

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. 68 September, 1993

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

NW Australia Wader Expedition - 1992

Once again the Australasian Wader Study Group (AWSG) was in action on the coast between Port Hedland and Broome, this time from 20 September to 17 October.

The course was led by Clive Minton, a man, for those who do not know him, with tremendous drive and enthusiasm. Clive is responsible for getting major studies of migrant waders underway in Australasia since he moved from England in 1978. A great deal has now been learnt about migrant waders in this part of the world, but there are many questions still to be answered.

The objectives of this expedition were to band and monitor newly arrived waders from Asia as they had not been studied during this time of year. The other aim was to place yellow leg-flags on as many birds as possible for future sightings around the flyway. Within a few weeks yellow flagged birds were seen in the eastern states of Australia, proving once again the worth of flagging.

There was a very good international flavour to the members of the expedition with people from Australia, England, Vietnam, Germany, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, and New Zealand. Betty Seddon and I were the representatives from New Zealand, but unfortunately neither of us could stay for the full month.

Pavel Tomkovich, from Moscow, spends a good deal of time in the high Arctic during the breeding season studying the waders on their nests, so it was very interesting to have him on the expedition and to hear first hand all about the waders in these places.

The expedition started in Broome but moved to Port Hedland 600 km south-west to mist net on the moonless nights at the saltworks 35 km north of the town and to

cannon net by day. The mosquitoes there are amongst the friendliest in the world, waiting on the flaps of the tents to greet us each dawn.

The mist netting at night wasn't as good as we would have liked, as many of the birds seemed to disappear at dusk having spent all day feeding beneath the furled nets. However, we did catch some good birds including 61 Broad-billed Sandpipers and 11 Asiatic Dowitchers.

Back at Broome we had mixed success on the beaches of Roebuck Bay. A catch of 40 Pied Oystercatcher was the biggest of that species in the NW, where they are not very numerous. A catch of 80 Black-tailed Godwits was also significant as they usually elude the cannon nets. Nowhere in Australia do Pied Oystercatchers gather in the concentrations that we see in NZ.

The other site to be visited was 80 Mile Beach (actually 240 km long), a truly remarkable place where the treeless sand dunes form the backdrop to a seemingly endless white sandy beach which just disappears into the heat haze in both directions. This is a very hot place where the sea almost disappears at low tide and at high tide the water looks almost as inviting as the sharks which cruise through the shallows. In the heat of the day the beach wrecked sponges make the only shelters for small passerines such as Pipits, but the waders sit out the heat in the blazing sun along the waters edge. Cannon netting on the beach means placing the net just above the predicted high tide line, this isn't always easy as there is such a huge daily range in tidal height (up to 10 m). Birds are moved towards the nets by two vehicles, one coming from the north, the other from the south. When all goes well several hundred birds out of the 10 000 or

so pushed into the area will be caught. Once caught, processing is carried out as quickly as possible so that the birds can return to the blazing sun!

While at 80 Mile Beach we had two days of very strong winds coming from the desert which made life rather difficult for birds and humans alike, so during that time for the well being of the birds we did not attempt any catches. However, the time was not wasted and we split into groups to do a count of birds on the beach at high tide. Totals of 92 106 waders and 780 terns were counted on 49 km of beach, the other 180 not covered would hold similar numbers per km. Highest totals were for Great Knot - 34 874, Bar-tailed Godwit - 24 441, and Oriental Dotterel - 10 839.

Driving back to camp along the beach at high tide is a wonderful experience as cloud after cloud of waders would lift off, circle around against the intense blue sky before settling again. Few people visit this stretch of 80 Mile Beach, so when we pulled out to head back to Broome the birds would be left in peace again.

No account of a NW Australia expedition would be complete without a vote of thanks to Doug Watkins who without fuss keeps the technical side of things running so well, and Ros Jessop who does such a great job running the camps.

ADRIAN RIEGEN

A Reminder

Invoices for next year's
subscription (1994) are inserted
with this issue.

New Members

The Society would like to welcome the following new members and wishes them many happy years of birdwatching.

New Zealand

Laureen Alston, Julie Beardslee, Joy B. Bishop, Andrew Booth, Claudia Bos, Cathy Brown, Helen Crabb, Martin R. Day, Frank Deacon, Sibilla Giraroet, David Havell, Dee Hudson, Craig M. Jones, Mr & Mrs J. Kearvell, Paul Kelly, Alison Lindores, Brenda Lewis, Marion MacBeth, AnnMcCallum, Christine McGregor, A.J. & M. McKenzie Shaw, Martin Maguire, Mary Ann Miller, D. & J. Mitchell, Janice Molloy, Andrew Raj, P. Rhodes, Heather Smithers, Martin Snowball, Takeshi, Hiromi, Masumi & Tamao Sugimoto, Ian Sutherland, Jack Tolley, K. Trumper, Brenda Waring, Thelma Wilson, S.D. Wratten, Graham C. Wood.

Overseas

Japan - Haruo Oai; Australia - J.P. Young, Dr Richard Barnard; USA - Beth & George Wallace; Saudi Arabia - Dr Philip Seddon, Dr Yolanda van Heezik; Scotland - Applied Ornithology; Belgium - Aves.

HAZEL HARTY
Membership Secretary

Donations

A big thank you to the following people for making donations to various funds. They are much appreciated and go to the particular fund, as requested.

Laureen Alston, R.M. Bellingham, D.H. & E.L. Booth, Claudia Bos, Alvin Brett, Dr M.J. & V. Bycroft, R.S. Carmichael, Neil Cheshire, Jack Davidson, A.M. Davis, D.K. Eason, S. Grantham, Mrs R. Hows, Graham Hunt, Dr E.J. Kirk, N.J. Ledgard, Tim Lovegrove, Martin Maguire, W.B. & R. Messenger, P.L. Munns, Mike & Susan Patterson, Rob Schuckard, Lorraine & Val Skelton, K. Trumper, K.B. Walshe, Lois Wagner.

Donations for the *Fleming Memorial Issue* have been received from Paul Cuming, E.G. Turbott, John Warham.

Donations are tax deductible and receipts are issued if requested.

HAZEL HARTY
Membership Secretary

1993 AGM and Conference, Camp Morley, South Auckland

Proceedings got underway with councillors assembling at Hazel and Tom Hartys' at Drury on Thursday evening. Thanks to a supplied map and an 'OSNZ' sign on the mail-box, everybody seemed to find the rendezvous with little trouble. Once people could be diverted from catching up on each others' news, the serious business of tackling the full agenda began. By the time

the meeting finished at 5.30 pm on Friday, with of course the break for some sleep, Raewyn had more than enough minutes to cope with at some later date. Decisions made and information of interest to members included:

1. the production of a colour brochure to provide to prospective members,
2. 100% financial assistance for travel to AGMs for Regional Representatives to ensure as many as possible are able to attend,
3. that Richard Holdaway and Brian Bell have made much progress with production of the Fleming Memorial Issue of papers about Chatham Islands birds,
4. the inclusion of a Scientific Day (Friday) with the 1994 AGM and Conference at Nelson, and
5. that John Davenport and his helpers have continued the efficient functioning of the Rare Birds Committee.

Following the end of the meeting, the small flock from Hartys' joined the last stages of migration to Camp Morley, near Clark's Beach, to join the rest of the assembling flock. The evening was taken up with locating spare beds, and more importantly socialising with friends from all over the country, many of whom hadn't been seen since the previous gathering at Masterton. Of course, Tom and Hazel were in charge of the bar and kept those requiring refreshments well supplied. During the evening some hardy souls, namely Regional Representatives, met elsewhere for a while to discuss the activities, problems, etc in their regions over the previous 12 months and to consider ways of improving things during the next year. The chatter of the rest of the flock continued well into the night, and for one reminiscing group into the early morning!

Of course an AGM wouldn't be typical if over the breakfast table there wasn't the odd bleary pair of eyes and the tale of interrupted sleep because of a snoring room-mate. However, it was a treat to eat our breakfasts at first-floor level and be able to see mudflats only 50 m away dotted with waders searching for theirs. Following breakfast the majority of people headed off by bus for one of two field trips. Although the forecast was not the best the day remained fairly dry until mid-afternoon. One party led by David Lawrie went off for a look at some birding sites along the Awhitu Peninsula.

The first stop was at the Akaaka flats to view a flock of more than 40 Cattle Egrets on a dairy farm. From there it was on to the lookout at North Waikato Head providing a view over the sand bar and islands at the Waikato River mouth. In summer this area is home to a Caspian Tern nesting colony. At morning tea time the party stopped at a viewpoint overlooking the Waikato delta with excellent views of

waterfowl, shags and herons. From the Waikato it was to the other end of Awhitu Peninsula for a visit to the Manukau South Head Signal Station. Here the party was given a lengthy talk on the history, operation and importance of the station. It was then back south to Awhitu Regional Park but no amount of tape playing or squeaking would provoke the Fern-birds into view. From there it was back to camp, Morley of course.

The other party, led by Pam Agnew, headed for the Hunuas and Miranda, forest birds and waders respectively. After passing through Papakura and Clevedon, the forest-clad hills came into view. Once at a road end the party disembarked for a walk through forest to a ridge-end viewing point. Although a few birds were seen and heard along the way, as to be expected in autumn, most were shy and quiet. However, some members were not deterred by this and were jotting a few notes to enable them to return to the area at a later date for a walk along some of the many kilometres of forest tracks available. After returning to the bus and having a snack we continued on to reach the coast at Wairoa Bay. Here, with binoculars and telescopes put to good use, SIPO, NZ Dotterels (one with colour bands), Banded Dotterels and godwits were the species of most interest. Continuing along the coast road beside the Firth of Thames to Miranda there was plenty of scenery and occasional flocks of roosting waders to see. Of course there was the ceaseless chatter of the flock on the bus or was it the rumbling tums! Our next stop was at the centre of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust, where a welcome sight was Keith Woodley, the warden, preparing a much anticipated cuppa. For those of us who hadn't visited the centre before, the buildings and facilities looked excellent, and the informative displays about the area and its birds provided plenty to read about. Having had lunch, and an introduction to the Centre by Keith, it was high tide time so we were off to the nearby wader roost sites. Coming from Wellington, where waders are a scarce resource, it was an impressive sight to see hundreds of SIPO in close company on shell beaches. However, the highlight for many members was seeing a flock of over 1000 roosting Wrybills that briefly flew up in front of us before returning to the roost.

Back at Camp Morley the evening began with an auction of over 70 bird paintings on paper, pottery, and wood. Mark Cederman, a Wrightsons auctioneer, with the help of Bryony and Dick Veitch, ensured that a quick and entertaining auction took place. It seemed to be a buyers market; people were well pleased with the cost of their purchases. The auction was followed by a very satisfying dinner - variety seemed to be the theme of the menu. Then came the more formal part of

the day; the Annual General Meeting. There was a good attendance and the business was dealt with efficiently. No contentious issues were debated and so the meeting was soon declared closed so that members could return to their socializing.

Sunday morning dawned to atrocious weather—strong gusty winds and heavy rain. Just making the 100 m dash from room to breakfast without looking drenched at the end was quite an achievement. After breakfast and through until lunchtime a series of talks were given. First up was Ian McFadden talking about the rodent control campaign at Wenderholm during spring 1992 and how this had ensured the success of about 50% of the kereru nests found in the 50 ha area. Previously, over several seasons, all kereru nesting pairs found failed to raise a single fledgling.

Tim Lovegrove spoke about his study of Saddlebacks transferred to Kapiti Island from Stanley Island. He compared the survival and breeding success of those that used roost and nest boxes with those that did not. Unfortunately it has been a struggle for all the Saddlebacks on Kapiti to elude the predatory rats.

Graeme Taylor, with the use of some excellent slides, gave a fascinating talk on the birdlife of the Kermadecs (see *OSNZ news* for details). No doubt many in the audience would now like the opportunity to visit this group of islands to see first hand the variety of seabirds present.

Warwick Murray talked about the problems introduced, and a few native, plants are causing for the Department of Conservation on lands under its stewardship. While most people know of mainland reserves with weed problems, important islands, such as Raoul and Little Barrier, have such problems too.

An excellent talk was given by Terry Hatch about his and volunteers' continuing efforts to revegetate parts of Great Mercury Island. This has involved collecting suitable seeds and cuttings from the island, growing them on the mainland, transporting them back to Great Mercury, and the strenuous efforts to get them to the planting sites. If that wasn't enough there was spray drift and hungry stock to contend with. However, the reward for their efforts is now very evident as formerly brown and barren hillsides and valleys begin to turn green with a covering of shrubs and forest. The impact of this improving habitat on birds, such as Tui and Kereru, will be interesting to monitor over the years.

Shaarina Boyd talked about the recent happenings in the Kakapo supplementary feeding programme on Little Barrier. After almost daily efforts through winter and spring, the team were excited to find evidence that two females had mated at the track-and-bowl systems. Wendy duly was found at a nest, but unfortunately only one

of her three eggs hatched and the chick disappeared a few days later, presumably taken by a kiore. Late in the season Jean was found at a nest by Craig Hodsell and dog, Sue. This was a remarkable find because Jean hadn't been seen since her release back in 1982; unfortunately her clutch was infertile.

Late in Shaarina's talk the wind was really kicking up a fuss outside, having uprooted a tent and then knocked out the power. Luckily, we missed out on seeing only one slide.

Overall, the talks proved very informative and, by the number of questions offered and the clapping after each talk, much enjoyed. It was great to see that Dick Sibson braved the elements to hear the talks and meet friends from afar. It was a shame only a few Auckland members came along to this very enjoyable conference. The cooks, locals supporting Waiua Pa kindergarten, were well organised so that lunch was not delayed by the power cut. However, a few peoples' exits from the camp were delayed by fallen branches across the road, but not for long. Special thanks go to the helpers mentioned above, plus Tony Habraken, Kay Haslett and of course Anthea Goodwin, the South Auckland RR, for a memorable conference. I wish the Nelsonians all the best with organising the next AGM and conference.

RALPH POWLESLAND

Beth Brown

We are sad to tell you all that Beth Brown died at home on 29 July 1993. From the time she was introduced to birding in the early 1960s Beth took to ornithology with great enthusiasm and her meticulous attention to detail. The fellowship of the Society was equally important and she believed in joint activities between the regions and organised many trips in which she was joined by members from throughout the country. Taking over from Ross McKenzie as Regional Representative for South Auckland with some trepidation (who wouldn't!) she served the region with great loyalty for 14 years, even during her demanding time as President of OSNZ. She will be greatly missed by many friends in the Society and we offer John and their family our most sincere sympathy.

Assistance to attend 21st International Ornithological Congress - Vienna, 20-25 August 1994

The NZ Ornithological Congress Trust Board is offering travel assistance fellowships valued at NZ\$1000 each for up to two persons to attend and participate in the 21st IOC to be held in Vienna from 20 to 25 August 1994. Registration papers for the Congress can be obtained from XXI IOC, Interconvention, Friedrichstrasse 7, A1043 Vienna, Austria.

Preference will be given to (a) New Zealand amateur or professional ornithologists who are members of the OSNZ or the Royal Society of New Zealand, or (b) post-graduate students from a New Zealand university who are undertaking a topic relevant to the study of birds. Successful applicants will be required to forward to the Board by 30 November 1994, a report of their attendance at the Congress suitable for publication in *OSNZ news*.

Applicants for these fellowships should forward their ornithological CV, reasons for attending the Congress with supporting letters from two referees to: NZOCTB Travel Fellowship, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington. Applications close on 12 November 1993 and decisions of the Board will be advised in December 1993. The Board reserves the right to make no awards.

C.J.R. ROBERTSON
Business Manager NZOCTB



Royal Spoonbill update

Since the June *OSNZ news* I have received over 20 reports of colour banded Royal Spoonbills which is a great effort.

Firstly, it is sad to report the loss of one bird—white over blue. This was one of the first chicks to be banded, on 6 February 1991. In May of that year it was seen on the Motueka Sandspit, Nelson. In April 1992 it was seen at the Bromley Sewage Ponds, Christchurch. Two months

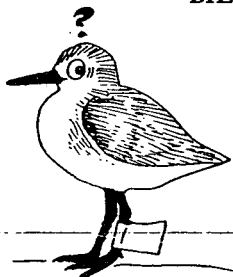
later it was back at the Motueka Sandspit. Then on 25 May 1993 it was shot, mistaken for a Canada Goose (it was in a flock of six, they did well to pick out the banded bird), at the Invercargill Estuary. This is the farthest south a banded spoonbill has been recorded, the majority of the birds migrate north. Also, with the recently formed colony at Invercargill it would have been interesting to see just where this bird would have nested. Still, I'm pleased for those who returned the band.

On a happier note, of the 24 birds banded last season 12 have been seen elsewhere. Nine have gone to Auckland or beyond and another seven banded in previous years have also been recorded in the Far North this winter.

The bird that spent the winter of 1991 in the Bay of Plenty has turned up again, this time on the Manukau Harbour.

A surprise is that no banded birds have been seen in Hawkes Bay. The numbers of Royal Spoonbills in that area have increased over several years and we all assumed they came from the Wairau colony. Hawkes Bay members will just have to keep looking.

BILL CASH



Flag Watch 1993

The wader leg-flagging programme in Australasia has continued during the last year with a further 10 000 birds being marked. An important extension to the programme during the year was the commencement of marking in north-western Australia, where some 4500 waders were flagged yellow. Thus birds are now being flagged orange, white, green and yellow.

With the increasing numbers of flagged birds, the incidence of sightings has accelerated, these coming recently from China, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Brunei, Indonesia, and New Zealand, as well as very interesting records from within Australia. The most dramatic report was of three Bar-tailed Godwits in the same flock at Ariake Sea, Kyushu, Japan, in April 1992. These birds had white, green and orange flags, indicating that they had originated from New Zealand, Queensland and Victoria, respectively. A report on the results of the programme to date was published in the April 1993 *Still*.

Allowing for a conservative annual survival rate of 75%, it is estimated that there are currently about 14 500 Australasian leg-flagged birds in the

flyway. The most commonly flagged species include Red-necked Stint, Great Knot, Grey-tailed Tattler, Lesser Knot, Sanderling, Mongolian Dotterel, Pacific Golden Plover, Whimbrel, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Turnstone, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Greenshank, Large Sand Dotterel, and Eastern Curlew.

The great majority of flags have been placed on the upper right leg (tibia), but a few are on the lower right leg (tarsus) – especially Turnstone and Sanderling – and also on the left leg. The exact position is not important.

Reports of sightings should include species name, place (including latitude and longitude), date, colour of leg-flag, and also approximate numbers and species of waders present.

All sightings should be reported to the Banding Office, Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 10420, Wellington.

MARK BARTER

Mystery Bird # 12

Mystery bird # 12 at first glance seems not to be giving too much away. Its head is facing down, so we have no idea what its bill is like. Likewise, its underparts and legs are not so visible. So we are left solely with the upperparts for the identification.



Firstly, what type of bird are we looking at? Structurally the main feature is the extended wing, which is very long relative to the length of the bird, especially the outer wing. Long wings are generally considered characteristic of certain groups of birds, such as the swifts, martins and swallows, waders, terns, and seabirds. The bird is not large, which alone does not rule out any of these groups, but when combined with the plumage features of dark upperparts with a white rump, rules out terns, swallows and all of the waders barring perhaps Oriental Pratincole. Of the seabirds, only the storm petrels have the white rump found here, so it is apparently one of these, a pratincole, a martin, or a swift.

Mystery Bird # 13

Identify this bird. Answer next issue



Tree Martin can be ruled out as the white rump does not extend up the centre of the back at all. It also lacks the pale bar up the inner wing, which likewise eliminates two other contenders – the Fork-tailed Swift and the Oriental Pratincole. So then we have a storm petrel, four species on the NZ list having a white rump and dark upperparts. Two of these (Black-bellied and White-bellied), however, lack the pale bar on the wing, leaving Wilson's Storm Petrel and Leach's Storm Petrel. Structurally, the bird tends towards Leach's, being long in the wing and this is confirmed by close examination of the tail. It is quite obvious that the tail has a fork in it, this being characteristic of Leach's Storm Petrel (formerly known as Leach's Fork-tailed Storm Petrel).

Leach's Storm Petrel is a widespread seabird in the Northern Hemisphere, in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. In the non-breeding season it migrates to tropical and subtropical waters, even occasionally to the subantarctic zone. In Australasia it has few records – 4 Australian and 5 New Zealand. Rather amazingly, one of our records was of two birds on land at the Chatham Islands, possibly prospecting for nest sites.

Having a bird in the hand obviously aids in the identification process, as at sea Wilson's and Leach's Storm Petrels are difficult to separate unless seen very well. Being on a breeding island obviously aids in the procuring of a photographic subject and I confess that mystery bird # 12 was a bit of a cheat in this respect – it comes from a thriving North Atlantic colony and not from a vagrant to our waters.

PHIL BATTLETT

Mystery Bird Quiz

Here we go with the third round of the Mystery Bird Quiz. Three more species from the New Zealand list to test you.

Several of you decided to try the March 1993 quiz, so results are now a little different from those I reported last time.

Firstly, the identifications.

A. Dunnock. Photographed at Hanmer Springs during the "big snow" of August 1992. All the birds were cold and hungry and with fluffed feathers. Guesses included Robin, Chaffinch, Redpoll, Silvereye, and Yellowhammer.

B. Brown (Subantarctic) Skua. Photographed near the Lords River, Stewart Island. Guesses included Northern Giant Petrel and South Polar Skua. I think the pale mark above the bill confused some of you. Peter Harrison in *Seabirds of the World* considers a pale band at the base of the bill diagnostic for South Polar Skua, but Paul & Joy Sagar's photograph of a Brown Skua in *Readers Digest Complete Book of New Zealand Birds* shows a pale band too.

C. Black Petrel. Photographed in the Hauraki Gulf near Little Barrier Island. There were 11 different species postulated for this picture. The guesses ranged from Harrier and Gannet through various albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels. Only one person was correct.

D. Bellbird. Photographed in the Marlborough Sounds. Most guessed Bellbird, with Fernbird and Tui also being noted.

E. Common Myna. Photographed in Auckland. Too easy! Apart from one guess for Blackbird, everyone knew it was a Myna.

F. Brown Teal. Photographed on Tiritiri Matangi. There were several guesses for Shoveler and one for Mallard.

So at the halfway stage, Daryl Eason of Te Anau leads with all six correct. Lloyd Esler of Invercargill and Kathleen Todd of Hastings are right behind with five correct, and there are several people with four. Again, thank you for comments in your letters. One entry is even coming from the USA, the Wallaces in Columbia.

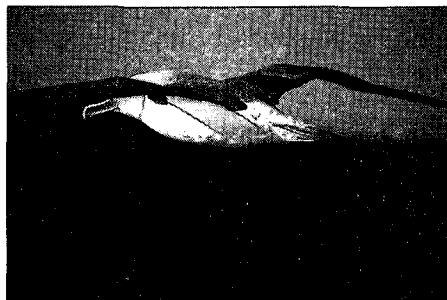
Post your entries to: Don Hadden, 288 Yaldhurst Road, Christchurch 8004.



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RAOU Column

The eagles have landed!

The long-awaited second volume of the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (HANZAB) is almost ready for publication at the time of writing. All of the plates have been completed and galleys are being proofed before submissions to the publishers, Oxford University Press, in September. We confidently expect to have copies available in mid to late October.

Volume 2 will cover 117 species, 91 of which breed in the region. These include eagles, kites and hawks, falcons, introduced galliforms (such as Chukar and Common Pheasant), native quail, button-quails, crakes and rails, thick-knees, jacanas, Plains-wanderer, oystercatchers, stilts and avocets, sheathbills, plovers, dotterels and lapwings. Volume 3 will contain the rest of the waders, skuas, gulls and terns, and the pigeons.

Discussions held with ornithologists in New Zealand during the 1990 IOC helped immensely to improve HANZAB's coverage of the birds of New Zealand. We look forward to a long and fruitful association during the course of the HANZAB project. Further details of HANZAB will be available with the September edition of *Wingspan*.

Other new publications

Two other important books that have been published recently are *Australian Raptor Studies* and the *National Plan for Shorebird Conservation in Australia*. *Raptor Studies* is the Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Conference of the Australasian Raptor Association, held in Canberra in 1989, which covered a wide range of topics including raptor evolution, biology, ecology, and conservation. *Shorebird Conservation* was compiled with funding from the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and to date is the most complete analysis of shorebird conservation in Australia. It identifies important areas for shorebirds, of both national and international significance, estimates population sizes, and provides a separate account for species occurring in Australia. As the title suggests it also lists recommendations for the conservation of shorebirds in Australia. Both these titles are available through the RAOU.

A boost for the ABC

The long-running Australian Bird Count (ABC) received a massive boost recently with nation-wide coverage on a *Question of Survival*, a weekly environmental show from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). A special six-week Birds in Gardens survey was designed for viewers of the programme and national advertising ensured an excellent response. However, nobody quite expected the success of the survey – the RAOU's Sydney office was deluged with 10 000 completed survey forms and volunteers worked virtually round the clock to process the results in time for the final episode of *A Question of Survival*. The response has been very encouraging and invaluable in spreading the word around the country about birds and their conservation.

DAVID ANDREW

Australasian Seabird Group

In Hobart on the evening of 3 December 1993, before the 1993 RAOU Seabird Congress (on 4-5 December), a meeting is planned to revitalise the Australasian Seabird Group (ASG). All past, present and intending members are welcome to attend. At this meeting it is proposed to discuss the direction and aims of the ASG, and it is hoped to vote in a new committee. The editorship and format of the ASG Newsletter will also be discussed. To this end contributions to the newsletter are now being solicited, nominations are being called for officers of the Group, and suggestions for business are requested. All correspondence should be sent to the ASG, c/o RAOU, 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039, Australia.

PAUL SCOFIELD

Ocean Birdwatching off Otago

Twice recently I have been fortunate enough to be able to help my wife, Abby Smith, on day-long trips off the Otago coast. Abby studies the chemistry of the seawater and makes monthly trips to sample the Southland Front at depths down to 1000 m. The Southland Front is the boundary between a warm water current from Australia that sweeps around the southern coast of the South Island and cold water from Antarctica. This boundary is very rich in pelagic marine life, and consequently in bird life as well.

Our first trip was on 10 November 1992, the second on 7 March 1993. Fortunately, the sea was calm on both occasions, something of an unusual event in this part of NZ.

On both trips I started seeing interesting birds as we left Otago Harbour: Northern Royal Albatross, Stewart Island Shag and Spotted Shag colonies on Taiaroa Head. Both species of shag, Black-backed

and Red-billed Gulls, and White-fronted Terns flew around the harbour entrance, joined on the latter trip by numerous "wintering" Black-fronted Terns. The latter species is one of the most difficult to identify because of the variety of plumages in late summer – immatures and adults in every stage of transition to their winter plumage, some bills orange, some black, some birds with full black caps, and others with just remnants of black on the nape. In November this species was presumably on its breeding grounds inland.

Within a few kilometres almost all of these species were absent, the Black-backed Gulls and White-fronted Terns venturing farthest out on both trips. The first true seabirds I saw were abundant, tens of thousands of Sooty Shearwaters, most within 20 km of the coast. In November, these were joined by smaller numbers of prions about 5 km offshore. There were only a few prions left in March. A few Hutton's Shearwaters were seen with the flocks of Sooties in March. The odd Cape Pigeon followed the boat briefly in both months, from about 5 km off the coast, and on both trips we saw Yellow-eyed Penguins feeding.

With the flocks of Sooty Shearwaters and farther out, but not beginning until about 10 km offshore, were several all-dark petrels. After a lot of frustrating attempts to get a good look at their bills, I finally succeeded, and decided there was no dark tip. Therefore, they were White-chinned Petrels and not Westland Petrels – at least the half a dozen or so in each month that came close to the boat were.

In March only, in the range 10-30 km offshore we saw dozens of Mottled Petrels. This species is possibly the easiest of the New Zealand gadfly petrels to identify, with its combination of a conspicuous black diagonal stripe on its white underwing and dark grey belly patch on an otherwise white underbody. With these, at about 25 km from the harbour entrance, I saw a Soft-plumaged Petrel. This species is quite different from the Mottled Petrel. The underwing looked dark from my distance of some 50 m, but the bright white underbody was crossed by a narrow blue-grey band around the neck.

Another unexpected species in March was a Buller's Shearwater, off which I saw four, the furthest south I have seen this species.

In both months I was lucky enough to get superb views of several kinds of albatrosses and mollymawks. They flew right around the boat, and sometimes when we stopped to sample, settled on the water perhaps hoping for some fish scraps. In March, Buller's Mollymawks were the closest to shore (with the exception of the Royal Albatrosses returning to their colony), and yet this species was completely absent in November. I have seen them about 5 km offshore in July 1992 as well.

In contrast, Salvin's Mollymawk was only present in November. In both months Shy and Black-browed Mollymawks were also seen, the latter were the last to appear as we journeyed outwards. The two largest species, Royal and Wandering Albatross were also present in good numbers.

With the albatrosses and mollymawks I saw a few Northern Giant Petrels, more in November than in March. On the November trip I was fortunate enough to see one of the Southern Giant Petrels. A large white bird appeared far away and homed in on the boat before coming to rest in the water right next to me. In fact it wasn't all white, but had flecks of dark brown all over.

In spite of all this diversity, two groups surprised me by their absence; Diving Petrels and Storm Petrels.

HAMISH SPENCER

Kingfisher preying upon mouse

Recently I saw a photograph of a Kingfisher which had apparently choked to death on a mouse and this reminded me of an occasion in July 1988 when a Kingfisher was much more successful, though the end result for the mouse was just the same.

I was fortunate enough to catch sight of the Kingfisher carrying its mouse as it flew into a tree about 20 m from my home and was able to watch for the ensuing 20-30 minutes by binoculars. The bird moved through several perches until apparently satisfied that the best position had been found. The mouse was then gripped by the bill across the base of the tail and was beaten to one and then the other side against the branch. After a few minutes of this the mouse was worked round in the bill until the grip was across the neck, the beating then resumed.

The persistence and vigour with which these actions were repeated suggested to me that not only was the mouse being beaten to death, but that its shoulder girdle and pelvis were being broken to allow for greater compression during swallowing. Swallowing occupied about 5 minutes, the mouse going down head first in a series of convulsive gulps with long pauses. When the Kingfisher finally flew off there was still a length of the tail hanging from the bill and the bird had a well developed chest contour.

I have also had the experience of seeing a Kingfisher take and devour a Silvereye, although I was not able to make such detailed observations. The Silvereye was one of a flock which I was watching from about 2 m as they fed over a clump of red-hot poker. The "take" was so fast that I was only made aware of it by the alarm calls of the flock, and almost as soon as I located the Kingfisher it moved more deeply into its tree. I could only identify

its continued presence by the sight of feathers floating to the ground. In due course the Kingfisher came to the outside of the tree and was seen to be literally red-breasted from blood. I searched the ground below the tree and found both Silvereye wings and many stray feathers, but no sign of the head.

A.D. MCCUTCHAN

NZ Falcon on Mt Tarawera

On 4 July 1993 a NZ Falcon was seen on Mt Tarawera. The Falcon soared above the main crater just north of the summit, then it made a gliding dive to land on a rocky outcrop on the rim overlooking the crater. It perched there for about 10 minutes even though I was just above it on a ridge some 10 m away. The bird eventually took off gracefully and headed north.

Is this sighting unusual? It is the first Falcon that I have positively identified in the Tarawera area.

JOHN BRIERLY

Seabirds off Farewell Spit

Many of us land-based birders have only limited chances to see the seabirds New Zealand is so famed for, if we don't happen to have contacts with owners of fishing boats. However, a good thing about New Zealand is that you don't necessarily even have to take foot off *terra firma* in order to see seabirds if you can get to a decent promontory. I spent January and February 1993 on Farewell Spit and took regular opportunities to gaze seawards.

The commonest seabird was, not surprisingly, Fluttering Shearwater, with large numbers of prions at times also passing by. Sooty Shearwaters and Westland Petrels were seen regularly, but frequently too distant to be distinguished unless in very good light. Large seabirds were well represented, with giant petrels (mainly juveniles) passing by or following fishing boats, and albatrosses of several species – Wandering, Shy, Buller's, Salvin's and Black-browed – seen occasionally.

Some surprises were dished up though. Only one Buller's Shearwater was identified, and the most Arctic Skuas seen was only 2 at a time. However, the trump card for the summer was an intermediate morph South Polar Skua which was flying around the tip of the Spit one evening. This caused loss of a few heartbeats by showing itself for only about 30 seconds, but then gave 5 minutes of better viewing, even chasing a Black-backed Gull for comparison (see Mystery Bird # 11 solution).

Add to these the breeding Gannets (about 950 pairs by my rough estimate), Caspian Terns (unfortunately washed out twice and finally abandoning breeding) and

Black-backed Gulls and you can see that Farewell Spit is not only a great haven for waders. And where else can you see such incongruities as a giant petrel gliding gracefully behind 1000 Black Swans?

PHIL BATTLE

Black-fronted Dotterel anecdotes

During the five years we have been banding Black-fronted Dotterels we have made some interesting observations.

In 1988, a pair nested in an asparagus patch adjacent to a stream. This coincided with picking, so obviously the dotterels were constantly disturbed. However, the birds seemed determined not to give up, and were observed still incubating 40 days after the nest was first found!

In 1989, we found a nest on a shingle beach. This is unusual for Black-fronted Dotterels as they seem to prefer river shingle and sometimes the dry mud margins of marshland.

On 28 February 1993 we were watching one of our banded birds feeding on a marsh verge when a Harrier flew low overhead. The waterfowl, Pied Stilts, and Spur-winged Plovers all flew up, with the stilts and plovers attempting to drive the Harrier off. The Black-fronted Dotterel, which was the only bird left, lay outstretched on the ground until the danger was past, then resumed feeding, well before the other birds landed.

WAYNE & MARGARET TWYDLE

Kaka in suburban Auckland

Kaka are generally rare on the North Island mainland and can be seen with reliability only in larger remnants of mature native forest such as Pureora and Whirinaki. Suburban Birkenhead, only ten minutes from downtown Auckland, is hardly the place one would expect to see and hear Kaka. However, at least one Kaka was resident in Birkenhead, living in suburban bush reserves, from August to November last year. I saw the bird on many occasions and heard it daily. kaka do straggle to Auckland regularly, presumably from island strongholds such as Little Barrier, 80 km to the north east. This bird, or birds, however, had been living in the city for at least three months. A longtime Birkenhead resident informs me that this is the first time she had seen a Kaka in the 50 years she's been here.

The local Kaka is almost certainly a straggler from Little Barrier, which is visible from our street on a clear day. Kaka colour banded on Little Barrier have turned up in Warkworth and as far away as Gisborne. Although the bird I saw was not banded, Kaka have distinct dialectal differences and this one sounded exactly like those on Little Barrier.

The presence of Kaka in the suburbs of a major city is further evidence of the importance of island sanctuaries as reservoirs for many native bird species. It is also evidence of the value of suburban bush reserves which provide a refuge for such out of town visitors.

The fact that young Kaka on Little Barrier often die during their first winter suggests that this population may have reached its maximum size. It is not surprising, therefore, that some birds leave the island for greener pastures, even the "bright lights" of a bush reserve in the big city. While Kaka are unlikely to breed successfully amidst the possums, rats and cats that abound in suburban Auckland, there's no reason why a few could not survive for decades in bush reserves of sufficient size and diversity.

There is considerable irony in this Kaka residing, almost literally, in my backyard. For the last four years I have been studying the productivity and foraging behaviour of kaka on Kapiti Island for a Ph.D thesis which I am now writing up. I've placed great emphasis on the increasing rarity of the Kaka on the main islands of New Zealand, so it was a strange experience to have my train of thought frequently interrupted by the raucous skraaks of this supposedly "threatened" bird! Must have been some kind of omen that the time to finish my thesis is nigh.

RON MOORHOUSE

Twizel spreads a banquet for oystercatchers

It is not only humans that find Twizel a good place to visit. While staying there in January I was delighted to see upwards of 30 Pied Oystercatchers enjoying one of the town's amenities. Sprinklers were being used to keep the wide grass verges green, and the oystercatchers were having a feast, presumably on insects as well as earthworms that were coming to the surface.

The birds were oblivious to all the noisy traffic passing close by, but when I left the car and held up my camera they nonchalantly sidled around to the other side of the sprinkler without stopping their rapid eating.

A primary schoolboy proudly told me that; "when the sprinklers were going they always had lots of oystercatchers at his school".

AUDREY EAGLE

Curlew Sandpiper & Marsh Sandpiper swimming

In September 1992, while working with the Australasian Wader Study Group expedition in NW Australia, we witnessed the strange sight of waders swimming.

We were camped at the Port Hedland Salt Works for the purpose of cannon and mist netting migratory waders. While on a preliminary survey of the various evaporation ponds we saw small mixed flocks of Curlew Sandpipers and Marsh Sandpipers floating on one of the ponds. They appeared to be feeding off surface insects or possibly brine shrimps, which are common here. As they were moving forward in the water it appeared that they were paddling with their feet. The water was at least a metre deep and, in this pond, very saline, which may have accounted for the birds' ability to float. Some Red-necked Avocets were also swimming and feeding in a similar manner.

BETTY SEDDON

Odd visitors to the Brothers Islands

Over the last couple of years there have been a number of visits to the Brothers Islands, the Northern or Little Brother only, that's the one with the lighthouse.

The Brothers are renown for their seabird populations and to date only one species of passerine, the Hedge Sparrow has been recorded breeding on the island. There are two pairs resident on Little Brother and last summer I found a nest with three eggs.

However, there are numerous visits to the island made by other species of passerine, usually small flocks of less than 10 birds are seen. These flocks usually appear on the island in the morning and by evening they are gone. Starling and Goldfinch would be the most regular visitors but Redpoll, Blackbird, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer, House Sparrow, Skylark and Welcome Swallow have all been recorded.

All these passerines may be on internal migration, but two of our native species have also been recorded recently. Just what they were doing there is uncertain. In February 1992 a lone Grey Warbler was heard singing and on 10 March 1993 two Fantails were seen flying around the island and hawking insects amongst the Hebe bushes. The nearest patch of bush is on Arapawa Island, 4.5 km away.

Checking through old copies of *Notornis* I discovered that this was not the first time Fantails had been recorded on the island. In Vol. 5 No. 1, dated July 1952, J.H. Sutherland authored an article "Birds of the Brothers" in which he recorded that a Fantail visited the island on 14 March 1951 and stayed for three days.

BILL CASH

Going to welcome the migrants

Members from Wellington, Taranaki and wanganui joined the Manawatu team to welcome the waders which returned to the Foxton Estuary by 3 October. The party had to face a fresh wind and small tide, but nevertheless saw a good number of birds.

The most significant feature was the change in numbers during three consecutive days; David Medway visited the estuary on 2 October and the Bells remained until 4 October. Wrybills appeared to be passing through on their way south, with only 2 present on 2 October but 16 the next day - all were in fresh plumage and one sported a metal band.

Walter Chelley (Manawatu) had been watching the steady increase in the numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits and on 3 October we counted 290. The numbers of Lesser Knots had also been increasing - we counted 65. On 3 October we saw only one Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, but the next day there were 6; in the same period the numbers of Pacific Golden Plovers increased from 4 to 10. The most interesting rarity was a Wandering Tattler.

It was a good day both for the birds - some of the golden plovers were still in remnant breeding plumage - and socially as it brought members together from various regions. We may repeat the exercise in late summer to say farewell to the migrants.

BRIAN D. BELL

Unusual seabird in Hamilton

On 28 January 1992, an unusual bird was brought into the Hamilton SPCA. At first I thought it was like a black prion, then I decided it was a petrel of some kind.

The bird had landed exhausted on the Dinsdale Hill in Hamilton and had to be rescued from the clutches of a cat. It was kept as quiet as possible and put in a warm dark shed after being fed. However, it succumbed during the night

Folkert Nieuwland identified the bird as a White-faced Storm Petrel; a seabird nowhere near the sea! Possibly it was a young bird which had been blown off course during the strong westerlies that week. This is the first record of a White-faced Storm Petrel in Hamilton.

PAUL CUMING

Aerial surveying of seabirds

Since 1989 the Department of Conservation has been conducting aerial surveys of Hector's Dolphins off Banks Peninsula. During early March 1992 I was fortunate to accompany Martin Rutledge on a dolphin survey from Taumutu (at the southern end of Lake Ellesmere) to Sumner

(Christchurch). During a period of two hours we flew over Banks Peninsula's 335 km of coastline at 150 m above sea level. The flight path was rather irregular and at randomly chosen intervals we flew transects of up to 10 nautical miles off the coast. This offered me the opportunity to observe seabirds from a rather different perspective. I was keen to find out just how visible seabirds were from the air.

The flight commenced just after sunrise and by 0830 h there was a distinct glare off the sea on side of the plane. The sea was moderate and white caps were the major distraction for Martin's dolphin survey - the reason for the early start!

Black-backed Gulls and Australasian Gannets were easily spotted, but seabirds flying lower over the water were harder to detect. Spotted Shags could be distinguished from shearwaters quite easily on the basis of their different flight patterns. Buller's Shearwaters stood out, although smaller shearwaters were hard to differentiate. All of these seabirds were in flight and no feeding groups were noticed.

I was impressed by Martin's ability to spot Little Blue Penguins. On a typical flight during the 1991-92 season, Martin recorded about 50 Little Blue Penguins. Martin remarked that when viewed from above, Little Blue Penguins had a distinct laterally compressed profile. It was clear that one had to acquire experience with aerial seabird spotting!

After the flight I was convinced that aeroplanes offer a potentially effective tool for extensive seabird surveys. With training the observer could identify seabirds to a reasonably specific level. While the expense of such surveys could be a major restriction, I am sure that aerial surveys could provide much needed data about the distribution of our inshore seabirds.

PETER LANGLANDS

Recent Reports

Insufficient reports were received to include this feature in the September OSNZ news. Please forward report for the December issue to me c/o Post Office, Karitane, Otago by 10 November, at the latest.

DEREK ONLEY

Regional Roundup

Northland

The last three months have been busy with a wide variety of activities. Several members were involved a bird survey at Mangawhai Estuary for the Mangawhai Restoration Society, who want to block one of the estuary entrances. Surveys of bird usage of the affected area were made before and after a giant sand castle was built.

In June, Gavin Grant found 2 Fairy Terns at Skull Creek on Whangarei Harbour and Pat Miller saw 3 at Tokitoki Creek in July. Fairy Terns regularly used Whangarei Harbour in the 1970s, but until now have not been seen there for many years.

At our June meeting Pat Miller gave a very unornithological slide show about his and Don Pittham's recent trip to Madagascar in search of the aye-aye, tenrecs, tortoises, giant & dwarf chameleons, etc. The only bird that featured in this talk was extinct - the giant Elephant Bird. Pat and Don visited an area in the extreme south of Madagascar where fragments of Elephant Bird eggshell dated at 1000 years old litter the sand dunes. The shell is 3 mm thick and complete eggs have a volume of 7 litres.

Passerine banding got off to a slow start this winter due to the low numbers of birds at Jean Hawkens' orchard where we banded last year. It was not until the third site was tried that we got good numbers of birds.

Eight members spent the weekend of 24-25 July on Motukawanui Island in the Cavalli Group, tree planting. Hundreds of trees were planted - taraire, *Coprosma*, *Hebe*, flax, etc. One member had a fight with a spade and required 16 stitches.

The number of Royal Spoonbills visiting Whangarei Harbour increased to 21 this season. Other interesting birds around our region at present include Eastern Curlew and White Heron at Waipu Estuary.

(Pat Miller)

Auckland

Evening meetings seem to vary in attendance from around 50 to 70 plus on a good night. In the mid to late 1980s we usually scored around 70 members with just under 100 I recall on one evening when Geoff Moon presented one of his bird slide spectaculars. I also remember when many of us would go down to the South

Auckland meetings a couple of days after our usual monthly gathering. As for field activities, they were well supported, and I recall John Dowding having a serious headache on a couple of occasions with too many beach patrol enthusiasts!

In contrast, Sharen and I plus Mel Galbraith and his young daughter were the only beach patrollers on one recent Sunday morning when admittedly the weather was less friendly. However, that weather has always been around and it didn't deter people so much in the past.

Our field activities other than beach patrols are also up and down. Wader counts used to be an absolute must, and who cared what the weather conditions were? I recall with some pride Beth Brown sending us off into the howling wind and rain that often coincides with the routine wader counts on the Manukau. Phoning back later, after a hot bath and stiffener, we were anxious to communicate our results and discover if we were the only ones to record the whimbrel.

Today, wader counts are erratically supported. Sometimes we have enthusiasm for particular outings and sometimes we literally get a "nil return" for a wader count. The geographical location is not a factor. Taporā can be well supported on one occasion but shunned on another. The same applies to all locations.

Fairly local activities tend to be the most popular these days - Ambury Farm, Mangere Ponds, Wenderholm Regional Park, and Pollen Island visits have been well supported. Ironically, one of the most popular long term studies, the twice yearly Tiritiri Matangi survey, is also the most expensive at around \$65 each for the weekend. We don't have many problems finding 15 members required for that activity, which indicates that the dreadful economic patch the country has been through isn't entirely to blame for the general reduction in activity support.

Looking at the excellent programmes we are lucky enough to compile for this region, the bird study subjects certainly have no bearing on the reduced support. Tony Beauchamp on the decline of Wekas in the North Island, in May; NZ waders by super-bander Adrian Riegen and Dick Veitch, in June; Little Terns by Stephen Davies, Fairy Terns by Richard Parrish, Caspian Terns by Michael Taylor, and terns in general by Geoff Moon made up a superb July meeting. Most recently, Terry Greene from DoC Little Barrier was again excellent with Kaka, Kakariki, and Kakapo. The field activities are equally varied and interesting, and we also enjoy a good consumption of national and international news. Sarah Lowe, just back from Japan, praising the survival success of sparrows and pigeons in the urban gloom of that country. Nan Rothwell "glowing" birds and experiences of Scotland. Sharen and Mike Graham marveling at a Caspian

Tern above Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, at least 500 km from the nearest sea. And we have much welcomed overseas visitors nearly every meeting.

So why are we going through a patch of reduced, varied, and sometimes no support for the OSNZ activities in our region? As usual, in my view, there are a number of reasons.

Economics is definitely a factor. In general, there isn't much money to spend on leisure or hobby activities these days. There are few in the country who have not experienced some reason to exercise financial restraint. Pensioners have been under pressure, students, the source of so much enthusiasm and expertise in the past, are under pressure, and so too are DoC and the former DSIR who are gradually coming to terms with very different financial regimes. They do not have the resources to help groups like OSNZ in the way they often used to.

Leading on from the above is the second factor which I title "performance economics". Our Society has been and thankfully still is, helped greatly by many individuals whom in our context can be termed "professionals". I have mentioned Doc and DSIR, and they are the obvious examples. However, just as important are the many professionals from universities, regional and local authorities, museums, zoos, private reserves, and dozens of greatly talented individuals involved in photography, filming, wildlife tourism, and other related trades. We should not forget the general business people of the Society.

All of this large group have to contend with the Employment Contracts Act, a very competitive and difficult business environment, and their success or failure - their future - generally based on well defined, and usually demanding performance criteria.

We should be very appreciative of their continued support.

The third factor I choose to mention may well be the most important - the human factor. Sometimes societies or regions are fortunate enough to be blessed with groups or individuals whose enthusiasm, experience, commitment, charisma - sometimes eccentricity - just act as a catalyst and everything seems to go at 100 kph. The region "gets on a roll". Auckland was in such a position in the mid 1980s. At the moment we see Waikato doing great work, and seemingly having much fun doing it, because of the people available to do it all. They have a wonderful team of active ornithologists and are on a roll.

What puzzled me was the fact that I have met wonderful teams of active ornithologists from every region, and yet we all seem to suffer these "hills and valleys" of support levels. My father, a

veteran of sports club captaincies, chairmanships, and organising committees, explained that it was all quite normal. His belief in people is such that he maintains there is always talent in any group, but the wide circumstances of life in general create the chance to exploit the talent. It's a cyclical, or opportunist situation, but he assured me that we will all get our turn.

He's right. Look at the small South Auckland region and the tremendous AGM they managed this year.

I close a somewhat different Regional Roundup hoping that it stimulates feed-back from further afield, and repeating a comment Dick Veitch made at our June meeting. Dick pointed out that in joining OSNZ we joined a common dedication to study birdlife in New Zealand. He reminded us that the regular census works done in beach patrolling, wader counting, and other surveys, were very important in the overall scientific and conservation context. It's important that we keep it going well.

(Mike Graham)

South Auckland

It was a challenge for South Auckland to host the Society's AGM for the first time and the venue, at Camp Morley near Clark's Beach, on the Manukau Harbour, just held the 92 participants. Saturday offered a choice between the known delights of the Firth of Thames and the chance to explore the Awhitu Peninsula. Sunday's talks on Island Conservation were of a high calibre and the arrival of Dick Sibson drew a spontaneous round of applause.

We participated in another Kokako survey of the northern Hunua Ranges in April, organised by Brenda Green of the Auckland Regional Council. Despite the bad weather the results seem promising, with several reports of birds from new areas. The Kiwi survey of southern Ponui Island, organised by Shaarina Boyd of DoC, was also a bracing experience, but this did not deter the Kiwis, which are obviously thriving. Members participated in 3 major wader counts within 8 days during June (this includes helping with the count of South Kaipara) and in July we had another delightful overnight trip to Tiritiri Matangi where 43 species were recorded, including a chance to watch the nearly fully grown Takahe chick with its parents and hearing the newly released Little Spotted Kiwi.

In May, David Game of DoC spoke to us about his side of the work on Raoul Island. He is responsible for the practical side and safety of the team there and obviously delights in the chance to visit the island himself. In June, Brenda Green updated us on the work being done with Kereru at Wenderholm and invited us to participate in searching for nests during the

spring. She also showed a rather sobering video of nest predation of kokako in the Rotoehu Forest and discussed how it could relate to the Kokako population in the Hunua Ranges. In July, Stella Rowe, organiser of the 3-month research project on the Mangaia Kingfisher, gave us a very well prepared and interesting talk on the work there last spring. This provided a baseline for further research on this rare species.

(Anthea Goodwin)

Waikato

Winter census counts of Kawhia and Aotea Harbours were completed on fine calm days, large numbers of Royal Spoonbills being the more remarkable find – 17 were found on the day, but 18 had been noted previously. Debate still continues as to whether a group of 5 birds seen on the day had already been counted. If not, there could have been 22 present on the harbour. A subsequent trip to check the numbers of Royal Spoonbills was foiled by a boat losing a propeller and having to be towed back to Kawhia, by which time the tide had receded too far. With such a large increase in spoonbill numbers (6 is the most seen previously) and no colour banded birds present, we wonder where they have come from.

A low tide on another day found us wading Kawhia's mudflats with Christine Reed from DoC, Twizel, to seek migrating Black/Hybrid/Pied Stilts. Twelve of these were located. Christine's knowledge of juvenile plumage and adult node patterns was of great assistance to those of us who only see the birds once or twice a year.

Evening meetings are our most popular winter activity, with large attendances to hear the Tanga'eo Research Group, led by Stella Rowe, describe their project and experiences during the two months the two teams spent on Mangaia Island in the Cook Islands.

Bird study took on a new dimension for us when Dave Wills showed excellent slides followed by a video, on predation of NZ Dotterel on Matakana Island. Dave made the video using an infra-red camera with a one second time lapse over 72 hours. In one instance the film showed a Harrier taking an adult dotterel from its nest, while cats, Black-backed Gulls and opossums were also identified as predators.

John Dowding continued the NZ Dotterel theme at a subsequent meeting when he told us of the plight of the Stewart Island population, with its numbers down to 65 birds and on the brink of extinction. Concerned, lively discussion at the conclusion of the talk resulted in a large donation from Waikato Forest & Bird being given to enable cat control work to proceed this season, in the hope that a long term recovery plan can be implemented before the following breeding season.

Ventures into the technological age continue with some of the Grey-faced Petrel study team being initiated into the mysteries of operating a "burrow-cam" devised by DoC staff from Rotorua. The apparatus looks a bit like a vacuum cleaner hose containing a small camera, which is inserted into the petrel burrow and enables the team to view the burrow chamber and its occupant (if there is one) on a small TV screen with minimal disturbance to the birds. You are bound to hear more about this from project leader Hugh Clifford.

An "indoors field trip" to the Auckland Museum was organised by Pam Bovill for the purpose of studying plumage details of waders. This proved to be a very valuable teaching day and highly recommended to all regions close to a museum collection.

(Bev Woolley)

Hawkes Bay

Our May field trip was to a farm on the inland side of the Outfall Channel, Ahuriri, where the farmer had reported seeing a Glossy Ibis and this was confirmed by two OSNZ members. Although there was no Glossy Ibis to be seen an enjoyable afternoon was spent looking at wetlands which previously we had only seen from the stopbank on the other side of the channel. Many Black-fronted Dotterels were feeding in the wetlands.

The June wader count was carried out successfully at both Ahuriri and Porangahau. We noticed that there did not seem to be the usual numbers of birds at Porangahau and wondered whether the change in habitat was one of the reasons for this. There was not as much exposed mudflat as there has been in the past.

In July, we travelled to Lake Opouahi and Thomas Bush at Tutira for our monthly field trip. A pleasant walk around the lake and on up to Thomas Bush revealed abundant Fantails and Grey Warblers. Other native birds included Tui, Bellbird, NZ Pigeon, Whitehead and Tomtit. Introduced birds in the surrounding farmland included Yellowhammer, finches, and Redpoll. Mallards were the only waterfowl on the lake.

We held one mist netting session in July, which was attended by a few members. The nets were set up at an apple orchard and we caught about 60 birds – mostly Greenfinches and a good number of Chaffinches.

(Christine McRae)

Wanganui

Wanganui monthly meetings are attended by between 6 and 10 members. The first meeting of the year was in February when Colin Ogle gave a talk about birds and their habitats at Lake Wairarapa. This was illustrated with excellent slides and graphs and was enjoyed by all who attended.

Our second meeting had no guest speaker and the falling member attendance was discussed with several suggestions made about how to attract more members. These included field trips, guest speakers and more member involvement.

At our third meeting we welcomed 2 potential new members, Bev and Ken. The new members were given a summary of the regional activities and of some of the projects that members were involved in.

At our fourth meeting Tom Teasdale gave a talk about his involvement with the rehabilitation of Harriers. The numbers of Harriers which are killed or injured on our roads is a concern.

Colin Ogle returned as guest speaker at our fifth meeting when he talked about the preferred habitat of the California Quail. This involved a very detailed study and was well presented – a very enjoyable and informative talk.

The next meeting was at the Wieraka Estate where we started the evening with a guided tour of the museum. There was a display case of British birds which brought back some fond boyhood memories to some of us. Other displays included beetles from around the world, moths and butterflies. The display of NZ birds included Kakapo, Huia, Kokako, mollymawk, Giant Petrel, NZ Thrush, NZ Falcon, Harrier with chick, Kiwi, and Bittern. Over supper the 12 members talked about the displays and some of the history of the estate.

(Tom Teasdale)

Manawatu

Five members from our region attended the AGM in South Auckland. Everyone enjoyed the weekend, despite the unseasonal Auckland weather! The venue at Camp Morley was ideal, and the hospitality, trips, and talks were all much appreciated. Thanks South Auckland.

There has quite a lot of activity in the region. The Department of Conservation have decided to publicise the Manawatu Estuary at Foxton as the regions "Living Place" for Conservation Week. This involved a number of members, collaborating with DoC and the Science Centre in Palmerston North, to produce all the relevant material regarding the importance of the estuary, from an OSNZ perspective. We rallied all available members and telescopes for a closer look at the estuary on 8 August, when the general public were invited to Foxton for a "hands on day". DoC hopes to make the public aware of how the integration of tidal mudflats, salt marsh and sand dunes makes this such a unique ecosystem.

We have also had a joint field trip with Forest & Bird, visiting Pukepuke Lagoon and Lake Koputara. This trip was well attended, about 50 people, and although we did not manage to produce any Fernbirds

it was a great day for all the usual bird species.

Pam & Roger Slack and David Havell finally found our Cattle Egrets. They hadn't wandered too far away from the spillway at Whirokino, but had proved very elusive, until 19 June that is. They seem to have been disturbed by the clearance of dead macrocarpa trees near their usual roost just about the time they arrived back from Australia. They now appear to have found some more trees to roost in on Springs Road, on the banks of the Manawatu River. There seem to be about 125 birds in the roost.

Record numbers of Royal Spoonbills were counted at Foxton on 22 May, with 58 birds including a banded juvenile from the Wairau Lagoons. There were still 50 present on 19 June.

During the duck shooting season the Manawatu Estuary provided many birds with a safe haven. On 19 June there were about 600 Mallard, 330 Grey teal and 26 Shoveler. The Chestnut Teal was again seen on 22 May and 3 July.

(Pam Slack)

Wellington

With a particularly mild winter participants in our ongoing projects of counts on Kapiti Island and at Pauatahanui Inlet have enjoyed fine calm weekends. On Kapiti, Kokako and Stitchbirds were heard by several counters.

Our high standard of evening speakers has continued. A trip to the little-known Seychelle and Mauritius Islands was illustrated with magnificent slides by Don Merton, who has worked to help save the endangered Seychelles Magpie Robin. Snipe were the topic of the June meeting when Colin Miskelly told us about the forms which used to live in New Zealand. Colin went on to discuss his research on the Snares subspecies.

In July, Peter Bull told us about the nest recording project which he has been carrying out on a 10-acre property near Ohau since 1974. Not counting House Sparrows and Starlings, Peter has recorded a total of 648 nests between 1974 and 1992, showing what valuable information can be built up through a long term research programme in a small area. The August meeting brought us a selection of projects by local members. An update of Kerry Oates' Blue Duck surveys was followed by Max Falconer with some results of almost 10 years of trapping Silvereyes in his garden on the western hills of the Hutt Valley. Some of these birds were found a surprising distance away, and became addicted to the trap and was recaptured about 40 times.

Somes Island has been a place of interest for Reg Cotter over many years. Reg gave us some information about the birds of the island and the replanting

programme being run by Forest & Bird. Enfy's Graham rounded off the evening with a speedy travelogue of birdwatching in Spain.

Some local sightings of interest include Kaka seen near Raumatī, and near Kaitoke, north of Upper Hutt. No one seems quite sure where these birds may have come from – maybe Kapiti Island. A Cirl Bunting was seen by Max Falconer in Normandale – the first in about 20 years, and 4 Tuis in a Kowhai tree in Tawa was an unusual sight. At Waikanae Estuary there have been Black-fronted Dotterel, Grey Teal and a Little Egret. A NZ Falcon at Lake Kohangatera, Pencarrow, and 2 Reef Herons between Pukerua Bay and Paekakariki were also reported.

(Ros Batcheler)

Canterbury

A Little Stint was seen at Lake Ellesmere in November 1992 and stayed the summer, the last sighting was on 26 March 1993. Five members were able to get a good description of the bird and its changing plumage. If accepted by the Rare Birds Committee, this will be the first official sighting for new Zealand.

A total of 11 Glossy Ibis spent the summer at Ellesmere and a Greenshank was seen there in April and a Marsh Sandpiper in May and July. A White-winged Black Tern was seen in March in the company of a Little Tern. By June the White-winged Black Tern had assumed full breeding plumage and was still there on 26 July when Maida Barlow accompanied us to the far end of Kaitorete Spit, which was the site of our largest Caspian Tern colony last summer with about 36 occupied nests. Maida was thrilled to see 3 of her banded birds there. A good total of 11 Pectoral Sandpipers summered at Ellesmere as did 71 Red-necked Stints, two of which had orange leg-flags.

Our region also has had an influx of Little Black Shags, at least 7. Will they nest? Winter brought 2 Little Egrets to the Ashley Estuary and an Australian Little Grebe for the second year running to the Waikuku waterways. The Scaup and Coot survey continues and is now in its second year.

One of several on-going projects in the region is the winter count of Crested Grebes on the Ashburton Lakes. On 24 July, 6 Christchurch members joined a group from Mid Canterbury at Mount Somers, where leader Donald Geddes sorted us into small parties so that the entire lake system was covered and counts made not only of the grebes but also all the waterbirds using the lakes and wetlands. It was a hard slog for some, over extremely swampy terrain and we were all glad at the end of the survey to partake of hot soup and cups of tea provided by one of our friends at his Lake Clearwater bach.

A few days before this survey, Sheila Petch and Kathleen Harrison visited Lake Forsyth where a good count of Crested Grebes was made. It was a surprise to find 43 grebes using the lake – almost twice the number counted last year. Ten of the grebes were immatures and to our delight we witnessed two pairs of adults performing their courtship display. Whether these Forsyth birds are from the Ashburton Lakes is anyone's guess, but undoubtedly a good living is made on Forsyth and the birds are present from June to August each year.

Our monthly meetings have been well attended with interesting speakers including Dr Ken Hughey, DoC, about managing endangered species and Francis Schmechel, an American, telling us how logging was stopped in an area near Mt St Helens to save the Spotted Owl.

(Sheila Petch)

Otago

During the June meeting and to a large audience, Abby Smith explained the subtropical convergence off the Otago coast and pointed to the various seabird distributions in the different zones off the coast. For a detailed description of these zones and their seabirds I refer you to Hamish Spencer's article in this issue of *OSNZ news*.

A number of members who have witnessed the most southern occurrence of a Grey Phalarope in New Zealand, at Inch Clutha, have since been debating the misnomer: should this male in red breeding plumage be called by its American name - Red Phalarope? Lengthy discussions are still taking place about the route this bird may have taken to reach the shores of Eastern Otago. Did it come from the west coast of South America or the west coast of Africa? We'll never know.

(Peter Schweigman)

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