



*Newsletter of the Northland Region of the
Ornithological Society of New Zealand - trading as Birds New Zealand*

February 2017 Amokura 118

(Published in February, July and October of each year)

MEETINGS of the Northland Branch of the O.S.N.Z. are held each month on the second Thursday, for the period FEBRUARY to DECEMBER. TIME: 7-30p.m.

VENUE: Founders Room, Alzheimer's Society, 148 Corks Road, Tikipunga, Whangarei.
COST: A donation of \$3-00 per person per meeting is requested toward the cost of Hall hire, supper and the production and distribution of "Amokura".

ALL WELCOME

PROGRAMME TO July 2017

MARCH

- 9 MEETING – 7-30p.m.
- 3 WEST COAST BEACH PATROL
- 14 EAST COAST BEACH PATROL (Meet at the Kensington Carpark 12:30pm)

APRIL

- 13 MEETING – 7-30p.m.
- 8 WEST COAST BEACH PATROL
- 18 EAST COAST BEACH PATROL (Meet at the Kensington Carpark 12:30pm)

MAY

- 11 MEETING – 7-30p.m.
- ? WEST COAST BEACH PATROL – Date to be advised.
- 16 EAST COAST BEACH PATROL (Meet at the Kensington Carpark 12:30pm)

JUNE

- 8 MEETING – 7-30p.m.
- ? WEST COAST BEACH PATROL – Date to be advised.
- 13 EAST COAST BEACH PATROL (Meet at the Kensington Carpark 12:30pm)

JULY

- 13 MEETING – 7-30p.m.
- ? WEST COAST BEACH PATROL – Date to be advised.
- 18 EAST COAST BEACH PATROL (Meet at the Kensington Carpark 12:30pm)

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE	Janet Snell	438-5737
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AMOKURA EDITOR	Hilton Ward	946-0074

Previous Issues of Amokura - <http://www.osnz.org.nz/regnews.htm>

OCTOBER

At the July meeting Dai Morgan, Applied and Environmental Sciences Tutor at North Tec, gave an informative presentation on the possible negative effects of magpies on New Zealand avifauna. Further to his study for his PHD he researched why magpies attack other birds and animals. His conclusions are interesting and often contradict popular belief with less than 9% of magpies actually attacking. The most commonly attacked birds being those that are most abundant.

NOVEMBER

The November meeting was enlightened by Laurence (Raureti) Sullivan who presented his personal biography and growth via North Tec through his studies for a Bachelor of Applied Science. Passionate about all things in nature and especially lizards. His enthusiasm was appreciated.

DECEMBER

The December meeting started early. As usual for this meeting attendees brought a plate and all tucked into food and conversation celebrating another year past.

Stories - Adventures – Yarns – Sightings

Thank you Adrian Gilbert for this interesting photo taken at Ngunguru in the estuary. Lucky to get four species in one photo



Pat Millers Big Day / Bird Race

A few bird races were organised by some of the OSNZ regions in the 1990's, and that was the last time I'd done anything like this. So when Russ Cannings, a member of the website birdingNZ.net, organised his one for last weekend – 17-18 December, I was keen to participate. The weekend however didn't work for me, with a Christmas function on each day, so I did it on 19-20 December starting after work, which was my last day for this year.

Leaving home around 5.50pm I headed out towards Whangarei Heads. My first stop was at Waikaraka, by which time it was only 5.55pm, but rather than risk the knots here flying away if I waited until 6.00pm, I made a fighter pilot decision to start the clock at 5.55pm. The first 14 species were observed here, nothing particularly outstanding, but godwit and particularly knot were good to get so early on.

Moving on to Parua Bay 5 more species were clocked up at Wharf Road including one lone gannet and a thriving white-fronted tern nesting colony on the largest of the rocky islands. Near the Parua Bay Tavern another 4 new species were collected, including the first harrier hawk of the day and grey duck, but not the bird I was particularly looking for here – banded rail. That species eluded me. With a further 3 species observed along the road while driving, pukeko, chaffinch and thrush, the total was at 26 species by 7.03pm when I moved on to Ocean Beach.

Before I left home I made a critical error, in that I did not bring my sleeping bag with me. I was aiming for sea and shore birds at Ocean Beach this evening and nocturnal birds at another site after dark. Had I brought my sleeping bag I would have slept in the car and done Bream Head in the morning to get kaka, tomtit and bellbird. Bother!

Walking south over to Dead Horse Bay and further along the rocky coastline towards Bream Head, I picked up NZ dotterel, skylark, yellowhammer, and rosella. Out at sea south of Guano Rock, fluttering shearwaters and diving petrels, were grouping up getting ready to fly into Mauitaha Island (adjacent to Guano Rock) after dark. Both species breed there. I was hoping to add reef heron to the list on the rocky coastline here, but none were showing. However little blue penguins were gathering in the 800 metre stretch of water between the mainland and Mauitaha, to come ashore after dark.

It was now 8.30pm and time to move on to my kiwi spot. Within a very short time of starting my walk in, a morepork flew in and landed 5 metres away from me. A pair of kiwi called at the same time, (around 9pm) presumably as they emerged from their burrows. However I had given myself an extra rule to Russ's ones in that I only count birds seen, so I kept on walking and an hour later got a mediocre view of a kiwi – enough for another tick, but not a satisfactory viewing. However after another hour or so I saw another kiwi, which I was able to watch for some time in the torchlight. It was a bit of a scruffy one though – looked like it had lost a few feathers off its back and the plumage looked very worn. This was the last species for the night. As I arrived back at my car another morepork flew past and landed on the corner of a house nearby. So the nocturnal part of the evening ended with a morepork at each end with 2 kiwi sandwiched between. What do you call that - a morepork kiwi sandwich?! I arrived home just before midnight with a total of 35 species. Six hours down, 18 to go – well 12 really taking sleep and preparations in the morning into account.

In the morning I loaded up my kayak gear minus the kayak, which I would pick up in the afternoon, as I was planning a paddle across the harbour to Pirate Island. My first morning mission though was to visit the Council Wetlands. Australasian little grebe was the main target species here. On the way there Malay spotted dove was added to the list at Onerahi, and shortly afterwards spur-winged plover at Dave Culham Drive. The Council Wetlands were quite productive, with paradise duck, silvereye, black shag, shoveler and fantail added to the list in the morning. The fantail was the only fantail seen during the day. I was pleased about the shoveler, but disappointed to miss out on the grebe.

It was a lovely time of day to be out birding, about 6.30am with lots of bird activity and a beautiful sunny day. Why don't I target getting out at this time of day more often?

Heading south towards Ruakaka, a single magpie in a paddock near Mata was added to the list as a "drive-by".

Papich Road at One Tree Point, was my next stop, where dabchick, little black shag, barbary dove and Californian quail were seen along with more shoveler, but NO grey teal NOR any black swan. I thought I could pick up black swan at Semenoff's Lake, but the lack of grey teal was a problem. I might have to add Whau Valley Dam to the itinerary to try again for them.

There were NO black swan on Semenoff's Lake either. Where had they all gone?

Uretiti, produced a female pheasant, but no male and no greenfinches. Where is a good greenfinch when you need one? A shining cuckoo sang from a pine tree in the scrubby dunes but it was too gorsy to get near to and try and see it. This was to be the only shining cuckoo opportunity of the day, so that species

was a near miss.

Waipu Wildlife Refuge is a birding Mecca in this part of the world, mainly because of the fairy tern, but also because of the wide assortment of other water birds and shore birds. It has been a reliable site for banded dotterel and turnstone as well as fairy tern in the past and I thought I would get all 3, plus black swan here. Alas, there were no banded dotterel nor any turnstones today. The fairy terns, didn't exactly co-operate either, but I finally tracked a pair down by wading across from the Estuary Heights access point to an area where I had seen them before. One bird was sitting on a nest and 2 ladies from Birds New Zealand were monitoring the nest. At one stage, the sitting bird stood up for a few seconds and 2 eggs were visible. The other bird was standing on the sand about 10 metres away.

As well as the fairy terns, I finally got black swan at the Estuary Heights access point, so Waipu Wildlife Refuge resulted in 2 additions to the list, not the hoped for four, no make that five; I had hoped for a reef heron here as well. It had taken a long time to get these 2 extra species too and I still had plans to get to Bream Head later as well as my paddle to Pirate Island. The strike rate was slowing down markedly.

OK, what now! Returning to Whangarei via Kioreroa Road I stopped again at the Council Wetlands briefly and finally got the Aussie little grebe. The little blighter had moved ponds! I drove through Bank Street in downtown Whangarei looking for the rock pigeons that always hang out there – nothing! Bother! Up to Whau Valley Dam to try for scaup, but no joy there either. I toyed with idea of going to Waro Lake at Hikurangi to try for scaup again, but it was in the wrong direction from the rest of my itinerary, so headed out to Onerahi.

The airport used to have banded dotterel way back, and the site was a “driveby”, so I went there before heading home to pick up the kayak. NO banded dotterels at the airport. I was now on 53 species and I was hoping for at least 60. Should I skip the kayak and go to Bream Head? I wouldn't have time for both. No, go with the kayak. It was a good tide, and I had hopes of whimbrel and curlew at Pirate Island, plus if I was lucky wrybill. Not only that I have been waiting for a good tide and good conditions to paddle over there anyway. The two don't always coincide, nor does the opportunity.

So that's what I did. I picked up my kayak from home, launched at Tamaterau, and paddled across to Pirate Island, which is a vegetated sand/shell bank near Mangawhati Point. I was still about 200 metres from landing when a huge flock of white-faced herons (about 70 of them) flew up. This was a bit of a bother, because I thought they would cause everything else there to fly away. But my luck was in. There actually wasn't the usual large flock of godwit and knot there today about 1.5 hours after high tide (2.6m) when I arrived, but while I was getting my telescope out after landing, a familiar whistle caught my ear. And lo and behold there were 2 curlews and a whimbrel flying past. They circled past me and landed in the large open mudflat that the godwits are usually on and when I made my way closer, I found 3 curlew and 3 whimbrel there. Bingo!

I now had 55 species on my list, getting to 60 was not looking good with time going by. By the time I paddled back across the harbour and loaded up my kayak, it was 4.50pm. Not enough time to go to Bream Head now. What could I aim for now? I still didn't have a reef heron, so I headed out to Reotahi, to check out the near side of Motukaroro Island. No luck there and no luck at McLeod Bay or Kennyrob Island either. With 10 minutes left should I check some short metal side roads for a possible pipit or try Ritchie Road at Parua Bay for a reef heron. I went with the Ritchie Road option and there with 3 minutes to go before the end, I saw a greenfinch and a reef heron. At last!

My final tally was 57 species in 24 hours from 5.55pm on 19 December to 5.55pm on 20 December 2016. All these birds were seen.

Another 2 species were heard: Shining Cuckoo, & Kaka

Pat Miller

Editor's comment: I also attached Pat's spreadsheet of sightings. (Following) A brilliant effort Pat. One has to have good local knowledge to achieve such results.

Species	Waikaraka	Wharf Road	Parua Bay Tavern	Bream Head/Ocean Beach	Council Wetlands	Papich Road	Marsden Bay	Waipu Wildlife Refuge	Uretiti	Pirate Island	Other Place
Red-billed Gull	X	X	X	X						X	
House Sparrow	X		X								
Myna	X		X								
Blackbird	X			X	X						
Pied Shag	X	X			X			X		X	X
White-faced Heron	X	X	X								
Little Shag	X										
Bar-tailed Godwit	X						X	X		X	
Mallard	X										
Tui	X										
Knot	X						X				
Variable Oystercatcher	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	
Kingfisher	X	X	X								
Starling	X				X						
Black-backed Gull		X	X					X		X	
White-fronted Tern		X	X					X			
Gannet		X						X			
Welcome Swallow		X	X		X			X			
Grey Warbler		X				X					
Caspian Tern			X					X		X	
Grey Duck			X		X						
Harrier Hawk			X								
Goldfinch			X		X	X					
Pukeko					X						X
Song Thrush				X	X						X
Chaffinch					X	X					X
New Zealand Dotterel				X			X			X	
Skylark				X							
Yellowhammer				X		X					
Rosella				X							Whau Valley
Fluttering Shearwater				X							
Diving Petrel				X							
Morepork				X							
Brown Kiwi				X							
Spur-winged Plover											X
Spotted Dove											Onerahi
Paradise Shelduck					X						
Silvereye					X						
Black Shag					X						
Shoveler					X						
North Island Fantail					X						
Dabchick						X			X		Whau Valley
Little Black Shag						X					
Californian Quail						X					
Barbary Dove						X					
Pheasant									X		
Pied Stilt							X	X			
Magpie											Mata
Fairy Tern								X			
Black Swan								X			
Aust. Little Grebe					X						
Whimbrel										X	
Curlew										X	
Greenfinch											Ritchie Rd
Reef Heron											Ritchie Rd

All the above birds were seen. Total 57 species
Birds heard but not seen, Shining Cuckoo, Kaka

Ngunguru Birds – by Michael Szabo:

I saw 80 Pateke (Brown Teal), 5 Australasian Shovelers, 2 Grey Ducks, 106 Grey Duck/Mallard hybrids and 27 Paradise Shelducks at Ngunguru sewage oxidation ponds off Waiotoi Rd in Ngunguru (Northland) on 26th December. This is the largest flock of Pateke I've ever seen.

Mike Cam visited the ponds the next day with the following comment “I had a look in yesterday afternoon, and frankly there were so many birds of all descriptions on the water that counting was not an option.... one great moving feathered mass. I would think his count was probably conservative.”

Michael also noted 11 Pateke, 1 Australasian Bittern, 2 Australasian Little Grebes, 2 Australasian Harriers and 3 Shining Cuckoos at a nearby small lake further along Waiotoi Rd on the same day, plus a single Whimbrel with c30 Bar-tailed Godwits on the Ngunguru Sandspit at high tide the same afternoon.

A visit to the nearby Old Mill Lane wetland on 30th December produced 4 Fernbirds and 2 Banded Rails. I had a great time walking around your wetland. I saw what I assumed were the same Fernbirds coming and going in that same area that we (Hilton Ward) saw them in. Then after walking around for a while I checked the small track you pointed out near the entrance. As I walked along the small side arm of the creek two Banded Rails flushed from the sedge. One ran off at high speed and the other swam away. I also had close views of a Fernbird near the main arm of the creek.

(Editor note) Thankyou Michael for the comments and observations. It is a pleasure having the Editor of Birds New Zealand visiting and knowing our neighborhood at Ngunguru.

Shore Bird Count at Ngunguru - 19th November 2016

A Shore Bird count at Ngunguru sand spit and lower estuary was undertaken by a group of 9 enthusiasts on Saturday November 19th. The count is part of a seasonal inventory of shore birds in New Zealand conducted by the Ornithological Society and for the Ngunguru Sandspit Protection Society and takes in the highlighted areas on the map. This count recorded a total of 136 birds. This is only slightly lower numbers than the same period in previous years. Variable Oyster catchers (indigenous, regionally significant) are the usually the most abundant birds sharing our bit of coast; 33 stood still to be counted this November. Still down on the average of 62. They were spread about over all areas of Te Maika Spit, Pi Manu and the Ngunguru foreshore. New Zealand dotterels (indigenous, nationally vulnerable) are also resident and 15 were found around the tip of the Pi Manu and further down Pi Manu's ocean beach and 2 on the Te Maika spit. The average being 22. Black Backed Gull (2). Red Billed Gull (29). Caspian Tern (2) Welcome Swallow (11) Spur Winged Plover (3) Pipit (1)



We are fortunate to share our beaches and estuary with so many species indigenous and native birds. Please be aware of the birds, and give them a wide berth, when walking along the beaches or crossing the dunes. Now that Pi Manu (The Sandspit) is Department of Conservation land no dogs are allowed there. The following photos were taken on the day.

Submitted by: Hilton Ward



Australasian Bittern

Melva and I occasionally see the Bittern at Old Mill Ln Wetland but we had never heard it. For two days and into the dark during November it boomed and boomed and boomed. What a sound. It was like blowing over a flagon in a folk band.
Hilton Ward

Sightings Count Sheet

Bird	Number	Place	date	Name
Spur Winged Plover	7	Alz		Ruth & David Crocket
Fernbird	1	Old Mill Ln Wetland	10-Nov-16	Melva & Hilton Ward
Black Billed Gulls	5	Kaiaua Carpark	2-Nov-16	Melva & Hilton Ward
Reef Heron	1	Tutukaka Marina	15-Oct-16	Pamela Kane
Kereru	2	Matapouri	10-Nov-16	Pamela Kane
Variable Oystercatchers	24	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
New Zealand Dotterels	12	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
Banded Dotterel	1	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
Royal Spoonbills	2	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
Reef Heron	1	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
Black Backed Gulls	4	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
Little Black Shag	1	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
Black Shag	1	Johnsons point Road	1-Aug-16	John Troost
Spotless Crake	1	12 Old Mill Ln wetland	23-Dec-16	Hilton Ward
Tomtit (Miromiro)	1	Hugh Crawford Reserve. Old Mill Ln	22-Jan-17	Melva & Hilton Ward
Kiwi (Male and female)	2	Hugh Crawford Reserve. Old Mill Ln	14-Jan-17	Hilton Ward (Trail Camera)