

THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 5/2006 October 2006

The Otago Bar-tailed Godwits

First an update of the presence of the godwits. The winter population was about 160, but not all areas were visited. The early spring numbers are well over 800, still short of the long-term average of just over 1800, but that was in November. We have another month to get there, if the godwits cooperate.



Interesting to note that we have so far 18 banded birds along the Otago coast, with the majority at Warrington, where most of them were banded in February this year (see photo). Hopefully that number will increase over the next few months, including the planned catching of oodles on 6 November. High tide that afternoon will be 17.13 hrs in Dunedin with a height of 2.2 m. The high tide

on 22 February this year was at 17.08 hrs, but the godwits arrived at their usual roosting place, Warrington Beach, at 1450 hrs and were caught at 1615 hrs.

Prior to that date we want to know the number of godwits present, where they are roosting at high tide and at what time. We need your help on the Monday and on previous days, if possible. The weekend prior to Monday 6 November is ideal. A high tide on Saturday will be at 15.30 and on Sunday 16.21. Could those available during the weekend, please arrange a time with Derek Onley, phone 488 0303. If you are available during the week, could you be in touch with me on 455 2790. The more people we will have during the cannon netting exercise, the



easier the tasks will be. We will assemble at the Warrington picnic ground car park at 12 noon. Please let me know, if you will need transport.

Peter Schweigman

Our RR, Mary Thompson adds:

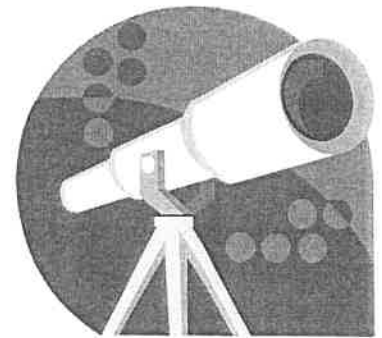
Peter Schweigman is our key person coordinating all our efforts for checking godwits for bands. Peter collates all our observations and returns them to the National Coordinator. This project is part of a National Shorebird Colour-banding Scheme which is now in its third and final year. This time of year, when the birds are returning and still moving throughout the country, is an important time for a concerted effort to count godwits and look for bands. So please let Peter know if you are able to help. There will usually be some of us going out to check the godwits every weekend if the tide is right, i.e. when we can get to Warrington, Aramoana and Hoopers about 2 hours before high tide. Peter is contacting all those interested via an email list so if you would like to be added to that please just email Peter at peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz

Advance Notice of OSNZ AGM.

The 2007 National AGM is to be held in New Plymouth during Queen's Birthday weekend, with registration on 31 May, field trips on 2 June and 4 June and the Scientific Day and dinner on the 3 June. Contact: Barry Hartley, PO Box 315, New Plymouth. Otago RR, Mary Thompson, is planning to attend, so some others from Otago would be nice.

OSNZ(Otago) Telescopes

Our Branch owns 2 spotting scopes with tripods that any member is welcome to borrow for a birding expedition, especially if you are heading out for a day to estuaries and there is the possibility of finding banded godwits. A telescope can be fairly easily tracked down by contacting Lesley Gowans, 481 1177 or Mary Thompson, 464 0787.



Magical Moments with Mary!

On Sunday 10 September 2006, Mary Thompson organised a venture with Louise Foord and me to follow up on a reported sighting of **Kaka**. We didn't find the **Kaka**. But, we visited the Lagoon behind Brighton on the Otokia River. The Lagoon is reached by turning right past the Brighton Surf Club and following the road alongside the river, for a short distance. A large eucalyptus tree marks a vantage spot and turning area.



As the river was blocked at the mouth, the lagoon was covering 2/3 of the area. What an exciting place, on that day for a birder. We saw the first sighting for the season of 5 **Royal Spoonbills** and the **Black Stilt**, with a **Pied** × **Black** hybrid, presumably last year's chick. They were on the edge of a flock of **Pied Stilts**. Also seen were **Shoveler**, **Mallard**, **Gray Duck**, **Spur-winged Plover**, **Little Shag**, **Black Shag**, **Harrier**, **Blackbird**, **Pukeko**, **Paradise Duck**, **Starling**, **Redpoll**, **Yellowhammer**, **Chaffinch**, **Goldfinch**, **Fantail** and **Welcome Swallow**. We heard a **Gray Warbler**. On the journey home via Big Stone Road, in a forested area, a **Little Owl** was spotted on a fence post. What a day! Thanks Mary!

Lesley Gowans

Otago Winter Wader Count, 4 June 2006

The Otago Harbour, including the Otago Peninsula, has been covered again this June. It was not the nicest day, with cold, strong southerly wind, but we managed very well. All the NZ waders were slightly down in numbers, except the **Pied Stilt**.

	Aramoana Papanui Inlet	Hoopers Inlet	Harbour West	Harbour East	LPG Depot	2006 totals	2005 totals
South Island Pied							
Oystercatcher	84	59	264	13	140	2	562
Variable							
Oystercatcher		15	3		21		39
Bar-tailed							40
Godwit	132	10	73		7		222
Banded							271
Dotterel	74						74
Pied Stilt		45	134	8	22		209
White-faced							193
Heron	4	1			5		10
Caspian Tern			2				2
Kingfisher	13		6				19
							12

This year we have been part of the National wader count, but it might seem a bit strange to be part of it with a total of 1106 waders, a mere 0.9% of the national total of 126426. But we didn't do too badly with the **Bar-tailed Godwits**, although down a bit, it was still was 2.8% of the national total. The most import aspect of these annual wader counts is to persist in continuing these censuses since 1984. It all adds

to the knowledge of our birds using the harbour and the Otago Peninsula Inlets. Needless to say, it would be nice if more people were available for these surveys.

Peter Schweigman

Birds on Campbell Island

I managed to have a short trip to Campbell Island in August as part of the last Campbell Island Teal release. Although it was winter and blew everyday we were on the island, there was no shortage of birds to watch and listen for.

Yellow-eyed Penguin were almost the first thing we saw once anchored in Perseverance Harbour. While we were stacking gear on the rear deck prior to handing it into the dinghy, a group of five penguins appeared and hung around the boat. They could be seen diving for prey but also porpoising through waves and observing the boat. YEP could also be heard calling ashore in scrub in the next bay around from Beeman Base.

Southern Royal Albatross chicks were everywhere, in sheltered gullies and along exposed ridges. They had nest bowls in low scrub and in grasslands. Chicks were mostly feathered up with some down remaining on the neck. Some were starting to practice exercising their wings in the breeze. Adult Royal Albatross could appear at any time and in any place winging into a nest. They clearly could approach nests from any direction and would cross land to get access to their nest.

Giant Petrel are winter nesters and so females were to be observed on the bluffs above NW Bay sitting tight in all sorts of winds. We also came across a group of 10 Giant Petrels feasting on a sea lion carcass in the head of Perseverance Harbour. One or two birds were working away at either end of the sea lion whilst the rest waited patiently for their turn.

Cape Pigeon were the most common seabird in Perseverance Harbour. They were also to be seen off the bluffs above NW Bay where they were seen flying along the cliffs. In one place a bird had landed on a ledge and looked to be prospecting for a burrow.

Campbell Island Shag could be seen hunting in packs in both Perseverance Harbour and NW Bay. The hunting pack was a rolling front of birds continuously diving and resurfacing chasing prey.

Antarctic Tern were present along the shores of Perseverance Harbour where they hawking along the littoral edge. Pairs were also seen on the bluffs above NW Bay.

Both **Red-billed Gull** and **Southern Blacked-backed Gull** were present throughout Campbell Island. Red-bills in particular were scavenging food scraps and left over teal food around the buildings of Beeman Base.

Southern Skua were mostly absent but in the latter half of the trip appeared on the bluffs above NW Bay.

Mallard were seen in small flocks in Perseverance Harbour. They were extremely wary and did not allow a close approach at all!

Dunnoek were present around the buildings of Beeman Base but also occasionally in dracophyllum scrub further afield. Our party did not see any house sparrows.

Redpoll were common around Beeman Base but seemed to suffering a high winter mortality with a number being picked up dead around buildings.

Blackbird were seen and heard in Dracophyllum scrub throughout the island. One flushed out of low scrub in front of me on the exposed slopes above NW Bay. No confirmed sightings of **Song Thrush** were seen, however some of the calls heard might have been thrush.

Silvereye were heard only. They were present deep in Dracophyllum forest along streams.

Perhaps the highlight of the trip (in terms of general bird observations) was the density and boldness of **Campbell Island Pipit**! These birds were everywhere and would come right up and forage between people's legs. **Campbell Island Pipit** were not observed by Kai Westerskov during his visit in 1960 and were never considered to be common on the island. Although I looked closely for it none of the observed birds had the fulvous coloration reported. The increase in pipit numbers could be the most tangible response so far by the birds of Campbell since the removal of Norway Rats in 2001.

Bruce McKinlay

Cook Island Birding

Having decided to go to Rarotonga for a relaxing family holiday, we couldn't resist the challenge of tracking down all the endemic bird species of the Cook Islands. This meant that instead of lazing on the beach for two weeks, we had to do a bit of walking in the interior of Rarotonga, and also visit two of the outer islands: Atiu and Mangaia. In addition to the six endemic species, there were also two near endemic species, and we also hoped to see a few other birds as well!

After our first day in Rarotonga, things didn't look too promising – apart from a solitary **Reef Heron**, the only birds around were the ubiquitous **Mynahs**, though their numerous calls did at least give the impression of a greater variety of bird life. However, we had been in touch with Ian Karika at the Takitumu Conservation Area, and arranged to go looking for the **Kakerori**, or **Rarotongan Monarch**, native only to Rarotonga, and any other birds that might be around. Most of the native landbirds

are found in the interior of the island, which is mountainous and forested, and hence not particularly accessible with a two year old, so we were grateful of the opportunity to have a closer look at the habitat.

It took about forty minutes walking to reach the breeding area, followed by another fifteen minutes or so before we were treated to good views of four or five adult **Kakerori**. A short time later, while climbing to a viewpoint, we watched a younger, orange-plumaged, bird on the path ahead of us. Conditions in the area were not ideal for birding, but we did have several **Pacific Pigeons** fly over, not to mention numerous fruit bats. We'd heard the calls of **Rarotongan Starlings**, but had just about given up of seeing one, when one last scan of the trees found one feeding out in the open; just as well, as it was the only one we saw on the island.



The rest of the week on Rarotonga was fairly quiet, though there were occasional **Reef Herons** (on the reef!), **White Terns**, and the impressive sight of about 30 **Great Frigatebirds** hanging over the road near Avarua. On our last day we came across a couple of **Cook Islands Fruit Doves**, our third endemic, on a short drive inland from Avarua.

Next stop was Atiu, a much less visited

island 200km to the north-east of Rarotonga, and positively teeming with birds by comparison. One of the target birds here was the **Kopeka**, or **Atiu Swiftlet**, which breeds in just two caves on the island, and has a total population of about 400 individuals. We visited one of the caves, but as it was very early in the breeding season, we only saw a couple of birds, but did hear their echolocation calls. However, we were compensated by birds frequently hawking for insects immediately outside our villa.



Also on our "garden" list were **Kakerori** (several birds were transferred to Atiu as insurance), **Pacific Golden Plover** and **Grey Duck**, the latter very distinctive compared to the New Zealand variety. A ecotour with Birdman George found us, among other things, our other target bird for the island, **Chattering Kingfisher** (otherwise found only on Ma'uake), and good views of **Pacific Pigeon**. Other birds on Atiu included **Rarotongan Fruit Doves**, **Long-tailed Cuckoo**, white and grey phase **Reef Herons**, and various seabirds – frigatebirds, tropicbirds, noddies and boobies.

Our final port of call was Mangaia, even less visited than Mangaia, but home of our last two endemics. The available literature suggested they weren't too hard to find, but at times we were practically tripping over the **Cook Island Warblers** – far more

obliging than any other *Acrocephalus* warblers we've come across. Not so easy was the **Mangaia Kingfisher**, similar in appearance to, but more richly coloured than, the **Chattering Kingfisher**. It needed a hired vehicle to negotiate the rivers, sorry, muddy tracks to Lake Tiriara, where we saw a pair, along with **Red and White-tailed Tropicbirds**, and a pair of **Blue-Grey Noddies**, otherwise known as **Grey Ternlets**. One last bird was the **Chestnut-breasted Mannikin**, which was recently discovered on Mangaia, and is thought to have made its own way from Rimatara in French Polynesia. It is now quite widespread on Mangaia, though it is classed as an introduced species, having been introduced to Tahiti.

Richard & Suzanne Schofield

Ornithological Snippets

Mary Thompson and Sue Galloway saw a pair of **Crested Grebe** at Queenstown, 29 August 2006, in the lake just past the Earnslaw wharf. A pair of grebes was also seen in the same vicinity last year at end of November. On 6 September 2006, Alan Baker saw a **Grebe** building a nest attached to a willow branch at Sailors Cutting, not far from the boat ramp. Four days later a bird was sitting on the nest.

During Blossom Festival Weekend, Sue Galloway saw a **Falcon** in the Manuka Gorge and also one in the Cromwell Gorge. Alan Baker had a good view of a **Falcon** on the edge of Governor's Bush, Mt Cook, on 7 September 2006.

Programme 2006

Indoor Meetings will be held in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street at 8 p.m. Please be on time: the door will be locked after 8 p.m.

Wednesday, 25 October	Indoor Meeting Topic: Cook Islands Birds	Richard & Suzanne Schofield
Saturday, 4 November & Sunday, 5 November	Godwit Spotting, Warrington Contact: Derek Onley, ☎ 488 0303	
Monday, 6 November	Godwit Cannon Netting & Banding, Warrington Contact: Peter Schweigman, ☎ 455 2790	
Sunday, 12 November	Summer Wader Count Aramoana High Tide 9.26 a.m. Backup Date: 19 November High Tide 2.46 p.m. Contact: Ken Gager, ☎ 487 6670	
Sunday, 19 November	Godwit Spotting, Warrington and/or Aramoana Contact: Peter Schweigman, ☎ 455 2790	

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