



# OSNZ news

Edited by PAUL SAGAR, 38A Yardley Street, Christchurch 4,  
for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

Please note that the sightings in this Newsletter are subject  
to confirmation.

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**NOTE: Deadline for the December issue  
will be 19th November.**

## Fiordland Island

The Seal Islands and Petrel Islands in Dusky Sound range from 0.2 to 24 ha. *Hebe-Olearia-Dracophyllum* scrub covers the smaller islands and rata-kamahi forest the larger ones. In February 1984 Bellbirds, Silvereyes and Tomtits were common throughout the islands, Wekas were widespread, Fiordland Crested Penguins were moulting ashore and Sooty Shearwaters were breeding. On Parrot Island, Kiwi probes were seen but there was no sign of a recently reported S.I. Robin. However, Robins were plentiful and well distributed on the Breaksea Islands.

During April 1984 DSIR staff trapped Norway Rats on Breaksea Island and nearby Outer Gilbert Island, Breaksea Sound. Interesting birds were a White Heron on Resolution Island, and 2 Welcome Swallows which appeared while we watched Fiordland Skinks on Outer Gilbert Island. In Dusky Sound, a flock of 65 NZ Pigeons wheeled over podocarp forest on Indian Island where the miro was fruiting well. Mottled Petrels were breeding again on Front Island. One of the Shelter Islands, Dcutiful Sound, was well used by Fiordland Crested Penguins and Sooty Shearwaters.

KIM MORRISON

## Scott's Point, Mahurangi Peninsula

The Homestead at Scott's Point provided an excellent base for an informal weekend seminar (3/3-1/4/84), during which 12 members were accommodated in the adjacent cottages and very well looked after by courtesy of the Auckland Civic Trust.

Heavy rain on the Friday evening fortunately cleared, and we were able to devote Saturday morning to an exercise in attempting to map the location

of common birds within the A.R.A. Reserve where the Homestead is situated. The Reserve includes rocky shores, a small beach backed by large pines, an old orchard, and bush-clad slopes. The species tally was 25 and included counts of 16 NZ Pigeons, 18 Tuis, and at least 1 Kookaburra which was both heard and seen. Eastern Rosellas were also seen, and at dusk we watched a Morepork being scolded by a pair of Grey Warblers. Other activities during the successful weekend were an inspection of Casnell Island, a 7 ha outpost accessible at low tide, an evening of slides and discussion, and visits to the Burton Wells bush reserve and possible wader haunts of Mahurangi Inlet.

MICHAEL TAYLOR

## Saddlebacks and Stitchbirds on Kapiti Island

*Saddlebacks:* For the past summer, as in the previous two summers, the Wellington District Office of the Department of Lands and Survey have continued to fund the Saddleback study on Kapiti Island.

This season work has again concentrated on the reasons for the decline of Saddlebacks on Kapiti. Further observations have been made on roosting and nesting behaviour, the two aspects where predation seems to be most significant.

Of the 6 young birds produced during 1982/83, none has survived. Only 3 birds survived from the batch of 22 produced during the 1981/82 breeding season. 244 birds have been introduced to the island during the transfers, and only 13 now remain.

This season we started with 7 pairs. These birds reared 28 young during what has been a most productive year. One of these pairs was astonishingly productive, rearing 10 young in 4 broods.

However, figures from previous years

indicate that we can probably expect only about 1 in 7, i.e. 4 of these young birds to survive until the end of the year. In the meantime there will probably be a further decline in the total of longer established birds. To date too few locally bred young birds have survived to fill the gaps caused by predation in the adult population. Unfortunately the Saddlebacks seem to be declining to local extinction on Kapiti.

Clearly the birds can breed very successfully, despite the threat of predation at nests by Norway Rats. However, survival for the remainder of the year is very low. This heavy mortality outside the breeding season is because of the Saddlebacks' roosting behaviour. The birds roost in cavities on or near the ground, where they are very vulnerable to predation by rats. I have found the rat-eaten corpses of birds at roosting places.

Our next step on Kapiti will be to try a management experiment using the few birds that we have left. This will involve putting up rat-proof artificial roost sites. It may prove to be difficult to induce the Kapiti birds to use these artificial roost boxes, because there are already so many natural roost sites. Initially the boxes will be placed close to known roosts, in the hope that the birds will investigate them.

Another part of the experiment will involve placing large numbers of these roost boxes on 2 of the northern Saddleback Islands — Motukawanui Island (Cavalli Group), and Stanley Island (Mercury Group). Both of these islands have young forest, and thus a natural shortage of good roost sites for Saddlebacks.

The plan is to try and establish Saddleback populations on these islands, in which the birds habitually use the artificial roost sites as well as natural sites. Once the birds are using the boxes we can then transfer some of these roost box users to Kapiti, where such roost sites are already provided.

In the long term we hope to establish

about the distribution of Red Phalaropes and Pink-footed Shearwaters was also obtained.

Few birds were found at Duke of York Island but as the annual rainfall is over 9m that was not surprising!

After visiting Punta Arenas an excursion was made to the very difficult island of Noir, offshore from the south Fuegian Islands. This was most rewarding and large colonies of Rockhopper and Macaroni Penguins were found, as well as Giant Petrels and Narrow-billed Prions. During our time ashore the weather was terrible, and extremely dense scrub made tramping a slow, uncomfortable business. Gerry and Chilean ornithologist Andreas von Meyer were caught out on the island and had to spend an extremely cold, never to be forgotten, night in very thin plastic survival bags.

After a quick look at islands south to the Gilbert Islands and Isla Stewart, *Totorore* returned to Punta Arenas in early March. Here Anthea Goodwin (Clevedon) joined the expedition for an offshore voyage to Cape Horn. Andreas was replaced by his sister Julia, as he had to return to the family farm in Puerto Montt.

While sheltering in a cove on Waterman Island, the new crew was introduced to the violence of the 'rafagas' or williwaws, for which this part of the world is renowned. However, having experienced this nothing else that followed alarmed them unduly. A few days were spent in the Morton Group and a day visit was made to the Ildefonso Islands, which were covered by Black-browed Mollmawks and Rockhopper Penguins.

The next main objective was a species list for the virtually unstudied Isla Hornos. This was accomplished and the most exciting discovery was a breeding colony of Blue Petrels on the top of Cape Horn itself. Landing on the Cape was not easy and the expedition members can join those who can claim to have had a swim off Cape Horn! Camping on the peak also was not easy the tent was very nearly blown away. An early cold spell with heavy snowfalls followed and that seemed to drive most of the land birds away to the north. The expedition's work on the other islands of the group was rather restricted by gales but several other small colonies of Blue Petrels were found. On the return journey to Punta Arenas *Totorore* anchored close to a large glacier one night. In the morning we were not only surrounded by a field of ice chunks from the glacier but the water surface itself was frozen and the ice was thickening by the hour. It was necessary to force a slow passage through about 2 km of ice to escape, but the scenery was fantastic.

The *Totorore* expedition now plans to spend the winter in the Falkland Islands and South Georgia before returning to Chile for the late spring and summer. There

is still tremendous scope for the ornithologist in the outer islands of the Patagonian Archipelago, about which there is little literature available, and the expedition hopes to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge.

GERRY CLARK

## News from the Rare Birds Committee

The functions of the Rare Birds Committee include helping observers to identify birds when they are unable to reach decisions, and to check the validity of all sightings of rare and vagrant species.

The Regional Representatives have a list of species for which full descriptions are needed before records can be accepted. Acceptance by the RBC is required before the Checklist Committee will include any record in the National Listing.

Descriptions should be submitted on an 'Unusual Bird Report' form, and this can be obtained from your RR. This form has been revised recently to assist observers with their submissions.

Obviously when a rare or unusual bird is seen it is best to take full written field notes at the time and not to rely on memory. From the records we have received in recent months it is clear that observers are providing good descriptions of shape, plumage colouration and behaviour to support their claims. This is the essence of proficient field recording.

Records accepted recently are:

*Red-Tailed Tropicbird* — 2 adults near the Three Kings Islands on 17/3/84, and 1 adult *Long-tailed Skua* also in the vicinity (A. McBride). *Common Tern* — 1 bird seen in summer plumage at the Rangitaiki Rivermouth, Bay of Plenty on 8/4/84 was accurately described and photographed (P. C. M. Latham, B. Chudleigh, W. Hutton). After consultation with Chris Corben of Brisbane the RBC are able to accept the species identification but not to the subspecies level. The current thinking on the identification of Common Terns would not support acceptance of Eastern Common Tern on the basis of the black bill as other races may show such colouration at certain stages.

*Orange-fronted Parakeet* — 1 bird was seen at close range in the Hawdon Valley of Arthur's Pass on 5/2/84 (A. Read, P. McClelland).

*Moseley's Rockhopper Penguin* — a bird found at Moa Point was kept at Wellington Zoo from January to March 1984. It was identified as a male and later released (P. J. Moors).

*Snipe* — a bird was flushed from the swampy borders of Lake Tekapo on 31/12/83 and 1/1/84 but did not allow close examination of the plumage colouration (R. J. Pierce).

Details of the flight characteristics are being studied to see if these will help specific identification. In the past Snipe have been determined as Japanese Snipe. However, it is possible that Chinese Snipe could reach here as both are regular in Papua New Guinea. At present this record is accepted at the generic level only.

JOHN FENNELL, *Secretary, RBC*

## Brown Teal study — assistance requested

In May this year I began a 3-year research project into the ecology of Brown Teal on Great Barrier Island. An outline of the project has been published recently in *Flight*, the journal of Ducks Unlimited. A colour banding scheme will begin in August and it is feasible some marked birds may move to the Coromandel and Northland areas. Anyone seeing colour banded Brown Teal should report the sighting to Grant Dumbell, Zoology Department, University of Auckland, Private Bag, Auckland. Information required includes the colour combination, location (preferably a map reference), time and date, and some idea of the bird's activity. The inclusion of the observer's name and address will allow a reply to be forwarded.

GRANT DUMBELL.

## Nankeen Night Herons

During the summer of 1981/82 the Nankeen Night Herons at the Wellington Zoo had a very good breeding season. This resulted in housing problems and the Wildlife Service gave the Zoo permission to release the birds into the zoo grounds. Permission was given because Night Herons were already appearing in the wild in New Zealand, apparently having crossed the Tasman Sea from Australia. Night Herons usually remain in the vicinity of their release point and several zoos overseas have resident colonies of free-flying Nankeen Night Herons.

During the first year the birds remained in the Zoo, coming to the aviary at 1400 hours to be fed, before they returned to the pine trees at the back of the Zoo to roost until night. Then gradually they became more secretive, only returning to the Zoo aviary when all was quiet in the late afternoon. Now we seldom see them at all unless one happens to be fishing around the shores of the Zoo lake.

This summer it became apparent that the birds had started to disperse. Wellington OSNZ members were reporting birds in Lower Hutt and even as far away as Blenheim and Nelson. The original birds had been at the Zoo since 1975 and were colour banded on the left leg, with a