

KUAKA



Welcome to the newsletter of the South Auckland Branch of Birds NZ

Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa

Issue 72 – OCTOBER 2025

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Hi everyone, welcome to the October issue of Kuaka.

As you can see, our highlighted photos this month are of white birds. Top L is a riroriro/grey warbler, seen recently in the Waikato. Photo by Tony Mills

Top R we have an excellent image of a kotuku ngutu papa/spoonbill. Photo by maddoxphotography.rocketspark.co.nz



Finally, there is a white kotare/kingfisher seen in Tapapakanga Regional Park last week. Photo by Shaun Lee

**Our next meeting will be on Tuesday
November 11 at 7.30pm**

Would you like to contribute to our newsletter?
A drawing or photo, detail of a sighting, or maybe an
article or two – just drop an email to the editor.

We would love to hear from you.

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PROGRAMME FOR 2025

Monthly Meetings: held on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Papakura Croquet Club, 1 Chapel Street Papakura. Meetings start at 7:30. Visitors welcome. \$3.00 donation to cover costs please

Nov 8	Coromandel census (HT 0955 3.03m)
Nov 9	Firth of Thames census (HT1058 3.5m)
Nov 11	Monthly meeting Jacinda Woolly 'An overview of Auckland Councils bird monitoring and survey work'
Nov 23	Manukau census (HT1312 3.9m)
Jan 2026	Annual picnic/BBQ – date and venue TBA

SPEAKER FOR OCTOBER



Over the summer of 2024/25, Ellen Webb was based up in Waipū, (between Tāmaki Makaurau & Whangārei), to undertake her Master's project focused on improving nest site protection strategies for birds like the critically endangered tara iti/fairy terns. Her project was one of several research initiatives, supported by DOC, that, combined with ongoing conservation efforts and recent successes, represent a strategic effort to secure the future of tara iti. By addressing critical knowledge gaps, DOC aims to develop effective strategies to ensure the survival and growth of NZ's rarest endemic bird.

Tara iti nesting threats range from coastal development, predators (including other birds), weather events, erosion and human activity.

Ellen talked to us about providing shelter for the chicks from aerial predators and the weather (sunshine and rain). The shelters trialled included driftwood, plywood A-frames, and terracotta tunnels. They were placed two meters away from the nest scrape so not to disturb the parents, or attract predators.

Chicks use shelter for up to 10 days after hatching. Ideally, they would use driftwood or plants growing nearby, e.g., pingao, to shelter from the heat but when predators are present, they rely on their camouflage colouring and freezing in place. Ellen found that they youngsters avoided going into the A-frames, although they would take advantage of any shade cast to the side. They did not use the terracotta tunnels at all. The parents called them out of the A-frames and tunnels as they could not easily keep an eye on them. Ellen believes the chicks prioritise natural shelters (driftwood), only using artificial shelters if no other options, including plants, exist.

RR REPORT

Spring has finally arrived here in South Auckland, with warmer temperatures, new leaves on the trees, and colour in the gardens. The birds are also making their presence felt in my own garden, with lots of sparrows and greenfinches about. In past years, a popular nesting site for blackbirds or thrushes has been on the top of a stepladder that I have leaning against the back wall, but no-one has taken up residence this year as yet. However, a blackbird has built a nest in my acacia tree and been sitting on it for a couple of weeks now. I'm not sure how it will fare if we get more heavy rain, as there is not a lot of foliage above the nest. Tuis are calling and chasing each other about, but when they flew towards the acacia tree recently, a male blackbird chased them away, presumably trying to protect the nest.

I also have a large Pohutukawa tree which provides more cover than the acacia, and just as I was wondering why it had never been chosen as a nest site, I looked up to see a very untidy nest near the top of it, which appeared to be made mostly of grass. Initially I couldn't see any birds nearby, but in the last couple of days I have spotted a couple of sparrows on it.

Further afield, I was delighted to see and hear my first shining cuckoo for this spring, although other South Auckland members have been hearing them since September. I recently attended the spring migration day at Pukorokoro Miranda, where we heard a very interesting talk by Dr Dan Ruthrauff about some of the wading birds that breed in Alaska. It was great to see photos of the tundra, such a contrast to the habitat that the migratory waders inhabit when here. I joined many others to see the spectacle of large numbers of recently arrived godwits, knots and Pacific Golden Plovers on the stilt ponds. The first of the godwits arrived in mid-August and there are now 75 juveniles in the flock of about 4500 godwits. Keen birders have been spotting bands and flags and following the tracks of birds carrying transmitters.

Happy Birding, Sue

SIGHTINGS

- Greenfinches are common in parks and open ground at present
- A matuku moana/reef heron was spotted on the coast north of Thames
- The kawau paka/little shag colony behind the Warehouse near the airport had 23 active nests on September 28
- Juvenile kuaka/godwit are arriving and have been sighted at Miranda, Kidds, and Orua Bay. 30 were seen at the Mangere lagoon
- There is single tuturiwhatu at Pokora Gap (Awhitu Pen)
- A torea pango/VOC nest with a usual number of eggs, 4, was spotted at Pokora Gap
- Two matuku hurepo/bittern were spotted at Puhinui Reserve in late September
- Around 1000 karoro/black backed gulls were spotted on the spit at Miranda
- 15 golden plover have been seen at the stilt pond, Miranda
- Four kaka were seen near Tuakau recently

KAHU/HARRIER BANDED IN NELSON SIGHTED IN CROMWELL

Nelson branch¹ recently reported that a kahu/harrier, banded in their region, has been seen and photographed in Cromwell, a distance of around 300 km. In the past a kahu banded in Ward, Marlborough, was recaptured in Auckland².

In Dec 24 DOC reported³ an adult male kahu flying 1600 km, between the Whangamarino wetland, North Waikato, and Middelmarsh, Central Otago in under two weeks last spring (2024). The manu was GPS tracked and, interestingly, soared across Cook Strait at heights of 300m. DOC is monitoring kahu as part of research to better understand how this bird of prey uses the environment and interacts with threatened native bird species. While this common native bird, found throughout Aotearoa, is known to disperse over large areas, its journey hadn't been GPS-tracked and documented before.

DOC Technical Advisor Thomas Emmitt says kāhu prey on a range of threatened species such as matuku-hūrepo/Australasian bittern and tarapirohe/black-fronted tern. “However, we don’t know the extent to which kāhu impact threatened species populations. This research will help us understand whether we need to further protect these species from kāhu as part of wider conservation efforts. By tracking kahu, we hope to understand how much time they spend foraging around places where vulnerable native species live compared with farmland or other areas, and whether it’s just individual birds that pose a threat or kāhu more widely.”

It’s thought these birds are dispersing to new territories. Further monitoring will show whether they stay in these locations.



Image: Ormond Torr

ARE YOU REALLY SEEING A PĀRERA/GREY DUCK?

From the Manawatu branch newsletter.

eBird is trying to get more accurate observations of pārerā/grey duck and have posted an article on the NZ eBird news page about how to distinguish between pārerā, hybrids of pārerā and mallard and mallard. Follow this link to read the full article: https://ebird.org/region/NZ/post/grey_ducks.

In ebird they have created a scoring table to assess whether you really are seeing a pārerā.

The manu needs to have: two clear black face stripes on a cream background, have no white bar

on the front border of the speculum, only a faint white line on the back boarder of the speculum, a slate grey bill, a cream nape, a slate grey tail and grey-brown legs.

eBird ask you to add lots of description of the birds, if you think it could be a pārerā/grey duck. in the comment field to make it easier for the reviewers to assess the observation.



a clear pārerā/grey duck
photo: Serge Rivard

If it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck,
we have to at least consider the possibility
that we have a small aquatic bird of the
family *Anatidae* on our hands

(Douglas Adams (1987) Dirk Gentleys Holistic Detective Agency.

BIRD FLU – H5N1

In our September newsletter we reported on vaccine trials undertaken by DOC on endangered species and this is a follow up to that article.

So far, Oceania is the only region to evade H5N1 avian influenza. But researchers say the virus's arrival is only a matter of time. Particularly vulnerable are NZ's critically endangered bird species, five of which number fewer than 500 individuals. A recent effort using a H5N3 vaccine showed that vaccination can induce a six-month-long immunity in four of these species, which has researchers rushing to develop a strategy to vaccinate greater numbers of animals. But time is ticking; travelling seabirds begin to arrive in the spring, each with the potential to unleash bird flu on the untouched region.

It is easy to imagine how it could happen. A petrel, flying east from the Indian Ocean at the end of the

Austral winter, makes landfall at NZ's southern Codfish Island/Whenua Hou. Tired from its long journey, the petrel seeks refuge in the burrow of a kakapo. If the seabird intrudes when the kākāpō is primed to breed, the male parrot may attempt to mate with the smaller petrel, accidentally smothering it in the process.

In this case, there are two unwitting victims. The petrel harbours a deadly agent: H5 avian influenza. Soon after, bird flu begins to rip through the imperilled parrot population, pushing the species – which numbers fewer than 250 individuals – to extinction.

Tens of millions of wild birds have succumbed to H5 worldwide, but so far Oceania has managed to keep the virus out – buying time for NZ to add another weapon to its arsenal before thousands of birds arrive from distant shores.

The full article for this topic can be found at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/sep/02/new-zealand-vaccinations-rare-species-bird-flu-virus-pandemic-immunisation-migration?utm_source=Live+Audience&utm_campaign=be0b8ae81e-nature-briefing-daily-20250903&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-33f35e09ea-50197944



The results of bird flu on Beak Is, Antarctica, March 2024. Photo Ben Wallis/Reuters



A Westland Petrel
Photo: Peregrine/Alamy

DOC have a comprehensive guide to what to watch out for when you find a dead, sick, or dying bird – go to doc.govt.nz/our-work/wildlife-health/avian-influenza/

TEMPORARY CHANGES TO DOG RULES AT ORERE POINT

New temporary dog access rules from 1 October 2025 until 1 March 2026

(Auckland Council – abridged)

To protect our native shorebirds, like the endangered dotterel, during breeding season, there'll be temporary changes to dog access rules at Ōrere Point Beach Reserve and Ōrere Beach this spring/summer.

From 1 October 2025 until 1 March 2026, dogs will be prohibited at all times on beach and intertidal areas within Ōrere Point Beach Reserve car park and east of the Ōrere River mouth.

In 2024/2025 breeding season, three pairs of northern New Zealand dotterels attempted to nest east of the Ōrere River mouth, with only one chick successfully fledging. Nesting birds and chicks are very vulnerable to disturbance and predation by mammals, including dogs until the chicks fledge at around six weeks old," says Maddie White, Auckland Council Conservation Advisor.

Breeding and roosting habitat for shorebirds is of very limited extent around Auckland, and much of it is under pressure from development and recreational activities – this includes dog walking.

We know Aucklanders love and care for our natural environment and our native wildlife so we're asking dog owners to follow all signs and instructions during the breeding season and help protect these vulnerable birds.



Similar rules apply at the top of the Awhitu Peninsula and include not driving on the beach.

As this picture from Anna demonstrates, rules aren't obeyed if there is no-one there to enforce them.



SONGBIRD COMPETITIONS

Back in our August issue we highlighted the situation of the trade, illegal or otherwise, in songbirds in Indonesia. Here is another aspect on the songbird trade in South East Asia. This is an image from the Hua Nok bird singing competition in

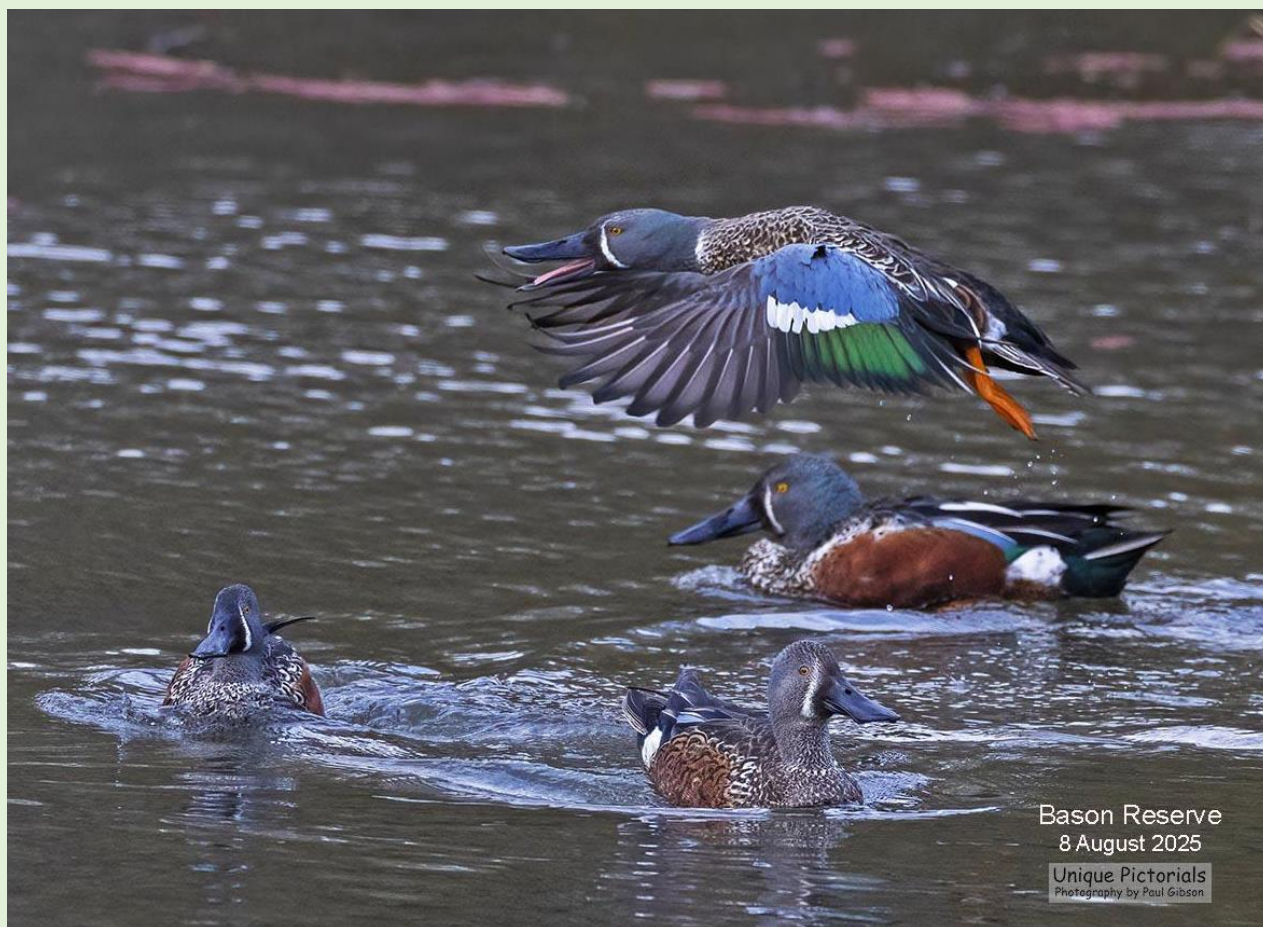
Thailand. Bird singing competitions take place all over Thailand, and are particularly popular in the south. According to Wikipedia, such contests are held in at least 22 countries (including Belgium) and at least 36 different species are used.



Photo from asianitinerary.com



"Wait...that's not a gray chested black wing hawk, that's a drone."



A great photo of kuruwhengi/shoveller

Photo: Paul Gibson

GIVING THE GIFT OF BIRDS THIS CHRISTMAS

Are you looking for a Christmas gift to give to someone special?
You can gift them a 2026 Birds NZ subscription for just \$1.75 a week
to help foster a lifetime appreciation of birds
(just 90 cents a week for students).

Please send an email to membership@birdsNZ.org.nz and
we will send you the Gift Voucher, or visit the website for more details:
<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/donate/gift-a-membership/>



Thanks for reading Kuaka issue #72, October 2025

If you would like to contribute to our newsletter - whether you just want to supply a drawing or photo, or maybe even an article or two – just drop an email to the editor.

Don't forget our Facebook page



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