THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

OSNZ — Birds New Zealand

birdsnz.org.nz and birdsnz.org.nz/society-publications/notornis/

December 2025

Kia ora koutou,

We have had several exciting bird reports for the region recently, including a Gould's Petrel. A reminder that over summer in the past we have also had an interesting assortment of terns 'turn' up, so make sure to keep an eye out for birds of interest. You can post or read about interesting bird sightings and alerts at: Bird Sightings and Alerts - BirdingNZ.net.

The next Wellington BirdsNZ meeting will be held on 2 February 2026. The February meeting is our annual "Member's night". It is a casual opportunity for members to share interesting bird sightings, or preliminary findings in a safe and supportive space. It can be especially good for students who want a practice at presenting without doing a full 40 minute presentation. Hopefully, we all see many interesting things over summer and have lots of keen presentations ready to go. Presentations are not bound to the Wellington region, so if you have something of interest from another region (or international) you are welcome to bring this along too. Presentations can be as short as 1-2 minutes, with a maximum cap at presentation length will be 8 minutes. Please reach out if you are wanting to give a presentation. For the February meeting I also encourage people to attend in-person. If you have a presentation and it is likely to be in excess of 10 minutes, I encourage you to consider offering it for a general meeting presentation, we still have several gaps in the calendar for 2026, and I would appreciate any suggestions.

The start of December concluded our Wellington Region meetings for the year. It was great to have a presentation and Prion identification quiz run by Colin Miskelly. Rod Hitchmough was the best at prion ID and a well-deserved quiz winner. Christmas also came early with a great assortment of birding books and goodies provided by Dallas and Geoff, many thanks! A quick plug that the online registration has opened along with early bird pricing for the 2026 BirdsNZ Conference! In 2026 the conference will be in Wanaka, and like always, it will certainly be well worth attending: https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/news/nz-bird-conference/ . There is financial support offered for students to attend, so if you are a student thinking of going, and interested to have some support, please reach out in the next couple of months. Finally, wishing you and your families a safe and prosperous holiday period. I hope that you are able to relax and recharge in ways which are meaningful for you, and I look forward to hearing about your birding adventures in February!

Keep up the awesome birding and thank-you all for an amazing year.

Nāku noa, nā

Annemieke Hamilton

Greetings, 2025 is fast drawing to a close. As I compile this newsletter my attention is regularly diverted by two sibling fledgling tui coming to the sugar water feeder. While both fledglings have yet to develop their white throat tufts (poi) only one of the birds has white shoulder feathers.

The December newsletter has reports of some rare visitors to our region. However, these tui remind one that even the more common birds are worthy of attention and study. Note, contributions to the newsletter are most gratefully accepted.

Best wishes & great birding, Geoff de Lisle

Wellington Birds New Zealand Monthly Meetings

1. In person at the Te Papa Collections Building, 169 Tory Street.
2. Online via the Zoom Meeting via a link to be supplied.
   The meeting will start at 7.45pm.

There will not be a meeting in January 2026. The first meeting of the year will be on the 2nd of February, 2026 and will take the form of a Member's Night with short contributions as described above by Annemieke.

Recent Meetings

October 6th. Jim O'Malley "Kapiti Ecological Restoration Project (KERP) & North Island Rifleman The Kotukutuku Ecological Restoration Project (KERP) is based on a 32-hectare Kapiti Coast property with mature and regenerating coastal forest plus pasture and plantation forest. The aims of the project includes the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of the 17-ha coastal forest remnant on the property through intensive pest control. In 2020 a vegetation survey was done including eight 20 m × 1 m survey plots originally surveyed in 2016 before pest control operations began. This enabled a comparison of the 2020 survey results with the pre pest control results to identify whether the control of rodents has had an impact on vegetation as it is known that rats and mice eat seeds and seedlings. The reduction of predators has now reached a level where re-introductions of missing bird species can be considered. Permission has now been obtained to transfer riflemen (titipounamu) from the Wainuiomata water reserve to the Kapiti Reserve. There will be opportunities for Wellington Birds New Zealand members to participate in this transfer and subsequent monitoring.

November 3rd, Nic Rawlence, Otago University "MythBusting de-extinction to sort fact from fiction"

In this talk Nic covered issues associated with the de-extinction of ancient species. De-extinction has recently received attention in the international press with the claims for de-extinction of the shire wolf which was basically a genetically engineered grey wolf. Locally, Peter Jackson has recently supported a project to bring back the moa. Nic's presented a fascinating talk with elements of advanced new science, ecological considerations, wealthy donors, ethics, indigenous rights and personal criticism on social media. The following is a list of websites that cover many of these issues. Nic has raised in the media his concerns around the claims of de-extinction of the shire wolf and the proposed project to bring back the moa. These concerns are summarised in an article by Nic in the Conversation, https://theconversation.com/first-the-dire-wolf-now-nzs-giant-moa-why-real-de-extinction-is-unlikely-to-fly-260797

What is functional de-extinction? *Functional de-extinction is defined as the process of generating an organism that both resembles and is genetically similar to an extinct species by resurrecting its lost lineage of core genes; engineering natural resistances; and enhancing adaptability that will allow it to thrive in today's environment of climate change, dwindling resources, disease and human interference.* *https://didyouknowscience.com/how-functional-de-extinction-is-revolutionizing-conservation-biology/#google_vignette*

The major players in de-extinction.

Revive Restore – established in 2012 as a non-profit wildlife conservation organization focused on use of biotechnology in conservation. Their suite of programmes includes the de-extinction of the passenger pigeon. https://reviverestore.org/

Revive Restore has a project on the takahe which is using modern molecular biology / DNA techniques and is not part of a de-extinction programme. https://reviverestore.org/takahe/

Colossal Biosciences Inc was officially launched in 2021 as an American biotechnology and genetic engineering company working to de-extinct several extinct animals, including the woolly mammoth, the Tasmanian tiger, the northern white rhinoceros, the dire wolf, the dodo, and the moa. Wikipedia states that the total equity of Colossal was $10.2B US.

De-extinction of the moa? In July 2025, Colossal announced a collaboration with Peter Jackson, Paul Scofield Curator of Natural History, Canterbury Museum and adjunct professor of Canterbury University and Ngāi Tahu Research Centre to revive the New Zealand moa . https://colossal.com/moa/

Ethical / cultural considerations of de-extinction research

https://www.science.org/content/article/effort-revive-new-zealand-s-extinct-moa-stirs-controversy

https://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2025/07/09/moa-de-extinction-plans-announced-expert-reaction/

De-extinction, social media, personal attacks & lawyers

Scientists targeted by dark PR tactics. Several academic scientists critical of de-extinction projects have become the targets of anonymous smear articles and weaponized copyright infringement claims Howard Wolinsky [1,✉], Holger Breithaupt [2], Yehu Moran [2,3]
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12549971/

Moa Bones from Te Papa Collection on display at the November talk. Left tibia and right *Euryapteryx curtus* Karikari Bay, North Auckland. Presented by Alan Tennyson.

Christmas Meeting

This was a most enjoyable meeting (in-person only) with a pot luck dinner, a diverse selection of presents (bird books) from Santa and a fascinating talk by Colin Miskelly on the MacGillivray prion, complete with multiple examples from the Te Papa Collection. At the end of the meeting there was a challenging quiz (see below) on the identification of prions. Rod Hitchmough won the chocolate bar.

December 1st, Hidden in plain sight: genetic analysis of museum specimens confirms the presence of MacGillivray's prion in New Zealand and Australia. Colin Miskelly[1], Alan Tennyson[1], Philippa Horton[2], Maya Penk[2], Peter Ryan[3], Christophe Barbraud[4], Karine Delord[4] and Lara Shepherd[1], EMU 125:2025 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01584197.2025.2490644

On 4 July 1954, OSNZ stalwart Peter Bull picked up an unusual prion on Ōtaki Beach. It was acquired by the National Museum in 1979, and registered as being a broad-billed prion. In 2024, 70 years after it was found, the bird was identified as New Zealand's first (and so-far) only MacGillivray's prion.

The Quiz. Identify the prions. Results at the end of the newsletter.

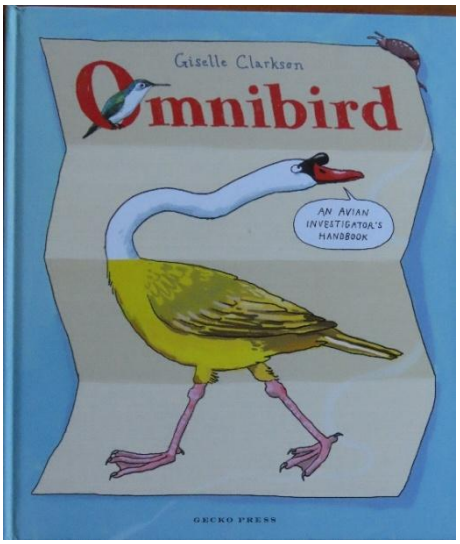
The birds in the background are broad-billed prions from the major wreck of seabirds in July, 2025. A summary of this event can be read in the Te Papa blog by Colin Miskelly, Riders of the storm – thousands of seabirds perish on New Zealand shores, https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2011/07/18/riders-of-the-storm-thousands-of-seabirds-perish-on-new-zealand-shores/

Regional Representative, Annemieke Hamilton,

Regional Recorder: Peter Hodge peter.hodge@gmail.com

Matiu / Somes Island survey, Shane Cotter, heather.shane@xtra.co.nz

Newsletter, Geoff de Lisle, osnzwelly@gmail.com



Omnibird, Gisselle Clarkson, Gecko Press

Read Age 8-12 years. This is a delightful book, full of good birdy information presented with quirky humour and excellent illustrations.

"Have you seen a bird today? Probably, unless you're reading this in bed. Did you notice what was really interesting about that the bird? Investigating a bird is like solving a puzzle. To gather all the pieces, you look for clues: meet the omnibird."

Quiz – what is the world's smallest flightless bird? The answer to be found in Omnibird or at the end of this newsletter.

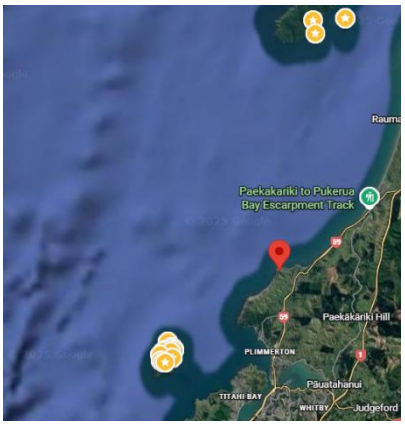
https://geckopress.com/bookshop/omnibird/

Sea birding from Dry Land

Pukerua Bay sea watch (Red marker. Map)

Johannes Fischer Igor Debski, 27 Oct 2025. 8:35 am, Stationary Duration: 4 hr, 1 min, 24 Species Observed +2 other taxa, 660 individuals

Bar-tailed Godwit 2
Arctic Skua Number 1
Pomarine Skua 1
Silver Gull (Red-billed) 50
Southern Black-backed Gull (dominicanus) 100
White-fronted Tern 70
tern sp. 1
White-capped Mollymawk (steadi) 34 Exact count.
Grey-faced Petrel 27
White-headed Petrel 1 Details White head with black mask, dark underwing, slightly larger than the Grey-faceds passing through. Seen well at medium distance for ~ 1 min.
Procellaria sp 4
Flesh-footed Shearwater 28
Sooty Shearwater 50
Hutton's Shearwater 50
Fluttering Shearwater 200
Australasian Gannet 10
Black Shag (novaehollandiae 1
Pied Shag 6
Tui 4
European Starling 8
Eurasian Blackbird 3
Dunnock 2
Common Chaffinch 3
European Greenfinch 2
Redpoll 1
Yellowhammer 1
http s://ebird.org/checklist/S281570967



Beach Patrols, Alan Tennyson

26/10/2025, Peka Peka Length of beach patrolled 3.4 km. Current weather and tide, Lowish; fine, Previous weather, Some NW gales in the past week.

Bird Species Found

White-headed Petrel 3 age unknown
Prion sp 6 age unknown
Fairy Prion, fairy-prion-pachyptila-turtur 7 age unknown
Hutton's Shearwater, puffinus-huttoni-huttons-shearwater 1 age unknown

25/10/2025 Waikanae Length of beach patrolled 4.7 km, Waikanae River mouth to Opposite Pharazyn Reserve

Current weather and tide, Lowish; fine. Previous weather Some NW gales in the past week.
Fairy Prion fairy-prion-pachyptila-turtur 1 Age Unknown
Australasian Gannet, australasian-gannet unknown 1 Rotten wings only.
White-capped Albatross Sub-adult 1 Some dark on the upper unguis, so not fully adult. Moult: outer 3 primaries very worn, inner ones not so worn. Culmen length 127 mm.
Hutton's Shearwater puffinus-huttoni-huttons-shearwater 1 Wings only. Moult: primaries fresh. Wing length 222mm.
Prion sp prion-spp 2
White-headed Petrel 3
Grey-faced Petrel grey-faced-petrel-pterodroma-macroptera 1

White-headed petrel – *The white-headed petrel breed in colonies on subantarctic Kerguelen Crozet, Macquarie, Auckland and Antipodes Islands. They may also breed on Marion and Prince Edward Islands and on stacks off Campbell Island.* NZBirdsOnline. There are very few observations in eBird of white-headed petrels in the Wellington Region.

Beach Patrol Hugh Robertson, Banded fluttering shearwater October 2025

Hugh reports, "*I have found a few banded beach-cast birds over the years (one of which was the subject of my very first publication, unhelpfully titled "an unusual band recovery" which didn't mention what species was involved or why it was unusual! It was a Campbell Island black-browed Mollymawk found dead 8 days after it was banded).* https://doi.org/10.63172/980704tvrgcd

This [fluttering shearwater] *is the first band recovery I have had from 1000s of birds found since I resumed regular patrolling on the Wellington West Coast in 2018, apart from a racing pigeon, which doesn't count.*
The fluttering shearwater had been banded 16 years earlier, as an adult, on Long Island, Marlborough Sounds. Strangely, it had two bands, one if which I assume was added for training purposes. Because it was very freshly dead, with a bit if a known history, it has been added to the Te Papa collection."

Hybrid kiwi on Kāpiti Island, 31 Oct 2025

Richard Littauer and the Aotearoa New Zealand eBird Team

"No, we aren't referring to different cultivars of kiwifruit! Hybrids are the natural result of species interbreeding with another species and producing offspring. Sometimes hybridisation is impossible: a moa would never have hybridized with a hihi | stitchbird for example. However, for birds that are more closely related, hybrids can establish and can impact the rest of the gene pool. For instance, pure pārera | grey duck are now relatively rare and/or hard to identify, as rakiraki | mallards have hybridised extensively with them. Hybrids become more frequent in small populations where birds can't find a mate of their own species, and where a closely related

species occurs in the same area – and this has happened more frequently in the past few hundred years due to anthropogenic impacts such as habitat loss, introduced of mammalian predators, invasive species etc.

Like many taonga manu on islands, kiwi have also at times hybridised with other kiwi. One such example is the tokoeka | Southern brown kiwi and kiwi-nui | North Island brown kiwi, which don't normally have overlapping ranges. On Kāpiti island off the west coast of Te Upoko o te Ika/Wellington region, members of both species were introduced before it was established that they were two different species. Both populations flourished and interbred and they are now considered a hybrid population.

What does this mean for you as an eBirder?

Going forward, if you log a brown kiwi on Kāpiti, you can use the new hybrid taxonomic designation on eBird:

Southern brown kiwi x What North Island brown kiwi

This will accurately reflect the population there. This designation should only be used for these kiwi on Kāpiti though, as they are currently the only known hybrids. Any birds seen near Mākara or in the Remutakas should be logged as North Island brown kiwi, as these birds were brought in from up north, not from Kāpiti."

https://ebird.org/region/NZ-WGN/post/hybrid-kiwi-on-kapiti-island

Te Papa Blogs

DNA identification of a putative South Island kōkako feather

By: Lara Shepherd On: 5 Dec 2025

The South Island kōkako is an elusive forest bird, famed for its haunting call. Despite numerous reported sightings over the past 50 years, no definitive evidence to prove its survival – such as a specimen, photograph, or droppings – has been found since 1937. In 1986, a feather discovered on Rakiura Stewart Island was suggested to belong to this elusive species. Genetics researcher Lara Shepherd recently sequenced DNA from this feather to answer the question: was this truly from a South Island kōkako, or a case of mistaken identity? Strongly recommend reading of the entire blog. For those who want the answer to the question – go to the end of the newsletter.

https://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2025/12/05/dna-identification-of-a-putative-south-island-kokako-feather/?mc_cid=36f6a772fa&mc_eid=392ea2cb84&fbclid=IwY2xjawOfSrZleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeqqBIVCB5JPWUsECjfW2GEMKWMJFgjR8JaRej963A7WPWEnBPBxnRzAr8aHA_aem_2XKtcjEWb_oZZrXdc3l_Yg

'It was a horrible scene to witness': How bird flu has decimated elephant seal populations 6 November 2025

"The sudden decimation by bird flu of the world's largest seal species has sent shockwaves through the scientific community, and the ecosystems shaped by these majestic animals." This recent article is a shocking reminder of the effects of the current bird flu epidemic and that it is presence is getting closer to New Zealand.

https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20251105-the-impossible-decline-of-the-southern-elephant-seal

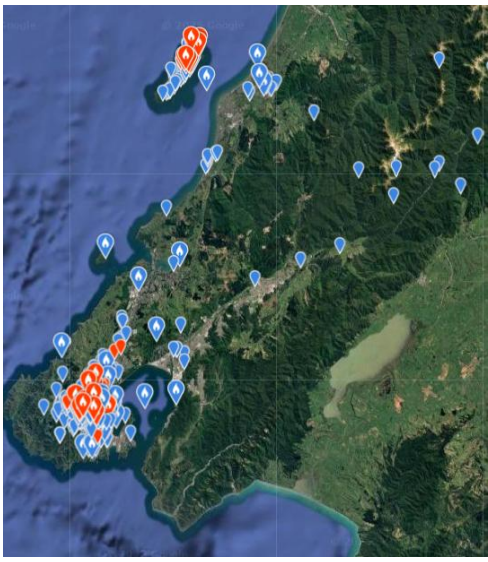
Saving the Titi colony from extinction on Kapiti Island

We are incredibly excited to announce our partnership with @kapitiicecream to support the @docgovtnz's project to Save the Titi Colony from Extinction on Kapiti Island, New Zealand.
Titi or Sooty Shearwater are a taonga (treasure) to local iwi and are under threat from another Taonga (and native species), the weka bird. The Department of Conservation is working on a 3-year project to save the colony which is on the brink of collapse. This project will identify ways to reduce predation by weka and experiment with novel exclusion methods, supported by robust monitoring of nesting success over several seasons. At the same time, it explores the indigenous knowledge about each of these species, their history on Kāpiti and how that Mātauranga Māori can guide long term management.
The following video provides a background to the project,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G50sKabgCxM

Kaka Nesting Outside the Zealandia Fence

Ōtari-Wilton's Bush Trust ·**https://www.facebook.com/OtariTrust**



"December 2nd. *Four kākā chicks banded at Ōtari this week will likely fledge and leave their nests within days. They will be joining fledgling kererū, tūī, korimako, ruru and other native birds venturing into the big wide world from nests throughout Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Please be extra vigilant when exercising your dog. We recommend short leashes, to help protect these ground-based chicks as they learn to fly.*
And while most of the region's kākā are now unbanded, Ōtari Kai Tim Park said banding a few helped give an understanding of how they are spreading around the landscape. For example, a banded parent who nested at Ōtari last year was hatched ten years before in Ngaio, confirming generations of kākā are now breeding and dispersing outside Zealandia."

The translocation of kaka to Zealandia has been a major success. Not only are they common in the Zealandia sanctuary but also in Wellington City and surrounding reserves such as Wilton's Bush and the Botanic Gardens. This is well illustrated in the map of kaka sightings in eBird for the last 5 years. What is notable is the relative few sightings of kaka beyond Zealandia and Wellington City. The distant sightings are invariably of single birds and no evidence of breeding. The markers at the top of the map are from Kapiti Island which has a large population of kaka.

Fernbird Nest, Mana Island

Colin Miskelly, 6th December, Flax weevil site, Mana Island.
Spring and summer breeding. A deep, woven, feather-lined cup of fine grass or sedge leaves in dense vegetation, usually less than 1 metre above ground or water. Clutch size typically 2 on islands and 3-4 on mainland. Both members of the pair incubate the eggs and care for the young.
Incubation 12-19 days, Fledging 15-19 days
NZBirdsOnline

Gould's petrel – Waikanae, December 2025

Staff at The Nest Te Kōhanga, Wellington Zoo, report that they are caring for a Gould's petrel that was found inland at a Waikanae Dog Park on 6 December (identification confirmed from photographs by Colin Miskelly at Te Papa). The bird has been rehabilitate and released.

Photo Annemieke Hamilton taken at the Nest, Wellington Zoo.

Gould's Petrel including New Caledonian petrel are a reportable species under Birds New Zealand verification process for sightings of rare vagrant bird species, There are 13 accepted UBR records for Gould's Petrel and 3 submissions pending. Currently there are not any records in the Birds New Zealand UBR database for the Wellington Region.

Moulting Korora / Little Penguins Matiu / Somes Island

December, 20th. The majority of Korora / little penguins on Matiu / Somes Island have finished breeding and their chicks have recently fledged. After the chicks have fledged the parents will return to sea to feed and put on weight before returning to moult. They will moult all their feathers at the same time during which they remain on land and do not feed. Moulting will take two to three weeks. The photographs show adults in different stages of moult. Left, early moult, centre further advanced and right nearly finished moulting with new shiny blue feathers apparent. Photographs Sam Hughes

Birds Snippets

Wrybill, Seatoun Beach

Hamish Johnston » Sat Sep 27, 2025

I stumbled across three wrybill at Seatoun today, initially on the coast by Ludlam st before flying to the southern end of the main beach. They hung around for about 25 minutes before flying off to the north after being harassed by a black backed gull.

Seems some of the less common waders in Wellington may be passing through at the moment, also saw a red knot at Waikanae yesterday. BirdingNZ.net
https://ebird.org/checklist/S275672955 with pictures

Bellbird Wellington City

ledzep » Mon Oct 06, 2025

On my lunchtime walk coming off Korimako track onto Ridvan Grove in Khandallah, had a Bellbird fly into a Kowhai tree in front of me. Watched it feeding for several minutes. We do hear them in the Khandallah area but not often close enough for a good view. BirdingNZ.net

Cirl Bunting Moa Point

Nikki McArthur » Wed Oct 29, 2025

Got great views of a pair of cirl buntings today, foraging on the grass verge of Moa Point Rd, a couple of hundred meters north of Moa Point heading back towards the airport. I think they're a Wellington Region 'lifer' for me, so happy days. BirdingNZ.net

Pipit Mana Island

Colin Miskelly, 29th Oct, 2025. Pipit recorded at the Trip / Lighthouse during a five minute bird count. Pipits have rarely been recorded on Mana during the last five years but were commonly seen on the island during 5MBC carried out between 1987-93. https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Miskelly_etal_69_243-255.v3.pdf

Brown tui Wellington

Colin Miskelly » Sat Nov 15, 2025

A pale brown tūī visited the neighbours' Callistemon this morning. First time I have noticed it.
Mt Cook, central Wellington. BirdingNZ.net

Tawaki /Fiordland Crested penuguin Wellington South coast

Michael Szabo » Fri Nov 21, 2025

A Tawaki Fiordland Crested Penguin has been reported via iNaturalist, photographed ashore on the Wellington south coast on 4/11 but there were no further reports of it after that: BirdingNZ.net
https://inaturalist.nz/observations/325 ... NyAXi-TaNQ

Reef Heron – Matiu / Somes Island

Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop, 22nd November 2025. Reef heron near wharf.
https://ebird.org/checklist/S286156852

Bellbird Botanic Gardens

ledzep » Tue Nov 25, 2025

I am hearing a Bellbird calling every time I walk into the Wellington Botanic Gardens from the main entrance on Glenmore St opposite the Chinese Embassy, above the driveway leading to Lady Norwood Rose Gardens. Maybe breeding in the vicinity. BirdingNZ.net

Also multiple eBird records of bellbirds in the Botanical Gardens.

Cirl bunting, Mana Island

Colin Miskelly » Mon Dec 08, 2025

Adult male heard singing, then 30 minutes later seen while singing from the top of a taupata (from about 20 m) on 6 December. Only the third cirl bunting I have seen on Mana Island in 33 years of regular visits, and the first I have heard singing. BirdingNZ.net E

ANSWERS – Prion Quiz

A *Pachyptila crassirostris* flemingi lesser / Southern fulmar prion
B *Pachyptila desolata* Auckland Islands Antarctic prion
C *Pachyptila turtur* eatoni Sub-antarctic fairy prion
D *Pachyptila desolata* Scott Island Antarctic prion
E *Pachyptila crassirostris* crassirostris Fulmar prion
F *Pachyptila macgillivrayi* MacGillivray's prion
G Pachyptila turtur *turtur* Fairy prion
H *Pachyptila* vittata Broad billed prion
I *Pachyptila salvini* Salvin's prion
J *Pachyptila belcheri* Thin-billed prion
K *Pachyptila macgillivrayi* MacGillivray's prion
L *Pachyptila pyramidalis* Pyramid prion

The Answer – world's smallest flightless bird, the Inaccessible rail from Inaccessible Island, a volcanic island located in the South Atlantic Ocean, 31 km (19 mi) south-west of Tristan da Cunha. Wikipedia

The Answers – Possible South Island Kokako. 1988 feather from Rakiura, DNA sequence of blackbird. Interestingly, another feather collected on the Weast Coast in the 1990s – also thought to be a South Island Kokako – was also identified as blackbird DNA.