



OSNZ news

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Edited by PAUL SAGAR, 38A Yardley Street, Christchurch 4,
for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)
Please note that sightings recorded in this Newsletter are subject
to confirmation.

Note Deadline for the June issue will be
21st May 1988.

It is not possible for all members to attend Annual Conferences and AGMs, so the Society's office holders may not be familiar to them. To put a "face to the name" future issues of *OSNZ news* will include a photograph and short introduction to members of Council and other office holders.

PAUL SAGAR, *Editor*

Beth Brown, President

Beth Brown joined OSNZ in 1963 when her curiosity was piqued by finding a Black Stilt among Pies on the southern shore of the Manukau Harbour. Encouraged by the late Ross McKenzie, she was soon an active member of the South Auckland group and as interest grew, attended many of the Field Study Courses held throughout the country.



Living at Papakura, in easy reach of the great wader roosts in the Manukau Harbour and the Firth of Thames, it is logical that shorebirds figure largely as her particular favourites. She organised the regular summer and winter wader censuses in her area for many years and thus has had opportunity to discover some of the rarer vagrants, most recent among these, a first record of Asiatic Dowitcher in the North

Island. The remnant population of Kokako in the Hunua Ranges has remained an interest as has sound recording of New Zealand and South Pacific birds, especially those of Fiji, to which she helped organise field trips for OSNZ members in the 1970s.

Beth became RR for South Auckland in 1973, a position held until May 1987. She was elected to Council in 1978, became Vice-President in 1981, and has been President since 1983.

Banded Dotterel migration

Fifteen members banded a total of about 500 Banded Dotterels in NZ during the 1987 breeding season. This included good coverage in the central and southern North Island and in Marlborough, regions in which we know little about seasonal movements of Banded Dotterels. I hope that observations of colour-banded dotterels during the 1988 autumn/winter will complete the migration picture of this species.

Members can help by checking the legs of any Banded Dotterels they encounter. Please be careful in observing and recording combinations - it can be tricky to distinguish between blue and green, and (for some people) left and right legs often become confused! The position of the metal band is also required.

Please send me the following details about any Banded Dotterels you observe: locality, date, number of birds present, number checked for bands, number banded, and band combinations for each bird e.g. left leg red over blue, right leg white over metal.

RAY PIERCE, P.O. Box 5521, Auckland

Survey of plumages of the Little Shag

A national survey is in progress to record details of the various plumages of the Little Shag *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos brevirostris* to follow up the study and genetic analysis reported in *Notornis* 34: 41-57 (March 1987). Forms for members to use in recording the plumage, as white-

throated, pied, smudgy etc, and notes explaining their use should be available from all Regional Representatives. The survey is intended to run for 12 to 18 months and progress reports will appear in *OSNZ news*.

JOHN DOWDING & MICHAEL TAYLOR

RAOU subscriptions

In 1984 I opened an account in Auckland for the RAOU, to allow OSNZ members to pay their RAOU subscription locally without incurring the bank draft fee on each remittance to Australia. Since then the RAOU has been able to accept Bankcard and Visa transactions and possession of these cards has become widespread here. Credit card transactions are simple, and much fairer to both member and the RAOU in that they allow for current exchange rates. It is also better that members deal directly with RAOU HQ rather than entering into the double handling that payment through me entails. Therefore I no longer intend to handle RAOU subscriptions.

If you wish to pay an RAOU subscription but do not own a Bankcard or Visa, may I suggest you persuade a friend with such a card to pay your bill. The amount in NZ dollars will appear on your friend's statement. If paid before the due date no interest charge is incurred.

B.J. GILL, *OSNZ/RAOU Liaison Officer*

Farewell Spit Study Course. 28 December 1987 to 9 January 1988

Participants: eleven junior members were nominated: Chris Wetzel (Far North), Sue Moore (Auckland), Justin Penney (South Auckland), Paul Cuming (Waikato), Glenn Brady (Waikato), Rachel Hamilton (Hawke's Bay), Philip Battley (Manawatu/Wanganui), David Stone (Wellington), Lynn Adams (Canterbury), Andrew Crossland (Canterbury) and Peter Langlands (Canterbury). Regional "representatives" were: John Dowding and

Elaine Murphy (Auckland), Sandra Morris (Auckland), Anthea Goodwin (South Auckland), Stella and John Rowe (Waikato), Folkert and Shirley Nieuwland (Waikato), John Innes (Volcanic Plateau), Christine McRae (Hawke's Bay), Jim Hamilton (Hawke's Bay), Gail Quayle (Nelson), Stewart Lauder (West Coast), Carolyn Fry (Marlborough), Colin Miskelly (Canterbury), Margaret Child (Otago). Council members attending were: Barrie Heather, Derek Onley, Paul Sagar with Joy and Matthew, Sue Triggs, Roy and Judy Slack and family, Jenny Hawkins and Hugh Robertson.

From north, south and east they came like homecoming starlings to a roost, gathering at the base of the Spit on Monday afternoon at the low tide for the final 4-wheel drive run up the beach, though many of the juveniles, I mean juniors, filled in the time by walking the whole 21 kilometres to the lighthouse. There, by courtesy of the Department of Conservation, we were able to set up our temporary colony in a grassy meadow surrounded by old pines and macrocarpa, and before long little tents were springing up everywhere around one of the cottages used by the lighthouse keepers before the light was automated in 1984.

The first full day set the pattern for the fortnight - a mixture of carefully planned activities with the odd hour or so when we could follow our own interests, interspersed with regular intake of huge amounts of good food. Each day too, a time was set aside for a general reporting and discussion session with junior members updating the particular topics and studies that had been assigned to them. These discussions were a most valuable part of the course.

There was, however, plenty of variety. On one occasion, Geoff Rennison, DOC District Conservator, Takaka, came out to give us a most interesting talk on other aspects of the Spit - "Tahuroa" or the "long beach" of the Maori. We learned that there are various theories, still unresolved, as to the origin of this unique landform.

One evening Roy Slack showed slides on the latest Chatham Island Taiko expedition and Colin Miskelly gave us a fascinating illustrated talk on the Snares Islands. At other times, John Innes brought out his tin whistle to entertain and delight us, or Barrie Heather would appear in yet another outrageous hat.

In fact, everyone contributed to the success of this camp whether it was Chris Wetzel with his expertise with things mechanical like the water pump, or John Rowe with his first aid kit which was fortunately used only for minor cuts and abrasions. Thanks must go to Patrick Riddett, DOC Summer Warden of the lighthouse complex for his helpful assistance, especially with transport.

And special thanks from us all to the organisers, Jenny Hawkins, Gail Quayle and Hugh Robertson.

Our activities were many and varied as will be seen from the following reports.
STELLA ROWE

Gannets

There are 4 Gannets colonies near the tip of the Spit. Nesting was first noted in 1983/84. At least 1600 adults were counted on this field course, and the colonies are still growing. The growth has been at the expense of Red-billed Gulls which used to nest in large numbers on the shell banks.

Observations made were of flights of adults and the feeding of chicks.

More adults moved to or from the colonies in the early morning and evening than during the middle of the day. Most birds were heading north to the open sea to feed rather than south to Golden Bay. One interesting result was that about three quarters of Gannets lifting off the colony near the middle of the day did not actually leave the colony, but returned to the ground after a couple of small circuits. Only a very small proportion of birds were carrying nest material.

Generally chicks were not fed as soon as adults arrived back. Chicks begged for food by pointing bill vertically and tapping the bill of the parent. Some chicks were fed up to 9 times in a 10-minute feeding spell.

GLENN BRADY

Distribution and numbers of shags

Over the period of 2 weeks, data were collected on shag distribution, numbers, and behaviour along a study area extending from Puponga Farm to the shellbanks at the tip of Farewell Spit. Three species of shags were recorded during the course: Black, Little and Spotted. Two other species which have been recorded as vagrants along Farewell Spit are the Pied Shag and Little Black Shag; neither of which was noted during the course. Two types of marine environments were recognised; the Bay Flats consisting of shallow tidal waters sheltered from strong winds and an exposed Ocean Beach habitat. Different shag species used these environments accordingly.

Black Shags were noted along the entire length of the Ocean Beach, but only at certain localities along the Bay Flats (e.g. Mullet Creek). Observations of feeding birds were made but roosting was the main activity noted with groups of up to 10 birds. Regular movement along the Ocean Beach was also apparent (e.g. a flock of six on 6/1/88 moving east).

Little Shags were recorded from the Bay Flats and Freemans Lake but were clearly absent from the Ocean Beach. Counts would indicate that at least 15 birds are on the Bay Flats with 100+ roosting at Freemans Lake. Clearly, use of Farewell Spit by Little Shags is seasonal (e.g. 115

during the study course compared with 400+ during June 1987, B. Heather, pers. comm.) with the largest numbers present during winter.

PETER LANGLANDS

Waders

During the 2 week course various flocks of waders were studied at leisure by most people and the Spit was censused on 8/1/88. Smaller waders were often hard to track down, and some that had been seen during the course were not noted in the census. The January census provided a good chance to see how numbers had changed since the November census.

The maximum numbers for the 2 week course were: Pied Oystercatcher - 4641, Variable Oystercatcher - 59, Spur-winged Plover - 3, Golden Plover - 25, Banded Dotterel - 575, NZ Dotterel - 2, Wrybill - 3, FE Curlew - 16, Whimbrel sp. - 17, Bar-tailed Godwit - 11 560, Hudsonian Godwit - 1, Siberian Tattler - 2, Turnstone - 1245, Knot - 11 124, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper - 6, Curlew Sandpiper - 2, Sanderling - 1, Red-necked Stint - 33 Pied Stilt - 16.

Some of these figures were markedly different from those in November.

Pied Oystercatcher - an increase of 2171 on the November count due to the onset of the northern migration. 10 birds were seen flying northward off the Spit in the direction of Mt Egmont on the evening of 6/1/88.

Golden Plover - an increase of 18 on the November count.

FE Curlew - an increase of 9 on the November count.

Whimbrel - an increase of 16 on the November count. Small groups had been seen a few times during the fortnight, with 4 Asiatic and 1 American being identified.

Turnstone - an increase of 250 on the November count, possibly due to a better coverage of the Spit during our visit.

Knot - a decrease of 7285 on the November count. This could be due to movement of the birds, or a reflection on the counters. A similar situation happened during a 3 week study course in January 1961, when there was a difference of 10 000 birds in counts in the first and third weeks of the course.

Red-necked Stint - an increase of 26 on the November count. A bird in full breeding plumage seen in November was seen twice during the course but not on the census. This shows that 34 birds were actually present.

Other exotic waders included 2 Siberian Tattlers which were seen frequently, 1 Sanderling seen only once, and a Hudsonian Godwit seen on the Ocean Beach on census day. 1 pale NZ Dotterel was seen on 3/1/88, and was joined by a more colourful bird when seen on 5/1/88.

PHIL BATTLE

Banded Dotterels

The post-breeding movement of Banded Dotterels is usually reflected in an increase in the numbers of the bird on Farewell Spit from January onwards.

In the 1967 camp for example, two counts make a few weeks apart in January revealed an increase of about 600 birds. The main purpose in studying Banded Dotterels this time was to record this seasonal influx and to search for banded birds.

The first Banded Dotterel census took place on 29/12/87. 575 dotterels were counted, of which 400 were checked for bands and 4 banded birds were found. The second count, held on 8/1/88, was made under atrocious weather conditions and recorded barely 200 birds.

Banded Dotterel Census, 29/12/87

- Sections: 1) Gobi-Stockyard Pt (Pans)
2) Stockyard Pt-Mullet Creek (Bay Flats)
3) Stockyard Pt-Mullet Creek (Pans)
4) Mullet Creek-lighthouse (Bay Flats)
5) Mullet Creek-lighthouse (Pans)
6) Spit tip

Section	Total	juv. No. checked	No. banded	
1	17	n.c.	12	0
2	105	<5	73	0
3	215	<20	82	0
4	35	1	30	0
5	188	16	188	4
6	15	0	15	0
	575	<42	400	4

During the course of the camp, 10 banded birds were sighted on Farewell Spit. Seven band combinations were seen fully and 3 of those birds were identified as coming from the Upper Waiau river in North Canterbury, the Oreti river in Southland and Westland. For three birds incomplete readings were made. A further bird was sighted at the Taupata stream mouth in Golden Bay, near the base of the Spit, and proved to be a female banded at the Conway River in 1986.

ANDREW CROSSLAND

Variable Oystercatchers

The main hightide wader census on 6/1/88 recorded 59 Variable Oystercatchers along the Farewell Spit beach, Inner Pans and mudflats. Pairs of birds were scattered along the beach and small groups of up to 5 birds, possibly non-breeders were found on the Bay Flats.

Section totals were: lighthouse = 9, Runway = 13, Mullet Creek = 9, Bread Basket = 6, Banana Pan = 6, Gobi = 16. A nest was found by Paul Cuming in the lighthouse section and this contained one egg, but had failed by the following day. This, together with the total absence of juvenile birds indicates that breeding success was very poor this year, as birds were seen on nests with eggs in November (J. Hawkins, pers. comm.).

The 59 birds found on the census may be slightly below the true figure as birds

are easily missed in such a large area, particularly those sitting in low dunes behind the beach.

The November 1987 Wader census recorded 45 Variable Oystercatchers, however, the main emphasis of this census was to count the vast flocks of waders and therefore some oystercatchers were probably missed.

In previous years around 22 pairs of Variable Oystercatcher have been present in summer. About this number of pairs were present during the camp. All oystercatchers seen on Farewell Spit were of the black colour phase. One blue colour banded bird sighted on 30/12/87 near the Gannet colonies had been banded as a chick on Somes Island in 1986.

ANDREW CROSSLAND

Wader feeding behaviour

On 4/1/88 all of the Junior members plus Hugh Robertson and Barrie Heather made detailed observations of waders' feeding habits. For this exercise Banana Pan (situated on the central flats) was chosen and 11 species of waders were observed (of which 5+ were noted feeding). Observations concentrated on two species, the Lesser Knot and Pied Stilt.

Peck rates were recorded for Knots at Banana Pan (shallow water) and Stockyard Point (mudflats exposed at high tide). Peck rates were similar for both locations although some birds adopted a sewing machine like action on open mudflats, with up to 94 pecks per minute!

Although no conclusive results were obtained from this exercise, it was worthwhile because all of the Juniors learnt how to record the feeding habits of waders. Hopefully enough interest was generated so that future studies may result.

PETER LANGLANDS

Terns at Farewell Spit

180 Caspian Terns populate the colony on the shell banks of Farewell Spit. They nest along with Black-backed Gulls and Gannets. This year there were 25+ chicks seen at the colony and there were a few casualties and deaths. Unfortunately, there have been no White-fronted Terns nesting since the Gannets came but they still mill around the end of the spit.

One event really attracted my attention while I was watching the Gannets: 4 Black-backed Gulls attacked an immature Caspian Tern in flight. They drove it to the ground and pecked it to death. It was then dragged along the sand and left. Even though a few chicks die, the success of the Caspians has improved because of the shelter of the Gannets and possibly the lack of Red-billed Gulls.

The range of the Caspian Tern on the Spit seems to be from the base (Puponga) right along the Ocean Beach and there have been a few records of them in Golden Bay.

Adult White-fronted Terns have also been seen right along the Spit but they haven't nested anywhere along it this year. One immature bird has also been recorded on the beach with an adult.

The Caspian Tern colony seems to be more active in the morning. On 3/1/88 37 Caspian Terns were flying east along the spit, presumably toward the colony and a third of them were carrying food. The fish that were mainly caught were yellow-eyed mullet, flat fish and possibly butterfish. When food was brought back to the colony the adult bird would go to the water's edge and wash the fish, then stand on the mudflats and wait for a chick to come running toward it begging for food. If no chick came the tern would then move to a new spot and wait again. If a chick still didn't come the tern would eat the fish itself.

DAVID STONE

Gulls and skuas

Gulls were reported up and down both Ocean Beach and the Bay Flats. Southern Black-backed Gulls were the most common, followed by Red-billed Gulls and occasional reports of Black-billed Gulls. No complete census was made of the gulls but they were present on most parts of the Spit.

The Red-billed Gulls had 2 colonies on the Spit. One colony of 18 birds with small chicks was half way along the Spit. The other is being slowly taken over by the Gannets at the tip of the Spit and only a small colony remains. Between 2 of the 4 Gannet colonies we could see at least 2 chicks and 11 adults.

Three Southern Black-backed Gull colonies are sited along the Spit. The traditional nesting area in the Gobi Desert, near the base of the Spit, had only 2 well-grown chicks and 2 nests. Half way along the Spit was a colony of 120 adults with about 20 chicks, of which many had well-developed feathers. Near the Gannet colonies on the shell banks there were many chicks. Eighty nests were reported earlier in the season. Many chicks were still present, some of them close to the Gannet colony.

Most skuas - 15 Arctic and Pomarine Skuas - were seen around the tip of the Spit, where the Caspian Terns nest and White-fronted Terns roost.

LYNN ADAMS

Fernbirds

In 1967 there were no Fernbirds found on Farewell Spit, although there were Fernbirds in Golden Bay. Five years ago Fernbirds appeared to have reached halfway along Farewell Spit.

In the 1987-88 Junior Summer Course, most of the observations of Fernbirds came from the airstrip, just west of the lighthouse area. In the airstrip there are areas of lupin and bracken and on the track

leading from the airstrip to the Bay Flats there are 2 swamps. In one of the swamps we mist-netted and banded a juvenile male Fernbird.

One morning a Fernbird landed on a lupin bush directly behind the house where we were based. It remained there for half an hour as about 10 people talked and took photos of it. It flew off into the airstrip but returned to the lupin about 2 hours later.

Of the 40 observations, 34 of them were within 2 kilometres of the eastern end of the Spit; therefore by 1987 Fernbirds had clearly colonised this area.

SUE MOORE

Distribution mapping

All birds seen and heard were mapped in 45 1 km² units covering the entire Spit. This included records of birds at sea but within the square boundary. In view of the limited time available, results are bound to be incomplete.

Of the 66 species observed, the single most widespread was the Southern Black-backed Gull which appeared in 29 squares. The Yellowhammer was the most widespread passerine (19 squares). Species also present in 15 or more squares were Turnstones, Caspian Terns, Black Swan, Banded Dotterel, Godwits, Knots, Pied Oystercatchers, Variable Oystercatcher and Skylarks. Conversely, birds confined to one square were Pomarine Skua, Feral Pigeon, Little Owl, Tree Martin, Fantail, Grey Warbler, Tui, Silvereye, Greenfinch, Guinea Fowl, Sanderling, Shining Cuckoo, Little Shag, Spotted Shag, Royal Spoonbill, Spotless Crake, Spurwinged Plover, Wrybill, Grey-tailed Tattler, Fluttering Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, and Hudsonian Godwit.

Remaining species, located in 2-14 squares were House Sparrow, Grey Duck, Weka, Siberian Tattler, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Pukeko, Song Thrush, Pipit, Goldfinch, Redpoll, Starling, NZ Dotterel, Whimbrel, Blackbird, Black-billed Gull, Curlew Sandpiper, White-fronted Tern, Curlew, Mallard, Harrier, Pied Stilt, Paradise Shelduck, Golden Plover, Arctic Skua, Chaffinch, Red-necked Stint, Black Shag, Dunnock, Red-billed Gull, Fernbird, White-faced Heron, Gannet and Welcome Swallow.

A striking result was the confinement at this time of year of Silvereye and Blackbirds to only one and three squares respectively. Also notable was that more passerine species were observed around the lighthouse compound where large trees are present.

RACHEL HAMILTON

Birds of the Lighthouse Compound

We recorded the following species regularly in good numbers in the lighthouse compound - Song Thrush, Blackbird, Skylark, Dunnock, Welcome Swallow,

Fantail, Silvereye, Yellowhammer, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Redpoll, House Sparrow. Two species, Starling and Welcome Swallow, varied in number from day to day and showed signs of moving through the compound. Species recorded on most days in small numbers were Harrier, Pipit, Fernbird, Grey Warbler, Greenfinch. White-faced Herons roosted irregularly in the pine trees with a maximum of 104 on 2/1/88. Unusual birds were Feral Pigeon, Shining Cuckoo, Little Owl, Tree Martin and Tui.

JUSTIN PENNEY

(3), Song Thrush (6 + 1), Blackbird (17 + 1), Dunnock (34 + 1), and House Sparrow, (7). A total of 5 recaptures was made of birds which Derek Onley had banded during previous visits. One Dunnock had originally been banded in March 1985, while 2 others had been banded in June 1987. A male Chaffinch was originally banded in April 1986, and a Song Thrush in September 1985.

* recapture

PAUL CUMING

Estimated numbers of birds in the Lighthouse Compound

Species	29/12	30/12	31/12	1/1	2/1	3/1	4/1	5/1	6/1	Breeding
White-faced Heron	0	15	0	1	104	8	18	1	7	Roosting
Harrier	1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	Probable
Feral Pigeon	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	-
Shining Cuckoo	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	-
Little Owl	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	-
Kingfisher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-
Skylark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Confirmed
Tree Martin	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	-
Welcome Swallow	15	25	4	7	15	20	30	50	40	Confirmed
Pipit	0	0	12	8	20	1	2	0	0	Probable
Dunnock	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Confirmed
Fernbird	1	2	10	8	6	2	4	2	7	Confirmed
Grey Warbler	3	3	4	3	3	3	0	3	3	Probable
Fantail/Pied	5	4	11	5	8	8	8	8	13	Confirmed
/Black	0	0	0	3	2	3	2	2	1	Probable
Song Thrush	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Confirmed
Blackbird	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Confirmed
Silvereye	50	50	50	50	80	80	70	50	50	Confirmed
Tui	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	-
Yellowhammer	9	10	3	17	11	11	11	10	13	Confirmed
Chaffinch	20	20	20	20	20	30	30	20	20	Confirmed
Greenfinch	4	2	11	11	4	10	4	5	4	Probable
Goldfinch	15	11	13	25	30	10	15	5	30	Confirmed
Redpoll	50	50	30	40	50	50	50	50	60	Confirmed
House Sparrow	60	60	60	70	70	30	70	70	70	Confirmed
Starling	20	20	8	365	20	200	20	16	106	Confirmed

Note: ✓ present but numbers were difficult to count.

Results of passerine mistnetting

During the stay on Farewell Spit, a group of ornithologists conducted a passerine study. Mist-nets were set up in various locations around the camp and airstrip where Derek Onley has netted during the last 3 years. Measurements were taken of the various parts of the birds and they included wing length, tail length, tarsus, head and bill, bill, and weight. We used calipers to measure head and bill, bill, and tarsi, and metal wing-rulers to measure tail and wing. Pesola balances were used for weighing. The use of the mist-nets included standard pole nets, nets with pulley systems, hand-held nets and 30-metre long nets with tape recording to lure Fernbirds into them.

The vigils kept by the group were no longer than half a day but could start at 5.00 a.m. Species caught in mist-nets were: Silvereye (52 + 3*), Welcome Swallow (2), Goldfinch (4), Fernbird (1), Redpoll (18), Fantail (6), Chaffinch (4), Yellowhammer

Rat trapping

During the course of the camp rat and mouse snap-traps were set around the lighthouse compound to obtain information on both the identity and abundance of rodents. Fenn traps were also set to catch stoats to see what they were eating.

In 3 different habitats areas 20 mouse and 20 rat traps were set approximately 25 metres apart, over a 3-night period. From the airstrip (lupin and gorse scrub) 6 mice were caught per 113.5 trap nights and no rats were caught out of 58 trap nights. In the pine trees and houses no mice were caught per 111.5 trap nights and no rats per 56 trap nights. Sand and marram grass areas caught no mice per 102 trap nights and no rats per 51 trap nights.

Fenn traps caught only one stoat out of 18 trap nights but one stoat was also caught in a rat trap in the marram grass area. On autopsy of the stoat from the marram grass area, the small intestine was found to contain mouse fur, seeds and

insect elytra. In the other stoat, the stomach and gut were empty. Both stoats were young females.

Rat tracks were found in the sand on the edge of the marram grass and so six rat traps were set in that area but no rats were caught in 18 trap nights.

Rat droppings were found in the roof of the house where our camp was based but they were not fresh. Two rat traps were set but no rats were caught in 8 trap nights, but one mouse was caught.

Stoats may have been keeping mouse and rat numbers down, except in the roof of the house and in closed scrubby areas (e.g. airstrip area) where mice find hiding places.

CHRIS WETZEL

Animal tracks

Tracks of 10 species were recorded. Nine of these were regularly seen in the lighthouse area. This reflects the fact that people spent more time in the lighthouse area, where we stayed. Tracks of most species were also seen on the rest of the Spit.

Sightings of animal tracks on Farewell Spit, 28 December 1987 to 9 January 1988

Animal Species	Location			
	Puponga Farm to Stockyard Point	Stockyard Point to Muller Creek	Muller Creek to Lighthouse	Lighthouse Area
Red deer	x	x	x	x
Possum	x	-	-	x
Hedgehog	-	x	-	x
Cat	-	-	x	x
Stoat	x	x	x	x
Hare	x	x	x	x
Rat	-	-	-	x
Mouse	x	-	-	x
Weka	x	x	x	x
Penguin	-	x	x	-

Key; Tracks present x, Tracks not seen -

Red deer tracks were seen regularly because they are large and easy to identify. Fawn tracks, which were much smaller, were recorded occasionally. Deer tracks were seen crossing tidal flats to small raised areas covered in vegetation. On the other hand, mouse tracks were not seen often because they are small and indistinct. Few cat tracks were seen, indicating that trapping by the local ranger has been successful.

Stoats were seen frequently around the lighthouse compound, as were a possum and a cat. Hares were seen in many parts of the Spit.

CHRIS WETZEL

Beach patrols

During the course the entire length of Ocean Beach along Farewell Spit was patrolled. Several members participated, although special thanks must go to Justin Penney for the enthusiasm he put into collecting records. Patrolling on Farewell Spit is not straightforward due to 2 reasons:



Members of the Juniors Course on the Bay Flats

(Photo. Colin Miskelly)



Derek Onley holds a Fernbird caught for banding

(Photo. Colin Miskelly)



Reporting back and discussion time

(Photo. Joy Sagar)

- a) numerous indistinct tide-marks spread over a wide beach
- b) because sand movement by strong winds quickly covers up corpses

Nonetheless 29 birds of 14 species were recorded including several terrestrial species (e.g. Weka, Tui) and a Common Dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*). The following list notes the species which were beach wrecked - Little Blue Penguin, Fairy Prion, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, Australian Gannet, Black Swan, Western Weka, Pied Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Knot, Southern Black-backed Gull, Caspian Tern, White-fronted Tern, and Tui.

PETER LANGLANDS

Migration watching

Last year in *OSNZ news* (No. 42) I asked that people keep a watch for migrating passerines. Although I received several interesting letters indicating seasonal changes in bird numbers, only Andrew Crossland set out with the specific intention of counting migrating birds and he was hampered by the Christchurch mid-winter weather. So in order to encourage a bit more participation this autumn and winter and show that there really is something to see out there early in the morning, here is a summary of my own observations for last year.

On the West Coast I watched from Cape Foulwind lighthouse, just south of Westport, and from Millerton at about 300 m above sea level, overlooking a narrow coastal strip of land.

Goldfinches were seen moving northwards throughout April and May and the first week of June. Chaffinches moved northwards also, although there was a fall off in numbers by the middle of May. The maximum, again at Cape Foulwind, was 101/hour on 3 May. There were only small numbers of Greenfinches in April, apart from 177/hour at Millerton on the 18th, and the main northward movement occurred in May and early June with 100 to 150/hour regularly during that period. Redpolls, which gather in huge flocks in autumn and winter, only reached a maximum of 20/hour and unlike the other finches showed no obvious northerly movements.

Silvereyes presented a rather confusing picture. At Cape Foulwind there were virtually none in April and they reached a maximum of only 35/hour in May and June when they flew, about equally, in all directions. In contrast, at Millerton, where there is considerably more native bush, there were large numbers of birds in April and May and very few by the middle of June. There was an obvious southerly movement in mid-April and the first week of May with a maximum of 178/hour on

8 May but there was always some movement in other directions.

Welcome Swallows were recorded only in ones and twos, apart from 53 which passed northward at Cape Fowlwind on 2 May.

I visited the Farewell Spit lighthouse with Peter Dilks, Judy Grindell and Kina Scollay from 26 June to 2 July. The first morning was fine and clear and well over 1,000 Silvereyes and 50 or so Greenfinches passed eastwards out to sea. The following day was wet with low cloud and groups of up to 50 silvereyes flew low along the Spit from the west all day. Apart from a few small groups of Silvereyes leaving the end of the Spit after dawn there were no obvious movements of birds for the rest of our visit.

I hope that this year a few more members will get out and try to count migrating passerines. The complex movements of Silvereyes really need more observation before any explanation is attempted, and it would be interesting to know if the northerly movements of finches continue into the North Island. Instructions on when, where and how to look are in *OSNZ news* 42 (March 1987).

DEREK ONLEY

Change of address of Regional Recorder

Derek Onley, regional recorder for the West Coast, has moved southeast and until November 1988 his new address is: c/o D. Noonan & K. Olsen, Papatowai Beach, R.D. 2 Owaka, S.E. Otago.

Hudsonian Godwit near New Plymouth

On 8 November 1987 Ron Scarlett and I were at a freshwater lake on Mamaku Road at Waitara, about 15 km north of New Plymouth. This lake formed during recent years following the end of quarrying operations and it has become an increasingly valuable habitat for various species of waterbirds, including Paradise Shelduck, Shovelers, Mallards, and Pied Stilts. The lake is deep, but oxygen weed has become firmly established around much of the margin, so thickly in parts that Pied Stilts have no difficulty walking and feeding on it.

As we counted the various bird species we noticed that 2 Pied Stilts flying in were accompanied by a large brown wader. They landed on the mat of oxygen weed near the edge of the far side of the lake about 100 m from us. It was immediately obvious that the brown wader was a godwit, which we were able to observe closely through binoculars for more than an hour.

The bird's upperparts and folded wings were a uniform grey-brown with a somewhat darker forehead and faint white superciliary stripe. The underparts as far as the upper belly were of the same general colour as the upperparts. The lower belly and vent area were whitish. The bill appeared to be a similar size, shape and colour as that of the Bar-tailed Godwit. The legs seemed as dark, or perhaps even darker than, the forepart of the bill.

The bird spent a good deal of its time resting and preening. It also fed occasionally among the oxygen weed, at times close to Pied Stilts and some Mallards and Shovelers. Once it partially immersed in the water and bathed actively.

When preening, the godwit several times raised one or both its wings and its almost completely blackish underwings were very obvious. This character identifies the bird as a Hudsonian Godwit, rather than the similar Black-tailed Godwit which has an underwing which is white outlined narrowly by black leading coverts and tips to flight feathers with white axillaries. The godwit twice flew a short distance showing a very striking black and white pattern on both the upper and under tail. The upper tail coverts, and perhaps also a portion of the lower rump, were white; the rest of the tail was jet black, narrowly tipped with white. The undertail pattern appeared the same as above except that the white tip seemed broader. The striking black and white pattern of the tail, together with its almost completely blackish underwings, were the most noticeable features of our bird.

It was silent until it took flight suddenly and for no apparent reason and flew away rapidly, calling several times in quick succession as it did so.

To my knowledge this is the first Taranaki record of this species.

DAVID MEDWAY

Colour tagged Rooks in Southern Hawke's Bay

In November 1987, Ecology Division DSIR in collaboration with the southern Hawke's Bay Pest Destruction Board began a programme to study the movement of Rooks in the south-eastern North Island. So far (20 November 1987) nearly 80 Rooks have been banded and colour tagged on each wing. The tags are provided with a rookery colour (white, orange, yellow, or yellow and orange). Those on the right wing will also have an individual letter, number or symbol in a darker colour over the rookery colours.

In view of the bad spring, when a number of the rookeries chosen in the study area were destroyed by gales, it is hoped that observations will be made

through 1988-1989, providing that tags last. OSNZ members can assist with this study by reporting tagged Rooks. The information required for each bird is the rookery colour, and if possible the symbol on the right tag, and any other details. All reports will be acknowledged with details of the origin of the Rook and any earlier reports where a specific bird is reported.

Reports should be directed to Nigel Langham, Ecology Division, DSIR, Private Bag, Havelock North (phone HBN 778-196 or evenings 354001), or Owen Harris, SHBPB, Dannevirke (phone DV 47235).

NIGEL LANGHAM

Regional Roundup

Auckland: Parts of the members' questionnaire having been distributed to Regional Representatives, there is the opportunity to analyse the responses which deal with regional activities. For Auckland the return rate was 30%, or 50 out of some 160 members.

Some useful suggestions for changes in content and topics came in, however, most are satisfied with present content as expressed by "yes" from 36 responses, "no" nil responses, and "only partly" from 2 responses. Also gratifying is the fact that 42 agree to being adequately informed of regional activities, while 4 partly or wholly dissented.

The question "Are there enough of the following activities in your area?" scored yes in respect of meetings, local and visiting speakers. Instruction scored yes (24) to no (10); field trips yes (32) to (7); co-operative local studies yes (23) to no (7). The RR was among those saying no and will be seeking to increase the opportunities for those wishing to participate.

1987 ended with a bumper 25 page issue of *Tara* and the New Year has begun with members scattered all over in search of birds. Regretably, however, no one was able to attend the Far North activities during Auckland anniversary weekend. Perhaps the local attractions of Spine-tailed Swifts, Australian Little Grebes, and the Lesser Yellowlegs still at Mangere, had something to do with this.

The annual survey of the South Kaipara dune lakes on 13/2/88 was organised by Mike Graham and Gwenda Pulham, with 10 members, including DOC officer Craig Hodsell plus kayak. The team tallied 45 Dabchicks on 6 lakes and several chicks and juveniles were also seen. A pair of Little Grebes were rearing a chick on the same small lake as last year. Their progress is being closely followed and excellent photographs by Geoff Moon featured at our first evening meeting for 1988. (Michael Taylor)

South Auckland: Birds seen at Miranda recently include 1 Large Sand Dotterel, 2 Terek Sandpipers, up to 19 Curlew Sandpipers, 23 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 1 Grey Plover, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, and 15 Little Terns. The Marsh Sandpiper is still present but it is elusive. It was seen on 25/12/87 by Bridget Walsh and Richard Lowe. (Anthea Goodwin)

Waikato: Beach patrols were generally quiet during most of 1987 but in September the first real westerly storms of the year hit the coast with a consequent rise in seabird mortality. Patrollers on Taharoa, Kawhia, Raupuke, and Waikorea beaches during the period September to December found 86 seabirds, including 2 Grey-headed Mollymawks, 1 Giant Petrel, 1 White-chinned Petrel, 1 Cape Pigeon, 9 Antarctic Fulmars, 5 White-headed Petrels, 5 Kerguelen Petrels, 3 Blue Petrels, 26 prions (3 species), 10 shearwaters (4 species), and 1 Diving Petrel.

The September census of birds on Hamilton Lake, carried out by Mercia Barnes and Monica Daly, reaffirmed the continuing rise in the number of resident coots - from 178 at the same time last year to 218 this year. In summer up to 300 have been seen on the lake. Meanwhile, the number of Black Swans appears to be down.

At the November wader census 34 Lesser Knots were counted at Aotea Harbour where they are not present very often.

The prize for 1987 must surely go to the sighting at Rangiriri of 7 Glossy Ibis, observed by a number of members on 27/11. (Stella Rowe)

Gisborne/Wairoa: 5 species of prions, estimated to have been dead for 1 to 2 weeks, were found during a patrol of Opoutama Beach, Mahia, on 9/8/87. They comprised 20 Fairy, 3 Fulmar, 2 Thin-billed, 3 Salvin's and 3 Antarctic Prions.

Also in August there were some interesting sightings of Kiwis in the Cricklewood Road area, just out of Wairoa. Although it is an area of farmland with the usual scrubby gullies and small patches of bush there have been a few sightings of kiwis there over the years. One bird was in a deer paddock alongside the main road, about 10 km west of Wairoa. Its bill was about half the normal length and badly worn and cracked, but the bird was in good condition and was released in the Raupunga water reserve. Another Kiwi was killed by a car on the Putere Road, a long way from any cover, and 2 other birds were seen on the Cricklewood Road. There is good Kiwi country to the north of where these birds were seen.

I saw 2 Royal Spoonbills at the Wairoa Estuary on 8/8/87, but they did not stay. Perhaps they were part of the Ahuriri Estuary flock paying a brief visit. (Geoff Foreman)

Hawke's Bay: 16 Royal Spoonbills overwintered at the Ahuriri Estuary in 1987. 14 of these were closely examined through a telescope and aged as 7 adults and 7 immatures (W. & M. Twytle).

An albino Kingfisher was seen at Eskdale by John Berry.

Wayne and Margaret Twytle counted 25 000 Starlings coming to roost at Riverbend Road, Napier, on 26/7/87. Flocking began at 4.45 p.m. and the last birds flew in at 5.30 p.m.

The arrival of the arctic waders was followed with the usual interest. A whimbrel was seen by Lucy Hodgson in early October, followed by 5 Lesser Knots on 19/10 (K. Todd), 6 Turnstones on 3/10 (K. Todd), a Wrybill and Little Tern on 25/10 (W. & M. Twytle), and 5 Red-necked Stints and a Pectoral Sandpiper on 25/10 (W. & M. Twytle). (Kathleen Todd)

Wellington: On 3-4/10/87 we counted the birds on Mana Island again, however, because the weather was bad only 2 counts per line were completed. With 3 counts completed (June, July and October) the numbers already indicated that there is a considerable annual variation of birds on the island and that there is very likely a considerable exchange of small birds between Mana Island and the North Island. In October the Sooty Shearwater burrows on the south west part of the island were not in use and we failed to find the northern colony, despite a search of the most likely areas. (Tony Beauchamp)

The second count of birds along the Makara Walkway was completed in fine conditions on the morning of 18/10/87. There were differences between the May and October surveys in the numbers and species of birds counted, with greater numbers of finches and fewer gulls, terns, shearwaters, and shags in October. (Russell Thomas)

Nelson: In November and December the Southern Black-backed Gull nests on the Boulder Bank were counted and later the chicks were banded. There were only 200 banded, perhaps the closing of the nearby Atawhai rubbish dump is having some effect.

Red-billed Gulls gathered in 6 different places on the Boulder Bank this summer. They laid eggs at 4 sites and hatched them at one site, but then deserted long before the chicks fledged. Maybe the lack of young gulls is why Jon Jackson has noticed fewer skuas in the area.

White-fronted Terns began laying eggs at 2 sites on the Boulder Bank, but then left for the Bell's Island shellbanks.

Recent interesting sightings include a Bittern seen by Kelly Quayle up Nelson Haven; a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper also seen up Nelson Haven by Zack and Sam Williams and Kelly; Gail Quayle saw a Far Eastern Curlew, 7 Wrybills and several

Lesser Knots in Nelson Haven too - this is an area well worth watching. Alvin Brett had some good bird watching at Druggans Dam recently which included Australian Coot and Little Grebe, Scaup, Grey Duck, and Black Swan. (Jenny Hawkins)

Canterbury: Lake Ki-Wainono continues to be the bird watching location in the region. In November Ray Pierce was able to see a Ruff and a Lesser Yellowlegs at the lake. These follow the Grey Phalarope seen in June.

Meanwhile it is still hard to find the birds at Lake Ellesmere because the water level has been consistently low during the summer. However, a Hudsonian Godwit and Terek Sandpiper were reported in November, several colour-banded Wrybills during January, and up to 65 Red-necked Stints in February.

39 Cattle Egrets were in the vicinity of Ellesmere during January and there were 21 Royal Spoonbills at Kaituna on 24/1/88.

Peter Wilson and Kathleen Harrison saw 2 Asiatic Black-tailed Godwits at Coopers Lagoon in February. A snipe was also reported from the lagoon by Kathleen in November. (Paul Sagar)

Otago: It appears that the Gannets have been breeding at the Nuggets this summer. They were absent last year but Ken Gager observed 5 adults on what he thought were nests on 10/1/88. A Southern Giant Petrel visited Moeraki during the summer. Janice Jones nursed the exhausted bird and she was able to release it in January.

The Welcome Swallow survey is coming to an end. The absence of swallows around Lake Tuakitoto is noticeable, particularly as they bred there last year. There have also been no sightings from the Catlins, but there is one sighting from Middlemarch. (Peter Schweigman)

Southland: The 1987 migrant waders reached Invercargill Estuary on 28/9, when Roger Sutton saw 2000+ birds, including 800+ Bar-tailed Godwits, on Jennings deer farm - the traditional touch down spot - at 4.30 p.m. Mr Jennings independently reported 200+ godwits at 5.30 p.m., some sitting low on the paddocks and some feeding quickly. Arrival dates in previous years have been 28/9/84, 23-27/9/85, and 16/9/86.

Some waders either overshot or did not like it there e.g. a lone Lesser Knot, chivvied by breeding Banded Dotterels at the confluence of the Wairaki and Waiu Rivers on 26/10; and on 20/10 2 Bar-tailed Godwits feeding in shallow water beside a gravel fan on the Oreti River, 3 km upstream from the Dipton Bridge. Both sites are about 60 km inland from the closest wader habitats at Riverton.

The oddest bird news in recent months was the finding of "a strange bird" below Dog Island lighthouse. The keeper sent it over to Roger Sutton, who happened to

meet John Hall-Jones after picking up the parcel. Imagine 2 bemused men, opening their mystery parcel in the centre of the city, to find a beautiful but very dead Marsh Crake! Dog Island has no Marsh Crake habitat, the closest population being at the Waituna Wetland Reserve, 18 km across the sea.

I spent 3 days on Ruapuke Island in early November, data collecting for Ray Pierce's Banded Dotterel work. Of the 72 dotterels found, 43 were adults, 27 fledged juveniles, and 2 were about 10-day chicks. I found no nests and clearly most birds had nested concurrently in September. This is a marked contrast to Banded Dotterels breeding in the inland Southland riverbeds, which has been late and meagre, with fewer birds than usual, and mostly in poor condition. A wet winter and late high country snow meant that many gravel flats, which is prime Banded Dotterel breeding habitat, were under water. Others were under sheep, as riverbed farmers destocked their wet, slow-growing pastures and fed to stock concentrated on the river flats.

Back at Ruapuke Island, 2 unexpected sightings were a Glossy Ibis on Moana Putakitaki Lagoon and 3 Peacocks on open scrubland near Te Awatuiau Lagoon. No, the peacocks did not fly there!

Southland's loss is Otago's gain, through Kim and Jenny Morrison's move from Te Anau to Dunedin. Alan Wright proposes a similar move this year, so OSNZ loses its 3 active members from the Te Anau region.

Roger Sutton, Michael Criglington and Maida Barlow began the new year with a morning visit to the Invercargill Estuary shellbanks with the aim of banding late-hatched Caspian Tern chicks. It was disappointing to find that both the Caspian and White-fronted colonies had been washed out, probably by the big tide and gales on Boxing Day. 23 Caspian juveniles were seen, but only 3 of the 21 younger birds that Maida had metal-banded as nestlings on 22/12 survived. By 1/1/88 these 3 chicks were about 3 weeks old, and their tarsi were long enough to take the second (colour) band, making 21 colour-banded chicks for the season. The washout of the White-fronted Terns was especially unfortunate. With 204 nests, some hatching, on 22/12/87, this had been the largest colony in the region since 1982. On 1/1/88 only 1 chick had survived.

The bad news was somewhat alleviated by seeing one of the puzzling small terns that appear from time to time on the Southland estuaries. This one liked to perch on the mudflats among godwits and Turnstones. In the air it swooped and hovered rather like a marsh tern, but dived with a splash to feed. Its underparts were white, wings smooth pale grey with dark tips, bill black, legs dark, front and crown white, nape black, and a black line eye to

nape widening and white-flecked at the ear coverts. It was probably a northern hemisphere Little Tern in eclipse plumage, the first on this estuary since 1980, and a good sharpening-up identification exercise for the new year.

Other recent rarities in Southland were an Oriental Dotterel and a Terek Sandpiper at Invercargill Estuary shellbanks on 8/2/88, another Oriental Dotterel at Waituna Lagoon, and an Oriental Pratincole and a Pectoral Sandpiper with a flock of 130 Banded Dotterels on Ruapuke Island's Tauatemaku Lagoon on 10 and 11/2/88. Descriptions of the 3 Oriental birds have been submitted to the Rare Birds Committee for verification.

Colour bands on 4 of the Banded Dotterels on Ruapuke identified them as 2 Aparima River females, 1 Oreti River male, and 1 Upper Oreti River juvenile banded as a chick in October or November 1987. The 2 chicks banded on Ruapuke during November were not found during the February visit, nor was the Glossy Ibis. (Maida Barlow)

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