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## *Otago Region Newsletter 2/2020 February 2020*

### **Ornithological Snippets**

As autumn rapidly approaches, summer migrants are still in evidence; a **Long-tailed Cuckoo** at Jacks Bay on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb was presumably starting its northbound migration, and Nick Dunckley photographed a **Shining Cuckoo** juvenile being fed by **Grey Warbler** by the river at Lake Hawea on 19<sup>th</sup> Feb.

Bruce McKinlay came across a male **Indian Peafowl** in the Puerua Valley on 25<sup>th</sup> Jan, while a **NZ Pigeon** reported near Millers Flat on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb was away from any other records. A **Morepork** was found in Kaitangata on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb.

Suzanne Schofield found an immature **Banded Dotterel** on the airfield in Balclutha on 31<sup>st</sup> Jan, the first record there for over 15 years; while checking out the dotterel later that evening, the compiler picked out a **Whiskered Tern** among the Black-fronted Terns flying down the river, and later found it going to roost on a gravel island. Unfortunately neither the tern nor the gravel island has been seen since!

An **Eastern Rockhopper Penguin** (identified after the event) was photographed at Nugget Point on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb, and a **Spotted Shag** was in less likely habitat, feeding in the river at Balclutha on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb. Finally, a **Red-billed Gull** made the news by befriending Queen guitarist Brian May on a Dunedin beach.

Please send any interesting reports to Richard Schofield, [cluthaphotos@gmail.com](mailto:cluthaphotos@gmail.com)

Don Pearson saw a juvenile falcon at Glenleith on 20<sup>th</sup> Feb.

### **eBird News**

As the summer recording season draws to a close, total Atlas coverage has reached 115 species in 207 squares (almost 60% of the total). However, summer coverage to date has taken a dip compared with spring, with 124 squares visited, down from 142. There are still a few days left to fill in some gaps; not many completely empty squares close to home, but by

looking at the Atlas Effort map, and selecting Species observed & Summer (Dec-Feb), you can get a good idea of where there are more species to be found.

Hopefully the weather will cooperate and we can get away for another field trip on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March. The plan is to get up to Clark's Flat/Middlemarch area, meeting at 9am at Otaki St. outside Bunnings to carpool, and then at Outram, by 4 Square. Please let me know if you would like to come. Phone Richard Schofield, 027 281 8701.

## Oystercatchers in the Mist

Mist feathered faraway Taiaroa Head as three of us flew at shrub level to Papanui Inlet for an extra Bar-tailed Godwit count, on Sunday 16 February 2020.

Bruce flew his birdermobile and saw birds at the same time as we soared just above the harbour, with me as co pilot, while Rob from England noted any we might miss. A humid morning warmed the harbour under low cloud, and we hoped the peninsula mist would clear. Spotted Shags in hundreds flew low and fished the harbour, with White-fronted Terns, there were lots of fish in there. Seeing impressive boil ups close to shore of small fish fleeing unseen predators, maybe salmon and kahwai, I considered suggesting we turn around to get fishing rods. Yes, today is about waders, but birds and fish and people need each other so I'm still on course. Anyway, I was scribe today.

High tide was well in at Papanui Inlet, following the spring tide series of 8 to 14 February. We started looking for godwits, and counting all waders. Numbers are in the chart available later. A bit slow at first, no Spur-winged Plovers on the low sandy hills before the shore. Then a low flying Harrier helped us, as two Spur-winged Plovers flew up to see off the hawk, and called in two more to join in. Flying beyond the plovers' territory didn't bring the Harrier relief, because a Magpie then flew at the hawk. We counted more plovers, and Pied Stilts including juveniles. Godwits are usually zero to few at Papanui, so we weren't optimistic. Many Goldfinches, the most common land bird, their bright flashing flights and liquid calls. Starlings also common, and Skylarks. Some Redpolls, Greenfinch, and flocks of Silvereyes working the bush. We saw only one Kingfisher. No Rosella near the farmhouse.

Then Rob saw oystercatchers, tucked in under a low shore bluff, looking at us over a grassy bank. As we reversed, the birds discussed us, ah – yeah well they went past, but now they're coming back...They remained for us to count. Four Pied Oystercatchers and 17 Variable Oystercatchers, together in a group. Mist teased us as if clearing as we climbed on Cape Saunders Road above the cliff, and we didn't see any Caspian Terns. We scoped the far NNE shore, counting another 200 Variable Oystercatchers. Higher up, flowing mist cloaking everything was not good for us. Then a grey ringed portal cleared enough to reveal Papanui Inlet shore near Victory Beach far below. We piled out of the birdermobile just in time for mist curtains to close over everything again.

Further down at the cliff junction up from the creek, mist still hid all, with brief taunting glimpses. So our most organised birder supplied tea, a special brew that magically clears mist and enhances vision. I scanned the spectacular rock cliffs surrounded by bush above us, where surely we will see a Falcon some day, but not yet. Then the tea worked, clearing mist from the sandbar and beach below, where there were also four sea lions. The inland western point of sandbar was stained pink by a swathe of stranded krill, a probable clue to why harbour animals were so busy. Bruce counted another 400 Variable Oystercatchers through his scope, with a few Pied Oystercatchers.

Called Kuaka by Maori, we name them Bar-tailed Godwit, after old English "god wiht" or "good fellow," also naming Robin Goodfellow who is a kind sprite. Another suggested name origin

praises Godwits as good food, not that we mention it among birders. Anyway, why would we care how they got their name? After passing a fishing bonanza, braving the wilderness, and drinking vision enhancing tea, we hadn't seen any godwits. As pragmatic explorers we applied our Universal Rights to The Commons. We went over to Hooper's Inlet. At Hooper's, a small black sea lion ashore watched over three more playing in a water channel. The channel would also funnel any tide borne fish into a tight area. Of three sea lions in the water, two were probably juveniles. One was black, another tan, and the largest was light tan. Looking across the inlet to two low-lying exposed sandbars, we saw many Bar-tailed Godwits and Variable Oystercatchers. They were very far away, better counted from a hillside on the opposite shore, and likely in numbers from the official counter for Hooper's Inlet.

On our way home, bird and fish activity was slower in the harbour. Dinner could have been wild salmon from the harbour frenzy, but you can't fish and count waders. So it was bacon and tomato tortellini with greens and whole meal bread, a marine appetite consuming all with none saved for tomorrow. Along with recalling busy birds and fish in the harbour, and wading birds on the peninsula. As a famous birders' song by the Rolling Stones concludes, "you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you might find you get what you need."

**Andrew Austin**

## **Paradise Shelducks 2,333 + and a White Heron**

Huge numbers of Paradise Shelduck massed for their annual summer moult at Tomahawk Lagoons, followed by the White Heron returning still in breeding colours.

Many Paradise Shelducks fly in past my house, and I hear them call day and night. They go in my bird survey. ECOTAGO surveys are often with school groups who don't patiently count large numbers. The obvious increase in Paradise Shelducks encouraged me to count them properly. Working alone I did all species surveys earlier than usual for ECOTAGO, who put them on e-Bird. Surveys were done at about same times on different days from three sites.

On lower lagoon, counts from the weir are best for seeing them massed on water and shore. Then count from the famous outlet, but it is harder from there due to topography, obstacles, and angle of view. Counts by scan closer birds with binos, and distant water and shores with scope, and just count...Factor in not counting same birds again from moving groups, black headed males harder to see on rock shorelines and in shadows so they and entire crowds are really undercounted in my numbers. Any inaccuracy is undercounted.

6/12/2019. From lower lagoon outlet, Paradise Shelduck: 88. Soon after counted from weir, Paradise Shelduck: 39. Then they start arriving for annual moult.

8/1/2020. From best view at the weir, Paradise Shelduck, missing more coming in, and missing birds obscured by terrain and shadow: 896. Followed by another count soon after from outlet: 778. Plus more on hillsides and flying in from distance, not in reported counts – got to stop somewhere!

18/1/2020. I gave all species survey to ECOTAGO, and they e-Birded it. From best view at the weir, Paradise Shelduck: 1,248 (+). Plus more missed among rocks, shore vegetation, and flying during count. Then same day soon after from outlet, a poorer view site: 1,177(+). Plus more flying in not counted, many scattered on hillsides, and more in night. There were more than 1,700 Paradise Shelducks afloat and ashore around lower lagoon. House Sparrows flew off with smaller shed feathers, for their bumper nesting season.

Upper lagoon is less favoured for moulting. 8/1/2020, Paradise Shelduck: 16. All a hillside group only, 0 on water. Short time earlier, lower lagoon: 896 (+).

Upper lagoon, 18/1/2020, Paradise Shelduck: 190, most on water, a few on hillside. Same day a bit earlier, lower lagoon from weir: 1,248(+).

Other surveys 1/2/2020, not on ECOTAGO or e-Bird yet. Counted from lower lagoon weir, Paradise Shelduck: 1,669 (+). Then 53 minutes later, counted from outlet, Paradise Shelduck: 1,842 (+). Why see 173 more today from the usually poorer view ex outlet? Weather. A strong NE wind gusting into SW and W shores, so more birds on the NE side sheltered by the hill and more visible from the outlet. I didn't blame them, with my scope shaking in gusts at the exposed SW outlet. Then on to upper lagoon, with 193 Paradise Shelduck on water plus 298 on a nearby hillside, so 491. Paradise Shelducks counting both lagoons totaled 2,333 (+). Ending that upper lagoon survey, the White Heron flew out of Raupo Cove.

At times 25 – 28 Scaup on both lagoons, although there can be 56 on upper lagoon, but ducklings are seen only at upper lagoon. This year they nested in the raupo walled secret places. On 16/12/2019, 52 Scaup included a female with 8 ducklings. By 31/12/2019, Scaup included light brown juveniles. On 19/12/2019, 47 Canada Geese in V formation flew over. On 8/1/2020, 38 Scaup on upper lagoon included: a female with 5 ducklings morphing into brown juveniles, a male and female with 5 new cryptic patterned ducklings, a female and 2 ducklings, and another with 8 ducklings. Shoveller Duck on upper lagoon include juveniles. Their previous nests were hard to find.

A lone Pied Shag stood on Bird Hub tree at lower lagoon on 18/1/2020 with Black Shags and Little Shags, later after I did ECOTAGO survey. Usually not seen, but singles or pairs at times, and a group of 5 once previously. Five to 16 Spoonbills. Lots of fish in upper lagoon: many small Gobiomorphus bully fish, perch fry, and Galaxias (white bait) so shags are doing well. Also eels, trout, larger perch, and crayfish. No small flounders for years.

The White Heron perches over or in Raupo Channel, daily since 27/1/2020. A big heron, it had a completely black bill and plumes from the wings, still in breeding colours. Now the plumes seem less, and the bill is turning back to yellow again, gradually from the gape. Last summer it returned in post breeding colours with bill half black and yellow.

**Andrew Austin.**

## **Otago Branch**

### **Town Belt Counts**

If you have any counts from last spring that you have not already given to Bruce can you please email them.

Bruce won't be at the February meeting and so if you want to give them to him then it will be the March meeting. Other wise send them through to [brucejmckinlay@gmail.com](mailto:brucejmckinlay@gmail.com)

## **Birds New Zealand (OSNZ)**

### **Subscriptions 2020 – reminder!**

The annual membership subscriptions were due 1 January 2019. It is all too easy to overlook this during the Christmas New Year period. There are heaps of us who have forgotten to pay!! Remember that you can pay subs by direct banking online. Or ask your RR for a printed form. Thanks.

Mary Thompson, Regional Representative

## **Birds NZ Conference and AGM, 30 May to 1 June, Christchurch**

The annual meeting of Birds NZ is being held in Christchurch at the Commodore Hotel at Queen's Birthday Weekend. This is a great chance to get to a conference, as it is close. There will be two days of presentations on recent research and a variety of field trips, including atlas trips, bird banding, and a behind-the-scenes tour of the bird collection at the Canterbury Museum. Early Bird Registrations by 1 March 2020.

### **'Munida' Transect**

Francesca Cunningham and I went on the Polaris water sampling voyage 14th January, the 'Munida Transect' that has been run for twenty one years by Kim Currie of Chemistry Dept. Inshore to 25 km off was quite murky from the heavy seas and high rains of the last month and the sky tinged brown with smoke from Australian fires. Unusually there were quite a few sightings of Cookilaria group petrels most likely Cooks petrel. Photos to deliberate upon?



Cookilaria group petrels



A Chatham mollymawk was confirmed near the end of the day, the second time I have seen one in a year.



The neatest sight of the day, fifty km east of Taiaroa, were ten white-chinned petrels attending a work up of long-finned pilot whales and southern right whale dolphins. Unfortunately the mammals were boat averse so we could not see what their prey was. I presume that the birds were getting scraps of bigger things.

Inshore there were modest work ups of red-billed gulls, and out at the shelf break, 25km off there was a stream of sooty shearwaters, but only about fifty in view at a time.

Commercial set nets were encountered fifteen kilometres off.

### **Other birds**

Southern and northern royal albatrosses and giant petrels. White-capped, Salvins, Bullers and Campbell mollymawks. Sooty, Buller and Hutton/fluttering shearwaters. Mottled, white-chinned, Cape, diving, grey petrels. Black-bellied storm petrel, fairy prion. Red-billed and black-backed gulls. White-fronted terns and Otago shags.



Campbell Islands Mollymawk

### **Extreme birding**

I was climbing the 200m free hanging rope out of Harwoods Hole on Takaka Hill, looked up and there was a morepork foraging at the 80m level in the late afternoon. A great silhouette. I had seen fantails foraging that far down earlier in the day.

17 April South East Marine Protected Areas submissions close.

**Graeme Loh**

## Wild Dunedin Festival 17 – 23 April 2020

There's a lot happening during this year's Wild Dunedin Festival with events for all ages during the April school holidays. This year there's a focus on rewilding.

If you have children or grandchildren to entertain during the school holidays, check out the Wild Dunedin Festival's programme for many nature and wildlife focussed activities.

Several events for adults this year involve discussion on native forests, successful replanting projects and native plants.

Orokonui Ecosanctuary is holding a Walk for Wildlife, and on Earth Day you can explore the Ecosanctuary for a heavily reduced entrance fee.

The Halo Project is running a Landowners Field Trip in the West Harbour area to show you how to fund and implement a biodiversity rich reforestation plan for your property.

Larnach Castle is running a Native Plant Detective activity throughout the school holidays, with prizes, and free entry for children. The Royal Albatross Centre is putting on express tours at a bargain price, Blue Penguins Pukekura will have excellent family deals, and Penguin Place and Monarch Wildlife Cruises are offering discounts for their tours. This is a great time to visit these local wildlife attractions, when tourism is winding down.

Many other wild activities will be available at Otago Peninsula, Sinclair Wetland, Otago Museum, Toitū, Tomahawk Lagoon, Ribbonwood Nursery, NHNZ, Dunedin Public Library and the Art Gallery. And special guest Suzy Cato and local musicians will be celebrating nature through music and song.

For all Festival information, and to become a friend and have early access to the online programme launched on 6 March, and preferential bookings, visit [www.wilddunedin.nz](http://www.wilddunedin.nz). And you can follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



## Programme 2020

**Monthly Indoor Meetings** will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

**Wed 26 Feb** Indoor Meeting. Richard Schofield on “ NZ Bird Atlas Project- an update”.

**Sun 1<sup>st</sup> March** Atlas Field Trip. Clark’s Flat/Middlemarch area. Meeting at 9am at Otaki St. outside Bunnings to carpool, and then at Outram, by 4 Square.

**Wed 25 March** Indoor Meeting. **Bird Briefings** - a chance for any member to give a 5–10 minute talk about anything birdy that has captured your interest over the summer: special birds seen, unusual behaviour, latest photos, difficult ids, etc.  
Contact Mary 464 0787, 021 029 80504, [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz) to be added to the list of speakers for the evening.

### **Saturday 18 April Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Watching, 10am to noon**

This is our event for Wild Dunedin Festival; we plan to have telescopes to let the public see birds close-up and to help identify them, etc. Contact Andrew if you can help; phone 454 5830

**Wed 22 April** Indoor Meeting. Karthic will present "Birds through the lens" - Screening of two short-documentary films on conservation of endangered species - Yellow-eyed Penguins and Southern NZ Dotterels. This will be a special treat.

### **ANZAC weekend (25-27 April) Atlas Weekend Field Trip.**

Destination and details to be decided. Please diary this long weekend now.

**Wed 27 May** Indoor Meeting. Susan Walker from Landcare will present “Insights for native bird conservation from the Bird Atlas projects”.

**Offers and suggestions for talks or topics for Indoor Meetings would really be appreciated, please contact Mary [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz)**

Please send all contributions for the March newsletter to:  
Sue Odlin [sodlin@gmail.com](mailto:sodlin@gmail.com)

Many thanks to all who contributed.  
Final date for copy for next newsletter: **18 March**