



OSNZ news

No. 7

June 1978

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

Deadline for the September Issue will be 30 August.

My warm thanks to Regional Representatives and to the many members who have supported the first seven issues of OSNZ News. It has been a pleasure to renew acquaintance with some and meet other members by correspondence; an editor can work only with what he receives and the response from most districts has been high. Please support PAUL SAGAR with the instant information that is the life-blood of OSNZ News; keep him informed of all that is going on well in advance of publication deadlines, for neither he nor I can produce a newsletter out of our heads. From now on, the text for the News will be produced in Christchurch but as usual printed in Wellington and mailed with Notornis from Gisborne — complex, perhaps, but at present the most economical method. We owe thanks to CHRIS ROBERTSON for his handling of printing logistics and of the emergencies that must occur with a hastily produced publication [Has anyone guessed why No.6 had such a small type size?].

NOTE: All copy for next issue to be sent to PAUL SAGAR, 2/362 Hereford St, CHRISTCHURCH.

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Cattle Egrets

NOTE NOTE NOTE: The official count weekend for 1978 will be 26-27 August.

It is hoped that by now members will be aware of the numbers which have returned to last year's localities, and be preparing for a co-ordinated count.

It may be most important for this count to be accurate, for it may show whether the birds of recent years have been migrants from Australia or cunning local breeders.

No evidence of breeding in New Zealand was found last season, despite a thorough search of many likely places. Although one bird over-summered near Pokeno, South Auckland, two in South Taranaki and a group near Lake Ellesmere, they apparently did not breed. There was a spate of reports of early sightings of a few birds in March/early April but since then the OSNZ News spy network has been curiously silent. This suggests either that OSNZ's active members have become avid Dabchick-hunters (very promising for that inquiry) or that last year's birds have not returned more numerous than ever.

If the number at your localities are lower than usual, do not give up. A clear picture of the 1978 population will be needed, for there is only 1977 which has been properly documented and smaller or larger totals for 1978 could be correlated with climatic events in Australia, to show whether or not the remarkable increase of recent years has been a mass migration across the Tasman.

As before, send all records promptly after 26-27 August, to B.D. Heather, so that results and conclusions can appear in the September OSNZ News.

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A.G.M.

election of officers

Secretary: Mr H.A. Best. Editor: Mr B.D. Heather. Councillors: Mr R.R. Sutton, Mrs B. Brown (both unopposed).

appointments

Editor, OSNZ News: Mr P.M. Sagar.
Regional Representatives: Wanganui — Mr Lawrence Edlin; West Coast — Mr S. Launder; Otago — Mrs J.B. Hamel.
The motion to amend the constitution was withdrawn before the meeting.

Nest records

Congratulations to the 52 members who sent in a total of 679 cards, a great improvement on the 334 cards for 1977. There are now 12,363 cards in the Scheme, covering 147 species. The Cape Pigeon appears this year for the first time. The best effort for the year was from CHRIS LUSK of Carterton, with 107 cards of 29 species. Many of his cards are full of details, showing what an individual can do. Other notable card numbers were received from PAUL SAGAR, TONY WHITAKER, RAY PIERCE and MARY BOMFORD.

Don't forget that there are special Colonial Cards for species that nest in groups. Only 34 such cards were received — surely more than 34 colonies of gannets, shags, gulls and terns were seen last year.

September OSNZ News will be rather late to remind you to get cards from your RR. Get them now and watch for the start, not just the peak of your local breeding.

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Classified Summarised Notes

Close your books at end of June and send all notes in early, as CSN must be ready for Notornis by September and they are a mammoth task to prepare.

All notes now go to Mr R.B. SIBSON, 26 ENTRICAN AVENUE, REMUERA, AUCKLAND.

Reports of rare species or those difficult to identify may not be accepted unless convincing evidence is included, such as significant details of plumage or behaviour.

More notes are needed on unusual behaviour; on stages of plumage in species where there is visible change between summer and winter (e.g. grebes, Banded Dotterel); on post-breeding flocking, e.g. of finches, Spurwinged Plover; extensions of breeding range; on plumage phases of species with variable plumage, e.g. Little Shag, Variable Oystercatcher; on local movements of non-migrants, e.g. Kingfisher, swallow, forest passerines; on changes in distribution or abundance of introduced birds.

SEND YOUR NOTES IN NOW.

HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR DISTRIBUTION ATLAS?

Albinism in Yellowhammers

In response to David Perry's note in No.6, HAMISH LYALL of Rotorua records that between 1952 and 1959 when he lived inland from Taihape, he saw cock Yellowhammers in which it seemed that the yellow of the head had failed to develop and was replaced by cream. In some birds the head was cream, almost pure white, while in others the cream was faintly tinged with yellow. There were never more than half a dozen such birds, confined to the one locality; seen for several years. In winter, some used to hop round the feed boxes while horses were being fed. Apart from the colouring of the head, there was apparently nothing else unusual about them.

Hamish adds rather interesting notes that in Siberia there is frequent and widespread hybridising of Yellowhammer and the Pine Bunting (*Emberiza leucocephala*). The Pine Bunting, apart from its distinctive dark chestnut throat and facial markings, looks like a Yellowhammer in which the yellow has been replaced by white. It even has the Yellowhammer's chestnut rump; and the females of both species are said to be virtually indistinguishable in the field. Some authorities therefore regard both species as conspecific, the more sedentary Yellowhammer being the typical western form, the migratory Pine Bunting being the typical eastern form. It is possible therefore that a tendency to albinism, if not common in Yellowhammers in NZ, may however be quite normal among Yellowhammers in other parts of the world.

To Hamish, David Perry's bird near Waiuku could have by description been a male Pine Bunting in either immature or winter plumage, but he cannot explain how such a bird could turn up in NZ — though the Little Bunting (*E. pusilla*) is known to have turned up in Indonesia.

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HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR DISTRIBUTION ATLAS?

Black-billed Gulls

Is the South Island version of the Black-billed Gull quietly taking over the North Island? For many years, the Black-bill has bred in several places, notably at Rotorua where endless persecution may have diminished the colony to a shadow, at Gisborne and Porangahau. In recent years colonies have established fairly regularly at Firth of Thames (Miranda), Wairoa, Napier Hastings and Ohiwa, Bay of Plenty. All these colonies, however, have been coastal, in sites more typical of the Red-billed Gull, generally at estuary mouths, at Gisborne even on an old groyne. In 1971, for example, about 300 birds wintered in Wairoa and stayed to breed at the river-mouth bar (the observer was in the lounge bar); there being about 80 occupied nests. In 1972, of about 300 wintering birds, about 150 stayed to breed, there being 57

occupied nests in early November. In 1973, the Wairoa flock built up from 50 in May to 150 in June/July and back to 50 in December; 1520 were counted on nearby Whakaki Lagoon in March/April. None were found breeding. In 1974, about 200 wintered, and up to 800 at Whakaki, but none were found breeding. In 1975 there were 300 from April onwards, 350 in March rising to c. 1000 in winter on Whakaki. And so on. The local feeling is that breeding is regular but site unknown. (GEOFF FOREMAN). At Ohiwa Harbour, there were 14 pairs on eggs in 1975/76, the first recorded, since when they have shifted to the Whakatane River mouth (ROY WESTON). Nesting was recorded on Matakana Island in Tauranga Harbour in 1976.

The Hawke's Bay colony at the mouth of the Ngaruroro and Tutaekuri Rivers is on record from at least 1954. In 1974 some 250 nests were counted, and up to 800 birds overwinter in the area. In 1975 and 1976 the colony was washed out but in 1975 about 100 nests were seen at Aropaoanui, on the Tutira coast. In 1977, some 170 nests were counted. (KATH TODD). In December, Max Falconer found two groups totalling over 130 birds, with over 60 chicks, on the inner side of the spit, and 300 birds high on the spit, with nests containing chicks on the perimeter, ranging to well-fledged chicks in the centre.

Now small groups are nesting in southern Hawke's Bay and northern Wairarapa, for the first time in South Island-type sites. For several years, a small group has bred in the Pahiatua district, once at the Pahiatua sewage ponds, otherwise on the Mangatainoka River (REG & SHANE COTTER, MAX FALCONER). There were 14 nests, only one still occupied, and 8 large chicks on 8 January. Near Dannevirke on the upper Manawatu River were 41 birds, 20 nests and 33 eggs on 7 December 1977 (JANET DRAKE). This colony was mysteriously destroyed but another, larger group was found closer to Woodville, with 80 nests, about 27 fresh chicks and over 100 eggs. By late January, Mrs Drake estimated that over 60 chicks had been raised successfully. (See *Forest & Bird* May 1978: 11-12).

With a recent winter report of 1000 birds near Bulls indicating more than the usual winter influx to the west coast from Wellington to Turakina and to southern Wairarapa, perhaps breeding may have begun also on the lower Manawatu or the Rangitikei Rivers. Do the Dannevirke/Pahiatua birds with their riverbed breeding indicate South Island birds, or an offshoot of the traditionally coastal breeders of the eastern North Island?

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The first Black-fronted Dotterel of the Bay of Plenty winter was seen by PADDY LATHAM at the Kaituna Cut on 15 May, only 2 days later than the first of 1977. However, it has not been seen since.

From Auckland, Michael Taylor writes that WORD BOTCHERS are represented by an associate JACK DAW who reports:

"Sir, Spring in the north has brought the usual FLOCKS of GODWITS inter-mixed with TANGLES of KNOTS. Prominent among these was a LONG-BILLED MUD-STICKER and, conspicuous by their erratic flight, a WHITERALL and several STONED TERNS. Local shorebirds LONELY DOTTEREL, GRIEF HERON and CRESTFALLEN CORMORANT do not appear to be having a particularly good season. In the Waitakeres a ground bird seen taking household scraps was certainly not a WEEKEY, but may have been a PUDWEKA.

A spot of controversy between RRs Beth and Sylvia centres on whether a small BROWNBIRD is in fact a REED'S BUNTING. Writing from Tamaki, we note a decline in the numbers of BLACK-LEGGED STINTS NITPICKERS and LONE-VOICED BABLERS, all of which may soon be endangered species in New Zealand."

HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR DISTRIBUTION ATLAS?

Mrs JEAN SKINNER would be interested to know how often the Harrier is recorded nesting high in trees. During a Christmas holiday on a farm 35km inland from Ruarua, Hawke's Bay, she and her husband found in a gully of remnant bush two large nests, one 20m, the other 15m up a tall Tawa. Droppings and pellets were on the ground below. After some hours of waiting, a Harrier's head was raised into sight on the higher, newer-looking nest. Although the birds were seen frequently in the area, their approach to and presence of the nest were most elusive.

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Kaipara Harbour survey, Easter

We have as yet no information on what went on but we do have the interim results from RICHARD VEITCH. Taking the larger of the totals made on the two days: SIPO 14934, Golden Plover 70, Grey Plover 1, NZ Dotterel 100, Banded Dotterel 505, Large Sand Dotterel 1, Wrybill 376, Curlew 1, Asiatic Whimbrel 20, Asiatic Black-tailed Godwit 1, Bar-tailed Godwit 5603, Knot 10,782, Turnstone 380, Pied Stilt 6145, Black Stilt 2, Stint 4, White-faced Heron 829, White Heron 8, Reef Heron 5, Black Swan 3450, Arctic Skua 2, Black-fronted Tern 2, Caspian Tern 311, Fairy Tern 2, Little Tern 44. Members present 59, not many to tackle the enormous length of shore; results are a tribute to their zeal. Of particular note are the large number of Knots and of Whimbrel.

WRYBILLS

This progress report comes from ROD HAY.

Research into wrybill movements and distribution continues, with many more sightings of banded birds. Between August 1977 and January 1978 a further 146 birds were colour-banded on the Rakaia and other riverbeds. Fifty-four of these have been seen in the North Island so far and 30 others are known to have died as chicks before migration, leaving about 60 to be accounted for. Searches of wintering areas are not complete and more sightings are expected.

Birds marked on the Rakaia over three seasons have appeared in the following numbers at various localities:

	Adult	Juvenile
Lake Onoke	—	1
Tauranga	—	3
Miranda	42	31
South Manukau	4	9
North Manukau	4	12
South Kaipara	1	2
North Kaipara	4	4
Whangarei	1	2
Parengarenga	—	2
TOTAL	56	66

Note that the juveniles are more evenly spread throughout the area. Individual ones may move from harbour to harbour, while most adults banded spend each winter at Miranda.

From a number of wrybills banded at Miranda, the following sight recoveries have also been made:

1. Female banded 14/7/76, seen at Miranda until 5/5/77, Karaka in August 1977, Upper Rangitata River 14/11/77, Miranda April 1978.
2. Female banded 21/2/77, breeding on the shore of Lake TeKapō November-December 1977, Miranda February-March 1978.
3. Male banded 21/2/77, paired on Upper Ashburton River 20/10/77, Upper Rakaia River 25/11/77, Miranda February-April 1978.
4. Female banded 16/6/77, breeding on Godley River November 1977.
5. Female banded 17/6/77, breeding on Tasman River November 1977, Miranda February-April 1978.
6. Female banded 18/7/77, breeding Ahuriri River mouth November 1977.

There is inevitably a low recovery rate in the south of birds banded in the north as searching and breeding areas would take longer than is warranted. The sightings do suggest a fairly random dispersion of birds from Miranda, the wintering centre for about half the total population.

I would like to thank all those members of OSNZ who are providing assistance with band sightings. Their support is invaluable.

Early one morning in September, Alan Jones found that his Whitianga, Coromandel garden was occupied by a noisy, aggressive pair of Pied Stilts. One was "kneeling" with one wing down and an extra pair of small grey legs protruded. Then a small chick walked out, flapped its minute wings, and was allowed to walk about the garden feeding for about 5 minutes. The adult then "knelt" again, the chick walked in from the front, and the parent again dropped one wing to the ground. After a short period, the parent flew away, leaving the chick alone. This routine, which took 15 minutes to complete, recurred all day with little variation. The apparent male spent the time flying around with a lot of noise.

At dawn there was a great commotion. Alan found that the chick had gone — no doubt the neighbour's cat. A sad result, but a relief that the noise of the male had ceased.

Swan Lagoon near Lake Ohau, inland Canterbury, hit the news in December with a Hoary-headed Grebe in breeding plumage seen by KEITH OWEN during a wildlife inventory of the area. Also present were 31 Black Swan, 11 Grey Teal, 7 shoveler, 2 Grey Duck, 59 Mallard, 2 Scaup, 1 Paradise, 3 Canada Goose, 11 Black Stilt, 84 Pied Stilt, 11 Banded Dotterel, 2 Spur-winged Plover, 24 Black-billed Gull. The grebe was still present in early March (Noel Hellyer, P. Anderson).

A seminar held at Te Anau on 5-6 May under National Parks auspices involved all aspects of the Takahe from rediscovery to the latest research, the vegetation of the Takahe area, the history and latest research of the introduced mammals in the Takahe area and recommendations for future policy and activity. The published proceedings of this seminar are awaited with much interest.

Another naturalists' tour

Colin Searle is organising another of his tours. This time he will be spending about 3 days in Perth visiting wildflower regions, then to Singapore for a similar period. The tour will continue along the east and west coasts of Malaya, with a stop at the Taman Negara National Park in the Central Highlands. Offshore islands in the South China Sea will also be visited if feasible. The cost will be about \$1100, and the dates — departure 8 September 1978, returning 30 September.

Further details can be obtained from the organiser at P.O. Box 2577, Auckland, Ci. Telephone Titirangi 5889.

Mapping of squares

Members who have bought the *Provisional Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand* should be pleased at the quality of the results of their labours 1969-76. We now have two years to complete the survey of the country so that the complete Atlas can be published after 1980. It will be obvious which squares in each region have been inadequately visited; less obvious are those which have been visited once or twice.

Start with your home squares; don't assume someone else will be doing them. This time round, don't just visit a corner of a square but, as some members are doing, set out to search a square thoroughly for all the habitat-types it contains. Make a point of selecting one square and working it fully, until you are satisfied no further species can be discovered in it. Early morning and evening are the best times to record species easily.

Rural members have an advantage here in being able to reach squares that urban members can only see in special brief visits. Obtain cards and return them to your Regional Representative, so that local effort can be planned to fill gaps.

Wherever Sir Charles Fleming and R.B. Sibson go, birds appear in unusual numbers. On 22 May, the day after the AGM, they found 56 Dabchicks, a record for the Waikanae sewage oxidation ponds, and 70 Black-fronted Terns, the most at Waikanae estuary, apparently, since 320 in May 1958. Take these two to the Chathams and there would be a record number of Black Robins.

Information wanted — Piopio

Any information that could relate to a study of the distribution of the Piopio (NZ Thrush) is wanted by ANTHONY HUGHES, C/- Dr P.F. Jenkins, Zoology Dept., University of Auckland, Private Bag, Auckland 1. Details of any sightings made, especially in last 20 years, that have not been recorded in literature, preferably with exact locality and habitat. He is particularly interested in the Raukumara and Kaimanawa Ranges, but will not refuse anything from the Ureweras, the Wanganui and Ruatiki Rivers and the Hauhungaroa Range. He would also welcome any South Island information, including details of the Lake Waiuana, Fiordland sighting of August 1962, mentioned in the Checklist.

Can anyone throw light on the early March 1957 record by Mr Frank Hudson on west side of Kaimanawas, in from Desert Road? This record of an alarm call in thick scrub near a river may not have been published.

Ducks Unlimited [NZ] Inc.

Members wishing to be in touch with this organisation are advised that the address is P.O. Box 74, Hamilton.

A recent newsletter explains that they, together with Wildlife Service, Waimarino Acclimatisation Society and New York Zoological Society, have sponsored a three-month study near Raetihi of the Blue Duck by Miss Jan Eldridge, a graduate of University of Minnesota who has recently spent three months in Chile studying the Torrent Duck of South America. We hope to see the results of her comparative work in due course.

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The Hoary-headed Grebes of Southland have been doing it again — on a visit to their breeding place early in February, Mervyn and Helen Jukes saw 3 adults, one with a small chick on its back, and keeping well away two large juveniles, obviously of an earlier hatching.

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The summer census of Kawhia and Aotea Harbours in Waikato on 25 February revealed the usual numbers of Godwit, SIPO, Pied Stilt, etc., but more than usual of Knot. A mighty 16 on Kawhia and 10 on Aotea (first record there). Also 7 Asiatic Whimbrel, 4 Curlew and a Black Stilt on Kawhia. A pair of NZ Dotterel with a downy chick on the Aotea shellbank was frantically defending the chick from the large number of SIPO at roost on their territory. The chick ran among the SIPO which were quite unmoved. This must have happened twice a day through the dotterels' breeding time.

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During a tramp on the Hauroko to Dusky track in Fiordland, JENNY MOORE of Te Anau recorded the expected variety of birds (15-22 March), with Yellowhead and Erown Creeper together in the Hauroko Burn, Lower Seaforth and Spey Valley but not in the Upper Seaforth. 2 Blue Duck and 2 Brown Teal were seen in the Upper Seaforth and a Rock Wren below Centre Pass. Several Grey Duck were seen — there is actually a region without Mallards??

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A Terek Sandpiper at Karaka in April was watched by Beth and John Brown using a variety of feeding methods — picking, probing, snapping in the air and side-swiping (the last presumably the specialty of the upcurved bill.

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NZ Association of scientists

The 6th Edition of the *Directory of New Zealand Science* is being compiled by the NZ Association. If you wish to be listed in it and have not already received an application form, please contact the Secretary, NZ Association of Scientists, P.O. Box 1874, Wellington.

Seen on 22 April at Karaka performing to a stunned audience of Meaningless Dotterels was a Mongolian Dotterel which stretched to full height, trilled a soft *tirrit* repeatedly, and then the lot flew up and around three times in a tight circle, before repeating the performance. Mind you, neither type of dotterel could have known which the other was, each being equally meaningless in its own way. (Beth Brown).

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The flock of Knot at Karaka, Manukau Harbour, reached an enormous 12,000 by late March, confirmed by several experts at counting stones on a shingle beach. By late April, the number was down to a reasonable 3000, give or take a few. In late March there were also about 5000 SIPO, 1800 Godwit, 140 Wrybill, 235 Banded Dotterel, 37 Golden Plover, 585 Turnstone, 4 Whimbrel, 12 Stint, 2 Large Sand Dotterels. Among the stints have been two pale birds causing much interest, thought perhaps to be Semipalmated Sandpipers.

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A Dabchick nest found by PETER WILKINSON on a pond at Bombay, South Auckland, was flooded on 8 April and he thought all was lost. However, there were two chicks on 2 May. This seems to be an unusually late brood. Any comments?

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Are wekas known to carry their chicks? On the Chatham Is, AUDREY and ALAS-TAIR GORDON were challenged by two birds with a chick. One then picked up the chick, fumbling at first, then carried it, as a cat would its kitten, to shelter under a rock ledge. It then joined its mate in continuing to challenge.

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A summary of the usual March wader survey of Whangarei Harbour, compiled by MIKE KEARNS, shows a marked drop in most species, since there was a higher tide than usual. Godwit total was down (1237), Knot absent (1172 last time), and Wrybill (120) up on last year. Among the also-rans were 2 Hudsonian Godwit and 4 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

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Among 4 Yellow-eyed Penguins found dead on Wellington coasts in April/May was a bird on Paekakariki Beach on 14 May which had been banded as a chick at Penguin Beach, Owaka, Southland on 17 January 1978.

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An immature Greenshank which appeared at Manawatu estuary early in May was still present in June; also a Little Egret and a stray Black-fronted Dotterel (Jim & Maureen Moore).

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Dabchicks

Little has been reported from regions on the progress of this 1978 survey. It is known that North Island regions are following as best they can the numbers that occur on well-known lakes and ponds. Please ensure that progress reports are sent to Barrie Heather for the North Island, and to Paul Sagar for the South Island (including Crested Grebe). It is known that most regions have been very busy recording changes of numbers at known localities but we have few figures. The February dune-lake survey near Muriwai, north of Auckland, showed 49 birds, a slight drop from the 57 of 1977. This has little real meaning as numbers may change markedly on a lake from day to day, as is shown by figures in the southern North Island.

HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR DISTRIBUTION ATLAS?

Numbers have fluctuated widely there this season but on 11 June a 'census' was organised of the known localities of Manawatu, Wellington and Wairarapa. Results: Wairarapa — Masterton 6 (22 on 2 April), Waingawa 2, Carterton 3 (4 the previous day), Martinborough 0 (1 earlier), Featherston 2 (3 earlier), Boggy Pond 2. Total 15 (Bob Stidolph, Dave Sim, Colin Scadden). Manawatu — Marton ponds 35 (Roger Wasley, Lloyd Jones), dune lakes from Waiterere near Levin north through Foxton to near Bulls, total 63 (Lindsay Davies, Hugh Robertson, Mike Dennison, Roger Wasley, John Cockrem, Chris Lusk, Bob & Sybil Creswell, Lloyd Jones). Ox-bow lagoons beside Manawatu River, Opiki to Shannon — 10 (Barrie & Rosemary Heather). West Wellington — Lake Horowhenua 91, Papaitonga 4 (22 in March), Wairongamai 24 (11 earlier), Waikanae 47, Total 166. (Eric Jones, Max Falconer, Reg, Anne & Shane Cotter, Alan & Iris Gollop, Don Goddard, Gavin Woodward.) Apologies for any names omitted.

Grant total for all 3 regions: 289 Dabchicks.

As with all studies, the investigation produces more new problems than it solves. The total includes far more birds than can possibly breed in these regions. Where do they come from? Why, if there is a mini-migration, do they not reach Marlborough and Nelson? Birds were still spread reasonably well on the smaller dune and ox-bow lagoons, so that the massive totals at places such as Horowhenua and Waikanae cannot be explained merely as a movement from breeding places. The wide and confusing variety of plumages at this stage do not show that all are juveniles. There seems to be no answer without a colour-marking programme. Applications are invited from a scuba-diver-bander who doesn't mind swimming in sewage ponds.

The NZ Dabchick may be extinct in the South Island (why?) but certainly is flourishing in parts of the North.

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THE COURTEOUS GULL

The following letters to *The Times* in Britain have been summarised from a series supplied by ELLIOT DAWSON.

From Mr James Dawson

Sir, For some years I have noticed that a gull using a flag pole as a vantage point invariably makes way for another gull wishing to alight on the post and this irrespectively of the size of the two birds.

Can any reader explain the courtesy of the incumbent in making way for a newcomer, please?

From Mr J.D.S. Bloch

Sir, Almost all birds vacate a vantage point in favour of a newcomer either from fear of its shadow or because the pressure of wind from its beating wings causes loss of balance and subsequent take-off.

However, would-be observers are advised not to stand directly beneath their flag-pole or flight path because the apparent courtesy of the gulls would not extend to them.

From Mr Reginald Bosanquet

Sir, Gullibility?

From Mrs C. Hart

Sir, Perhaps the gulls are familiar with the Rules of the Air and Air Traffic Control Regulation 1976, which state, Rule 17 (5): An aircraft while landing or on final approach to land shall have the right of way over other aircraft in flight or on the ground or water.

From Air Marshal Sir Leslie Mavor

Sir, Could not the answer . . . be that the seeming courtesy of the gull on the flagpole arises from the knowledge that he is in no position to argue? If he stands his ground, he fights from a precarious foothold, whilst if he takes off to contest possession he will be at an immediate and serious disadvantage in height and speed. So the sensible course is to make for another flagpole, knowing that, if tenanted, it will be surrendered with vacant possession.

From Mr M.W. Pienkowski

Sir, It is perhaps a tribute to the advertising industry's ability to increase its own business that urban gulls now apparently see a need to employ agents to improve their corporate image while they themselves chase each other from perches.

From Mr James Lawley

Sir, . . . I'd like to say that, having watched gulls for years flying on and off the rugby posts on the school playing fields by our house, and having frequently seen them make unsuccessful attempts to dislodge incumbent birds, I must presume that either gulls in Birmingham are rather more uncouth than their London counterparts or that the etiquette required for flag pole does not apply to a rugby post.

From Mrs Caroline Oliver

Sir, From a window in Bloomsbury I can see a turret surmounted by a dome, surmounted by a smaller dome, surmounted by a stone ball. On the top of the ball is a tiny platform, possibly made of guano. On winter mornings the platform is occupied almost continuously by gulls, but never for long by the same one. The changeover rate can be as high as three a minute.

The incumbent gull almost always faces west, and the dispossessor flies in from the east. On a few occasions I have seen the dispossessed gull sail rapidly round and regain its position. Just once, I saw an approach from the side, which was dealt with successfully by the incumbent with a sally. The resultant melee looked momentarily very dangerous.

From Mrs Christopher Hull

Sir, I suspect that the lack of a rear gun turret is the cause of Mr Dawson's gull relinquishing its flagpole. I have noticed that the incoming gull with well poised beak invariably approaches from the rear.

One wonders whether New Zealand gulls show such behaviour and whether, like draining bathwater, incoming birds approach from the west in the Southern Hemisphere.

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HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR DISTRIBUTION ATLAS?

A note from DAVID MEDWAY of New Plymouth tells of a Black Fantail which is living in the bush on his property. First seen on 25 March, it was still present at the end of May. It is the first he has seen in the area, although there have been occasional reports in Taranaki over the years. Birds in the black phase are reported from time to time in the Wellington region, usually in autumn, but apparently do not survive long. One was reported by Bill Cash on Kapiti Island on 4 March.

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Nest-boxes for Welcome Swallows have been used with success at the Mangere Sewage Treatment ponds by MAURICE FIELD. Two were erected as a trial in September 1977. One quickly became a Black-back roost but by 11 November, there was a nest with 4 eggs and on 15 November there were 4 chicks, which were banded on 30 November. By late December, there were 4 eggs again. A more ambitious programme of boxes is planned (*Tara* March 1978).

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Return of Whisky Tern

Since the last of the two 1977 Whiskered Terns left Lake Horowhenua in early October, many Manawatu and Wellington eyes have watched the lake, so that records of dabchicks, ducks and swans are better than ever. One Whiskered Tern is back already — arrived on 28 May, when seen by Barrie Heather. Seen closely since by Eric Jones, Hugh Robertson, Alan Gollop, and others from Wellington and Manawatu, it presents a problem. Whereas the two of 1977 were in winter plumage and going into breeding plumage by early October, thus suggesting that they were of the Australian subspecies, the 1978 bird seems to be developing breeding plumage in June, suggesting an Asiatic or Indonesian subspecies. Why should Horowhenua receive two different forms as first records in two successive years? We await with interest further observations on whether the present bird goes into breeding plumage by July and whether others arrive in late July/August as in earlier years in the Australian sequence of plumage changes.

The present tern has the engaging habit, since shags and gulls often occupy its favourite posts, of resting with the small flock of Black-billed Gulls on the car-park, well within camera range.

The 11 Little Terns at Sulphur Point, Tauranga, gradually dribbled away in early May. Bruce Goffin's notes record 10 on 14 April, 7 (4 in breeding plumage) on 2 May, 4 on 15 May, none on 19 May.

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Record NZ flock of Fairy Terns?

For years the Fairy Terns of Northland have vanished for the winter, causing confusion in the early days of sorting out whether Little Terns were coming to NZ. Few are recorded in winter in the breeding areas. It is quite startling, therefore, that a group of 13 was found on 11 May at Tapora, in Kaipara Harbour by BRUCE GOFFIN of Tauranga and DICK HOOPER and his family of Warkworth. One even had a red band, an adult female banded at Mangawhai Spit on 3/12/77. They were spread out on a sand flat with 8 Little Terns, 3 of which were already in breeding plumage, and 4 more small terns were fishing in the distance. Identity of the group was later confirmed by Geoff Moon, not that there was much doubt, as Bruce is fully familiar with the deviant Fairy among the Littles at Tauranga. Only 2 Fairies were seen in the March census, but 44 Littles.

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Eric Jones noted a Song Thrush anting in his Levin garden on 28 March and a male Blackbird on 22 April. Ants were definitely involved, in the last case very small ants, with some winged ones among them.

WANTED

Colour transperancies of ALL species and sub-species of birds found in New Zealand. More than sixty New Zealand ornithologists are currently preparing a new definitive book on New Zealand Birds to be published by Readers Digest. As each species is to be illustrated in colour we wish to know of as many photographers as possible who may have photographs which could be used. This is your opportunity to participate in an exciting new work.

Please send your name and address for further details to C.J.R. Robertson, Managing Editor N.Z. Birds, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington North.

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Several years ago, Rod Hay watched several birds mobbing a Kingfisher in a Norfolk Pine in the grounds of Auckland University. The Kingfisher had a Grey Warbler in its bill, held by the tail. The warbler struggled free with the loss of a few tail feathers, and the birds dispersed. Have other members seen similar events with Kingfishers?

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During a one-day visit to Kapiti Island on 4 March by a Wellington team, Mike Dennison and Hugh Robertson were assigned the task of investigating the Sooty Shearwaters at the summit. They found about 100 burrows with fresh signs of use, scattered north and south of the summit; the one burrow 'tested' contained a young Sooty almost ready to leave.

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The struggles of shags to eat incredible prey are well known. A recent example was seen by Barbara Burch, Beth Brown and Anton Habraken in April on the Waikato River. A Black Shag was struggling with a very large catfish whose weight was such that it could not get it up to swallow it head-first as usual. The shag was mostly under water as a result, but other eyes were watching. After the many submergings and emergings, two other Black Shags joined in, one from the side and one from the rear. In the end none won. The catfish, very dead, sank and the three shags went to rest on a sandbank.

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HAVE YOU BOUGHT YOUR DISTRIBUTION ATLAS?

DAVID MEDWAY recently returned from an international conference in Vancouver on *James Cook and his times*, a meeting which brought together Cook scholars from all scientific fields and should stimulate much activity in all these fields. David gave a paper on "Some ornithological results of Cook's Third Voyage" and, on the way home, spoke on the Hawaiian ornithology of the Third Voyage at the Bishop Museum, Honolulu.

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A Welcome Swallow was seen by Alan Jones at Whitianga in April, performing aerobatics for about 5 minutes round a Monarch butterfly. It almost touched the butterfly a number of times but made no attempt to molest it. Thought to be another swallow?

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The paper in the current *Notornis* by P.M. Brunton confirms what many New Zealanders know, that the Black-backed Gull readily and with average skill (for gulls) drops shellfish to break them. A recent paper in *Emu* seems to suggest that this does not happen, but MARTYN WARNE of Shelly Bay, Wellington affirms that he has seen the gulls often carrying mussels, slime and weed attached, 8 to 10m high in strong winds, 3 to 5m in light winds to drop them on the hard sealed road.

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We await with interest a report on the Workshop Weekend arranged by Auckland Region at Muriwai on 26-28 May. Under convenors DOUG BOOTH and MICHAEL TAYLOR, about 50 members were to take part in talks, discussions, slides, films, instruction, study of museum skins and field work.

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All-red Redpolls

On 26 December, while walking to the historic Golden Progress gold mine site at Oturehua in the Maniototo area of Central Otago, the attention of HELEN and MERVYN JUKES was attracted to a small bright-red bird in flight near some old hawthorn trees. Through binoculars, they saw that its body plumage was completely red, only its wings and tail being brownish.

Deciding it could only be a Redpoll, they checked again a few days later, finding it in the same place.

On 4 January, while fishing in the Upper Manuhereki River near the gorge, Mervyn saw three more of these scarlet-bodied Redpolls.

Has anyone else made similar sightings or heard of an explanation?

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HONG KONG NEWS

In march, after 6 months in Hong Kong, Laurie and Alison Howell had seen few of the birds regarded as rare in New Zealand, apart from a glimpse of a Grey Plover and a good view of some Bar-tailed Godwits (well worth the journey!). They did see, however, a Little Ringed Plover foot-trembling on a low-lying flooded paddock. The right foot was held, trembling, about 25mm above the surface; followed by a peck, then a few paces forward. Always the right foot. Seen only on the one occasion, although they and Kentish Plovers were often watched on the Mai Po marshes. A nesting colony of Little Egrets was of interest, in trees overhanging a busy road just outside Mai Po village. The local reservoirs each has a pair of the grebe *Podiceps ruficollis* though where they bred was a mystery (perhaps like North Island grebes, they don't have to breed, they appear).

A letter since March reveals that the Howells have begun helping David Melville trap and band waders on Mai Po marshes. The approach is like the low-tide mud of Firth of Thames, with the consistency and smell of some sewage systems. In three nights they had trapped 23 Fantail Snipe (3 retraps), 4 Swinhoe's Snipe, 2 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Mongolian Dotterel, 2 Wood Sandpiper and a Richards Pipit. So, if you see a Richards Pipit or a snipe, watch out for bands. While setting out nets one evening, a Red-necked Phalarope alighted in front of Lauri, who almost fell in the sludge. There were later problems when, in their spattered, stinking state they were stopped by a Pakistani border patrol in search of illegal immigrants desparately crossing the border; and when they got home to find the water turned off.

Detailed descriptions have already been sent of Great Knot (so tame it would not fly, even after aggressive display by New Zealand Woman) and of Mongolian Dotterel. We hope to see photos eventually.

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On 15 May, PADDY LATHAM saw the highest total of Black-fronted Terns he has seen yet for the Bay of Plenty: at least 58. 44 roosting at the Tarawera mouth, 4 at the Rangitaiki mouth and at least 10 hawking over fields up the Tarawera. Where do these birds come from each year?

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DEATH OF LADY MOLLY FALLA

Members will be saddened to hear of the recent death of Lady Falla. Well known for her observation, love and care for sick and injured birds, she portrayed this admirably both as an artist and authoress. The Society extends its condolences to Sir Robert and family upon their great loss.