



BIRDS
NEW ZEALAND
Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

MANAWATŪ

Newsletter December 2025

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From the Regional Representative

Christmas and the holiday season is fast approaching. The birds are bringing up their young ones and the migrating birds from the north have arrived. What a joy!

We have had a year with lots of activity. It has been great to see between 10 and 25 people at the meetings year-round. Thank you for coming along and making the meetings enjoyable.

I am in the process of planning the meetings for next year. I have speakers for February, March and May. (See under “upcoming meetings”). If you have suggestions for topics or speakers please contact me.

I am also planning trips for next year. Sue Moore suggested arranging a trip to Mana Island. I would like to hear how many would be interested, maybe in March. (See under “upcoming trips”).

There are a few places left on the pelagic trip from Petone into Cook Strait on Saturday 24 January 2026. (See later in the newsletter).

Please send me photos and notes about your bird adventures and sightings or other bird news for the next newsletter, on kirsten.b.olsen@gmail.com.

Deadline for the January/February issue is 25th January 2026.



Photo by Paul Gibson

Last meeting

Review by Kirsten Olsen

Associate Professor Phil Battley gave a talk on wader identification. He focused on migrating birds that can be tricky to identify in their winter/non-breeding plumage.

The birds were organised into size groups to make it easier to distinguish between birds in the field. It was a really helpful way to organise the birds.

An example was the comparison between the Bar-tailed, Black-Tailed and the Hudsonian Godwit.

Another comparison was between the Great knot and the Red Knot, and further, the Sharp-tailed and the Pectoral Sandpiper.

At the end of the talk he had some challenges. One was a photo with three sandpipers. See below.



<https://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?t=14267>



Cleland Wallace showed some nice photos from the Great Matuku/Bittern Muster at Lake Omanu and a video of a Ferret lurking around.

We were 25 people enjoying the challenges of identifying the waders. I hope I can remember it when I go to the estuaries. One thing is always to look for the ones that look a bit different from the ones you know.

Regional bird news

By Neill Haggarty

The Wader survey occurred recently, and one notable observation were 7 Pacific Golden Plovers at the Manawatu estuary.



Previously in the month three Turnstones were seen, along with a Red-necked Stint. Also, during the Wader survey Cleland Wallace heard a Bittern at the Te Hakari wetland and a Barbary dove was observed at Waikawa.



An exciting observation (with photos) was made by Mali Swanney on the Mangahou river near Balance of a juvenile Nankeen Night Heron.

Also, an observation of a Banded Rail was made at Pinewood Road, Foxton Beach, although there were no photos.

I saw a very noisy Falcon in a big tree in the Esplanade. This is apparently somewhat of a problem-child, well known to staff at Wildbase. It is a female banded at the Manawatu golf course and has been brought in injured to Wildbase three times! Apparently, she gets injured then goes and lies in a nearby carpark waiting to be rescued!

The great Matuku-hūrepo Muster 7-9/11 2025

By Kirsten Olsen

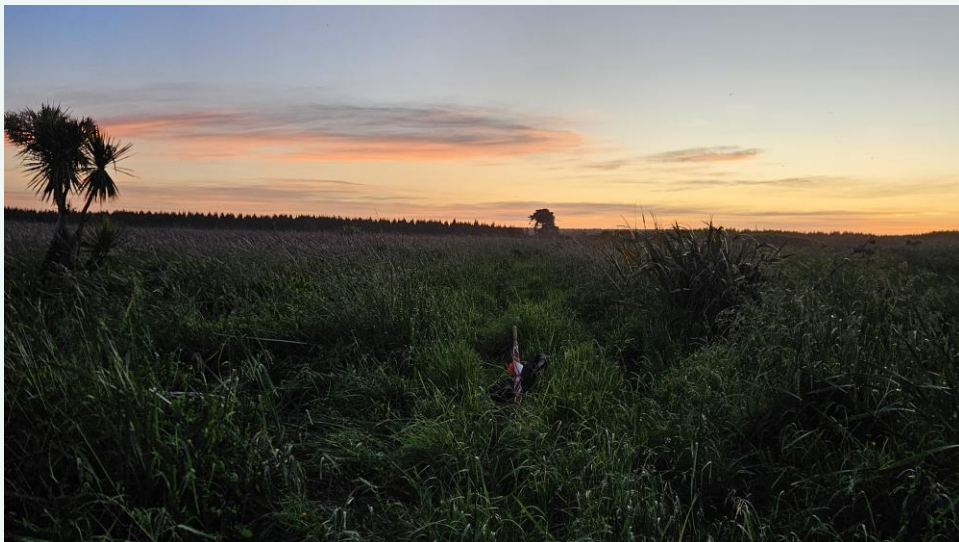
At the last meeting Cleland Wallace reported from the Great Matuku-hūrepo /Australasian Bittern muster at Lake Omanu near Foxton and showed some amazing photos.



Lake Omanu by Cleland Wallace

On the second day his group heard one booming and saw one flying. There might have been two Bitterns at Lake Omanu. Their group was: Cleland Wallace, Neill Haggarty and Mali Swanney.

At Pukepuke Lagoon a group heard Bittern booming all three nights. The first two nights we heard it in the area between the main lagoon and the two small ponds at the entrance to the area. The third night we heard booming from the south western side of the lagoon. Our group was: Chris Tuffley, Stephen Legg and Kirsten Olsen.



Listening station at Pukepuke by Kirsten Olsen

Wader census Saturday 22/11-2025

Phil Battley coordinated sixteen members from Birds NZ Manawatū, Whanganui and Wellington participated in the Manawatu-Whanganui wader census. We covered the following areas (Numbers of wader species/individuals in brackets): Waitotara (4/120), Whanganui (3/49), Whangaehu (2/2), Turakina (4/18), Rangitikei (7/141), Manawatu (6/235), Ohau (5/147) and Waikawa (6/27) Estuaries.

We counted just on 1500 birds including 739 waders. There was nothing unusual or spectacular, but Spur-winged Plovers were in large post-breeding flocks at Waitotara (97) and Rangitikei (61).

The waders counted were: Pied Oystercatcher (25), Variable Oystercatcher (42), Pied Stilt (119), New Zealand Dotterel (7), Banded Dotterel (4), Pacific Golden Plover (7), Spur-winged Plover (172), Red Knot (5), Bar-tailed Godwit (358).

From Manawatu Estuary by Jackie Carr

Waders were all lined up ready to be counted when I arrived at 10am. Sunny and calm. Eddie from Kapiti arrived too. then Lindsay and Pam. 200 godwit to count, a lone Royal Spoonbill and 3 White-faced Herons at the campsite end. A pair of Canada geese with a cute waddling young gosling between them appeared. The gosling still finding walking on the sand a learning curve. Later a new array of smaller waders appeared as the tide came in rapidly, calling for another recount.



Pacific Golden Plover by Neill Haggarty

Great to see golden plover and so many White fronted terns which flew in later. We were getting hot and bothered standing in the midday sun and we had just packed away the telescopes when a group of interested visitors arrived, - one of which Jackie hadn't seen for a while and she enjoyed letting them use her binoculars and they were impressed with the numbers and variety of birds & the migrants' journeys. Though they were disappointed not to see Wrybills.

Upcoming meetings

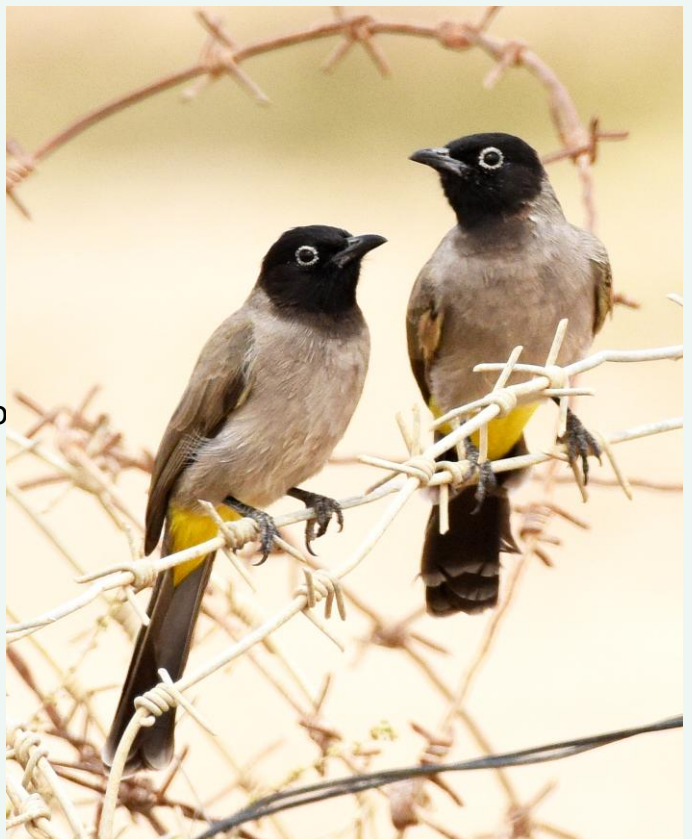
The next Birds New Zealand Manawatū meeting is on **Wednesday 11th February 2026 at 7:15pm in Val Kenward Room at the Palmerston North Community Leisure Centre, 569 Ferguson Street.**

The meetings start with a short introduction that includes updates on regional bird sighting and notices. At the end of the meeting there is the opportunity for all to have a cup of tea or coffee and a chat.

Ian Van Tets, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Alaska Anchorage will talk about:

A flexible frugivore: Changes in the urine of white-spectacled bulbuls (*Pycnonotus xanthopygus*): a survival strategy in the desert?

Ian worked for a number of years in the desert of Southern Israel studying desert adaptations in small birds and mammals. As part of this work, he worked with white-spectacled bulbuls to see if they could manipulate the nitrogen composition of their urine. At the time I did the study, the only birds that were known to do this were two species of US hummingbirds that altered their urine in ways that would help them conserve nitrogen when their diet was high in water and low in nitrogen.



Meeting dates for 2026

11th February, 11th March; Birds NZ Manawatū AGM and a talk by Chris Tuffley about birding in Queensland, 8th April, 13th May; Ruby Bennett on Black Robin and Rangitira Island, 10th June, 8th July, 12 August, 9th September, 14th October, 11th November and 9th December.

Please send me ideas for topics you want covered and email them to me:

kirsten.b.olsen@gmail.com

Upcoming trips and events

Seabirding on Cook Strait Saturday 24th January 2026

There are still three places on the pelagic trip from Petone into Cook Strait Saturday 24 January 2026. The boat will leave Petone 7am and be back 1pm. Two hours out of Wellington harbour to the site, two hours on site and two hours back, where there will be a BBQ.

If leaving from Palmerston North the same morning you would have to leave by 5am.

The boat is a fishing boat and it will have fish scrap to attract the birds. (Phil Battley uses this boat to take his students on pelagic trips). The boat costs \$2400 and it takes 20 people, so the cost per person is @120, if we fill the boat. We need you to indicate if you are interested in coming on this fantastic pelagic. Please email Kirsten Olsen if you are interested in going on this trip:
kirsten.b.olsen@gmail.com



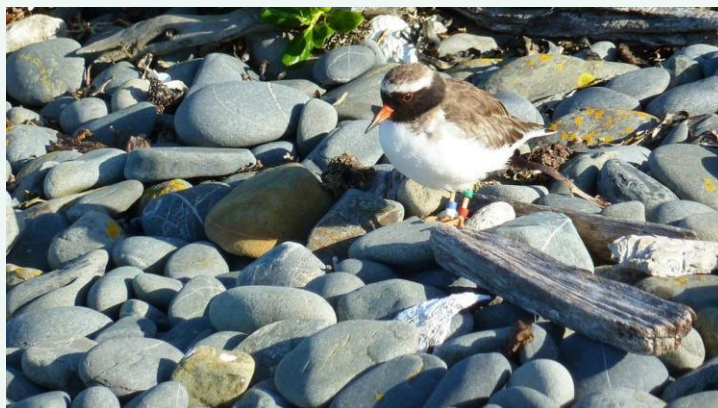
Source: <https://kahunz.co.nz/koken/albums/cook-strait-pelagic-photographic-trip/content/ab13-1/>

Sunday 15th February 2026 Tutaenui Reservoir north of Marton.

This will be a half day morning trip. Leaving Palmerston North at 8am (it takes around 45 – 50 minutes to drive there). There are both short and long walks on well formed tracks. There are lots of water fowl and some bush birds. We will be back around 1pm. If you are interested, please email Kirsten: kirsten.b.olsen@gmail.com

Trip to Mana Island maybe Saturday 28th March 2026

Access to Mana Island is controlled. The only way to get there is to go on a trip with Go Mana <https://gomana.rezdy.com/502704/mana-island-day-trip> . They sail from Mana Marina at 9am and are back about 2pm. There are lots of birds. On eBird there are reported 72 species on the hotspot <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L521298?rank=lrec> At this point in time there are 35 places available on the boat. To minimize the organization of the trip I suggest that each person book their own place on the boat. Please contact me on kirsten.b.olsen@gmail.com if you are interested in this trip.



Links to other regions' newsletters and other material

Newsletters

Waikato – November 2025:

<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Waikato-2511.pdf>

Notices

2026 Membership Renewals

Your annual membership is renewable on the anniversary of your joining date. Renewal reminders are sent out at regular intervals starting six weeks before your renewal date, and will continue until six weeks after the due date, until your annual membership has been paid. You can renew your membership via the website, either by a direct credit payment or a credit card payment:

<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 if your email address has changed since your last renewal: membership@birdsnz.org.nz

2026 NZ Bird Conference

The [2026 New Zealand Bird Conference](#) and 86th Annual General Meeting will be held in Wanaka from 30th May to 1st June during King's Birthday weekend. The event will be hosted at the [Lake Wanaka Centre](#).

Online registration and conference details will be available soon.



2026
WĀNAKA OTAGO
Birds New Zealand Conference

Health and safety

Please, if you have any incident that could have resulted in injury or results in injury while participating in Birds New Zealand activity, report it to the Regional Representative. In Manawatū it is Kirsten Olsen, email birds.manawatu@birdsnz.org.nz or phone 027 354 6010

Health and safety of Birds New Zealand's members when they participate in Birds NZ organised activity, like meetings, collection of data and fieldtrips, is important to the Council. The [Health and Safety Policy](#) can be found on Birds NZ webpage. Press [Here](#) to get to the policy.

To make it more practicable, the Council has developed [health and safety guidelines for field trips](#) that also can be found on the website.

“If a member has an allergy or medical condition, they should bring their own anti-histamines and personal medications. The trip leader should be advised of medical problems a member has and how to deal with them. Bring a mobile phone and share phone numbers with others. Don't hesitate to call 111 for any incidents involving injury.” (...) “The trip leader should check the weather forecast for the day and, if necessary, monitor the weather conditions during the trip. Turn back if the weather deteriorates. Each member should bring sufficient food and drinking water for their personal needs.”

Photo by Chris Tuffley



Contribution to future Birds NZ Manawatu newsletters

Please send photos and text that would be appropriate for this newsletter, to Kirsten Olsen kirsten.b.olsen@gmail.com.

Deadline for January/February 2026 issue: 25 January 2026

Please send your contributions to: kirsten.b.olsen@gmail.com

Contacts in Birds New Zealand Manawatū Branch:

Regional representative: Kirsten Olsen

email: birds.manawatu@birdsNZ.org.nz

Regional recorder: Neill Haggarty

email: iolaandneill@inspire.net.nz

Please report interesting bird sightings to Neill

Wader count coordinator: Phil Battley

email: p.battley@massey.ac.nz

BIRDS | SCIENCE | PEOPLE



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.

You can join Birds New Zealand for just \$1.75 a week.
That's \$90 a year, and just \$45 for students.

www.birdsNZ.org.nz

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