

# OSNZ news

No. 11

June, 1979

**NOTE: Deadline for the September issue will be 30 August.**

## Change of Address

Please note that as from 1 July all correspondence should be addressed to the editor at:— 38A Yardley Street, Christchurch 4.

## 1978-79 Chatham Island Taiko Expedition

The last party of the first expedition to the Tuku to locate the breeding grounds of the Chatham Island Taiko has returned to New Zealand. Although the expedition was unsuccessful in finding any occupied burrows much has been achieved and valuable experience gained to plan and carry out further searches. In retrospect the highlight was the capture, examination and release of three more Taiko. Having compared the measurements of these birds with those of the two captured on 1 January 1978 the existence of five individual birds has been confirmed.

During the six month duration of the expedition, members have developed our Base Camp into an all-weather establishment. This includes bulk storage for food, fuel and water, thus reducing the time-consuming task of servicing the camp to once a fortnight.

Expedition members have gained valuable field experience and considerable knowledge about the access and nature of the extensive bush regions in the south west area of the island. With the recent production of a Lands and Survey draft contour map to supplement our aerial photographs many problems of interpretation and plotting have been alleviated.

The finding of at least two old and disused breeding sites of petrels amongst the roots of large *Dracophyllums* has given us hope that either a small colony or a number of scattered burrows may be providing a sanctuary for the remaining population of the Magenta Petrel or Chatham Island Taiko.

The discovery of the burrows by a future expedition will benefit from the

groundwork established and the field experience gained by the present expedition.

Further field work is planned as soon as personnel, financial support and equipment can be assembled.

DAVID E. CROCKETT (Expedition Leader)

## Bird Distribution Mapping Scheme

With the scheme drawing to a close at the end of this year it may be interesting to reflect on the efforts of some of the more enthusiastic (fanatical) contributors.

In Northland SANDY EDGAR has fostered the scheme since its inception. All Northland lists go firstly to Sandy, who transfers the information to cards, keeping the original copy for his own records. Aided by Wildlife Service records and the efforts of local members, notably BILL CAMPBELL, the list of species recorded from each square now averages 40, with 72 species recorded from one square. Only two squares exceed this total, Manawatu Estuary and Punakaiki. During 1979 it is proposed to re-visit a number of squares to search for less conspicuous species, so no doubt more species will be added to many squares as Sandy painstakingly transcribes this information onto cards. When the time eventually arrives, this tireless gentleman has requested the initials B.D.M.S. on his tombstone. On the East Coast JIM HENLEY has become devoted to the scheme. He has visited every accessible square in this region and also keeps his own progress records. Jim's cards are characteristically typed and scrupulously accurate. In his retirement Jim frequently travels the country visiting relatives, his constant companion being a clipboard of maps, cards and details of poorly covered squares. JIM FOWLER began his work for the Mapping Scheme in the early 1970's and personally visited all the Wellington and Wairarapa squares, with the exception of one or two in the Tararuas. By the time he left New Zealand in 1974 a once perfectly good car had been run into the ground.

Edited by PAUL SAGAR, 2/362 Hereford Street, Christchurch, for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

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

Records from many of the inland Canterbury squares were first made by DICK JACKSON. The combination of enthusiasm for tramping and the Mapping Scheme made him an invaluable supporter. His frequent expeditions could be followed, on the cards he submitted, from one mountainous square to the next. PETER CHILD has made a similar contribution from Central Otago where his wanderings have taken him over many an isolated square that no other ornithologist would visit. Many exciting cards became available when I met RHYS BUCKINGHAM who had kept detailed bird notes of his journeys, including one six week trip from Big River, through the centre of Fiordland to Milford Sound. He has departed again for South Westland via N.W. Nelson National Park in search of more remote squares. His enthusiasm for the Mapping Scheme has been heightened by my promise of a bottle of home brew for each virgin square he enters.

I would be pleased to help direct other enthusiasts who are eager to make a final contribution to the Mapping Scheme.

PETER GAZE (Ecology Division, D.S.I.R., Private Bag, Nelson)

The over-summering Cattle Egrets were still at Piako on 15 March when FRANK THOMPSON, an Acclimatisation Society Officer, was at the river mouth in a boat. The birds were out on the mud on a falling tide and it seems possible that other searchers, put off by the fat rats and monumental stench of the local tip (simmering in the pitiless summer sun), may have turned back too soon and missed the birds. Several people failed to find them around this time. Determination (and perhaps a stiff breeze in the right direction) may reveal more in this muddy and mangrove-studded place. Boating would be safer than wading.

Cyclone Henry apparently brought two tropical seabird species along. A Sooty Tern was recovered from Wai-kawa Beach and a Frigate Bird was seen in the Eastern Bays area of Wellington Harbour.

## Taranaki Kokako Study

During Easter and the last weekend in April JOHN CLARK, DAVID NUNN, PAUL JAMISON and MYLES KING started what is hoped will be a long-term study of the Kokako in a North Taranaki State Forest. Crouching in root holes, perching up trees and lying on the forest floor they will try to describe the diet of this rare species.

The area occupied by the Kokako here is botanically very diverse. An unimproved pasture grades into virgin forest in which more than 90% of the emergents are rimu. Also there is a vigorous crop of young miro and totaras, which are colonising an area modified by fire.

During April there was an abundance of berries in the area. Kokako were seen eating miro berries on two occasions. This autumn berries festooned the ridge-top miro. Paul Jamison recorded Kokako eating the kernel of unripe rewarewa pods. These are also a favourite food of possums but it is easy to determine which species enjoyed each pod. Possums split the pod along its full length to extract the seeds. However, Kokako plucks the pod with its bill and returns to a stout branch in the tree tops. Here a foot holds the pod on the branch while the bill rips open the distal end of the pod to extract the seed.

On 4 April Kokako were recorded eating what seemed to be shoots from the crown of a young totara. A bird then removed what looked like a case-moth from the foliage of a nearby kamahi and extracted the insect using bill and claw. The case was dropped but unfortunately this could not be found.

The group extends a warm welcome to all OSNZ members passing their way, to join in and help with the project.  
JOHN M. CLARK

## A Kea's Nest

Over a number of years of working in the Canterbury high country I have found the nests of most of the bird species inhabiting the region. Until recently one notable exception has been that of the Kea. Apart from the notable paper by Jackson (*Notornis* 10 (7): 1963), which must contain most of the information recorded about Kea nesting, little has been reported on the birds' breeding habits. Luck must have been with me when I found my first Kea nest on 2 December 1978.

On a dull wet day I was walking with a party of botanists down a well-formed track alongside Cave Stream in the Craigieburn Forest Park (100 km west of Christchurch) when a Kea cried

and flew from the forest floor about 20 m below us. Here the altitude was 1200 m and the slope 25 degrees. This was not the first time I had disturbed a Kea in the forest and it was only the open nature of the forest floor that allowed my casual glance downhill to notice anything unusual. At the base of a large beech tree there was a flat bare bench of ground about 1 m square from which radiated vague tracks through the scattered cover of 20-30 cm high beech regeneration. Seedlings on and about the track appeared to be clipped short and many of the protruding tree roots were well-gouged and nibbled. The adult bird was still calling from the canopy as we worked our way down the slope to see a large opening between the roots of the beech tree at the base of the bare bench of ground. Three fully-feathered young birds could be seen crouched at the back of the cavern, just over 1 m inside. The cavern measured about 1.2 m deep by 60 cm wide. There was no sign of any down on the birds and only the pale colouration of the birds' bill (particularly the lower mandible) gave a clue to their juvenile status. Both the nest and area in front were quite bare although below the front lip of the area was a quantity of litter and down which appeared to have been recently pushed from above.

As with most of Jackson's nests this one was in mature beech forest not far below the tree line. The southeast aspect may be unusual as Jackson records Keas nesting mostly on northern-facing slopes with only 2 of his 36 nests having a southerly bearing.

As the nest site gave the appearance of having been used for more than one season it will certainly be visited in the future.

NICK LEDGARD

## Fifth Pan African Ornithological Congress

Preliminary Notice: The Fifth Pan African Ornithological Congress will be held in Lilongwe, Malawi, from 23-30 August 1980. Full details of costs and proceedings will be issued in the near future.

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The Ahuriri Estuary has proved its ornithological worth again. This past summer a Little Whimbrel was recorded together with about 400 Bar-tailed Godwit, 30+ Golden Plover, many Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Turnstones and 2 Pectoral Sandpipers. These sightings show that the estuary is a must for members visiting Napier.

## Australian Little Grebes

STEWART LAUDER reports that since the report in the last issue of *OSNZ news* the Australian Little Grebes at Bell Hill have successfully reared a chick. Two chicks were hatched but one disappeared late in February. The remaining chick was seen up to 25 April by FRED OVERMARS and by 2 May it was gone. Growth and development had been steady and when last seen the young grebe was considered nearly ready to fly. The timing of the departure of the adult grebes was similar to that of last year with one leaving when the chick was about five weeks old and the other the following week.

It had been assumed that the start of the duck shooting season caused the adults to leave. However, this now seems purely coincidental. This year the grebes seemed to take little notice of the shooting but kept their normal distance when people were about.

Australian Little Grebes have been reported breeding in Canterbury this summer. BRUCE and DIANE KEELEY saw two adults with three chicks on St. Annes Lagoon (just north of Cheviot) on 2 March. The adults were in full breeding plumage. The birds were seen subsequently on 5 March (one adult and three chicks) and in mid-April (two chicks).

## Wanted to Buy

Natural history books and journals, especially those of an ornithological nature. Odd books, small collections and large libraries purchased. Odd parts or volumes of *Emu* especially required. Harvey Dickison, 26 Rose St., Bentleigh 3204, Victoria, Australia.

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A popular picnic area at Belfast near Christchurch, known as the Groynes, harbours an interesting selection of waterbirds. The south branch of the Waimakariri River flows through the reserve and there is plenty of cover provided by raupo and other swamp vegetation. New Zealand Scaup are breeding successfully and at present there are about 14 birds. Some of these are quite tame and will compete with the Mallards for bread scraps thrown by visitors. This autumn a juvenile Australian Coot appeared and has remained. It is a lively bird and often comes out onto the bank to forage with the ducks. One afternoon recently, we watched the coot diving repeatedly, bringing up a beak full of weed each time. This was promptly snatched by nearby ducks, although not without a struggle from the coot.

KATHLEEN HARRISON and  
PHIL HOWELL

## Book Auction

The family of Sir Robert Falla wishes to advise members that Sir Robert's ornithological library is to be auctioned shortly. Catalogues are available at \$1.00 each and postal bids for items will be accepted. If you are interested, please write for a catalogue immediately to J. H. Bethuen & Co. Ltd., P.O. Box 63, Wellington.

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A howler from the proofs of the June issue of *Notornis* read as follows. See if you can find it (corrected, of course) in the current issue. "Noticed wren looking at Curlew Sandpiper, a very similar bird but with a straighter bill."

## Cattle Egret count

This year's count is set down for the weekend of 25-26 August; this includes any other heron and egret species we have counted before but the main interest centres on the CE.

Indications are that numbers are dramatically up on last year and, for this reason and by request of most RRs, it has been decided to do another count this year. After this year, it may be worth leaving it for a while.

There seems to have been a double influx, with early arrivals from mid-April in Taranaki, West Coast and Southland and a second, perhaps larger group arriving in early May. Many birds were reported at first in small parties in unusual places but during May/early June birds have continued to gather in some of the usual places in larger flocks than in previous years. We hope that by late August, the wanderers will have settled down so that an accurate count can easily be made. Please send results to RRs promptly so that totals can be quickly collated for the September issue. Remember that, if you can see a flock closely enough, some Australian birds have now been banded and it is worth checking.

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DICK VEITCH reports that numbers of Stitchbirds on Little Barrier Island have shown a marked increase and are now seen and heard every day from the bunkhouse. The Wildlife Service would like to attribute this to the reduction in cat numbers. Past evidence suggests that when cats were at their peak Stitchbirds were nearly extinct. Cat work is going well but it still may be three more years work to completely eliminate them. There are less than 20 cats left on the island but these are the toughest 20.

PETER HARPER advises that he has moved from the hot air of the capital city to take up an appointment as a lecturer in science with the Department of Extension Studies at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch. Professor W. C. Clark of the Zoology Department has provided Dr Harper with a research laboratory so that both departments may benefit from several joint research projects on birds and other beasts. Peter's new home address is: 86 Hamilton Avenue, Christchurch 4.

Peter also reports that he has received wide enthusiasm for another joint effort with F. C. Kinsky: this time birds for beach patrollers.

While in Auckland to lecture on birds at the Oceans '79 Conference, Peter met Tim Severin — the man who sailed a leather boat across the North Atlantic, from Ireland to Newfoundland. In addition to gossiping about seabirds Tim expressed an interest in an adventurous ornithologist to accompany him on his next voyage — following the sea route of the legendary Sinbad the Sailor; those interested should apply to Peter in the first instance.

## Auckland Workshop Weekend

Forty Auckland members and a few from neighbouring regions took part in a bird study workshop at Muriwai over the weekend 25-27 May. Main activities this year were practical sessions which covered catching, handling and measuring birds led by Sylvia Reed and Dick Veitch, the mapping scheme by Sandy Edgar, and behavioural observations by Peter Jenkins. For inspiration the group heard from Dick Sibson on the value of notebooks and personal records, and there were accounts of recent expeditions by Tim Lovegrove, Russell Thomas and Dick Veitch. Sylvia Reed and Michael Taylor acted as conveners and hope that success will be shown in subsequent results.

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## From the editor

More contributors are required for OSNZ news, so dust off those notebooks and write a short note about that recent trip to your favourite bird watching haunt, bird watching overseas, bird behaviour, interesting sightings or current study project. Remember that OSNZ news is your newsletter and that its contents depends upon your contributions.

## Summer School of Ornithology

Members are reminded of the School of Ornithology to be held at Ward in January 1980. The dates have now been set, January 14 to January 20. Application forms will be available in the September *Notornis*.

The course will be held on Jack Taylor's farm at Ward and will concentrate on basic study techniques and their field application. Members will be housed in farm buildings and some tents. Arrangements are being made for an evening meal to be provided by local caterers. The cost per day is expected to be about \$7 per head. Unfortunately children under 15 can not be accommodated. Should any family wish to holiday in the area, camping and motel accommodation is available at Ward itself (about 2 miles away).

Organiser: B. D. Bell,  
C/o Wildlife Service,  
Department of Internal Affairs,  
Private Bag,  
WELLINGTON.

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One of Australia's rarest birds, the Night Parrot, has been rediscovered in the far north of South Australia, so that no mainland Australian bird species has actually become extinct since European occupation. The 22 known specimens in museums were all collected in the 1880s, and the last confirmed sighting, and collection, occurred in 1912. But the naturalist author, Graham Pizzey, writing in The Sydney Morning Herald of 9 June, says "Over the years, right up to the recent present, stockmen, pastoralists, mailmen and others have reported disturbing green parrots from the spinifex, by day and by night, and seeing them fly low for a distance before dropping to cover. Some of these records were no doubt authentic. So vast is the Night Parrot's habitat that it was inconceivable that it would disappear forever." The Night Parrot lives in the arid interior, in the vast areas of porcupine grass (*Triodia*) and commonly called spinifex, where it constructs a daytime retreat inside a clump of *triodia*, thus conserving body moisture, and giving protection from avian predators. At dark it comes out to fly to the nearest water, perhaps some miles distant, which it may do several times during the night, and to feed on *triodia* seeds. The collapse of the species to near extinction has been due to the overstocking of the Centre by cattlemen, and Graham Pizzey concludes by saying "I hope the re-discovery will strengthen the arm of those, particularly in CSIRO, who are advocating and battling for a more conservative stocking policy in Australia's vast arid zone."

Tv One's Natural History Unit spent nearly a fortnight at Miranda in frustrating weather conditions in mid-March. Rain started the day after they arrived, thunderstorms raged daily and floods washed out many roads on the Coromandel Peninsula. Still, perseverance won and a film on Wrybills will be the end result. More is to be filmed on the South Island riverbeds in the breeding season. Three red-eyed South Aucklanders were relieved when the filming was over at last. After being up all night with the newly-formed Miranda Banders trying to mist-net waders, four long hours in the long-awaited sunshine on blindingly white shellbanks tested endurance somewhat. In spite of the rain all three film makers enjoyed the northern warmth and thought that they could stand a move north quite well.

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Karaka did it again on 18 March when Dick Veitch, Maurice Field and Beth Brown found a Greater Knot near assorted dotterels on a shellbank. It was still there on 1 April and seems to be the first recorded in the country for 6 or 7 years.

JOHN CHEYNE reports that a pair of Brown Teal bred last season at Mangatarata, which is just south of the Firth of Thames.

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When REG PULLEN was at Lake Waikareiti he followed up a report of 15 white herons in trees near a tarn and found it correct. He watched them from about 500 m but could not get bill and leg colour. This was on 1 March and the birds have since gone. It seems possible that they were Cattle Egrets on the move.

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On 24 March PAULINE JENKINS was in a bush reserve just off Highway 63, where it climbs Tophouse from the Wairau Valley. There were many Bellbirds around and she noticed an unusual harsh, croaklike sound. Later about a dozen Bellbirds responded to a squeak bottle and it became apparent that the birds were imitating Morepork. The end of the call was the harsh sound she had noticed previously. It was such a good imitation that Pauline walked around the trees to make sure that it was the Bellbirds making the call.

## Brown Teal

Once abundant over the whole of New Zealand the Brown Teal is now found only in localised areas of Northland, Fiordland, Stewart Island and Codfish Island. The total population is estimated to be 1,000 birds. However, although protected by law, this level

may not be maintained if habitat losses continue.

In 1975 'Operation Pateke' was launched by the Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited (N.Z.). The scheme aims to rear and liberate 1,000 teal over the next decade, from a nucleus of 15 pairs held at Mt. Bruce and others held by members of Ducks Unlimited. Over 60 birds have been reared in the four seasons to date. To further ensure the survival of this endangered endemic species two Brown Teal females will be sent to the Wildfowl Trust in Britain. The Wildfowl Trust was the first organisation to breed Brown Teal in captivity, having been sent two pairs in 1957. Over 90 birds were reared from these two pairs but inbreeding and infertility has left only three males surviving. Should the need arise, birds reared at the Wildfowl Trust will be returned to New Zealand.

The N.Z. Wildlife Service has overall responsibility for Operation Pateke and has approved the export of the birds. No doubt OSNZ members wish the scheme every success.

## Invitation to Artists

Can you do black and white drawings of birds? Can you recognise at least some of the birds living in your area? If so, then the Atlas of Australian Birds wants to hear from you. The Atlas is to be published by Melbourne University Press in 1982/83 and is expected to have wide international distribution. By inclusion, unknown artists particularly may gain recognition otherwise difficult to obtain.

The Atlas will cover the distribution of all birds in Australia and its surrounding seas. The period covered is from the first exploration of Australia until the end of 1981. A page will be devoted to each species and will include a short discussion, maps and a black and white drawing.

Thousands of volunteer birdwatchers are supplying the information. Artists, both professional and amateur, will be represented and receive a fee. Artists familiar with species inhabiting remote areas are encouraged to provide illustrations. Accuracy and realism are essential.

In October/November 1979 a decision will be made as to allocation of species so that artists will have ample time to complete their drawings.

By the end of July which groups of species you are interested in, with a photocopy of a sample drawing, needs to be known. But first, apply for further information (and do not submit a sample) to: The Atlas of Australian Birds, 119 Dryburgh Street, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051, Australia.

## Miranda Naturalists' Trust

The annual report for 1978 of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust contains some good news in the form of a substantial observation shelter. Built from materials salvaged from the old barn (which collapsed during a gale), it provides shelter and a birds'-eye view over the estuary. This summer thousands of shorebirds of many species settled close by. In the near future it is hoped to provide accommodation in one of the nearby derelict Public Works Department huts. The hut has been cleared of a mountain of muck and given its first facelift — new windows and shutters. Eventually it is hoped to have water, electricity and a fence but all these cost money so donations would be gratefully received (Hon. Treasurer, Mr Russell Thomas, 25 Ravenwood Drive, Forrest Hill, Auckland 10). In the more distant future the Trust continues to plan for a fully equipped observatory.

The report also includes an article about Caspian Terns in the Firth of Thames, an annotated checklist of Miranda cicadas and a list of selected bird species seen during 1978 (including a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross, 2 Masked Boobies, 5 heron species, Spur-winged Plovers, 150 Golden Plovers, Terek Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers and Little Terns.

The report concludes that those who visited the Firth for the first time seldom went home disappointed.

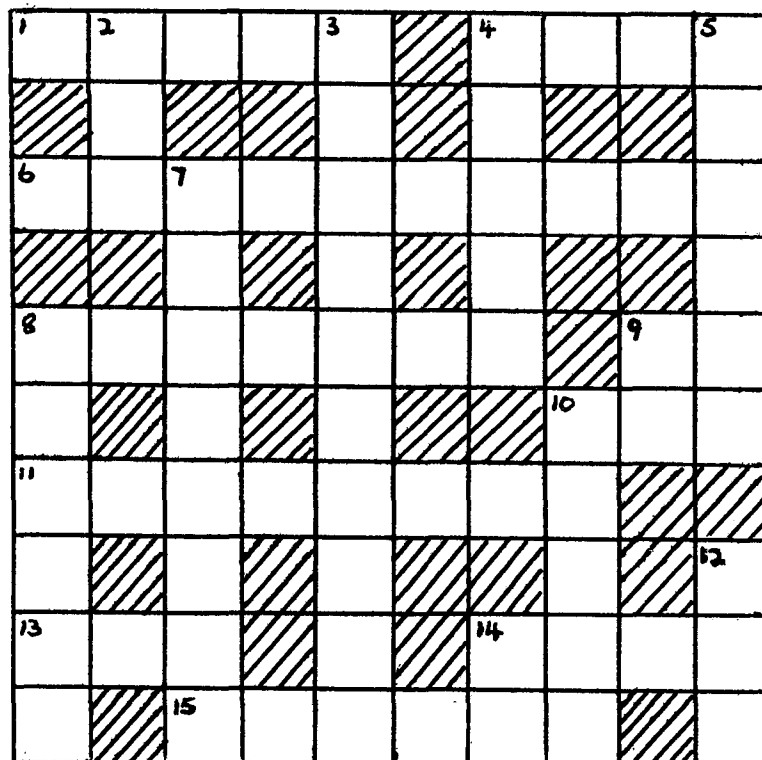
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Kathleen Harrison and Phil Howell would like to know if any members have observed collective fishing by Black Shags. They observed this one day when completing a survey of the birds of the Bromley Sewage Ponds. Their attention was drawn to a disturbance in the water over on the Heathcote-Avon Estuary and as they watched, several Black Shags surfaced periodically, nearly always with a silvery fish which was hastily gulped. The success rate was quite extraordinary, as the shags swam back and forth across the mouth of one of the outlet pipes discharging waste into the estuary. Eventually the birds left the water two or three at a time, to return to their roost on nearby *Macropus* trees. 36 birds were in the fishing party.

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RUSS LACEY saw 20 Curlew Sandpipers in breeding plumage at Miranda on 14 April. These must have been 'late leavers' on their way from the south as there have been very few records of this species at Miranda this summer.

GILLIAN GUEST has submitted this ornithological crossword; word botchers beware. Solution in next issue, if I can work it out.



**CLUES**

**Across:**

1. To stitch through your joint maybe?
4. Ornithological chessman.
6. Cattle to equestrians.
8. Granny is eager to see this colour.
9. Pukeko's tail going backwards, that's fine.
10. This thrush is half extinct!
11. Oh! levers muddled.
13. Wot a goose sez.
14. Sum of beach patrol customers.
15. Diminutive female sibling and relatives, in suspense.

**Down**

2. Take a look within. He's a cheeky fellow.
3. Orbs of metal.
4. This boy sings well but continues to steal.
5. Misspelt vehicle out for count twice.
7. Sparrows to some.
8. Aged Homeric character, confirmed breeding.
9. Grey-faced petrel.
10. A peeping Tom, we hear.
12. Welcome after a hot day's birding.
14. Cabbage-tree.

DEREK BETTESWORTH has reported some interesting observations on the feeding of Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls at Opononi, Hokianga Harbour. On still evenings from mid-February to mid-March gulls were watched as they caught flying crickets. Crickets fly slowly and directly so their capture by the gulls involved a straight pursuit, with short, rapid wing beat and a stalling movement prior to snapping up the prey. On other occasions Red-billed Gulls were seen to use the tops of rugby goal posts as convenient perches from which to take off in pursuit of large cicadas flying from nearby trees.

Any smoky fire at this time of year soon brings a wheeling flock of gulls,

presumably having learnt to expect flying insects escaping from the many scrub and bush burnoffs occurring in the district.

PHIL HOWELL and KATHLEEN HARRISON report that for the second season running they have noticed small flocks of Arctic and Pomarine Skuas attacking and being chased by White-fronted Tern fishing flocks off the beaches of Pegasus Bay throughout April and May. The latest sightings were made at least six weeks after the Arctic waders had left the local estuaries. Are these non-breeding birds wintering over or do Northern Hemisphere skuas leave later than the migrant waders?

**A.G.M.**

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Councillors: Dr B. D. Bell and Mrs Sylvia Reed (both unopposed). Mr F. C. Kinsky was appointed to Council for a one year term.

**APPOINTMENTS**

Regional Representatives: Taranaki — Mr R. Lambert; Wellington — Mr A. Gollop; Marlborough — Mrs Pauline Jenkins; Otago — Mr M. Foord.

**NEST RECORD SCHEME**

This year 42 members contributed 419 cards covering 68 species. There are now 12,783 cards in the scheme covering 147 species. The best effort of the year was by JON LUSK, brother of Chris Lusk, who has completed 301 cards in the past four years.

The value of the scheme in providing opportunity for individual activity is shown by the detailed observations made by Jon and Chris Lusk. Members unable to participate in group or regional activities could contribute their personal observations through the Nest Record Scheme. Other notable cards numbers were received from MAIDA BARLOW, COLIN O'DONNELL, RALP POWLESLAND and RAY PIERCE.

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**BEACH PATROL SCHEME**

Notable events during the year were the wreck of southern seabirds during August/September and wrecks of Sooty Shearwaters and Fairy Prions. 188 members made 633 patrols covering 3,765 km for a return of 12,433 birds.

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**CLASSIFIED SUMMARISED NOTES**

Winter is with us again and this is the time of year to go through those notes made during the warmer months and to sort them out for the CSN. All notes should go to Mr R. B. Sibson, 26 Entrican Avenue, Remuera, Auckland.

In addition to notes giving numbers and locations of species more notes are needed on unusual behaviour, stages of plumage, local movements (flocking of finches, Kingfisher, Welcome Swallow) and breeding behaviour (e.g. singing times and locations, territorial disputes).

This is a scheme where everyone can contribute so send your notes in now.

**Request for Information**

Seddon Bennington (43 Falkland Street, Maori Hill, Dunedin) is studying the common estuarine mudflat snail *Amphibola crenata* and would be pleased to know of observations of predation on these snails. Full acknowledgement will be made if any material is published.

## Publications

*A Bibliography of Offshore Islands of New Zealand* by R. M. C. Thompson. Miscellaneous Publications New Zealand Oceanographic Institute 80, 1977. Excludes the Kermadec Group, the Chatham and the Subantarctic Islands but covers most of the over 500 islands or island groups offshore from the New Zealand coastline. It is not comprehensive but does include a large proportion of the principal papers relating to the biology, geology, archaeology and oceanography of particular islands.

*The Complete Outfitting and Source Book for Birdwatching* by Michael Scofield. The Great Outdoors Trading Company, California, 1978. Orientated to the multitude of North American birdwatchers, especially the listers, this book is basically a catalogue of the equipment, books and guided tours available in North America. The limited explanation about equipment is useful. If you have the money then it would be worthwhile to drool over this book.

*Factors affecting the egg size of Red-billed Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae**, J. A. Mills, Ibis 121 (1): 53-67. 1979. The factors influencing the egg size of the Red-billed Gull were studied at Kaikoura between 1964 and 1972. Length, breadth and volume of eggs in all sized clutches decreased as the season progressed. The size of eggs from single egg clutches tended to be smaller than eggs from two-egg clutches laid at the same time. When the mean egg volume of two-egg clutches decreased there was an increase in the proportion of single-egg clutches laid.

The egg size showed no direct correlation with the abundance or availability of food. The largest eggs were produced early in the season when food was in short supply. It is suggested that the birds were able to produce the largest eggs because they are the most efficient foragers for food and those which nest later in the season produce smaller eggs, even at peak food abundance, because of their inefficiency or inexperience.

There was a tendency for larger eggs to be laid by the heavier older females and those mated with older males.

This is an important paper.

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On 10 April, during a diving trip in the vicinity of the Poor Knights Islands, BETTY and JOHN SEDDON saw 400+ Grey Ternlets on the Sugarloaf Rock. Most were resting on the steep north face of the rock stack and some were fishing in a group close to the rock; these were dipping and picking from the surface or just under.

## New Field Guide

Have you seen "A New Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand" by R. A. Falla, R. B. Sibson and E. G. Turbott? This edition has been revised, extended to include about 30 new species and re-illustrated to become a must for every bird-minded person in New Zealand. As with the previous editions the authors are to be thanked not only for their fine efforts but also for signing over the royalties from this book to the OSNZ.

The field guide is published by Collins and is available from most booksellers. Price \$13.95.

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Spur-winged Plovers appear to be on the increase in Hawkes Bay. On 25 April BRUCE KEELEY saw a flock of 26 feeding on wet pastureland beside the main highway at Lake Poukawa, near Hastings. Also in the area were c 120 Pukeko, c 58 Paradise Duck, c 200 Pied Stilt, 50+ Banded Dotterel and a few White-faced Heron. The Spurwing number is significant because up until now, reported sightings have not exceeded 5 or so birds at any one time. This may reflect some population pressure from the Wairarapa.

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RUSS LACEY saw one Black Stilt feeding with Pied Stilts in a paddock south of Miranda on 5 April. This bird had a little white on the forehead, breast and under the tail.

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RAY JACKSON reports that on 11 April he and TONY PALLISER were birdwatching at the coast. As they drove along the side of the Rangitaiki towards the sea they spotted about 1 000 Red-billed Gulls in the water and moving towards the shore. Many were seen to be bathing and, in addition, were seen feeding on long yellow objects. Tony was set for wading in to solve the mystery of what the gulls were eating but this proved unnecessary. The gulls were discovered to be eating yellow willow leaves (*Salix* sp.). In Europe gulls have been recorded as eating grass but have any New Zealand birds been observed doing this?

Ray also reports that recently while observing Dabchicks at Lake Okareka, near Rotorua, he was puzzled to see what appeared to be an Australian Coot feeding a Mallard drake. Time did not permit further investigation but on 6 May he was studying Dabchicks again, this time at Okere on Rotoiti. Again a coot appeared to feed a Mallard. A close watch revealed that the Mallards wait for the coots to emerge from their dives for weed (Canadian Pondweed *Elodea* sp.) and then deprive the coots of their meal.

Despite heavy rain the Black-fronted Dotterel census conducted by Manawatu and Wellington members on 11 and 12 November 1978 was a great success. On the Rangitikei River, from Onepuhi to just short of Tangimoana, 66 Black-fronted Dotterel, 130 Banded Dotterel and 110 Pied Stilt were counted. On the Manawatu River between Hopelands Bridge and Opiki 117 Black-fronted Dotterel were counted. R. Wasley recorded 14 Black-fronted Dotterel, 11 Banded Dotterel and 20 Pied Stilt on the Oroua River between Feilding and Awahuri. Janet Drake found Black-fronted Dotterel farther up the Manawatu River than previously so they are still expanding their range.

The latest reports from Manawatu show that the Black-fronted Dotterels have returned to the Longburn Freezing Works again this winter. On 18 May there were 91 birds present, a record. Numbers at the site fluctuate with the rise and fall of the nearby Manawatu River, highest numbers being recorded during floods. When they can, birds return to the river edge during the day to feed along a muddy margin.

## Predatory Pukekos

In late spring 1978 I was watching a family of Pukekos browsing along the creek banks in front of the house. There were two adults with two very leggy young birds. The larger of the two adults (presumably the male) flew off up the creek and momentarily disappeared from view. I heard a kind of squawk before he reappeared carrying in his beak what at first appeared to be a frog. However, a closer look with the glasses showed it to be a fledgling thrush. This he presented to the other birds and the three of them pecked and tore at the prey for a few minutes. Eventually the female carried off the remains into the undergrowth but returned shortly and the four birds then continued their normal selective grazing of grass.

A literature search showed that several writers have mentioned that occasionally Pukekos will eat insects, frogs and small birds. Incidentally, the male seemed to have been a very aggressive bird because after killing the fledgling thrush he chased away a Mallard drake which was dozing peacefully nearby and later went for a small rabbit which crossed his path.

MARGARET DIVERS