

OSNZ news

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.

No.52 SEPTEMBER, 1989

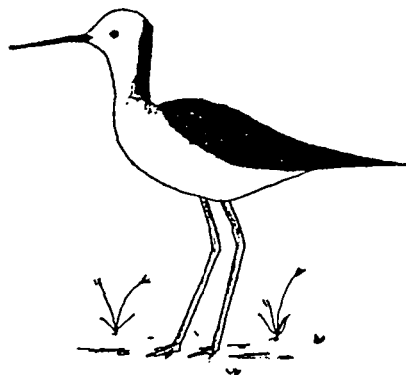
Note Deadline for the December issue will
be 20th November, 1989.

Seasonal Movements of Pied Stilts An OSNZ 50th Anniversary Project

During the breeding season the Pied Stilt has a wide distribution in New Zealand, occurring in a variety of shallow wetlands. The results of the Bird Mapping Scheme and OSNZ wader counts indicate after breeding there is generally a movement coastwards and northwards, with large numbers of stilts occurring in the large harbours of the Auckland region. Are there any patterns to these movements and do individuals follow the same route and favour the same harbours from year-to-year? These are some of the questions which the Society's 50th Anniversary project aims to answer.

This study is not going to be easy. In fact, just about every aspect of it will be more difficult than the Banded Dotterel project. Firstly, there has been little recent banding of Pied Stilts to give us a head start, whereas hundreds of Banded Dotterels were already banded before that international project got under way. Secondly, more effort is needed to catch Pied Stilts than Banded Dotterels, and it requires people working in pairs rather than solo. Thirdly, it will be difficult to get colour-band recoveries because, except at a few exceptional localities, Pied Stilts tend to be scattered around harbours and lagoons even during high tide. There is the challenge.

If you are still with us, then you deserve the good news. Colour bands will be placed on the tibia – i.e. above the "knee" joint. This should increase the potential for sightings, both by increasing the visibility of bands and reducing the tainting of colours (which happens to tarsus bands in some of the sludge areas stilts call home).



If we can overcome the expected teething problems early this season, then I'm sure that this programme will bear fruit. In fact it might even follow the Banded Dotterel project in going international. Two recent events in Australia have kindled a trans-Tasman interest in stilts. The first of these was the discovery in Tasmania of a node E stilt (see RAOU Newsletter 80 – June 1989). The second event was the Australasian Wader Study Group recognising the need to carry out work on Australian endemic waders, and it included Pied Stilts on that list. One thing that I've wondered about in recent years, is the level of Pied Stilt movement, if any, between Australia and New Zealand. Perhaps it won't be long before that will be tested.

In the meantime, however, we need to concentrate on getting a decent sample of stilts colour-banded in New Zealand.

Members can participate in this project in a variety of ways – by assisting with the colour-banding, reporting the location of Pied Stilt nesting colonies to your RR, and

checking legs of Pied Stilts for colour-bands. A national network of regional coordinators has been set up and these are the people who will be responsible for banding in each region. If you want to help with banding then contact your RR and find out who is your local coordinator. All reports of colour-banded Pied Stilts should be sent to me at: P.O. Box 5521, Auckland.

Let's make this 50th Anniversary project a huge success!

RAY PIERCE
National Co-ordinator, Pied Stilt study

Don Merton QSM



D. V. Merton holding Kakapo

The name Don Merton is synonymous with Black Robin. However, his name is tied to many other endangered species and conservation projects.

Don was interested in birds as a youngster. He kept a few cage birds and even in those early days tried a little "egg manipulation" – raiding local Goldfinch nests and putting their eggs under his canaries! Don's interest in birds was noticed by the late Archie Blackburn, then RR for Gisborne and later President of the Ornithological Society. Archie's encouragement and direction was responsible for Don joining the Wildlife Service as a trainee.

Don's training involved all facets of the work of the Wildlife Service, but his goal was to work with protected fauna. Shortly after completing his training he had a trip overseas on a Churchill Fellowship, during which he visited many wildlife institutions. He also worked for a period as a technician with the CSIRO Wildlife Research in Australia, studying the Lyrebird.

As protected fauna officer in Auckland he had his first experience with endangered species work – NI Saddleback transfers. This was followed shortly after by the rescue operations for SI Saddleback, Stead's Bush Wren and Stewart Island Snipe, following the invasion of Big South Cape Island by rats. Then he took a major role, as field leader, in the Ornithological Society's 25th Anniversary expedition to the Kermadecs. During the 1970s he had 2 years secondment to the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service as Conservator of Wildlife on Christmas Island.

His work with the Black Robin and Kakapo are well known. The former is now past the critical point in its recovery and Don is hoping to be able to concentrate on Kakapo. Despite these major commitments Don has continued to contribute to the international scene. He was successful in translocating the Noisy Scrub-bird in Western Australia and more recently he led the team which removed rabbits from Round Island, Mauritius.

Don's friends and acquaintances were all thrilled to hear he had been awarded the Queens Service Medal in the Birthday Honours. All agree it was a fitting award for years of deication to the conservation of endangered species.

Congratulations, well done.

BRIAN D. BELL, President

Science Fair winners

So far this year we have been advised of three young people who have been successful in winning the award for the best bird display at their recent local science fair. Each receives a prize of a book token and a years subscription to the Society.

We congratulate:

Mark Allan, Wairarapa
Adam Dowsett, Dunedin
Richard Goodwin, Dunedin

We welcome them to the Society and look forward to seeing their names appear associated with future activities of the Society.

BRIAN D. BELL, President

More on the 50th Anniversary celebrations

It is with great pleasure that we include the following photograph of some of the earliest members of the Society, about to cut the anniversary cake during the 50th Anniversary celebrations at Whangaparaoa. They are, from left to right: R.B. Sibson, B.A. Ellis, P.C. Bull, Lady Fleming, and E.G. Turbott.

Prof. Brian Marples replies

At the 50th Anniversary AGM the meeting conveyed its greetings to Prof. Brian Marples, one of the main movers in the formation of the Society. In his reply to the President, Professor Marples says:

" Thank you so much for your letter and especially for sending the wonderful greeting from members at the AGM. I was very thrilled to get it, please convey my return greetings and best wishes to all when opportunity offers. I was so pleased to hear what a success the 50th AGM seems to have been and wish I could have been there. The Society is growing so well and doing so much. I am always very interested to read Notornis and find out what is going on, what a comparison since the little typed publication which we started with! I don't deal with birds myself these days except to record those which frequent the garden, and that idea started out of the records I used to make years ago of the three different Bellbird songs in Dunedin.

Please give my greetings to any members who remember me, and again many thanks for your letter. All the best."

Yours

-(Signed)-Brian-Marples-



(Photo. Bev Woolley)

Regional recorders

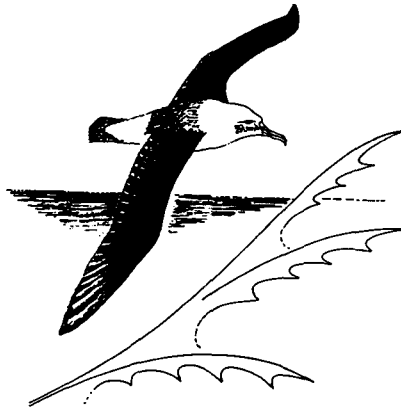
For the information of members the following are the Society's regional recorders.

Far North/Northland: Terry Toohill, 4/35 Kamo Road, Whangarei. Phone 488-777. Auckland: Mike Graham, 9 Grendon Road, Titirangi, Auckland 7. South Auckland: Barbara Burch, 27 Beihler's Road, Weymouth, Manurewa. Phone 267-4363. Waikato: David Riddell, Gordonton Road, RD1, Taupiri. Bay of Plenty: Paddy Latham, 72 Simpsons Road, Papamoa. Phone 420-406. Gisborne/Wairoa: Geoff. Foreman, 6 Rimu Drive, Wairoa. Phone (0724)8370. Taranaki: Vacant. Manawatu: Sybil Creswell, 98 Manawatu Road, Palmerston North. Phone 75-271. Wanganui: Graham Randle, 44 Koromiko Road, Wanganui. Phone 50-186. Hawkes Bay: Mary Craven, cnr Havelock & Norton Roads, Hastings. Phone 87-583. Wairarapa: Tenick Dennison, 129 Renall Street, Masterton. Phone (059)85200. Wellington: Kerry Oates, 12 Jackson Terrace, Porirua. Phone 379126. Nelson: Gail Quayle, 6 Tresillian Avenue, Nelson. Phone 520-456. Marlborough: Beverley North, PO Box 341, Blenheim. West Coast: Richard Stocker, Iveagh Bay Road, RD1, Kumara. Phone 80-535. Canterbury: Andrew Crossland, 46 Frensham Crescent, Christchurch 6. Phone (03)893-964. Otago: A. Hocken, c/o Oamaru Public Hospital, Oamaru. Southland: Maida Barlow, 38 Filleul Street, Invercargill. Phone (021)83-580. SUE TRIGGS, Secretary

Beach Patrollers

In 1988, 7545 dead seabirds were found from 3295 km covered. This is a rate of 2.3 birds per km—a fairly average result. From the cards received to date (early July), it seems that the seabirds fared well in the first half of 1989. From January to June 2423 birds were found from 894 km covered, a rate of 2.7 birds per km. There was a minor wreck of Grey-faced Petrels on Bay of Plenty beaches, and Little Blue Penguins on Bay of Plenty and Auckland East beaches in January 1989.

Much of the year has now passed, so I expect many patrollers have results of patrols in notebooks. Please put the details onto cards and pass them to your RR or send them to me. Invariably, I receive many cards in the year after the patrol took place. It would make the processing of the information less hectic before the



AGM if completed cards were sent in within a couple of months of patrols.
RALPH POWLESLAND,
Convenor, Beach Patrol Scheme

Beach Patrol Guide

This guide is intended as a helpful starting point for patrollers who enjoy walking beaches and are curious about the stormcast birds they find.

The laminated cover is weatherproof and the format will readily allow extra sheets of information to be incorporated. It is expected that new or amended information will be issued from time to time.

The guide is priced at \$8.50 and is available from: Stella Rowe, 1 Corrin Street, Hamilton.

STELLA ROWE

Envelope stickers

The Ornithological Society requires more publicity. For this reason Council produced envelope stickers relating to the 50th Anniversary of the Society, for use on members correspondence.

FIFTY YEARS OF BIRD STUDY 1939-1989



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND

P O Box 12397
Wellington



Drawings by Frank Bailey

BEACH PATROLLERS' GUIDE TO STORMCAST SEABIRDS (PROCELLARIIFORMES) FOUND IN NEW ZEALAND

Stella Rowe
Adrian Plant

The sticker (see example above) is brown on white and is available from Brian D. Bell, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, at \$10 for a box of 250. Most RRs also have these available to sell to members. You may purchase them in box lots at the above price or in strips of 20 for \$1.

BRIAN D. BELL, President

OSNZ sweatshirts and T-shirts

Sweatshirts and T-shirts with an OSNZ design on them are still available. The design is of a Takahe, coloured green, blue and red, with "Ornithological Society, New Zealand, 50th Anniversary 1939-1989" in black about and below it (see front page of this issue). However, the "50th Anniversary 1939-1989" portion will not be on shirts printed in 1990. I expect many members would be glad to receive one as a Christmas present!

The garment colours available are jade (dark green), candymint (pastel green), sky (light blue), seaspray (pastel blue), lilac, pink, and white. Costs per garment, which includes postage and a contribution to OSNZ funds, are:

Size	6,8,10,12,14	SM,M,OS,XOS,XXOS
Sweatshirt	\$26.50	\$35.00
T-shirt	\$13.50	\$19.50

If you want a shirt, send your requirements with payment to: R.G. Powlesland, 64 Roseneath Terrace, Wellington 1. RRs have order forms. Please make cheques payable to OSNZ. RALPH POWLESLAND

Banding Mail Bag

During the past year the Banding Office received a number of recoveries of particular interest.

There were a few long distance recoveries, the most exciting of which was perhaps that of a Knot (C-31141). The bird was banded as an adult of unknown sex by the Miranda Banders, at Kaipara Harbour on 28/2/87. It was captured alive in May 1987 (in the company of an Australian-banded Knot!) on Chongming Island, Shanghai, China (31° 40'N, 121° 50'E).

Also crossing the equator was a Sooty Shearwater (Z-6329), banded as a pullus at Tairoa Head on 24/4/78. It was recovered dead on 3/9/88 at Fort Stevens, Oregon, USA (46° 05'N, 124° 00'W), apparently as part of a large beach wreck. The report was accompanied by a video tape which we have not been able to watch. It is recorded in 'PAL', which is incompatible with the video players used in NZ.

A Banded Dotterel (B-54759), banded as an adult female at Lake Wainono on 29/9/85, was caught at Inverloch, Victoria, Australia (38° 37'S, 145° 45'E) on 14/5/88. The researchers who found it added an Australian band.

A Mallard (27-35149) died on 21/5/89, shortly after it was rescued from the attacks of a Wedge-tailed Eagle, near Bendameer, New South Wales, Australia (30° 53'S, 151° 10'E). The bird was banded as a juvenile male on 21/2/89 at Karere Lagoon, Manawatu.

Another Mallard (270-02408), banded under the Australian scheme as a juvenile of unknown sex on 28/8/82 at Norfolk Island (29° 02'S, 167° 57'E), timed its visit to NZ wrongly. It arrived just in time for the start of the duck shooting season and met its fate on the northern Wairoa River on 8/5/88.

Details of birds banded under overseas schemes are often slow in arriving, but here are a few for which we have received definite details.

Wandering Albatross (JO-4327) washed up rather decomposed at Pororari Beach, Punakaiki, in October 1988. It was banded as a chick of unknown sex on Marion Island in the southern ocean (46° 54'S, 37° 45'E) on 31/8/86.

Northern Giant Petrel (123-0076) was banded as a chick of unknown sex on 23/2/89, by the British Antarctic Survey team on Bird Island, South Georgia (54° 00'S, 38° 02'W). It was

recovered freshly dead on Whatipu Beach near Auckland on 9/5/89, just 77 days after banding.

We have finally received information from East Germany on the 2 Giant Petrels recovered in 1985. Both these birds were banded as chicks of unknown sex at the South Shetlands, Antarctica (62° 14'S, 58° 59'W) in February 1985. 221045, was washed up dead near Oakura, Taranaki on 15/9/85 and 220982 was found freshly dead on the Foveaux Track near Bluff on 21/8/85.

MICHAEL WAKELIN

1990 Banding Programme at Ward

It is planned to continue the banding and training at Ward, Marlborough, in summer/autumn 1990. Although dates have not been finalised the schedule should enable members to plan their participation.

The probable dates are:
20-22 January (Wellington Anniversary weekend);
3-6 February (weekend and Waitangi Day);
17-18 March (weekend);
13-16 April (Easter).

~~You will note an effort has been made to have long weekends whenever possible.~~ This ensures that the maximum time can be spent banding and undertaking other studies. Remember that we will have to check Lake Grassmere for colour-banded stilts and other waders.

Further information is available from: Brian D. Bell, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington.

Another visit to Macauley Island

We made a return visit to Macauley Island, in the Kermadec Group, from 21 November to 8 December 1988 (for an account of our previous visit see *OSNZ news* 50). On this visit migratory seabirds had returned and the island was seething with petrels. None of the 3 most common species of petrel had laid, but burrow cleaning and courtship were well advanced. Our main work involved censusing the seabird populations and determining the effects of revegetation on the birds. Only preliminary census results are given here.

Black-winged Petrels were the most abundant seabird on the island. Birds were seen in flight over the plateau at all times of the day, with a

minimum of several hundred visible at one time. We estimated the total population on the island at 2.5 million pairs.

The next 2 most abundant species were the White-naped Petrel, with about 50 000 pairs, and the Wedge-tailed Shearwater, with about 40 000 pairs. Both these species were most active at night, but the Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were also ashore occasionally during the day. Macauley Island is now the only known breeding site of the White-naped Petrel. This species used to nest on Raoul Island, but was exterminated there by cats and rats.

Sooty Terns also nested abundantly on the island - we found 9 colonies and counted about 10 000 eggs. Grey Ternlets were less obvious than they were during our September trip, when we estimated that there were about 10 000 pairs. By December, they were at the end of their breeding cycle, because well-grown chicks and fledglings were common. Small numbers of White-capped Noddies were nesting and 50 nests contained eggs through to well-grown chicks.

The nesting season of Masked Boobies was still in full swing, with some nests containing well-grown chicks and others fresh eggs. About 100 pairs nest on Macauley Island, but amazingly we have now recaptured 11 boobies that were banded on Norfolk Island, which lies some 1300 km to the west.

We counted up to 130 Red-tailed Tropicbirds in flight at one time, but the species had not begun laying at the time of this visit.

The nesting season of the Kermadec Little Shearwater appeared to be nearly over, as we found freshly dead corpses of chicks near to fledging but saw no live birds. Several hundred pairs probably nest on Macauley. Kermadec Petrels had just begun laying when we arrived on the island - probably less than 50 pairs nest here.

One of the highlights of the trip was the capture of a White-faced Storm Petrel while we were spotlighting. The bird was an adult with a largely bare brood patch and soil on its bill, which strongly suggested that it was either breeding or attempting to breed close by. Presumably it came from either the steep cliffs on Macauley Island or from nearby Haszard Islet. Currently there is debate as to whether or not the species breeds on the Kermadecs, as prior to our visit there were no substantiated records of live birds ashore.

The taxonomic position of the Kermadec White-faced Storm Petrel is also debated. The bird we caught was relatively large and square-tailed, like the Australian race. Although its rump was very worn, it appeared mainly white—unlike the N.Z. subspecies which has a grey rump. Thus it seems probable that a distinct “white-rumped” Kermadec race does exist. However, this needs to be tested by detailed comparisons with birds of the Australian race.

There had been a considerable reduction in the number of landbirds on the island since our September visit. Kermadec Parakeet numbers had declined to perhaps only 5 to 10% of those that we saw on our earlier trip and many corpses were found. The only other landbirds seen on this trip were Starlings, but their numbers also appeared to be lower and dead and dying birds were seen. There is no permanent fresh water on Macauley Island and a very dry October probably resulted in the decline of the landbird populations.

Golden Plovers, Turnstones, and 2 tattlers were the only wader species seen.

The spectacular regeneration of plants on the island, since goats were removed in 1966-70, did not appear to be adversely affecting the numbers of nesting seabirds. Even in the densest areas of Cyperus sedge, petrels were nesting abundantly. However, the continuing spread of Cyperus will probably restrict the surface nesting seabirds, such as the boobies and Sooty Terns, to the cliff edges.

Black-winged Petrels were the most widespread birds that we saw while travelling to and from the Kermadecs. Some of our most interesting sightings at sea were: several thousand Cook's Petrels north of Great Barrier Island on 21 November; 16+ Black Petrels about the ship north of Great Barrier Island and the occasional bird as far out as 600 km NE of Auckland; up to 26 Grey-faced Petrels following the ship on the first day. We saw our most southerly White-naped Petrel, Kermadec Petrel, and Sooty Tern about 400 km SW of Macauley Island.

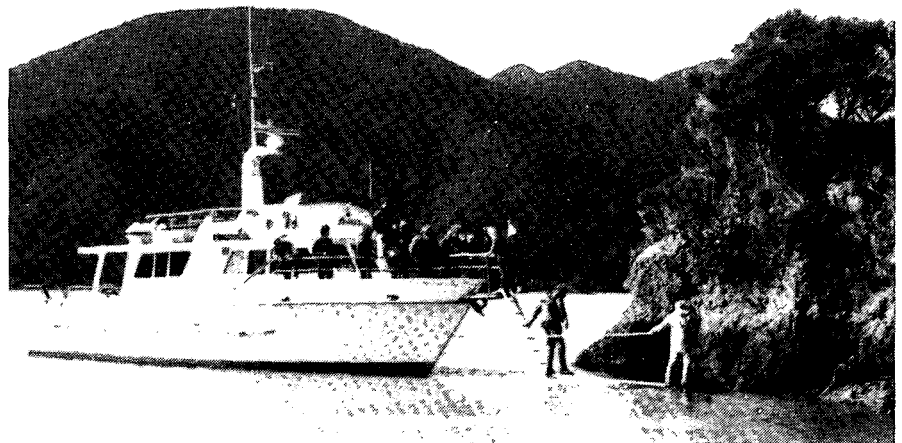
The Captain and crew of HMNZ Southland very kindly provided transport to and from the Kermadecs.

ALAN TENNYSON, GRAEME TAYLOR & PAUL SCOFIELD



The old house on Maud Island

(Photo: M. Neverman)



Disembarking from "Ariki Tai".

(Photo: M. Neverman)

Maud Island Trip 14-16 October 1988

On Friday 14 October a motley crowd led by Brian Bell set off in breezy conditions from Wellington to Picton. Birdwatching began immediately and interest quickened as experienced spotters identified for us the first group of Fluttering Shearwaters, followed by a Giant Petrel, 3 Shy Mollymawks, Cape Pigeons, a flock of Fairy Prions, a Sooty Shearwater, and a possible Westland Black Petrel. We also saw Common Dolphins and once in the Marlborough Sounds, nesting Pied Shags and a Red-billed Gull colony.

Unfortunately (for some), bad weather changed the venue from Stephens Island to Maud Island. Early Saturday morning saw the repacking of packs (a rodent control measure) before a short walk to the wharf, where we were joined by South Island members. Spotting continued as Ariki Tai headed for Nydia Bay, where we disembarked and started up a track through attractive beech forest with glimpses back to the inlet.

A moderate climb took us to the summit for a windswept view of bothsides of the ridge. On the descent, Jean saw a Black Fantail carrying food. a piedmewas noticed nearby and with Brian directing operations, Ralph and team set off on a nest search. The nest, in supplejack, held 4 chicks. Later Ralph also found a Silvereye's nest (with 4 eggs), attached to 2 tree fern fronds.

Finally, we reached Tennyson Inlet for a most welcome lunch. Entertainment was provided by the fierce winds whipping wave crests off the sea and hurling sheets of spray high in the air across the bay.

After a tricky mooring at Maud we were met by kindly 'Buck' Bucknell, who loaded the food onto his tractor, while we climbed the steep hillside towards the very old homestead. Despite threatening rain and extremely strong winds (one member was whipped off his feet), we set off around the island. The best sightings came at the end—3 Takahe picking at the grass. We were watching 'Mrs White', with last

season's chick, Becca, and Pippi, a season older. 'Mr White' was ill and confined to Buck's hospital area. We enjoyed a wonderful dinner, despite having left one food box on the boat, and the kindness of Jean, Buck's wife, in making us apple shortcake was greatly appreciated.

Later, in pouring rain, a small group followed Brian up the muddy forest slopes behind the house to look for Hamilton's frogs. One of the party, who failed to catch a warning, caught a handful of stinging nettle instead! After supper nothing could keep us from our beds, though the heavy rain and gale-force winds threatened to bring the house down around us.

To wake to the calling of the Takahe is a truly memorable experience. The sun shone and the wind had dropped as a small band of early morning enthusiasts watched Mrs White and Becca feeding nearby. Tuis flew noisily in and out of the tall gums and the sun on the forested hillside picked out the white breasts of Native Pigeons. Overhead we were lucky to see a pair of the pigeons perform their exciting aerial display. Soon Shane discovered a Little Blue Penguin, complete with chick, sitting tight under the veranda.

Our next highlight was to be a visit to Duffers Reef, one of the breeding areas of the endemic King Shag. Beyond Maud the sea roughened, but our minds were occupied with frequent sightings of Fluttering Shearwaters and shags (mainly Spotted, in striking breeding plumage). The Chetwode Islands were now in view, then Rangitoto Islands, and finally the distant shape of Stephens (Brian claimed to see a Tuatara on a ridge!).

Even our slow, deliberate approach and circuits put the 40 King Shags up several times, but we had plenty of opportunity to observe them in flight, and again as they settled back on the reef. It was sobering to think that this is one of the world's rarest shags, with a population of less than 500, and we realised how lucky we were to see them. Here too someone spotted a Diving Petrel in flight.

Bird Island, our next stop, had many pairs of Black-backed Gulls, a pair of Variable Oystercatchers, a small colony of Spotted Shags, and a dozen Little Shags. The latter took off and circled high above us.

Passing many headlands and inlets, we headed back to Maud and lunch. Jean Bucknell had come up the time with freshly baked scones, dear lady! Too soon we reluctantly left for Havelock.

We had travelled only a short distance when we ran into a feeding of Fluttering Shearwaters, 20+ Flesh-footed Shearwaters, numerous Black-backed Gulls, and many White-fronted Terns. The terns were closely followed by an Arctic Skua. Our boat circled the area many times as we watched this exciting spectacle.

About half an hour later we came upon a second and even larger feeding frenzy. This time the gulls, terns and shearwaters (many of them bobbing in the water beside the boat) were joined by a number of Gannets, which plummeted into the water near us. In the midst of all the turmoil a school of Dusky Dolphins arched out of the water and, twisting and turning, flashed beneath the boat as they pursued their prey. To end the performance 3 of them launched themselves vertically out of the water in front of the boat. None of us could believe our incredible luck.

Then it was on to Waimaru Point, where the Gannets sat on mounds much larger than those at Muriwai. It was also interesting to note that a few had begun to nest on the headland itself.

Afterwards it was full throttle back to Havelock, where we farewelled our South Island contingent.

Sincere thanks to Jenny Hawkins for her fine catering, and to Brian Bell for his great organisation of an outstanding weekend. The lucky participants were: B.D. Bell, M. Bellingham, K. Brown, J. Bullock, N. Bray, R. & S. Cotter, J. Hawkins, H. Heinekamp, C. & J. Jackson, P. & P. Jenkins, R. Lai, V. Lowrie, J. Luke, M. Neverman, R. O'Brien, R. Powlesland, R. & P. Rider, D. Rodgers, B. Tennyson.

M. NEVERMAN & V. LOWRIE

Brown Creeper feeding on berries

While staying at Akaroa during March this year I observed Brown Creepers feeding. On 9/3 a pair with 2 fledglings were seen to feed regularly on coprosma berries. The adults would eat one or two berries and then feed several to the fledglings. Insects would then be gleaned for about 30 minutes before the birds returned to feed on the berries again. Occasionally an adult held a berry in its claw and broke the skin with its beak before either swallowing the berry or feeding it to a fledgling.

The weather was warm on 9/3 and even warmer the following day and the

Brown Creepers continued to feed regularly on the berries. On 11 & 12/3 the weather was cooler and although the Brown Creepers continued to feed in the same area, I saw very few berries eaten.

Perhaps the berries eaten on 9 & 10/3 were for their moisture rather than their nutrition.

PETER REESE

Conservation group receives substantial grant

To assist with its work at the Sinclair Wetlands, near Dunedin, the waterfowl and wetlands conservation group Ducks Unlimited has received a grant of \$25,000 from the N.Z. Lottery Board.

Ducks Unlimited aims to create N.Z.'s major environmental attraction at the Sinclair Wetlands and has already built a large educational centre on the property. The educational centre was opened by the Governor-General last year and includes a viewing lounge, visitors centre and accommodation, tearooms, lecture rooms, research facilities, and the manager's residence.

In addition to the educational centre, public attractions will include, walkways to hides which overlook the 310 ha of wetlands and the largest captive waterfowl collection ever assembled in N.Z. The wetlands support nearly 70 species of birds, including many rare wetland birds, such as Fernbird, Bittern, Marsh Crane, Spotless Crane, Scaup, and the occasional Brown Teal. Many of these can be readily seen from the walkways and hides.

The total cost of the project is some \$400,000 and Ducks Unlimited is very close to achieving this amount and the complex should be fully open to the public later this year.

NEIL HAYES

Miranda Banders

Thanks to a grant from the OSNZ Projects Assistance Fund and a lot of hard work from Kane Glass, Stephen Davies and Flora Thirkettle in particular we have been able to construct 2 new 20m x 10m cannon nets and cannons to help us with our studies of migrant waders.

Our loyal band of netters stuck with us during several unsuccessful netting attempts, caused mainly by technical problems. However, towards the end of the 1988-89 summer we obtained 2 very good catches.

Although we now have 3 nets it is not our aim to fire them all at once, but to set out 2 or 3 in the roosting fields and then fire the one net into which we can move the birds.

In spite of the large number of birds in the project area at Jordans Farm on the Kaipara Harbour (4000+ Bar-tailed Godwits and 4000+ Lesser Knots) we have found that the birds will only come off the mudflats at very high tides (4+ m). Also, they do not like to be "walked" once in their roosting field, and so nets are set only after much consideration.

A 20m x 10m net laid out on a suburban lawn looks huge, but in a 50 ha field it looks ridiculously small. On our 2 good catches this season it was the secondary net which provided the success.

We are continuing our banding of Lesser Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits in association with the Australasian Wader Study Group (AWSG), to learn more about the birds and their migrations. The measurement and weight data that we record are sent to Mark Barter at the AWSG. The results of his work appear regularly in *The Stilt*, the AWSG publication.

On 27/12/88 at Jordans we caught 126 Bar-tailed Godwits. As they are considered to be a difficult species to handle, 126 is considered a good catch. None of these birds had been previously banded.

On 23/1/89 we started by moving 40+ Wrybill into one of the net areas to act as decoys. Soon 500+ Lesser Knots joined them, but unfortunately they forced 10 or so Wrybills to move over and stand on the furled net. Of course we could not fire because of the risk of injury to the Wrybills and as anyone who has observed this species will know, they will only move when one walks up to them and politely asks this favour. I did this, but of course the Lesser Knots flew off. I had a quiet word to the decoys about their role and 2 hours later 2000+ Lesser Knots returned, with some landing in the catching area. We were successful in catching 778 of these.

16 of the birds were retraps - 11 of these had been banded in the same field on 28/2/87 and one of these was banded originally at Jordans on 2/3/80; 3 had been banded at Jordans on 2/3/80, but had not been recaptured until now; and the last 2 were banded at Queenscliff (Victoria, Australia), one on 8/11/86 and the other on 1/10/88. The last bird adds further proof to the suggestion that at least some of our Lesser Knots arrive each year via Victoria.

We have banded over 1400 Lesser Knots since February 1987, but have had only one recovery - a bird found dead at Parengarenga Harbour in November 1987. It had been banded as an adult in February 1987, so was probably returning from the Arctic when it died.

The Miranda Banders will be in action later this year. Anyone wishing to become involved should contact me at 231 Forest Hill Road, Waiaatarua, Auckland 8.

ADRIAN RIEGEN

Trip south

When is a car car not a car car? When it is a Kaka or course!

While travelling south about 2 km north of Lake Grassmere on the afternoon of 23/5/89 I had an unusual experience. As I came over the brow of a hill and headed down a straight slope, about 100 m away and flying straight up the opposing lane about 1.5 m off the road was a Kaka. It was just like meeting an opposing car, with the Kaka and I passing within a few metres of each other. Through the rear vision mirror I saw it still travelling straight on up the road.

Other highlights of this trip were being taken around Otago Peninsula by Mary Anne Thompson and seeing a Northern Royal Albatross circling Tairoa Head, plus Stewart Island Shags and a Yellow-eyed Penguin at Sandfly Bay. Another highlight was a N.Z. Falco sitting on a telephone pole by the roadside, 14 km east of Lake Heron.

JIM HAMILTON

Common birds, unusual plumages

In the past 6 months or so we have seen several common birds in unusual plumage. The first and most interesting of these was a Red-billed Gull seen in Whangarei during December 1988. This bird was grey everywhere a normal Red-billed Gull is white. Even the normally white windows in the black primaries were grey. The bird was amongst a flock of normal coloured Red-billed Gulls and had very worn plumage, particularly the flight feathers. The bill and legs were red-black not the usual bright red, but there were no brown spots on the upperwings as found in juveniles. We have not seen the bird since.

The second unusual bird was an albino Little Blue Penguin. It was found dead on Kauri Mountain Beach, near Whangarei, on 13/1/89 just after

Cyclone Delilah. The bird was completely white but for a few black flecks on the back. The feet, lower mandible, and flippers were pink, while the upper mandible was whitish. A lot of pink skin showed through the feathers on the flippers. Unfortunately the eyes had deteriorated by the time we found the bird, so eye colour could not be determined.

The last unusual bird was a white Spotted Shag seen on 6/5/89, on a section of rocky coast several kms north of Kaiaua on the wet side of the Firth of Thames. It was in a flock of 20-30 Spotted Shags roosting on large rock. The birds later flew off across the Firth towards the Coromandel Peninsula.

PAT & KAREN MILLER

Unusual occurrence of Pied Shag

On 4/8/88 I saw a juvenile Pied Shag standing at the kerb in a suburban road in Taradale, Hawke's Bay. The bird appeared uninjured and was quite unafraid of approaching humans, which it eyed with apparent disinterest before continuing to preen. A nearby householder told me that earlier that morning the bird had slept for at least 3 hours on his lawn. The bird presumably flew off shortly after I saw it because it was nowhere to be seen when I returned 20 minutes later.

Pied Shags are seldom seen in Hawke's Bay.

JULIET PEARSON

Birdwatching in the north

Over the past 5 months or so I have had the pleasure of many birdwatching outings in the Auckland region.

The summer started on a good note with the sighting of a possible snipe at my local bird haunt of Meola Reef on 6/11/88. Several trips were made to the Ambury Park-Mangere Ponds area and birds seen here include Spotted Shags, Royal Spoonbills, hundreds of Grey Teal and Mallards, many Shoveler, a single Brown Teal, an occasional juvenile Banded Dotterel, up to 250 Wrybills, a Black-tailed Godwit, a tattler, a Marsh Sandpiper, a Black Stilt, Turnstones, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, and a lone Pomarine Skua.

The highlight of the Firth of Thames wader census on 27/12/88, which was completed in wind and rain, was a dead Black petrel found by Tony Habraken. A few Wrybills, stints, and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers

At Western Springs, the number of Coots had risen to 25 on 3/12/88, however, sightings of 3 possible Tree Martins could not be verified.

A trip to Tapora on 9-10/12/88 for the wader census provided many non-wader highlights, including nesting shags, Spotless Crakes, Fernbird, Bittern, and Brown Kiwi. Cook's Petrels flew overhead at night.

Patrols of Muriwai Beach have produced few dead birds. However, in January, in mill-pond seas, Arctic Skua, Grey-faced Petrel, Buller's Shearwater, and Fluttering Shearwater were seen flying offshore.

The Australian Little Grebes appear to have left South Kereta Lake, none was seen on a visit with Michael Taylor on 18/12/88 or the following day with Phil Battley and Phil Knightsbridge. However, 5 Scaup, 15 Caspian Terns, Little Black Shags, and several Dabchicks were seen.

A visit to Pollen Island on 30/1/89 provided an extraordinary sighting of an American Golden Plover, with 3 Pacific Golden Plovers. The identification of the American bird was confirmed by Adrian Riegen a few days later and is now being considered by the Rare Birds Committee. All 4 plovers were seen again on 19/2, along with 2500 Bar-tailed Godwits and 4000 Lesser Knots.

Finally, a university trip to Leigh from 23-26/2/89 provided an opportunity for sea-watching. Among the 3 common shearwaters seen were a Reef Heron, a Little Shearwater, a possible Long-tailed Skua, an Arctic Skua, and a strange storm petrel. A day-trip to Little Barrier on 24/2 provided the usual highlights of Robin, Stitchbird, Brown Teal, and Saddleback on the island, while Sooty Shearwater, Pycroft's/Cook's Petrels, and a Black-winged Petrel were seen during the crossings.

CHRIS JOWETT

Smashing snails

I noted with interest the reports of Starlings hammering snails in much the same way as thrushes (*OSNZ news* 47 & 49).

Recently I have come across evidence of 2 additional species of snail taken by what I presume are Song Thrushes. These are the mudsnail *Amphibola crenata*, and the introduced pondsnail *Lymnaea stagnalis*. The pondsnail occurs in huge numbers in

shallow ponds at Oreti Beach near Invercargill and these ponds dry up periodically, leaving the snails vulnerable to predation. Rocks in the vicinity of these ponds can be surrounded with broken shells.

The mudsnail must be a very difficult customer for a thrush. The shell is very strong and I would think that the only bird capable of breaking in would be a moa, yet I have seen several stones on estuarine mudflats in Otago and Southland where the shells have been smashed. Could this be seagulls?

LLOYD ESLER

Gatherings of birds

Here are some correct terms for gatherings in the bird world.

A fall of Woodcocks; a wisp of Snipe; a murmuration of Starlings; an exaltation of larks; a siege of herons; a watch of Nightingales; a nide of Pheasants; a cast of hawks; a building of Rooks.

Can members recall any other correct terms?

JUDITH BEIRNE

Dotterel news

Banded Dotterels

Migration studies continue on this species. Bad weather in spring 1988 meant that we had to work hard to catch birds, and little more than 200 were banded. Nevertheless this total included many birds breeding in central N.Z. including Marlborough and Manawatu - 2 areas especially in need of coverage. Already several of these birds have been spotted on mudflats and roosts in different parts of the North Island, and it remains to be seen whether any were found wintering in Australia.

Meanwhile the banded sample has been improved in many other parts of the country, including Otago, North Canterbury and central North Island. Areas receiving banding coverage for the first time included East Cape, Auckland and the Far North.

Provided recoveries continue to come in at a fast rate, then regional banding will now cease. Some banding may continue to help answer some local migration questions and to enable comparisons with Black-fronted Dotterels (see below). Meanwhile, please keep checking those legs.

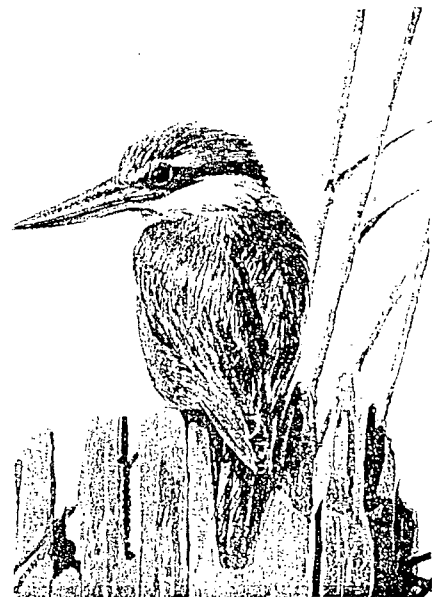
Black-fronted Dotterels

We have done some preliminary work on this species. Birds were colour banded in Wairarapa (24), Hawkes Bay (6), and Central Otago (2). All are individually colour-coded to enable us to study mate retention, nest site fidelity etc, as well as post-breeding movements. This study will also involve comparisons with local Banded Dotterels, e.g. nest-site selection, feeding sites, and interaction between the 2 species.

Please send details of all sightings of colour banded dotterels to: Dotterel Study Group, P.O. Box 5521, Auckland.

RAY PIERCE

N.Z. Kingfisher survey



The Otago and Southland regions are launching a NZ Kingfisher project where sightings, habitat information, and observations of behaviour are to be collected. It is hoped to have this project advertised in the local newspapers to invite the general public to participate, as part of the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the Society. Members from outside Otago and Southland who come our way between September 1989 and August 1990 are encouraged to participate. Your RR will be able to provide you with details.

MAIDA BARLOW & PETER SCHWEIGMAN

Books wanted

A slim chance perhaps, but has anyone got copies of Lars Jonsson's guides to European birds that they would like to sell? I am looking for vols 1,3 & 4 published as Penguin nature guides in

England, and Birds of the Mediterranean and Alps published by Croom Helm. Several foreign language editions are also available and would be quite acceptable.

Anyone able to help please contact Derek Onley, c/o Post Office, Lake Waiholo.

DEREK ONLEY

Kiwi call scheme

In the September 1986 *OSNZ news* a plea was made for members to help listen for kiwis and record the number of calls heard per hour on a card supplied. If no calls were heard cards were still needed to be filled out and returned. The aim of the scheme is to determine the national distribution of kiwis, relating their density to location and habitat, and to study changes in these populations with time.

The scheme was begun by the Wildlife Service and is now operating under DoC. Response has been mixed. Of a total of 700 cards returned relatively few have been received from the North Island. Cards returned are now on computer and distribution/density maps are beginning to be produced. *But many more are required.* If you can help please write to: Rogan Colbourne, Conservation Sciences Centre, Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 10420, Wellington.

NZ Dotterels cross Foveaux Strait

In December 1988, the NZ Dotterel Study Group began work on the southern population of the species, when John Dowding and Elaine Murphy visited Stewart Island and colour-banded 7 large chicks. On 29 January 1989, Maida Barlow found 2 of these birds among a flock of 12 NZ Dotterels at Awarua Bay in Southland. This was surprisingly rapid proof that NZ Dotterels as has long been assumed, can and do make the journey across Foveaux Strait to spend the autumn and winter in Southland.

The flock seen by Maida consisted of pale birds (including both banded birds) and moderate to brightly coloured birds, suggesting that adults and juveniles were present. Although no adults have been banded yet on Stewart Island, there seems every reason to suppose that some of them also undertake the journey across Foveaux Strait.

Juveniles from the northern population often wander widely in

their first winter; it will thus be interesting to try and follow the movements of the 2 banded birds in Southland in the months to come. A single bird in very pale plumage (assumed to be a juvenile) was also seen recently by Maida. It was with Golden Plovers and Banded Dotterels at Fortrose Estuary, 28 km east of the Awarua Bay site, on 10 February 1989.

JOHN DOWDING &
MAIDA BARLOW

Colour-banded Caspian Terns

Colour-banding of Caspian Terns at the Invercargill Estuary breeding colony began in 1987 and 72 birds have now been banded. This total is made up of 21 breeding adults, 21 chicks from 1987 (combination -/RM), and 30 chicks from 1988 (-/BM). Members are asked to check Caspian Terns for colour bands whenever possible.

I am especially interested to know the whereabouts of the birds which were banded as chicks. No 1987 chicks returned to the colony in 1988, although 15 of the 18 adults banded in 1987 were back at the breeding site.

The birds disperse in December/February, after breeding, and the adults begin to return in September. Good information is coming in already from some vigilant members. For example, an adult which was metal banded as a chick in 1969 and colour-banded on 25/11/87 was seen by Peter Langlands on 19/1/88 and by Andrew Crossland on 6/3/88 at the Bromley Sewage Ponds, Christchurch. This bird was back at the Invercargill Estuary by 29/10/88. Chicks banded in 1987 have been reported from the Tukituki River, Havelock North (Wayne & Margaret Twytle), Bromley Sewage Ponds (Peter Langlands & Andrew Crossland), and Waikawa Estuary (Derek Onley). A 1988 chick, banded sometime between 24/11/88 and 20/12/88 was seen by Andrew at the Bromley Sewage Ponds on 24/1/89. This bird was with a 1987 chick which was in adult plumage.

All sightings are valuable, and your co-operation is eagerly sought. Please report sightings either to your RR or direct to the Banding Office.

MAIDA BARLOW

Birds and horticulture

My experience with crop loss to birds is confined to viticulture, but through association with other crop

growers I hear of their problems. I feel that members should be aware of the growing confrontation between crop growers and some species of birds. Horticulturists, like most people, enjoy having birds around, but come crop ripening time war is declared.

Shelter and food are two main requirements for birds to survive. A drive through the countryside soon shows how much shelter has been planted. These shelter belts provide shelter for an increasing diversity of crops, which in turn provide food for birds practically all year round.

Species that cause financial loss to grape growers are Starling, Indian Myna, House Sparrow, Silvereye, Blackbird, Song Thrush, and "finches". "Finches" is apparently the Greenfinch, though I have not seen any finches damaging fruit. From a survey carried out in 1987 it was estimated that bird damage to grapes was over \$1.8 million. Add the cost of control (\$0.8 million) and the related lost wine production and the total loss to the NZ wine industry could top \$10 million per year.

Nashi growers placed brown paper bags over the fruit to prevent damage by House Sparrows, but the sparrows pecked through the bags. The only option to prevent bird damage to nashi is to install a bird exclusion canopy at a capital cost of \$12,000 per hectare.

Some examples of crop damage are:

Yellowhammer - eats seeds off strawberries thus ruining them.

House Sparrow - eats grapes, grain, peas, nashi etc.

Finches - eats spring buds of pip fruit and grapes, also may eat grapes.

There are many examples of damage to agricultural crops by ducks, geese, Weka, Pukeko, Pheasant etc., but where the real confrontation is occurring is in the high value horticultural crops.

Shelter belts provide roosting and nesting sites. While year-round food supplies are provided by a greater diversity of fruit types, longer picking seasons, and reject fruit left on orchard trees and the ground. All these factors contribute to the continuing population increase of some bird species. If the populations of bird species which damage fruit continue to increase there will be calls for drastic action to be taken.

JIM HAMILTON

N.Z. Kingfisher survey

The Otago and Southland regions are launching a NZ Kingfisher project where sightings, habitat information, and observations of behaviour are to be collected. It is hoped to have this project advertised in the local newspapers to invite the general public to participate, as part of the 50th Anniversary celebrations of the Society. Members from outside Otago and Southland who come our way between September 1989 and August 1990 are encouraged to participate. Your RR will be able to provide you with details.

MAIDA BARLOW &
PETER SCHWEIGMAN

Recent Reports

This report is compiled from records sent in from Auckland, South Auckland, Waikato, Hawkes Bay, Manawatu, Wellington, Wairarapa, Nelson, Canterbury, Otago, and Southland. Some of the gaps were filled by the odd roving reporter. Many thanks to all for their time and effort.

Please note that some of the records have yet to be confirmed by the Rare Birds Committee.

Records for inclusion in the December issue of *OSNZ news* must be with me by 20 November.

Mainly seabirds

Very few dead seabirds were found from June-Aug. A few Diving Petrels were picked up on the Waikato beaches in July and a Giant Petrel from Ocean Beach (Hawkes Bay) was unusual. A Wandering Albatross at Kariotahi (South Auckland) bearing an Australian band was a good find.

About 50 Diving Petrels and smaller numbers of Fairy Prions were close inshore off Kaikoura (Marlborough) in early July. Further offshore, on 8 July, c300 Cape Pigeons and c20 Shy Mollymawks were the commonest birds feeding around a fishing boat, small numbers of White-chinned, Westland Black, Grey and Giant Petrels, Antarctic Fulmars, Wandering and Royal Albatrosses, and Salvin's and Buller's Mollymawks were also recorded. In contrast, following a fishing boat off the Nuggets (Otago) were hundreds of adult and immature Buller's Mollymawks, a few Shy Mollymawks, and a solitary Cape Pigeon.

An estimated 120 pairs of Grey-faced Petrels bred on the Auckland West Coast. The Gannets at Farewell Spit (Nelson) had laid 2 eggs by 10 Aug.

At the Manawatu Estuary, the last Little Tern was seen on 25 Apr., but the

immature bird at Aramoana (Otago) was still present on 2 July.

A Gull-billed Tern has been around the Ahuriri Estuary (Hawkes Bay) for 3 years, on and off, and it was present again this winter until the end of June. On 28 July, however, one was seen 100 km south at Porangahau (Hawkes Bay) - presumably the same bird.

Following the autumn report of unusually large numbers of Black-fronted Terns in eastern and northern parts of the South island, the flock in Hawkes Bay increased to 66 by 16 July, many more than last year.

4 Caspian Terns, about 40 km inland, on the Clutha River at Clydevale (Otago) on 10 June were unusual.

Geese, Swans, Ducks, and ... Grebes

Canada Geese seem to be increasing in the North Island. For example, there were 49 at Masterton (Wairarapa) on 5 Aug. and 77 at Porangahau (where the previous highest count was 20) on 28 July.

Bromley S.P. (Canterbury) continues to attract larger and larger numbers of wildfowl. 1019 Black Swans there on 20 Aug. was the highest count yet. Wintering Scaup also find Bromley attractive with 230 in May, although all but 3 had left by 22 July.

Two stories from the Wairarapa show that wildfowl move around a lot and sometimes appear in the most unexpected places. Within 2 weeks, a pinioned pair of Scaup, released at Henley Ponds, Masterton, had attracted 2 other pairs, yet there are no previous records of Scaup from the area. The male Blue Duck that had been associating with Khaki Campbells on farmland in the Mangatarere Valley (Tararua) was transported to the Waiohine headwaters and released with a female. It preferred Khaki Campbell mates, however, and soon covered the 20 km or so back "home". On the other hand, Grey Teal seem reluctant to cross over to the West Coast of the South Island. 3 at the Orowaiti Estuary on 25 June was only the fifth record in the last 10 years.

A more encouraging sign for the survival of Blue Ducks was a pair on the upper Makaroro River (Hawkes Bay) on 21 May. This is the first report from the Ruahines in recent years.

Crested Grebes are increasingly moving to lowland Lake Forsyth (Canterbury) for the winter, with a maximum of 30 on 22 July. One Australian Little Grebe was present on Muriwai Dune Lake (Auckland) in July.

And from the Wanganui area, it seems as though we will finally get a convincing record of a pair of Northern Shoveler - without shooting them.

Herons, Ibises and Spoonbills

Apart from 140 at Rangiri (Waikato), Cattle Egret numbers appear to be lower than last year in many areas. In Hawkes Bay, after 2 brief sightings in May, 5 arrived at Fernhill-Puketapu on 10 June and there were 6 at L. Hatuma in early Aug. The usual flock did not appear in the Wairarapa and there have been only 14 birds briefly in several areas. 25 were at L. Horowhenua (Wellington) in June and only 9 appeared at Appleby (Nelson) this year. 8 near Westport (West Coast) on 25 June had increased to 16 by 4 Aug. In Otago and Southland, flocks may have moved around more than usual and there is some evidence of late arrivals. The Taieri (Otago) flock disappeared during June, but 18 reappeared in the usual area on 3 July and stayed into Aug. There were only about 6 birds in the Balclutha-Owaka (Otago) area in June-July, until 38 were reported at Stirling on 23 July and these stayed into Aug. The first arrivals in Southland were 20 on 4 May near Thornbury, but on 5 June 3 flocks totalling 43 birds flew over the area - possibly new arrivals.

Like the Little Egret at E. Clive and the Ahuriri (Hawkes Bay), which stayed into July, a bird at Motueka (Nelson) on 10 Aug. was the first for several years. One was at Wattle Down Ponds (South Auckland) from 9 July to 6 Aug. and another was at the Ashley River (Canterbury) from late June until at least 5 Aug. 1 of the 2 long-staying birds at L. Waiholo (Otago) was still present on 18 Aug.

Apart from the main winter flocks, there was a scattering of spoonbills throughout the North Island, with 2 at Kawhia (Waikato) on 25 June, 2 at Waikanae (Wellington), and 4 or 5 at L. Horowhenua. At the Ahuriri Estuary, 4 arrived by 19 Mar. and numbers built up to 20 by 17 June. These remained there into Aug. There were 62 in the flocks of the Nelson district, an increase of 1! The Avon-Heathcote (Canterbury) flock of 35 in late April decreased to 26 by early July, and to 19 by late Aug., but there was no indication of a return to the breeding colonies on the south east coast.

A Glossy Ibis associated with Cattle Egrets at Rangiri in June and July and there was at least 1 at L. Wairarapa on 11/12 June. The 3 birds near Berwick (Otago) pattered around the same paddock throughout the winter.

A Reef Heron that is usually present at the Ahuriri Est. from Jan. to Oct., returned yet again this year and 2 were reported from Mataikoria (Wairarapa) in May.

The 3 Bitterns reported last autumn at E. Clive were still present in June and July and 1 was at Whitehall (Waikato), an unusual locality, on 8 June.

Waders

A few of the rarer waders stayed through the winter. 2 Curlews were at the Waimea Est. (Nelson) on 23 May (unusual also because they were away from Farewell Spit) and there was 1 in July on the southern Manukau (S. Auckland). There was also a whimbrel at Manukau and another 2 at Kawhia on 25 June. A Hudsonian Godwit, which arrived last year at the Avon-Heathcote Est. was still present in August, but the Terek Sandpiper from there may have moved to L. Ellesmere (Canterbury), where 1 was seen in June. 3 Curlew Sandpipers were also at Ellesmere and there was 1 at Manukau on 8 July. A Marsh Sandpiper at Miranda (S. Auckland) was in full breeding plumage in June.

There were 6 Black or hybrid Stilts at Kawhia on 25 June and 13 there on 23 July. 2 Black and 6 hybrids stayed nearer home at L. Ellesmere through June and July.

The wandering NZ Dotterel at the Avon-Heathcote was still there in late Aug.

Several North Island areas reported high numbers of Spurwinged Plovers. The 60+ in June around Auckland was three times the previous highest total. There were 71, also in June, at the Firth of Thames (S. Auckland) and a flock of 31 flying over Napier (Hawkes Bay) on 17 June. These counts indicate the big build-up in numbers in the last few years. While birds were still flocking e.g., 90+ at Winton (Southland) on 28 July, others had begun to breed. Chicks were found near Nelson at the end of July, at Sinclair Wetlands (Otago) on 1 Aug., and at Henley Ponds on 5 Aug.

The Pied Oystercatcher flocks left the Auckland harbours in the last week of July, but Canterbury birds were returning to their breeding areas early in the month and some coastal Southland birds were exploring territories in late June. Birds in territories along the Lorneville-Dinton Road (Southland) increased from 6 pairs on 20 July to 18 pairs and 2 singles by 11 Aug.

A Black-fronted Dotterel at the Kaikourai Est. (Otago) in July could have come from the small breeding population inland at Outram. This year's census at Napier and Porangahau produced only 13 birds, compared with 120 last year, but they may well have been elsewhere as the 86 inland at L. Hatuma on 28 July suggests.

The rest

NZ Falcons were reported widely from farmland and even urban areas during the winter. In the Waikato, 2 appeared at Waingora and 1 at Pukekawa in Apr. One was at Rukuhia from 8 to 11 May and at the end of July, and another flew along the river at Hamilton on 21 June. In South Auckland, birds were seen at Orene and Bombay in Aug. and an immature was at Havelock North (Hawkes Bay) in July, with yet another at Otokia (Otago) on 2 Aug.

A Barn Owl has been seen several times over the last few years in Christchurch. The latest records are from the Travis Swamp/Burwood area in May and June. Is it the same bird seen leaving a ship in Lyttelton Harbour in 1985? Also in Christchurch, a Kaka was feeding on eucalyptus blooms at Sumner for at least a couple of weeks in Aug. One was at Taylors Mistake later in Aug. and another, 25 km away at Irwell, throughout July and Aug. Another garden Kaka was seen at Outram (Otago) on 4 July.

Spotless Crakes were more numerous than usual at Whangamarino Swamp (S. Auckland) in Aug., when 4 Brown Quail were also seen. Unusually conspicuous were over 100 Californian Quail sheltering under a lucerne bush at Clifton (Hawkes Bay). The adjacent asparagus paddock had just been cleared.

Cirl Buntings were present on the Kaikoura Peninsula on 9 July, near their Marlborough stronghold, but 2 in suburban Alexandra (Otago) were unexpected and are some way south of previous Central Otago records.

Redpolls are common in the Wairarapa in spring and summer, but are almost absent from March onwards, with only 2 winter records this year – at L. Wairarapa and Henley Ponds in July.

And finally, two contrasting hints of spring. 3 Black Shags were sitting on nests at the Wangaeu colony (Wairarapa) on 5 Aug. and 15 other birds in breeding plumage were present. In Auckland City the first Chaffinch song was heard on 10 Aug.

Compiled by DEREK ONLEY

Regional Roundup

Auckland: The arrival of copies of the group photograph taken during the Whangaparaoa Conference served as a reminder of a very enjoyable occasion. In fact it took some time to come back to earth afterwards!

The main feature of our June meeting was an entertaining account by Phil Millener of his activities in

collecting and studying fossil bones to trace the ancestry of the New Zealand fauna. In support, Brian Bell, Andrew Crossland and Jenny Hawkins provided interesting information from their respective regions. In July, Mike Graham led an evening which focussed on birds of Pacific Islands. Then in August, we turned our attention to 2 national projects with news of the Little Shag survey, now in the analysis stage, and results from the dotterel studies. Plans for the Pied Stilt survey were also considered. The stilts are out there waiting to be studied – 2600 on the Kaipara and distributed in smaller flocks in Auckland east coast harbours, according to the winter census.

The region's tally of Pied Oystercatchers topped 15 000, an increase of 40% on the 1988 figure, and 5 colour-banded birds were found (no, we don't claim to have checked every pair of legs). 15 members took part in the wader counts, ably led by Gaeme Taylor and Alan Tennyson, to return a total of 23 000 birds of 13 species.

As I shall be working in the UK for the next few months, future reports will come from Mike Graham, who will also be acting RR. (Michael Taylor)

South Auckland: Our June field trip to look at Sulphur-crested Cockatoos had to be cancelled as this winter the birds did not flock as usual. In late July a working party visited Tiritiri Matangi Island for the weekend. We planted trees and clumps of cutty grass around the dam where the Brown Teal have attempted to breed. Before starting this work we were rewarded with the sight of the resident pair of teal, loafing and preening in the sun. Other highlights were, of course, the Saddlebacks and Bellbirds in the Wattle Track area and the incredible number of Spotless Crakes calling from all over the island as we walked out after dark to visit the Grey-faced Petrel colony.

Early in August we scouted around in search of possible Pied Stilt breeding places. Stilts in courtship display were seen near Kopuku and the other moat promising area appears to be near Aka Aka. With a Kokako survey in October and the NZ Dotterel census we are looking forward to a busy couple of months.

At our July meeting Terry Green gave us a fascinating insight into the different habitat requirements and lifestyles of Red-crowned and Yellow-crowned Parakeets. His slides of Little Barrier and its birds were first class. On a totally different subject, George Garside gave us an account of his and Mabel's golden wedding trip to Britain

via British Columbia, Alaska and the Pribilof Islands, with their teeming colonies of seabirds. Which of us wouldn't love to follow in their footsteps. (Anthea Goodwin)

Waikato: An interesting morning was spent recently by members observing and recording the behaviour of a group of 17 Pukekos on Ray Dench's farm at Ohaupo. Afterwards there was some lively and worthwhile discussion at the de-briefing session conducted by Folkert Nieuwland.

In July members joined a DoC field trip to construct and erect nest boxes for Grey Teal on the eastern side of the Whangamarino Swamp, a wet but worthwhile exercise with 19 boxes set in position.

Evening meetings have been well attended in spite of cold winter nights. In June Rick Thorpe gave a well-illustrated talk on the Mauritius Islands, in particular the control of rats and rabbits on Round Island to protect indigenous birds, reptiles and plants. In July we welcomed Ian McFadden down from South Auckland, to bring us up to date on the transfer of Black Petrel chicks from Great Barrier to Little Barrier. A last minute change of speaker in August had Bruce Postill speaking on the dangers and elights of the Copeland Pass. As a postscript, Norman Taylor showed an astonishing series of slides of a NZ Falcon devouring the meat on the antlered head of a freshly shot deer in South Westland. Not only are NZ Falcons seldom seen to eat carrion, but also the photographer was able to approach close enough to lift the antlers into the air with the bird still clinging tenaciously to its feast. (Stella Rowe)

Hawkes Bay: In the first half of the year members 16 members beach patrolled in the Westshore, Whirinaki, Napier to Clifton, Ocean Beach, Waimarama, and Aramoana areas. Birds recovered were as follows: Black-backed Gulls-24, Little Blue Penguins-11, Black-billed Gulls-8, Gannets-6, Black Shags-5, Buller's Shearwaters-5, Fluttering Shearwaters-2, Short-tailed Shearwaters-2, White-fronted Terns-2, and one each of Black-browed Mollymawk, Giant Petrel, Sooty Shearwater, Broad-billed Prion, Diving Petrel, Little Black Shag, Spotted Shag, Caspian Tern, magpie, and goose. Thanks to Kath Todd for co-ordinating beach patrol activities in the region. (Christine McRae)

Wairarapa: In a typical lower valley gale force wind 11 OSNZ members set out on 8 July to complete the winter wader count. 1603 birds were recorded, including 889 Pied Stilts, 226 Banded Dotterels, 173 Black-fronted Dotterels, 1 Glossy Ibis, and 1 White Heron.

None of the 173 Black-fronted Dotterels carried bands. The Wairarapa survey of this species on 29 January produced a total of 239 birds and subsequently 22 of these were individually colour-banded. This implies that 1 in 11 local birds are banded. As none of the 173 was banded this suggests that many come here from other regions during the winter.

Another successful passerine mist-netting session was held at Greytown on 9 July with the help of Hugh Robertson and Barrie Heather. 18 members attended, including 6 juniors. The latter were fast learners and very quickly became adept at handling, weighing, measuring and banding the birds. It was a perfect day for this activity and with over 90 birds of 8 species being caught provided an excellent training session. Since then mist netting and banding have been carried out at 3 other sites in the South Wairarapa and since May 1989 a total of 1067 birds has been banded.

On 26 July an evening on "getting to know your seabirds" was held in Masterton. Brian Boeson used an excellent selection of Dave Sims' study skins and mounted specimens (the result of many years beach patrolling) to complement the slide-video talk. With luck we may have stimulated a few members to become beach patrollers.

Brian Fitzwater has completed the frames for 20 Pied Stilt traps and these have been distributed around the regions for the 50th Anniversary Pied Stilt Banding Project.

On 29 July some known Black-fronted Dotterel flocking sites were checked and 6 of our 22 banded birds were located. All these birds were within 0.5 km of where they were originally banded. (Tenick Dennison)

Nelson: In July Gail Quayle took a late afternoon trip to Cable Bay and watched the Spotted Shags fly into their night roost on Pepin Island and adjacent stacks. 2000-3000 Spotted Shags roost on this island during the winter months and it appears that each shag knows its "spot", flying directly to it with very little confusion. In the early morning long strings of shags can be seen flying out across the bay. However, we don't know where these shags go after they leave Tasman Bay in August/September.

This winter efforts have been made by Henk Heinekamp and others to move the Pied Shag colony from the Norfolk Pines in Rock Road, because of the continued complaints from the human residents and also the trees are slowly dying. Empty nests and ecoys were placed in trees on Haulashore Island and some Pied Shags are beginning to nest there now. Complete success may only be

achieved by cutting down the trees at Rocks Road.

Gail Quayle, Alvin Brett and Elspeth Waghorn have since found a new shag colony in the trees on the end of Bells Island in the Waimea Estuary. (Jenny Hawkins)

Canterbury: At our July meeting Andrew Crossland and Peter Langlands presented some of the results obtained from their 3-year study of bird numbers at the Bromley Sewage Ponds. They showed good trends in the seasonal occurrence of some species, but perhaps the most important conclusion was that we have an area of national importance for waterfowl right on our doorstep - in the heart of Christchurch.

Richard Holdaway intrigued us with his account of the extinct Haast's Eagle at our August meeting. The thought of such a large active predator in NZ obviously stirred members' imagination and provoked a lively discussion about the habits of the species.

Peter Reese and others have continued passerine banding at local grain stores, capturing several hundred birds - mainly Greenfinches and Goldfinches. (Paul Sagar)

Otago: A well-attended August indoor meeting heard a very interesting talk by John Dowding, illustrated with excellent slides of bird islands of the Hauraki Gulf. For most Otago members this is as close as we will get to the Hauraki Gulf and its birdlife for a while.

The NZ Kingfisher project has come to life. OSNZ members outside the Otago and Southland regions who intend to holiday in these areas are urged to participate in this project.

The Kaikorai Estuary census has started. Imagine some 35 plus species of birds occupying an area dominated by 2 refuse dumps. The area smells a bit and one has to watch where one walks, but birdlife is abundant. (Peter Schweigman)

Southland: The gods were kind on 17 June for the winter wader count, giving us a mild day with reasonable light sandwiched between 2 definitely non-birdwatching days. 14 people covered 9 coastal areas.

The local annual meeting, held around the Muller's cosy fire on 15 July, was attended by 16 members and about 7 cats. The obvious breeding and high pedigree of the cats stifled any question of their true interest in the study of birds. They were excused from paying the local sub., which covers the production and postage costs of the regional newsletter. (Maida Barlow)