

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. 73 December, 1994

Note Deadline for the March issue will be 10th
February.

Tiritiri Matangi Island Open Sanctuary - 10 years on

Many OSNZ members will recall the field trip to Tiritiri Matangi Island Open Sanctuary in the Hauraki Gulf as part of the 1989 AGM held in Auckland. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the start of the restoration of this island reserve, with considerable progress evident since the OSNZ visit.

The restoration process has been a successful partnership between the Department of Conservation and the public. Although the initial public involvement was largely that of physical labour, it has since progressed to include an input into management philosophies and a significant contribution to the island's funding. Visitor numbers, currently around 16,000 annually, are still increasing. Many visitors are ornithologists from overseas, suggesting that the island is gaining international recognition as a place to see birds.

When the replanting programme started ten years ago, few would have envisaged the dramatic transformation that the island would undergo. In selected areas dominated originally by bracken, volunteers have planted nearly 300,000 trees. Habitats on the island now include pasture, grassland, wetland, regenerating and mature bush.

The current list of bird species sighted on or near Tiritiri Matangi is 69, a remarkable increase on the 31 species listed during an OSNZ Auckland survey in 1969. This 1969 survey which was described as 'estimated pretty complete' recorded only 24 Bellbirds. Bellbirds are now the most abundant species on the island, with a population probably in excess of 1000. This population increase is a clear indicator of the success of the restoration programme. Systematic recording of bird species on the

island, initiated in 1987, is carried out every six months by Auckland members of OSNZ.

Over the ten years of restoration, seven bird species have been introduced to the island. These are Red-crowned Parakeet, North Island Saddleback, Whitehead, Brown Teal, Takahe, North Island Robin and Little Spotted Kiwi. Most of these can be considered reintroductions of species long absent from the immediate Auckland region. The Takahe and Little Spotted Kiwi introductions, however, are part of national recovery plans using island refuges.

In 1993, the island's population of the Pacific Rat (kiore) was removed by poisoning, with eradication likely to be confirmed in mid 1995. Observations already indicate a substantial increase in plant fruiting and germination rates, and invertebrate populations. As an island now free of introduced predators, Tiritiri Matangi's conservation value has increased significantly. There is potential for further translocations, including Stitchbird, North Island Fernbird, North Island Kokako, and threatened insect and reptile species.

Tiritiri Matangi is visited regularly by primary and secondary school groups and is used at tertiary level for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. A high media profile and a public presence at many of the releases has helped to spread the conservation message, a role certain to continue with future translocations.

A visit to Tiritiri Matangi Island is recommended to ornithologists visiting Auckland. Transport can be arranged through Barbara Walter, phone (09) 479 4490.

MEL GALBRAITH

The long flight of the Grey Phalarope

In July of last year Murray Nielson of the Department of Conservation identified a lone Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* in a shallow backwater near the sea at Inchclutha, South Otago. This small Arctic wader enjoys the benefit of two names, Grey Phalarope in England where it is seen as a passage migrant in smoky grey winter plumage, and Red Phalarope in the Americas and Russia where it is more likely to be recognised in its rusty red nuptial dress.

Phalaropes form a distinct group of waders which have partially lobed feet similar to those of coots and grebes. The two polar breeding species are perfectly aquatic, and whereas waders can swim if necessary, phalaropes are distinguished by their swimming ability.

The Grey Phalarope is a circumpolar breeder and nests in the tundra mainly near the coast in the Arctic Circle and further north than the other two species.

The Red-necked also nests in the tundra whereas Wilson's Phalarope is to be found on the western plains of North America. The latter is more of a wader and its feet are less broadly lobed than the other two polar breeding species.

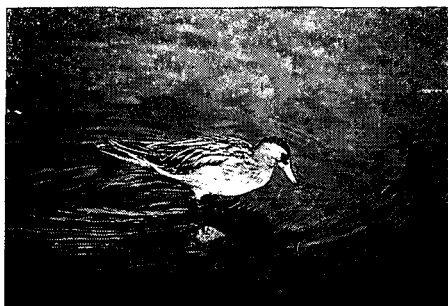
Phalaropes are also known for their reversal of roles. The female is larger and more brightly coloured than the male and tends to dominate in sexual activities, when she pursues her mate until he finally submits to her aggression. The building of the nest, most of the incubation and the rearing of the young is left to the male while the female goes off to join those similarly inclined to engage in hen parties on the water.

The young remain behind insulated by their dense breast feathers and thick underlayer of down which gives them protection and aids their buoyancy. They are the last waders to leave the Arctic. The adult birds make an earlier departure on the long migration to the oceans of the southern hemisphere where, being pelagic, they remain, frequently gathering in large flocks. They feed on insects found in the masses of floating seaweed and in kelp beds. They were known to sailors as 'whale-birds' and their presence in large numbers sometimes indicated the presence of whales. To the phalarope a spouting whale alerted them to where crustaceans could be found and the back of a whale presented a suitable platform, harbouring parasites for their attention.

It is of interest to speculate the route taken by the Inchclutha bird. Was it picked up by a cyclone in the south China Sea and borne south through the Philippines past New Guinea and to our east coast? This would seem unlikely as the Grey Phalarope has been seen on one occasion only in Australia. A more likely explanation is that, aided by its swiftness of flight, it came down the west coast of Africa and was picked up by the prevailing westerly winds. In this way it would follow the flight path of the Arctic Tern which also breeds in the tundra and spends the summer in sight of the south polar ice. Whatever happened, it arrived at Inchclutha in breeding plumage.

Since 1883 there have been six sightings of Grey Phalarope in New Zealand. The first three were females seen in breeding dress, as was a male observed in 1977.

Photographs taken at Inchclutha disclose the rapid movements of the head which create a vortex, bringing insects and larvae to the surface for easier pickings. To see this dainty wader was an unforgettable experience for all the observers involved and we could but pay tribute to the ability of a young bird to make the long migration from one hemisphere to the other. Let us hope that it returned safely to the Arctic Circle.



Grey Phalarope - Photo George Chance
GEORGE CHANCE



The New Zealand Royal Spoonbills in 1993 & 1994

My earlier prediction that the total population for New Zealand in 1994 would top 500 was a correct one. With the two latest breeding colonies at Omaui Island in Southland and Parengarenga in the far north this prediction was not very difficult. Rumour has it that a number of North Island members are anxiously trying to convince the world that there are other breeding colonies in the making. Any why not? - the habitat is there, we have the numbers of spoonbills and keen members to monitor their progress.

The winter census of the spoonbills which coincided with the winter wader count was the best one yet, not just number-wise, but more importantly with a full participation of all regions with spoonbills. My thanks to all who participated and to all those who passed on the information quickly.

The results for the past two years are presented in the table. All figures relate to adults and juveniles only. Not having ready access to the various colonies, mainly to avoid undue disturbance, chicks have not been included in these figures. Knowing that a number of eggs and chicks are still in the various colonies at summer count time, the winter numbers should be and are up.

One can argue that the 1994 figures are very close and I must admit that as an example Green Island had at least 20 eggs and chicks, and therefore the winter count in 1994 should have been higher, but don't

forget that any census, whether of butterflies or birds, will always be a minimum. Nobody can guarantee that all of the birds have been counted - let's just do our best.

I would like to continue with this project for at least another year with one census on Waitangi Day 1995 and the winter census in mid-June. I trust that we are all sufficiently interested to make this coming year the best one yet in terms of participation and consequently the highest count of our magnificent Royal Spoonbills.

If I am allowed to make another prediction - a further expansion of the spoonbill numbers and two new colonies!

PETER SCHWEIGMAN

Pied Oystercatchers on the move

There...

This year there was another excellent response from members to our appeal for sightings of colour-banded South Island Pied Oystercatchers after they have dispersed from their mid-Canterbury breeding sites, usually in late December.

By 30 September we had received reports of sightings of 23 different adults, from as close as the Avon-Heathcote Estuary to as far afield as Whangarei Harbour. The Firth of Thames and Kaipara Harbour coasts received more attention this year and this boosted our records of banded oystercatchers in these areas. As in previous years the same birds returned to the same areas. However this year's sightings did produce the first known movement between sites - a bird seen at the Manukau Harbour in March was at the Firth of Thames in May, and seen by the same observer both times.

We now have a total of 183 sightings of 61 different adults on file.

Region	Waitangi 93	Winter 93	Waitangi 94	Winter 94
Far North	0	102	16	144
Northland	0	20	6	23
Auckland	0	28	0	51
Sth Auckland	0	6	1	8
Waikato	0	17	0	31
Bay of Plenty	0	14	2	13
Gisborne	0	20	0	15
Taranaki	0	0	0	1
Manawatu	4	53	41	47
Wanganui	0	7	0	0
Hawkes Bay	1	26	0	29
Wairarapa	5	0	40	0
Wellington	0	2	2	0
Nelson	2	134	8	110
Marlborough	131	20	133	11
Canterbury	85	41	46	39
West Coast	29	12	30	26
Otago	148	0	173	0
Southland	12	0	53	12
Totals	417	502	551	560

The Ornithological Society
Of New Zealand (Inc.)

Nominations for Council

Under the provisions of the Constitution, the following Council members retire in May 1995, and nominations are hereby called for, to fill the vacancies created:

Brian Bell (President)
Mark Nee (Treasurer)
Tenick Dennison
Tim Lovegrove
Hugh Robertson
Paul Sagar

Nominations close with the Secretary on 28th February 1995, and must be signed by two financial members and consented to by the person nominated. Retiring Officers are eligible for re-election.

Notice of Motion

Notice of any motion to be considered by the 1995 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before 28 February 1995 in writing and must be signed by the mover and seconder.

The 1995 OSNZ Annual Conference and A.G.M. will be held in Stewart Island on Saturday 13 May 1995.

Raewyn Empson
Hon. Secretary
P.O. Box 12397
Wellington

Birds banded as chicks are fitted with a band combination which indicates the year in which they were hatched so usually it is not possible to identify individual birds. However supreme efforts by Elaine Ward and Anthea Goodwin, and John Dowding resulted in them getting close enough to the birds to read their band numbers through their telescopes! Perhaps the most interesting feature of this year's sightings of known-age birds were reports of two (aged one and three years) from Otago. These doubled the number of birds known to have moved south from the breeding area.

And here...

We resumed weekly checks in our study area in mid-Canterbury in early August - the eighth year of our study. The first clutches were laid in the second week of August, but the season got off to a slow start and peak laying was not until mid September. The first chicks also hatched mid September.

By 24 September 1994 we had recorded 78 of the 90 (86.7%) breeding adults known to be alive at the end of the 1993 breeding season. It is likely that some of the birds currently missing will be recorded later this season or in subsequent years, so overall annual survival is likely to be over 90%, as it has been in previous years.

We thank OSNZ for financial support for this project in 1994 with a grant from the Projects Assistance Reserve. We also thank all those members who looked at oystercatcher legs searching for colour bands. We look forward to receiving more reports from you next year.

PAUL SAGAR & DONALD GEDDES

**SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1995
ARE NOW DUE**

**REMINDER!!
ROYAL SPOONBILL CENSUS
WAITANGI DAY 1995**

Preservation Inlet birds - 1868

I happened to be fossicking through the *Otago Provincial Gazette* the other day and I came across the attached. It is to be found in a report on the birds of the area by A. Johnson, Assistant Surveyor, following a visit to Preservation Inlet in November 1868, which was published in the Report of the Superintendent on 3rd June 1869. The punctuation is as in the original.

"Nearly all the varieties of birds on the East Coast are met with in the Inlet, and a few more peculiar to the south and west of the Middle Island, such as the crow, the thrush, and the jackbird, a small whistling bird larger than the robin, black, with a brown back, and a long straight beak. The kakapo or green-bird was found everywhere, from the ocean beach to the banks of the fresh water lake at the top of the Inlet. The kiwi, evidently rarer than the kakapo, was also found throughout the Inlet, chiefly on the slopes of the hills away from the beach. At this season they have young. Two old birds were caught, one of them having one young bird, the other two. They are both night birds, and are taken usually in holes during the day, traced there by means of a dog. Neither of them appears to have any favourite hole or haunt, merely adopting the first that comes to hand when daylight sets

in, or when hard pressed. Both are good eating, particularly the kiwi. There are two kinds of woodhens, black and brown, and are found feeding together on all the beaches. Some suppose the latter, the male, and the former, to be the female bird. All the varieties of duck are common, paradise, black, grey, blue or whistling duck, and the red-bill. Mutton bird frequents the Inlet too in the breeding season. At the top of the Inlet two white cranes were seen, apparently male and female. Kakas were very plentiful but this year the pigeons, which at times are equally numerous, were exceedingly scarce"

Extract from the *Otago Government Provincial Gazette* (1869) Vol XIII No. 613, "Report of the Superintendent" dated 3rd June 1869 - *Surveyors Report on Preservation Inlet*, following a visit in November 1868.

FRANCIS DE HAMEL

**Cockatoo Records requested
from OSNZ members**

I have carried out a two and a half year study on a population of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos in the Turakina River Valley, Wanganui, as part of a post-graduate research thesis. The scope of the study is being extended to include a broader study of the species in New Zealand.

The purpose is to obtain information on the location and size of Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Galah and perhaps other cockatoo populations in New Zealand. The information is for use in my research at Victoria University but, more generally, it will provide an update on the New Zealand status of these Australian parrots.

For each record I need information on the name of the observer, date, location, species and numbers of birds observed. If more than one population or species occurs in your area, then please send me separate records for each. Please send them first to me, and I will forward copies to the OSNZ Regional Recorders. My address is: Andrew Styche, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, P.O. Box 600, Wellington.

The following sample from Turakina lists the type of information required: Name, address and affiliation of observer; date; locality name; map series and map number (eg. NZMS 260 522) and North or South Island; Grid reference (eg. East 126 South 415); species name; maximum number; minimum number.

Please send in all your cockatoo records - all contributions gratefully received! Many thanks.

ANDREW STYCHE

Labour Weekend in South Canterbury

OSNZ members from Otago and Canterbury converged on a small camp at Gunn's Bush, South Canterbury, at Labour Weekend. There were 27 of us, including both RRs and a special guest, Francesca Cunninghame, the 1994 winner of the OSNZ Otago Science Fair Prize. It was a sunny dry weekend and we greatly enjoyed the whole trip. The following report represents the work of:

Daniel Allan, Frank Austin, Prudence Barker, Louise-Blue Booth, Scott Butcher, George Chance, Tony Crocker, Francesca Cunninghame, Louise Foord, Judith & Ken Gager, Sue Galloway, Phil Garside, Lesley Gowans, Keith & Maeve Harrison, Carolyn & Chuck Landis, Barbara Markby, Ann McCallum, Sheila Petch, Peter Schweigman, Abby Smith, Hamish Spencer, Mary Thompson, Dave & Janet York.

On Saturday 22 October 1994, we split up into seven teams in order to survey the birds of the Opihi and Orari Rivers (see report elsewhere in this issue). This was an attempt to replicate the surveys of 1985 and 1987 in order to determine any changes that may have occurred since then. Each team slogged its way down the shingle beds, periodically bush-whacking along bramble- and gorse-covered banks, counting birds and locating colonies.

The results were quite disturbing. Overall numbers were substantially down on 1987. On the Opihi, 7276 birds had decreased to 3050 in 1994; on the Orari, the 3211 birds were down to only 286. Numbers of riverbed breeders such as Black-fronted Terns and Black-billed Gulls have dramatically decreased. In some sections the unfortunate birdwatchers only found five birds per kilometre.

We returned to camp exhausted, sunburnt, scratched wet and sore! Luckily a fine tea was ready and waiting, and the rest of the weekend was much less taxing. Some highlights: Black-fronted Dotterel at the Levels gravel pits, three Pacific Golden Plovers, eight Lesser Knots, several Wrybill and a Red-necked Stint at Wainono Lagoon, a Bar-tailed Godwit at Washdyke Lagoon, the soft mossy carpet underfoot at Gunn's Bush with both Kowhai and Fuchsia in bloom and pairs of Riflemen calling among the trees, a Leopard Seal at Washdyke, a male Cirl Bunting at the side of the road for some of the Otago team, and a pair of nesting Australian Little Grebes beside SH1 for the Cantabrians. A total of 63 bird species was very satisfying.

Of course some felt that the wonderful Christmas pudding provided by Blue Booth was the real highlight. On reflection, though, it is clear that the best thing about the weekend was meeting and getting to know other birdwatchers on a sunny

weekend with lots of birds, lots of food, and lots of fun!

ABBY SMITH

Mystery Bird Quiz

With three rounds completed and just the last quiz to be attempted, there is a three-way tie for first place. Pam Agnew, George and Beth Wallace and Rod Hitchmough all have seven out of nine correct. Pressing strongly is Paul Cumming on six. The one year subscription to *Notornis* is still wide open.

The mystery birds in the September OSNZ *News* were:

- G: Little Shag. This bird was photographed at Western Springs, Auckland
- H: Goldfinch. Photographed in a Christchurch apple orchard
- I: Barbary Dove. Photographed in the Auckland Zoo, not in a cage but flying freely.

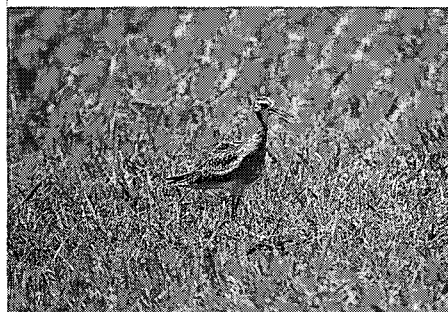
Best of luck for the last round.

DON HADDEN
P.O. Box 6054
Christchurch 8030

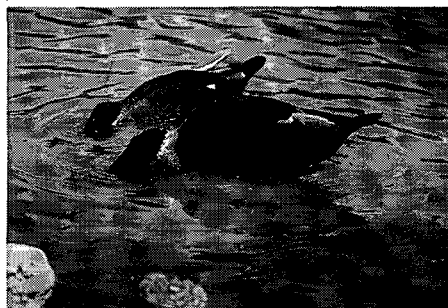
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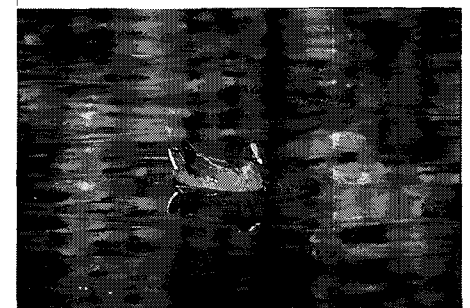


Mystery Bird # 17

The bird in the photo seems quite at home in the water and is obviously some species of waterbird. There are several possible groups of birds which match the general description of Mystery Bird #17 including grebes, petrels, shags, ducks and rails. The prominent pointed bill and frontal shield on the forehead is a key diagnostic feature and eliminates all these groups except rails (grebes have a pointed bill but lack a frontal shield; shags have long narrow hooked bills and no frontal shield; ducks have broad flat bills and no frontal shield).

Ten species of rails have been recorded in New Zealand; eight breed here and two are vagrants (Dusky Moorhen and Black-tailed Native Hen). Five species of rails have pointed bills but lack a frontal shield (Weka, Banded Rail, Auckland Is. Rail, Spotless Crake and Marsh Crake) and so can be excluded.

The remaining five species of rails all have frontal shields (Pukeko, Takahe, Australian Coot, Dusky Moorhen and Black-tailed Native Hen). At this point, if the photo was in glorious colour, it would be immediately obvious which species was in the photo as the colour of the bill and/or frontal shield varies between these species (red in Pukeko and Takahe, red and yellow in Dusky Moorhen, green and red in Black-tailed Native Hen and cream-white with a blue tinge in Australian Coots). Without the additional luxury of knowing body-size (large in Pukeko and Takahe, medium-small in other species), or body colour (prominent blues, purples, greens and black in the larger species, duller browns, greys, greens or black in the smaller species), the feature most apparent in the photo is the prominent white patch on the vent and undertail coverts. This marking is absent in Australian Coots and Black-tailed Native Hens (but note that this latter species has prominent white spots on the flanks below the wings).



Mystery Bird #17 could therefore be a Pukeko, Takahe or Dusky Moorhen. Without size or colour as a guide, the bill shape is diagnostic. Both Pukeko and Takahe have large, conical shaped bills with the shield and upper mandible extending fairly straight or slightly raised before reaching the pointed bill tip. There is no obvious separation of the frontal shield and bill at the nostrils and the bill



Mystery Bird # 18

Identify this bird. Answer next issue

is all one colour. In contrast the Dusky Moorhen has a distinctly separable frontal shield and short narrow pointed bill which in life is red with a yellow tip (non-breeding adults have olive-green shields; juveniles have olive-green shields and bills with a yellowish tip).

Clearly then the bird in the photo is a Dusky Moorhen (photographed in Australia). If the legs were visible, they would also reveal a major difference. Breeding adult Dusky Moorhens have red legs in front but GREEN behind (legs are olive-green throughout in non-breeding adults and immatures) whereas the legs of Pukeko, Takahe and Black-tailed Native Hen are all red (greyish-pink or brown in juveniles) and Australian Coots are grey.

To date there has been one record of a Dusky Moorhen in New Zealand; a single bird at Lake Hayes in 1968.

GRAEME TAYLOR

Page Charges in *Notornis*

The publication of scientific journals is expensive (about \$100 per printed page in *Notornis*). Societies and publishers have different ways to deal with this, and more and more of them require that authors pay for the right to publish. These 'page charges' have been introduced to practically all New Zealand science journals. At its October meeting, OSNZ Council discussed the question of page charges in *Notornis*. While it is the Society's interest not to pass up on potential earnings, and so decrease the cost of publication, our main concern was that individual authors without

external support should not be deterred from submitting their work for consideration. Council furthermore thought that OSNZ members, even if they have access to external funds, should have a lower rate to pay.

It has been decided that:

- a page charge of NZ\$30.00 (inc. GST) per printed page be introduced;
- this should be waived for individual authors who are members and are without external support;
- that members who have institutional affiliation and are senior authors on papers have 30% discount on this charge;
- that authors unable to pay full or partial page charges should indicate this at the time of submission

Inability to pay page charges in no way prejudices evaluation and publication of manuscripts.

These changes will be announced in *Notornis* and will become effective for manuscripts submitted after the publication date of the March 1995 issue. Manuscripts received before that date will not be affected by this change.

In order to inform readers and prospective authors of the timeframe of publication in *Notornis*, the date of receipt of the first version, that of the final version and the date of acceptance will be printed at the end of each contribution. This change will take effect from Volume 42 (1).

GÁBOR LÖVEI
Editor, *Notornis*

NZ Falcon survey

The status of the Bush Falcon is unknown. In particular it is not known if it is declining or its breeding range shrinking. Sightings of Bush Falcons occur in all North Island conservancies except

Northland, but this does not indicate whether the population is declining or not. For example the occasional falcon is seen on the Coromandel Peninsula but no evidence of breeding has been found recently. Anecdotal evidence given by farmers suggest that Bush Falcons are less common now than twenty years ago.

It is possible that a decline in bush birds due to forest degradation and increases in predator pressure is causing a corresponding decline in falcon numbers. Studies of threatened native species indicate that possums are a major predator and competitor of many bush dwellers, and the removal of possums from Kapiti Island has resulted in a large increase in bush bird numbers.

It appears that the Eastern Falcon population, which has been studied to a much greater extent than the Bush Falcon, is at the present time stable. There is a need to establish whether the Bush Falcon population is declining, stable or increasing, so that proper management can take place.

Monitoring of pairs of Bush Falcons at several sites throughout their range could indicate the current state of the population and whether we are about to experience a serious decline, or even increase, in numbers.

The Raptor Association of New Zealand (RANZ), in association with DoC are about to establish a breeding success monitoring programme in an effort to find out if the current wild falcon populations are self-sustaining or not. The main objective is to give some indication of the need for a Recovery Plan for the species.

Each conservancy should be able to locate at least two breeding pairs in deep bush and either in farmland or on the margin of bush and farmland. It is hoped that this will provide some comparisons in breeding productivity, for example, between bush and modified habitat.

OSNZ members are asked to keep an eye out for falcons and to report sightings either to DoC or to Steve Lawrence, 94 Plateau Road, Upper Hutt. Details required are: have you 1) been 'dive-bombed' by falcons? 2) observed falcons regularly carrying prey to the same location? 3) observed the transfer of prey between falcons? 4) observed a group of two or more falcons at the same location during late summer-autumn? Plus location, approximate date of observation and any additional comments.

STEVE LAWRENCE

A Banded Chaffinch

On 14 August I was trapping passerines in my funnel trap. Usually when a bird is released it flies to a neighbouring tree approximately 50 metres away.

I had just released a newly banded female Chaffinch. I watched her fly into a plum tree just above the trap and for the next ten minutes she tried to remove the band. She pecked so vigorously at it that several times she nearly fell of the branch. She eventually flew away when a neighbouring cat ventured along.

JANICE WOON

Cannibalistic Blackbirds

On 30 October a female Blackbird flew onto the lawn in front of our kitchen window in Egmont Village. She had an egg in her bill which appeared whole. She started to break the egg by pecking it. When it broke she pulled out what looked like a well-developed embryo and proceeded to treat it like a food item, ie: she shook it to separate pieces from it, which she then ate. She completed all of them and then flew off, leaving the empty egg shell behind. The egg, which I have kept, is unmistakably a Blackbird's egg.

I have wondered if this happen to all unhatched eggs, as I often see them in nests of various species for two to four days after the rest of the eggs have hatched, and then disappear - where? Only occasionally is an egg still present after the chicks have fledged.

ERIKA WOODGER

Opihi and Orari River Wetland Bird Surveys 1994

The Canterbury and Otago regions of the OSNZ undertook as part of their Labour Weekend ornithological outing to carry out a complete survey of the Opihi and Orari Rivers. The purpose was to compare the findings with those of previous surveys carried out in 1985 and 1987 by the former NZ Wildlife Service and Department of Conservation. The source of the figures given in the tables that accompany this note are from unpublished results of those surveys, with acknowledgement to Ken Hughey (1985) and Colin O'Donnell (1987).

Both riverbeds were surveyed on foot simultaneously by twenty-three local members and friends on 22 October 1994 using the same techniques and sections as per O'Donnell (1987).

Due to the large May 1994 floods in South Canterbury, both riverbeds were free of vegetation. No regrowth was in evidence, although large amounts of flood debris, mainly crack willows (*Salix fragilis*) and poplars (*Populus* sp.), mostly whole trees, showed some sprouting regrowth.

The totals for both rivers were well down from the 1987 figures, with 3050 on the Opihi and 286 on the Orari.

A pretty grim picture of those species that rely heavily on riverbeds emerged.

Table 1: Wetland Bird Counts on the Opihi and Orari Rivers 1985, 1987 & 1994

SPECIES	OPIHI 1985	OPIHI 1987	OPIHI 1994	ORARI 1985	ORARI 1987	ORARI 1994
Black Shag	34	6	15	3	5	6
Little Shag	3	4	7		1	
White-faced Heron	27	20	17	7	7	2
Canada Goose			1		3	4
Paradise Shelduck	16	39	31		22	6
Mallard	111	107	59	56	106	91
Grey Duck						2
NZ Shoveler	2	10	1		2	
Duck sp.				3		
Pukeko	7			1	2	
SI Pied Oystercatcher	70	68	49	21	43	11
Spur-winged Plover	35	76	105	44	41	27
Banded Dotterel	13	41	6	21	59	21
Black-fronted Dotterel	39	32	4	15	23	9
Wrybill		2				
Pied Stilt	164	163	37	27	102	12
Black-backed Gull	72	212	915	101	179	20
Black-billed Gull	2085	6306	1608	78	2401	40
White-fronted Tern	50	3		2		1
Black-fronted Tern	79	127	50	38	162	3
Caspian Tern	1	2	1	2		1
Kingfisher	12	7	11		6	4
Welcome Swallow		51	133		47	26
TOTALS	2820	7276	3050	419	3211	286

Table 2: Opihi River Bird Count 1994

SPECIES	SECTIONS				TOTALS
	I*	II	III	IV	
Distance (km)	16	10	11	7	44
Black Shag	7	6		2	15
Little Shag	4	1	2		7
White-faced Heron	2	10	1	4	17
Canada Goose	1				1
Paradise Shelduck	28	3			31
Mallard	30	5	16	8	59
NZ Shoveler			1		1
SI Pied Oystercatcher	20	7	19	3	49
Spur-winged Plover	31	6	56	12	105
Banded Dotterel			2	4	6
Black-fronted Dotterel			4		4
Pied Stilt	12		13	12	37
Black-backed Gull	407	4	4	500	915
Black-billed Gull	1600		4	4	1608
Caspian Tern				1	1
Black-fronted Tern			10	40	50
Welcome Swallow	10	3	60	60	133
Kingfisher	2	3	5	1	11
TOTALS	2154	48	197	651	3050

* Note: Section I is the lower stretch of the Opuha River

Table 3: Orari River Bird Count 1994

SPECIES	SECTIONS			TOTALS
	I	II	III	
Distance (km)	14	10	15.5	39.5
Black Shag	1	2	3	6
Little Shag				0
White-faced Heron			2	2
Canada Goose		2	2	4
Paradise Shelduck	2	2	2	6
Grey Duck		2		2
Mallard	18	20	53	91
SI Pied Oystercatcher	4	2	5	11
Spur-winged Plover	15	7	5	27
Banded Dotterel	1	16	4	21
Black-fronted Dotterel		1	8	9
Pied Stilt		10	2	12
Black-backed Gull	4	7	9	20
Black-billed Gull			40	40
White-fronted Tern			1	1
Black-fronted Tern	2		1	3
Caspian Tern			1	1
Welcome Swallow		12	14	26
Kingfisher		2	2	4
TOTALS	47	85	154	286

Both rivers combined to give the following results - Banded Dotterels 27, compared with 100 in 1987; Black-fronted Dotterels 13, compared with 55 in 1987; Black-billed Gulls 1648, compared with 8707 in 1987; and Black-fronted Terns with 53, compared to 289 in 1987. (see Table 1)

In stark contrast to the previous surveys, the only colony of Black-billed Gulls was found in Section I of the Opihi (which is in fact the lower stretch of the Opuha River), with a total of 1600 birds. Just downstream of this colony was a colony of 400 Black-backed Gulls. The only colony of Black-fronted Terns was on Section IV of the Opihi River with 38 nesting birds.

There doesn't seem to be a logical explanation as to why this massive decrease should have occurred. Previous observations tend to indicate that when the gravel is free of vegetation, bird numbers increase. The flood debris should not have influenced breeding attempts.

Distribution of all riverbed birds on river sections are summarised in Tables 2 & 3.

PETER SCHWEIGMAN

Additional OSNZ Sale Item

Further to the insert in the September *Notornis* regarding OSNZ sales items, we now have available copies of *The Black Robin* by David Butler and Don Merton, at a cost of \$12.00 (plus \$6.00 post and packaging). Orders for this and other OSNZ sales items should be sent with a cheque payable to Ornithological Society of NZ to: OSNZ Sales, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington.

Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress

Professional and amateur ornithologists are advised of the Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress, an international conference that has been scheduled for early October 1996. This meeting will be conducted in Western Australia, and organised by Australia's leading bird research and conservation group, the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU). Although the major focus of the congress will be upon southern birds and their habitats, delegates who wish to highlight differences or similarities between avian systems in various parts of the world will be most welcome.

The conference will take place from Friday 5th to Tuesday 9th October 1996 (following the ISBE Conference that has been planned for 29/9 - 4/10/96, and is to be held in Canberra). The venue has not yet been finalised, although it is certain to be a major regional centre within easy reach of Perth, Western Australia. Excellent conference facilities will be available,

accommodation ranging from basic to luxury provided, and pre- and post-conference tours that demonstrate the magnificent natural history of southwestern Australia will be offered to delegates.

The major theme is birds and their habitats in Australasia, Africa, South America, Antarctica and on sub-Antarctic islands.

Sub-themes are -

- 1) conservation and management of arid zone and forest birds
- 2) impact of habitat fragmentation on bird communities
- 3) studies of migratory seabirds and waders
- 4) breeding biology and mating systems of southern hemisphere birds
- 5) abundance and distribution of birds
- 6) plant-animal interactions and pollination
- 7) foraging behaviour in terrestrial bird communities

For further information, please contact the President of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, Professor Brian Collins (C/o School of Environmental Biology, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U 1987, Perth, Western Australia 6001, Tel. 61 (9) 351 7041, fax 61 (9) 351 2495).

Third International Penguin Conference

Cape Town, South Africa, 2-6 September 1996 - first announcement

Following on from the successful First and Second International Penguin Conferences held in Dunedin, New Zealand and Phillip Island, Australia in 1988 and 1992 respectively, the Third International Penguin Conference will be held at the Breakwater Lodge, Cape Town, South Africa during 2-6 September 1996.

The conference is being organised by the African Seabird Group, with the support of local organisations and societies, under the broad theme 'Penguins: science and management'. It is intended that there will be four days of formal talks and poster sessions, all in plenary, broken in the middle by an excursion to historic Robben Island, home of an expanding population of Jackass or African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus*. Pre- and post-conference excursions are planned to seabird colonies in the West Coast National Park and to a mainland penguin colony on the Cape Peninsula. The proceedings of the conference will be published as a special issue of the African Seabird Group's journal *Marine Ornithology*.

Persons interested in attending should write to the Organising Committee, Third International Penguin Conference, P.O. Box 34113, Rhodes Gift 7707, South Africa, to be placed on the mailing list for the second circular, which it is planned to mail in mid-1995. The second circular will give full details of registration fee,

accommodation, excursions, publication plans etc. It would be helpful if the organisers could be informed of the intention of making a presentation when replying to the first circular. Please also include full postal and electronic mail addresses and an international fax number.

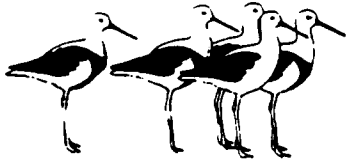
Further information may be obtained from John Cooper, Chairperson of the Organising Committee, at the above address, or by electronic mail (jcooper@botzoo.uct.ac.za), fax 27 (21) 650 3295 or phone 27 (21) 650 3294. Other members of the Organising Committee, from whom information may also be obtained, are Robert Crawford, Bruce Dyer, Norbert Klages and Tony (AJ) Williams.

22nd International Ornithological Congress

The 22nd International Ornithological Congress will be held in Durban, South Africa from 16-22 August 1998. Professor Peter Berthold (Germany) will serve as President, Dr Janet Kear (United Kingdom) as Vice President and Dr Aldo Berruti as Secretary-General. This congress will include a full scientific programme and a large series of ornithological tours to numerous areas within southern Africa. All interested ornithologists are invited to take part.

Potential members of the Durban congress are requested to contact Dr Aldo Berruti (Durban Natural Science Museum, P.O. Box 4085, Durban 4000, South Africa) to be placed on the mailing list, or to provide suggestions on any aspect of the 22nd congress. Person on the mailing list will be sent information on all aspects of the congress in proper time.

The Chairman of the Scientific Programme Committee is Dr Lukas Jenni (Schweizerische Voegelwarte, CH-6204 Sempach, Switzerland). Suggestions for the scientific programme should be sent to him. Announcements for the scientific programme will be published separately. Letters of enquiry about the scientific programme can be sent to Dr Lukas Jenni, Professor Peter Berthold, Professor Walter Bock (Secretary of the IOC, Box 37, Schermerhorn Hall, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027, USA).



AWSG News

The Australasian Wader Studies Group has decided to introduce a newsletter *The Tattler*. The objective of the Newsletter is to increase the level of communications between wader enthusiasts, researchers and conservationists. *The Stilt*, the journal of the Australasian Wader Studies Group, is circulated to all members of the AWSG and has included news items drawn from regional newsletters and other sources. It is felt however that a newsletter circulated to a wider audience is required. This will relieve some of the workload for the editor of *The Stilt* and free up the journal for scientific papers. Hugo Phillips, Conservation Officer to the RAOU (the parent body of the AWSG) attempted part of these objectives with the production of *AWSG News* which was circulated to a number of non-member groups and individuals within Australasia. This became an onerous task for Hugo with the increasing workload of Conservation Officer. Now Phil Straw has stuck his head in the noose to produce this newsletter.

Waders inhabit some of the most threatened habitat in the world. Wetlands are disappearing at an alarming rate wherever we look and unless positive action is taken by specialists such as ourselves to identify the needs of waders a large number of the remaining wetlands will be lost. The production of "A National Plan for Shorebird Conservation in Australia" has identified important areas for waders around Australia.

This effort will be fruitless unless an effort is made to follow on with the recommendations made in that report and to fill in the holes in our knowledge. An inventory of wetlands in each region is one suggestion with some of the more remote areas being tackled by joint expeditions between regional groups. With the Ramsar Convention being held in Australia in 1996 now is the time to agitate for recognition of our most important wader habitats.

This letter will be circulated to members of the AWSG, members of regional wader groups, conservation bodies and both government and non-government wetland agencies and groups. Summaries of articles and papers appearing in *The Stilt* and regional newsletters may seem somewhat repetitious but this is aimed at the wider audience. If you are aware of the presence of someone who should receive

The Tattler then please notify the editor. The success of this newsletter depends on the reader and active participants.

All issues concerning waders in the Australasian region will be welcomed, including conservation, requests for information, regional and national issues, environmental threats, suggestions etc. Material that is thought to be appropriate for inclusion in *The Stilt* will be forwarded to the editor of that journal.

The Tattler issue No. 1 (October 1994) includes items on disturbance to waders, a Siberian Great Knot in Broome, leg flags, Ramsar in Australia, the Australian Wetland Alliance, the 1994 and 1996 North West Australia wader expedition, the Tundra Ecology '94 Expedition, plus regional news from New Zealand, NSW, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

PHIL STRAW
15 Kings Road
Brighton-le-Sands
NSW 2216, Australia.
Phone/Fax 61 (2) 597 7765

Regional Round-up

Northland

A Poutu Lakes survey in late September was a change from our usual February survey of these lakes and an attempt to do a survey at a more exciting time of the year for bird activity when many birds are breeding. Black Swans, Spur-winged Plovers and Paradise Shelduck were seen with young and the Bitterns were booming, but for other species it was a little early.

A seabird watching trip in October left from Taurikura, headed around Bream Head and up towards the Poor Knights. We hadn't been on this bit of sea before and the trip exceeded our wildest expectations. Not only were there masses of seabirds but we saw two groups of Bryde's Whales, one of five and one of three, which, cruising slowly around in circles, we watched for some time. The whales were feeding, and when we got onto the first group there was a large flock of prions. Weather and sea conditions were ideal for most of the day with just a light chop getting up in the mid-afternoon on our way home.

An enjoyable trip to Karikari Peninsula in early November had mixed ornithological fortunes. Waimango Swamp was a disappointment this time, but a trip to Walker Island to observe waders was more successful. Only an hour and a half was spent there, due to worsening sea conditions, but a large flock of godwits and knots were there and the highlights were a flock of 12 Little Terns and a curlew. The tide was a very high one - one pair of New Zealand Dotterels had been wise and built their nest on top of a small sand dune, but

many other nesting birds were washed out while we were there.

A meeting held in September to discuss the programme resulted in a decision to have a questionnaire to find out members' views on a variety of topics but got nowhere with ideas for activities. We had another one in November and achieved more this time.

At our usual bimonthly meeting in October Gerry Brackenbury gave a talk on his trip to Western Australia earlier this year, which featured Rottneest Island, Kalbarri, Monkey Mia and Hamelin Pool.

(Pat Miller)

Auckland

In September John Kendrick addressed about 50 members and friends, telling of some of his experiences since aged 5 - about 80 years of watching, imitating and recording birds. Between 1950 and 1960 he was often in the field with Dick Sibson, Ross McKenzie and Geoff Moon, other well-known enthusiasts, and later, with the Wildlife Service, he had some amazing experiences recording bird calls on off-shore islands. John played tapes of some native birds including petrels, these being done in the burrow a few centimetres from the birds with a special microphone. John's amazing recall was an example to us all.

At the October meeting Dr Russell Gray described his research studies designed to determine whether families of birds based on anatomical structure corresponded to family relationships based on patterns of behaviour. The work followed suggestions by Konrad Lorenz that behaviour was as important as morphology in constructing family trees. Dr Gray's studies on seabirds and penguins compared classification of families and genera using DNA characteristics with observed behavioural patterns seen in such things as mating. Overall there was considerable conformity between family trees compared using these two methods (morphological and behavioural).

Dick Vietch gave an illustrated talk in November at short notice on his visit to Western Australia at the request of the Perth Research Institute, to help with their programme of eradication of predators in the Dryandra Forest, south-east of Perth, Barrow Island to the north-west and at Monte Bello Island. He then went on to Broome Bird Observatory where cannon and mist netting were an integral part of the day's activities. The high point at the end of the day was watching the waders depart for the Arctic, flying north-west to the Equator to take advantage of the following wind north of the tropics, and flying in long skeins, thus saving 70% of their energy. Dick showed slides taken from a rock hide on the beach, where the birds were almost too close to photograph. A birding person's paradise.

The on-going land dispute continues to limit the monthly Muriwai beach patrol to about half the beach. Since August returns have been modest in numbers, with 8 in August, 56 in September and 25 in October, but interesting in species. There was an Antarctic Fulmar in August and 36 Diving Petrels in September, along with the first Kerguelen (4) and Blue Petrels (4) for some time. In October the variety included Kerguelen, Blue and Cook's Petrels, Antarctic and Fairy Prions, Buller's Shearwater and a single Little Tern in good condition. The Pakiri beach patrol in October yielded very little - 1 Blue Penguin, 5 Gannets - but was about average for the time of year, as were the live birds - 50 NZ Dotterel, 40 Variable Oystercatcher and 35 Caspian Tern nests. Unfortunately eight of the latter were predated, but a beautiful Cape Pigeon was picked up, in A1 condition - it will be offered to the Auckland Museum for their collection.

On 27 August over 20 members turned out on a good day to look for bittern and other birds in the mixed but interesting environment at Whatipu on the Auckland west coast. Though bitterns were not to be found, a flock of about 300 Redpoll was a good sighting for our region, and Fernbirds were heard calling. We saw NZ Dotterels and Black Oystercatchers, with Shoveller, Paradise Shelduck and Mallard on the expanses of open water.

A trip to Rangitoto Station in the north-west Pureora region on the 14th October was made by Doug Booth, Gillian Eller, Simon Chamberlin and Sharen and Mike Graham. This remote hill station is to the east of Te Kuiti and Otorohanga and is now a reserve, still very much farmed, logged and hopefully recovering. In our first hours of walking we had three sightings of NZ Falcon, renowned in the area. Hedge Sparrows, Redpolls, Tomtits and Bellbirds were reasonably common. Kokako were heard on three occasions but neither Kaka nor Kakariki were recorded. The facilities at the station are excellent and necessary for the cold wet nights, but trip numbers should be restricted to less than twenty.

21 members spent a sunny day on the restored scow *Te Aroha* on 30 October looking for seabirds on the Hauraki Gulf. The weather was good but this meant that the expected birds were probably well clear of the Barrier islands. First stop was Maria Island in the Noises group. Several burrows, probably of Diving Petrels, were examined, although most were probably concealed under the canopy of an introduced legume which is rapidly enveloping the island. Live birds included Variable Oystercatcher, Hedge Sparrow, Grey Warbler, Silvereye, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and a harrier. Pied Shags, two Caspian Terns, White-fronted Terns and Black-backed and Red-billed Gulls were

also present. From here we went to Gannet Rock at the entrance to the Firth of Thames. The few birds on the water included Blue Penguin, two Buller's Shearwaters and a single Fluttering Shearwater. The gannet colony is spectacular, with around 2000 birds nesting on the low rocks. Some 30 Spotted Shags were also present, but nest on Tarakihi Island further south. Well done Christine Thompson for organising an enjoyable trip.

The wettest part of Auckland's drought saw a small group of members at Windermere Reserve, a game reserve and farm at Pokeno, on 25 September. A wealth of water birds now live here, the commonest being Grey Teal at all stages of nesting using the nest boxes. There were also Shoveller and a pair of Canada Geese.

A Pukeko nest in a *Pittosporum*, about two metres off the ground, discovered by Ray Clough at Ambury Park recently, was inspected by four members a day or two later. An amazing sight, it was constructed of twigs and leaves stripped from adjacent five-fingers and *Pittosporums*, very tidy, and with birds in residence when found. There were two dead chicks on the ground the next day, and several days later the nest showed signs of refurbishing with more fresh leaves. How did the parents hope to get the chicks to ground level without breaking their legs or necks?

A study of the Muriwai gannetry to assess the impact of sightseers is being organised by the Regional Parks service. This season's first inspections of the colony found the number of pairs in residence had increased from 226 on 10/9 to 550 on 15/10. At Mangawhai a pre-nesting group of 45 Caspian Terns was found on 16/9, while on Tiritiri Diving Petrels have established a colony at the northern end of the island. The region's Royal Spoonbill flock held 36 birds at Mangere Ponds on 26/9, rising to 55 on 20/10, the highest number this spring, and down to 14 on 31/10. A lone Whimbrel on Muriwai Beach on 2/10 provided an unusual distraction for the beach patrollers. An early report of nesting Variable Oystercatchers was of a pair with eggs at Waiwera on 30/9. First Chaffinch song in Auckland city was noted on 8/8, followed by Greenfinch on 11/10. Shining Cuckoos were heard at Wenderholm and Titirangi on 26/9 and after some days of strong northerlies a Long-tailed Cuckoo perched in full view of coastal North Shore residents on 25/10.

Much shorter voyages have carried Bellbirds from Tiritiri Matangi to Whangaparaoa Peninsula where their presence and probable nesting in Shakespear Regional Park was confirmed by dawn patrols on 29/10 and 5/11. Around 25 people assisted with a survey organised by Brenda Greene in the park over two days, locating about 15 males and four females. Reports are also coming in of Bellbirds at Stillwater and Okura.

Think of the effort we birding people have put into the search to see Kokako over the years! On 18 September Mike and Sharen Graham joined a party of over 30 trampers from the Auckland Tramping Club in the Hunua Ranges who, after a long uphill morning, sat down for lunch on Puka Ridge. Within minutes this noisy mob were joined by a pair of Kokako coming down to feed on Putaputaweta fruits no more than ten feet above the group. The pair fed each other, called throughout the hour long break and were totally unconcerned with the human presence.

(Gillian Eller and Kay Haslett)

South Auckland

We have been watching our Black-billed Gulls closely and at present Kidds seems to be the most promising site with 112 present on 24 October.

In late August we visited the coastal area near Kokonga Road West, in the south western corner of our region. In the heavy sea the roosting White-fronted Terns were being dislodged by the spray on Kaiapiapia Rock and the outer stack, but 50 odd Spotted Shags were roosting on the sheltered side of the northern side of the northern stack and at least eight Black Shags had nests on the summit.

In September we checked out Kidds for returning waders. Some Golden Plover were still retaining most of their breeding plumage and there was a nice flock of 100 Turnstones. Of the nine NZ Dotterel the three recently banded by John Dowding were much in evidence. High tides and storms have eroded both banks and shores.

In early October we enjoyed our annual visit to Tiri. Both the birds and the vegetation were bursting with vigour. The Brown Teal were protecting a tiny duckling and the Takahe, including the Pukeko who thought he was a Takahe, kept us company. We had to postpone our night visit to Mangatangi because the weather closed in, but the next morning a Bellbird joined the dawn chorus near the Wairoa Dam and three others were singing a little later.

Tony Habraken has been following on with his Pied Stilt studies and beach patrols continue monthly, with a wreck of Kerguelen Petrels during the winter.

At our evening meeting in August Val Hollard gave us a thoroughly professional look at the work of the Native Forest Restoration Trust and in September Kathy Barrow and Gillian Eller shared their exciting trip to China with visits to the National Park for Giant Panda and over a pass into Tibet. In November David Crockett traced his involvement with the Taiko up to the present day. The latest scheme is to try and restore and protect an ancestral breeding ground and to reintroduce young birds there. We wish

him success in his dedication and perseverance to the cause.

(Anthea Goodwin)

Waikato

Beach patrols over recent months have brought few returns, most western Waikato beaches being swept clean by wind-driven high tides. A few Kerguelen Petrels were found, including one live one which died later. A White-capped Mollymawk at Ruapuke was probably the most notable find.

Our August Cattle Egret count revealed the smallest total for some years, with only 187 birds at Rangiriri, and 74 at Lake Ngaroto. Scattered sightings of birds in groups of two or three are puzzling, as they disappear after a few days, and we have no way of knowing whether they join local flocks, or move on to other places. No wing-tagged birds were seen.

A weekend camp at Pureora was fogged by very inclement weather, giving time to practise out Yahtzee skills and learn Stella's new dice game. Sightings of bush birds from the Bismarck Rd tower included good views of Kaka and Kakariki, with Tomtit and Whitehead being seen nearby. Robins were in full song, and seemed present in good numbers in the Waipapa Ecological Reserve. Fernbird obliged by responding to taped calls, and the weekend was capped off by excellent views of a Kokako. An October field trip to look for bush birds in the Pirongia area was disappointing, with few birds being seen. However the group did manage a fleeting glimpse of a Spotless Crane in a nearby swamp.

From the Grey-faced Petrel project, Hugh Clifford reports that burrowscoping for chicks has been completed at both study sites, with lower numbers of chicks being found on Mount Maunganui compared to the previous season, while numbers at Motuotau Island compare more favourably. Monthly visits will now be made to check for and band chicks.

Unusual bird sightings include a very good view of a Kookaburra in a Hamilton garden by two of our members, which confirms several previous reports of this bird being seen in the city. In a Hillcrest suburb the residents are being entertained by a Kaka which is tame enough to feed from the hand, while two Kaka were observed playing in an oak tree about a kilometre away. Are Little Barrier birds visiting the mainland?

Evening meetings included an excellent presentation by Jo Waas on egg ejection in Royal Penguins. Most were surprised to learn that the ejection was from the nest, not the bird. Jo's reason for 'ejection' not 'rejection' was related to his theory that this is a bird in transition from being a '2-egg' bird to a '1-egg' bird.

Terry Greene gave us an update on the findings from his work in attaching radio transmitters to Blue Duck and Kaka at Pureora, in an attempt to determine the effect of 1080 poison on these species. Terry's slides showing possum damage in the forest show how important it is that a control on these animals is imposed before too long.

As a follow-up, Colin Giddy spoke at our October meeting about the logistics of planning and carrying out a successful possum and rat eradication programme, using Mt Karioi as his example.

(Bev Woolley)

Hawkes Bay

Our field trips in the past few months have included trips to Lake Roto-o-kiwa, Shine Falls and McLean's Bush. Lake Roto-o-kiwa had been dry about a month before we visited it in August. Birds seen included Dabchicks, Grey Duck, Paradise Shelduck and a few Grey Teal. A noticeable absence were nesting shags - on previous visits Little and Black Shags have been recorded nesting there. Perhaps the fact that the lake had completely dried out may have accounted for their absence. NZ Pigeons, Tuis and Bellbirds were abundant on the walk into Shine Falls. Many Chaffinches were hawking over the falls. Whiteheads were heard in the bush across the gorge. A trip to McLean's Bush Scenic Reserve was a first time for all those that went. Situated in central Hawkes Bay, the reserve was fenced off from stock in 1976. Regeneration is now occurring since possum control has taken place. Pigeons, Tuis, Bellbirds and Grey Warblers were the native birds inhabiting the bush.

We have carried out a wader watch again this year - the Ahuriri Estuary has been visited each day to monitor the arrival of the waders. It would seem from our observations that the birds don't arrive en masse - instead the numbers gradually build up. In fact we think that some of the birds just use the estuary as a stopover and then move on. The highest number of godwits to date is 350 and we have recorded up to 12 knots, 12 Golden Plovers, Turnstones and 2 Red-necked Stints. An Asiatic Whimbrel is also present.

Three NIPO (North Island Pied Oystercatchers!!) have been banded this season on the Ngaruroro River - this is the second season of our South Island Pied Oystercatcher banding project. We have been unable to locate the pair that we banded last season.

(Christine McRae)

Taranaki

Our trips to Te Wera and into the Moki Forest were enjoyed by the participating members. The usual bushbirds were seen in both areas including Whiteheads, which

were particularly plentiful in the Moki Forest. Fernbirds were seen in the Te Wera swamp.

A Blue Petrel was found in suburban New Plymouth and a White-headed Petrel at Onaero Beach. Both were alive but died the following day. Beach patrol finds included another Blue Petrel, nine Kerguelen Petrels, a giant petrel, a Grey-headed Mollymawk and a Spotted Shag - not usually washed up on Taranaki beaches.

In other areas, two NZ Falcons have been seen again at Omoana, two others on Mt Egmont and one at Lake Rotorangi. One and four Black-fronted Dotterels and a White Heron were located again at Waitara, and two Rooks flying over New Plymouth are a new addition to the local bird scene.

13 Cattle Egrets was our highest count this season, the same as last. The first Shining Cuckoo of the year was on 28 September, consistent with previous years.

(Erika Woodger)

Wanganui

It has not been a very good year for birding on the Wanganui River estuary as work has been underway for a new sewage scheme and the life on the river has been disrupted.

Our monthly meetings have been visited by a dwindling number of members. We have been watching a series of videos on New Zealand and Australian birds. We also had a very interesting talk on the Galapagos Islands by Ian Sutherland, complemented by a good display of slides.

Through my involvement with Bird Rescue Wanganui-Manawatu, we have received a number of Kerguelen Petrels. All died but one, which was released. A Blue Penguin in moult was also released once the moult was complete. A Fairy Prion, Broad-billed Prion, White-fronted Tern and White-headed Petrel all died. We have also had NZ Pigeons, Moreporks and Tuis. We often receive common introduced species which are cared for until they can be released back into the wild. A Barn Owl was looked after by Dawne Morton and sent to Wellington Zoo when its strength had built up.

(Tom Teasdale)

Wairarapa

Wairarapa members came back from the AGM in Nelson all fired up to attend the AGM in Stewart Island next year and have already carried out two fund-raising efforts toward the trip.

This year we were favoured by fine weather for the winter wader count and again Pied Stilts proved to be the most abundant birds on the day. Other notable sightings were a White Heron and a Glossy

Ibis. Earlier in the year a Glossy Ibis had been seen on the cricket pitch in Greytown Park - fortunately it left before being bowled out!

A feature of many of our meetings has been the programmes put on by our own members. Most nights one member has given a 10 - 15 minute talk about a particular species that they have studied or some aspect of ornithology. This way we find that we all learn together. One evening Matthew Wong talked about his harrier banding project, now in its third year, and this was a very interesting evening. Another was held in the library, with the Librarian explaining how the classification and computer systems worked to find out where all the ornithological books in the library were, as well as the interloan system which was a great help.

One of our projects is to follow up the Black-fronted Dotterel survey and to this end we have experimented with a mat trap to try and catch the birds. The mat trap has been used successfully on Shore Plover but so far we have not had any success with the Black-fronted Dotterels - perhaps we will have more luck at nesting time.

Recent sightings around the district have included a Banded Rail, 6 Royal Spoonbill, 20 Cattle Egret in one flock and 14 Sereru feeding in tree lucerne.

(Colin Scadden)

Wellington

One of the most significant recent sightings in our region has been a Great Knot seen by an OSNZ group at Waikanae in October, once again confirming this area as a premier birding spot. Other sightings this spring have included two Lesser Knots (for ease of identification), five Wrybill, a Royal Spoonbill, two Red-necked Stints and a Turnstone.

Our first mapping field trip, on 18 September, attracted only four members. One went to the Orongorongo River and back while the others did a triangular walk along the Orongorongo Track, up Cattle Ridge and down the new Butcher track. Bellbirds were distributed throughout. Other target species as part of our mapping scheme were few and far between. Tuis and NZ Pigeons were mostly near the information centre but we were impressed with the numbers of Tomtits which seemed to be the most widespread species.

Our second trip, this time with five members, was to the Kapiti Coast on 15 October. We checked some of the tracks in the Maungakotukutuku Valley. Perham's Road disclosed only a couple of Bellbirds and a NZ Pigeon, but the northern end of the valley rewarded us with Bellbirds, Tuis and Eastern Rosellas. A Tui count was difficult as the birds, a dozen or more, were calling noisily and constantly moving in the trees.

Five Wellingtonians and three from Manawatu, led by Graeme Taylor and Alan Tennyson crossed Cook Strait for the day on 13 August, a week later than planned due to bad weather. Two Frenchmen joined the party on the southbound leg. Graeme and Alan had us rushing from side to side of the vessel with no time to pause for even a cup of coffee. We saw at least 22 different species including Northern and Southern Royal Albatrosses, Black-browed, White-capped and Salvin's Mollymawks, prions, Fluttering Shearwaters, Diving Petrels, a Grey Petrel and perhaps most exciting a Kerguelen Petrel. We all had a really close look at this bird and it was thought that there is no previous record of one being seen from a Cook Strait ferry.

8 October was a beautifully fine day for a dozen Wellington members to join Manawatu members at the Manawatu Estuary. Though numbers of species seen was not great, we had fine views of Golden Plover, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Turnstone and Wrybill, as well as godwit and knot of course.

Our August meeting was a comprehensive briefing of the species that can be seen in Cook Strait by Alan Tennyson, with accompanying specimens for study after the talk. In September Kerry Cates described the series of counts we have done on Mana Island, starting in 1987. Each visit aimed at a morning and afternoon count on both Saturday and Sunday, although the weather often had the last word, with a bedraggled team bearing a hasty retreat. In total 47 species were recorded. It is intended to repeat the counts at some time in the future, when the effects of the DoC tree-planting programme may be felt. In October Molly Neill and Bice Tennyson talked briefly about their trip to the Iron Range National Park in northern Queensland, a trip organised by OSNZ's Hawkes Bay branch. They then played a video of the birds of tropical Queensland.

(Peter Moore, Max Falconer, Bice Tennyson)

Canterbury

Our August field trip was a survey of the status of Black-fronted Dotterels on the Waipara River - only six birds were sighted, which was a surprise. Tony Crocker has subsequently seen a pair with a well-grown chick.

20 members helped to explore the Okuku Valley in September. This is a very scenic valley with black beech forest interspersed with plantation pines. A healthy number of Tomtits were seen, some obviously nesting.

The October field trip was combined with Otago over Labour Weekend. We had a great weekend - a fuller report is in this issue.

Spring has brought a disappointing number of migratory waders this year, with only 43 Red-necked Stints seen so far. One of these carries an orange leg flag. A Little Egret is still around, with 48 Royal Spoonbills at Lake Ellesmere and seven at the Ashley Estuary, one of the latter banded. Three Glossy Ibis are still around Colin Hill's farm and three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

Tony Crocker and myself are conducting a study of two hybridising pairs of Variable/South Island Pied Oystercatchers. Attempts to band the birds have been largely unsuccessful due to persistent strong winds that will not allow the trap to stay up! We have caught, banded and measured one VOC, and measured and weighed three clutches of eggs. Don Hadden has taken an excellent series of photographs of both pairs. This is the third season they have nested in this area, and both pairs successfully fledged a chick last year. A fuller report will be published later.

A survey of the upper Waimakiriri in early November was aborted because of high river levels. They are still high, resulting in most of our riverbed species having lost their nests. Will they re-nest?

Johanna Pierre has been awarded the Phil Howell Trophy for this year.

Sheila Petero

Otago

At the October indoor meeting Stuart Parson gave us an interesting talk on oats. It's nice to be able to listen to a knowledgeable speaker who at the same time is enthusiastic about the topic.

Members and friends were once again involved in counting incoming Yellow-eyed Penguins on the Otago Peninsula during the first week in October. According to our leader John Darby all indications suggest an increase of about 6-8% on last year's count. The December count will confirm this or otherwise.

The high loss of juvenile Spotted Shags during September and early October, coupled with very late breeding, was of concern here in Otago.

The survey of breeding records of Welcome Swallows in Otago has commenced. This is a follow-up of an earlier survey in 1987 of the expansion of the Welcome Swallow. During the breeding season we will try and come up with a total breeding population. Visitors coming to Otago during the main holiday are invited to participate in this survey.

(Peter Schweigman)

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