



THE
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OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Birding New Zealand

New Zealand wasn't my first choice as a birding destination. There were more exotic locations with forests rapidly destroyed by chainsaws, areas where youth and health and ability to travel on a shoestring come in handy. New Zealand I could do when I was older, staying in clean hotels, eating safe food and not worrying about tropical diseases. But my parents were living in the Land of the Long White Cloud for the year and I couldn't think of a better reason to visit.

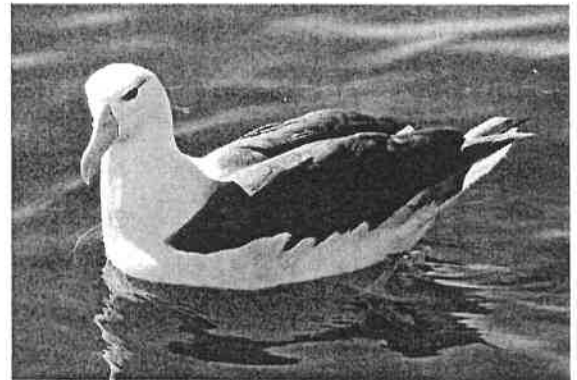
When I mentioned New Zealand to my non-birding friends, the first thing that everyone said was "Are you going to see kiwis?" Either that or something about the "Lord of the Rings" films. I had heard of kiwis, and even knew that there were three species. Or thought I knew, is it four or more now with the latest taxonomic changes? But I had met too many people who had made the trip and not seen the nocturnal, elusive national symbol. What interested me more was the diversity of seabirds and the conservation efforts at forming breeding populations of endangered endemic birds on small, predator-free islands.



On my first full day in Kiwi soil, three days after leaving Los Angeles International Airport, my parents and I had booked a whale-watching trip out of Kaikoura. It was not the seabird experience I had hoped it would be. We had our two-minute look at a sperm whale and several looks at what appeared to be **Flesh-footed Shearwaters** in the distance, but the big highlight was a **Wandering Albatross** that plopped down on the water so close to the boat that I didn't know what everyone was looking at until I moved closer to the window to see it. I wondered about the Albatross Encounter trip I had reserved for the next day.

At check-in (pronounced 'chicken' here to my confusion) I met the other three members of our group, a Japanese woman who didn't speak much English, and an English twitcher couple. Our guide Alastair explained the procedure: drag some frozen fish guts behind our little boat and wait for the birds to show up.

After the poor showing the day before I was not entirely convinced by Alastair's optimism. How wrong I was! The frozen treats had hardly hit the water when swarms of **Cape Pigeons** magically appeared. **Westland** and **White-chinned Petrels** shortly followed them, the latter so close its tiny white chin was even visible. Then came the mollymawks. We still call them albatross in the Western Hemisphere, *Thalassarche* if you want to get scientific, but mollymawk is a more interesting word, conjuring up images of nineteenth century sailors fighting the fierce southern seas. The Dutch term 'mollymawk' meaning 'stupid gull' couldn't have been less fitting for these graceful masters of the wind. We saw **New Zealand White-capped** and **Salvin's Mollymawks**, but the star mollymawk was the **Black-browed** with its striking pattern of black on white and pink lipstick.



The 'real' albatrosses were still more impressive with their enormous wingspans and overall large size. They even dominated both species of aggressive **Giant Petrels** that were very effective at throwing elbows and displacing other birds. We were able to compare the different subspecies of **Wandering Albatross** as they sat side by side on the water. It was a great thrill to see the **Snowy** subspecies, noticeably larger than other **Wanderings**, qualifying it as the largest albatross in the world.

Still more thrills were to come on Ulva Island, a five-minute water taxi ride off Stewart Island. We had driven through some nice forests in the Catlins and in Fiordland, but every place we'd seen had been somewhat or mostly altered by invasive species. All the species of 'problem' exotic animals had been removed from Ulva so that apart from some **Redpolls**, the fauna had a very native feel. We visited the island twice, the first time just to begin to appreciate the most natural forests we would visit, and the second with a guide, also named Ulva. This was the first place where I saw **South Island Robins**. The robins were so tame that I could lie on my side on the ground, clear leaves from a little patch of ground and watch as they foraged there less than half a meter from my face, sometimes perching on my boots or knee.



Even tamer than the robins were the **Wekas**. They came running up to us at the beach as if they were pets looking for a handout but soon lost interest as we were good tourists and heeded the "Do Not Feed the Wekas" signs. It was tempting to

want to feed these goofy, inquisitive rails, especially since we had just come from our B & B where the **Kakas** were fed bread crusts on the balcony. **Wekas** were my first flightless New Zealand land birds and they made me imagine a time when **Moas** roamed the land and birds had no fear of humans. And when New Zealand was covered with forests that were probably full of two other birds I saw on Ulva, the **South Island Saddleback** and the **Yellowhead**, birds that had become very rare or even extinct on the South Island.



The first island 'refuge' I had heard about before visiting New Zealand was Kapiti, famous for its kiwi and abundance of native birdlife. I had found out from a Dutch birder I met on the Stewart Island ferry that it was possible to spend the night on Kapiti, something contrary to all the literature I'd read. After the better part of the day exploring the island and seeing such new birds as **Whitehead** and the rare **Stitchbird**, I walked along the east coast to the Barrett's land on the north side of the island. John Barrett, who had met us earlier on the beach and given the boatload of day-trippers an introduction to the island, was waiting with an Aussie couple. **Takahes** munched on grass in the back yard, while **Kereru** and **Kakariki** flew all around as if the place were an aviary. John's wife Susan fixed an excellent dinner then we sat back, had a beer and waited for **Kiwi** time.

At about 8 p.m. our guide for the evening, Ron, decided the conditions were right. The rain had stopped and we could hear **Little Spotted Kiwi** calling. We walked very quietly for about 45 minutes, making a loop of the property and sometimes hearing kiwi in the distance. That we did not see a kiwi on our first circuit did not surprise Ron and he told the story of traversing the area until 3 or 4 in the morning and seeing no birds. After about loop number five we were starting to feel like this could be us. About 11:45 p.m. I went to my cabin to get a jacket. As I was standing outside the cabin I heard a sniffing sound, a little like something trying to blow dirt out of its nose. After a minute, a large female **Little Spotted Kiwi** sauntered out from under a tree, peered up at me in the light of the full moon, then scurried back under the foliage with a rollicking gait. I ran to tell the others but we couldn't relocate the bird. Finally, after walking around for another hour, we caught a quick glimpse of a significantly smaller male in Ron's flashlight beam. These weren't as satisfying views as those of endemic island songbirds feeding a meter from my face, or a raucous mass of hundreds of seabirds in the wake of our boat in Kaikoura, but it was a **Kiwi**! Why were these birds so shy while the majority of the other natives on the island so tame?



We headed north toward Auckland, missing the **Blue Duck** in the Whakapapa area, but seeing **Little Black Shags**, **Australian Coots**, and most importantly, the endemic



New Zealand Dabchick. Our next day concluded with a successful search for one of the strangest birds in the world, the **Wrybill**, at the Miranda Shorebird Center. Despite the low tide, there was one group of a few hundred **Wrybills** roosting close to shore. And while thousands upon thousands of shorebirds foraged at least a kilometre away at the low tide mark, one each of **Marsh, Pectoral** and **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** roosted and foraged near the **Wrybills**. At the center, we waited until a **Banded Rail** came out to forage in and out of the rushes next to the main building.

One of the natural history highlights of the trip came with a visit to the island of Tiritiri Matangi, another predator-free refuge. I saw many native birds and a Tuatara under conditions so special that I had to promise to keep them a secret. Tiritiri had been mentioned as the best place in the country to see a **Kokako**, the largest of the wattlebirds, a unique New Zealand bird family.

"They're very difficult to see," people said. "We heard them but didn't see them," others lamented.

"What do they sound like?" I asked.

"Like something strange, like something you've never heard before," or "Like a person wailing."

"Do they say 'Kokako'?" I asked. "No, definitely not," everyone assured me.



With time running out on Tiritiri, I headed down the final stretch of path toward the three water troughs, the favorite hangout of the **Kokako**. At one point, all lined up nicely in a row, were **Stitchbird, Bellbird** and **Tui** all perched on the edge of a trough. But still no **Kokako**. Then I heard a quiet, muttered "Ko – ka." Could this be it? As if to clear up any room for doubt, the bird called again, "Ko – ka – ko." Shortly, a dark shape emerged from the low canopy. "Ko – ka –

ko," it said, not really sure of itself. The problem with illustrations of birds in a book is that they are static. No single illustration could have prepared me for the experience of this bird. "It moves more like a squirrel than a bird," I had been told. Maybe more like a squirrel, but this description still did not do the bird's movements justice. The **Kokako** looked most like a dinosaur in the early stages of evolving flight. It scrambled along one branch, then jumped with powerful legs toward the next, spreading its wings, it appeared, as much for balance as lift. At the edge of the water trough the bird hunched over and paused, nervously surveying the surroundings. From some distance away a hollow, haunting moan of another bird reached our ears. The call of the **Kokako**!

Later, I thought about North American equivalents to these protected islands. There are many protected islands in The States, from Alaska to Florida, but none with the same conditions as in New Zealand with such an intense removal of destructive invasive species combined with the introduction of endangered native birds. Perhaps this is what the future of conservation will hold in the U.S., as more and more protected areas are becoming isolated by the destruction of the surrounding habitat. This is already happening in New Zealand where conservation efforts have worked so well on islands that similar techniques are now being used on the mainland to create 'virtual islands.' How widespread and successful these efforts will become will depend largely on funding and public support, but the potential is great based on the results that I saw.

In addition to some of the most spectacular scenery in the world, New Zealand birding offers a wealth of thrilling discoveries. I definitely want to come back. For my next visit, I'll plan on coming when there are pelagic birding trips offered out of Auckland and keep my fingers crossed for a trip out of Dunedin as well. In Dunedin, I enjoyed talking birding with Hamish Spencer and had a great time watching **Australasian Shovelers** and other birds with Chuck and Carol Landis. I'm hoping a trip to see the **New Zealand Falcon** with them is in my future. I'd also like to do a trek on Stewart Island to try to find the **Brown** (or is it the **Stewart Island**?) **Kiwi**... this time during the day. The final trip total of 108 species was more than I expected, but the highlights for me were sharing the water with seabirds and exploring island refuges that offered a glimpse of what life must have been like before humans arrived.



Adam Kent

New Zealand Falcon Sightings



There has been a flood of **Falcon** sightings recently. Tim Cotter reports one visiting the aviaries at Dunedin Botanic Garden on 24 June 2005. It caused all sorts of mayhem for the aviary birds, swooping at the birds in the large aviaries and landing on the roofs of the smaller aviaries. A good looking bird, it arrived at 9:00am and left around 10:00 a.m. in the direction of the Flagstaff. Tim reports a second sighting from the same spot, on 30 July 2005 at 3:30 pm. This bird perched in a large gum tree for 20 minutes, causing two **NZ Pigeons** to fly away. **Bellbird** and **Tui** were emitting alarm calls and flying from perch to perch near the falcon. The bird then left towards the Northern Motorway.

On 20 June 2005, a **Falcon** turned up on the gutter of Graeme Loh's St Clair house, overlooking their pet magpie call birds. The **Magpies** were calling very loudly and

in great distress. The **Falcon** flew off when Sue went to investigate the source of the magpie's alarm.

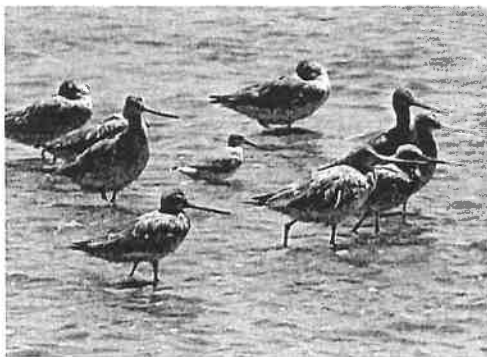
Richard Schofield reports a further **Falcon** was seen and heard in the centre of Lawrence on 25 June 2005, above the end of Gabriel's Gully Road. And in late June, Fergus Sutherland reported his first **Falcon** sighting at Papatowai in 9 years of living there.

Email List for Bird Alerts

For some time I have been running an informal reporting net work for bird sightings. The idea is that anyone on the list was able to email me any unusual bird sightings (general in Otago) and I will then email the around the whole group, thus getting the word out quickly. (Another consequence is that this newsletter's editor can be alerted to interesting sightings.)

I have recently updated my list and I invite any members who are not on this list to let me know if you are interested in joining. Please send me an email at j.j.wilson@actrix.co.nz.

Jim Wilson



The Otago Waders

Otago has been involved in the nation wader censuses of 1984-1994, with the coastal area covered from Kakanui to the Catlins. Although numbers were always low compared with the major estuarine areas, we have done our bit and have a good idea of what we have, and where. The four main NZ waders, **Pied Oystercatcher**, **Variable**

Oystercatcher, **Banded Dotterel** and **Pied Stilts** were found in most estuarine areas. And the only Arctic wader, the **Bar-tailed Godwit**, was always present in the major inlets. The mean of our numbers of the various species compared with the mean National totals are here in tabulated form:

Species	Winter		Summer	
	National	Otago	National	Otago
Pied Oystercatcher	80619	2175	14779	889
Variable Oystercatcher	1393	87	905	53
Banded Dotterel	7882	241	836	12
Pied Stilt	17971	506	6567	521
Bar-tailed Godwit	12108	302	83133	1877

In *Wader Studies in New Zealand*, Notornis Volume 46, part 1, March 1999, the totals for Otago are included in the national totals, but the main part of this publication concentrates in detail on the major estuarine areas.

A follow up for another ten or so years meant that the nation was going to continue a nationwide wader count, but mainly concentrating on these major estuarine areas. Otago felt that we shouldn't stop, although we were not going to be part of the equation, we had a lot of valuable data for these 10 years. However, it was decided to curtail our activities somewhat and concentrate on the Otago Harbour, including the Otago Peninsula. As a consequence we have now data for the Otago Harbour for 20 years, and we are still continuing.

Add to these wader counts is a new project, the banding of arctic waders. This is an ideal way of combining wader counts with the checking, for Otago, of **Bar-tailed Godwits** for bands and flags. (For more information, see Derek Onley's article of our first attempt in the Otago Regional Newsletter 1/2005, January 2005). The OSNZ is promoting a project to band/flag godwits, knots and turnstones, catching them with a cannon net. And the intentions are to include the Otago Harbour. Since the Atlas scheme has finished, we might have some time to get involved in these projects. The catching of godwits needs number of participants and the more we have here in Otago can supply in October the better. Checking for bands on these godwits is an ongoing exercise, but can be done at any time with suitable high tides.

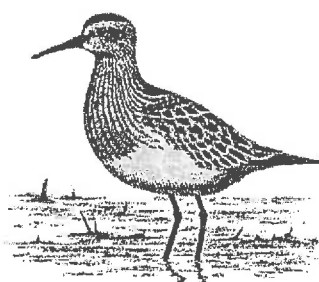
Peter Schweigman

Otago Winter Wader Count, 19 June 2005

	Aramoana	Papanui Inlet	Hoopers Inlet	Harbour West	Harbour East	LPG Depot	Totals
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	102	88	251		141		582
Variable Oystercatcher		11	8		21		40
Bar-tailed Godwit	109		162				271
Banded Dotterel	5		81				86
Pied Stilt	31	31	96		35		193
Royal Spoonbill							0
White Heron							0
White-faced Heron		12	7				19
Caspian Tern	3		2				5
Kingfisher		3	9				12

After the wader count, Richard Schofield checked the Catlins for waders and the results are below. Most of the waders were near the yacht club in two paddocks. He saw no flagged or banded **Godwits**. North Otago locations at the Waitaki River mouth, Kakanui River mouth and All Day Bay were checked by Liz Meek over the period 30 June to 1 July. She saw many species but no **Godwits**.

	Estuary	Paddocks	Catlins Lake	Total
Bar-tailed Godwit		68		68
Pied Stilt	1	7	1	9
Banded Dotterel	1	40		41
Pied Oystercatcher	2	98	2	102
Spur-winged Plover		21	7	28
White-faced Heron	2	4	5	11
Royal Spoonbill	3			3
Black Shag	2		3	5
Little Shag	33		14	47
Spotted Shag	1			1
Stewart Island Shag	4			4
Black Swan	5		7	12
Paradise Shelduck	2		14	16
Mallard	139		331	470
Shoveler	20		89	109
Grey Teal	66			66
Caspian Tern	1			1
Red-billed Gull	10	18	~140	~168
Black-billed Gull		20	~280	~300
Black-backed Gull	33		97	130
Kingfisher	8			8



On 2 July, Louise Foord and Lesley Gowans checked Warrington Beach and Karitane at the river mouth, again finding no **Godwits**. At Karitane there were 140 **White-fronted Terns** and 1 **Caspian Tern** across the river. **Swallows**, **Red-billed** and **Black-billed Gulls** were also present. At the far south of Warrington Beach there were 24 **Variable Oystercatchers**, 5 **South Island Pied**

Oystercatchers, 19 **Banded Dotterels**, 2 **Pied Stilts** and 1 **Pectoral Sandpiper**, identified with the aid of a telescope, which was feeding in humps of sand and seaweed near but separate from the **Dotterels**. The **Sandpiper** did not run about as the **Dotterels** did, but was of similar size. Each of the upper feathers seemed to be patterned light and dark. The white lower body was not the bright white of the **Dotterels**, but the dividing line across the chest between the white and patterned areas was clear. They also heard a **Grey Warbler**, **Dunnocks** and **Thrushes**.

The NZ Robin Population at Flagstaff

The assumption has been in the past that the **NZ Robin** only occupied Douglas Fir stands at Flagstaff. With the disappearance of mature stands of the Douglas Fir, the robins seem to be hanging on and have been observed breeding in *Pinus radiata*, adjacent to the remaining small pockets of Douglas Firs. But with the harvesting of *P. radiata* on a large scale, the **Robins** are disappearing drastically. Of the 36 adults and juvenile robins, only 7 have been located at the tail end of the breeding season. Where are they? It is hoped they have escaped to the native vegetation of the Silverstream/Powder creek catchments, always a good habitat of these robins. It is intended to follow this up in spring and have a thorough investigation of that area. It is going to be somewhat time consuming, so the more people who are willing to explore the area from September onwards, the easier the task.

Peter Schweigman

Ornithological Snippets

Sue Galloway saw a lone **Cattle Egret** in a paddock of horned cattle on the back road to Manapouri on the 14 May 2005. No others seemed to be around. Richard Schofield reported that there were 37 birds in a single flock on Inchclutha on the morning of 5 June 2005. Mary Thompson counted 15 birds near Henley Road on the Taieri Plain in the second week of August.



Programme 2005

Please note the different venues for the next two indoor meetings.

Wednesday, 24 August	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: Bruce McKinlay
	Topic: Operation Ark in the Catlins	
	8 p.m., Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street	
Wednesday, 26 October	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: TBA
	8 p.m., Otago Arts Society Building, Corner of Albany and Great King Streets	

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Material for the next newsletter should be sent to Louise Foord as Hamish will be away.



4P New Zealand

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