

# 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. 64 September, 1992

Note Deadline for the December issue will be  
10th November.

## More Stilts on the Move

### 1991 banding totals

The 1991 season was fairly erratic for nesting stilts and this was reflected in the regional banding totals, which were good in some areas but low in others. Conditions were generally poor for stilts in inland South Island where banding totals were correspondingly low. I suspect that there are still a few banding returns to come in though.

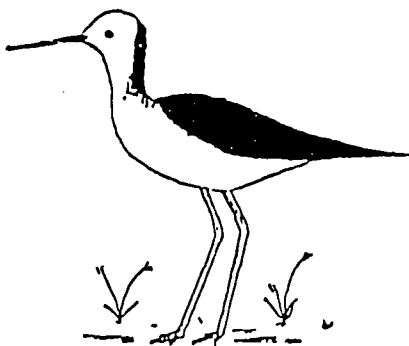
Highlight of the season was a tally of 74 banded in Auckland, nearly half the national total for 1991! These were bagged mainly in South Auckland thanks to determined effort by Tony Habraken, David Lawrie and others (including Pam Agnew before she deserted to Australia – a temporary move we hope), and of course, a suitably damp environment.

Some other good totals came in, including that from Hawkes Bay where Christine McRae and Jim Hamilton banded 20, most of them adults.

There were many reports of banded birds nesting in the same areas as previous years. However, at the other extreme two birds which nested at Wairoa in November 1990 nested unsuccessfully at Westshore Lagoon (Hawkes Bay), 70 km to the south, in November 1991.

### Post-breeding recoveries

The Auckland banding has received equally good follow-up with about 30 individual birds sighted in the Firth of Thames, Manukau Harbour and Kaipara Harbour by Tony Habraken, David Lawrie, Bev. Woolley and others. Monthly checks of these and other areas have revealed a good deal of movement to and from harbour and pasture sites. The latter sites are visited mainly by local birds with the migrants staying on the harbours.



Amongst the harbour flocks have been birds from Waikato, Hawkes Bay, Wairarapa, East Otago, Central Otago, and Southland.

In Canterbury, there have been many sightings of coastal breeders, especially the Avon-Heathcote birds which have remained close to their breeding grounds. There are no reports of inland South Island breeders wintering anywhere along the South Island coast, but plenty of sightings of these birds from the northern North Island.

There is an interesting pattern emerging nationally. Most stilts do not seem to move far, 10-20 km being typical for lowland birds observed in East Otago, Christchurch, Nelson, Lake Wairarapa, Manawatu, Hawkes Bay, Taranaki, Waikato, Auckland and Northland. Some individuals appear to be staying virtually at the breeding grounds throughout the year.

The migrant birds are more interesting. These are mainly South Island birds, plus a few from Wairarapa and Hawkes Bay. For example, of the 20 migrant stilts coming into the Auckland - Northland regions, all but three were from the South Island - Southland (4), Central

Otago (4), East Otago (3), McKenzie Basin (2), Mid Canterbury (3) and Christchurch (1). The other three were from Wairarapa (1) and Hawkes Bay (2).

This emerging pattern sounds familiar doesn't it? Banded Dotterels from inland South Island did not just move to the coast, they also migrated the greatest distances.

### 1992 banding

We now have a reasonable overall picture of regional patterns. There are significant gaps though, such as Marlborough. In fact, we are rather lacking in banded birds from inland South Island areas south to Mid Canterbury. Also there is a gap in Westland for unlike Banded Dotterels, Pied Stilts do not find Farewell Spit attractive, so Westland birds will either be sedentary or migrate farther afield – which? Manawatu riverbeds and nesting areas north to Taranaki could also do with more coverage. The rest of the North Island and southern South Island look to be well enough covered, but do we know enough about habitat influences on movements e.g., Hawkes Bay rivers versus Hawkes Bay lagoons? On current information we would have to say “no”.

In addition to the regional focus, it would be useful to band mates of existing banded birds to determine retention of pair bond after nesting and between breeding seasons. Similarly, banding chicks of adults that are already colour banded will enable us to examine questions of family party retention.

Good luck to all those members participating in this study. Watch out for those Murphy's puddles which are always 2 cm deeper than your gumboots!

RAY PIERCE  
Coordinator, Pied Stilt study

## From the President's Desk

Most will be actively involved in their bird studies now that the nesting season is well underway. Each season provides its different activities, but none has quite the intensity or interest of spring. Birds are in full song, nests and fledglings abound and these are a constant pleasure to those studying them. However, as well as enjoying the season it is well to remember that there is also much to record – song, territory size, behaviour of various kinds, and the actual biology of reproduction.

Often we pass this latter aspect off with the casual remark "surely this is all common knowledge". This is far from the true position for there are very great gaps in our knowledge of even some of our commonest birds. The information often quoted about some species is based on a single record rather than on a good sample – hardly good science, but a start. What it does indicate is the wide open opportunity for further studies, either by an individual member or as a collective scheme run by the Society.

The study of birds is the primary object of the Society, but too often this is left to only a small proportion of the membership. The success of the Society really rests with the proportion of the membership who actively contribute to this objective. Not everyone can become involved in a major study, but all can contribute in a small way by providing information for collective enterprises such as the beach patrol, nest record, and moult schemes. This was demonstrated very graphically about 20 years ago when members were providing distributional data on all birds for the Mapping Scheme. This resulted in the very valuable *Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand* (which is still available), which is still used extensively by planning authorities and others involved in land use and conservation.

Active participation brings its own rewards. We learn and enjoy much of the intimate lives of the birds we study. Often the studies can take us to places we may not normally visit and these can be rewarding. We meet many people who share a similar interest and can talk "our language". Many friendships begun casually while birdwatching develop into lifetime associations.

Finally, subscription time is coming around again. There are two aspects I would like to comment on briefly. Early payment of subscriptions makes it easier for your honorary workers, particularly the Membership Secretary and Treasurer. Often we hear comment that the subscription is too much and perhaps we should have a cheaper subscription for those who do not want to receive *Notornis*. Perhaps these people are looking at the subscription as a subscription to a magazine and not to the Society. Your subscription

should be considered as a total package with the magazines as only one part. There is the administration, running of schemes, library, local and national meetings, and field activities etc. Much of the latter activity is carried out by honorary workers such as Council members, scheme organisers and Regional Representatives (we have no paid staff). Besides providing their time and energies at no cost, many have accepted extra costs of travelling to meetings, toll calls, postage etc without passing these on to the Society. They have done this willingly as their contribution to something they have a commitment to – bird study.

Council is aware of this contribution and also the additional pressures on members due to the current economic situation. In an effort to alleviate this, Council have increased the administration allowance to regions and have made a grant towards travel within regions (in the form of petrol vouchers – subsidised by a grant from BP) so that members can take part in national surveys etc. Unfortunately, it is neither practical nor economic to offer a reduced subscription to any section of the membership while our Society is still very small.

I wish you good birding for the Spring and coming holiday season for which you will be planning.

BRIAN D. BELL  
President

## Fleming Memorial issue of *Notornis*

The special Fleming Memorial issue of *Notornis* devoted to the birds of the Chatham Islands has been scheduled for September 1993. This now gives all those who wish to contribute definite dates to work to. Those who are producing major papers will already have received a circular letter from me which sets some dates. A number of authors have produced their manuscripts already and this will ease the burden on the editors.

While the bulk of the issue will be made up of important papers on aspects of bird research carried out recently in the Chatham Islands, there will be a collective paper on incidental observations made by various people who have visited the islands for a variety of reasons. These observations will collectively provide an accurate record of species occurring in the islands, their distribution and, in some cases, their numbers. If you have any records you can make available, no matter how trivial, please send them in. All contributions will be acknowledged.

For those who have not been approached directly, but who feel they could provide a substantial paper, we would be very happy to receive your contribution.

Critical dates are:

31 December 1992 – all incidental observations.

31 March 1993 – final date for draft manuscripts (but we would hope to have most beforehand).

Please send all contributions to the Fleming Memorial issue to me at P.O. Box 12397, Wellington. The manuscripts will be sent on to the special editor and the incidental records will be assembled into a general article before being passed on to the editor.

Should anyone have suitable photographs for this issue, either historical or current, we would be interested in seeing them for possible inclusion.

BRIAN D. BELL

## Wanted – Editor for special issue of *Notornis*

As announced above there will be a special issue of *Notornis* next year to commemorate the contribution made to ornithology by the late Sir Charles Fleming. The Society requires the services of an editor for this one-off issue. Any member willing to assist in this role should contact:-

Brian D. Bell,  
P.O. Box 12397,  
Wellington  
before 31 October 1992.

## The Ornis Book Club

Oxford University Press (OUP) approached OSNZ and suggested that we cooperate in establishing a bird (and related topics) book club. After discussion with OUP, Council has agreed to the suggestion as this will provide another service to members. The main benefit to Society members will be access to a selection of quality bird books.

The new book club is being launched with this issue of *Notornis/OSNZ news* (see enclosed brochure). The brochure will become a regular six-monthly feature of your publication package. We would recommend that you take advantage of this generous offer by OUP, both for your own benefit and for the benefit of the Society.

## OSNZ Poster

Recently Regional Representatives received 10 OSNZ posters each for display in public places, such as museums and schools, so hopefully many members will have seen one by now. If you have not seen the poster, it was painted by Derek Onley, and features six species of waterbird in an estuarine setting. The poster is 42 by 60 cm.

Should you wish to purchase one or more of these posters please send your order with money to me at 64 Roseneath Terrace, Wellington 1. Please send cheques payable to OSNZ.

Prices are:

Unlaminated poster	-	\$2.50
Laminated poster	-	\$3.50
Tube for mailing	-	\$1.00
Postage	-	\$2.50

Since postage is expensive hopefully individuals in an area can combine their orders and so reduce costs.

RALPH POWLESLAND

## OSNZ Library Journals

Members who receive journals on circulation from the library are requested to pass them on more promptly. Some of the circulation lists have become quite lengthy and if the scheme is to be a success the journals should be passed on within about a week.

Also, would members who have overlooked returning journals in the past, please do so without delay. These are required to complete reference sets and if we are to seek replacements from overseas the cost would be substantial.

KATHY BARROW  
*Librarian*

## 1993 RAOU Bird Calendar

This is an Australasian bird calendar, with four of the 13 birds depicted being on the New Zealand species list. Superb colour photos (one of which was taken by an OSNZ member), large, clear dates and space for noting appointments. An ideal Christmas gift.

Cost per calendar - \$13.00

Packaging & posting per calendar - \$1.15

Send your order with payment to R. Powlesland, 64 Roseneath Terrace, Wellington 1. Please make cheques out to OSNZ and cross them 'not negotiable'.

## National Kea and Kaka Databases

The Kea and Kaka sighting schemes have been running now for three years and consist of over 900 records from throughout New Zealand. These records hold much information on bird sightings, which over many years can give some indication as to changes in Kea and Kaka populations and reveal basic behavioural information. Although data have not been analysed since 1991 it looks as if Kaka are generally restricted to lower altitude tracts of native forest in both islands, with vagrants making appearances in suburban gardens. Kea would appear to be in stronger numbers, but restricted to higher altitudes throughout the South Island.

Should you see Kaka or Kea or have old records in notebooks, please send them to me stating region, precise location, date, number of birds, time of day, map reference and altitude. If you don't have access to maps then the description you supply should enable me to pinpoint the right spot.

Send sightings to: Michael Wakelin, Science & Research Division, Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 10420, Wellington.

## Observation hide at Sandfly Bay, Otago Peninsula

A long time ago, at the October 1988 Council meeting, the Otago region was granted \$500 from the Projects Assistance

Fund towards the erection of a hide on the Otago Peninsula for the observation of Yellow-eyed Penguins.

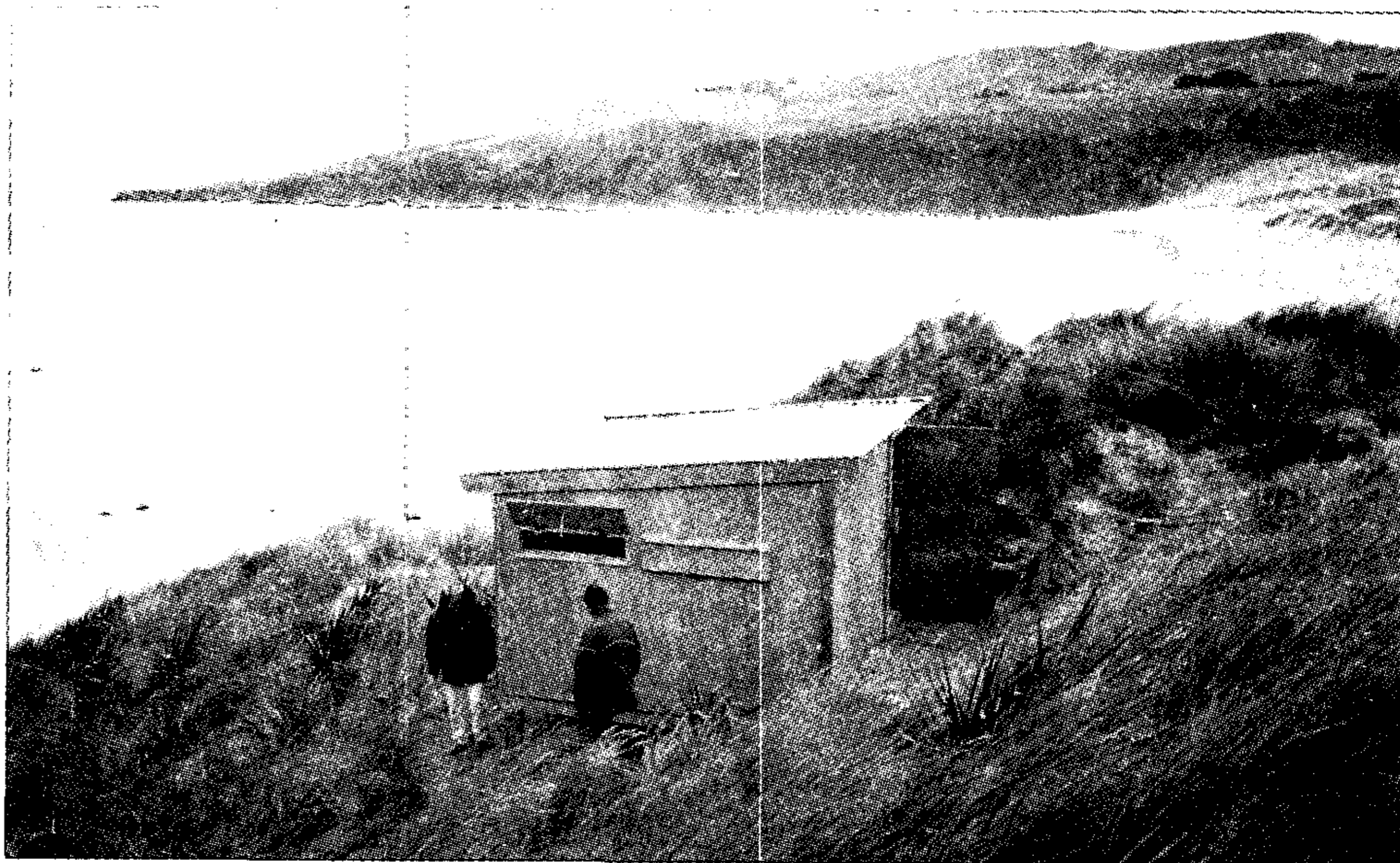
After a lot of set backs and hiccups, we finally have our hide! The hide being officially opened by the Deputy Mayor of Dunedin in June 1992.

The initial intention was to create a small hide with seating for two OSNZ members assisting John Darby in his Yellow-eyed Penguin project. This would enable observations of the penguins to be made in relative comfort, away from these nasty southerlies. The end result turned out to be a 15-seater hide to be used not only by OSNZ members but by the general public as well, as an educational facility.

Needless to say, the cost became a figure well beyond OSNZ means, even with the generous grant from the Projects Assistance Fund. However, with the financial assistance of the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, Save the Otago Peninsula, the local branch of the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society, and the Department of Conservation we have now a splendid observation hide at Sandfly Bay, Otago Peninsula. The hide is nicely tucked into the dunes overlooking the Pacific Ocean with a clear view of the beach, the landing place of our Yellow-eyed Penguins.

I would like to thank OSNZ Council, the Department of Conservation, The Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust, Save the Otago Peninsula, and the Otago branch of the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society for their assistance with this project. My special thanks goes to Phil Garside, the designer of the hide. The long hours spent behind the drawing board were worth it. It looks great.

PETER SCHWEIGMAN



Yellow-eyed Penguin viewing hide, Sandfly Bay, Otago Peninsula.

(Photo: Neville Peat, DoC)

## Report of the Moulting Recording Scheme – 1991-92

Over 1991-92 the New Zealand moulting data formerly residing on an IBM mainframe computer at Victoria University was transferred to an Apple Macintosh desktop computer. While this was an important step towards making national moulting records more available to users, final checking of data has to be completed and data from recent years added.

During January 1992 I visited the British Trust for Ornithology at their splendid new headquarters at The Nunnery in Thetford, Norfolk, to discuss methods of moulting recording and analysis. As a result of their helpful advice, new routines for analysis will be written for the computerised New Zealand records. The resulting programmes and database will be in a format that can be used on either Macintosh or IBM PC machines.

Once the computerised scheme is completed, I shall be advising OSNZ members of new procedures for recording moulting and will provide information on the analysis options that will be available.

If you are recording moulting, please endeavor to obtain a complete record of moulting where possible, and especially on New Zealand endemic species. A tendency simply to record the primary moulting is evident from existing returns. This provides only partial information and I ask contributors to include records of no moulting as well as active moulting.

Will those who still have moulting information to send in to the scheme please do so as soon as possible so that the main database can be brought up to date prior to the anticipated transfer to a new computer system.

Please write to me if you require more moulting cards and/or record sheets, or if you are interested in general information on the Moulting Recording Scheme. Thanks again to all those who have contributed to the scheme. I look forward to an increased return of records over the 1992-93 season.

My address is: School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, P.O. Box 600, Wellington. Phone (04) 472-1000 ext. 8160; fax (04) 471-5331.

BEN BELL,  
Convener

## Seabird deaths

In *OSNZ news 60* I requested that beach patrollers note on their cards why a bird had died if the cause was obvious. To 1 August 1992, patrollers have sent in 692 cards for patrols carried out in 1991. 6562 birds were found, the cause of death being indicated for 12 (0.002%). Two birds had fishing line in their throats, so presumably had hooks in their alimentary tracts; a

Flesh-footed Shearwater and a Red-billed Gull (both species known to scavenge bait from lines). The other 10 birds were oiled; 2 Grey-headed Mollies, 2 Sooty Shearwaters, 2 Short-tailed Shearwaters, 1 Fluttering Shearwater, 1 Pied Shag, and 2 Black-backed Gulls.

RALPH POWLES LAND  
Beach Patrol Scheme Convener

## Mystery Bird #8

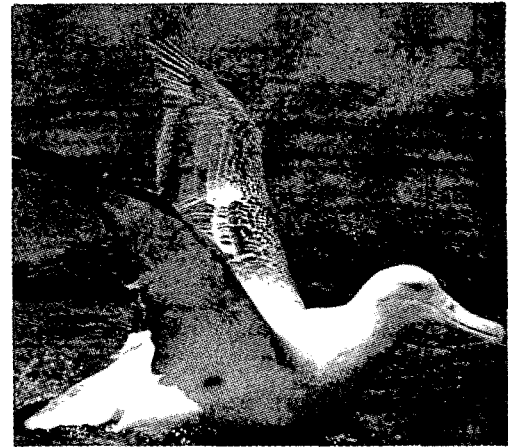
Last issue's mystery bird is obviously a seabird, and the tube-like nostrils situated on the side of the hooked bill show it is a member of the Order Procellariiformes, the true seabirds.

The huge bill alone excludes all of the Families Procellariidae which includes the fulmars (the giant petrels have a large nostril sheath along the top of the bill), petrels, prions and shearwaters; Hydrobatidae (storm petrels) and Pelecaniidae (diving petrels); leaving only the Diomedidae (albatrosses).

There are two main groups within the albatrosses: the smaller dark-backed mollymawks, and the larger white-backed 'great' albatrosses - the Wandering and Royal Albatrosses. Our mystery bird shows an all-white head and body, white underwings with a thin black margin trailing edge and a white back, making it one of the two great albatrosses. The upperwing is mostly blackish with a white patch half-way along the centre of the innerwing, extending as a mottled line towards the back. The dark of the inner forewing is also flecked with white.

There are two subspecies of Royal Albatross: the Southern breeds on Campbell and Auckland Islands, and the Northern breeds on the Chatham Islands and at Taiaroa Head, Otago. The latter shows wholly dark upperwings, and so can be eliminated from contention here. Southern Royal and Wandering Albatrosses, however, go through several stages of subadult plumage before reaching their adult plumage. As adults both have largely white upper fore-wings with a black trailing edge our bird must be a juvenile. Wanderers fledge entirely brown apart from the underwings and face, but progressively get whiter to the point where they can have an upperwing very like a Royal Albatross. A good pointer when a bird is in the plumage of the mystery bird is the tail, Wandering Albatrosses typically showing a dark tip to the tail, while Royals have a clean white tail. Unfortunately, the tail of the bird of our bird is submerged in the photo, so this cannot be gauged. If ever you are actually close enough to see a Royal or Wandering Albatross well, then another main feature becomes obvious - does the bird have a black line along the cutting edge of the upper mandible? This feature is diagnostic of Royal Albatross, and is

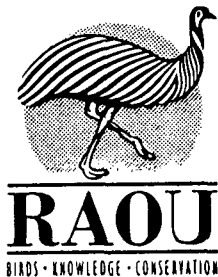
clearly visible in the photograph, hence our bird is a Southern Royal Albatross (stage 2 plumage if you want to be exact).



This Southern Royal Albatross was photographed off Kaikoura by Don Hadden.

Breeding only in the New Zealand region, Royal Albatrosses can be found right across the Pacific Ocean to waters off western South America. A Northern Royal Albatross which nested at Taiaroa Head attained an age of at least 62 years before disappearing in 1990.

PHIL BATTLETT

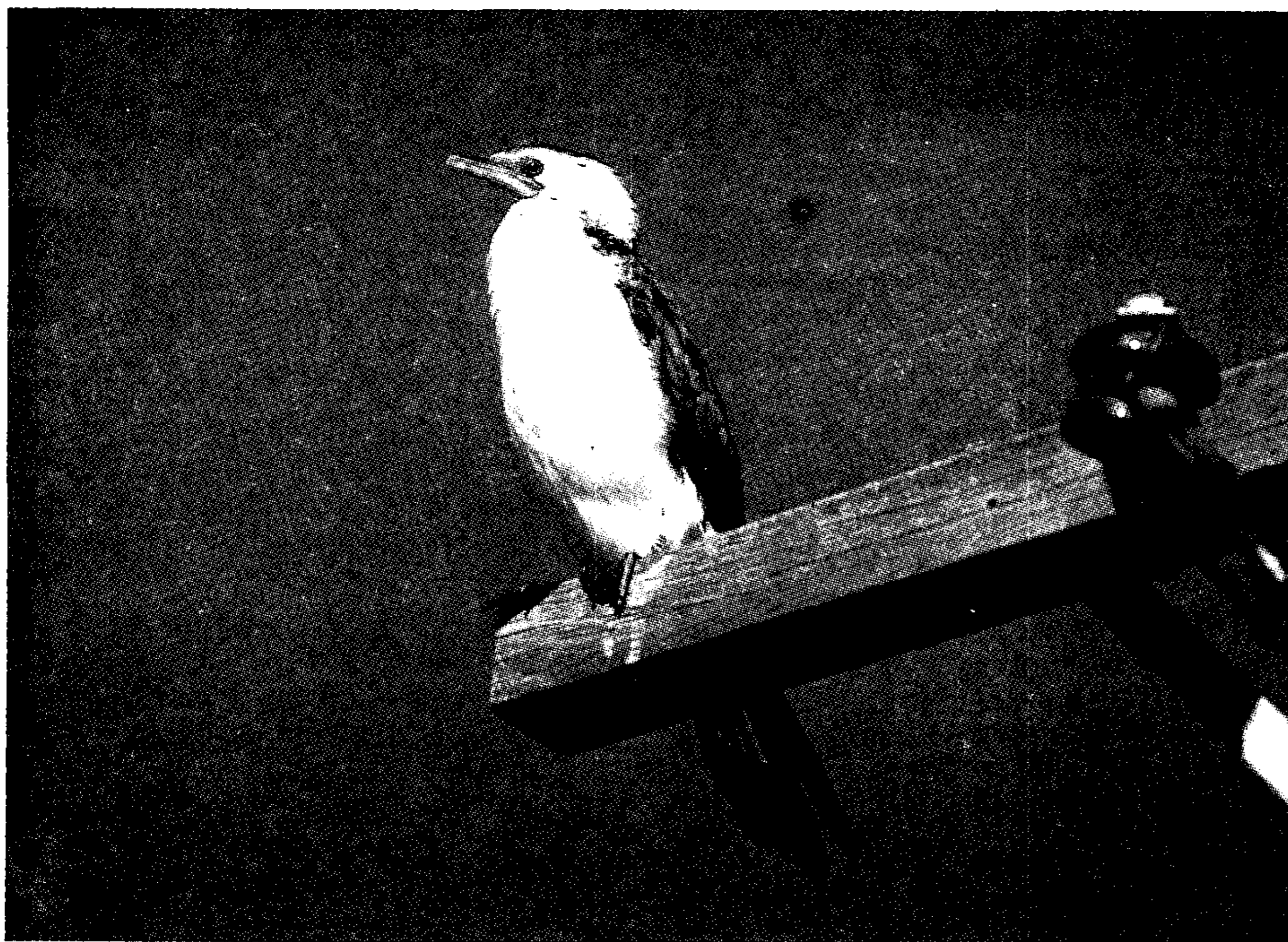


## RAOU Column

The Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service recently commissioned the RAOU to prepare two important documents: the *National Action Plan for Australian Birds* and *Threatened and Extinct Birds of Australia*. Both have now been published and are available from the RAOU.

The *Action Plan* presents a recovery outline for 95 of Australia's most threatened taxa. The status, distribution, habitat, reasons for decline and conservation measures for each species or subspecies are analysed, and, for the first time a recovery outline is presented, together with a cost estimate. The bad news is that for these 95 taxa, the bill is likely to be A\$15 million.

*Threatened and Extinct Birds* is an updated version of *Threatened Birds of Australia*, published by the RAOU in 1990. *Threatened Birds* looked at the 57 species occurring in Australia that are extinct, endangered, vulnerable, rare, indeterminate or insufficiently known on a worldwide basis. This new report updates



## Mystery Bird # 9

Identify this bird. Answer next issue.

former with a number of important differences; it includes races as well as full species and species that are threatened on a regional level. Unfortunately, the total number of taxa included is 157.

*Threatened and Extinct Birds* and the *Action Plan for Australian Birds*, both compiled by Stephen Garnett, are available from RAOU Head Office (21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039, Australia) for A\$18.00 and A\$21.50 respectively, including sea mail postage.

### Bill's Odyssey

In 1989 the RAOU flew English comedian Bill Oddie out to Australia to take part in our annual Twitchathon or Great Bird Race. The exercise was very successful and thousands of dollars were raised for the conservation of our rarest bird, the Black-eared Miner. This year we decided to ask Bill if he would come to Australia again and to our surprise and delight, he agreed.

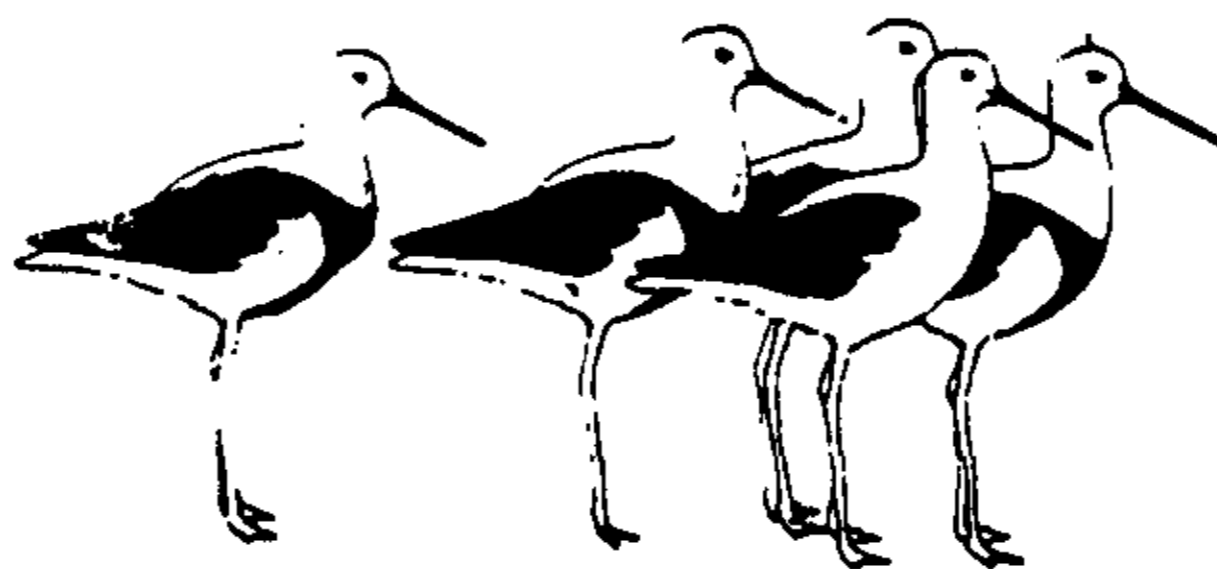
For three weeks in June pandemonium reigned at the RAOU offices in Perth, Melbourne and Sydney. Bill spent a hectic week in each capital, being interviewed by the media, attending corporate functions and presenting his own slides to packed audiences with a commentary in his inimitable style. In Melbourne, Bill launched *Threatened and Extinct Birds and the National Action Plan for Australian Birds*; in Perth, he opened the new office of RAOU's Western Australian branch. At

Two Peoples Bay in the south-west he participated in the translocation of Noisy Scrub-birds by helicopter to an offshore island. He managed to squeeze in a few days' birding in the west and saw many new birds, including lots of parrots.

Bill's visit can only be described as an outstanding success. He participated in 75 different interviews across the country and appeared on nearly every major news and current affairs show. Overnight, the profiles of birds, the RAOU and bird conservation were lifted to a level never seen before in this country. One journalist was heard to say, "What is it about birds? All I've heard about this week is birds!"

It is perhaps a sad state of affairs that we had to use an English birder to publicise bird conservation, but such is the public profile of bird conservation in this country.

DAVID ANDREW



### AWSG News 6

AWSG News provides a regular summary of activities and news relating to the Australasian Wader Studies Group, for the benefit of societies and institutions

concerned with shorebird research, natural history and conservation in the Australasian region and the East Asian/West Pacific Flyway.

The 20th number of *The Stilt* has just been issued with 76 pages of exciting and useful information of interest to charadriophiles.

The impact of human predation on waders in the East Asian Flyway, using evidence from band recoveries, is examined by Michael Bamford. He suggests that up to 18% of the Great Knot population may be harvested annually by wildfowling, a value over half the expected average annual mortality for the species.

Richard Alcorn and Mike Fleming report on the AWSG Regular Counts Project. The data gathering phase has been completed, although a final report has not yet been written. Combining project data with information from the earlier RAOU Wader Studies Project has produced a database of over 36 000 observations on 56 species of wader over a 10-year period.

Analysis of species composition of different sites has resulted in the recognition of 11 site groups which will enable much fine detail to be resolved in our understanding of the birds' ecology and migration strategies. A preliminary look at some of the Bar-tailed Godwit data shows differences between site groups in the timing of arrival and departure, and in relative numbers present during the non-breeding season.

For those actively involved in banding waders there are two practical articles. Mark Barter and Megan Rush explain the simple manufacturing procedure of the colour flags that are being so successful in tracing migration routes, as well as how to attach them to the birds. Michael Weston looks at the problem of methodological bias in the techniques of cannon-netting and suggests some ways of isolating it.

Brett Lane claims that the Yellow River delta in north-eastern China is of global significance for migratory waders, its importance comparable to that of the Wadden Sea of north-west Europe, Delaware and San Francisco Bays of North America, and the north-west Australian coast. The first survey of the 350 km<sup>2</sup> area was limited, but the result was an estimated 1 million shorebirds using the area during southward migration. The most numerous species were Kentish Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Marsh Sandpiper and Terek Sandpiper, but over 2000 Eastern Curlews were seen as well in the small area covered.

Other articles in *Stilt 20* include a summary of 1989/90 banding results in Taiwan, an autumn survey of Sheyang Saltworks in China, a study of the biometrics and moult of Red-kneed Dotterels, observations of flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes in Brunei Darussalam,

and a complete list of all 300 international wader recoveries received by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme to January 1992.

#### **Other news**

An internationally renowned wader expert from Russia, Pavel Tomkovitch, will be visiting Australia in September in order to take part in the 1992 NW Australia Wader Expedition, as well as have discussions with government and museum officials in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra. Pavel is Curator of Birds at the Zoological Museum of Moscow University, as well as chairman of the Russian Working Group on Waders.

An authority on the evolution and ornithogeography of sandpipers, he makes frequent visits to northern Siberia, where many of the waders of the East Asian Flyway breed. This liaison between researchers from different parts of the east Asian Flyway is likely to stimulate joint studies and is important for effective conservation of wader species in all the varied habitats of the Flyway.

HUGO PHILLIPPS

#### **Waikato Science Fair – 1992**

The ornithological prize this year went to 12 years old Rachel Melville from Te Awamutu, for her entry entitled Hoiho.

In her diary documentation Rachel explained that she had been brought up learning to care for her environment. The aim of her project was to encourage others to care also. As she has always been interested in penguins she chose Hoiho for her theme.

Rachel's careful research produced an attractive display which explained briefly the breeding biology of the Yellow-eyed Penguin, and the problems associated with its breeding on the mainland. Pictures and photographs showed how and why people were helping, while clear motivation indicated how anyone could help, and who to contact for further information. A tape-recorded Yellow-eyed Penguin call added further interest to a well presented display. Congratulations Rachel.

BEV. WOOLLEY

#### **Westland Petrel research analysed**

In February-April 1991 I took up a longstanding invitation from Henri Weimerskirch (CNRS) to use his laboratory facilities to analyse the results of my long-term study (1970 – 1991) of mortality patterns in the Westland Petrel. The Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) is a large fundamental research organisation operated by the French government. Amongst other activities, emphasis is placed on demographic studies of long-lived

subantarctic and antarctic seabirds and advanced computer programs have been developed for studies similar to mine.

Before leaving New Zealand I manually extracted from my Westland Petrel database 1618 recaptures of the 1365 banded birds used in this part of the study. The results, using the specially developed capture-recapture survivorship program SURGE-4 revealed weaknesses in my data, especially in the recapture frequency of females, as well as unexpected trends, which were studied in detail during the latter part of my stay.

An impressive 43% of each age-class of downy chicks survives to adulthood, and annual survival (both sexes) during these difficult pre-breeding years was a surprisingly high 92%. However, average annual survival of adults was lower than expected at 91%, partly because fewer females (88%) survived than did males (93%). The effects of age were swamped by large year-to-year fluctuations.

Prior to the 1982 El Niño, male and female survival and productivity were sufficient to explain the considerable population increase observed, but since 1982 neither survival nor productivity has been at replacement level. The difficult times that Westland Petrels experienced from 1982 to 1991 were reflected by a progressive decline in their average weight. The population did not decline during this period because of the high numbers of new birds reaching breeding age, the progeny of the bumper years of the 1970s. Apart from the biological importance of these findings, they have great significance for the conservation management of the species.

Because year-to-year fluctuations in survival of different age and sex classes were not synchronous, the relative effects of poor feeding conditions (such as some El Niño years) and possible human impacts such as tuna longlining and driftnetting are difficult to measure. Ideally, field work should be continued to, resolve these uncertainties. Nevertheless, the analyses will be written up and submitted for publication as soon as possible.

SANDY BARTLE

#### **New Survey of Pauatahanui Inlet**

Pauatahanui Inlet is an arm of Porirua Harbour, some 25 km north of Wellington. It consists of 400 ha of shallow water and tidal mudflats. Although not of great ornithological significance on a national scale, it is one of the Wellington OSNZ region's more important habitats for waders and other waterbirds.

OSNZ members carried out a regular monthly survey of the Inlet from mid 1982 until mid 1984 and has just begun a repeat survey which will produce a set of counts exactly 10 years apart.

For the 1982 survey, the Inlet was divided into six sections while two other

areas on the landward side of Gray's Road (which skirts the northern shore of the Inlet) were also surveyed since they regularly attracted the same bird species as did the Inlet.

The object of the survey was to establish the species, numbers, and distribution of birds within the study area. During the survey 55 species were recorded, the most numerous being Black-backed Gull, Mallard, Red-billed Gull, Starling, and Pied Stilt. Predictably, some species showed a strong seasonal pattern e.g., Kingfishers were absent in January and February, built up numbers to a winter high (maximum of 24 in July), then tailed off to 1 in December.

Similarly, the distribution of some species within the Inlet was quite marked. Thus, all records of Banded Dotterels were from the three sections at the head (eastern end) of the Inlet. In contrast, 92% of Variable Oystercatcher records and 79% of Pied Oystercatcher records were from the three sections at the western end of the Inlet.

The survey also documented a part of the colonising success of Spur-winged Plovers. It took 16 months before any of the counts reached double figures for this species, but towards the end of the survey period there were counts of 35 (May 1984) and 25 (June 1984).

The Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society (RF&BS) now manages a 43 ha reserve of marshland at the head of the Inlet. This reserve includes substantial portions of OSNZ counting sections 1A and 1B. A management plan for the reserve was approved in August 1984 - the very month in which the OSNZ survey was completed. In the intervening years RF&BS has carried out considerable development work constructing tracks, hides, and fresh water ponds, and introducing a regime to control water levels in the ponds at the head of the Inlet.

Apart from its general value, the new OSNZ survey should give some indication of the effect of the RF&BS development on bird numbers and distribution within the Inlet.

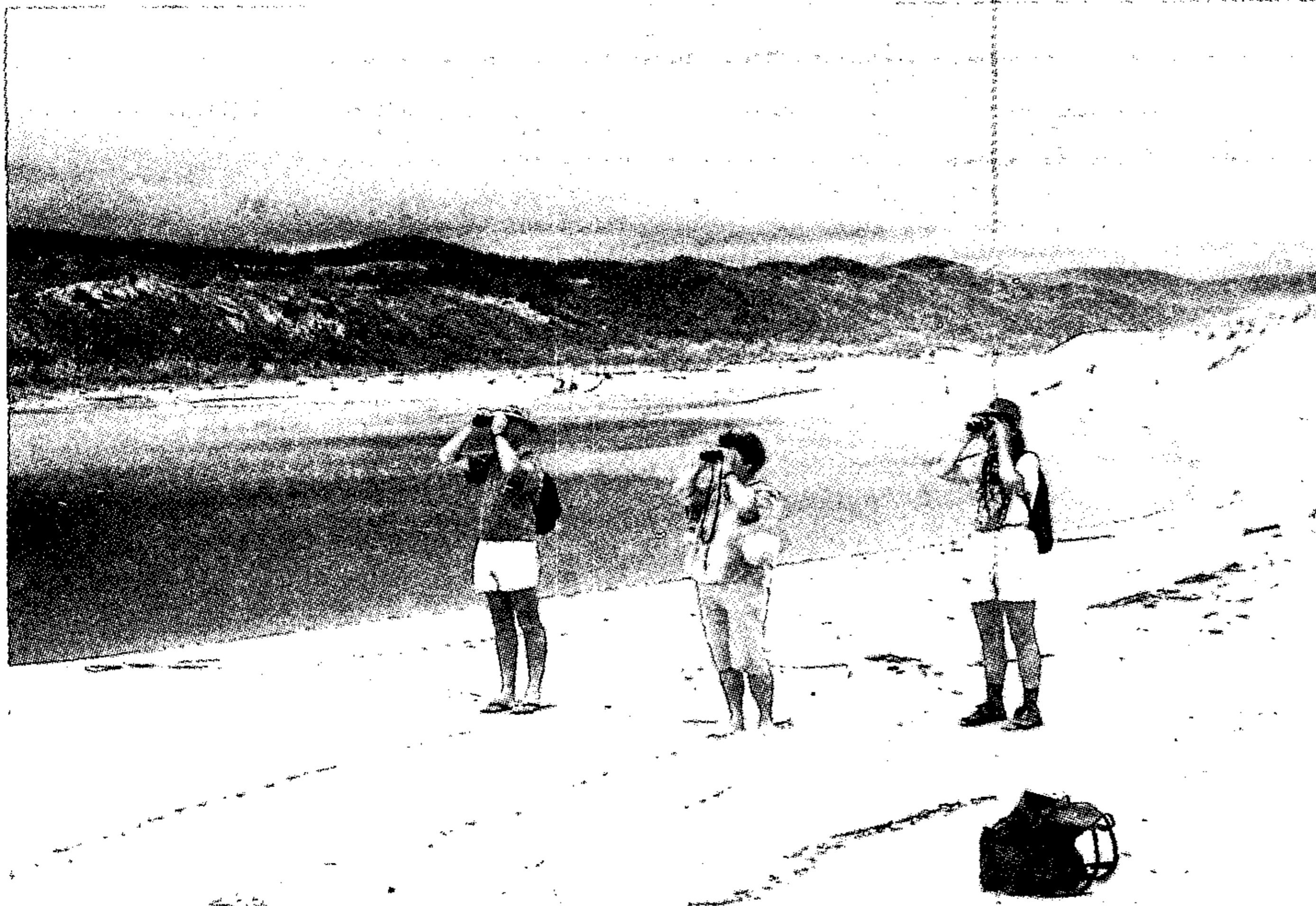
ALLAN MUNRO

#### **Black Shag feeding in stockwater race**

On 20 April 1991, I observed a Black Shag swimming in one of the many stockwater races in mid Canterbury. Because the race was only about 1.3 m wide and 0.5 m deep, the shag could cover the entire cross-section of the race as it fed.

Two days later I found a freshly dead brown trout, 40 cm long and 1.25 kg in weight, in the race. This fish had 2 holes in a gill cover, possibly where the shag had punctured but not been able to hold the fish.

PETER HOWDEN



Observers at Waipoua River estuary L to R Ken Bond, Kathy Barrow, Gillian Eller.

(Photo: Doug Booth)

## Birds of the area from Hokianga Harbour to Waipoua River, Northland

From 23 to 28 January 1992 we were based at the Auckland University Field Club Scientific Station at Kawerua. Kawerua is situated on the west coast of Northland, 50 km north of Dargaville and 17 km south of Hokianga South Head.

The objective of the visit was to survey birdlife of the coastal area from the South Head of Hokianga Harbour to the Waipoua River and included the estuaries of the Waimamaku and Waipoua Rivers. The following is an annotated list of the coastal and estuarine birds recorded.

Yellow-nosed Mollymawk – wreck of juvenile found.

Buller's Shearwater - Rafts comprising up to 300 birds seen offshore; wreck of one bird found.

Sooty Shearwater – three dead birds found.

Fluttering Shearwater – a dead bird found.

Fairy Prion – two dead birds found.

Blue Penguin – nesting beneath the Scientific Station. An adult returned to the nest at the following times on three successive nights - 2315, 2310 & 0010 hours. Six dead birds found. A live penguin with half of the upper mandible turned to the right was found, the bird appeared weak and ailing.

Gannet - single birds seen fishing off the coast. One dead bird found.

Black Shag – one seen.

Pied Shag - seen resting on the beach or rocks. Total number recorded was 69; may be breeding.

Little Shag – two seen.

White-faced Heron – five seen near rocks.

Reef Heron – three seen, including a pair.

Harrier – single birds observed flying over farmland.

California Quail – one seen, others heard.

Variable Oystercatcher – eight pairs plus two juveniles seen.

Pied Stilt – 24 adults and a juvenile seen.

Pair displaying, but no nest or young found.

NZ Dotterel – 24 birds counted.

Banded Dotterel – four seen at the Waipoua River estuary.

Spur-winged Plover – 17 seen on coastal farmland.

Black-backed Gull – small numbers of adults and juveniles seen along the coast.

Red-billed Gull – less common than the Black-backed Gull.

Caspian Tern – seven seen, two of which were juveniles.

White-fronted Tern – seven seen.

Eastern Rosella - seen near the Scientific Station. (Also observed in the Waipoua Forest and the Waima State Forest.)

Morepork – heard at night.

Kingfisher – eight seen.

Skylark – very common near the Scientific Station and observed on hummocks singing until nightfall.

Welcome Swallow – common.

Pipit – three seen.

Blackbird – more often heard than seen.

Song Thrush – occasionally seen.

Fernbird – five birds seen.

Grey Warbler – common.

Fantail – frequently seen in coastal vegetation.

Silvereye – common in all vegetation.

Tui – one seen near the Scientific Station.

Yellowhammer – quite common.

Chaffinch – heard but not seen.

Goldfinch – flocks comprising of from 12 to 25 birds seen.

House Sparrow – present in most areas.

Starling – seen in twos and threes.

Common Myna – seen in all types of habitat.

Australian Magpie - one of the white-backed form was seen on farmland near the South head of Hokianga Harbour.

DOUG BOOTH, KEN BOND,  
GILLIAN ELLER & KATHY  
BARROW

## A "Flycatcher" Feast

While walking along the coast to Cape Turnagain from Herbertville on 13 January 1992, we noted a White-faced Heron feeding on the sandy beach some distance ahead. We approached more closely and, through binoculars, saw that the food source was a swarm of flies clustered around the decaying carcass of a conger eel. The heron would look intently then reach forward quickly with its bill to snap up the next victim with deadly accuracy. Our passing disturbed the bird only briefly and it was soon back to its interrupted meal.

This sighting compares to one similar when Rob & Gillian Guest noted a White-faced Heron picking flies off the carcass of a cattle beast at Le Bons Bay, Banks Peninsula (see *OSNZ news* 8: 3).

STELLA & JOHN ROWE

## Morepork hunting in daylight

At about 09.35 on 23 July 1992 I was working in Kelsey's Store, Whangaparapara, Great Barrier Island when I heard a Kingfisher screeching and a male Chaffinch making alarm calls. My first thoughts were that the Kingfisher had caught the female Chaffinch. However, after a minute or two of searching I spotted what I thought at first was a Harrier, but then realised it was a Morepork. It had the Kingfisher, which was still screeching. The Morepork, with the Kingfisher in its talons, flew from the ground into a nearby puriri tree. The Morepork kept a watch on me, so I decided it was best left. Half an hour later I was able to return and look for the Morepork in the puriri but found it had moved to a shed roof under the tree. It sat there with a beak full of white feathers.

EMMY PRATT

## Harrier attacking Pukeko

On 26 February 1992 we were driving very slowly along the rough track beside a lake at Kaiāua, Firth of Thames. An approaching vehicle startled two Pukekos which were foraging in long grass and the birds ran across the track in front of us before one flew low out to the middle of the lake. Just before the Pukeko landed on the water a Harrier swooped and attacked it. The Pukeko disappeared briefly under the water, then made for the far bank. The Harrier circled above and as the Pukeko scrambled up the slope the Harrier attacked again, but the Pukeko managed to break free and make its escape into the undergrowth.

There were five or six Mallards swimming nearby and these were not disturbed.

Has anyone else observed a Harrier hunting a Pukeko?

BETTY SEARLE

## ... and a Spur-winged Plover

As a group of five Waikato members were returning home from a days tramping, near Paeroa we noticed a Harrier make a sudden dive towards the ground. As it did so, a Spur-winged Plover lifted from the ground. The Harrier struck the plover about 2 m above the ground and the two birds landed amongst a flurry of white feathers, with the Harrier perched on its dead prey. Meanwhile, the presumed mate of the dead plover made tentative swoops at the Harrier.

Unfortunately, we were not able to witness the final part of the drama. It would have been interesting to have found out whether the Spur-winged Plover had been sitting on a nest at the time of the Harrier's attack.

BEV WOOLLEY

## Falcon catches swallow

While completing a survey of Black-fronted Dotterels on the Ashburton River during June 1992 we saw a NZ Falcon in a willow about 6 km from the river mouth. The Falcon was feeding on a dark bird of Blackbird/Song Thrush size; this bird was still alive, but died as the Falcon continued plucking. Soon after we lost contact with the Falcon, but after a few minutes it was seen chasing a Welcome Swallow which it caught and started to pluck on the ground. However, it only managed to pluck some wing and tail feathers before we disturbed it, whereupon the Falcon flew a short distance and dropped the swallow among some branches on the riverbed. The Falcon searched for the swallow on the ground, but gave up after a few minutes and flew to perch on a branch nearby. Shortly afterwards the Falcon pursued another small bird, probably a swallow, which it caught and ate.

A Falcon was seen later some 1-2 km from the river mouth. It disturbed many birds, including Pied Oystercatchers and Spur-winged Plovers, but did not seriously pursue any of them.

LYNN ADAMS & PETER HOWDEN

## Kakas in the Bay of Plenty

Two Kakas were seen in early May 1992, feeding at a kiwifruit farm close to Edgecumbe, Bay of Plenty. They fed mainly on feijoas and once a fruit was seen to be devoured in about 10 seconds flat. They were also reported to have fed on mandarins and walnuts. The farm is about 10 kms from the nearest continuous native forest and the birds stayed in the area for about a fortnight. They were quite fearless of humans, whom they entertained with calls and chatter at quite close quarters.

JOHN BRIERLY

## Australian Tree Martin in the Waikato

On 20 February 1992 I was at Pukete Oxidation Ponds, Hamilton, observing the plentiful Pukeko. I also noticed that Welcome Swallows were abundant, as they hawked for insects over the water.

Then an unusual bird appeared. Although about the same size as a small swallow, the striking feature about it was its squared off tail. Other features noted subsequently were the conspicuous white rump and less pale throat. The plumage was also less red under the chin. Its flight was very similar to that of the swallows.

Having seen an Australian Tree Martin in 1988 at Farewell Spit, I was readily able to identify this bird. After 7 minutes of viewing, the bird joined some swallows flying north and here the excitement ended. Unfortunately, the martin was not seen on subsequent trips to the oxidation ponds.

This is the first sighting of an Australian Tree Martin in the Waikato.

PAUL CUMING

## A Ballet of Black Swans

On 28 December 1991 there were many hundreds of Black Swans on Awarua Bay near Invercargill. Between 09.30 and 10.00 hours a fast incoming tide was running west-east, filling the shallow 12 km x 3 km bay, and a SW wind rose rapidly from moderate to gale force.

As the wind rose the birds moved fast, wind and tide behind them, from the exposed waters of the bay towards the north and east shorelines. On reaching a certain degree of shelter, and presumably water depth, in groups of 3 to 6 birds they dropped their heads and necks into the water, turned around and fed briefly (or

tested for food?), then surfaced and fed normally into the wind and tide. Their legs and feet, not visible, must have been working strongly to hold them in this direction.

Viewed from the north shore, about 1.5 km of coastal curves and inner bays were soon fringed with 4-8 m of shallow, foam-flecked water, then a 3-6 bird deep band of feeding swans. Some eastward facing birds, motoring downwind and shorewards from the exposed bay, succeeded in jostling their way in to the feeding birds. However, most moved further east, out of my view behind a low, vegetated headland and presumably joined at the back of the queue of feeding swans.

The westward facing feeders and the eastward facing birds motoring downwind looked like a huge *corps de ballet* moving with well-trained precision. The directional and speed differences between the two groups formed a line of demarcation which mirrored the coastline.

MAIDA BARLOW

## Australian Little Grebe at Waikuku

On completing a winter count of wading birds on the Ashley Estuary we made our usual check of waterbirds on part of the Taranaki Stream that meanders through farmland near Waikuku village. Amongst a resident flock of Scaup we noticed a small grebe which we identified as Hoary-headed. The bird was diving and surfacing along one of the waterways, too distant to enable a detailed inspection of its plumage.

On 5 July we located the grebe again and noticed that it was being harried by 2 Scaup, which kept flying at it until it was forced to retreat into a stand of reeds. We waited a short time but the grebe did not emerge.

We were successful in finding the grebe on two other occasions (18 July & 13 Aug.), but as the bird was foraging some distance away, any subtle change in its plumage was not apparent. However, Tony Crocker was lucky enough on 16 Aug. to observe the grebe at very close range and noticed a distinct "tear drop" at the base of the bill and the bird's yellow eyes—diagnostic features of the Australian Little Grebe. Tony also witnessed behaviour which, according to the literature, is typical of the species. The bird, evidently disturbed by Tony's presence, quickly submerged until only its head was visible.

We arranged a meeting at Waikuku on 23 Aug., in order that we could all agree on the identification. This proved an easy matter as the grebe was now assuming full breeding plumage. The "tear drop" was unmistakable, as were the bright yellow eyes. Head, nape, mantle and back were a much darker brown than previously and a faint russet was developing along the sides



of the neck. We watched for some time to see if there was any interaction between the grebe and other waterbirds in the vicinity - Scaup, Grey Teal, Shovelers and Mallards - but all was peaceful.

To our knowledge, winter and immature plumages of the Hoary-headed and Australian Little Grebes appear almost identical, hence our initial confusion.

SHEILA PETCH,  
KATHLEEN HARRISON  
& TONY CROCKER

## Migration, Dispersal and Nomadism

A symposium on the topic Migration, "Dispersal and Nomadism" will be hosted by the Southern African Ornithological Society at Langebaan, South Africa, from 12 to 16 September 1993. The symposium will take place on the shores of Langebaan Lagoon, one of southern Africa's prime wader sites, in the new West Coast National Park. At the time of the conference, the migrant waders will be arriving from their northern breeding grounds, and the spring flowers in the park will, weather permitting, be close to their best.

All persons interested in attending this symposium should inform Mr T.B. Oatley, Avian Demography Unit, Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 South Africa, in order to be put on the mailing list to receive a copy of the First Announcement which will contain further details of the programme. The First Announcement will be posted in late 1992.

Anyone wishing to present a paper or a poster should also inform Mr Oatley. Papers on all aspects of migration will be welcomed, but special attention will be devoted to the Palearctic-African, intra-African, and Southern Ocean migration systems and to the conservation of migrant birds. The concepts dispersal and nomadism will be interpreted liberally, and will include, for example, topics such as the foraging movements of seabirds. Papers presented at the symposium will be considered for publication in a special number of *Ostrich*, the journal of the Southern African Ornithological Society.

## Recent Reports

These reports cover the months of late April to August. Please note that many of these records have yet to be confirmed by the Rare Birds Committee.

Thanks to all contributors, especially those who send in records on a regular basis.

Please send all records for the December issue of *OSNZ news* to Derek Onley, 49 Bernera Street, c/o Post Office,

Karitane, Otago by 15 November. Please note the slight change of address, if not of abode.

## Seabirds

Apart from 2 Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses washed ashore on Northland west coast, the Bay of Plenty provided most of the seabird records over the winter. An immature Black-browed Mollmawk was seen in June and an adult, probably of the nominate race, in July. 4 Yellow-nosed Mollmawks were recorded in June. Cape Pigeons, Grey-faced Petrels and Northern Giant Petrels were present and a Southern Giant Petrel occurred as well. The last Sooty Shearwater was seen on 11 June. 2 Southern Skuas were seen in June and July.

Also in the Bay of Plenty, a Spotted Shag frequented Tauranga Harbour over winter, one of only 3 recent records for the Bay. The Hobson Bay (Auckland) flock of Little Black Shags numbered 200-220 on 9 June, c60 were counted at Lake Horowhenua (Wellington) on 2 June and c100 on Lake Pauatahanui (Wellington) in mid Aug. Pied Shags began nesting at Bromley Sewage Ponds and Motunau (Canterbury) in early July, with 94 and 147 birds present at each site. Small numbers of Black Shags were seen well inland at 1486 m asl in the NW Kaweka Forest Park (Hawkes Bay) in late May.

Counts of just 22 Black-billed Gulls in Hawkes Bay and 7 in West Manukau Harbour (S. Auckland) show how restricted the range of this endemic gull is. Numbers of Black-fronted Terns in Napier (Hawkes Bay) had only reached 30 or so in June, but 68 were present by 6 July. c60 were at Waikanae (Wellington) on 26 May. A Gull-billed Tern was seen, as usual, at the Ahuriri Estuary (Hawkes Bay) on 1 June.

## Hérons etc

Another Reef Heron near Dunedin, at Karitane Beach on 19 Apr., suggests the odd pair still nests around the Otago peninsula. 4 White Herons in Napier during winter was an exceptionally high number for the area.

Little Egrets turned up in the usual places: there was 1 in the East Clive (Hawkes Bay) area from 25 May to 2 July; 2 at Wattle Downs Ponds (S. Auckland) from early June; 1 at Miranda (S. Auckland) in early Aug.; 1 over winter at the Ashley Estuary (Canterbury); and 1 in the East Taieri area (Otago) on 14 June and 7 July.

Only the Rangiri (Waikato) and Foxton (Manawatu) Cattle Egret flocks reached the usual numbers - 150 and c60 respectively. Numbers were low in Northland, Auckland and Otago or flocks did not turn up at all in the usual sites. 5 managed to reach Wairoa by 6 Aug., but

missed Hawkes Bay!

Wintering Royal Spoonbills in Northland continue to increase in number with a total of 129 at Parengarenga, Unahi, Whangarei and Waipu. In contrast, the Mangere (Auckland) flock seems to have decreased over recent years - numbers dropped from 22 in May to 15 by 3 July and stayed at that level through the winter. The Ahuriri Estuary held 22 spoonbills in July and the Manawatu Estuary 35 in June, much the same as usual. Elsewhere, small numbers were reported from Whitianga (S. Auckland), Muriwai and Wairoa Lagoons (Gisborne/Wairoa) and 5 were seen on an offshore rock at Tiritirimatangi Peninsula (Waikato) on 8 June. The first return southwards was 1 at Hawkesbury Lagoon (Otago) on 31 Aug. Odd reports of the "elusive" Bittern came in as usual: 1 at Te Awanga (Hawkes Bay), a new site and 2 reports from the Taieri area in June and July, a regular site. Only one report of Glossy Ibis this winter, of 4 at Lake Ellesmere (Canterbury) on 10 Aug.

## Waterfowl

An Australian Little Grebe at Waikuku waterway (Canterbury) had observers guessing until late Aug. when it came into breeding plumage. Also in Canterbury, the removal of bankside willows at St Anne's Lagoon may have been the reason for the absence of Australian Little Grebes and Coots, although it did not seem to affect the Scaup - 111 were counted on 25 Aug. 1 of the 2 Cape barren Geese released at St Anne's Lagoon was still present during the count, but 2 near the Styx River by the Christchurch motorway in July were a surprise.

Black Swans increased to a new high of 1518 birds in Hawkes Bay, whilst Mallard numbers decreased by about 25% to 715. Of 200+ Grey Teal at Westshore (Hawkes Bay) on 2 May, only 30 remained the next day.

The Chestnut Teal at the Manawatu Estuary was still there on 2 June and a flock of Plumed Whistling Ducks turned up for the second year running on the West Coast. This time there were 7 at Hokitika Sewage Ponds from early Apr.

Spotless Crakes responded to tapes in the usual spot in the upper Ahuriri Est. and several were heard in the Opuatia Swamp (Waikato) over winter.

## Waders

Numbers of Spur-winged Plovers in the North Island now seem to be comparable to those in the South Island. For example, 227 were counted at Koriti (Gisborne/Wairoa) on 21 June. The Ahuriri Est. continues to be a good wintering area for Black-fronted Dotterels, with 50 there in late June. Wandering birds turned up at Ruapuke Beach (Waikato) on

15 June and 27 July; Waikanae, 3 on 26 May; and Lake Ellesmere, 5 on 10 Aug. A NZ Doterel wintered in the Gisborne area at Muriwai Lagoon and further south at Ahuriri a pied Variable Oystercatcher was unusual amongst the blacks.

High numbers of whimbrel overwintered in Northland. There were 16 at Whangarei, 13 at Tabora and similar numbers at Parengarenga, perhaps to be expected after the large numbers in the area in summer. Elsewhere, 4 were reported from Kairito on the Firth of Thames in early May, 3 from the Oraka Est. (Gisborne/Wairoa) on 21 June, and 2 of the Asiatic race at the Ashley Est. over winter. The Firth of Thames also had 2 Eastern Curlew, 1 at Kairito and 1 at Yates.

A Hudsonian Godwit was at Kirk's, Manukau Harbour, in June and an Asiatic Black-tailed Godwit was still present at Whitianga in late May. Lake Ellesmere had the largest number of Curlew Sandpipers: 24 on 10 August. There were 15 still at Miranda (S. Auckland) in early June and 1 stayed at the Manawatu Estuary at least until 2 June. Less expected were 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at the Ahuriri on 10 May and 1 at Lake Ellesmere on 10 Aug. The rarity for the winter was a male Grey Phalarope in breeding plumage at Karaka (S. Auckland) for 3 days in early June. This is the sixth record for the country and all have, surprisingly, been here when they should have been breeding at the opposite end of the world.

#### ... and the rest

A DoC survey of the Kaweka Ranges (Hawkes Bay) in May and June located 32 Brown Kiwis. Numerous sightings of NZ Falcon in the Dunedin area over winter indicate the species is doing well there. The usual scatter of records came in from Hawkes Bay and the birds were reported from Pukekawa and Glen Murray in S. Auckland. A dead Morepork in Dunedin in mid May confirmed that the species is still present there (unless it was the last one) and the Barn Owl from Whenuapai (Auckland) may well have flown to Great Barrier Island, where 1 was present in July.

12 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos flew around Paraparaumu (Wellington) on 2 June, while in S. Auckland Galahs look set to gain entry to the NZ *Checklist*: 9 were seen at Pakiki Is in mid July and 35 at Mangatawhiri in early Aug. Kakas continued their winter wanderings around Northland (from the Hen & Chicken Is?) and in S. Auckland at Clevedon and Wairamarama. 1 was seen at Wairoa on 21 July and 1 at Opoho (Gisborne/Wairoa) on 19 July.

Several reports of Kookaburras from Whangarei suggest an extension of range and an "unconfirmed" report from the Otago Peninsula suggests .....

Rooks appear to be increasing in the

Wairoa area, where 74 were counted on 2 Aug. and the Blackhead-Porangahau Road (Hawkes Bay) had c100 on 4 July.

Two late reports of Long-tailed Cuckoos in Apr. and May at Raetiti (Wellington) and Waruku (S. Auckland) suggest they did not know about Mt Pinatubo. Finally, yet another report of a Fan-tailed Cuckoo, the third since last winter. This time from Haast, but no other details.

Compiled by DEREK ONLEY

## Regional Roundup

### Northland

At our June meeting Keith Hawkins gave a talk about Takahe and showed some slides of great age and historic interest, even depicting a young Peter Anderson. The talk was spiced with humour throughout.

At our August meeting we had talks from Richard Parrish, Ray Pierce and Tony Beauchamp. Richard spoke about the Fairy Tern surveys he has organised over the last 15 months. These had varying rates of success, but the results indicate a New Zealand population in the region of 20 - 25, making it our rarest bird.

Ray has been studying NZ Pigeons for some time now and he believes that their breeding success is insufficient to maintain the population. Rats, stoats and possums are to blame for the poor breeding success of the pigeons. Convincing people that there is a problem is difficult because the birds are still common in many areas.

Tony moved north 18 months ago to undertake a study of Wekas and he has devoted vast amounts of time and energy to this project. The outlook for Wekas in Northland looks bleak. Drought, dogs, possums and Timms traps are all factors contributing to the decline of the weka population.

Passerine banding began in Northland this winter with two netting sessions at Jean Hawken's orchard. Around 100 Silvereyes were banded each time, plus a sprinkling of other species. Did you know that at 5 g each, there are 2200 Grey Warblers to the Wandering Albatross (the albatross I weighed was 11 kg)? Grey Warblers are our lightest bird and weigh even less than a Rifleman.

The numbers of Royal Spoonbills in Whangarei Harbour increased to 18 briefly, then dropped back to 17. One is banded, but there is dispute as to whether the bands are blue and white or green and white.

(Pat Miller)

### Auckland

Recently, Brian Ellis retired as our Regional Representative and left the region for a quieter life in Richmond, near Nelson. Brian has not enjoyed good health recently and it is hoped this move improves things. Our thanks to Brian for a job well

done - we will miss his great sense of humour.

Mike Graham has accepted the position of RR. It is not a new job for Mike, who stood in for a year when Michael Taylor was overseas. Michael Taylor continues as Regional Recorder, and will be introducing a 'Sound Spot' at future meetings from his extensive collection of bird call recordings. Other new activities from the region include a bird stamp collection managed by Betty Binning, bird book reviews from Kathy Barrow, and a cage and aviary Bird report from Ken Bond.

The big news from the region regarding 'tame' birds is the release of a female Takahe on Tiritiri Matangi Island. The widow from Maud Island joins the two original birds (males?) and the young bird (female?) reared on the island. All four are getting on well together and we look forward to the possibility of birds breeding naturally on the island in the near future. The next field study weekend is on 20 November and will be the 13th of the on-going Tiritiri project. After 6.5 years we are now accumulating some interesting data on the birds adapting to the revegetation project. While we are usually oversubscribed for these visits each March and November, visitors from other regions should contact Mike Graham (9 Grendon Road, Titirangi, Auckland) if they would like to participate, or visit the island independently.

The regional meetings have been well attended, thanks to a line-up of some excellent speakers. In April, Dick Veitch used his inimitable humour and great knowledge to liven up the statistics of beach patrolling. It is an important aspect of bird study that deserves better support. In May, Rick Thorpe gave us a horrifying tale of pollution and destruction in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Rick is with DoC Hamilton and obtained good information from his interesting assignment. The June meeting featured Brian Gill reporting on extinct NZ birds, another excellent evening, in spite of the shocking statistics of New Zealand having at least 57 bird species that are extinct. July featured John Kendrick with some remarkable film footage of yesteryear (when Don Merton for example, was a very young adult) recording early visits to Hen Island.

The August meeting highlight was a presentation by Mike Sibley from the Auckland Zoo on the heart-break and elation of rearing Kakapo chicks. That they succeeded with one out of three is a superb achievement only appreciated once one is aware of the volume and quality of the scientific work associated with it. The presence of tape worms in the young birds is new and disturbing news although Mike now knows that the usual treatment for such parasites works on Kakapo. One can

imagine his dilemma though, when learning of the presence of the parasites, but not knowing how the endangered bird would respond or react to treatment.

(Mike Graham)

### South Auckland

During the last weekend in June a small party of members stayed at Kauotunu and from there visited Omana Spit to check for NZ Dotterels. We also looked at another wader roost, across the water accessible through Woodfish Farm, where Pied Stilts and a few Bar-tailed Godwits were using a small shellbank; Banded Dotterels were using the adjacent paddocks. Emmy Pratt had first discovered this roost when she and her husband did a complete survey of Whangapoua Harbour by boat last summer. On the Sunday, we explored Kennedy Bay and on the beach were surprised to find quite large flocks of Pied Oystercatchers and Variable Oystercatchers with the resident NZ Dotterels.

Winter wader counts extended our members and friends, but we were lucky with the weather. Numbers of Knot were good but counts of Bar-tailed Godwits were rather low this year. Early in August we ignored other waders to concentrate on Pied Stilts in the area from Kaiaua to Thames. Most stilts were on the soggy paddocks and only three colour banded birds were found, but a lot are already checking their inland breeding-grounds, particularly at Kopuku.

We have had three excellent speakers for our evening meetings. In June, Grant Dumbell's infectious enthusiasm for his work with Ducks Unlimited won us to their cause. Betty Seddon's visit to Alaska on a "Wings" tour was shared at our July meeting. This was high pressure American birding, but with unbelievable weather and glorious wild flowers as well. And what a joy to visit Barrow and see Snowy Owls on their nests, waiting to feed on emerging waders. A real tonic for wet and windy August was David Lawrie's sharing of his and Lynne's month with Pam & Des Agnew in Australia's Northern Territory. It was all go for this party too, successfully seeking rarities from Darwin to Ayer's Rock and beyond.

(Anthea Goodwin)

### Waikato

Surveys and censuses have dominated recent activities. Several members assisted in the capture of Robins from Mamaku Plateau pine forests for transfer to Tiritiri Matangi Island in the Hauraki Gulf. We will help monitor the success of this transfer over the next few weeks. A reverse transfer of 36 Saddlebacks from Tiritiri to Mokoia Island in Lake Rotorua has been monitored on 2 4-day visits; 17 birds were located during the first visit, and 21 during the second. To date, 32 of the 36

Saddlebacks released have been sighted. Hinemoa's hot pool provided welcome relief for aching limbs at the end of each day after scrambling through tangled undergrowth and head-high blackberry in search of elusive colour-banded Saddlebacks.

Kawhia Harbour censuses coincided with gloriously fine, calm days. Six Royal Spoonbills, including a juvenile, were found, along with the usual group of Black Stilts and hybrids that overwinter there. A special surprise was finding a group of 14 Asiatic Whimbrels.

Beach patrols continue regularly. One carried out in the teeth of a NW gale netted absolutely nothing!. An interesting result when a patrol on a nearby beach just a few days earlier found a small wreck of prions and various shearwater species. Twice now a sole Black-fronted Dotterel has been seen by patrollers at Ruapuke Beach, along with "that" Pipit, whose vanity still attracts it to car mirrors with the inevitable results.

A further day of cannon-netting at Miranda gave several members valuable experience in extracting Knots and Wrybills from the nets, as well as banding and measuring practice under the guidance of the Miranda Banders.

Three excellent evening meetings have attracted large audiences. As a follow-up to our Kapiti visits earlier in the year, Ron Moorhouse and Isobel Castro-Udy were invited to speak. Ron charmed us with the antics of Kapiti's Kakas, but revealed alarming details about the amount of time young Kakas spend on the ground before they fledge. Isobel delighted us all with her humorous insights into the sex lives of Kapiti Stitchbirds. On a third evening, John Charteris involved the audience in construction of models as he demonstrated the mechanics of feathers and flight.

A weekend visit to Pureora to observe Kaka resulted in few sightings, but a foray further afield found several hardy souls thigh-deep in a freezing stream while a pair of Blue Ducks were observed and photographed at close range.

Our July field trip took place in a warmer venue - the Ornithological Section of the Auckland Museum. Here, Dr Brian Gill treated us to a 'behind the scenes' explanation of the functions of this section of the museum. The afternoon was spent by members working in groups with study skins, learning to identify seabirds likely to be encountered on beach patrols. We were lucky that Sandy Bartle of the National Museum happened to be visiting that day, and using a bird we had conveniently brought with us for identification, he gave clear guidelines on how to identify a beach wreck. The fact that Sandy couldn't commit himself to a positive identification without further careful measuring and comparison highlighted the importance of taking "problem" birds to an expert or a museum.

We may have found a rare bird. Watch this space!

(Bev. Woolley)

### Bay of Plenty

Gordon & Leonie Blackmore counted 12 Royal Spoonbills at the Kaituna Rivermouth this winter and one of these was the same banded bird that visited the area last year.

Ross Carmichael has been watching 2 Reef Herons for a number of years. They are often seen on the Tauranga Marina breakwater, with up to 3 being present recently.

On 16 August local members set off to look for Blue Duck in the Motu River region behind Opotiki. En route, we called in to see Bill and Rachael Sloan. Bill is a retired vet and DoC has been giving him injured birds to treat. This year he has coped with a juvenile Wandering Albatross (which took over the swimming pool), a Bellbird, 3 Moreporks, 2 Pukekos, 3 Harriers, 2 kiwis, and a Kaka. We were allowed to observe an energetic 1.5 legged kiwi doing his self-imposed physiotherapy i.e. sprinting across the lawn. Luckily, it doubled back to hide its eyes between the trousered ankles of a birdwatcher! Later, we had good views of two pairs of Blue Duck on the Motu River.

(Len Buchanan)

### Wellington

Wellington continues to turn on interesting meetings month after month, each new and completely different. In June, we heard about the shearwater transfer begun on Maud Island in 1990. Brian Bell was instrumental in this and told us how the site on the island had been selected and about the preparation of burrows. A hundred chicks near fledging were transferred from nearby Long Island and the next big undertaking was feeding these in the newly prepared burrows. Smolts from the local salmon farm formed the basis for the food, mixed with golden syrup, muttonbird oil and vitamin B tablets. All but one of the chicks fledged in 1990, while 39 of the 46 transferred in 1991 flew from Maud Island. The next phase of the plan is to try and get birds to breed on Maud Island by using acoustic gear to attract them ashore.

July took us to islands further away - the Pitcairn Group. Jim Jolly was invited to spend 3 months on this group of islands as part of the 18-month Peter Scott expedition organised by Cambridge University. The aims of the expedition were to look at the botany, geology, birds, fish, coral weather and archaeology of these unstudied islands. Jim's role was to investigate the birdlife on the outlying islands of Henderson and Ducie. The seabirds he studied included Murphy's Petrel, Herald Petrel, Christmas Shearwater, Brown Noddy, Bristle-thighed Curlew, and Fairy Tern. Forest birds

included the Henderson Fruit Dove and Henderson Island Crane. Jim illustrated his talk with slides and we heard tapes of bird calls. A fascinating look at a little known part of the Pacific.

More islands in August – this time the Galapagos, with Elsie Gibbons and Bill Locke. These islands are so crowded with interesting wildlife it would take many visits to see it all. Elsie and Bill gave us a good sample of what can be seen there, including Blue-footed and Red-footed Boobies, Masked Boobies, albatross, Swallow-tailed Gulls, Lava Gulls, Flamingo, frigatebirds, as well as tortoises and iguanas.

Outdoor activities continued with the 3-monthly counts of birds on Kapiti Island, which showed an increasing number of Silvereyes. The recent release of a further 50 Stitchbirds should make the next count a challenge for us to locate some of them. We have started another series of monthly counts at Pauatahanui Inlet. We plan to continue these for two years and compare the results with those obtained 10 years ago. Members also took part in the national wader counts. There was not a huge number of waders in our part of the country, but 19 people were enthusiastic enough to get out and look.

We are delighted to congratulate Don Merton on the Honorary Doctor of Science degree, conferred on him by Massey University. This is a well-deserved honour, marking 35 years contribution to the biological conservation of endangered species both in New Zealand and overseas.

Winter moves to spring and we look forward to a great summer of birdwatching.

(Ros Batcheler)

### Canterbury

For our June meeting, Paul Sagar gave two talks. First, he presented a summary of the trends in counts of Buller's Mollymawks at the Snares Islands and then he discussed the movements of Pied Oystercatchers in the non-breeding season. The results of the oystercatcher banding programme show that birds from a relatively small area of mid-Canterbury disperse far and wide, and usually northwards, after breeding. Pairs do not stay together in the non-breeding season and the same birds return to the same coastal areas year after year.

In a second "double-header", Colin O'Donnell spoke to the July meeting about 10 years of bird counts on the Ashburton River and on Kaka-possum interactions in West Coast forests. The riverbed study has shown up the problem of scrub growth on the Ashburton River, with the population of Black-fronted Tern, in particular, declining dramatically over the study period. The counts show the benefit, but also the problems, of long-term studies. The next 10 years may give some solutions to the problems exposed by the first

decade. Colin also described his work in West Coast forests, where possums are having catastrophic effects on several of the more vulnerable native birds. His comments were thought-provoking and gave a gloomy prognosis for forest birds. He focussed on the Kaka, whose distribution is now limited to areas where possums are absent or rare. As the possum's range extends southwards, the Kaka is being squeezed out. Other problems facing Kakas include predation at the nest by stoats. Where food supplies are limited by the effects of possum browsing, stoat predation is particularly damaging

Richard Holdaway spoke on the fossil bird faunas of West Coast caves at the August meeting. The range of bird species which lived this area until about 800 years ago is amazing – it included not just an extensive range of the expected endemic bush birds (including moas), but also a wide range of seabirds including Westland Black and Black Petrels, Fairy Prion, Diving Petrel, Cook's Petrel, and an undescribed shearwater. While cave deposits provided particularly rich sources of bone material of the larger species, some recently identified middens of Laughing Owls are proving invaluable sources of the bones of smaller birds, bats and lizards. It really is sobering to consider how many species of birds have become extinct since people and their camp followers arrived in this country.

The Silvereye banding project is now producing valuable results, with both local and long-distance recoveries supplementing the recapture records at banding sites. In addition to this, the region is establishing two long-term studies to provide experience in other aspects of birdwatching for young and older members. A Spur-winged Plover Group is getting under way. We are hoping to look at the effects of farm practices on breeding and distribution of Spurwinged Plovers in Canterbury, especially around Lake Ellesmere and on the plains. In addition, if/when the weather improves we will start a study of the birds on Colin Hill's farm at Lake Ellesmere where we plan to set up banding and breeding distribution studies of various species.

Of the field trips that eventuated despite the weather, Sheila Petch, Kathleen Harrison and Tony Crocker surveyed the Australian Coot and NZ Scaup populations on ponds and wetlands in and north of Christchurch. The winter wader count also went ahead, in brilliantly fine but freezing conditions. Ellesmere was rather low and those who broke the ice – literally – on the lake edge were rewarded with good numbers of the usual species.

Numbers participating in regular field trips have been disappointing, although the appearance of new and younger members is encouraging.

(Richard Holdaway)

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