



*Kōtuku White Heron at Whataroa, West Coast. Photo by Satori Mayell.*

## For your diary . . .

**6 December (Sat) – Ashley Estuary field trip:** This is the last outing of the year, and Anita has chosen the Ashley Estuary because it's one of her favourite places—'You never know what species might turn up there!' If you would like to join, let Anita know on [birds.canterbury@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:birds.canterbury@birdsNZ.org.nz).

**16-18 January (Fri-Sun) – Trip to Pūkoro Shorebird Centre:** This one, too, is courtesy of Anita. Meet in Auckland and proceed to Miranda on Friday, leave Monday. Option to visit TiriTiri Matangi before Pūkoro on the 15th. Contact Anita ([birds.canterbury@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:birds.canterbury@birdsNZ.org.nz)) by 30 November.

**22 February (Sun) – Te Waihora (Lake Ellesmere) survey:** With our November shorebird count behind us, we can look forward to the all-waterbird count in February. These surveys are important for the long-term welfare of our bird populations, so please diary this date and help out if you can.

**February 23 (Mon), 7:30 pm – Members Meeting:** This will be our first members meeting for 2026, and after the long break there should be lots to share in the line of birding trips taken and sightings made. Come along in person or drop in online.

*The sound of birds stops the noise in my mind. -- Carly Simon*

# REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE'S REPORT

Greetings,

Phil Crutchley reported the year's first Shining Cuckoo call in Canterbury (that I'm aware of) in Governors Bay on 23 September, followed by Joy & Paul Sagar on the 26th in Pleasant Valley, Geraldine. On the 15 September Ben Ackerley, Samuel Amaris and Judah Gray found a pair of banded Black Stilts in the wetland at the Halswell River mouth on Lake Ellesmere. Ben reports both birds were hatched in captivity from wild eggs collected from the Tasman delta and released there after being raised. It will be interesting to see if our November survey picks them up again. For these and other bird sightings around the Canterbury, see Ben's report in this issue.

A census of Banded Dotterels at Kaitorete showed numbers have increased following intensive predator control efforts by DOC, CCC and Pest Free Banks Peninsula. Cattle Egrets are still present in the paddocks surrounding Te Waihora / Lake Ellesmere, with Warwick Allen recently counting 17 of them. Australasian Crested Grebes continue their slow expansion, with one spotted several times on the Avon River.

Members meetings have been well attended in person and online, with some interesting speakers being particular draws. In August Nick Allen ran us through the birding highlights of his trip to Portugal, and the following month Andrew Crossland and Phil Crutchley reported on their hunt for wading bird locations visit on Bali-Flores.

David Melville called into our October meeting for an inspiring talk about wading birds, showing how data from our regular surveys helps determine species trends and inform conservation management both nationally and abroad. We've also been having short tutorials on tricky bird ID challenges. Most recently David Thomas showed us how to distinguish various sandpiper species, so now we're all swotted up for our November 23rd waders survey.

Mid-week rambles led by Janet Burton, Sharon Lake and Bev Alexander continue to be popular, with visits to local spots such as Te Waihora and Caton's Bay. I'm organising a January trip to Pūkoro, which will be a first for several of us. The last date for people to join us is November 30<sup>th</sup>. After that, if you want to come along you'll have to make your own travel arrangements.

As 2025 draws to a close, I'd like to thank everyone who has helped support our branch this year, whether you've organised field trips, helped out in surveys, given a talk at one of our meetings, been on our organising committee or contributed to or edited our newsletter.

Let's hope 2026 will be equally successful.

Ngā mihi nui

**Anita Spencer**

Regional Representative  
Canterbury and West Coast



# Birding Rambles with Janet, Sharon and Bev

The midweek rambles continued to be well planned and well attended over recent months. On 13 August Janet Burton took us to Cooper's Lagoon and environs. Several Banded Dotterels skittered about on the shingle, and on the beach side we were treated to the curious sight of a seal about 20m offshore thermoregulating by holding one pectoral flipper in the air.



*A Chaffinch gets close and personal at the Christchurch Adventure Park. Photo by Janet Burton*

On 28 August Janet took us to the Christchurch Adventure Park. On another beautiful day the group explored the Cashmere Esplanade Reserve before taking to the trails around the Adventure Park buildings. Not much bird life was found among the large conifers, but the Chaffinches frequenting the deck around the coffee shop provided uncommonly close viewing of that common species.

Sharon Lake organised the next three rambles, the first on 11 September to Embankment Road, Te Waihora Lake Ellesmere. On a perfect early spring day we were treated to a nice variety of shorebirds, sometimes viewed through a slight haze of midges. The highlight was the sighting of what we took to be a Gull-billed Tern, later corrected to Australian Tern.



*Erick, Jan & Glennis doing the touristy thing at Roto Kōhatu. Photo by Sharon Lake*

September 18 found us at Roto Kōhatu Reserve off Sawyer's Arms Road. Roto Kōhatu is off limits to jet skis, so water birds feature prominently, especially the resident pair of Great Crested Grebes. The stroll around the lake was perfect for a morning's outing, especially with coffee afterwards at the Copenhagen Bakery!

Finally, on 16 October, we wended out Little River way to visit Price Valley and Birdlings Flat. Word had it all but one of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos in Price Valley had been culled, and indeed we saw only one. A strong wind was blowing at Birdlings Flat, but we spotted several Banded Dotterels amongst the shingle as well as a great many oystercatchers, gulls, Caspian Terns and Paradise Shelducks in the marshy pond beside the residential area. An added treat was a lunch stop at the old power boat club shed to view the grebes, gulls, terns and waterfowl on Lake Forsyth.

--Erick Akeley



*Jan, Tineke & Bev scan the distance at Coopers Lagoon. Photo by Erick Akeley*



*Sharon & Jan discuss a sighting as Patrick gathers more data. Photo by Erick Akeley*



# Members' News

*Peter Reese, Banding Legend:* In the last issue of *The Wrybill*, Anita reported on the tribute paid at the BirdsNZ annual conference to local banding guru Peter Reese. Peter was also written up in the NZ Bird Banding Scheme's August 2025 issue of *BirDBanD*, which you can find here: [BirDBanD](#). To get more information about Peter's banding exploits and lots of photos and reports of other banders, go to Peter's blog at [Banding Blog](#).



Peter Reese in his natural environment. Photo by Rachel Hutton

*Team Members wanted for Fraser Hill Bird Race, 20-21 June 2026:* BirdsNZ member Bud Chapman puts out the following call for expressions of interest in a spectacular birding opportunity:

*On 20-21 June 2026 Tourism Pahang in Malaysia will hold its 37th Fraser's Hill Bird Race, an international birding extravaganza which attracts teams from across the world. The race (a bird survey on steroids) challenges birders and photographers to identify and photograph as many species as possible in a 24-hour period.*



Long-tailed Broadbill. Photo by Bud Chapman



Ready! Set! . . . Photo by Bud Chapman



Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush. Photo by Bud Chapman

*I have attended five of these events, three times taking teams from India. Now I would like to assemble some*

*teams (3 people in each) from New Zealand for next year's event. For the weekend of the race, transport from and back to the airport is provided, as is accommodation and vouchers for local food shops.*

*To make the most of the trip, I plan to arrange with an NGO I belong to on Borneo for a week or so there before flying home. This will not be a guided tour, so participants can*

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*organise their own flights and accommodation if they wish. It's about making new friends, having new birding adventures and experiencing life in a different part of the world.*

*If interested, please contact me, Bud Chapman, at [budchapman@trioschools.com](mailto:budchapman@trioschools.com) or on 021 1447 690 (Messenger or WhatsApp preferred). You might also like to check out the YouTube video and Facebook post below for further details:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXYd5FjDxE>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdwatchingmalaysia/posts/1217023723028868/>

## Reports from Afield

A roundup of recent BirdsNZ activities, outings and fieldwork

### Canterbury Bird Sightings

With spring well underway, bird activity has increased since the return of Shining Cuckoos and migrant waders.

As of the end of October, the Ashley Estuary was still hosting the resident pair of Little Egrets, which were showing some nice head and back plumes. A group of 10 Red Knots arrived at the estuary earlier in the season, and a White-winged Tern was reported there by Heather Rogers on the 19th of October.

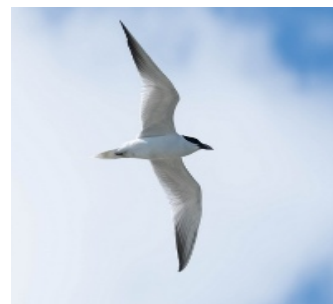
White-winged Terns were reported again on 25 October, when Steve Attwood sighted a pair hawking about over Coopers Lagoon. Both birds were coming into breeding plumage, with one not far off full.

At Travis Wetland, sightings of Spotless Crake, a secretive wetland species rarely seen, are becoming increasingly regular around the viewing tower on the west side of the wetland.

Notable waders seen at Lake Ellesmere (Jarvis to Wolfes Bay) include 5 Sharp tailed Sandpipers, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper, 18 Red-necked Stints, 13 Pacific Golden Plovers and 19 Red Knot, as well as 2 Curlew Sandpipers earlier in the season.

An exciting addition to the above list of annual migrants was the sighting on 24 August of a Whimbrel, only the second ever individual recorded in the Selwyn District. What was presumably the same bird was re-sighted on 20 September and 11 and 19 October. The bird is quite difficult to find as it has been moving around the Jarvis/Wolfes Bay area as water levels fluctuate.

The resident Lake Ellesmere Australian Tern was sighted at Wolfe's Bay on 19 October and again on the 24th, hunting fish and getting chased about by Black-billed Gulls.



*Australian Tern. Photo by Ben Ackerley*

On 15 September Samuel Amaris, Judah Gray and I found a pair of banded Black Stilts in the flooded wetland at the mouth of the Halswell River on Lake Ellesmere—a rare sighting for the lake and a nice band re-sighting. Both birds were hatched in captivity from wild eggs collected from the Tasman delta, where they were released after being raised. The female carries very important genes for the Black Stilt population.



*Black Stilt seen at Halswell River mouth, 15 Sept. Photo by Ben Ackerley*

-- Ben Ackerley

## 2025 Bird(s) of the Year!

As you all know, the winner of the 2025 Bird of the Year contest was the Kārearea/New Zealand Falcon, which is now a two-time champion, having also won in 2012. You may not have seen, however, the full results given below. -- ed.

Rank	Candidate	Vote Tally	Rank	Candidate	Vote Tally
1	Kārearea/New Zealand falcon	14317	38	Tawaki	2838
2	Kea	12506	39	Shore plover	2742
3	Black robin	11726	40	Harrier	2703
4	Kākāpō	10792	41	Weka	2703
5	Ruru	10174	42	Red-billed gull	2636
6	Eastern rockhopper penguin	10030	43	Long-tailed cuckoo	2568
7	Fantail	9915	44	Pūteketeke	2524
8	Takahē	9828	45	Spotted shag	2439
9	Hihi	8885	46	Subantarctic skua	2246
10	Hoiho	8665	47	Black-fronted tern	2213
11	Toroa	8458	48	Variable oystercatcher	2188
12	Kōkako	7459	49	Pūkeko	2171
13	Whio	7011	50	Mohua	1838
14	Kiwi pukupuku	6902	51	Grey warbler	1836
15	White heron	6847	52	New Zealand dabchick	1751
16	Kororā	6818	53	Hutton's shearwater	1690
17	Wrybill	6575	54	Subantarctic snipe	1660
18	Tūī	6367	55	Pūtangitangi	1653
19	Rock wren	6113	56	Grey duck	1591
20	Rifleman	6094	57	Bar-tailed godwit	1534
21	Kererū	5809	58	Fernbird	1533
22	Kōtare	5699	59	Brown teal	1524
23	Orange-fronted parakeet	5691	60	Black-billed gull	1439
24	Kākā	5445	61	Reef heron	1278
25	Fairy tern	5377	62	Fairy prion	1066
26	Southern New Zealand dotterel	5303	63	Shining cuckoo	1027
27	Northern New Zealand dotterel	5137	64	Cook's petrel	961
28	Kōka	4797	65	Australasian gannet	926
29	Saddleback	4395	66	Pipit	723
30	Australasian bittern	4240	67	Brown creeper	716



31	Royal spoonbill	3878	68	Westland petrel	612
32	Kakī	3717	69	Banded rail	542
33	Miromiro	3680	70	Scaup	527
34	Tauhō	3431	71	Red knot	484
35	New Zealand robin	3112	72	Spotless crane	473
36	Korimako	2987	73	Whitehead	430
37	Banded dotterel	2861			
					VOTE TOTAL 75,439

## *Kaikoura Birding Adventure* (photos by Janet Burton, Ying Yi and Tim Horne)

With eight in our group we headed off to Kaikoura for a long weekend from Saturday to Tuesday, 8th to 11th November. The accommodation was again great, and the weather stayed fine throughout our stay.



*Something to chirp about! Banded Dotterel and dotterel chick.*

Around 4pm on Saturday afternoon Ailsa Howard came to talk about the project she started 10 years ago to increase Banded Dotterel numbers at South Bay and along the beach front in town. These little birds are under constant attack from people, pets and other predatory birds, and unfortunately the breeding success rate is not high: 1-4% each season if

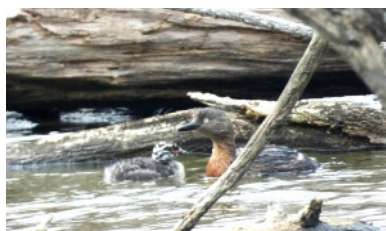
lucky, which is very disappointing. Happily, we were able to report back to Ailsa that we spotted three young chicks and two parents at locations she asked us to check. We hope they survive!

On Sunday morning five of us went on an Albatross Encounter Pelagic boat cruise. The sea was a bit choppy at 9am when we started, but we saw albatross, mollymawks, large and small petrels, Hutton's, Buller's and Short-tailed Shearwaters, plus gulls and shags. A pod of Dusky Dolphins gave us a show too!



*Seabirds galore on the pelagic cruise.*

The next day we drove to Lake Elterwater, which is always a good spot for birding, and there we found a Dabchick



*Dabchick with young.*

with one young chick, a Hoary-Headed Grebe and four Australasian Crested Grebes, among other more common waterbirds.

Back at South Bay, Pied Shags were breeding in the trees by the car park, and then a gannet turned up, although after a few unsuccessful dives it continued on its way. We checked out several other well-known birding spots in the area before finally heading home on Tuesday. A good time had by all, and we may look at doing the trip again next autumn.

-- Janet Burton

## Memorial Picnic Table at Yarrs Bay



A job well done! The new table in place and ready for use. Photo by Janet Burton

On 14 November Anita and other committee members met at Yarrs Bay to erect a picnic table just beside the carpark. The table was donated by the Christchurch branch of BirdsNZ and features a plaque quoting a line from enthusiastic long-term member Sheila Petch.

The weather was good, and with

many willing hands lifting and Bev Alexander keeping a close eye on the spirit level, the table was firmly set in place by Craig Alexander. Now all are welcomed to sit, enjoy their picnics and search for whatever elusive bird they may have come to see from the many to be found in this area.



'I have found that to get proficient at identifying waders you have to regularly visit them. The rewards are to ID by yourself a bird that has not been seen before.' -- Sheila Petch. Photo by Janet Burton

-- Janet Burton

## 'Welcome the Birds' Event at Waikuku

The Waimakariri District has braided rivers on two sides which are home to some birds needing special attention. Wrybill, Black-fronted Tern and Black-billed Gull immediately come to mind. These rare birds live in the middle of a growing population, yet many people don't even know they exist.



The event was held in the community hall. Photo by Richard Chambers

To address this problem, the Waimakariri District Council collaborated with several local groups to organise a 'Welcome the Birds' event at Waikuku on August 31. The date is significant as the river is closed to vehicles from September 1 until Feb 1 to allow the birds to breed with less disturbance.

The three groups working with the council were the Ashley Rakahuri Rivercare Group, whose efforts focus exclusively on the Ashley River, the Waimakariri Biodiversity Trust and

Pest Free Waimakariri. Together, we liaised with schools to create a 'flock' of 2-dimensional cutout birds to represent the real arriving migrants. We delivered blank cutouts to the schools, and the children painted the birds in class and then brought them along to place



in the exhibit. This concept is one championed by BRAID (Braided River Aid) to heighten public awareness of birdlife on our braided rivers.

Each of the organising groups had its own display table, with members 'meeting and greeting' the public, distributing information brochures and supervising face-painting, badge-making, colouring by numbers or what have you. Mayor Don Gordon spoke eloquently about the importance of native river birdlife, and I and several others on the planning committee echoed Don's sentiments in our own brief addresses.



*A somewhat exotic flock created by school children in Waimakariri to 'welcome the birds'. Photo by Richard Chambers.*

We had hoped to do everything out of doors, but rain forced us into the nearby community hall. Unfortunately, the wet weather also limited the guided walks we had planned. Nevertheless, the turnout was fantastic, and the vibes were positive and vibrant. We plan to run the event again next year, so keep an eye out for the notices.

-- Richard Chambers, Pest Free Waimakariri

## *Cats Endangering Pukunui Southern New Zealand Dotterels on Stewart Island*

Member Janet Burton recently visited Stewart Island and would like to call attention to a recent report from RNZ's Farah Hancock about feral cat predation on Southern New Zealand Dotterels there. The following is excerpted from Farah's article. For her full report go to <https://www.rnz.co.nz/programmes/in-depth-special-projects/story/2019013693/the-controversial-secondary-kill-plan-to-eliminate-feral-cats-on-stewart-island>.

*Daniel Cocker, also known as Dotterel Dan, is one of the Department of Conservation (DOC) rangers dedicated to saving the Southern New Zealand dotterel / pukunui from extinction.*

*Feral cats are the birds' number one enemy and in recent years the rangers have been fighting a losing battle against the feline predators. Hungry rats steal the bait from the cat traps before cats come across it and the wary felines are naturally suspicious of traps.*

*Last year was a good breeding season where numbers increased from 101 to 105, but the seasons before were a different story.*

*'When your population's dropping, when you're seeing 40 to 50 adults dying each breeding season, that's the stuff that keeps you up at night', Cocker says.*



Male Pukunui Southern New Zealand Dotterel in snow. Photo by DOC / Daniel Cocker

*There's a goal to build the population to 300 by 2035, but while cats prowl nest sites, it feels like a pipe dream. With 40 birds killed by cats each year, extinction seems more likely than the 10-year hope of tripling the population.*

*Without drastic action, there's a chance the pukunui could join the ranks of 14 other extinct native bird species, where feral cats played a starring role in their demise.*

*With the birds poised on the edge of oblivion, drastic action has come in the form of small green cereal pellets laced with sodium fluoroacetate, a*

*controversial poison more commonly known as 1080.*

*The hope is that rats will eat the 1080 pellets, and that cats will eat the poisoned rats and die themselves, giving the dotterel a clear run at a successful breeding season.*

## **Te Waihora Lake Ellesmere Shorebird Survey**

The shorebird survey at Te Waihora Lake Ellesmere came off smashingly, with over 15 eager counters from BirdsNZ turning up at the end of Embankment Road for an 8:30am start. After a short briefing by Anita, we were away to our assigned areas. We had a large area of lake shore to cover—from Osbornes Drain in the north-east to Fisherman's Point in the south-west—as well as Cooper's Lagoon and the mouth of the Rakaia River. The weather was perfect, however, and with the lake being low most of the normally soggy or muddy spots were easily negotiated. Keep an eye out for the results, which should be out before long.



Anita rallying (some of) the troops at the pre-count briefing. Photo by Francis Schmechel.

Not only are these surveys important for monitoring wader populations on the lake; they also make for an enjoyable day out for those involved. Many thanks go to all who participated. On 22 February we have an all-waterbird count, so please watch for further information from Anita.

-- editor





Pied Stilt *en pointe*, Te Waihora Lake Ellesmere, 23 February 2025.  
Photo courtesy of the stilt, with able technical and artistic assistance by  
Catherine Fitchett.



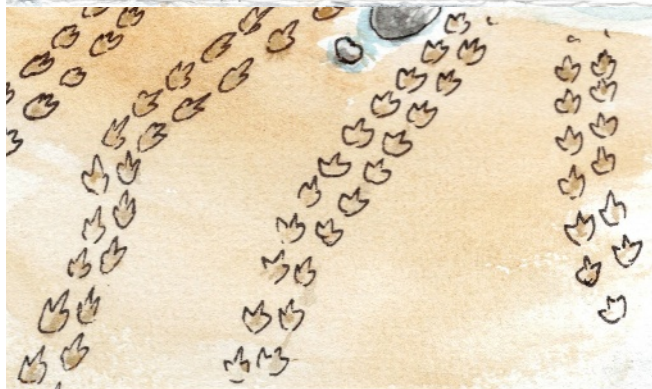
# Hoiho Obituary – an artist's lament

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No more  
Hoi ho  
in Roaring Bay



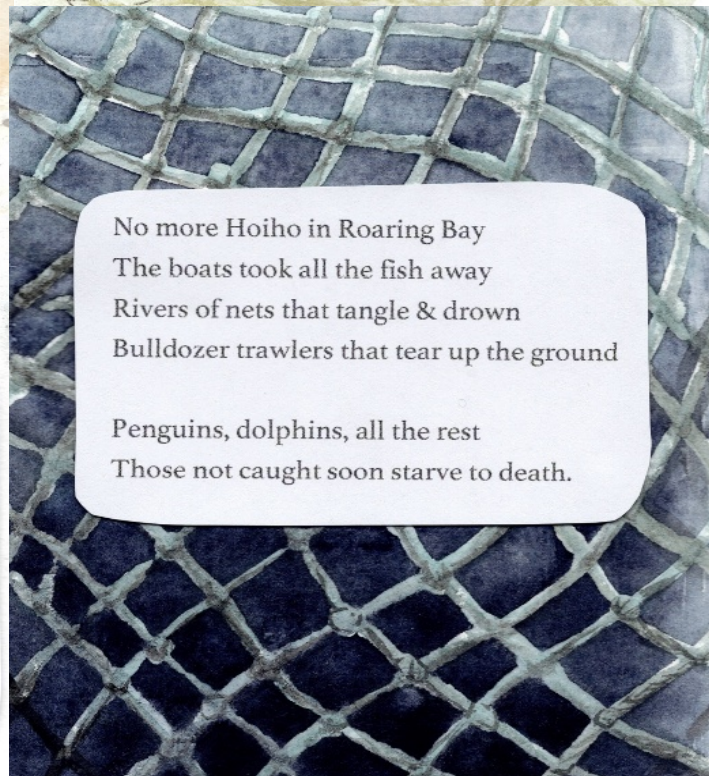
Poem & Art  
by Satori Mayell



No more Hoiho in Roaring Bay  
'But how could they have gone?' you say  
'Chased by dogs? Attacked by stoats?  
Loss of habitat? Warming home?'  
All factors, yes, but notably  
most Hoiho starve or drown at sea.

2

No more Hoiho in Roaring Bay  
Here last year, but gone today  
For a hundred, thousand years their calls  
filled these rocky, windblown walls  
Now silent save the empty waves.



No more Hoiho in Roaring Bay  
The boats took all the fish away  
Rivers of nets that tangle & drown  
Bulldozer trawlers that tear up the ground  
  
Penguins, dolphins, all the rest  
Those not caught soon starve to death.



No more Hoiho in Roaring Bay  
What did those big men have to say?

"There's plenty more fish in the sea,  
we don't need marine sanctuaries!  
or cameras on boats or technology  
or woke sustainability...

plus it's expensive."

It is close to dawn; Sky softly aglow with the distilled light of sun that has not yet broken the horizon.

It is Summer, but the night's chill lingers in the bay air, in the low, concrete hide looking down over wilding grasses and the quiet sea. I am wearing my warm cloak, and sipping from a thermos. I have been here since 4am.

Behind me, the wall features an officially-erected board detailing the lifecycle and ecology of the yellow-eyed penguin. Next to it, several pieces of printed paper hang from tape and blu-tack. On them are graphs, data, references. Lines across the page going down, down, down.

It is 2024, and where there were once hundreds of Hoiho nests beneath this hide, now there is one.

I hold my vigil, sketching the stretching bowl of the bay, and the trees blown into right angles growing green on the cliffs.

The stars have winked out, sky pinking and blueing as the sun rises proper, though the tall Eastern cliff holds the light at bay, creating a liminal space that is neither dawn, nor day.

No penguins on this fine morn; perhaps they slept at sea to have more time to hunt. In no rush I pack my materials, when at last the sun breaks onto the Western cliffs to my right, gently creeping down towards the stones and sea.

And there she is.

With no rapturous call, no fanfare; a single Hoiho picks her way across the shaded boulders down to where land becomes sea.

As the pale light reaches the water, setting soft glitter atop each wave, she steps forward to be swallowed by the ocean.

The following year, they do not return.

6

No more Hoiho in Roaring Bay  
Here for millennia, gone today.

"No more penguins? Well that sucks  
let's get fish & chips for lunch."



8



The last Hoiho in Roaring Bay  
November 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024. 6:33am

*Introducing you to . . .*

## The South Island Wildlife Hospital

by Ruby Garbutt, Alison Chick & Micah Jensen



*An Australasian bittern (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*; Threatened—Nationally Critical) at the South Island Wildlife Hospital. Photo: A Chick, SIWH*

Aotearoa is well known internationally for the unique range of birds inhabiting our diverse landscapes and surrounding ocean. The abundance of marine birds found here even lends it the nickname ‘the seabird capital of the world’. In addition, as Kiwis our namesake is an iconic endemic bird, giving testament to the cultural significance of our feathered friends. Given the treasured taonga we have at our doorstep, one would think wildlife care would be well funded. To the contrary, wildlife rescue work around the country is struggling, with the burden of finding funding landing heavily on the shoulders of the community, in the form of volunteering, sponsorships and donations. Yet hidden from view

in the Willowbank car park, there is a wonderful example of community spirit: a hospital whose staff are diligently working to protect our cherished taonga.

Since its establishment in 2007, the Wildlife Veterinary Trust had recognised the need for a wildlife hospital located in the South Island. As a result, the South Island Wildlife Hospital commenced operations in Christchurch in 2014. It was the first facility of its kind in the South Island. Since then, it has been working tirelessly to treat and rehabilitate sick and injured native birds for release back into the wild.

The South Island Wildlife Hospital is a non-profit organisation that runs completely on charitable sponsorships and donations. A powerhouse of committed volunteers cares for over 500 wildlife patients a year under the direction of highly trained and experienced wildlife vets and a talented board with varied expertise. The hospital would not survive without a grass roots community spirit—our team of over 60 volunteers do anything from helping on the hospital floor, to fundraising, website maintenance, social media, administration, phone support, and conservation education.



*A leucistic (loss of pigment variant) Southern Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) at the South Island Wildlife Hospital. Photo: A Chick, SIWH*





Antarctic fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) at the South Island Wildlife hospital. Photo: A Chick, SIWH

We treat numerous species, including many of Aotearoa's most threatened birds, such as the Antipodean Albatross, matuku-hūrepo (Australasian Bittern), Salvin's Mollymawk, hoiho (yellow-eyed penguin), and kea. We also receive migrant seabirds such as the Antarctic Fulmar and leucistic Southern Giant Petrel pictured. The hospital screens for wildlife diseases, supports key research projects, and responds to emergencies like oil spills, just to give a taster of our essential mahi. To date this year, we have admitted over 550 patients representing more than 70 species from all over Canterbury (including Kaikoura and Arthurs Pass) and the West Coast.

Most patients end up at the hospital due to threats caused by people, including predation (mainly by our cats and dogs), window strike, vehicle collisions, fishing gear entanglements, toxicities, pollution, welfare abuses and the impacts of climate change. Consequently, by giving affected wildlife a chance at recovery and release back into the wild, we play a critical role in offsetting the negative impacts of human activities. Many threats, such as plastic pollution, can be addressed through education about positive behaviour change. To empower a new generation of avian guardians or kaitiaki, we recently started a free conservation education outreach initiative teaching children (and adults too) about what actions we can take to protect our native New Zealand wildlife (see <https://wildlifelifehospital.co.nz/education/>).

To continue our important work, we need your support. To find out more about us and what you can do to help, please see: <https://wildlifelifehospital.co.nz/>



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*Birds are indicators of the environment. If they are in trouble, we know we'll soon be in trouble.* -- Roger Tory Peterson

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## What the Boffins say . . .

### *Recent findings in avian biology*

-- **In a global study, researchers have identified** a mutually intelligible whining alarm call among bird species commonly victimised by nest parasites. The 21 species studied included the Superb Fairy-wren in Australasia, the Tawny-flanked Prinia in Africa, Hume's Leaf Warbler in Asia and the Greenish Warbler in Europe. Whenever the birds hear the call, they initiate aggressive mobbing behaviour as if to ward off a nest intruder. Experiments showed that species in Australia and China responded just as rapidly to foreign versions of the call as to their own. In contrast, Yellow Warblers in North America, which are parasitised by Brown-headed Cowbirds but crucially lack the alarm call in their repertoire, do not mob when hearing it but return to their nests as they would in response to a distress call.

Researchers speculate that the distinctive call retains elements of the distress call of an ancient common ancestor, and that these elements still evoke distress responses in species like the Yellow Warbler, while in other species the call has evolved to signal specifically the presence of nest parasites and to elicit characteristic mobbing behaviour. As the first recorded instance of a vocalisation containing both learned and innate components, the study provides important clues as to how animal communication evolved.

-- **Merlin Bird ID app 'down under': the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology is helping** the nonprofit FishEye Collaborative develop their Omnidirectional Underwater Passive Acoustic Camera (UPAC-360), an aquatic audiovisual setup that can trace individual fish sounds to their source. The device has already recorded 46 unique vocalisations in the Caribbean, more than half from species not previously known to make sounds, and it is thought a Merlin-like app for fish might eventuate.

-- **CNBC reports** the following specs on the birds with the loudest calls:

White Bellbird – 125 decibels

European Bittern – 110 decibels

Screaming Piha – 116 decibels

Victoria Crowned Pigeon – 100 decibels

Common Raven – 115 decibels

Kakapo – 90-100 decibels

Common Loon – 110 decibels

For comparison, a petrol chainsaw or fire engine siren emits 100-120 decibels.

-- compiled by the editor

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## Other News of Interest

### *Occasional Birding Guides Wanted*

Anita is sometimes contacted by people visiting NZ and wanting to hook up with local birders while they are in the country. If anyone is interested in doing this on a paid basis, she will be happy to put their names forward. Just send her an email at [birds.canterbury@birdsNZ.org.nz](mailto:birds.canterbury@birdsNZ.org.nz).

### *2026 Chatham Island Birding Tours*

*Tour 1: 9-16 March 2026*

*Tour 2: 16-23 March 2026*

Led by Ela Hunt, Ornithologist Specialising in Chatham Island Birdlife

Join an expert-led expedition to the Chatham Islands – a rare opportunity to explore one of Aotearoa's most unique birding destinations. With renowned ornithologist Ela Hunt as guide, these flexible, small-group tours include visits to key hotspots, predator-free sanctuaries, and special conservation projects. Package includes return flights to the Chathams, private accommodation, all meals, expert guiding, and all excursions.

**Cost:** NZ\$7,100 (excluding NZ domestic connecting flights and meals prior to arrival)

**Full itinerary and details here:** <https://travelwithlesleywhyte.com/bird-watching-tours/>

### *Keep an Eye Out for Banded Dotterels Marked with Tags*

DOC is currently running a new **Banded Dotterel migration research project** and is seeking support from birders to help re-sight marked birds across Aotearoa. If you spot a marked banded dotterel, please email DOC at [b.dot.resighting@doc.govt.nz](mailto:b.dot.resighting@doc.govt.nz) with the following information:

- Description of the marked bird (band/flag details)
- Location
- Date and time of observation



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## Have you read this? . . .

### A selection of book or other recommendations

Here are three very readable books on the ever-intriguing topic of bird migration. All are available from the CCC Library collection in either hard copy or audio recording.

***A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds***, by Scott Weidensaul (2021) ranges from Yellow Sea mudflat destruction to Appalachian raptor migrations to illegal bird netting on Crete (or was it Cyprus?). The writing is fluent, colloquial and engaging, with many of the author's personal experiences featuring throughout. I most enjoyed the discussion of bird navigation, and especially the section on magnetoreception. Apparently, the avian ability to orient magnetically depends on exposure to blue light. If I understood correctly, photons of blue light interact with a molecule called cryptochrome 4 in the bird's retina to form traces in the field of vision something like the heads-up display in a fighter pilot's helmet. It seems, therefore, that birds can, literally, *see* the magnetic field—its strength, its longitudinal orientation and, crucially, its angle of declination (which increases with latitude). This sixth sense, together with solar, celestial, topographic and other visual cues, make birds the navigational wonders they are.

The subtitle of ***Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration***, by Rebecca Heisman (2023), rather overstates the case, as any number of questions about bird migration remain unresolved. Still, the mystery is knowledgeably discussed, and some promising developments are explored. The highlight for me was a chapter on bird sound recordings and how simple DIY audio receivers might be used not only to detect birds *Merlin*-style but also to count them as they pass overhead. I didn't get a clear sense of how successful these efforts have been—surely myriad variables can affect calling frequency—but the potential nonetheless seems real. All in all, *Flight Paths* is well informed and is, like Weidensaul's book, written for the layperson.

***Flight Lines***, by Andrew Darby (2020), may resonate more with Kiwi readers as here the focus is on the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. Darby, an Australian, tracks the flights of two satellite-tagged Grey Plovers from Tasmania to their breeding grounds in the Arctic. On the return journey, one bird stops transmitting in northern Siberia while the other makes it as far as Northern Territories, Australia. Numerous other species are discussed along the way; and when the author is diagnosed with cancer, the struggle of the birds to survive the hazards of migration becomes for him an intensely personal reflection of his own contest with mortality. BirdsNZ members will also be interested to find that David Melville, guest speaker for our October branch meeting, features prominently in those parts of the book dealing with habitat loss in the Yellow Sea and elsewhere in East Asia.

-- Erick Akeley

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## ***The Albatross***

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867)

Sometimes, to entertain themselves, the men of the crew  
Lure upon deck an unlucky albatross, one of those vast  
Birds of the sea that follow unwearied the voyage through,  
Flying in slow and elegant circles above the mast.

No sooner have they disentangled him from their nets  
Than this aerial colossus, shorn of his pride,  
Goes hobbling pitiably across the planks and lets  
His great wings hang like heavy, useless oars at his side.

How droll is the poor floundering creature, how limp and weak —  
He, but a moment past so lordly, flying in state!  
They tease him: One of them tries to stick a pipe in his beak;  
Another mimics with laughter his odd lurching gait.

The Poet is like that wild inheritor of the cloud,  
A rider of storms, above the range of arrows and slings;  
Exiled on earth, at bay amid the jeering crowd,  
He cannot walk for his unmanageable wings.

*Translated by George Dillon*



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## From the Editor's Desk --

Hello everyone,

In the interest of improving the *Wrybill*, I would like to enlist a few members as regular correspondents, or reporters, if you like, to provide content on specific topics for each issue. Two spots have been filled already: Ben Ackerley has kindly agreed to submit quarterly updates on rare bird sightings, while Ruby Garbutt and Alison Chick from the South Island Wildlife Hospital will keep us posted on goings on there. You can read their first submissions in this issue. I am grateful for their willingness to help, and I look forward to working with them further.

I would like to get a few more people, however, to cover three other subject areas. The first is book & video recommendations. Janet Burton and I suggested a few titles in the August *Wrybill*, and I have continued the column in this issue with three of my recent 'good reads'. I would love to have another avid reader take this column over and make it their own.

The second vacancy is for someone to keep us up to date on research findings in avian biology, or at least offer some interesting facts related thereto. You can see my attempt at this in these pages, but, again, I would prefer to get another person on board for it. You wouldn't need to have a Ph.D. or anything of the sort; just an active curiosity about what makes birds 'tick' and a desire to share what you learn.

Lastly, and to my mind most importantly, I would like to have someone reporting on political matters. BirdsNZ has historically been an apolitical nonprofit, and the *Wrybill* should, of course, publish accordingly. Opinion pieces, diatribes, polemics and explicit endorsements, in other words, are out. But being apolitical (i.e., non-partisan) does not mean being non-political (i.e., having nothing to do with politics), and I think the *Wrybill* might play a role in helping readers engage more effectively and responsibly in our various levels of government. The need, therefore, is for a dedicated person to provide accurate, objective information on those issues, pieces of legislation, elections, candidates, etc., that bear strong relevance to bird life in Aotearoa.

Again, this is a call for volunteers who can provide 300-350 words (about 1 page) of copy for each issue. These people would be named as authors of their respective columns and identified as regular *Wrybill* contributors. If you are interested in any of the jobs described, or wish to discuss any of them further, please contact me at [editor.cw@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:editor.cw@birdsnz.org.nz) or on 021-0278-2909. And if you happen to lack writing confidence, don't let that hold you back: I'll check the grammar and smooth out the rough spots.

-- Erick Akeley



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# Health & Safety for BirdsNZ Outings

For everyone to have an enjoyable time on field trips and other activities we need to make sure everyone stays safe. Here's how you can do your bit.

1. Wear clothing appropriate for the activity such as plenty of warm layers, hat and gloves in winter; a sun hat and sunglasses in summer. Bringing a raincoat is always a sensible option. Footwear needs to be suitable as well - think sturdy soles and good ankle support for many walks, especially on hills, something that can get wet and muddy especially at Lake Ellesmere in winter. Walking poles could be helpful to some on steep and/or uneven ground.
2. Be honest and open about your physical abilities. Not all trips will be suitable for everyone. If you have a pre-existing medical condition that could impact the trip (such as—but not limited to—asthma, allergy to bee stings, diabetes) please notify the trip leader of the condition, any problems that could arise and what the trip leader and others may be required to do to assist you. This information will be kept confidential unless a medical event requires it being shared. Make sure you bring whatever medications you may need.
3. Bring enough food and drink for the event plus a little extra in case the trip takes longer than planned. Fresh water is not always available and dehydration can be a concern in summer so bring your own drinking water.
4. Listen to the health & safety briefing given at the beginning of each trip, keep your eye out for unexpected hazards and talk to the trip leader and others if you have any concerns along the way. Inform the trip leader of any accidents or near misses.
5. Stay with the group at all times unless you have the trip leader's okay.
6. The trip leader reserves the right to decline participation in any trip if they have concerns about anyone being unable to participate safely or not being suitably equipped.
7. Health and safety incidents or concerns must be reported to the trip leader/RR immediately.

## **Scopes for Loan**

If you are in Canterbury and wish to borrow a scope, contact Sandra (sandraw67@gmail.com). If you are on the West Coast and wish to borrow a scope, contact Liz Meek (ronmeek555@gmail.com).

# Canterbury Regional Contacts

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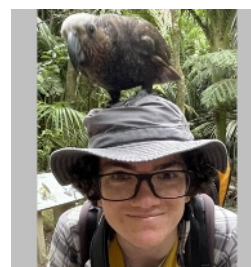


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# Who We Are . . .



BirdsNZ Canterbury/West Coast is one of 19 regional branches of Birds New Zealand that together provide a vibrant network for members to engage in the study of birds and their habitats across Aotearoa. We engage members through a variety of activities, including

- **Monthly branch meetings**, featuring bird ID tips and expert guest speakers



## Where?

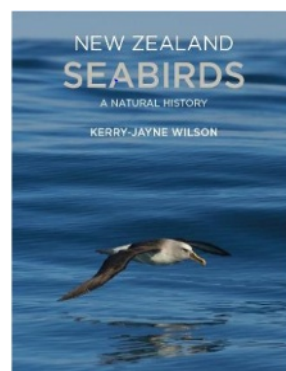
Mahaanui Area DOC Office, 31 Nga Mahi Road, off Blenheim Road, Sockburn. Plenty of parking available.

## When?

7:30 pm on the last Monday of each month

- **Regular Weekend Field Trips**, often in support of ongoing research or surveys
- **Monthly midweek birding 'rambles'** to local birding hotspots

Care to join us? Just come along to our next meeting or, alternatively, follow this link, <[BirdsNZ membership](#)> for an application form and further information. Current annual fees are \$90 for New Zealand residents or \$45 for students. As well as quarterly issues of our magazine, *Birds New Zealand*, new members now receive a complimentary copy of *New Zealand Seabirds: A Natural History*. Written by Kerry-Jayne Wilson, this stunning 136-page volume features informative text and over 100 full-colour photographs and maps, all offering invaluable insights into the lives of Aotearoa's seabirds.



## **2026 Membership Renewals Notice**

Your annual membership is renewable on the anniversary of your joining date. Periodic renewal reminders are sent out starting six weeks before your renewal date, and will continue to six weeks after that date or until the membership is paid. You can renew your membership by direct credit or credit card payment via our website at <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/login/#myaccount>.

Birds New Zealand depends on your subscription, so please pay promptly. Please also notify the Membership Secretary at [membership@birdsnz.org.nz](mailto:membership@birdsnz.org.nz) if your contact details have changed since your last renewal.



# BIRDS | SCIENCE | PEOPLE



Australasian Bittern Matuku-hūrepo photo: Glenda Rees/NZ Birds Online.

Our 2024 Research Fund is helping to fund a new eDNA monitoring study of the critically endangered Australasian Bittern to inform evidence-based conservation policies.

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

[www.birdsnz.org.nz](http://www.birdsnz.org.nz)

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*You'll have a lot more respect for a bird . . .*



*. . . after you try making a nest. -- Cynthia Lewis*