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Otago Region Newsletter 10/2025

October 2025



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/>

Ornithological Snippets

2 **Chukar** were reported from Isthmus Peak on 7 October. 3 **Wrybill**|**Ngutu pare** were at Warrington Spit 2 October, while a **Red Knot**|**Huahou** was seen at Aramoana on 16 October. Continuing **White Heron**|**Kōtuku** were at Glenorchy & Andersons Bay Inlet on 27 September.

An **Australasian Little Grebe**|**Tokitokipio** was resighted at Glenorchy Lagoon on 18 October, and a **Kaka** was at Lake Hayes on 16 October. 2 **NZ Fernbird**|**Mātātā** were discovered in the Matukituki Valley 20 September. Finally, an impressive flock of **Yellowhammer**|**Hurukōwhai** near Arrowtown 19 September numbered 210.

Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

eBird News

The annual taxonomic update will take place on or about 26 October. There don't appear to be many changes that affect New Zealand birds, but observers are asked to submit any unsubmitted checklists by 26 October, as mobile checklists with an outdated taxonomy may cause issues if submitted later.

Richard 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com

BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

Health & Safety



BirdsNZ Council have asked for Regional newsletters to include a standing request to report on Health & Safety issues.

A reminder to members that when involved with organised BirdsNZ Field Trips and activities, that we should not hesitate to call 111 to respond to medical events or incidents that result in harm.

If anyone has been involved in or is aware of an incident that resulted in harm to any of our activity participants, please contact the Regional Representative, so that the President and EO can be notified immediately

Plan ahead, stay safe while birding everyone.

Dawn: birds.otago@birdsNZ.org.nz 027 442 7348



For members wanting to consider their accommodation options for the NZ Bird Conference in 2026:

Accommodation

The conference will be held at the Lake Wānaka Centre.

Venue location: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/HHDjFj6GB4c4WVXw7>

About the venue: <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/venues/lake-wanaka-centre/>

Wānaka isite has secured a selection of accommodation options for our members that are currently on hold for us. This includes the entire accommodation capacity at the Wanaka Hotel, next door to the conference venue. Their reservations cover the period 28 May 2026 to 2 June 2026 (5 nights).

Other accommodation options secured for BirdsNZ members attending the Conference include:

- Wanaka Luxury Apartments
- Oakridge Resort Wanaka
- Alpine Resort Wanaka - Managed by THC Hotels & Resorts

To secure your accommodation booking, please email hello@wanaka.co.nz or call them at (+64) 03 443 1233 (available 9 AM – 5 PM daily) and let them know you are booking for the **BirdsNZ 2026 Conference**.

A deposit of one night's accommodation is required immediately after the Wānaka isite confirms your booking.

Wanaka isite Accommodation Cancellation Policy:

- 90% refund of deposit available until 28 February 2026
- Full payment due: 1 March 2026
- 90% refund of full payment available until 24 April 2026
- No refunds after: 25 April 2026

A grebe with a teenager on board

Photo Credit: John Darby [wanakaapp.nz](https://www.wanakaapp.nz)



Dunedin Town Belt Bird Trail



Are you:

- Looking for a walk in the City?
- Wanting to see some birds which are common or not in the City?
- Wanting to upskill your technique on identifying and counting birds?
- Wanting to get in touch with nature?
- All of the above?

For more information go to www.birdcount.nz

Updates and Messages from the Regional Representative

Newsletters:

Wellington – Sep 2025: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/wellington-newsletter/>
 Waikato – Sep/Oct 2025: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/waikato-newsletter/>
 Otago – Sep 2025: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/otago-newsletter/>

Pages:

RR page with useful links: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/about-us/manual/rr-page/>
 2026 NZ Bird Conference: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/nz-bird-conference-2026/>
 2025 NZ Bird Conference highlights:
<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/other-events/past-conferences-and-abstracts/>

Articles:

BNZRF 2024 – Long-tailed cuckoo: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2024-BNZRF-Long-tailed-cuckoo-movement-Summary-article-2509.pdf>
 PAF 2024 - National Royal Spoonbill Census: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/2024-PAF-National-Spoonbill-Census-Summary-Report-2510.pdf>

Bittern matuku-hūrepo project

On 1st October the Otago Daily Times published an update on our project. You can read the article on this link: <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/search-bittern-continues>

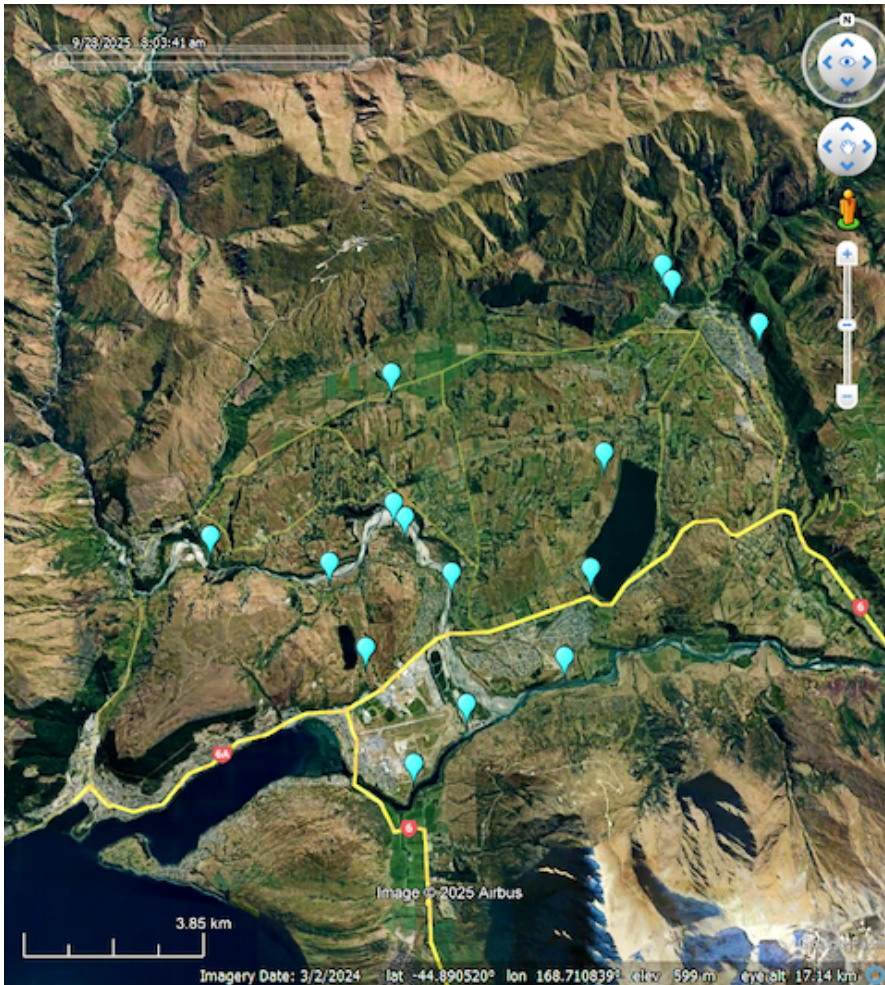
The five-year project, funded by Otago Regional Council and led by the Otago Branch of Birds New Zealand, has enjoyed collaborative support from the Department of Conservation (DOC), Forest and Bird, Te Nukuroa o Matamata, Tiaki Maniototo and landowners and community groups across the region. As we enter the 4th monitoring season, we can report that male bitterns have been recorded in the Catlins, Sinclair Wetlands, Lake Tuakitoto and Akatore in Coastal Otago. They have also been detected in the Maniototo in Central Otago, near Glenorchy, including the Glenorchy Lagoon, and in the Whakatipu Basin. This year, we will be monitoring bittern in the Catlins and continuing our inventory efforts in the Matukituki Valley, Maniototo, several of the Coastal Otago wetlands, with some new sites up in the Waitaki catchment.

Forest and Bird, with the support of Francesca Cunnighame and new member Catriona Gower, have organised matuku muster activities in the Catlins, and Dawn Palmer has assisted members of the Wai Wanaka group in their participation at wetlands in the Wanaka area. Conditions for the October listening were not ideal; no bitterns were heard, but marsh crakes were heard at Catlins Lake and MacLennan Wetlands. Hopefully, we'll have better luck in the November matuku muster events. Contact birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz if you'd like to join a matuku muster.

Inland Birding

On Tuesday, 14 October, 50 Mohua Yellowheads were caught on overflowing predator-free Anchor Island and transferred to the West Matukituki Valley, where there is extensive pest trapping. You can

see more details and photos on the Birds New Zealand Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Birdsnewzealand> or by visiting the Southern Lakes Sanctuary website, <https://southernlakessanctuary.org.nz/>



Source: Google Earth accessed 18/10/2025 with Whakatipu birding group locations

Meanwhile, the Whakatipu birding group has been getting their eye in for Sacred kingfisher/ Kōtare this spring. Here is a map showing where this hole-nesting species has been heard. We're yet to confirm nests, although we thought we had one on the Arrow River earlier in the season. Kōtare migrate into the area in spring.

The Kotuku in Glenorchy is in breeding condition. Skin around the bill and eyes was quite blue, the photo portrays the colour seen well. Tibia pink. No plumes seen.



Otago Harbour Survey: September 2025 Update

Thanks everybody. It looks like everybody had a good count for this first count of the 2025-2027 Harbour Survey. One section to come but I wanted to get this out and get you some feedback on the work.

Here is a summary table which includes everything that was counted. If it's not correct for your section let me know.

Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Bar-tailed godwit	0	0	0	0	0	0	177	177
black swan	0	0	1	0	32	52	92	177
Black-backed gull	167	2	40	52	118	780	5	1164
Canada goose	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Caspian tern	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
grey teal	0	0	0	0	0	59	17	76
greylag goose	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
kingfisher	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	4
little shag	32	32	62	62	39	151	23	401
mallard	8	20			0	0		28
Mallard/grey hybrid	0	0	19	37	27	34	3	120
Otago shag	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
paradise shelduck	4	2	3	10	2	2	8	31
Pied Shag	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
pied stilt	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5
Pigeon	18							18
Red-billed gull	99	158	905	42	54	3502	4	4764
shoveler	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	12
SI Pied Oystercatcher	7	0	0	0	75	1	44	127
small gull	0	0	0	815	59	0	0	874
spotted shag	0	1	0	0	0	8	0	9
spur-winged plover	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	6
v oystercatcher	11	10	0	0	6	16	10	53
welcome swallow	2			0			3	5
White-faced heron	0	0	1	4	1	0	2	8
white-fronted tern	32	1	13	68	12	321	1	448
Grand Total	383	227	1044	1095	427	4940	399	8515

The count of red-billed gulls might seem high. But the table shows that in past surveys numbers of red-billed gulls in spring can be as high as the current count.

Sum of Count		Season				
Survey Num	Species	Au	Sp	Su	Wi	Grand Total
1	black-billed gull	7090	94	2730	18	9932
	Red-billed gull	4093	2839	4700	1966	13598
	small gull	0	0	200	0	200
1 Total		11183	2933	7630	1984	23730
2	black-billed gull	110	0	204	15	329
	Red-billed gull	3614	2548	3503	1555	11220
	small gull	362	0	0	238	600
2 Total		4086	2548	3707	1808	12149
3	black-billed gull	19	30	3	0	52
	Red-billed gull	1619	3846	3151	2260	10876
	small gull	0	0	0	0	0
3 Total		1638	3876	3154	2260	10928
4	black-billed gull	6	0	0	0	6
	Red-billed gull	2402	3302	5404	2850	13958
	small gull	40	0	0	0	40
4 Total		2448	3302	5404	2850	14004
5	black-billed gull		0			0
	Red-billed gull		4764			4764
	small gull		874			874
5 Total			5638			5638

You might say that apart from March 1978 there has been little variation in the overall pattern for these species but as we know black billed gulls have dropped right out of the count.

Thanks for the efforts to keep the numbers of small gulls to a minimum and taking the time to look for red-billed gull. For the mallards; it would be good in future to receive notes that justify this, ie clear identification of green headed males etc.

In response to questions, I recommend that you take your time to get maximum coverage. I think coverage is more important than finishing in a hurry.

The next survey is scheduled for 19 October starting at 13:10.

At this stage I've got a gap for Section 1. Can everybody else confirm that they are available or what Plan B might look like.

On another matter: Don't forget that I'm talking about the Harbour Survey at the October Birds NZ Meeting (Benham Seminar Room 28 October 7:30 pm). I should have done this before we started so you can see the backstory, but the talk slots were booked up.

Cheers, **Bruce**

White Heron



This photo of a white heron was taken at Brighton on 17 January 2023 by Bram Evans. He contacted me wondering whether it is 'tool 'use. "This bird was looking for prey in the stream that runs across the beach, and – quite by chance – one of my photos shows it dropping a stone into the water, presumably hoping to flush out any fish that might be hiding among the weeds.

Is this a known behaviour? I have found references to the use, by green herons, of small items (insects, twigs, bread) as floating bait to attract fish, but cannot find any mention of the use of stones by herons, in the manner seen here."

Has anyone seen anything similar?

Mary nzmaryt@gmail.com

The bittern matuku-hūrepo project survey

Our Catlins team will be monitoring bittern detected over the past three years of the project. Franny Cunningham and Catriona Gower will be organising Matuku Muster active listening events over the full moon phase 7, 8, 9 November.

Franny has booked accommodation over the weekend in the Forest & Bird Lenz Reserve Accommodation so please confirm your place directly with Franny francescacunninghame@gmail.com

Lenz Reserve is located 5km south of Papatōwai at 614 Chaslands Highway, where the bridge goes over the Fleming River. It is shared bunk room accommodation and costs are covered by this collaborative bittern project which is supporting participation in Matuku Muster (Thanks ORC, BirdsNZ Otago).

No need to commit to the whole weekend. Any count effort is valuable.

We will be deploying acoustic recording devices into the wetlands of the Matukituki Valley, Maniototo area and a few sites in Coastal Otago.

We'd also like to deploy some where bitterns have been reported by members of the public on eBird and i-naturalist in the Waitaki area. If anyone is interested in helping with deployments up in the Waitaki reach out to birds.otago@birdsNZ.org.nz

Wader Count

Volunteers wanted for a summer wader count on **Sunday 30 November**.

High tide (1.89M) at Dunedin is at 12.28pm

Reserve day is Sunday 14 December. High tide (1.88M) at Dunedin is at 12.55pm.

All members and interested parties are welcome to participate.

Please contact Maree Johnstone email mareej@kinect.co.nz or phone 027 6609446 to be assigned to a team.



Welcome Day the 25th October and Ōtēpoti Dunedin Heritage Festival-South Seas Exhibition

Kia ora koutou,

Join us for some volunteering motu mahi, and/or explore, relax and recharge on Kamautaurua with Quarantine Island/Kamau Taurua Community Inc. **on this Saturday 25th October 2025.**

If you would like to come along, please complete the sign up form to secure your place and we will be in touch on Thursday or Friday to confirm.

<http://quarantineisland.org.nz/index.php/visit/welcome-days/>

About the South Seas Exhibition

Discover what happened to materials from the 1925 International South Seas Exhibition. **There will be a talk about materials used from the exhibition**, most of which can be viewed. You will also be able to **see the restored Married Quarters** Aotearoa/ New Zealand's only two-storied wooden quarantine building, which remains on its original site. This is the last remaining building of the 1870's quarantine station, a prominent two-storied building that once housed families in quarantine. The restoration project was awarded The Southern Heritage Trust 'Dave Cox Memorial Award' in 2019.

Disclaimer

The content and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual contributors, and are not officially endorsed by BirdsNZ or the compiler of this newsletter. They do not purport to reflect the opinions of Birds New Zealand.

Programme 2025

Birds NZ Otago Branch meetings for 2025 will be held on the 4th Tuesday of the month (from February to November) in the Benham Seminar Room, 2nd floor of the Benham Building, [Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street](#), starting at 7.30pm. Please arrive prior to this as the doors lock automatically unless someone is there to open them from inside.

Birds NZ Otago Monthly Meeting Zoom Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83922655184>
Meeting ID: 839 2265 5184 Passcode: 633186

25 - 27 Oct	Oscar - Tautuku Catlins field trip
Tuesday 28 October	Bruce McKinlay - Otago Harbour Bird Survey from 1977-2010
7 - 9 Nov	Dawn - Matuku Muster
Sunday 16 November	Bruce - Harbour Survey
Tuesday 25 November	Annual Quiz Night!
Sunday 21 December	Bruce - Harbour Survey

Contributions for the next newsletter should reach the editor, sodlin@gmail.com
by **18 November**

BIRDS | SCIENCE | PEOPLE



Royal Spoonbill: Michael Szabo

Our 2024 Royal Spoonbill nationwide census recorded 4,593 spoonbills, nearly double the count in the 2012 census.

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That's \$90 a year, and just \$45 for students.

www.birdsnz.org.nz

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