



OSNZ news

No. 2 March, 1977

Edited by BARRIE HEATHER, 10 Jocelyn Crescent, Silverstream,
for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

EDITORIAL

My thanks to members who have sent in material, the life-blood of *OSNZ News*. Keep it coming. I hope you do not mind my recasting the material, usually to conserve space, and that no serious errors have resulted. I hope too that members are answering the questions that others raise; a quick letter can be helpful and appreciated.

If there seems to be a bias toward water birds, this probably reflects the interest and activities of amateur members and is probably the field which tends to produce items of news. Material of interest on birds of sea, swamp, field and forest will of course be welcome.

Two members have objected to my remark that *OSNZ News* "cannot be quoted elsewhere, as official reporting." This was badly worded; accuracy of material supplied by members is not doubted, but to quote from a newsletter would be most unwise, as material is inevitably put together in haste, usually rephrased by me into shorter form and liable to error from hasty publication.

Members are better advised to correspond with contributors, to ensure accuracy and balance. My intention was to emphasise that material should also be *permanently* recorded in *Notornis* or in an appropriate official recording scheme of the Society.

Deadline for material for June issue will be *1st June*.

Important errors in No. 1

1. *OSNZ Library*. The catalogue has 17 pages, not 70, for 50 cents. Now available from Mrs A. Howell, 27 Tiri Road, Whangaparaoa.

2. Apologies to SHANE COTTER and to anyone else whose name is misspelt.

3. Publications. *Wildlife Review* 1976 is No. 7, not No. 1.

4. Did you notice the apparently new species of gull seen at Lake Wairarapa?

5. Editorial point 5, "varieties" should have read "rarities."

PETER CHILD of Alexandra, who has just completed his major report on the birdlife of Mount Aspiring National Park, has agreed to give some notes from different aspects of the report. Here is the first.

Some General Observations about Introduced Birds

After five years' part-time application to the task of making a general survey of the birdlife of Mount Aspiring National Park we now have a pretty clear idea of the composition, relative abundance and distribution of the various species. The Park is more or less evenly divided into a western and eastern half by the chain of the Main Divide, and there are some contrasts between these two sectors.

In most eastern forests (which are of almost pure beech) the general paucity of birdlife, both of species and numbers, is rather depressing, and probably a reflection of the tremendous habitat destruction caused mainly by red deer over the last fifty years or so. It would appear that several interesting members which were once a characteristic of this region, such as Laughing Owl, Bush Wren and South Island Kokako, are now virtually extinct — none of these having been definitely sighted during the survey. In particular, where understories are badly depleted there is a great dearth of the usual small forest insectivores. For instance, there are many areas where it is now impossible to find a fantail (which used to be one of the commonest birds throughout). I wonder to what extent the Chaffinch is directly competing — they even behave like fantails very often, e.g. fluttering out over streams to take insects on the wing. The Chaffinch is the commonest bird in the Park — found everywhere from valley floors to subalpine scrub — not quite reaching the high altitude tussock grasslands where there are a few of the more graminivorous Yellow Hammer.

The Blackbird also occurs thinly throughout the same altitudinal distribution as the Chaffinch, but Song Thrushes are much less common, being found mainly around lower forest margins, with only two records so far from subalpine scrub levels.

The forest belt itself is an "ecological barrier" to certain species, with populations living both below (on valley bottoms) and above (in subalpine scrubland and high altitude tussock grasslands) e.g. Yellow Hammer and Hedge Sparrow, although the latter species may also be found in forest clearings or second growth regeneration. (Of course the same type of distribution applies to the native Pipit).

Although skylarks inhabit the summits of the unforested ranges of Central Otago they do not occupy grasslands at similar altitudes in the Park. Most of the large valley floor grasslands are leased from the Crown for grazing, with the Park boundaries beginning at the edge of the forest, so that there are not many skylarks or other species peculiar to this zone which are actually within Park limits.

The Redpoll is very common throughout, although it does not enter the forest proper very much, being mainly found in or near the canopy where they apparently feed extensively on beech flowers and fruits as well as small insects. Small flocks are often encountered in subalpine regions of the scrub zone.

Only very spasmodic sightings have been made of Greenfinch, Goldfinch, House Sparrow and Starling, and none of these beyond the valley floor.

Perhaps surprisingly (since they are so common in Central Otago) no Little Owls have been recorded. The White-backed Magpie reached the verges of the Park (at Aspinall's Mt Aspiring station) about three years ago from the Wanaka area, but have not yet been observed within the Park itself.

The whole question of exotic species in natural ecosystems, their ecological niches, competition with natives, etc., offers wide scope for the interested researcher.

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Three Kakas which, from numerous reports to the museum from the public, evidently spent from May to Nov. 1976 in Auckland's eastern suburbs, frequenting flowering gums, were last reported on 19 Nov. (SYLVIA REED)

Nest Record Scheme

The Nest Record Scheme is one of our Society's longest established projects and could provide an interesting individual activity for all members.

Last year 375 cards were received for 50 species from 26 members. This represents about .4 of a card per member.

Completing a nest record card is a rewarding activity involving only one person — *you*. Organisational problems should be nil if you choose a species in your immediate environment. Recording details allows the individual to develop and become personally involved in a simple investigation and may form the basis of a research project.

The best way to understand bird behaviour is by the regular observation and recording of a nesting species.

The current nesting season is well advanced in most species.

Start next spring.

Nest Record Cards are available from your local Regional Representative or: DAVID CROCKETT, 21 McMillan Avenue, Kamo, Northland.

Library Interloan service

There is no reason why any member anywhere in NZ should not see any book or journal paper he wishes. Simply apply through your local library on interloan and they will get it from whatever university or Govt. dept. library has it. Make sure it is not in OSNZ Library first.

Some departments prefer to send a photocopy of a short article rather than take a journal out of stock; therefore, for example, ask your librarian for *Ibis* XII No. 6 or photocopy of p. 116-118.

Tahuna-Torea reserve

Members visiting Auckland with a little time to spare might plan a high-tide visit to this reserve, on the western side of the Tamaki Estuary mouth, between the eastern suburbs of Glendowie and Howick.

The reserve includes a sandspit, mangrove flats, tidal and freshwater pools, marsh and bush. It was saved from becoming a refuse tip largely through the action of local residents, with R. M. LOCKLEY prominent among them.

Habitats are being secured, improved and varied by plantings and by earthworks to create pools (even a bridge for swallows), to extend wetland and to provide roosting islands. As visitors often disturb roosting waders, terns and gulls from the sandspit, a safe mud island has recently been built up in the

tidal lagoon. It is now regularly thronged with godwit, knot, oystercatchers, turnstones, terns, gulls and whatever else is using the Tamaki. For instance, a Whimbrel was recorded on 14/12/76 by K. J. Taylor.

Banded Rail and Spotless Crake have been recorded, and permission has been given to introduce Fernbird from an area threatened by development — any member who knows of a threatened population of Fernbird or of other species likely to survive in this reserve should inform Ron Lockley.

Recently the group has had to widen its field of interest to the whole Tamaki where it is working with local authorities towards nature reserves on other parts of the estuary and to erect an artificial shag roost at Panmure to replace collapsing pines. The group is now called the Tamaki Estuary Protection Society (Inc); R. M. Lockley, Convenor, 6 Calder Place, Auckland 6. Annual sub. \$2.00.

Harrier rescued by falconer

This note has been prompted by J. A. McLennan's Short Note in *Notornis* 23 (3): 249 which records a harrier recovering a dead duck from the water.

MAX FALCONER and REG COTTER were fishing in Pelorus Sound, Marlborough, off Tawero Point below Maud Island on 28 April, 1973, when two harriers appeared over the point and flew at about ten metres over the water. They were engaged in what looked like playful courtship flight, with much swooping and diving.

This developed into more serious fighting and, to escape attack, one bird dropped straight into the sea. The pursuing bird began to fly off and the other rose from the water after only a few seconds. The first bird immediately attacked again and the second, after a brief tussle, again dropped into the water.

The whole scene was repeated but this time the vanquished bird was too wet to rise and sat quite low in the water without any attempt to move, for about 30 seconds. It then made an unsuccessful attempt to rise. We approached in the dinghy from some 200 metres away.

As we closed in, the harrier tried to escape us, making surprising progress, flapping with its wings and driving forward. It covered about 50 metres before we could pull it in. During the whole rescue the attacking harrier flew about the area about 30 metres up, until we drove off in the boat.

The harrier was soaking wet so we took it back to camp, kept it overnight and released it in the morning.

After reading McLennan's account, I am not too sure that the bird could not have effected its own rescue, having less than 100 metres to cover to reach shore.

* * * *

On 5/12/76 a Harrier was seen at Wanaka by PETER and MARGARET CHILD trying to pluck a live duckling of NZ Scaup from the lake surface. The parent Scaup was trying to chase the harrier off, but they could not stay to see the outcome.

Around the Manawatu Estuary

MAUREEN and JAMES MOORE

Over the past 8 years we have made regular visits to the Manawatu R. estuary with the intention of broadening the scope of our bird watching beyond the rather limited range of species available in the greater Wellington area. Initially just day trips to either Waiterere or Foxton Beach were made but latterly whole weekends at Foxton Beach have become the routine.

The most immediately obvious feature of the estuary is its attraction for waders, particularly over-wintering birds from the northern hemisphere. The estuary is able to support up to 500 or 600 waders of which perhaps 450 will be Godwits, with 50 to 70 Knots and smaller numbers of seven other regular wader species. A further eight waders have been recorded, making a total of 17, including Long-billed Curlew, Whimbrel, Tattler and Terek Sandpiper.

The area of marsh and reeds between Foxton and Foxton Beach provides an attraction for considerable numbers of duck and various members of the heron family. The Spoonbill is of course almost a permanent resident, while both White Heron and Little Egret are occasional visitors. Duck only really become evident on Duck Shoot Day when large numbers assemble in the wider part of the estuary and Shoveler and Grey Teal can usually then be found. Black Swans also seek sanctuary here in quite large numbers.

Most of the usual coastal species occur here, with Black-backed Gulls breeding and Black-billed Gulls resident. Sporadic visits by Black-fronted, White-winged Black and Little Terns have also been observed. Arctic Skuas are regular during late summer and occasionally a Pomarine has been identified.

Sea watching, although unpredictable, can sometimes be extremely rewarding. The fishing grounds of the South Taranaki Bight attract a variety of sea-birds which, on occasion, appear quite close inshore. Gannets and Giant Petrels are regular throughout the year and Fluttering Shearwaters can often be seen in large numbers in late summer. Albatrosses and mollymawks occur sporadically, occasionally in fair numbers, and usually during rough weather when Fairy Prions and some larger petrels have also appeared.

A few miles to the north of the estuary lie a number of small dune lakes such as L. Koputara, where Dabchick, Spotless Crake and the reintroduced Brown Teal can be found.

The surrounding dune scrub and adjacent exotic pine forests provide habitats for most of the introduced passerines together with pheasant, Californian Quail and Shining Cuckoo. In fact the only birds noticeably absent from this small area are the native bush birds, even the Tui being only a very rare visitor.

Our personal check list for the area now runs at 79 species which we think would compare very favourably with any other area in New Zealand. No doubt other members of the Society have their own favourite haunts which could claim an even greater variety of birds.

(Compare *N.Z. Bird Notes* 2 (8): 194-5. Royal Spoonbill in *N.Z.* by R. H. D. Stidolph, April 1948. *Notornis* 4 (7): 173. Birds in Manawatu District by R. A. Wilson, Jan. 1952.)

Colour-banded N.Z. Dotterels

The New Zealand Dotterel banding scheme started in 1950 and 87 birds have been banded. In the North Island this bird occurs, except for odd instances, from Kawhia to North Cape and from North Cape to the eastern end of Bay of Plenty.

Banding has been done from South Kaipara Head to Miranda in the Firth of Thames. Many sight recoveries have been made, but none north of mid-Kaipara Harbour or south or east of Miranda. Watch has been kept at Waikato Heads and parts of the coast of the Coromandel Peninsula with no result. One bird banded at South Kaipara Head as a chick came south to Miranda within a year. Others have come south from there also to Karaka, on the south side of the Manukau Harbour. Since these have travelled so far, all birds seen should be checked carefully. It is hoped that O.S.N.Z. members and friends will watch all New Zealand Dotterels in their areas and report sightings to their RR or direct to

me as I am the holder of the permit for the banding of this bird.

When a New Zealand Dotterel (or any other banded bird) is seen wearing bands which form metal and colour combinations great care is needed to (a) make sure of the left and right leg; (b) be sure of colours; (c) note carefully the position on each leg of both metal and coloured bands; (d) make sure that both feet are fully seen (some birds have an unnumbered metal band on one leg and a numbered metal and a coloured band on the other); (e) locality, date and any further notes; (f) do not try to read numbers with binoculars or telescope on a live bird as the figures are too small.

Examples (left leg first):

Red over Metal on Left — Blue over White on Right.

Metal on Left — White over Green on Right.

From this I will know the number on the band.

Everyone reporting a banded bird outside the present area will receive its banding history.

Good hunting.

H. R. McKENZIE,
P.O. Box 45,
Clevedon,
Auckland.

Kakapo

Members will have been excited by press news in January of the re-discovery of Kakapo on Stewart Island. The following is taken from information kindly supplied by DON MERTON of Wildlife Service.

The primary purpose of the 1976/77 season was to find a female for Maud Island. Since the Fiordland remnants are in extremely difficult country, it was hoped that a female would be attracted to the courtship arenas of booming males. The nine known males and a tenth new one were carefully watched but booming and thus breeding did not occur. This in itself is remarkable and confirms the claims of early writers that breeding does not occur every year. There is some evidence that booming occurs only during those summers when tussocks and grasses seed in profusion.

From 10 January to 8 February four two-man teams, led by RON NILSSON of Dunedin, aided by a timely grant from the National Provident Fund, searched a vast tract of scrub and forest on Stewart Island, east of the Tin Range in the south-east of the island. Success was immediate: Kakapo were discovered in a number of widely separated localities in many thousands of hectares of scrubland. The area extended from the Tin Range east to the very coast, mainly

within an existing fauna and flora reserve. Sign of 30 birds was found, including two typical courtship arenas. Females must surely be present.

Later this year the strength and range of these Kakapo will be more fully investigated. It is planned to confine research and disturbance to the minimum needed to safeguard the Kakapo in its existing habitat. It is noted that deer poisoning will need to cease, as Kakapo are partial to carrots, and that the absence of mustelids may have helped Kakapo to survive on Stewart Island.

We look forward eagerly to the results of expeditions to come.

Black Robins

Five of these precious birds were transferred in Sept. from Little Mangere to the most suitable part of Mangere Island at present, a slope of remnant but regenerating vegetation. Two pairs and an extra male were liberated and quickly divided up the slope into three territories.

A report has come from the Chathams that one juvenile has been raised to independence; possibly a second is lurking in the scrub. Both pairs of adults survive and appear in good health.

National Parks

The National Parks Authority has asked that any group or individual making a scientific study in a National Park should tell the Board Chairman, or the Chief Ranger of the park concerned.

The Authority's scientific committee, which prepares a report annually outlining work being done, is concerned that research has sometimes been done without their knowledge. Park records need to be complete, particularly as results of work may affect planning and management of a park.

The report has been ordered for OSNZ library.

Wrybills

As promised, we have further notes from ROD HAY on his study of the Wrybill in its breeding and wintering grounds. His study is supported financially by Dept. of Internal Affairs.

The project's focus is habitat use but, because of limited available information, the approach is fairly general. Colour-banding has been carried out for the past two breeding seasons on the upper Rakaia River and birds are also being banded at Karaka and Miranda in the north.

From Sept. 1976 to Jan. 1977 thirty breeding pairs were under observation. Most adults banded the previous season returned to breed and some banded yearlings also turned up, unpaired, in October. A mild early spring promoted a high success and by mid-November most

pairs had begun second clutches, their early chicks being fledged. Particularly interesting was one nest with four eggs instead of the normal two, and attended by two females and one male. A disastrous flood in early December destroyed all but one nest, a spectacular demonstration of what the birds must contend with at times. There was very little activity after that, most adults having moved off the river by mid-January.

Band recoveries and sightings have been coming in steadily and the vigilance of OSNZ members is greatly appreciated. Feeding, and the movement and distribution of flocks are being looked at in the north, and band sightings are giving valuable information on migration.

Members are asked to continue watching for banded birds. It is important to see *both* legs, although this can be difficult and a cautious approach may be necessary. If not already sent to Recording Scheme, all locality records, with date and number seen, banded and unbanded, will be appreciated. Nil returns from likely localities can help. Please send to Rod Hay, Zoology Dept, University of Auckland.

We are indebted to Mrs ANNE PRICKETT of Birkenhead for this intriguing episode recorded by Mrs Doig, Wilding Ave, Northcote, Auckland.

During March 1976, after some weeks of very dry weather, my son noticed a White-faced Heron standing on our terrace knocking with its beak on the floor-length glass door. He quietly opened the door and to our surprise the bird walked into the room, seeming quite unafraid of the four of us present. It walked around, looked into an open cupboard and finally settled on a couch cushion. After a while we began to move about and talk. Even when my son picked it up it did not object.

I put a dish of water and small pieces of fish out on the terrace, both of which it took.

We live near a bush reserve and swamp but, although we often see these birds, they have not ventured here before. For the next six weeks the heron was a regular visitor, appreciating the food and water. It would arrive about 6 a.m. and knock on my son's bedroom window. It he didn't get up quickly and give it fish, it would fly to the roof and tramp around. The visits were daily. It always came inside if a door was open, even standing beside me at the kitchen sink. When the terrace got hot about noon, it would fly down to the bush for a few hours, always returning when the children came home from school. The neighbouring children eventually were able to pick it up also.

At one stage another, larger heron came to drink and eat but was not tame

and kept its distance. After the rains came, the visits all ceased.

For a short time there was a third bird but it stayed in nearby pines, where they are often flying around. Nests have not been found in these trees.

The heron's habit of flying onto the music stool when my son was playing the piano, once gave the piano tuner a great surprise. (Was he white-faced? — Ed.)

A Fiordland Crested Penguin was seen on the shore of Kapiti by members of a Forest & Bird party on 19 Feb. Although it went up into the flax, it did not seem to be in moult. Sketches made by STEWART PAYNE made identity certain. In that rare little book *Kapiti Bird Sanctuary* by A. S. & Amy Wilkinson (1952) the Fiordland Crested is first recorded in Jan. 1926 at almost the same spot, a little north of the ranger's house, and was seen in later years also.

Ohope Spit, east of Whakatane, had a record 51 Golden Plover on 28 Dec., while Rangitaiki mouth, west of Whakatane, had 2 Little Terns and still one White-winged Black on 27 Dec. (Roy Weston). A WWBT has been seen during January near Nelson (Frank Boyce, Brian Bell, Peter Gaze). These seem to be the only ones recorded this year, very meagre after the earlier promise of breeding. Near Appleby Inlet, Nelson, on 25 Jan. were 7 Spoonbill and a Little Egret (Dick Sibson, Beth Brown, Anton Habraken).

Figures from JIM & MAUREEN MOORE (January), HUGH ROBERTSON (Manawatu branch 6 Feb.) and MIKE DENNISON (Manawatu branch 20 Feb.) for Manawatu Estuary show that the White Ibis is still there, 2 Glossy Ibis are on a nearby lake, there are now 3 Curlew, 32 Golden Plover, 400 Godwit, 70 Knot, 17 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 80 Banded Dotterel and a varying number of Curlew Sandpiper, Wrybill and Turnstone. On 20th some of the Godwit and Golden Plover were acquiring breeding colour.

Mike tells of one Sharp-tail spending at least 5 mins chasing another, with its feathers fluffed up and its tail fanned up like a wren. It kept its head low, occasionally jumping forward, raising wings abruptly to chase the other through the flock (which ignored them).

A pair of Brown Teal was seen on Kapiti by MAX FALCONER on 1/1/77 in the small Rangatira swamp; seen on 7/2/77 by HUGH ROBERTSON with two chicks.

For Sale

Annotated Checklist of Birds of N.Z.
I can still get more at \$2.00, post included.

Southland's massive Black-billed Gull population has enjoyed a fairly good breeding season, according to ROGER SUTTON. An unusually wet summer has ensured a bountiful food supply, so that the usual high mortality of weak and hungry gulls on Southland roads has not occurred.

Classified Summarised Notes

Sandy Edgar reminds members that material for these is welcome at any time. He asks those who send batches of notes to take 30 June as the end of their ornithological year and to send their summaries in July, to give Sandy plenty of time to compile CSN, to be with the printer in September.

Sir Charles Fleming, KBE

Seen on 28 Feb. 1977, in Wellington Town Hall, one OBE in excellent plumage receiving KBE from one Q, in courtly ceremony involving use of pointed stick.

One of those who got together to found OSNZ in 1939, the first regional organiser for Auckland and a former President of OSNZ, Sir Charles has been a major contributor to NZ ornithology, especially the phylogeny and biogeography of NZ birds, and has been particularly prominent in the conservation field. *OSNZ News*, on behalf of rank-and-file members of OSNZ, warmly congratulates Sir Charles and Lady Fleming on the award of Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire, invested by the Queen in person.

Muriwai Lakes

After an overnight stay at Forestry HQ, the teams making this survey had an early start on 6 Feb. The dozen or so dune lakes behind Muriwai Beach, north of Auckland on the west coast, have evidently dried up badly in recent years — totals were similar to previous years, although most birds were on Lake Kereta. Dabchick is the most important species on these lakes — figures for 1973 to 1977 are 67, 89, 71, 51 and 57.

Among other species were 10 Bittern, 13 Little Black Shag and only one Fernbird. 31 Grey Teal were new for the area. Over 200 swallows were seen, perhaps part of a local movement. They were seen repeatedly swooping onto Dabchicks, causing them to dive. (SYLVIA REED)

Christmas cards

After many years of successful labour by BRIAN & SUE BELL, aided in times of crisis by other Wellington members, the responsibility for advertising and distributing the OSNZ cards returns to Auckland, where the whole business began.

The scheme is now controlled by Mr R. N. THOMAS. Wellington members wish Aucklanders the best of ornithological luck with the work involved. The new cards will, I believe, feature the Pied Tit and the Kakapo and are again painted by Janet Marshall. Success is therefore guaranteed.

* * * *

The Australian Pelican seen near Dargaville last year did not disappear on 29 August, as stated in *OSNZ News* No. 1. It was seen again by RAE NICHOLLS on 2 Sept. at Helensville, at the south end of the Kaipara Harbour.

* * * *

The 13 Feb. census of Spotted Shags in the Hauraki Gulf gave a total of 3480 birds, 2215 of which were at the islands near Coromandel. Other main roosts were NE Ponui Island, and Tarahiki Islet, between Ponui and Waiheke.

Figures for the gulf show little change from 1975 and 1976. SYLVIA REED considers that almost all suitable nesting places are occupied and that the shags are virtually at saturation point.

* * * *

Another behaviour note from Southland's GRANT ALLEN. While in Auckland recently he saw a hedgehog crossing a lawn towards a Myna nest with young. The adult mynas made repeated and tenacious dives, causing the hedgehog to curl up. Examination showed that the hedgehog had at least six bleeding wounds. Presumably the mynas 'got the pricker' (not one of my corny remarks — Ed.).

* * * *

How many towns in New Zealand can claim to have swallows, stilts and Black-fronted Dotterels breeding within borough limits? All three bred this season in the Te Ore Ore excavation ponds in Masterton (BOB STIDOLPH).

If there are any derelict gravel pits in your area, they could be converted into ideal habitat for waterfowl and waders, says Bob. They may be available for next to nothing, a chance to do something practical for several species, and are ideal places for a hide.

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A pair of Blue Ducks is reported in late Jan. by COLIN SCADDEN, Masterton, on Mt Ruapehu. They were seen in the Whakapapanui Stream both above and below the Forest & Bird lodge.

Farewell Spit

The visit to Farewell Spit to give the younger active members of the Society an opportunity to learn more about wading birds took place as planned between 18 and 25 January. Many of the youngsters were well acquainted with waders but others were introduced to a new field. 12 young people took part, including one young lady, Lynda Budgeon from Marlborough. It is hoped that next time such a venture is planned, more young women will be available.

It was very pleasing to see that the generation gap did not exist among the birders. Small groups of young and old could be seen deep in discussion around the woolshed at any time of day or night. Only in the early evening did the 'oldies' retire for a little 'spiritual' refreshment but the youngsters were more interested in getting another look at the Greenshank, going over to the farm pond to check on the shags, or wandering even further afield to see the Little Blue Penguins coming ashore on the ocean beach.

The weather was generally kind — only one day was lost to heavy rain. On the following day the evaporating water caused such a weird effect on the Spit that it was hard to observe birds through the rising steam. No one suffered from over-exposure to the sun but many embarked each morning well decorated with John Seddon's 'war paint.' Only Tony Palliser had trouble, with legs as bright red as those of a breeding Plumed Egret (Hugh Robertson is said to have cheated by wearing longs — Ed.).

Transport was provided by the Wildlife Service and we were grateful for the efforts at the controls of Pete Fisher, Alan Hall and the Andy's Cox and Mardon. Some younger members were well ventilated on the trailer on the way to and fro but were less keen when sprayed by wet sand and rotting *Zostera*.

Three species were added to the list for the Spit — now well over 100. These were Cape Pigeon, Pectoral Sandpiper and Terek Sandpiper. Great interest was centred on Greenshank, Asiatic Whimbrel (20), Long-billed Curlew (18), Large Sand Dotterel (2), Lesser Yellowlegs (1) but it was the huge numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot and Turnstone which impressed the visitors. The most unexpected record was 3 Grey Plover — the largest group known from one place in New Zealand. Mind you, it took Beth Brown the full week to catch up with them!

There was one disappointing feature — only 11 regions sent a young representative. I hope that those regions not represented will have a look at their local scene to see what can be done to encourage more young people to bird study. Let's hope that when a similar project is planned in two or three years' time, all regions will send someone along (BRIAN BELL).

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A note from JOHN & MARY McFADZIEN of Havelock North expresses in glowing terms their fascination for the NZ cuckoos, particularly their long migrations and parasitic breeding habits. They point out that many of us tend wrongly to regard cuckoos as visitors to NZ when, since they breed here, NZ is their true home. They were very interested in R. St. Paul's article (*Notornis* 23: 289-298) and offer this assessment of cuckoo numbers:

Shining Cuckoo: 100,000. Based on a distribution over 50% of the country with a population density of one pair per square mile.

Long-tailed Cuckoo: 25,000. Based on a distribution over 12½% of the country with a density of one pair per square mile.

One can easily criticise the assumptions, but can anyone do any better? After all, we spend a lot of time counting migratory godwit.

* * * *

Among Cape Pigeons captured between the Snares and Auckland Islands in January by SANDY BARTLE, were two banded birds. One was banded at Cape Campbell, eastern Marlborough in 1957 by Fred Abernethy and the other in Tory Channel, Marlborough Sounds in 1963 by Fred Kinsky and Jack Cowie.

The Crested Grebes of Lake Elterwater have been seen by several members, despite a late *OSNZ News*, including Rod Hay on his northward migration from the Rakaia, and Mr & Mrs Schischka of New Lynn, Auckland, who spent an hour on 7 Jan. watching the adults teaching the half-grown chicks to fish. An adult would dive and then offer fish to each chick in turn — one chick finally dived for 10 secs, while the others would only dip their heads under.

* * * *

CHRIS BELCHER of Otama, RD3, Gore, has taken mild exception, as well he might, to my biased remark that the movement of magpies into Southland is "unpleasant news." Will members please deluge Chris with letters giving their experience for and against White-backed Magpie?

A white Harrier banded by Mervyn Jukes and Barrie Heather on 31/10/63 at Springhills in Southland, was reported on several occasions to be within a ten mile radius of the banding site. To check these reports, I retrapped the bird at Tussock Creek, c. 4 miles away on 13/7/71. Since then I have had further reports of a white hawk, the most recent being at Woodlands, c. 12 miles to the south, in Dec. 1976.

I have now heard of a white hawk being seen cruising up and down a creek near Te Anau, in Jan. 1977. The original one? (MERVYN JUKES)

Kapiti Island

In 1973 Wellington Region offered a study team to examine the status of bird life on Kapiti Island. When in 1975 the Kapiti Advisory Committee finally asked for proposals, the region naturally jumped at the chance and proposed a survey of birds in relation to different vegetation types. This was accepted and the study has been in progress for one year, built round a team of seven or eight members who are usually available for a weekend in March, June, September and December.

There are three transects (a) through fairly mature forest using the two summit tracks (b) in the north, through kanuka/manuka and early regeneration (c) in the south, through intermediate forest. Two of the transects coincide with DSIR work on possum-vegetation relationships. The five-minute count method used in West Coast beech forests and elsewhere (see Dawson & Bull, *Notornis* 22 (2), June 1975) is used. Each transect has 10 count stations.

One member counts the northern transect, counting up in the morning and down in the afternoon. The other two transects have double routes, so that two members for each work up and change over to work down in the afternoon. Team members change transects for the second day of a weekend.

It is hoped that from this survey, planned for three years, we will show:

1. what birds are on Kapiti
2. habitat preferences and seasonal changes of these preferences
3. any differences of altitudinal distribution
4. changes of population
5. effects of possums on bird life, if there are correlations with DSIR studies.

Some patterns are emerging but further years are needed to confirm them. Species such as Whitehead, Tui, Bellbird, Robin appear throughout the counts. Others such as Silvereye, Grey Warbler and Pied Tit seem more localised. Loud-voiced and mobile species such as Kaka and Long-tailed Cuckoo create problems during the counts.

Kiwis are a constant cause of frustration.

Among highlights so far have been sightings of native bats, an Antarctic Fulmar seen when the team was storm-bound recently, glimpses of Yellow-crowned Parakeets, an obliging Morepork which appears on demand on the northern transect, and perhaps the catch of fine fresh fish on the last visit.

Kapiti rangers have been an immense help and have shown keen interest in both our work and our welfare. We are grateful to Lands & Survey Dept and especially the Kapiti Advisory Committee for the chance to attempt this project (MAX FALCONER).

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The power of the press is being used by JO DOUGLAS on the West Coast to seek public interest; also by BETH BROWN to find Cattle Egrets. After seeing 19 Cattle Egrets, 18 in breeding plumage near Rangiriri in the Waikato she has persuaded STUART CHAMBERS, a farming member near Waitakaruru, Firth of Thames, to write an article for the *NZ Farmer*. So far she has heard of 8 which stayed 6 to 8 weeks in Aug/Sept 1976 at Waitapu, near Takaka, and a probable 3 near Ashburton. It seems likely there were c.60 Cattle Egrets in the country last spring, mainly in the Waikato. They seem to drift off about Nov. and back about May. Where are they breeding?

Waikato harbours

On a calm, hot day, 12 Feb., 12 Waikato members carried out a census of Kawhia and Aotea Harbours, on the west coast. Some of the results, with Kawhia figures first: Reef Heron 1, 0, Godwit 3887, 1556, Knot 3, 0, Curlew 3, 0, Whimbrel 1, 0, SIPO 2656, 340, Variable Oystercatcher 1, 3, Pied Stilt 270, 16, *Black Stilt* 3, 0, (one *Black Stilt* seen Kawhia 4/7/76), Banded Dotterel 46, 5, NZ Dotterel 2, 7, Caspian Tern 104, 5, Black-billed Gull 4 (2 imm.), 0. (JOHN & BETTY SEDDON)

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Why, asks BOB STIDOLPH, do swallows chase other species? At the Te Ore Ore ponds, Masterton, on 8 Feb. he watched a Swallow in close pursuit of a Stilt and later another swooped at two Black-fronted Dotterels. Neither species attempted to retaliate.

Several members have mentioned swallows swooping on Dabchicks. BDH has seen Black-fronted Dotterels attacked several times, and a Hoary-headed Grebe (?) on Lake Horowhenua forced to dive. Have members similar observations with other species? What happens when swallows and breeding Black-fronted Terns get together?

Members visiting Auckland in June or July may like to join in with mid-winter censuses of Firth of Thames (26/6/77) or Manukau (3/7/77). Get in touch with RR for Auckland or South Auckland. * * * *

In Wellington newsletter MAX FALCONER reports a Swallow nest with young built on the end of a hayfork handle stored in the rafters of a tractor shed, during the Farewell Spit wader census. What was he doing in a tractor shed during a wader census? * * * *

Red-billed Gulls have traditionally nested on two small rocks near the upper narrows on Riverton Estuary, Southland. This year they were found to have shifted to a new site, a large mai-mai in mid-estuary. Every possible site on roof, floor, seats and shelves was occupied and successful. (ROGER SUTTON)

Quotation for March

"The doctor . . . found a blue duck's nest on the bank of the Cleddau but as he did not know they were rare he left them."

From the diary of R. A. Wilson, 1891; supplied by PETER GAZE. Have you a favourite quotation, preferably brief, appropriate for *OSNZ News*? * * * *

An interesting episode from Dr R. T. BAKER, Levin, made on 6/2/73 when he was living in Christchurch.

I was sitting by one of the small pools in the Botanical Gardens idly watching a small group of Mallard X Grey Duck which had left the water and were standing on the stones surrounding the pool. There were a few House Sparrows sharing the stones and drinking from the water. Suddenly a male duck (with a fairly mallardish head) seized a sparrow in its bill and, ignoring the commotion set up by the sparrow and the other ducks, proceeded to bash its prey on the stones and path until it succumbed. It took the duck about 5 mins to kill the sparrow and during this time it had to ward off the attentions of the other ducks which were highly agitated. As soon as the sparrow was dead, however, the other ducks lost interest.

The duck with the sparrow now took to the water and spent the next 55 mins (timed) trying to knock the sparrow into a suitable size and shape for swallowing. It did this by holding its head under water and shaking vigorously, and also by banging the sparrow on the pool surface. The duck finally succeeded in swallowing the sparrow which, by this time, had no feathers at all and had been crushed somewhat by the duck's bill.

Has anyone read or heard of similar episodes?

A report has arrived of the Northland/Far North study of Motukawanui, the main island of the Cavallis, offshore north of Kerikeri. This large island, formerly farmed, is being allowed to regenerate now that the stock has gone. 28 members, led by DAVID CROCKETT, spent last Labour Weekend there and found that the prolific growth of grasses and clovers, plus the spread of scrub, has led to an explosion of Skylark, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Blackbird and Starling. Morepork, Silvereye, Warbler and Fantail have not noticeably increased and regrettably the Tui and the rather distinctive Bellbird of the islands seem to have gone. Swallows and Brown Quail flourish in present conditions, Pheasant and Californian Quail to a lesser extent. On the coast, the Kingfisher, Myna, and Pied Shag have healthy numbers, while there are several pairs of NZ Dotterel, Variable Oystercatcher and Reef Heron.

The changes destined to occur as coastal forest regenerates will make a fascinating future study. Whether the Bellbirds linger on or not, there are exciting prospects for future introductions.

Saddleback transfer

In January 26 people, mostly OSNZ members, helped DICK VEITCH successfully carry out the latest step in the Wildlife Service's conservation programme for the Saddleback.

On Cuvier Island, NE of Coromandel Peninsula, two teams, using tapes, decoys and mist nets, worked for a week each to capture and care for 101 Saddlebacks (including 24 re-traps of earlier birds). Most were released but 6 adults went to Mt Bruce and 12 male and 12 female immatures were transferred southward to Kawitihi in the Mercury group (for a locality map see *Notornis* 22 (3) Sept 1975 p. 197).

Counts based on a 10 acre permanent quadrat suggested a Cuvier population of at least 500 birds, close to saturation point — a successful result of the original liberation from Hen Island, east of Whangarei.

Kawitihi seems to be well suited to the Saddleback, although to overcome a shortage of holes in the young pohutukawa canopy, nest boxes had to be erected.

Cuvier parakeets — from stock liberated from Mt Bruce in 1974, the Cuvier population of the Red-crowned Parakeet has grown to an estimated 100 birds. A fine example of conservation based on aviary-bred stock.

When will the Stitchbird have its turn?

Thermal power

Members may be interested in the Impact Report on the proposed Auckland Thermal No. 1 power station. The station is to be located at Waiau Pa on the southern shore of Manukau Harbour, west of Karaka. A copy of the full report is in OSNZ Library and has been commented on by MICHAEL TAYLOR in *Tara* No. 3.

A supplement to the main report is the ecological impact report prepared by Bioresearches Ltd, to which OSNZ contributed by request in two ways (a) 1950-1975 wader census figures (b) studies by about 20 members of wader feeding patterns for two 6-hour periods on both rising and falling tides. For six months, Bioresearches did weekly counts at the various roosts as part of their work.

There has been much opposition to this station. If it is constructed, we hope that the impact report, which recommends preserving wader roosts and adjacent feeding areas and constructing new roosts, will not be ignored.

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The Southland pair of Hoary-headed Grebes have reared three young this summer and recently were well on the way with a second 4-egg nest. Chances of colonisation are now very real. (ROGER SUTTON)

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Some notes from Hawkes Bay include Spurwings nesting at Waipukurau, a probable Mongolian Dotterel at Westshore, Napier, and a lack of recent reports of the Westshore Kestrels. 5 Royal Spoonbills in breeding plumage appeared on 13 Dec. and left on 18th. Another from 9 to 12 Jan., and again in 13 Feb.

A census of the Westshore/Ahuriri area on 13 Feb. gave such totals as: Little Black Shag 85, White-faced Heron 109, Paradise Duck 263, Mallard 3145, Grey Teal 33, Shoveler 74, SIPO 11, Godwit 375, Stint 2, Stilt 1173, Black-billed Gull 34, Caspian Tern 10 (NORMAN MACKENZIE).

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The introduction of the Weka into Auckland's Waitakere Ranges in early Feb. was reported in the *NZ Herald* of 15 Feb. Two lots of 40 and 25 birds were released in the Centennial Memorial Park, by the Regional Authority, apparently the first time the ARA has been involved in such a project.

The press statement inspired several letters to the editor mentioning wekas seen previously in the Muriwai Valley, at Onerahi and, big surprise for readers of *Notornis* 23: 213-219, at Rawhiti, east of Russell. Thanks to ROY WESTON for these extracts.

Massey thesis work

RICHARD GRAY of Dunedin rifleman fame has nearly finished his work on food and feeding behaviour of Kakapo. The study has involved a comparison of all aspects of food, feeding and nutritional value of food plants on Maud Island and in Fiordland.

DAVID BAKER-GABB has been working on factors influencing the hunting behaviour of the Harrier in the Manawatu sand country. The broad aim has been to observe and consider the influence of weather, season, territorial and nesting behaviour on hunting and food-gathering.

ROBIN FORDHAM is continuing his work on the use by Pukekos of pasture adjoining swamp in the Manawatu; concentrated so far on activities, dispersion, impact of grazing, faecal studies.

RALPH POWLESLAND has completed a general study of the relationship between starlings and the haematophagous mite *Ornithonyssus bursa*; esp. breeding success, chick growth, etc. in relation to mite loads.

GARY PETERSEN has completed a project to measure populations of the same mite on starlings through autumn and winter.

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MICHAEL DENNISON has some notes from an 11 hour stint at a Harrier nest with two 5-6 week old chicks. The adults made 16 trips to the young in the time, dropping to the nest, leaving the prey and immediately flying off. Visits were preceded by high whistles, a special call, answered by the chicks as the adult approached. Sometimes the onslaught of the chicks forced the adult on landing into the thistles from where it had to make a hasty retreat.

Food left included 4 naked chicks (plucked?), usually eaten in one gulp, several mice, eaten quickly and usually whole, and a fledged thrush or blackbird, eaten feathers and all. A few pellets were scattered around the nest, mainly of fur, probably hare. Food was not shared; one chick fed at a time.

Although the chicks wandered from the nest, an adult call always sent them scuttling back to be fed. Between feeds, they preened vigorously, sometimes mutually; also flapped violently — once one chick was battered about the head for 30 secs by its mate's over-exuberant exercise.

When a mouse or chick had been eaten, the chick often 'stalked' any remains on the spot, jumping in the air to land on it and then peck it, repeating this several times.

National Museum

Routine for despatch of fresh specimens to Wellington: after being deep-frozen, send by air freight or by Newmans. Meanwhile inform museum by collect call or telegram of date of arrival. If doubtful of quality or need for specimen, store in deep-freeze and write to find out.

At present, National Museum would like fresh specimens of introduced finches. You are not asked to rush out in destructive frenzy but merely to keep freshly dead finches found by chance.

Wanted

1. Whereabouts of copies of H. R. McKenzie *In search of birds in N.Z.* Only one copy traced (thanks to JOHN GULDE, Opotiki) and sold to a Wellington junior member. Also W. J. Phillipps *The book of the Huia* (Whitcombe & Tombs 1963) — several members want this. Please observe local small shops, and homes of non-members who may not really want these and other books out of print. Original cost prices can be offered.

2. Wilkinson *Kapiti bird sanctuary* and G. H. Moon *Refocus on NZ birds* for Mrs Jean Skinner, Box 60083, Titi-rangi, Auckland 7.

3. H. J. Frith *Australian waterfowl 1967* and Downes & Watson *Australian waterfowl* for R. M. Weston, 250 River Rd, Kawerau.

4. Richdale *Sexual behaviour in penguins* (not xerox edition) and Oliver *NZ Birds* (2nd ed., not reprint) for Lieutenant Commander D. P. Fairfax, HMNZS Philomel, Devonport, Auckland 9.

5. Harper & Kinsky *NZ albatrosses and petrels 1974* is being revised. Suggestions, criticism and requests welcome. Send to P. C. Harper, 43 Rimu Rd, Raumati Beach.

6. Wairau Bar/Vernon Lagoons area, near Blenheim. Notes, however casual, members have, please send to Richard N. Holdaway, 32 McLauchlan St, Blenheim. He plans to prepare a summary of observations and distribution, as a base line to measure proposed changes with industrial development.

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Muriwai Lagoon, near Gisborne, is always worth a visit. A bird list for 16 Feb. from ARCHIE BLACKBURN includes: Shags: Black 3, Little Black 5, Little 3; WF Heron 51, Mallard 60. SIPO 2, Variable Oystercatcher 3, Golden Plover 37, Banded Dotterel 35, Wrybill 78, Godwit 154, Stilt 77, Black-billed Gull 12. A tern, probably White-winged Black, was seen briefly, but 3 Whimbrel and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper seen a few days before were not seen.

Publications

* = in OSNZ Library.

**The status of coastal waders in the South-western Cape, South Africa, summer 1975/76*, compiled by R. W. Summers, J. S. Pringle & J. Cooper. Western Cape Study Group, May 1976. 162 pp. report on detailed survey of 1100km of coastal areas extending from Cape Town. Donated to OSNZ Library by Dr L. G. Underhill, University of Cape Town. (M. Taylor)

Status, mortality and movements of grey teal (Anas gibberifrons) in N.Z., by J. A. Mills, Wildlife Service. NZ Journal of Zoology, 1976, vol. 3: 261-267. NZ population probably stable at less than 20,000. Preferred habitat shallow freshwater lakes with extensive marginal cover. Greatest concentrations South Auckland, Waikato, Hawkes Bay, Otago; virtually absent Taranaki, East Cape, NW & W of South Island. Disperse widely, probably prompted by food shortage. Flock composition changes continually; pair-bonds apparently retained. Almost complete pop. turnover every 4 years. (P. D. Gaze)

**Notes on the behaviour of the N.Z. Shore Plover*, by R. E. Phillips. Emu 77: 23-27, 1977. Observations from a 1972 visit to South-east Island. Besides notes on territorial and aggressive behaviour, special emphasis on vocalisations by analysis of audio-spectrograms. (P. D. Gaze)

Organochlorine residues in N.Z. birds and mammals, by J. W. Lock & S. R. B. Solly. NZ Journal of Science, vol. 19: 43-55, 1976. 61 bird and 16 mammal species analysed for organochlorine pesticide residues. In birds, DDE the predominant residue — depending on habitat-feeding preference, with highest concentrations in terrestrial carnivores/scavengers such as Harrier. Polychlorinated biphenyls found in only 16 carnivores. High levels in migratory species, e.g. Gannet, Giant Petrel, possibly gained from outside NZ. (P. D. Gaze, R. M. Weston)

South Pacific birds, by John E. duPont. Delaware Mus. Nat. Hist. monograph series no. 3, 1976. Colour-illustrated guide to birds from Fiji eastward through French Polynesia. Marred, at least for Fiji, by some omissions and some glaring inaccuracies, but the first guide with reasonable illustrations for the area; useful if used with caution. (F. Clunie)

**Sound recording and the birdwatcher*, by P. J. Sellar. British Birds, June 1976: 202-214. Written for English ornithologist but covers range of new equipment available and methods of docu-

menting and processing recordings. (P. D. Gaze, S. M. Reed)

Distribution, status and conservation of the pukeko in N.Z., by K. E. Westerskov; and *Urgent need for more research on rare birds*, by Peter F. Jenkins. Forest & Bird No. 203, Feb. 1977: 3-6; 25-31.

Breeding biology of the fairy prion (Pachyptila turtur) at the Poor Knights Islands, N.Z., by Peter C. Harper. NZ Journal of Zoology, 1976: vol. 3: 351-371. Interesting comment on arrival times with individuals, preferred nest sites, laying date and egg-size clines, predation and mortality. Incubation, hatching, food and feeding, departure of fledglings, territory, role of unemployed birds all documented. Important discussion on traditional weighing technique.

The care of sick, injured and orphaned native birds and animals, by Jack Wheeler. Geelong Field Naturalists' Club, Victoria. Useful free booklet for emergencies: treatment for shock, orphaned young, oiled seabirds, injuries. Care and feeding. Much applicable to NZ cases. (A small supply sent for; will advise of postage-only cost when available.)

**Notes sur l'avifaune de Nouvelle-Calédonie*, by F. Vuilleumier & M. Gochfield. Alauda 1976, vol. 44 (3): 237-273. Includes brief English summary and 4 page bibliography. (A. Goodwin)

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The 2 Jan. census of the Southland lagoons yields some impressive figures, as it should from such a splendid extent of habitat. 17 members took part in this difficult exercise, followed by a riotous evening to end the day.

Some selected totals: Godwit 4785, Knot 113, Turnstone 113 (fewer than usual), Whimbrel 1, SIPO 2036, Black Oystercatcher 21, Stilt 657, Golden Plover 271 (many more than usual), Spurwing 441, Banded Dotterel 307, Curlew & Sharp-tailed Sandpiper 13 each, Pectoral 2, Stint 20, Greenshank & Tattler 1, Sanderling 4.

As usual the Oreti Estuary gave the greatest numbers, Waituna Lagoon the greatest variety. Notably absent were the usual Curlews at Waituna and NZ Dotterel at Awarua Bay. Northerners complacently staring at their one pair of local Spurwings might contemplate the day when they will see the local equivalent of the 110 at the tiny Waimatuku Stream mouth or the 117 at the modest Riverton Estuary.

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Ross McKenzie has deposited with the OSNZ Library his unique *Records of Miranda trips 1941-1956*. For reference only.