

OSNZ news

Edited by TONY CROCKER, 117 Paparoa Street, Christchurch 5,
for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)
Please note that sightings recorded in this Newsletter are subject
to confirmation.

No. 72 September, 1994

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

Post AGM Field Trip to Farewell Spit

How could the wonderful scientific day and field trip of our May AGM be matched? Easily! Nelson RR Jenny Hawkins and President Brian Bell led a band of thirteen members out to Farewell Spit at the conclusion of the AGM. Our group comprised members from the length and breadth of New Zealand, most there for the first time; Prue Cozens, Lorna Simpkin and Pauline Smith (Whangarei), Doug Booth and Lois Booth (Auckland), Paul Cuming and Ian Reid (Hamilton), Frank Ayling and Heather Ayling (New Plymouth), Suzanne Orchard (Manawatu), Lindsay Kelynack (Wellington), Don Hadden (Christchurch) and Hamish Spencer (Dunedin). We were accompanied by Phil Battley and Brent Stephenson from Massey University who were studying waders.

Farewell Spit has a dynamic topography of sand blown incessantly eastward toward Cook Strait. This orientation surprised many of us, as did the variety of vegetation that survives the wind. The length of the spit varies with the tide, and we were glad to be spared the strenuous walk more common in the past. Transport out to the lighthouse was along the ocean beach by four-wheel drive truck. We passed flocks of White-fronted Terns, and seabirds including gannets and Westland Petrels could be seen feeding offshore. On arriving at the lighthouse we found that the recent thinning of the macrocarpas had exposed the compound to more of the gusting winds; however one of the houses now sports a new macrocarpa deck. The lighthouse is powered by electricity supplied by an underground cable and, courtesy of this line, the houses now also have electricity. Unfortunately the power failed just after 6 pm and we discovered that the back-up system for the

lighthouse did not extend to the house. Luckily our dinner was cooked except for the rice, and we dined by lighthouse-light and candlelight. Brian regaled us with stories of previous trips: vehicles getting stuck in the sand, passengers falling off vehicles, and always the wind.

The next morning the wind was gusting to 45 knots. We were intrigued to see the Welcome Swallows resting on the ground to escape the wind. The flying sand did not deter us however and we walked through the wind and shallow water to Bushy Point. A decaying Minke Whale provided a pungent food supply for the gulls along the way. The gannets had all finished breeding for the season, but we saw several flying nearby. After lunch as the tide came in, small flocks of waders - godwit, knot, Turnstone, Banded Dotterel - were driven in off the mudflats. With them was one of the highlights for the northerners, a Black-fronted Tern in full breeding dress. We were all ready for the vagaries of the power supply the second night, and had dinner all ready by 6.15. And sure enough, off went the lights again. Another meal by candlelight, but this time we had plenty of rice - in fact even Phil and Brent's best efforts could not finish it all. The day closed with Jenny cleaning her teeth with SPF15 sunscreen.

Overnight the winds had dropped slightly but were still quite invigorating. Our group split in two, with one group being driven back west to Stockyard to check on the numbers of Royal Spoonbills. Stockyard is a pan on the inner southern side of the spit, a short walk across from the ocean beach. While the spoonbills were counted (we claim 42) the second group was driven not so far back, to Mullet Creek. This creek drains onto the mudflats, whose waders are chased up by the rising

tide to roost along the sandflats on the edge of the creek. This party found a sheltered spot in the sun, and waited for the tide and the Stockyard party. We were rewarded by further Black-fronted Tern, godwit, knot, Turnstone and Banded Dotterel, and later three Far-eastern Curlew, one Whimbrel and a tattler of undetermined type. On checking the highest roost we found many more Banded Dotterel, knot, Turnstone and godwit, as well as the highlight for the southerners, three New Zealand Dotterel. These last birds were not banded - were they Stewart Island birds or not? Some of the party walked back home, the wind behind them this time. Our final night was rather tame. The winds were dropping still further and the power stayed on.

Although we searched hard, we never did find a Fernbird, though we did see some 46 species. We thoroughly enjoyed the friendship of the folks present. A special thank you must go to Jenny and Brian for our unforgettable experience living with the birds for two days in this unique place, 'the Spit'.

Written by all of the above.
Compiled by HAMISH SPENCER

Fairy Tern breeding in Northland

In November 1993 Richard Parrish and I commenced a study of the breeding biology of the New Zealand Fairy Tern.

Mangawhai Spit was chosen as the main study area because half of the breeding population of this endearing little bird attempts to nest there and their nest sites are in relatively close proximity - a factor which proved invaluable as the

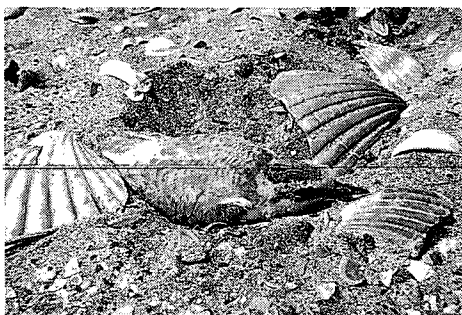
season progressed and nest losses occurred. In recent years Waipu Spit has consistently accommodated only one breeding pair, whilst Papakanui Spit is home to two, possibly three pairs. The nest sites here can be up to a kilometre apart.

By juxtaposing our annual leave we were able to maintain regular observations of nesting pairs at Mangawhai and also to monitor the other two breeding areas.

We were able to confirm the incubation and fledging period as well as gather data on choice of nest site, courtship, copulation, egg-laying, nest site behaviour, chick rearing and feeding. There was a total of twelve nesting attempts in the three breeding areas and only two of these successfully raised chicks. Unfortunately therefore we learnt a lot about nest losses.

I am most grateful to the Ornithological society for the generous grant from the Projects Assistance reserve which enabled us to hire a boat and outboard motor for use Mangawhai and contributed towards travel costs. A paper is currently in preparation for *Notornis*.

GWENDA PULHAM



Fairy Tern chick just prior to fledging.
Photo: Richard Parrish

National Wrybill Census - 29 May 1994

As we indicated in the last newsletter the NZWSG has been concerned about the status of the Wrybill population, and as the winter counts over the past ten years had indicated a possible decline in the population, we felt that it was time that a full census of the Wrybill population was undertaken. This was the first such census of Wrybill.

The aim was to cover as many of the known roost sites around the country as possible in one day. May 29th was chosen as the tides were good high ones, which would ensure that Wrybill would go to roost sites rather than stay out on the mudflats. It was also felt that at this time of the year there would be very little movement of birds between sites and regions. Most notable was the steady build-up in numbers at Miranda.

TABLE 1		ALL SITES				
Region or Area					Winter	
No	Site	Local	Site	Total	%	Census
1	Firth of Thames	Neill's Beach	(photo)	2091	40.88	2700
2	Firth of Thames	Taramaire		560	10.95	1
3	Manukau Harbour	Mangere Ponds		533	10.42	300
4	Waitemata Harbour	Pollen Island	(photo)	314	6.14	-
5	Manukau Harbour	Westfield		285	5.57	0
6	Manukau Harbour	Kidd's (Karaka)		266	5.2	170
7	Manukau Harbour	Seagrove		223	4.36	0
8	Manukau Harbour	Airport		219	4.28	450
9	Kaipara Harbour	Tapora (Sand Is 32-4)		110	2.15	83
10	Northland	Skull Ck		98	1.9	125
11	Far North	Parengarenga	30/6/94	82	1.64	82
12	Manukau Harbour	Pollock Spit		76	1.48	156
13	Hawke's Bay	Porangahau		65	1.27	66
14	Kaipara Harbour	Papakanui Spit		31	0.6	30
15	Tauranga	Sulphar Point		26	0.5	38
16	Kaipara Harbour	Webbers, Matakoho		23	0.44	-
17	Manawatu	Manawatu Estuary		20	0.39	21
18	Whangarei Harbour	Port		17	0.33	0
19	Kaipara Harbour	Jordan's		10	0.19	9
20	Tamaki Estuary	Tahuna Torea		9	0.17	-
21	Manukau Harbour	Puhinui		8	0.17	14
22	South Auckland	Port Waikato	(27/5/94)	9	0.17	-
23	Nelson	Motueka Sandspit		8	0.15	0
24	Canterbury	Ashley Estuary		7	0.13	6
25	North Auckland	Mangawhai	26/6/94	5	0.1	5
26	Northland	Ruakaka		4	0.08	3
27	Canterbury	L Ellesmere		4	0.08	3
28	Kaipara Harbour	Tapora (Waikiri Ck)		3	0.06	16
29	Waitemata Harbour	Shoal Bay		3	0.06	-
30	Far North	Herekino		1	0.02	-
31	Coromandel	Whangapoua	(26/5/94)	1	0.02	0
32	Far North	Houhoro Harbour		0	0	1
33	North Auckland	Omaha	(28/5/94)	0	0	-
34	Firth of Thames	Access Bay		0	0	1
35	Bay of Plenty	Matakana		0	0	0
36	Bay of Plenty	Waihi		0	0	0
37	Bay of Plenty	Maketu		0	0	0
38	Hawke's Bay	Ahuriri		0	0	0
39	Nelson	Waimea Estuary		0	0	41
40	Gisborne	Muriwai Lagoon		0	0	15

Grand Total 5111 4336

The census was a joint project of the NZWSG, Miranda Naturalists' Trust and OSNZ. In spite of the less than favourable weather on the day (there were gale force westerlies and squally showers in our area throughout the day) all went well, with the main roost sites in the country except Parengarenga being covered on 28 and 29 May. It was disappointing that we were unable to cover Parengarenga as it generally has the largest wintering flock outside the Auckland region (156 on 28/2/94). It has since been covered and while the number was lower than expected it has been added to the total.

Of the 67 sites listed to be covered 63 were counted by at least 70 observers. Many thanks to those who took part. Hugh Clifford and Paul Harrison grappled with the largest flock at Miranda which, in the end because the weather was so terrible and

the birds so restless, was only countable by checking the photos taken by Paul. Even then it took several people and enlarged prints to come up with an acceptable total. Special thanks should go to Pam Agnew for organising the Firth of Thames count and Tony Habraken who organised the counts at the twelve complex Manukau sites, as well as giving valuable advice on the movements between the Manukau and Waitemata Harbours and Tamaki Estuary - a problem area as the Waitemata and Tamaki have a high tide three hours before the Manukau but are just a few minutes flight away for the Wrybills. This did prove to be a problem as at least two flocks of birds left the Manukau before high tide and flew to the Tamaki Estuary and Waitemata Harbour after the scheduled high tide counts at those sites had been completed. These areas will have to be covered more

carefully on future winter census counts.

In the end the figure was better than expected with a total of 5,111 birds being counted.

Table 1 shows the sites in order of flock size and the percentage of the total population, and it also shows the winter census totals taken during June. Out of 63 sites checked, known historically to hold Wrybill, only 31 held birds during the census.

TABLE 2

Area	Site	Total	%
Firth of Thames		2651	51.83
Manukau Harbour		1610	31.51
Waitemata-Tamaki		326	6.37
Northland / Far North		202	3.95
Kaipara Harbour		177	3.46
Rest of North Island		126	2.46
All South Island		19	0.37
		5111	99.95

Table 2 shows the population distribution in the main harbours or regions. It also shows the percentage of the total population of each area.

From these figures it can be seen that 13 sites hold more than one per cent of the total population. Under the terms of the Ramsar Convention they would all rate as wetland sites of international importance. Only the two Firth of Thames sites are Ramsar sites. The FoT holds by far the largest percentage at 52.4%. It is therefore very important that every effort is made to see that this area is well managed for the Wrybill.

A more detailed account is in preparation for future publication.

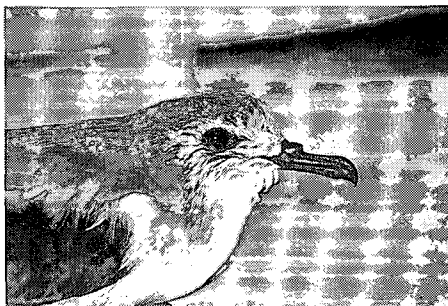
ADRIAN RIEGEN,
Convenor

A further Petrel species for Hamilton

Following visits from a Grey-faced Petrel and a White-faced Storm Petrel, Hamilton was graced by a further petrel species in April this year. It was a Cook's Petrel, which had been windblown in from the coast 50 kms away. The bird was handed in to the Hamilton Zoo for recuperation for a week, and after some photographing and identification sessions was released at Mount Maunganui by the Grey-faced Petrel team. It was thought that the milder winds on the east coast would be better for it's chances of survival, and it was last seen flying strongly northward.

This is the third petrel species in Hamilton in as many years. Firstly Bev Woolley received a Grey-faced Petrel from the SPCA. It was fed on squid until it's weight was ideal, and then released.

Secondly a White-faced Storm Petrel was blown onto the Dinsdale Hill and was picked up by Paul Cuming. This bird had been in a cat's mouth so, even after a good feed, it died that night. This bird is now preserved at the Miranda Naturalists' Trust centre.



Cook's Petrel Photo Hugh Clifford

The Cook's Petrel was the first recorded sighting of this species in Hamilton.

PAUL CUMING

Seabirds in the Hauraki Gulf

The survey I have undertaken since April 1992 - a survey of seabirds in the Hauraki Gulf - has come to an end after two years, although it will continue on another boat. This item covers the period of 1/1/94 - 30/3/94 and is a brief summary of the survey as a whole.

Interesting records over January-March 1994 include Yellow-nosed Mollmawk 1, Flesh-footed Shearwater maximum counts of 25,540 on 23/2, 29,605 9/3, Sooty Shearwater 63 on 9 occasions, max. 18, Short-tailed Shearwater 21 on 6 occasions, max. 6, Fluttering Shearwater max. 24,777 22-23/3, Hutton's Shearwater 1, Little Shearwater 3, Diving Petrel 1, Black Petrel 7, Giant Petrel sp. 1, Pycroft's Petrel 21, Cook's Petrel max 1,936 12/1, 1,158 26/1, Black-winged Petrel 32, Gould's Petrel 6, Grey-faced Petrel 2, White-faced Storm Petrel 392 on 8 occasions, max. 117 12/1, Blue Penguin max. 99 and 97, Australasian Gannet max 22,996 9/3, Spotted Shag 17 on 5 occasions, Brown/South Polar Skua 1, South Polar Skua 1, Arctic Skua 73 on 11 occasions, max 14 8/3, Pomarine Skua 35 on 10 occasions, max 6 8/2 and 8/3, Long-tailed Skua 5, Black-backed Gull max. 1,264, White-fronted Tern max. 1,324 and 1,026.

A smaller survey was made on ferry cruises over Auckland - Pakatoa Is - Motukahaua Is - Te Kouma Harbour - Pakatoa Is - Horuhoru Is - Browns Is, effectively circumnavigating Waiheke Is, on 21/1, 27/2 and 20/3/94. Interesting records were Flesh-footed Shearwater max. 7,072 20/3, White-fronted Tern max. 4,631 27/2, Australasian Gannet max. 8,910 20/3, Fluttering Shearwater max. 47,460 20/3, Arctic Skua 61, max. 31 20/3, Pomarine

Skua 21, max 9 27/2 and 20/3, Spotted Shag 301, Long-tailed Skua 4, Little Shearwater 1, Sooty Shearwater 1, Gould's Petrel 1, Cook's Petrel 7, Black-winged Petrel 1, Giant Petrel sp. 1, White-faced Storm Petrel 2.

A total of 562,641 seabirds were recorded in the two years of the survey, 431,028 in 1993/94. A total of 63 species was recorded, plus 8 non-seabird species, 41 in 1992/93, 58 in 1993/94. Abundance increased 118.3% between the two years (after accounting for the uneven number of survey trips in each year). Of 37 species that were recorded in both years, 10 decreased in abundance between 1992/93 and 1993/94 (including Grey-faced, Kerguelen and Cape Petrels, mostly non-local breeding, migratory 'southern' species). Species that increased in abundance by less than 100% (including Fluttering Shearwater, Red-billed Gull, Buller's Shearwater, Arctic Skua, Little Cormorant) were primarily local breeders, while those that increased by more than 100% (1000%+ species - Sooty Shearwater, Prion sp., White-faced Storm Petrel) were primarily migratory, summer-breeding, local species.

The major causal factors in the overall higher abundance in 1993/94 was presumed to be the colder sea surface temperatures (April 1992-March 1993 0.34 degrees C. below average of 1993/94) and the toxic algal bloom of August-December 1992. Data on abundance and distribution in this survey suggests reduced breeding success and/or emigration in Flesh-footed, Fluttering, Buller's, Sooty and Little Shearwaters, Cook's, Pycroft's, Black and Grey-faced Petrels, Prion sp, White-faced Storm Petrel, White-fronted and Caspian Terns. Mortality occurred only in Blue Penguin, Gannet, Spotted Shag, Black-backed and Red-billed Gulls, and to a lesser extent in Pied Cormorant and Diving Petrel - data on 1992/93 beach patrols on Auckland East beaches may add more.

Note that a number of these reports is unconfirmed.

CHRIS JOWETT

Musings on Marlborough birds

On 22/5/94 I saw a NZ Falcon pass food to another falcon in mid-air - in itself not unusual, but I feel that the time of year is. The two birds flew out over the valley, one calling a great deal. The first two passes were not close, probably 3-4 metres apart; the third was much closer. I could not tell for sure if the lower bird actually took the food from the claws of the top bird or if it was dropped a few centimetres. After the pass both birds went to a bank and stood about a metre apart with the receiving bird starting to pluck the prey. After ten minutes the male bird (it was much smaller) had gone. The other bird was

darkish but well-coloured on the front. The feathers left behind identified the prey as a Goldfinch.

On 5/12/91 I was fortunate in being able to travel with John Kendrick, Geoff Moon and Len Doel up the Awatere Valley. On the way back we made a bird count, making only a few brief stops. From the Molesworth travelling down the Awatere River road to the main state highway we counted 30 species: Silvereye, Goldfinch, Redpoll, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer, Hedge Sparrow, Grey Warbler, California Quail, Skylark, Canada Goose, Paradise Shelduck, White-faced Heron, SIPO, Magpie, NZ Falcon, Australasian Harrier, House Sparrow, Spur-winged Plover, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Starling, Welcome Swallow, Black-backed Gull, Bellbird, Pied Stilt, Banded Dotterel, Black-fronted Tern, Fantail and Pukeko.

During the summer months when the Hanmer-Molesworth road is open many OSNZ members must travel along it - can you better this count?

The bird we were most looking for and missed was NZ Pipit, as John felt that not so many are seen these days. Since then I have taken particular note of pipits on our farm. In the summer of 1991 I saw none, with small numbers in the winter. 1992 and 1993 were the same. Autumn 1994 has quite good numbers, although definitely not the numbers of, say, ten years ago.

JACK TAYLOR

Black Stilts 1993/94

There were fifteen pairs of Black Stilts in the wild last season, seven of which were pure black x black pairs. There were also another ten pairs that did not attempt to breed. The total population stands at 52 pure black adults and 27 sub-adults.

We artificially incubated 81 eggs at Twizel. Many of these were hatched in captivity. Including chicks from captive laid eggs, 32 birds have been reared for release wild in Sept 94. Of the 35 juvenile Black Stilts DoC released into the wild from the Twizel aviary in September 1993, at least 16 were still alive in February 1994. Rising lake levels has made it difficult to locate more than ten of these in a count in May 1994. So early results from the first major release of young birds look very encouraging and our predicted mortality of approximately 50% was reasonably accurate.

The wild population did not do very well again this season. Only two chicks fledged and both of these have disappeared. Habitat restoration continues as part of Project River Recovery funded by ECNZ, with willows being removed from the Ahuriri Delta and the planned removal of more from the lower river soon.

Some Black Stilts and hybrids continue to migrate to northern harbours and we have not yet located all wintering areas. So OSNZ and NZWSG members could help this programme significantly by reporting any sightings to our Twizel office. Most Black Stilts are colour-banded on the tarsus. The last two seasons we have been using two bands on each leg. Prior to that there may be two, one or no bands on a leg. Metal bands are not being used and it is uncommon for existing birds to have these.

CHRISTINE REED

(Reprinted by kind permission from *New Zealand Wader Study Group newsletter No. 3*)

Donations to the Society

The following donations have been made to the Society up to publication date. Many thanks to all of these people - it is very much appreciated and helps to fund particular projects. Chris Bindon, Bill Campbell, Bill Cash, Barbara Dingle, Mike & Sharon Graham, Laurie Hoverd, Jim Jolly, Ray Jackson, N.D.R. McKerehar & J.R. Alexander, Martin Maquire, Dr W. Mary McEwen, Rosemary Messenger, Robert G. Mills, Ray O'Callaghan, William N.C. Perry, Dr Derek Russell, Rob Schuckard, Carol Sawyer, G.W. Wells, Dr W.A. Watters, Lois Wagener.

~~HAZEL HARTY~~
Membership Secretary

- Field Assistant wanted -

to help with student research project on South Island Saddlebacks, Marlborough Sounds, Oct 94-Jan 95 (or part thereof). Volunteer, though help with travel, food costs possible.

Please send relevant details to
Johanna Pierre,
26 Nicholls Street,
Christchurch 1.
Tel (03) 389 5863.

The OSNZ Bird Slide Library

The Slide Library has been updated and members are free to borrow slides from it. Each Regional Representative has been provided with a catalogue which can double as an order form.

Each species has a letter or letters in adjacent columns, indicating whether a particular slide is a portrait shot, a nest or colony shot or a shot of a bird in its habitat. When ordering, simply circle the appropriate letter(s). As more slides become available to the collection the catalogue will be updated. RRs will hold

a copy of the catalogue and photocopy it when ordering.

In order to get the best possible use out of the collection it is important that slides are away from the collection for the shortest possible time. When ordering therefore please state when the slides are to be shown. I will send the slides to you fastpost about a week beforehand. When returning slides send by fastpost within two days or so of showing them.

The only charge for this service is asking that you return the slides with postage stamps to the value of the postage from this end.

Order forms can be posted to:-

OSNZ Bird Slide Library
C/o 82 Morrinsville Road
Hamilton
Tel. (07) 856 3891

PAUL CUMING

Unusual Chaffinch behaviour

Towards autumn this year I was observing some male Chaffinches feeding on some Wheki (*Dicksonia squarosa*) fronds. The fern was such a shape as to be two-tiered with circular layers of foliage. These served well as platforms for the birds to sit on.

As they sat on the lower tier, I saw some of them look up at the higher tier's underside. Then they began leaping up and grabbing at small insects underneath the fronds. This was only about half a metre in distance, and one particular bird was still at it 15 minutes later. Another amusing activity was that when one bird leaped it seemed to set off the others, and a whole wave of birds leaped up, as if they had seen football crowds doing a 'Mexican wave'! When they landed each bird had moved one perch to the right, where the last bird had leaped from, so that the whole group circled the fern in a counter-clockwise movement. There were a few birds that did not participate though, but fed in a different manner away from the main group.

I did not notice any female birds feeding in this manner.

PAUL CUMING

Summary of wader movements to and from New Zealand

14 Lesser Knot movements from Victoria to Auckland region - some of these birds have been caught in the same season so we know that at least some of the 60,000+ knot in N.Z. each non-breeding season come via Victoria. The reason for this is not clear but it appears to be pre-planned as some of the birds when caught in Victoria were in suspended moult, which is an indication that the birds are still on

migration. Interestingly as yet, none of the almost 4000 Lesser Knot banded in N.Z. have been caught in Victoria.

1 Lesser Knot movement from Auckland to Melbourne, Victoria - although no New Zealand banded knots have been caught in Victoria, there has now been one white-flagged bird sighted on a beach close to the centre of Melbourne.

2 Lesser Knot movements from Albany, Western Australia - these two birds were banded in late March in Albany. Both were still in moult which at the time of the year would probably indicate that they were second year birds which do not return to the Arctic to breed but instead spent the fourteen months between banding in Albany and capture in New Zealand making their way across southern Australia and then coming to N.Z., probably in October along with other Victorian birds. Other waders are known to travel across southern Australia during the southern winter.

1 Lesser Knot movement from Perth, Western Australia - we know very little about this bird as it was picked up dead in N.Z., but it may well have followed much the same course as the Albany birds.

2 Lesser Knot movements from the Brisbane region, Queensland, to Auckland - now that the Queensland Wader Study Group is well established we hope to see more movements between these two regions. Brisbane and Moreton Bay lie in a direct line between Auckland and the Gulf of Carpentaria, which we suspect is a major stopping place on both north and south migration for knots.

1 Lesser Knot movement from Auckland to Queensland coast - this bird was found on the coast of Queensland around Bundaberg in March 1981 having been banded in August 1980. They are not particularly common on this part of the coast.

1 Lesser Knot from Auckland to Brisbane, Queensland - banded in February 1989 and caught in April 1990 this is the first New Zealand banded knot to be caught and released again in Australia.

2 Lesser Knot movements from Auckland to Irian Jaya - these two were recovered on their way north at a good wetland site in southern Irian Jaya, close to the Papua New Guinea border and also close to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Between this part of the world and China knots are very rare, indicating that they probably fly non-stop from this region to China.

4 Lesser Knot movements from Auckland to Shanghai, China - these four birds were all recovered during the northward migration and this region of China has proved to be the most important refuelling area between Australasia and Siberia for many wader species. Interestingly this area of China doesn't

seem to be as important a stopover site on southward migration.

3 Lesser Knot movements from Auckland to the Sea of Okhotsk - all three birds were recovered during southward migration in late July and August. The area around the Tugur Peninsula and the northern tip of Sakhalin Island on the southern shores of the Sea of Okhotsk seems to be a regular staging place for birds returning from breeding grounds. It appears that they may carry enough fuel from Shanghai to get them to the breeding grounds, however they are probably unable to put on enough weight in the breeding grounds to get them much further than the sea of Okhotsk on their southward migration.

1 Bar-tailed Godwit with white leg flag sighted in Japan - this bird was seen on the coast of the Ariaki Sea in southern Japan, along with leg-flagged godwits from Queensland and Victoria. This would indicate that godwits from different non-breeding areas migrate through this area of Japan. This bird was seen in Japan on northern migration four months after being flagged on the Kaipara Harbour.

1 Bar-tailed Godwit movement from Auckland to Bering Island - this bird was shot during northward migration on Bering Island off the east coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula in the C.I.S., indicating that the bird was heading for Alaska, one of the known breeding grounds for Bar-tailed Godwit.

1 Bar-tailed Godwit movement from Pribilof Islands, Alaska to New Zealand - not much known about this bird, but presumably one that was breeding in Alaska.

1 Bar-tailed Godwit movement from Auckland to Kamchatka - another record for this region, this bird was taken in October, ten months after banding on the Kaipara Harbour.

1 Turnstone movement from Auckland to Brisbane and back - this bird was certainly a rare double catch, made even more remarkable when one considers that so few Turnstones had been banded in Queensland or New Zealand. Banded at Miranda in October 1991, it was caught in Moreton Bay, Queensland in September 1993 and released after a green flag had been added to its leg. It was then retrapped at Miranda in October 1993.

compiled by ADRIAN REIGEN
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Mystery Bird Quiz

It was great to have some extra entries in the Mystery Bird Quiz. Remember that there is a free subscription to *Notornis* for the winner. Now, to identify the first six for you:

- A Westland Black Petrel. This bird was photographed off the Kaikoura coast
- B Nankeen Night Heron. From time to time Nankeen Night Herons are reported in New Zealand and on two occasions breeding pairs have been released, but none have survived.
- C White-faced Heron. Almost everyone guessed this species correctly
- D New Zealand Dotterel. This bird was loafing near Whitianga Beach with others. I photographed as it came to the lagoon edge to drink. Guesses included Large Sand Dotterel, Banded Dotterel and Red-necked Stint.
- E Chaffinch. This female Chaffinch was photographed near Hanmer during the big snow in Canterbury in 1992. Most of you guessed this correctly.
- F Australasian Coot. This juvenile coot was photographed at Western Springs in Auckland. Guesses were evenly split between Pukeko and coot.

At this stage nobody has all correct, or even five right. Leading are George & Beth Wallace, Paul Cuming, Rod Hitchmough and Pam Agnew with four correct. On three are Martin Snowball and Lloyd Esler. Good luck with Mystery Birds G, H and I.

Send entries to:
Don Hadden
P.O. Box 6054
Upper Riccarton
Christchurch 8030
- please note change of address.

Mystery Birds G,H,I, see page 6.

G



Travelling to Hawkes Bay this summer?

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absent in adult Black-billed Gulls. The mystery bird also has a distinct white eye ring behind the eye and pale webbing on the feet, features absent in the gull species. Finally the mystery bird lacks the black and white markings on the primaries found in both gull species.



Therefore the bird is a Grey Ternlet. Sexes of this species are alike but juveniles are darker brownish-grey and the cheek and throat area is streaked. The bird is therefore an adult. It was photographed on Macauley Island in the Kermadec group. Tens of thousands of pairs nest on the Kermadec Islands. Grey Ternlets also regularly visit New Zealand and have been reported from the Three Kings, Poor Knights and Mokohinau Islands and the Volkner Rocks in the Bay of Plenty.

GRAEME TAYLOR

Mystery Bird # 16

Mystery Bird #16 was obviously a seabird or shorebird as revealed by its webbed feet. The bird has the shape or appearance of a gull, tern or noddy (*Laridae*). There are 21 species of this family that occur in New Zealand; 13 are breeders and 8 are regular visitors or vagrants.

The most important feature of the mystery bird is the white or light grey head, nape, neck and face. It clearly lacks any dark feathering on the crown, nape or cheeks. Except for White Terns this effectively eliminates all 14 tern species that breed in or visit New Zealand - Caspian Terns, Black-fronted Terns, White-fronted Terns, Fairy Terns, Antarctic Terns, Sooty Terns, White-winged Black Terns, Gull-billed Terns, Little Terns, Arctic Terns, Common Terns, Crested Terns, Whiskered Terns and Bridled Terns.

Nor can the mystery bird be a Black Noddy or a Common Noddy. These species have a pale white crown and nape but unlike the mystery bird have a black throat, cheek and ear coverts, and of course the whole body of these species is a uniform dark brown.

The mystery bird has a prominent dark narrow pointed bill. This eliminates both juvenile and adult Black-backed Gulls. Juvenile Black-backed Gulls have dark bills but these are much broader than that pictured and obviously their plumage is uniformly darker brown.

This leaves four species - White Tern, Black-billed Gull, Red-billed Gull and Grey Ternlet. The adult White Tern is wholly white whereas the mystery bird is clearly grey on the back. The juvenile White Tern has a dark ear patch which is lacking on the mystery bird. The mystery bird has a dark bill, a feature of juvenile Red-billed Gulls and adult Black-billed Gulls. The mystery bird has an all dark eye, a feature present in juvenile Red-billed Gulls but

The New Zealand Dotterel banding programme

Individual colour-banding of New Zealand Dotterel was begun in 1950 by Ross McKenzie, making the species, I suspect, one of the earliest to be colour-banded in New Zealand. Unfortunately the colour bands used in those days only lasted about a year and much information was lost. Later, more durable colour bands became available and in 1974 Sylvia Reed began banding adults. At the time of Sylvia's death in 1981 about 170 birds had been banded in total, most of them around the Auckland harbours, at Mangawhai or in the South Kaipara. Results of these studies were summarised in *Notornis* articles in 1978 and 1981.

By the time I became interested in the species in 1985, few of these birds were still alive and carrying all their bands: those that were still recognisable were quite widely scattered so a fresh start seemed appropriate. Since 1986, we have concentrated on the east coast north of Auckland and now have virtually all of the adults (about 75) between the Wade River mouth (near Silverdale) and Poutawa Stream on Pakiri Beach banded. We have already gathered a lot of information on movement patterns and site fidelity: as observations continue we are also learning more about survival and pair-bond

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Mystery Bird # 17

Identify this bird. Answer next issue

retention, as well as picking up useful moult and measurement data. Many people have helped us with this field work at different times, but Simon Chamberlin, Nan Rothwell and Elaine Murphy have been the regular stalwarts.

Another important part of the study at the moment is looking at the survival and dispersal of juveniles. Over the past six seasons we have banded nearly 200 chicks - many of them have not fledged of course but enough have to allow us to start building up a picture of the first few years of life of the average dotterel. Richard Parrish (Northland) and Bev Woolley and Phil Thomson (Coromandel) have made major contributions in banding chicks and collecting sightings in their areas. Unfortunately, I don't think we can justify using many more individual combinations on chicks, so from next season I intend to change to a system where all chicks at one locality in one season get the same combination.

One thing we still don't know a lot about is longevity, so I am currently trying to find any of the pre-1981 birds that are still alive. Those found so far have worn metals and occasional wafer-thin colour bands, so catching them and rebanding them is a priority at the moment. Obviously, I would like to hear about any possible 'oldies' that anyone sees. There are some on South Kaipara Head that I haven't tried to retrap yet and the most likely place for others is around South Auckland.

The banding programme on Stewart Island is largely conservation-oriented. The southern population has declined rapidly in the past 40 years (at the last count there

were only 70 birds left, with a heavy bias towards females), so birds are being banded to help keep a check on total numbers each year and to monitor annual survival of adults.

JOHN DOWDING

(Reprinted by kind permission from *New Zealand Wader Study Group* newsletter No. 2)

Obituary: Dr Mercia Barnes

All who knew her were shocked and saddened to learn of Mercia's untimely death, especially as she was so close to retirement and looking forward to spending more time on her favourite pastime - watching birds. Mercia had been a member of the Waikato region since about 1978. From 1983 she became the organiser of the Hamilton Lake surveys which were held three times a year. Now, more than ten years later, these records are a valuable source of information to the Hamilton City Council planners as they draw up a management plan for the lake.

For many years Mercia was involved with our shorebird census work on Kawhia and Aotea Harbours, often patrolled Kawhia Beach, participated in camps and field trips, seldom missed a Cattle Egret count and whenever time allowed she was often to be found with her telescope on the shellbanks at Miranda.

As well she was a regular supporter of our evening meetings for over fifteen years and a committee member since 1988. Her knowledge and experience will be greatly missed as will her quiet, warm and friendly personality. May her Spirit soar with the birds she loved.

BEV WOOLLEY



RAOU column

In 1996 Australia will be hosting the Ramsar conference in Brisbane, a major international forum which will spotlight Australia's efforts, successes and deficiencies in wetland conservation.

On 22 April the inaugural meeting of the Australian Wetland Alliance (AWA) was held at Melbourne University. This was established to enable non-government organisations to promote communication on and to enhance the conservation of Australia's wetlands. With the 1996 conference in view, the AWA urged that Australia's appropriate state and federal government agencies:

- work to ensure that Australia fully meets its obligations under the Ramsar Convention.
- implement the 'wise-use' guidelines adopted at the 1993 Ramsar conference in Japan.
- establish appropriate wetland policies and committees.
- properly manage existing Ramsar sites, and
- nominate additional Ramsar sites

For further information about the Australian Wetland Alliance and how your organisation can become involved with wetland awareness, education and conservation in the lead-up to the 1996 conference in Brisbane, please communicate with:

Roger Jaensch, C/o Wildlife Research Unit, Conservation Commission NT, P.O. Box 496, Palmerston, N.T. 0831. Tel (089) 221 759, fax (089) 221 739.

The Ramsar Convention is named after the Iranian city where the text of the convention, known as the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterbird Habitat, was signed in 1971. It is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for international cooperation for the conservation of wetland habitats. The Convention came into force in 1975 and now has more than 80 contracting parties throughout the world.

Because wetlands are essential not only for hydrological and ecological processes, but also for the rich flora and fauna they support, the broad objectives of the Convention are to stem the loss of wetlands and to ensure their conservation. Under the Convention there is a general obligation for

the signatory countries (the Contracting Parties) to include wetland conservation considerations in their national land-use planning, to promote, as far as possible, the 'wise use' of wetlands in their territory, and to promote the conservation of wetlands through the establishment of nature reserves.

A specific obligation under the Convention is the designation of wetlands for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance. Particular conservation duties pertain to the listed sites. Contracting parties are further obliged to cooperate in the management of shared wetlands and shared wetland species.

The Ramsar Convention has adopted an extremely broad definition of 'wetlands' which come under its aegis. They are 'areas of marsh, fen, peatland, or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water, the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres'. In addition the Convention provides that wetlands 'may incorporate riparian and coastal zones, and isolated bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands'. According to these provisions, the Convention covers a wide range of biotypes including rivers, coastal areas and even coral reefs.

Wetlands are selected for the Ramsar list for their international significance after consideration of the appropriate criteria. For example, a site may be accepted for listing because it is representative of a rare or unusual wetland type in a biogeographical region, or is of special value for maintaining the biological diversity of a region, or because it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds. Some sites cover millions of hectares, while others may not exceed more than 1000 square metres. Australia has a mere 41 such sites.

The RAOU has written to federal and state governments regarding what it sees as the recalcitrant attitude of the South Australian government surrounding development of the Hindmarsh Marshes in the Murray Mouth area of South Australia, and of the local authority regarding the Creery Wetland, part of the Peel-Harvey Inlet in Western Australia. It has also appealed for support for the rehabilitation of Blundell's Swamp near Sydney.

HUGO PHILLIPS
RAOU Conservation Officer

Black-backed Gull eats sparrow

On July 15 while burning some old apple trees I heard a Black-backed Gull calling overhead. I glanced up and saw the gull being pursued by a House Sparrow.

Suddenly the gull turned about and, catching the sparrow in its bill, gulped it down. All that was left was a cloud of sparrow feathers. The moral must be, choose your enemy before you commit yourself.

WILLIE COOK

Birding in the States

Birding in the USA is somewhat different to birdwatching in New Zealand. In our country birdwatching is a rather laid-back hobby, with few of us rushing around the country in search of a bird that he or she has not seen before.

In the States the object is to see as many bird species as possible and tick them off on a checklist. It can almost be compared with collecting stamps. The people who partake of this hobby are slightly mad and talk birds, birds and more birds. It does not matter what has happened on the political scene or that your house may have burned down, when you meet each other you talk birds. I had one in the car who talked birds continuously for three hours.

The jargon is never explained to a stranger. You are expected to know and understand it. A Lifebird is a bird you have seen for the first time in your life. A Yearbird is a bird you have seen in a particular year. A Statebird is a species you have seen in your particular state.

These birders have a hotline. This is a phone number for information about where you can see a particularly rare or vagrant bird.

If you have a friend who is a birder be prepared at the drop of a hat to be taken to some remote part of the country. For example we had just travelled for nine hours from Illinois to Arkansas and back. Coming home at midnight the hotline told us that a White Ibis had been seen in Illinois. We left early the next morning to see this bird, spending all day searching without success. Arriving home that evening, there was another call to say that nine Anhingas had been seen in roughly the same area, so after a few hours sleep we had another five hour drive in search of these birds. It turned out that they were a case of mistaken identification, and they were only cormorants. Tired and bleary-eyed we drove home, nearly colliding with another vehicle. Fortunately the hotline had no further new birds.

However there are compensations. They are good sorts, entertain you lavishly at their homes, and 152 White Herons roosting or 3000+ Cattle Egrets make up for stiff limbs and lack of sleep. The birders, even if they have missed a particular bird, are still cheerful and determined to try again as soon as the hotline reveals a new bird. Fortunately I

am flying out the next day and will miss another gruelling drive.

HENK HEINEKAMP

Reviews

The Oxford Dictionary of British Bird Names, by W.B. Lockwood. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993. viii + 175 pp. ISBN 0-19-866196-7. Price NZ\$23.95.

This is an updated, paperback edition of the 1984 hardback original (then titled *Oxford Book of...*), an absolute delight of a book. I mean if you are not only interested in birds (as we have a number of introduced European species, some information can be found on birds that New Zealanders will know), but especially if you, like myself, believe that the history of human knowledge is as fascinating as the natural history it strives to understand. How exhaustive it is, I cannot say - but I found it fascinating to find out what a Murdering Bird (shrike), a Nettle Creeper (Whitethroat) or a Bonxie (Great Skua) is. One agrees with the Introduction: '...the elucidation of bird names is as much an art in its own right as any other branch of linguistics'. Plus cultural history, plus some bird knowledge. I wish I knew a similar book for our parts of the world.

GÁBOR LÖVEI

NZ-Birds Database. - CALP Software Unit, Computer Assisted Learning Programme, Otago Polytechnic, Private Bag, Dunedin. \$112.50.

The NZ Birds database is a set of records about all the living, extinct and fossil birds of New Zealand. A database is an ordered collection of information. Databases that are stored on computers allow the information to be readily retrieved and viewed in way that would be difficult or impossible using the original records.

The target audience for the NZ Birds database is Form 1-5 school students. The information can be used by students to learn about the electronic retrieval of information, about the analysis of such information, and about New Zealand birds. The NZ birds records are provided in a format that can be read by database programs on a variety of computers (Apple II, Apple Macintosh, Archimedes, AMIGA, PC). The records provide the raw material for a database program that is already on a computer - they cannot be used without such a program. The records must be imported into the database program and are then accessed using that program. It is important to realise that the records are therefore only useful when there is a person familiar with a database program who can import the records and then develop exercises for students to

access the records with the database program.

The manuals provided with the records provide information on the types of information that the records contain, and offer suggestions for ways of using the information. The suggestions and accompanying exercises are valuable and show a wide variety of ways in which different types of information can be retrieved. For example, with a database program the records can be searched to find out which species have males that incubate eggs, which species that live in alpine habitats breed in summer, how many small birds live on sandy coasts and so on. The quality of the information is good, and the records can be added to and modified by individual users. The records are arranged according to the *Checklist of New Zealand Birds* and references are provided for each record.

The price for the database allows for unlimited copying of the records at an individual site such as a school. If a school already has a database program and a person familiar with its use then the NZ Birds records could form a valuable resource. For single users the price seems rather high for what is essentially a set of raw information rather than a functional program. Perhaps the next development for the authors of the database could be a customised functional database that could be run without any knowledge of a particular database program.

J.F. COCKREM

Regional Roundup

Northland

A steady flow of field activities has been maintained over the winter months. Beach patrolling continues to be popular with only average results in the bird line, while the last west coast patrol produced a fish that is possibly only the second New Zealand record and a wrecked boat!

Passerine banding has produced some interesting results with several of last year's Silvereye crop being recaptured in the same place.

A group of members took part in a NZ Robin survey on Morurua Island with very encouraging results. 23 robins were found.

Gavin Grant and Gerry Brackenbury organised a planting session at Whangaruru aimed at Brown Teal habitat improvement. After it was over and participants were on their way home, Teal Bay was proved to be aptly named when five Brown Teal were seen there.

In June we had our local AGM. Before the boring part Shaarina Boyd gave us a talk on Little Barrier and the Kakapo programme in particular. The heavy stuff

then took place with a narrowly defeated challenge to the sitting regional representative.

At our August meeting David Crockett showed slides of his trips to Stewart Island in the 1950s and 60s.

In August twelve members enthusiastically took part in a car rally called the 'Magical Birdydiversity Tour'. This was a very social event ending with a pot-luck dinner at David Crockett's office. Prizes were awarded for the overall winner, longest species list for the day, muddiest gumboots, oldest team (a packet of Chocosaurus biscuits) and the most cups of tea or coffee drunk during the day.

(Pat Miller)

Auckland

In May Mick Clout addressed a meeting of 50 members on bird conservation in New Zealand, a precis of an address given to an ornithological conference in the UK. His particular focus was on Takahe and Kakapo, both flightless herbivores and endangered species.

Mick described how the Kakapo population crashed in the early 1980s due to cat predation, and how the birds were relocated to island sanctuaries. There, supplementary feeding and captive rearing programmes have been established in an attempt to increase bird numbers. Kakapo are amenable to such programmes but a lack of productive females has meant slow progress. Nevertheless it is hoped that this bird population will recover to safer levels over the next decade.

John Staniland followed with a short slide show on the west Auckland Matuku Reserve, which members will be visiting in October.

John Dowding updated over 60 members in the June meeting on the progress of the New Zealand Dotterel. John's presentation was in two parts. The first was a most interesting study of the North Island population, looking at seasonal movements, breeding behaviour and how suitable breeding territories are subdivided. The second part dealt with the Stewart Island population which John believes should be recognised as a distinct subspecies. The differences in physiology and behaviour strongly support this belief. Sadly, like other Stewart Island birds the population is being decimated. Some preventative measures are being taken by the Department of Conservation, and it is hoped that full subspecific status will elevate the bird on the priority list for the diminishing conservation dollar.

Dr Chris Robertson drew an audience of over 50 to his address 'A pot pourri of Albatross'. Chris's presentation was also in two parts, with the first an interesting and amusing look at the problems associated with identifying the various albatross

species. In addition to reasonably obvious physiological and ecological differences, factors such as DNA, lice and even the nature of digestive tracts suggest an imminent increase to the number of currently recognised species. Part two of the presentation focussed on the difficulties facing breeding albatrosses at Taiaroa Heads and Forty Four Island in the Chathams. Due to natural causes the environment of Forty Four is now most difficult for breeding success, and a much reduced fledging rate is the consequence. Management problems at Taiaroa Heads have increased greatly in recent times, particularly with pressure from tourism. In addition to the well publicised cases of predation, breeding has also been adversely affected by heat, drought and flyblow. In spite of all the difficulties Chris ended on a positive note. These large birds are long-lived and out of necessity are extremely resilient.

Beach patrols on Pakiri have taken place every alternate month, but Muriwai difficulties have persisted, with only parts of the beach being patrolled because of the land dispute. At the time of writing it is understood that a settlement between Carter Holt and the Maori trustees has been reached, and beach access via the forest should again be possible. In spite of the bad weather the bird counts have been low. Apart from locally common gannets, Blue Penguins and Fluttering Shearwaters, we have collected a single Antarctic Fulmar and a Giant Petrel in recent months.

The Wrybill census in May was well attended and the results were very interesting. Numbers are static but some different distribution patterns have emerged.

In June 30 members met at Miranda for a birding weekend and a mid-winter Christmas dinner well organised by Gillian Eller and friends.

Frequent visits are made to Mangere Ponds where 36 Royal Spoonbill and 2 Little Egrets have been regularly recorded. A good flock of Cattle Egrets continues to occupy the Parakai area near Helensville, with individuals seen around the Auckland airport.

Torrential rain was appropriate but uncomfortable for a field trip to Tuakau and the Waikato River to look for ducks and shags in mid July. Shooting on the Tuakau ponds had chased off many birds but NZ Dabchick, scaup, shoveller, Mallard, Canada Goose and Black Swan were recorded. In a magnificent Kahikatea forest a large Black Shag colony extends over an area of about 200 square metres. Unlike other shags the Black Shags keep a good distance from each other, and most trees only have a single nest.

(Mike Graham)

Waikato

Our first attempt at the mid-winter harbour census was cancelled due to bad weather and too few boats available - a pity as that day turned out to be a better one than that chosen a fortnight later. However we proceeded to Kawhia and managed to launch the boats during a lull in the weather and had just completed a fairly rough count of SIPO, godwits and Black and hybrid Stilts when the wind changed, making our position on a sandbank in mid-harbour rather precarious. As the waves began to break over the sandbank we piled back into the boats and headed for safety, before a tide change would have added further difficulties. A shore party obtained a fairly accurate count of the upper harbour roosts, but the boat on Aotea had no luck, having been beset with engine problems. Not our best census but certainly an exciting one for some!

A week later, with Christine Reed from DoC Twizel, we set off across Kawhia's mudflats at low tide to search for the Black Stilt group, which were found feeding on the far side of the harbour. These birds like to wade in 'knee'-deep water, making band reading quite a challenge. Nine black and hybrid birds were located and they tallied almost exactly with our readings from the previous week when the birds were caught standing on two legs because of the strong wind. They usually roost on one and fly and hop without ever showing the second leg. Windy days have their advantages if you can hold your binoculars or telescope still enough!

Cattle Egrets are arriving in scattered groups all across the Waikato. We will be interested to see if they make their way to the large flocks by the time of our August census. No wing-tagged birds have been found to date, in spite of large numbers having been tagged in Australia last season.

Evening talks have been varied, with Stella and John Rowe telling us about their extensive South American and Antarctic journeys. Tim Day explained how his research of birds in Hamilton gardens revealed greater native birds species present when there was a large percentage of native vegetation. Bev Woolley told members about her two weeks spent on Maud Island during the shearwater transfer programme in January.

A day trip to the Auckland Museum to look at terns, gulls and shags was a very good exercise in observation for identifying features and differences within each group.

(Bev Woolley)

Hawkes Bay

In May we had a half day trip to visit an aviary and gardens in Bay View. In addition to the parrots, parakeets, rosellas, corellas, quail and canaries in the aviaries,

the gardens attract Tuis, fantails, Bellbirds and pigeons. Next stop was the Westshore Ponds where Mallards, Shovellers, Grey Teal and Black Swans were seen in their hundreds. At the estuary 35 Royal Spoonbill, 11 godwit and two Caspian Terns were among the birds.

In May we visited Blowhard Bush. Tomtits were abundant and a pair of robins approached very closely. Other species seen included Bellbirds, Tuis, pigeons, Grey Warblers and fantails. A flock of Whiteheads came to investigate the squeaker and Redpolls were seen from the road.

The Wrybill census produced 64 birds at Porangahau, but none at the other estuaries. In June we carried out the winter census on both estuaries, Ahuriri and environs and Porangahau. Highlights included 27 Royal Spoonbills (41 on 7 April) and our Gull-billed Tern at Ahuriri, and two Royal Spoonbills, three White Herons (five on 26 May) and a Little Egret at Clive. July took us to Lakes Tutira and Waikipiro. Scaup, coots and dabchicks were seen as well as the more common waterfowl.

In August we held a meeting at the Ahuriri Education Centre. Guest speaker Dr Chris Robertson gave us an entertaining talk on the gannets of Cape Kidnappers.

(Christine McRae)

Taranaki

We had two trips into the Moki Forest, where the usual bush birds were seen. Another trip to the Te Wera swamp had to be postponed until mid-July due to the wet weather.

One of our members gave us enthusiastic feedback from the AGM held in Nelson.

The Waitara area has proved rich in unusual sightings during the last few months with one to two Royal Spoonbills recorded on three occasions, one to two White Herons on six occasions and two Black-fronted Dotterels seen once.

Other records of interest were one male Tomtit on an Egmont Village farm about 10 kms from the Egmont National Park boundary, one NZ Falcon at Omoana, 17 Californian Quails at a local golf course, six Cattle Egrets in the Waitara area, and an albatross with two leg bands was found near Oakura. Information on the bands is still being awaited.

(Erika Woodger)

Manawatu

Yes, we are still alive and birding in the Manawatu even if we did miss the last deadline! We have had three evening meetings so far this year, all well attended. The March meeting was addressed by Gary Bramley on 'Weka conservation - where

next?'. Gary conducted his study on the breeding and ecology of Weka at Matawai, between Gisborne and Opoitiki, for his MSc at Massey University. He is now working at Waikato and we wish him well in his new job.

To celebrate the winter solstice we had a pot-luck Christmas dinner on June 25th. Beautiful food - I don't think anyone will ever forget the mincemeat 'spiders'. The evening was capped off with slides of the Slacks' trip to Cairns and the Atherton Tablelands at the end of March and then on to the U.K. March to mid-April was very cold and damp in the U.K. with a strong northerly wind most of the time - not exactly encouraging conditions for birds returning from the south. Highlights were observing Red Grouse on the Pennine Way in Edale, Dippers and Grey Wagtails in Doveedale, thousands of seabirds starting to nest on the RSPB Bempton Cliffs in N. Yorkshire, and Curlews, Snipe and Oystercatchers setting up breeding territories at Alston, Cumbria. We attended our son's wedding in Alston on April 23rd and on the way back to Manchester via the Lake District we saw our first Swallow and Wheatear. We visited the Guests in York and they sent their regards to all their OSNZ mates.

Our last meeting was on July 27th when Gábor Lovéi showed slides of some of the places and people he visits in Hungary on his bird banding expeditions, plus some fascinating slides on 'Italian Bird-catching Gardens', which dated back to the eighteenth century.

The AGM in Nelson was enjoyed by all the local members who attended. The Scientific Day was obviously a great success.

The national spoonbill count on 6 February was successful due to Bruce Collett providing river transport up the Manawatu River at Foxton and 41 birds being seen. During the shooting season they are more often seen towards the mouth of the river - Walter & Olive Chelley counted 71 on 7 May and there were still 44 on 11 June. No banded birds have been sighted this year.

Wrybill numbers have stayed at around 18-19 from mid January to mid May, then 21-25 until the present, with one bird banded as a chick on the Ohau in the MacKenzie Basin on 10/11/93. Cattle Egrets are again at Landcorp Mutoa with around 70 birds seen on 12 June. Around 50 Bar-tailed Godwits and one Lesser Knot have been present on the Manawatu Estuary during the winter months, with SIPO fluctuating from 40 - 63. Duck numbers raced up overnight with the start of the shooting season, with 800+ Mallard, 600+ Shoveller, 500+ Grey Teal, a few Grey Duck, 200+ Pied Stilts and two Chestnut Teal drakes.

Little Black Shags seem to have been fairly prominent both at the Foxton

Estuary and flying up and down the river in Palmerston North. 60+ were seen flying up-river from Fitzherbert Bridge in February, and 80 in April. At Foxton c.100 were seen beyond the boat ramp in March and up to 165 feeding in the river on 8 May.

We all look forward to the return of the Arctic waders on the Manawatu, and hopefully something unusual to keep up the interest.

(Pam Slack)

Wellington

In addition to 20 Wellington members attending the Nelson AGM, there have been a number of local projects to report. Our mapping scheme continues to operate with moderate levels of support and distribution pictures are starting to build up. We have also continued censuses at Pauatahanui Inlet and passerine banding in Upper Hutt.

On May 29 and June 6 Ralph Powlesland, Peter Reese and three others visited the Black Shag colony at Lake Kohangatera on Wellington's south-eastern coast. What an excellent opportunity for close-up bird study, right on our door step! The colony is situated in a fairly dense grove of Karaka and Manuka trees on a rather steep and slippery hillside to the east of the lake. About 50 pairs of shags nest on top of the Karaka trees and from an opposing hillside their comings and goings can be viewed with ease. Beneath the nests the ground was littered with discarded nest material, food relics, and hatched eggshells, some of which were collected for further analysis.

Ralph demonstrated his dextrous tree-climbing abilities and relayed juvenile shags down to the eager banding teams below; 25 juvenile shags were colour- and metal-banded over the two days, from down-covered chicks to near fledging. We all got the chance to handle and examine closely these quite shy birds and it was amazing to see how fast they grow in just seven days. Two hides, installed by the regular study team, provide excellent opportunity for photography and video-taping of the nesting adults as shown by Gavin and Peter at the June and July evening meetings.

Six keen ornithologists landed on Mana Island for a weekend of tree planting, bird watching and penguin banding. 581 trees were planted and 30 Little Blue Penguins caught and banded. The extent of planting and the rate of growth inspired us that our contribution to Mana Island's reforestation project had been worthwhile.

We were promised a continuation of the story of the 'Coming Round the Mountain' trip, but, sadly, the author of the chronicle, Jill Nendick, has withdrawn

publishing rights. And while we tried, no spoonbills could be found during the national count in June.

In the May evening meeting Hugh Robertson analysed the results of the five minute quarterly counts which we carried out on Kapiti Island between April 1991 and January 1994. He also compared results with those of the previous series of counts done between 1975 and 1978 and again between 1983 and 1985. There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of frugivorous species (NZ Pigeon, Kaka, Tui, Bellbird), while Weka numbers have remained much the same and Pied Tit numbers have suffered a decline. A major factor has been the eradication of possums from Kapiti - the programme began in 1983 and the last possum was removed in 1986.

In June Graeme Taylor talked about the birds of the Hawaiian islands, with special reference to Midway Island. A sad sign of the times was the number of albatrosses which have died as a result of plastic in the gut.

In July the meeting room resembled a battlefield - camouflaged hides, camouflaged clothing, nets, lenses resembling rocket launchers! In fact it was a photo forum led by Peter Reese. Peter covered the field - hides, lenses, exposures, flash units, perspective - as well as advice on stalking on one's stomach, digging oneself into the sand, and what not to wear when buying an ice-cream. Peter illustrated his talk with some superb examples of his work. We also heard some words of wisdom and saw some slides by Gavin Woodward and David Cornick.

(Kerry Oates/Allan Munro)

Nelson

This winter has been very wet and frosty (not together), and our birding activities have been largely confined to armchairs and bird books in front of the fire. The winter wader count was made in dubious weather. As usual at this time of year most of the SIPO had disappeared into paddocks behind high hedges.

On July 4 Willie noticed small flocks of SIPO flying south over his orchard throughout the day. About the same time Rob Schuckard saw about 60 Black-fronted Terns off White Rocks at dawn. Sightings of falcons have become more frequent close to the city.

Members have been making regular counts on Farewell Spit despite some rather inclement weather.

Once again Gail has devoted considerable time to judging the ornithological entries in the Science Fair. It is disappointing there are so few good projects. This year's winner was Rebecca McLeod, a sixth former at Nayland College.

Gail has been hearing accounts of Pukekos eating apples off the ground and also perched in the apple trees of local orchards, which says a lot for Nelson apples!

(Jenny Hawkins)

Marlborough

The following is a summary of the results of the winter wader count in June.

Lake Elterwater has nesting shags, plus Mallard, Paradise Shelduck and Black Teal and a Royal Spoonbill present. No waders were present but the lake has been very full of water for the past couple of years and this has been reflected in the wader numbers.

Lake Grassmere held 233 Pied Stilts, two Red-necked Stints, three Lesser Knots and a Banded Dotterel. Huge numbers of Black-billed and Red-billed Gulls were also present. Bird numbers seem to have dropped in winter at Grassmere, possibly due to the ponds having been flooded. A Chestnut-breasted Shelduck was also present. Two years ago there were 22, so this bird may represent a leftover from that flock or a new arrival.

Wairau Lagoons, under water in winter, had 10 Royal Spoonbills and there were 12 Cattle Egrets at Grovetown.

Bev Elliott reports from Kaikoura 30 Turnstones (down from 90+ in summer), 16 Variable Oystercatchers (down from 24 plus 2 chicks and 5 eggs in summer), plus SIPO, Banded Dotterels and Pied Stilts. The one definite and two probable Siberian Tattlers were not seen in the winter census.

The Royal Spoonbill colony at Wairau Lagoons was counted on 6 February by a group of nine members, where there were 134 adults, 35 nests, 13 young birds and 14 dead young. The deaths appeared to have been caused by stoats or rats, although there had been a chilly blast through the country.

(Beverly North)

Canterbury

In May a number of Canterbury members enjoyed the well-organised AGM in Nelson. Our thanks to Nelson for a wonderful weekend.

June and July field trips attracted disappointingly few members, resulting in a disjointed winter wader count. Only the fortnightly Silvereye banding attracted members. The programme has finished for the season with 380 new birds banded.

Our May meeting proved most interesting. Bob Reeve showed us excerpts from a video he has produced of his intensive study of a group of Shining Cuckoos, from the birds arriving in the area to the feeding of the cuckoo chicks by their foster parents. Bob has gained a remarkable

SUBANTARCTIC ISLAND & ANTARCTIC TRAVEL NEWS UPDATE

Are you contemplating a cruise to the Subantarctic Islands or Antarctica then you should know that Southern Heritage Expeditions, New Zealand's award winning natural history company is offering a number of itineraries on the Polar Research Vessel *Professor Shokalski* which have a number of distinct advantages.

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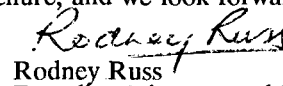
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Rodney Russ
Founding Director and Expedition Leader
Southern Heritage Expeditions.

understanding and knowledge of the birds which, when he began, he knew nothing about.

In June Colin O'Donnell enlightened us on his latest studies about bats - though not birds, they do fly!

In July Pauline Morse showed us samples of her art work, which also features on our bird stamps. Pauline must be one of the finest bird artists in the country and we are pleased to have her as a Canterbury member.

We had a few exciting birds over the winter with a Siberian Tattler at the Ashley Estuary and another at Kaikoura, and a Little Egret at the Ashley. One of the latter at Lake Ellesmere could be the same bird. Also at the lake were four White-winged Black Terns. A record 56 Great Crested Grebes were on Lake Forsyth and an Australian Little Grebe has reappeared on Taranaki Creek. A flock of White Cockatoos have taken up residence in Prices Valley. We are still recording large numbers (for Canterbury) of Variable Oystercatchers at the Avon-Heathcote Estuary, with 33 recorded roosting at MacCormack's Bay.

Spring is on the way with Little

Cormorants nesting. Paul Sagar and Donald Geddes have again commenced their banding study of nesting SIPO.

(Sheila Petch)

FUNDS FOR CONSERVATION PROJECTS

BirdLife International and the fauna and Flora Preservation Society, with support from British Petroleum, hold an annual competition for conservation exploration projects. Projects entering the competition are judged especially on the level of host country involvement and the global importance of the conservation issues on which the project is focused. Proposals for 1995 expeditions must be entered no later than 31st December 1994.

For further information contact

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(The editor has some further information on request)

DEADLINE FOR DECEMBER ISSUE IS 10 NOVEMBER