

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

Edited by TONY CROCKER
118 Cones Road, Ashley RD2 Rangiora.
Phone: 03-313 4995
Email: crockert@ott1.chchp.ac.nz
for the members of the Ornithological
Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

Please note that sightings recorded in this newsletter are subject to confirmation.

OSNZ News

Supplement to NOTORNIS • Vol. 43, Part 4
December 1996 • ISSN 0111-2686



Shearwater Transfer Success

The OSNZ Fluttering Shearwater transfer project began in 1991. Chicks were transferred at that time from Long Island in the Marlborough Sounds to Maud Island. Transfers followed for a further five years until 1996. In total 308 chicks have been taken on Maud Island, where they were raised on an artificial diet of blended fish for the last month prior to fledging.

The main aim of the project was to attempt to develop a method for transferring a colonial nesting procellariiform. During the course of the project, many members, both senior and junior, have been involved with every aspect of the transfer.

Like all procellariiforms, Fluttering Shearwaters take several years to mature before returning to the colony to breed, so that in a project such as this one it would be some time before results could shed light upon whether the project was going to be a success or failure.

The first indications that the project was going to be a success were in 1994, when a bird from the first year of the transfer was caught at the colony. A second bird was also seen but not caught during the same trip. Several birds were heard circling over the colony but were not caught.

The following year three more birds arrived back at the colony; two further birds from the first year of transfer and one from the third year. As in 1994, several birds were heard circling over the colony but were not caught.

During this season the project has had its greatest success. A pair were found incubating an egg. A broken egg was found in another burrow. One of the pair was caught last year, but the other (a bird from the second year of transfers) had not yet been recorded as a returning adult to the colony.

Although still at the relatively early stages, this project has every indication of being a success. It is the first time that a procellariiform species has been moved to a location where they did not originally occur and breeding has commenced.

BRIAN & MIKE BELL

Elizabeth Raewyn Smith Gavin Arthur Terence Darke Woodward

Raewyn and Gavin were found dead at their Taiko telemetry camp on the south coast of Chatham Island on October 9th 1996. As volunteers they had been participating with a number of others in a Department of Conservation radio tracking programme to find breeding burrows of the rare Taiko or Magenta Petrel. This tragic accident has caused a major loss to the Society with both being long serving senior members, Raewyn in Hawkes Bay, while Gavin was the current RR for Wellington at the time.

The Taiko programme was originally started by David Crockett in 1969. This date marked the start of a procession of interested and challenged volunteers, firstly in the search for the elusive bird and, after finally finding one in 1978, continuing in the search for breeding locations so that protection and management could commence. During that time and up to the present, 253 keen in-

dividuals have participated as volunteers in the crusade - more than 80% of them being members of the OSNZ. Both Raewyn and Gavin had participated a number of times over many years.

During the past 25 years the Taiko programme, along with other work in the Chathams on other rare species such as Black Robin, Shore Plover and Chatham Island Oystercatcher, has changed attitudes in the Chathams where 'mad birdmen' have become a class of people second only to Chatham Islanders themselves. Increasingly, birds rather than people and exploitation have started to illuminate the Chathams on the map. A grudging but growing respect has become evident for these strange birders who came willingly, cheerfully and enthusiastically - often coming back year after year - to live in primitive conditions, staying up all night in atrocious weather to catch a glimpse of something in the sky which might just prove to be a Taiko. Today, when more than 70 Taiko have been caught and released, some have been tracked with tiny transmitters to their burrows in the dense undergrowth of the southern Chatham highlands. Only when burrows are found can predator control be undertaken to protect the growing young. This essential tracking was in progress at the time of the accident.

These were two happy, enthusiastic people who were doing something that they enjoyed. As one Chatham Islander said to me the day before the funerals - "Isn't it marvellous that these people are prepared to come to save our heritage and show us the way?"

A more formal celebration of the lives of Raewyn and Gavin will appear in the March issue of *Notornis*. I am sure that your prayers and support will be with Terry Smith, Christine, Dean, Max and Jack, Rachel and Angela; Janet Woodward and Trixie Lake in the months to come.

As we celebrate the lives of Raewyn and Gavin, let us not forget that wherever there is a challenge, there is risk - but with endangered species, the greatest risk is extinction.

"A tragedy can turn out to be our greatest good if we approach it in ways from which we can grow"

C.J.R. ROBERTSON
President

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc)

Nominations for Council

Under the provisions of the new Constitution, the following Council members retire in May 1997, and nominations are hereby called for, to fill the vacancies created.

Hazel Harty
Gabor Lovei
Ralph Powlesland

plus the North and South Island vice-presidents for a term of three and two years respectively.

Nominations close with the Secretary on 28 February 1997, and must be signed by two financial members and consented to by the person nominated. Retiring officers are eligible for re-election.

Notices of Motion

Notice of any motion to be considered by the 1997 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before 28 February 1997 in writing and must be signed by the mover and seconder.

The 1997 OSNZ Annual Conference and AGM will be held in Whangarei on Saturday 31 May 1997.

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

From the President's Tent



Have bedroll - will travel, has continued to be your President's life throughout the year. Now camped once again among the albatrosses at the Little Sister Island, twelve miles north of main Chatham Island, it is a good time to reflect on some fleeting observations of the Society throughout the year and to wish that you all have a Happy Christmas and a fulfilling New Year.

Throughout the year I have been privileged to be with more than 60% of the membership at meetings throughout my travels. Many have made suggestions which go towards the useful debate and activity which keeps a Society such as ours active and innovative. I have tried to illustrate many of the things which you need to think about to ensure that all members have the opportunity to participate equally in our many activities. It is very easy to look inward at your own area, but remember that there are always others who know that area less than you who will benefit from your observations and expertise. I am sure that I have promoted things which have made some of you uncomfortable. However, I make no apologies for strongly promoting the ideas of members. Without ideas we stagnate. With ideas we should have debate and further new ideas. Some parts of the Society are accepting the challenge to think more about how we operate and the great response to the constitutional review was a good example of this. This is a time of rapid change, especially in the spreading of information. We need to ensure we are up to date and not lagging behind, particularly in our publications. See elsewhere in this issue for another area of the Society activities which will be reviewed during this coming year. Make sure you have your say!

In July I headed off round the South Island equipped with chains and warm clothing to deal with the frigid weather. Travelling into Invercargill, snow was still heavy on the ground and the forecourt of my motel had been iced for two weeks. Dozens of Black-billed Gulls were seen dead along the side of the road when coming in from the north - presumably killed by traffic while chasing insects, or possibly seeking warmth on the tarseal.

It was good to see such a keen young group of ornithologists in the far south. I am sure we are going to hear a lot more from them in the future. They seem to be able to maintain a high level of enthusiasm with plenty of outdoor projects. Southland and Hawkes Bay have been the only two regions I have seen this year with such a high proportion of young members and they are

setting an example to other regions, where the average age of visible members during my travels would have been about 50+ years.

In Dunedin we had a joint meeting with Forest and Bird during an evening extended by presentations from Rod Morris (*Wild South*) Neville Peat and Brian Patrick, all finalists in this year's Natural History section of the national book awards (Peat & Patrick with *Wild Dunedin*, the eventual winners of this section). The Otago Museum was undergoing a major refurbishment, so there was standing room only for much of a large crowd - for a discussion of albatrosses in the albatross capital of the world. The evening again illustrated the importance of factual data about our species and their habitat requirements in any management programme. It also demonstrated, from some of the comments made, that, for visually nasty problems like deaths from fisheries by-catch, it may be a lot easier to run a high-profile public conservation campaign, than for the seemingly more mundane problems of habitat loss, climatic changes or even chemical contaminants which people may feel powerless to attempt to solve.

Does this mean that in some cases, research and conservation management is becoming driven by public image? Maybe the real test will come when we have high profile sponsored campaigns, like those for Kiwi or Kakapo, for species such as King Shag or Fernbird. Not only do we need more basic data gathering by members of the Society, but we need to remind the science agencies of the country that it is usually too late to gather enough ecological data for good management of an endangered species when it is already endangered. As I have remarked before, there are few NZ endemic bird species increasing. As members of the Society we should all be doing our utmost to find out more about all species (introduced as well as native) as a way of finding the clues which may assist those species most in trouble.

A slide shown at the Canterbury meeting illustrated a point which should be of great concern to all members. Each year we have reports of rare or new additions to the New Zealand list of bird species. Many of these can appear as reports in *OSNZ News*, but without any verification by the Rare Birds Committee. This is a committee of senior members of the Society who review records of new or rare species to decide whether the evidence presented warrants them being added to the New Zealand list. On this occasion the very good photo was of a Yellow-nosed Mollymawk. However, even though this is a species which is being more commonly seen round our coasts, there are currently two taxa recognised - one from the Atlantic Ocean and the other from the Indian Ocean. The former has until now only been recorded from the Sisters Is in the Chathams (mid 1970s and 1995), while the latter are

the commonly seen variety. Clearly this is a photo which needs a submission to the Rare Birds Committee over an extension to range. The same applies to a record of a Laysan Albatross recorded at sea and reported in the last *OSNZ News*. If correct, this should be the first NZ record as the previous record referred to in Captain Cook's day was of a Black-footed Albatross and not a Laysan as shown in the *Checklist*. Again this is a record which must go to the Committee for authentication, to allow it to become a recognised part of the NZ avifauna. You seen something unusual recently? Have there been reports in your local paper of strange bird sightings? Follow them up and use the authentication processes which the Society provides to ensure the validity of new sightings.

At the September meeting of Council we spent some time looking forward to what should prove to be some exciting activities over the next few years. The new *Field Guide* should by now be on all your shelves and be drawing your attention to what we still don't know about our birds. All members should have one and ensure that it is widely known and used. Some interesting plans are being investigated to use the original illustrations as a series of travelling exhibitions to promote the Society and the possible auction process for the paintings themselves. Those interested in owning one or more of the original plates should probably start saving now!!

Coming ornithological activities include a new distribution Atlas, where planning is continuing for the pilot scheme. Future national surveys will probably include Reef Heron, Variable Oystercatcher, NZ Dabchick, grebes, Australasian Gannet and Red-billed Gull once the present scheme on Black-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns is completed.

The Council has asked Tony Crocker to investigate and coordinate the possible revision and upgrading of the Ross McKenzie classic *In Search of Birds in New Zealand - how and where to find them*, which is unobtainable except in second-hand bookshops. If you have ideas on this (for or against), or locations which should be added, please let Tony know. Use this summer to look at your favourite birding spots and record their salient points of interest - especially how to get there without getting lost!

The new year will see a number of new Regional Representatives taking over the organisation of activities in many regions. Please ensure that they are given your full support. For those that have retired, the thanks of all members should be loud and clear, for they have contributed to your enjoyment over recent years.


Finally, we should all keep in mind the recent accident which resulted in the tragic loss of two senior Society members while working as volunteers on the

Taiko programme in the Chatham Islands (see elsewhere in this issue). Ornithologists are keen outdoor people and it is appropriate that we all look at how we operate to ensure that unnecessary risks are not unwittingly introduced into our activities. In fact the records show that over the past fifty years only four or five people have died while participating in the many professional, amateur and recreational studies of birds which have been undertaken, often in some extremely remote and inhospitable places throughout New Zealand. Compared with just about any other activity one can think of, this is a remarkable record. While one can never eliminate risk, there is always a need to be vigilant and aware.

Happy and safe birding for 1997.

C.J.R. ROBERTSON

President



Advance Notice

1997 Conference and AGM
Whangarei, Northland
Friday 30 May - Monday 2 June 1997

Main Field trips - Trounson Park and Waipoua Forest - visit a "mainland island", New Zealand's largest kauri trees and the spectacular sand dunes of Hokianga.

- Pouto Peninsula - wild, desolate sandy beaches and a coastal dune lake.

Post-conference Trip - Far Far North - Rangaunu Harbour, breathtaking Parengarenga Harbour, with wonderful white beaches and the memorable view of the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean crashing together below Cape Reinga lighthouse.

Book early for the best choice of hotel and motel accommodation and also for reduced airfares.

For further details please contact your RR, or Lorna Simpkin, 27a Parkland Crescent, Whangarei. Ph (09) 437 2076. Or fax (09) 432 7478 (marked for OSNZ).

Druce Award

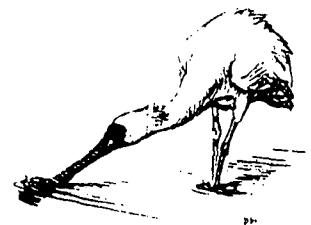
A set of *Notornis* has been donated to the Society by A. Druce of Upper Hutt, with the request that it be available to a young member of the Society. Council has decided that this award should be given to an active young member and should be retained by that member until their resignation from the Society, or they return the set back to the Society, at which time the set can then be awarded to another young member.

Nominations for this award were sought and considered by Council. It is with great pleasure that Council announces that the inaugural Druce Award has been awarded jointly to Chris Garden and Jamie Wood of Southland. They have been active participants in wader censuses and beach patrols, have assisted with counts of Yellowheads, Royal Spoonbills and Cattle Egrets, and have monitored the birds of the Waihopai River on a weekly basis as their own project.

RAEWYN EMPSON

Hon. Secreata

REMINDER
- SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR
1997 ARE NOW DUE



Spoonbill Census - winter 1996

The coordinated national census of the Royal Spoonbill has come to an end.

I am fully aware that these counts never gave the total figures due to various reasons - elusiveness of the birds a major factor and lack of available observers a close second factor. But we have a far better idea of how these spoonbills have expanded in New Zealand in the last six years. What started as a good number of 226 birds in June 1991 rose to a total of 659 in June 1996, an increase of almost 200%.

The trend over the years has not changed however. Highest concentrations are still in the Far North, Northland and in the Nelson region. The Manawatu Estuary is another very good area for spoonbills; from time to time though conditions are not suitable for birds or observers. This year was one of those situations when only 15 birds were counted, while in the previous three years we had an average of 50 birds there.

At the same time Auckland, including South Auckland, had a healthy increase from 46 to 93 birds, at the expense of regions like the Wairarapa with only two in June (but 32 in May). I can report on steady numbers from the Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Hawkes Bay and Canterbury. A special mention has to be made of Taranaki with two birds.

It can be frustrating to spend all day trying to locate spoonbills and not coming up with any or only a few. This is not confined to counting spoonbills though. Any census involves that risk. But this whole exercise is the basis of a nationwide census to find out where the spoonbills overwinter and how many. **We have achieved that.** I take this opportunity to thank all participants over the years who have made this programme possible.

The June 1996 results per region:

Far North	156
Northland	57
Auckland	21
Sth Auckland	72
Waikato	47
Bay of Plenty	23
Gisborne	32
Taranaki	2
Manawatu	15
Hawkes Bay	28
Wairarapa	2
Nelson	151
Marlborough	8
Canterbury	43
Southland	2
TOTAL	659

PETER SCHWEIGMAN

- Wanted -

OSNZ Sales Convenor

Ralph Powlesland is relinquishing the position of Sales Convenor in June 1997, and so the Society requires a new Convenor. The role mainly involves packaging and posting orders of sales items, banking funds, and providing the Treasurer with a monthly statement of income and expenditure.

A job description is available from the Secretary.

Members interested in filling this role or requiring further information should contact the Secretary (OSNZ, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington) by 30 April 1997.

Review of Society Publications and Methods

Council, at its September 1996 meeting, resolved to hold a review of all aspects of the publications of the Society, their content, funding and methods of production, to see whether they meet the needs of individual members and the Society generally, according to the objects of the Society as adopted in its new Constitution (1996). Written submissions from any member or region of the Society will be received until 30 June 1997. The Review Panel shall make recommendations on the future format of any Society publications to Council no later than 20 September 1997.

The Review Panel to consider the submissions and make recommendations will be the President (Chair), the current editors of *Notornis* and *OSNZ News* (Gabor Lovei and Tony Crocker), Derek Onley, Murray Williams, Kerry-Jane Wilson and Bev Woolley.

This is to be a wide-ranging review and no part of the present or possible future structure of Society publishing in its widest sense should be overlooked. This is a topic which has been widely commented on over recent years and a number of submissions to the Constitutional Review Committee made reference to publications. The objects of the Society set out the need for publications -

3.3 *To promote the recording and wide circulation of the results of bird studies and observations.* 3.4 *To produce a journal and any other publication containing matters of ornithological interest.* 3.5 *To effect co-operation and exchange of information with other organisations having similar aims and objects.*

A study of the annual accounts shows that a significant part of the annual subscription is devoted each year to publications and especially *Notornis* and *OSNZ News*. Though they are separate publications today, twenty years ago all material was published in *Notornis* and *OSNZ News* is still a Supplement to *Notornis*. Some members have noted that as printing techniques have improved, there is now no physical handicap to having all Society published material, including the freshest of news, once again under one cover. Such a publication would need a clear demarcation into sections so that the necessity for differentiation between peer reviewed material and 'news' is maintained. Some costs of printing and posting would be reduced. There are sure to be good arguments for and against such a proposal as well as the size of any resulting publication which will need to be presented to the panel. What are the editorial requirements for the Society publications? Should there be some form of remuneration for Editors?

There is no provision within the Constitution for a 'local subscription' which

have in the past been used for some forms of local regional newsletters. Members will have noted the recent steps for *OSNZ News* to publish any of this material that is provided so that all members may have access to this information and it is not being published two or three times. There are sure to be some good discussions over the need or otherwise for local publications and how they should be funded. One topic often raised is a loss of local identity if there are no such newsletters! This can be maintained within *OSNZ News* and all regional material is shown as such when needed. The biggest problem with local newsletters has often been their patchy distribution of information to members, even within the regions where they have been produced, let alone nationally.

Many people have asked if it is possible to have a full colour or more colourful newsletter etc. With the current size of the membership it is certainly not economic as a regular feature without some sponsor or other source of funding. Certainly one or two extra colours other than black can be feasible on a regular basis, but there needs to be a clear reason for doing so. There have been many non-specific comments about the material in our publications not being what the members want! However, there has been little feedback as to what is required. Now is the opportunity to be more specific - and perhaps you can suggest who should do the writing for the interesting things that you think you need.

Electronic publishing via the Internet and Web pages is a very current topic of discussion. It is also a good way of promoting the Society and items of interest about birds. Should the contents of *OSNZ News* be available online with the contents and abstracts for *Notornis*? What type of things could the Society show or promote on a Web page?

The Society and its regions will, from time to time, prepare special reports of local studies or investigations, some of them under financial contract. What should be the procedures to ensure that the research and final product or report is worthy of having the Society name attached, methods for review and editing, style of presentation etc? Should there be a special monograph series?

The Society has from time to time published or supported the publication of books such as the *Checklist* and *Field Guide*. Are there other publications which the Society should promote or organise?

The comments above are all topics for discussion which have been raised by members over the past 18 months. This is your opportunity to have your say, or to promote your ideas to a wider audience. Make sure that you have a discussion with other members in your region and if necessary provide a regional submission setting out a range of views.

Written submissions (one side of the page only please) should be sent to

OSNZ PUBLICATIONS REVIEW

PO BOX 12397

WELLINGTON

SUBMISSIONS CLOSE ON

30 JUNE 1997

C.J.R. ROBERTSON

President

Oystercatcher Sightings Still Required

Since 1987 we have studied the breeding and population dynamics of South Island Pied Oystercatchers which nest on farmland in mid Canterbury. As part of the study, all breeding birds are fitted with unique colour band combinations which allow individuals to be identified from a distance. In addition, chicks reared in the study area are fitted with a colour band combination which denotes the year in which they hatched.

The birds are on their breeding territories from about early July to late December. They spend the rest of the year on the coast. Over the past nine years we have received reports of 65 adults from coastal sites between Otago Harbour and Whangarei Harbour. Such sightings have enabled us to determine that individuals usually return to the same site (even to the same roost) year after year. Also, sightings indicate that males and females of a pair tend to go their separate ways when nesting has finished for the year.

So, what further information could we possibly require from this study? Well, despite the tremendous response we have had to calls for sightings of our study birds, we still require further sightings before we can be confident that members of each pair do not associate away from the breeding territories. Also, there are relatively few sightings from Nelson (Waimea Estuary, Motueka Estuary and Farewell Spit) and Bay of Plenty (Tauranga Harbour and Ohope), where good numbers of oystercatchers gather after breeding. And we also require further information about the movements of young birds. Do they go to the coastal sites favoured by their parents? Do they move around for a few years before favouring a particular site?

Therefore we would greatly appreciate more reports from OSNZ members of sightings of colour banded oystercatchers. The information that is required is date, location and colour band combination, and this should be sent to: Banding Office, Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 10420, Wellington.

We look forward to receiving reports of your sightings.

PAUL SAGAR & DONALD GEDDES

Spotted Shag Behaviour

There is a seasonal phenomenon with Spotted Shags visiting Golden Bay and Tasman Bay which is worthy of further study and perhaps some explanations.

Spotted Shags breed in small colonies throughout the Marlborough Sounds (possibly 200-300 pairs) and perhaps 30 pairs on the Tata Islands in Golden Bay. Each winter these resident birds are joined by thousands more, presumably from Banks Peninsula. The influx was noted this year by a fishing party near Stephens Island during Easter, when repeated skeins of the birds were seen flying low over the water, heading west.

This year, interesting observations of these shags were made by Ian Black at Tata Beach. The birds roost on the Tata Islands and adjacent coast, and visit the beach each morning before departing to sea for the day. In late February there were 150-200 birds present on the sandy beach at about 0745 h. On the morning of 26 May the number present had increased and the birds were occupying a strip of beach perhaps 150m x 2-3m. After the departure of the birds it was noticed that they had left small piles of pebbles on the sand. These regurgitations (?) were typically of rounded pebbles, 1-2 cm in diameter, with each pile being 8-10 cm wide. This occurrence has been recorded on one occasion by A. Wright (*Notornis* 22:130). The question is:

- are the pebbles being ingested to reduce buoyancy?

- why are they regurgitated?

- have other shags been observed doing this?

During July and August the early morning arrival of shags on Tata Beach continued, with numbers increasing to 1000 or more, with 500-600 birds in the water at any one time. The birds arrived in groups of 10-60 and underwent a vigorous form of ablutions within a few metres of the shore. Each bird would repeatedly duck and then rise up with flapping wings, at the same time making some vocal noises. The number of birds and the intensity of this activity was such that the local residents, who refer to this as quite a regular occurrence, comment that they can hear the activity from indoors in seaside houses, and that for an observer on the beach it sounds like heavy rain on a hard surface.

- has this activity been observed elsewhere with any species of shag?

- what purpose can it have?

After these ablutions, the birds tend to move south along the shore, some coming out of the water to roost on the beach (possibly to regurgitate pebbles), and all eventually fly seaward.

Spotted Shags congregate in Tasman Bay during the winter, in greater num-

bers than in Golden Bay. On 20 July I observed c.300 roosting on headlands near Kaiteriteri, and on 25 August c.5000 were congregating at the entrance to Nelson Harbour between 0830 and 0930. These birds were arriving from the north, presumably from roosts on Pepin Island, congregating on the inner Boulder Bank and then on the breakwater, before departing to sea. No "ablution" type behaviour was observed.

A small colony of resident Spotted Shags in Pelorus Sound had already laid by early July, yet the winter flock was still present at Nelson on 2 September. Some of these birds were juveniles but many were adults in breeding plumage.

- is there any evidence that these birds return to breed in Canterbury?

- is the start of breeding there later than in the Sounds?

PETER GAZE

Beach Patrol Oddities

Lloyd Esler reports odd things turning up on the beach! Over the past year they've had decoys, an oil slick, a pilot whale, several seals, a succession of bogged motorists and a large DoC sign, origin unknown, which says "To the Glaciers". Can anyone beat that?

Email address and Website

The Society now has an email address to facilitate communication with the national organisation, and to distribute and relay information among other email users.

The address is:

osnz1@ibm.net

Council is also investigating options and material for possible inclusion in a world-wide web site on the Internet. If you have any ideas of items for inclusion or for the format of such a site, please email me at the address above or at the top of the publication, or address them to the Hon. Secretary, OSNZ, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington.

TONY CROCKER

Editor, OSNZ News

Seabirds on Campbell Shelf

During September this year, I and fellow Fisheries observer and birdwatcher Peter Langlands were on a Ukrainian

trawler fishing for southern blue whiting on the Campbell Shelf. We spent from 10 September to 4 October fishing on the eastern side of the shelf, from 51° 25'-53° 08'S, 170° 09'-171° 25'E, about 40-90 NM from Campbell Island, mainly in waters 400-500m deep. Up to ten trawlers were present and numbers quoted are those about a single trawler at a peak time of day.

The Southern Royal was the commonest albatross, with 10-40 usually present, numbers decreasing gradually during our visit. One adult and a few immature Wandering Albatrosses were seen and two Northern Royals noted. The commonest mollymawk was the Black-browed with 50-200 present all the time. On a six day visit in early August 1992 our single trawler failed to attract any. There were always one-three Grey-headed Mollymawks with sometimes up to five or ten later on. Ones and twos of Shy, Salvin's and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses were seen regularly and a Chatham Island Mollymawk came to spilled fish on 10 September. Single Buller's Mollymawks were seen on two occasions. 10-20 giant petrels were around, about two thirds being of the Northern species, and Cape Pigeon numbers varied from 100 to 1000. Single Antarctic Fulmars were seen on seven days, some coming to the stern.

There were usually 200-400 Grey Petrels behind the vessel, with occasionally up to 500-600. (This is the only fishery where I have seen Grey Petrels about trawlers in large numbers. Up to 100 were seen on the Snares and Campbell Shelves in late July and early August 1992, but I have only seen odd birds during the February to April squid fishery.) Up to five Sooty Shearwaters were seen each day until 29 September, when a flock of 200 were seen feeding far off and a similar number were later behind the vessel, with up to 300 for the rest of the trip. It is possible their presence started to deter the Grey Petrels as there were only about 50 on our last day. One-three White-chinned Petrels were seen most days; three sightings of White-headed Petrels on 20 September; single Soft-plumaged Petrels on two occasions; and a single Little Shearwater on 2 October. Single Grey-faced Petrels were seen on six days, the furthest south being at 53° 08'S 170° 33'E. I have not seen this bird in the subantarctic before, but Peter saw one on the Auckland Island Shelf in April 1996. Perhaps it is extending its foraging range southwards.

A Blue Petrel performed beautifully beside the vessel for 20 minutes on 15 September, and single birds were seen twice more. Occasional Diving Petrels were seen, and usually 10-50 Fairy Prions, but careful scrutiny revealed only a couple of Antarctic Prions. The only storm petrels were 1-10 Grey-backed on about half the days, and only a single Southern Brown Skua was sighted.

A possible White-fronted Tern was seen briefly on 16 September and two other tantalising glimpses of *Sterna* spp. until 28 September, when a total of 8+ Arctic Terns in ones and twos were seen, all heading into a strong north-westerly wind. Two remained in front of the bows for 20-30 minutes, actually going backwards with the vessel. Plumages varied but we considered them mainly juvenile and immature birds. It is interesting that numbers of Sooty Shearwaters turned up on the same day.

CHRIS PETYT

Let It Slide

In the past six years or so the OSNZ Slide Library has been steadily added to. This year has been no exception. An impressive collection of over 100 slides has come from a generous Brian Chudleigh, OSNZ Bay of Plenty. The quality of these slides is tremendous, and many thanks to Brian for them.

Others who have contributed this year have been Pam Agnew of South Auckland and J.L. Moore of Wellington. OSNZ Waikato has again helped out in emergencies when all Wrybill shots went out at once!

The library is still under-utilised, and the value of it cannot be emphasised enough. The only cost to OSNZ members is the library's postage/packing, which is usually \$3.40. For more details refer to *OSNZ News* 72 (September 1994).

With the range of choice in slides now available, now is the time to borrow, especially when all of the actual shorebirds are still on our coasts. A new, revised catalogue is now 'at the printers' and is available to any OSNZ member for the cost of a letter. Or you can bypass the catalogue and write straight to me at:

OSNZ Slide Library
C/- 82 Morrinsville Road
Hamilton

PAUL CUMING

MBE for Ron Scarlett

Ronald Jack Scarlett was awarded an MBE in the 1996 New Year's Honours list for his services to science. Ron, a former member of OSNZ, is a world authority in avian osteology.

Among his major achievements was the excavation of Pyramid Valley, which resulted in the collection of more than 35,000 items for the Canterbury Museum archive. Mr Scarlett identified and named several extinct birds, and has had at least two species named after him.

LES MCPHERSON

Mystery Bird #25

Last issue's Mystery Bird has the classic shape and bill form of a wader, a sandpiper in fact. Its most noticeable feature is the black bill, which is slightly longer than the length of the head, thick at the base and tapering or down-curved (especially the lower mandible). The legs are black (or very dark), and while the wings appear to cross over, the tip of the right wing is just visible level with the end of the tail.

There are several noticeable plumage characteristics: a dark-streaked crown and top of head, a dark line from the eye to the bill, dark flecking mixed with grey-brown streaking on the breast, extending down as black streaks to the upper belly and sides, and dark v-shaped subterminal markings on the feathers just above the folded wing (the scapulars). Otherwise the plumage is plain grey-brown.

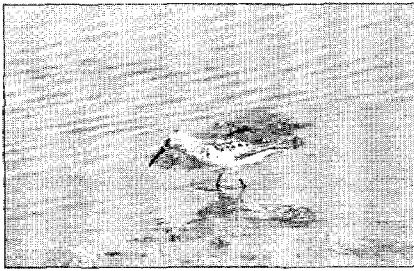
There are many sandpipers on the New Zealand list (or suspense list), but the long down-curved, all dark bill restricts our options to a manageable number of species. Pectoral and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers' bills are more down-curved than this, Red (Lesser) Knots' bills are not this long, while Curlew Sandpipers have a longer, more slender bill. The bill is similar in form, however, to any of Dunlin, Great Knot and Western Sandpiper.

Dunlin in breeding plumage are very distinctive, with a black belly patch, but in juvenile plumage have black markings down the flanks and sides of the belly, similar to our bird. They also have a buffy background to the entire breast region, and well-defined buff edging to the back and wing feathers. Mystery bird #25 shows neither of these features, and the dark spotting is not as extensive as might be expected for juvenile Dunlin.

Several features of the mystery bird are similar to Great Knot, such as the fairly weak streaked supercilium (eyebrow), and the dark markings on the breast and sides. This spotting, however, extends further along the body in Great Knot than on our bird, with the markings on the flanks being v-shaped, rather than just streaks.

So is it a Western Sandpiper? It is, a post breeding adult in fact. The breast and belly can become heavily streaked in breeding plumage, with our bird showing a moderate amount - in some birds this can reach almost to the undertail. Our mystery bird is a rather long-billed individual, which aids identification. For many birds the bill is much shorter, and causes confusion with the very similar Semi-palmated Sandpiper, which has been suspected in New Zealand on a couple of occasions. Some individuals may be indistinguishable in the field.

In breeding plumage Western has a rich rufous crown and scapulars (lack-



ing in Semi-palmated), but in non-breeding plumage there are no such obvious differences. Both are grey and white, small sandpipers, and identification lies more with the structure of the bare parts (especially the bill) than plumage. *Shorebirds* (Hayman, Marchant and Prater) has a useful summary table of the differences between the small sandpipers, including also Red-necked and Little Stint.

The Western Sandpiper is currently perhaps the most intensively studied migratory shorebird in the world, with an extremely multi-national research programme studying its biology and migration across the entire Americas, from the breeding grounds in Alaska to the wintering grounds in South America (coordinated from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver).

PHIL BATTLE

Par Avian

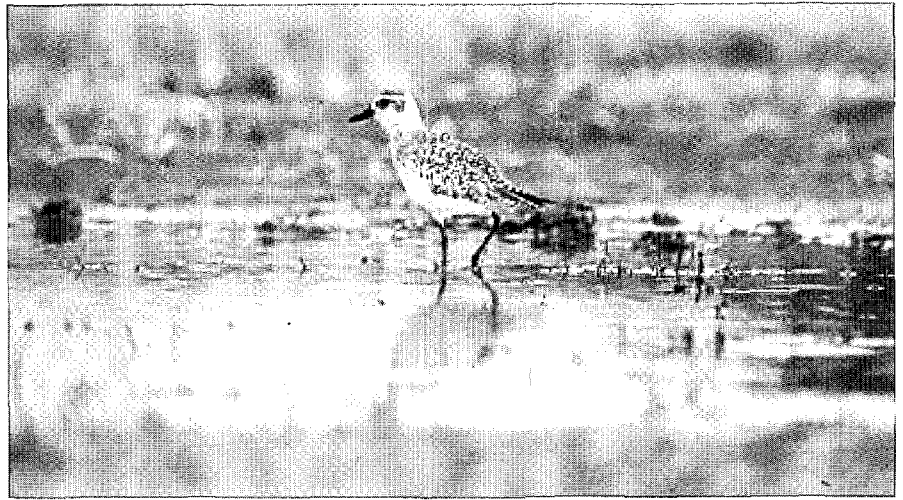
Do you like to receive letters, especially from overseas? Then join *Par Avian*, the pen-friend scheme for anyone aged 8-18 interested in wildlife. It's free! All you have to do is write.

Organisations in 49 countries are promoting *Par Avian* as a means of matching young people interested in wildlife around the world. This international pen-friend club is coordinated by the Young Ornithologists' Club, the junior section of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the United Kingdom. A number of young New Zealanders are already part of the scheme.

Questionnaires are available from the Editor of *OSNZ News*. Once you have completed your questionnaire, send it to *Par Avian*, who will match you with someone of similar age, sex, interests and hobbies, probably within 6 weeks. Then it's up to you to write!

Duck Specialist Group

Work has commenced to establish an international network of experts on the world's ducks. The Duck Specialist Group (DSG) will form part of the waterbird network on Wetlands International and IUCN's Species Survival Commission, and will be coordinated by the



Mystery Bird #26

Wildlife and Wetlands Trust at Slimbridge, UK. The DSG will aim to:

- stimulate, coordinate and support duck research, monitoring/banding, information exchange and conservation activity world-wide.

- provide appropriate information and advice to Wetlands International/IUCN and others in support of promoting conservation management and wise use of ducks and their habitats.

The priority projects and issues for the Group will be determined through consultation with the DSG network. An important early goal will be to establish a directory of current projects on ducks, and a list of expertise available amongst DSG members. The aim is to establish and publish, at least annually, a DSG bulletin for global circulation, and to organise conferences and technical workshops as appropriate and from time to time. The DSG will work closely with other Wetlands International/IUCN-SSC specialist groups to ensure maximum coordination and use of existing knowledge and expertise.

The DSG is open to individuals or institutes who are actively involved or interested in any aspect of the biology, conservation or management of ducks. If you would like to join the DSG please contact me at the following address. I would be delighted to hear from you!

DR JEFF KIRBY
The Wildlife & Wetlands Trust
Slimbridge
Gloucester GL2 7BT, UK
Fax 0044 1453 890827
Email - jeff.kirby@wwt.org.uk

Vulture Study Group

Vulture News is the only scientific journal devoted entirely to the study of vultures. Since its inception in 1973, the Vulture Study Group has provided a forum for the exchange of ideas, information and techniques. Since 1979 it has published *Vulture News* bi-annually, as well as the regular newsletter *Gyps Snips*. VSG may be contacted at P.O. Box 72334, Parkview 2122, South Africa.

The Editor of *Vulture News*, Mark Anderson, is also seeking information (published or otherwise) on birds of prey drowning in reservoirs, and why this might occur. Such mortality may be more important than other "unnatural" mortality such as powerline electrocutions and persecution, especially in arid areas. Details required are location, date, species involved, number of individuals, age/sex, type of reservoir and the amount of water in it, suggested reasons for drowning and any other pertinent information.

BP Conservation Programme

Funds available to entrants world wide total GBP34,000.00 annually in the BP Conservation Programme, organised by BirdLife International and Fauna and Flora International. Projects must address a conservation issue of international importance, and should involve participants from the host country as well as from overseas and include undergraduates.

Prizes of GBP3,000.00 are given by the programme to the best projects in four categories - globally threatened species, oceanic islands and marine habitats, tropical forests, and wetlands, grasslands, savannahs and deserts. Eight other projects receive GBP1,500.00 each, with GBP10,000 being awarded to the best proposal for follow-up work sub-

mitted by one of the previous year's winners. **Applications close on 31 December 1996.**

Further details regarding application criteria and a project screening form are available from the Secretary, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, or email Birdlife@gn.apc.org.

The Atlas of Southern African Birds

Preparation of the manuscript for *The Atlas of Southern African Birds* is nearing completion. The Southern African Bird Atlas Project covers Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Based on seven million distribution records, this is the largest biodiversity project in Africa. The 1600 page, two volume atlas also contains distribution maps and texts for 700 species; for many, the ranges are strikingly different to those shown in current field guides and handbooks. 200 vagrants are also covered.

To receive publication information, write to Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 South Africa. Email adu@maths.uct.ac.za or access the Avian Demography Unit's pages at <http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/>

Dollarbird in Golden Bay

On 11 October 1996 I was phoned by my neighbour, Tim Jessep, and told that a strange bird was hanging around his pottery in Tukuruia, Golden Bay. I soon found the bird and identified it as a Dollarbird or Australian Broad-billed Roller.

It is about the size of a Tui, but heavily built, with a short, thick neck and large, flat-topped head. It is generally a brown colour with bluish-green on the wings and blue on the throat. The bill is bright red, large and slightly hooked, and the legs are also bright red. The bird sits on an exposed branch or post, making occasional flights hawking after insects. In flight it appears larger, with large rounded wings with a very conspicuous silvery-blue patch near the tip. It becomes more active in the evenings, making long rolling flights in pursuit of prey. It mainly stays round a group of large gum trees, but has visited at least two local gardens, delighting the inhabitants. It is still around as I write this on 7 November.

CHRIS PETYT



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Rarebits

Fairy Terns - Three staff have been taken on to manage Fairy Terns this season. Barry Atkins has been pre-feeding and laying 1080 in bait stations at the base of Mangawhai Spit and is also running trap lines. In three weeks he has caught seven cats, two ferrets, a weasel and numerous possums and rats. Leigh Honnor started work at Mangawhai on 30 September to protect, monitor and video Fairy Terns and other species. Andrea Booth has commenced at Waipu carrying out similar duties there and at other estuaries.

(Richard Parrish)

Monarch Flycatcher, seabirds and Blue Ducks - Wanganui Conservancy has had the privilege of becoming the first in New Zealand to welcome a Black-faced Monarch Flycatcher to our shores. It however was not so appreciative of the hospitality bestowed on it. This relatively common Australian bird's rarity value was quickly recognised by a keen-eyed Stratford cat. The bird was handed into our Stratford office in a dead but relatively undamaged state.

The identification process was interesting - particularly as we ended up with a White-browed Woodswallow, also a rare visitor. Both Stratford Field Centre and ourselves had dusted off our "boys and girls book of birds" to find that only one species looked about right. The bird in the hand did lack a white brow, but hey!... what's a white brow or two between friends? Besides it was probably an immature version.

Photographs were sent to Alan Tennyson at the Museum of New Zealand whose "boys and girls book of birds" had a few more picture than our's. So the message came back that we had a Black-faced Monarch Flycatcher and the first of its kind in the country.

The conservancy has put in a reasonable amount of effort into maintaining mainland breeding colonies of Grey-faced Petrels and Fluttering shearwaters on the Taranaki coast over the years - however, as the species are not priority ones we have found the work increasingly difficult to justify. The sites are generally restricted to small areas of remnant coastal cliff top vegetation and are particularly vulnerable to predators. Some fencing and revegetation has been undertaken with, at times, intensive predator control.

Graeme Taylor and Colin Miskelly were invited up to help us out. Visits were made to the three major colonies, including an evening session at one site where we caught and banded a number of Grey-faced Petrels. Without going into too much detail, the upshot was that the

southernmost site, which is on Dow Elanco land, has possibilities for predator-proof fencing. The next site is essentially on a stack which is still connected to the mainland, but only just. The Tasman Sea is slowly but surely eroding the connection which will mean that the colony will become an offshore one and forego the need for further action. The northern site is the best of the three and offers huge potential for restoration and expansion of the colony, with the ultimate aim being to develop the site as a mainland island project. We believe that, for relatively low input cost, we can achieve some extremely significant conservation gains, not only for the birds, but also in terms of restoring a piece of the Taranaki coast to its former naturalness.

A priority for Blue Duck work this year has been to consolidate the management of the species in Egmont National Park. While we already had a reasonable handle on the whereabouts of the birds, we needed to catch and band any unbanded birds and recapture those already banded. We have ended up with five birds, all male. Only one new bird was unbanded. The remaining birds comprised two males of five released in 1991 (two of this liberation flew back to the Manganui-a-te-ao River, where they had been caught - 140 kms), and two males of seven birds released in 1987. The work this year has confirmed that the birds are extremely secretive. We also know that females are in short supply. A further input of either captive-bred or wild birds is currently under consideration.

(John Barkla, Wayne Hutchinson)

Blue Ducks - The (Tongariro/Taupo) conservancy Blue Duck monitoring report for 1995/96 is finally finished. This year's report pulls together six years of monitoring data from three sites and describes varying impacts as a result of the Tongariro Power Development Scheme. There appears to have been major disruption to some populations as a result of the Ruapehu eruption. However there are indications that there are also serious habitat problems on some rivers. These issues are complicating negotiations between the Department and ECNZ over the Tongariro Water Consent Process.

(Chris Buddenhagen, Cam Speedy)

Murray Williams spent several days in the (Hawkes Bay) conservancy earlier in the year and very kindly carried out an analysis of our Blue Duck monitoring data. His findings were that productivity was extremely low, but survival quite high. Overall the population did show an increase during the monitoring programme. Emphasis is now to be placed on obtaining better information on breeding success and juvenile survival and dispersal.

(John Adams)

Kokako, Kaka - More Kokako have been released onto Kapiti Island, five arriving from Little Barrier Island and two from the National Wildlife Centre. All are carrying transmitters to aid monitoring, particularly during the application of broadifacoum, the first exposure of Kokako to this toxin.

A successful Kaka breeding season on Kapiti last year resulted in plenty of juveniles leaping into cage traps and mist nets, so we were able to transfer five juveniles to the National Wildlife Centre for the trial release, along with four captive reared juveniles. The release has been carried out and the birds have remained in the vicinity of the Mount Bruce Forest reserve, with some regularly accessing the supplementary feeders provided.

(Raewyn Empson, John Sawyer)

Kea - One out of the unusual basket! In June this year we had a report of a Kea landing on a fishing boat. This in itself may not be unusual in Deep Cove or some similar location, except that this boat was 40 miles off the coast, about directly west of Mt Cook. The crew caught the bird and kept it in a box before handing it over to staff at Westport when they came ashore. One lucky bird!

Mohua Recovery Group - The programme continues to go well. A stoat population irruption occurred over the South Island during the 1995/96 summer as expected. Stoat control was undertaken at seven sites and, as a result, Mohua (Yellowhead) productivity was high, and no population crashes were recorded. Beech seed fall levels were low again in autumn 1996, indicating that stoat levels will not increase over the 1996/97 summer. Control operations will continue at four sites, largely to support research into developing more effective stoat control techniques.

32 Mohua from the Blue Mountains were transferred to Breaksea Island in October 1995. This is the first large scale attempt to establish a new population of Mohua on a large offshore island. All birds were captured, transferred (by helicopter) and released safely. Birds were kept and released in their social groups. They were seen feeding normally in the beech forest and in shrubs along the shore soon after being released. A brief survey of part of Breaksea Island in September detected over twenty birds.

Small populations continue to survive on Centre Island in Lake Te Anau and Pigeon Island in Lake Wakatipu after five years following transfers to these sites. Breeding continues and many surviving birds were born on the islands.

The captive breeding programme continued with eight birds being captured in the Blue Mountains and transferred to Christchurch. Four went to Orana Park and four to Peacock Springs. There were no problems with the capture and trans-

fer. However *Yersinia* and *Aspergillosis* continue to be problems and caused the deaths of four birds after three months of captivity. One pair was observed carrying nesting material but no breeding occurred.

(Colin O'Donnell)

Takahe - A review of the field programme, particularly the egg and chick translocation and wild animal control operations, is underway. The number of Takahe in the Murchison Mountains remained at 115, despite last winter being the coldest in 23 years of records in Takahe Valley. A high proportion of last season's eggs were not viable (27 of 57 eggs), possibly due to the severe winter conditions. The majority of wild eggs were taken to be reared at Burwood as a stoat plague year was predicted. 17 chicks were raised and 12 one year old chicks were released back there.

A total of 47 birds have now been released in the Murchison Mountains and 51% were accounted for this summer. A comparative study of the survival of captive-reared and wild birds is continuing. Recent field work has included the catching and "transmitting" of two six month old chicks.

(Andy Roberts)

NZ Falcon - The DoC/Raptor Association of New Zealand survey to monitor the breeding success of the New Zealand Falcon was initiated to obtain data on the health of the population as a guide to its management. The aim was to locate at least three pairs of falcons per conservancy and monitor their breeding success over five years.

Sightings were obtained by a variety of publicity methods. RANZ members, where available, have followed up sightings which suggested breeding, while OSNZ and Forest & Bird members have also been asked to do so. 45 probable sites were reported by the public in 1994/95 and a similar number in 1995/96. However detailed monitoring of nests has been hard to achieve. RANZ members and a farmer obtained data from five sites in 1994/95 but other groups were unable to do so.

It seems unlikely that conservancies can increase their monitoring effort, given the efforts required for higher priority threatened species, so some alternatives need to be found to make the survey succeed. One alternative could be to obtain data from falcons breeding in mainland islands in which native fauna and flora are being intensively monitored. Another potential source of assistance is through sponsorship to monitor nest sites in specific conservancies.

(Steve Lawrence)

NZ Dotterels - After two good seasons on Stewart Island, the southern New Zealand Dotterel population now stands at 93 (up 20% on last year's total of 75). This is the highest population count re-

corded since six years ago when 106 were counted at the same three sites (Cooks Arm, Masons Bay and Awarua Bay) during the annual autumn count.

The survival of dotterels on Table Hill, the most carefully monitored site on Stewart Island, was extremely good, with only one adult missing, presumed dead. Seven to eight chicks are estimated to have fledged there from five pairs. Unlike last year, no female/female pairs were detected, although an inexperienced pair found late in the season by Phred Dobbins did lay and incubate an infertile clutch.

The predator control programme on Table Hill was given a financial boost and no major glitches occurred, unlike last year when the initial poison bait supplied was unsuitable, among other things. Eleven definite cat takes were recorded and rats were controlled to the point where non-target poison take was reduced to a minimum.

The estimated total of breeding pairs for the season is 14 to 16, including the five from Table Hill. If there is no change next season, the planned programme will give protection to nine of these pairs as compared to five.

Around 50% of the population has been colour banded by John Dowding as part of his research into the subspecies. The value of these banded birds has prompted the team to try to increase the percentage of the population carrying bands.

(Mike Aviss)

Kakapo - Over the past six years Comalco New Zealand Ltd has sponsored a Department's Kakapo Recovery Programme, giving about \$1 million. Maria Robertson, CNZL's Principal Adviser for Environment and Energy recently visited Maud Island, spending part of her visit doing the feed run across the island and getting acquainted with the staff. "I found them all to be extremely committed. There is a real personal commitment to the objective of the programme" she said.

Despite it being a non-breeding year, Kakapo had a quiet booming season on Little Barrier Island, finishing in early March when the birds began to moult. Work was dominated by rat grid trials, to test how well they stopped rats getting to a "Kakapo nest" (a.k.a. a block of chocolate). Results are being analysed, but suggest that almost all kiore can be removed from near a nest during the all-important first weeks of a chick's life.

On Maud Island, Hoki, the only captive Kakapo, will be given a chance to breed with wild males next season. She is being trained to use a stoat-proof door, to go in and out of her pen at will. All three males and females on Maud are wearing transmitters and are being supplementary fed. There was some bowl activity last September but only sporadic activity over the early summer. No booming was heard.

Codfish Island saw another quiet season, with sporadic activity finally petering out in autumn. There were large amounts of rimu pollen noted in the summer all over the island. By late autumn green fruit was seen on many trees. As Kakapo last bred on the island during the last rimu mast, the team has high hopes for a busy breeding season in early 1997 when the fruit ripens.

The National Kakapo Team are planning for a breeding season to coincide with the rimu fruiting. As part of this planning, visits to conservancies which have indicated that they will provide staff will provide training, including communications procedures, disaster recovery plans, video equipment use and maintenance, chick and egg handling equipment, incubators and standard operating procedures.

Research continues on a comprehensive phenology monitoring programme which will give us robust information on plant performance. We hope that this will show links with Kakapo activity, and whether food abundance as a trigger to breeding. It is currently believed that breeding on southern islands is triggered by fruit production of rimu trees. Dr Pharis (a retired Landcare scientist) is helping us in inducing rimu trees to fruit outside the normal fruiting regime by injecting hormones into the tree. Work on kiore control around Kakapo nests continues.

Massey University researchers can now identify individual birds, using micro-satellite DNA from feathers. Identifying individuals will help us in studies of unsuccessful matings and managing future matings with greater certainty. Blood samples will also be used for disease screening and identifying normal health parameters.

Researchers at Wallaceville are currently experimenting with inducing egg production in Mallards. If this works we hope to translate the technique to the eleven currently non-productive female Kakapo.

The supplementary feeding programme is being looked at carefully. The team is also using the non-breeding lull for skill development and safety training. All team members completed surf boat training in March and got their boat master's certificate in April. A disease management course was held at Massey. Training also included field electronics and the new database, as well as a method of identifying and reducing the risk of significant workplace hazards.

(Kakapo Recovery Team)

The Menace of the Mangamaku

It was early evening on the 15th February 1996 as I made my way to the confluence of the Rangataiki River and

Mangamaku stream. The fishing hadn't been too good at Aniwenua and this was a reluctant last chance. "Have a couple of casts down there" said my grandfather as he stopped the car on the roadside. "You're sure to bag one". I wasn't so sure. Mother Nature can often turn into a hostile and unpredictable hostess. New Zealand forests, however, are blessed by the absence of predators antagonistic to humans. There are occasions though when otherwise benign inhabitants discard their usual behaviours. When such events do occur they are often worthy of further investigation. The account below is one such occasion when all is not what it seems; when familiar friends can reveal themselves as the most bitter enemies.

Every cast, every different piece of water covered, turned up nothing. It must be the lure, I thought, as I placed my rod on the river bank and made my way back to the car to retrieve some more tackle. I crossed the recently flooded Mangamaku, carefully avoiding slipping on the slimy rocks. The stream could easily make a fool of a careless punter. My concentration, however, was suddenly broken by the most peculiar sound. Cutting through the background noise of whirring cicadas, chirping birds and omnipresent river came an unprecedented whooping, a harmonic yawping. Its pitch was so unnaturally shrill and whining that the hairs on the back of my neck rose. What creature was this? Never before had I heard such a noise. The startling cry was getting disturbingly louder, yet I couldn't determine the direction of its source. Whatever it was, it seemed to be homing in - on me. Standing thigh-high in the Mangamaku the howling now seemed to be coming from just over my left ear. I fearfully craned my neck to look behind. Sheeeit! Never has this young man been so frightened, for clipping the left side of my head at a furious pace was the greatest terror ever known to the Mangamaku. I flicked my head away and caught only a brief glance of bristling talons before I fell disorientated into the stream.

When in danger it's only natural that you think the worst. All I could think of was that I had innocently disturbed *Harpagornis moorei*, the supposedly extinct New Zealand Eagle. What sacrificial vengeance was it now to reap? I screamed the scream of a dying man. My vain cry echoed up the valley, shattering my grandfather's afternoon nap. Shocked and stumbling on hands and knees, I tried to resume an upright state. Where is it? Where is the thirsty beast? Again I could see nothing but the ominous bush shadows. Gripped by paranoia, I stumbled onward, checking for blood. No obvious wounds. I was still alive. And then it came again - the haunting, bellowing whoop. Quiet and first and then growing in volume, until the insane madness of its cry had again cloaked me in fear. It flashed by, this thing coming out of the setting sun. I

swayed to the left and felt a whoosh! of wind against my face. The damned thing was toying with me. I was now running across no man's land, expecting to be swept off up into the trees at any moment. I was in cinematic slow motion, a bewildered stare etched across my face as I stumbled up a greasy bank, pushing gorse bushes aside, too numb to feel their feral barbs.

The car was in sight. Freedom seemed so excruciatingly close. And then it came again. "Grandpa! Grandpa!" I cried, lest he succumb to the bird of doom close behind. He was standing by the car, calm as you like. "Did you get one?" he enquired. Words failed me. My dishevelled state was surely expression enough. "What's up with you then?" he continued. Nearly hyperventilating, I managed to compose myself sufficiently to exclaim "Something's after me. A bloody eagle or something". My grandfather was flummoxed, while I felt a coronary coming on. I positioned myself beside the car, searching the sky, wringing my clothes, huddling and shivering. "Watch out! There it is!" Swooping low over the gorse bushes, the feathered demon revealed its full visage. It perched arrogantly on a fence post, staring at us with a fierce scowl. "It's just a morepork" declared my grandfather. "A ruru, a boobook owl, a *Ninox novaeseelandiae*. What are you so afraid of?" A what? A morepork? Nothing more than that? You've got to be kidding! I was not convinced, especially after what I had been through. "Be careful" warned my grandfather. "He's a vicious little swine, whatever it is".

"What a funny little chap", said my grandfather as he moved closer to the owl. The owl was unmoved and unafraid of his advance. My grandfather was now no more than two feet from it. The owl was still strangely mute and apathetic. Reassured, I moved from behind the car, relaxed and laughing at myself. I was in the act of explaining what had happened when the 'funny little chap' revealed his true evil colours. The owl came straight at me. I turned my back and covered my face and jumped behind the car while the owl shot overhead. It circled and angled back down to its previous perch. "He just wants to be friends" said my grandfather, who was now clearly enjoying the whole episode. "It's a juvenile male, I think." The owl's unpleasant delinquent streak certainly corresponded with that demographic.

Then came an unfortunate realisation. "I've left my rod by the river. I'm going to have to go and get it". "Okay, I'll keep the little fellow occupied" said my grandfather, holding up a jacket in front of the owl.

I made my way slowly out of view of the owl and then I ran for the river. A cessation of the Blitzkrieg could not be expected to continue for too long. Another intimidating Stuka attack had to be

imminent. I crossed the Mangamaku, picked up my rod and took a steadying deep breath. It wasn't until I was attempting to climb the greasy bank again that my luck ran out.

"He's off! He's off!" yelled my grandfather.

What a brittle cookie fortune is. Sure enough, I could see the owl make a high banking turn away to my right. It dived down at me but without the grim determination of previous efforts. I was conveniently shielded by the gorse bushes, crouched as I was with my arms over my head. Finally, I had its measure. Seconds later I had leapt the fence and was back by the car.

"As soon as the little guy heard you coming back up the creek bed he took off. There was nothing I could do" explained my grandfather. "I'm not sure why he finds you so attractive though."

No, me neither, I thought. What really mattered was that it was all over. I was removing my baseball cap as he talked. I was surprised to find that my yellow-tinted sunglasses had not been dislodged from the hat's peaked rim. Then, the penny dropped. Could it be that, from an owl's perspective, the lenses looked like large, threatening eyes? I might have been confused with a potential rival. Or maybe he was only playing? Whatever the case, I'm not so curious as to wish to revisit the Mangamaku and seek out the ornithological truth. I shall leave that to others. I have experienced enough of his natural charms in one night to leave the Menace of Mangamaku be. You have been warned!

BRUCE THURLOW

Bruce's grandfather is none other than Roy Weston, OSNZ member since 1956. Roy can verify that the whole incident actually occurred. John Brierley, who submitted this tale, reports something "nasty going on in the woodshed" - a cob Black Swan with female goose and cygnet offspring which have recently been observed by John and Roy at Matata Lagoons.

Shining Cuckoo Arrival Records

Here in Titirangi, West Auckland, we are lucky to have neighbours that enjoy the presence of a large eucalypt on their section. The tree is a local avian landmark, and each year the incoming Shining Cuckoos use it as a vantage point to advertise their presence. We started keeping records of their arrival dates in 1986 and now have information over ten years as follows:

1986	5 October
1987	27 September
1988	24 September
1989	21 September
1990	16 September
1991	18 September
1992	28 September
1993	26 September
1994	26 September
1995	7 October

The weather systems in northern New Zealand from mid-September in 1995 were not favourable to inward migration, but our hopes were raised just before the final weekend of 30 September-1 October, when a large high pressure system developed over northern New South Wales and started to spread across the Tasman Sea. Nothing happened because the front was very fast moving and did not go far enough north to pick up the birds.

By mid week 4 October the international weather maps showed a very large high pressure complex with origins deep in the far north of Queensland heading our way. Better still it had an overlaying high altitude jet-stream creating what the weather people call a "double decker high". That reached New Zealand on Thursday 5 October, bringing warm weather and torrential rain from the north-west. Auckland roads were chaotic that afternoon!

But it was good news for the cuckoos who would have had a free ride on the front of the high whose winds would have been blowing towards two low pressure systems that came up over Westland, then merged into one over the central North Island. Sure enough, on Saturday morning 7 October the birds were all over Auckland, and we will now enjoy their company until early March when a few late brood youngsters can still be seen.

While we have had to wait, this has been nothing but good news for the Grey Warblers, who by then were well into their first brood of the season. It's an ill wind, as they say.

To the smaller migrating passerines particularly, getting the weather forecast right is critical to survival. For us it has created a special interest in the international weather reports in March and September.

MIKE GRAHAM

A Sanderling at Huahine, Society Islands

On 4 and 5 December 1992 we observed and photographed an adult Sanderling in non-breeding plumage on a large salt pan close to the Hotel Sofitel Heiva on the north-east coast of Huahine, French Polynesia. It was not seen subsequently during our stay. Also observed on this salt pan were up to 63 Pacific Golden Plovers and five Wandering Tattlers at any one time. On two occasions tattlers were seen to catch, dismember and eat small red-clawed fiddler crabs.

Our observation of the Sanderling seems worthy of permanent record as it is the first of which we are aware for any of the main Society Islands. The only other records of Sanderlings in the Society group appear to be those of two at Maupiti in June 1973 and of three at Scilly Atoll in October of the same year (Holyoak and Thibault, *Memoires du museum nationale d'histoire naturelle*, Series A - Zoology, Volume 127 (1984):79).

DAVID & CAROLE MEDWAY



Sanderling with Pacific Golden Plover. Huahine 4 Dec. 1992.

Photo: David Medway

Pukeko Status Questionnaire

In mid 1995 I sent a questionnaire to OSNZ RRs asking for information on the status of Pukeko within their regions. I needed this information so that a tentative nation-wide picture could be drawn up and the Pukeko population of Travis Swamp, a 130 ha semi-modified wetland in urban Christchurch, could be put into wider perspective. In winter 1995, Pukeko numbers on Travis Swamp reached c.750 birds which represents just

over half the Christchurch city population. For ten years a tense debate had been raging over whether this area should be developed into a new suburb or preserved as a conservation park. One side argued that Pukeko are excessively abundant throughout New Zealand and protecting habitat for them is totally unwarranted. The other side pointed out that Pukeko numbers had fallen from 7000+ in the mid 1960s to less than 3000 today. The question was: is this decline peculiar to central Canterbury or has it been experienced in other parts of the country?

Returns came in from 19 OSNZ regions, which was a great response - thanks very much to all respondents! Unfortunately, very little hard data on status and population trends of Pukeko are currently available from anywhere in New Zealand - except from central Canterbury, where several populations are being monitored. However, using Carroll's 1969 *Notornis* paper as a baseline, most respondents were able at least to compare the present situation in their region to the 1960s situation as reported by Carroll.

Over the past 30 years only one region (South Auckland) reported a big increase in numbers; five regions reported stable numbers (Far North, Northland, Wellington, Marlborough, West Coast), although four of those reported losses in some areas balanced by gains in others; six regions reported an overall decrease in numbers (Auckland, Taranaki, Wairarapa, Nelson, Otago and Southland) while three reported a big decrease (Bay of Plenty, Gisborne/Wairoa, Canterbury). In four regions (Waikato, Volcanic Plateau, Hawkes Bay, Manawatu) the trend was unclear or unknown.

The overall findings from this tentative, but still very useful, questionnaire survey are that Pukeko remain a widely distributed New Zealand bird, but that, except for a small number of regions, it is more appropriate to classify their status as "common" rather than "abundant". They appear to be most numerous and widespread in regions with wet climates, lush pastures and an ample supply of wetland or tall grass/rush cover. Such areas include South Auckland, Waikato and the West Coast. In drier regions like Canterbury, Marlborough and the Bay of Plenty, Pukeko are generally limited to "wet meadow" habitats, riparian strips and permanent wetlands. These habitats were abundant one hundred or even thirty years ago, but are rapidly disappearing as urban areas spread and marginal land is "improved" for agriculture. In many eastern districts it is now true to say that Pukeko are no longer a conspicuous part of the rural landscape, but have become increasingly localised and low in number.

I think a small amount of monitoring and management work would not go amiss on Pukeko. In Southland some

years ago, it was found that a reduced bag limit brought about a large increase in Pukeko numbers after years of heavy shooting pressure. In Canterbury this year the bag limit has been reduced from four to two, to see if a similar recovery will occur. Those OSNZ regions who have concerns about Pukeko in their area could perhaps choose one or two easily countable flocks and conduct a mid-winter monitoring count every two or three years. Perhaps this could be done in partnership with Fish and Game Councils, as they have statutory responsibility for Pukeko populations. The questionnaire results indicate that we don't need to be overly concerned about Pukeko at this stage, but we should be aware that some regional populations are in decline. Regular monitoring will keep tabs on the situation. While it is hard to imagine Pukeko ever disappearing, it is worth remembering the fate that befell New Zealand Quail, Buff and North Island Weka as well as Brown Teal.

As a footnote, it is pleasing to report that in May of this year the Christchurch City Council decided to spend about \$6 million and purchase 60 ha of Travis Swamp, having spent \$800,000 to purchase 56 ha in 1995. The remaining land has already been developed for housing. The plan now is to restore the wetland with ponds, moats, extensive *Carex* raupo swamps, wet meadows and kahikatea forest. Over the past year Black Stilt and Royal Spoonbill were added to the area's checklist, which now stands at 52 species. It is hoped that within the next ten years species and peak numbers will increase, adding considerably to the birdlife of Christchurch city.

ANDREW CROSSLAND

More Skimming Gulls

I was interested to read Paul Cuming's account of the skimming gull (*OSNZ News* 79), and he asked if anyone had seen this activity.

On 10 December 1977 at Waitangi Estuary, near Napier, a Black-billed Gull with a comical, high-stepping canter was slightly in from the water's edge. The bird's neck was extended, bill wide open, and it skimmed along the surface for several metres, and then turned to canter back, although not skimming. This was repeated before a second gull joined in. This bird flew skimming along the water, similarly catching a small fish which it promptly swallowed.

This unusual behaviour by Black-billed Gulls may be more common than we think, considering it was performed in different places and years.

KATHLEEN TODD

South Canterbury Tui

Peter Howden of South Canterbury sent in a report of an unusual sighting of a Tui at a farm belonging to Mr and Mrs Collins of "Riversleigh", Glentunnel. The bird arrived on May 25 and took possession of a kowhai tree near their house, displaying aggression to all other birds in the vicinity, including magpies. The Tui took advantage of a container of sugar water hanging nearby and was seen to drink from this on frequent occasions during the next few days. The bird came and went at intervals and on June 15 was observed to act strangely, flipping over and flapping its wings, even diving on Mr Collins with no apparent fear of humans. Disappointingly the bird finally disappeared on June 16 and has not been seen since, though Mr and Mrs Collins are hoping to see it again, perhaps with a mate next time.

KATHLEEN HARRISON

REVIEW

Out with the Lark - In the Forest Volume One, by Matthew Lark. 1996. Audio cassette 9606, National Radio.

This unusual cassette presents eight bird species found in New Zealand forests, along with expert commentary from research scientists familiar with each. Listeners to Radio New Zealand's National Programme will be familiar with the original versions of these recordings, which were broadcast in two parts per species.

The field recordings are by Matthew Lark, on up-to-the-moment digital equipment using DAT technology. Lark interviews a leading researcher in the country on a given species, and blends these comments with the bird recordings and his own script. Contributions are from Paul Sagar for Bellbird; Graeme Elliott for Kea, Yellow-crowned Parakeet and Yellowhead; Hugh Robertson - Tui; Bill Cash and Tim Lovegrove - South Island Saddleback; and Tim Lovegrove - North Island Saddleback.

The programmes remind this reviewer of the presentation style used by Eric Simms on BBC *Nature* programmes for radio and record of some years ago. It is a style which is perhaps a little out-dated now.

The recordings are clean, clear and crisp, as one would expect given the technology in use. One or two of them which contain high frequency calls suffer on AM radio, but would be heard at their best on FM bands. All in all an excellent tape for someone wanting to learn the sounds of some of our bush birds and their biology. It is available from Replay Radio, Box 123, Wellington at the reasonable cost of \$20.00, post paid. Series Two is currently being broadcast and may be available later this year.

LES MCPHERSON

Regional Roundup

Northland

We finally made it to Motukawanui Island, on our fifth attempt, and ten members plus Steve McManus from DoC spent a lovely sunny day planting 500 trees and huge bundles of flax on a slope with a beautiful view. The crew of the *Wairere* joined us at the end to get the final plants in before we left at 4 pm. It was very satisfying to look at the miniature forest we had planted as we left. Next time we plan to stay overnight.

The annual bird race on 31 August saw four teams of keen twitchers driving around the region on a lovely sunny day. The "Okia" team won - again! - with fifty species. Two teams saw bitterns in two different places, which was a bonus, and we ended the day with a shared meal at Jean Hawken's home.

8 September saw 22 keen birdwatchers, including six from Auckland, aboard the historic launch *Wairangi* heading out from Tutukaka to the Poor Knights Islands. The boat moved in close to the Sugarloaf and the Pinnacles to give us good views of the bird life, especially gannets bringing seaweed onto the rocks as nesting material. We had lunch in a sheltered bay and the boat then took us around the main islands. The vivid red Poor Knights lily could be seen in flower on the very top of the cliffs. Apart from a good variety of birds we were also entertained by a group of about twenty Common Dolphins and six or seven Orcas. A memorable day.

Our September meeting was an interesting talk, illustrated with slides, given by Richard Parrish on the Three Kings Islands. This is a unique and special area which only a privileged few are able to visit, and it was exciting to have a glimpse of the endemic flora and fauna. Niklaus Moore, our central Northland Science Fair prizewinner, also gave a talk on his project on the effect of 1080 on kiwi.

Early October brought great sadness to our region with the death of Raewyn Smith and Gavin Woodward while working as DoC volunteers on the Taiko project on Chatham Island. Our visits to Taiko Camp will never be quite the same again without these two good friends.

The survey of the New Zealand Dotterel began with our group returning early from Te Pahi without being able to complete the task due to rain, rain, rain. We tried doing some areas on Saturday but the birds were difficult to find in the rain and the count obviously wasn't going to be correct. Travel to North Cape was impossible so we will return shortly to complete the count.

Other areas have been counted successfully in better weather, with some birds found in new areas, and some colour banded birds located. Nesting appears to be going well and there was

a chick at Kauri Mount Beach on 19 October. On Saturday 2 November we were dropped at intervals along the beach on the west coast of Pouto Peninsula from the "Bigfoot" vehicle which saved a lot of walking. After an exciting trip back some of us then travelled to Leigh ready to go over to Little Barrier Island the following day.

Twenty pilgrims assembled on Leigh wharf for a chilly, rather undulating trip to the island where a perfectly calm west landing on the boulder beach awaited us. After opening our packs inside the rat-proof enclosure and a talk from Irene, the ranger, the sun came out and we all had a marvellous day, seeing all possible species except Kakapo. A calm trip home in the hot sun ended a perfect day - bliss!

Beach patrols have continued on west and east coasts searching for an elusive Amokura or other rarity, but so far the usual species are appearing for the time of year.

We have booked a pleasant venue for the 1997 Conference and AGM and hope to welcome at least 120 of you to fill the waiting beds. We plan field trips to the Trounson Park "island sanctuary", Waipoua Forest, historic Pouto Peninsula travelling by "Bigfoot" bus and Puketia Forest for the upwardly mobile. Make our day - register early!

(Lorna Simpkin).

Auckland

Dr Grant Dumbell, at our August meeting, updated us on the activities of Ducks Unlimited, particularly in regard to the conservation of wildfowl. At the same meeting Rod Morris gave a talk on how special New Zealand flora and fauna were and made comparison with some unique features of the Pacific islands. Both talks were illustrated with superb slides. Nick Green spoke at the September meeting on his travel in India. Slides showing the Indian landscape illustrated the talk.

On 28 September a survey of Cornwall Park/One Tree Hill was undertaken as a follow-up to the survey in February last. The list of species dropped by one - no Skylarks reported this time. The number of birds counted was also down, which is only to be expected in spring. At the February survey our national Treasurer mislaid his car. This survey produced an attacking magpie, but the member assaulted survived without blood being drawn.

Dr John Dowding spoke at the October meeting on the predators impacting on bird populations in New Zealand. Graphic slides showed some of the imperiled birds and the predators. At a special meeting on 22 October we were honoured to have Dr Clive Minton from Australia speak to us, courtesy of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. His subject was the Banded Stilt of Australia, which

is a fascinating bird in more ways than one, and so different from our own stilts. Banded Stilts nest in colonies and only under certain conditions, their eggs are whitish with scribbled markings, the chicks are white, their habitat is a salt lake environment, they feed on brine shrimp and are able to, and frequently do, swim! Excellent slides illustrated the talk. The meeting attracted 73 birders and included members from Northland, South Auckland and Waikato.

John Staniland spoke at the November meeting on the birds of the Waitakeres and its environs. To newer members the talk gave a very good insight into the birds of Auckland, and slides shown highlighted features of birds which some of our more experienced members were not aware of.

Chris Bindon, leader of the November field trip, took members on a safari of Whangateau, Warkworth and the Dome Valley. Perhaps the highlights for most members were sightings of a pair of Shining Cuckoos and Pied Tits at close quarters. The day concluded with a barbecue at Chris's bush retreat.

On 18 August 71 Cattle Egrets were seen at Rat Island, Kaipara Harbour, and two Black Stilts were at Hedley's Farm on the Kaipara on the same date. Two New Zealand Falcons were reported at Muriwai in September but the report has yet to be confirmed. On Tiritiri Matangi Island Barbara Walter reported a North Island Kaka investigating a nest box on 29 September. Sulphur-crested Cockatoos are still residing near the Cascades in the Waitakeres. Caspian Terns have again nested at their traditional location at Mangawhai, and to date, with some success, DoC has carried out a trapping programme of cats, rats, stoats etc, and the high tides of last season have not eventuated.

A write-up in the *Rodney Times* seeking information on the Kookaburra yielded many telephone calls, mainly of sightings which extended from the northern Waitakeres in the west across to East Coast Bays in the east, to Mangawhai in the north. Detailed information on food and nesting sites is now being sought.

(Doug Booth)

Waikato

Sightings of Tui and Bellbirds are being reported, though neither species is common in the Waikato. Laurie Hoverd saw some Tui feeding on peach blossom in his garden, while Pam Bovill reported them eating kowhai flowers and leaves. Betty Seddon reported five or six Bellbirds at Karapiro, and Angela Wordsworth heard on calling in Hamilton East. Paul Cuming reports both species at Mount Karioi.

NZ Pigeons are being seen around the towns more frequently, with one feeding on Betty Seddon's Cambridge garden, and two birds seen by the river in the Hamilton City Gardens were re-

ported by a visitor. Six Royal Spoonbills, reported at Raglan Harbour, were not found when searched for, but a couple of weeks later six were also reported at the Mokau River mouth. We wonder if these were the same birds, moving through the country to southern breeding grounds. A Kaka has been present in the Te Miro area near Cambridge since April.

Our Cattle Egret count on 25 August was slightly up on last year's, with 145 birds counted at Rangiriri, 40 at Lake Ngaroto, three were seen at Raglan on 17 August by Chris Morris, and six were reported from Walton in late October. Coot numbers are up to 28 on Hamilton Lake, with the part albino bird still present in October.

Our evening meeting speakers have ranged from hearing about Chris Smuts-Kennedy's life as a ranger on Little Barrier Island, to Tim and Ann Lovegrove's experiences while monitoring Echo Parakeet nests on Mauritius. Then it was back home again to hear Gwenda Pulham talk about her study of Fairy Terns in Northland.

Our October field trip was planned to coincide with the visit of Clive Minton to Miranda, when we were privileged to hear Clive tell us what has been discovered about the migration of birds of the East Asian-Australasian flyway since banding of birds began. Those who stayed to hear Clive talk again in the evening were treated to the most magnificent slides of birds on their nests in their Arctic breeding grounds.

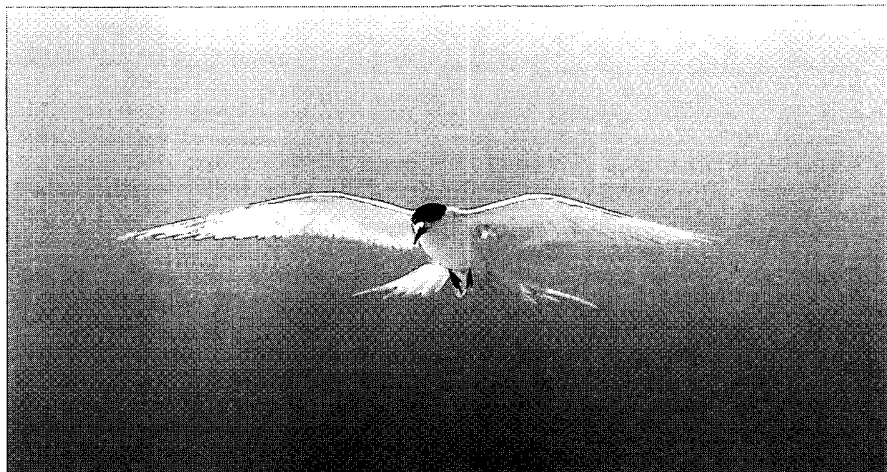
Members helped with the spring census of New Zealand Dotterels, the results of which are not final at the time of writing. However, while searching for dotterels at Raglan Beach, Paul Cuming picked up a most unusual bird. His first reaction was "Good grief! A toucan!!" Later consultation with books showed that Paul had found a Channel-billed Cuckoo. Now what was it that Peter Schweigman said about introducing these birds to control magpies? Well, Peter, the birds may be listening to you - though this one did not make it alive, which is fortunate for many of our other birds.

(Bev Woolley)

Bay of Plenty

A party of twelve members and friends took part in a boat trip on the Island Princess to White Island on Sunday 8 September. This is a regular tourist trip, which sails several times a week from Whakatane.

The weather was fine with a light wind, though the sea was bit rough on the way out to the island. Most members went onto White Island, to experience the moon-like landscape of the active volcano. Some vents were very recently formed, with boiling mud being thrown about in all directions.



Remember to look out for nesting White-fronted Terns during the holiday break, as part of the national survey of this species.

Photo: Mark McFadden

The variety of birds was a real treat - far more than I expected. Several Black-browed Mollymawks were seen, with a probable Yellow-nosed and possible White-capped Mollymawk. There were also Wandering Albatrosses and Northern Giant Petrels. Grey-faced Petrels were common near the island, and Fluttering Shearwaters everywhere. Fairy Prions were seen several times, plus Cape Pigeons, White-faced Storm Petrels, Blue Penguins (close to Whale Island), gannets, White-fronted Terns and gulls. We also saw three dolphins and possibly a marlin.

(John Brierley)

Hawkes Bay

A proposed field trip to Waipatiki had to be postponed due to poor weather - maybe third time lucky for this outing. In September we visited Lake Tutira, where we saw the usual range of waterfowl - including rafts of coots, about 600 in total. The coots were following along behind Black Swans and feeding on the weed that the swans had dislodged from the bed of the lake. Tui and Bellbirds were feeding on the flowering kowhai on the shore of the lake. Other waterfowl seen included several NZ Scaup, dabchicks, Mallards and Paradise Shelducks.

Our October meeting was held at the Education Discovery Centre in Napier, where Wayne Twyde treated us to a talk about the display that was presently showing. The theme was extinct birds in conjunction with the New Zealand Post release of the extinct bird series of stamps.

Mid-October saw a small number of members visiting Blowhard Bush and Lawrence Hut on the Taihape Road. The walk around Blowhard was enjoyable, and we heard Tomtits, NZ Robins, and there were many Whiteheads about. The walk down to Lawrence Hut was a highlight, with literally hundreds of Tui feeding and singing in the kowhai.

The White-winged Black Tern which has been in the Ahuriri area for the past

two years is now in full breeding plumage and can often be seen hawking over the Westshore Lagoon. One Cattle Egret was seen in a paddock at Otamauri. The White-fronted Terns have a nesting colony at Waitangi. Hopefully they will be successful this year - to the best of our knowledge they did not even try to nest last year.

The waders seem to have arrived back, with about 300 godwits, several knots, golden plovers and a Whimbrel at Ahuriri. With our summer census planned for this weekend, we hope to get an idea of total numbers on the estuaries.

(Christine McRae)

Taranaki

We were pleased to welcome Mark Nee to the August meeting, and trust he enjoyed his time in this area.

On a trip to Rahiri track on the Egmont National Park boundary, members enjoyed watching a Bellbird feeding on very small *Coprosma tenuicaulis* fruit, only 3-4mm in diameter. At Kaimiro, close to the national park boundary, a flock of 30 Spur-winged Plovers were observed in a paddock. Fifty plus Canada Geese were seen flying towards the Omata lagoons, probably from Barrett Lagoon. This occurred each day over a short period of time.

A kayak trip around the Mokau salt marshes was rewarding when four Fernbirds were viewed (more were heard), and, a big plus for the trip, a close up view of two Banded Rails. Pity the kayak has room for only one!

In August members visited Barrett Lagoon and Ratapihipihi bush reserve where 28 species of birds were observed, including fifteen native species. The surroundings of the Waipu Lagoons at Bell Block, developed by the New Plymouth District Council, are well hidden with a variety of shrubs and flaxes. This is good habitat for many species, the most notable being Australasian Bittern.

The first Shining Cuckoo was heard on the Tarata Saddle as members set out to walk through the Tarata State Forest.

On Manu-o-Tamatea, an island in the New Plymouth Marine Park, many burrows were examined and most appeared to be occupied, presumably by Grey-faced Petrels. Rats may be present also. Our offshore observer (not from his kayak this time) noted seven Shy Mollymawks, Fluttering Shearwaters and a few Buller's Shearwaters, plus a Flesh-footed Shearwater. He also observed ten diving petrels which he clocked flying at 23 knots!

At our September meeting a member, Bill van Gorkom, gave an ornithological account of his recent trip to England and Holland. A very descriptive and interesting talk which was enjoyed by all.

(Rosemary Messenger)

Wellington

We are all very saddened by Gavin Woodward's tragic and untimely death. Gavin has been part of Wellington ornithology for many years. He always added something special to a trip, with his cheerful nature and extensive knowledge. Gavin had recently become our new RR and was in the process of setting up a survey of the harbour - a repeat of the two years of counts done ten years ago. Gavin will be missed by us all and we extend our condolences to his mother Jessie, sister Trixie, and his nieces and nephew.

Our last few evenings have maintained the usual high standard. Tim Markwell gave an interesting alternative view of the interaction between seabirds and other fauna and flora on islands in a talk entitled "Do islands need seabirds?"

Peter McKenzie brought us up to date on the future plans for Nga Manu, which include an increased emphasis on flora as well as increasing the emphasis on natural features of the site.

September took us to the Antipodes Islands, where Reg Cotter and Alan Tennyson spent some time last spring. Reg gave us a general overview of the island and Alan talked about the albatrosses of the region.

The November meeting was the first since the accident on the Chathams. Graeme Taylor, who was on the trip, gave us some information about how that accident may have happened, and talked about the work on the Taiko which Gavin was involved with. He showed a video of the team erecting the antenna for the radio tracking, so we got good views of the site and surroundings. It was a fitting tribute to Gavin.

The last poison drop has been done on Kapiti Island - we are eagerly waiting for the results!

(Ros Batcheler)

Canterbury

On 10 November, Tony Crocker, Marion Macbeth and I observed two immature Black-billed Gulls feeding in the same manner as the Miranda birds described by Paul Cuming (*OSNZ News* 79). They were skimming in the estuary of the Ashley River but they flew back to start again. The incoming tide was forming a slowly-moving lagoon behind the sandspit.

Sue Waugh gave an interesting talk on 26 August on her work with mollymawks on Campbell Island. Ron Nilsson stepped in on 30 September when the advertised speaker was unable to attend, and spoke of work surveying a West Coast area of forest, and Jill West recounted results of a trip to Codfish Island surveying Mottled Petrels.

Ron was back again on 4 November to update us on the search for the South Island Kokako. In the past ten years he has collected a dossier of sightings, strange calls and unusual grubbings on the forest floor from different areas of the South Island. A tape was played, purportedly of the song of this bird. We all hope that the bird is indeed found again. DoC is at the moment funding searches and OSNZ is to assess the evidence.

In September a very small contingent visited the Spotted Shags and White-flipped Penguins at Tumbledown Bay on Banks Peninsula.

A start has been made on the national White-fronted Tern and Black-billed Gull survey in October and November. A very scenic two and a half hour flight covered the northern Canterbury rivers, and five colonies have so far been counted.

On Show Weekend, seven members spent their time at Kaikoura, staying at the University of Canterbury field centre. The first day was spent counting the nesting gulls and terns on the coast, including walking around the peninsula. The second day took us to the saltworks at Grassmere where Bev North joined us and guided us through the complex of evaporation ponds. Few waders were present, but we had a perfect view of a Pectoral Sandpiper. The rest of the day saw us looking at Lake Elterwater and some local rivermouths.

On the last morning Aimers Beach, near Seal Point on the Kaikoura Peninsula, produced 71 Turnstones and four tattlers. A check for gulls and terns at the Conway River mouth produced a SIPO paired with a pied Variable Oystercatcher (or was it a hybrid?), located on the beach with a well grown chick. Beautiful weather, plenty of birds and good company made this a delightful weekend.

Lake Ellesmere has been desperately low this year, so birds have been hard to find, but 17 Pacific Golden Plovers, 46 Red-necked Stints, 27 Curlew Sandpipers and 11 Turnstones have been

located. The Ashburton rivermouth had a juvenile Red-necked Stint, a Siberian Tattler and a Turnstone recently - the tattler has been present for some months - and three Far-eastern Curlews and eight Lesser Knots have been at the Ashley Estuary. There are still 33 Cattle Egrets at Greenpark.

(Sheila Petch)

Otago

Otago experienced a rather extreme winter, though not as severe as Southland. It meant an influx of Silvereyes. As a result the Otago passerine banding group had the opportunity to band and release a total of 3,832 Silvereyes, most of them in Dunedin. Derek Onley is still working on the data to find out what we have achieved in these three years.

We managed to survey approximately 4 km of a cliff face in North Otago to check the breeding population of Spotted Shags. We counted 469 nests over a stretch of 1.6 km, which gives a total of over 400 nests per kilometre. And what a fantastic sight it was.

Anderson's Lagoon had a pair of Southern Crested Grebes displaying mid October. If this comes to anything it will mean the first breeding record of these grebes on the east coast and in saline waters. We will keep you posted.

(Peter Schweigman)

Southland

Black-billed Gulls, among the birds to have been badly hit by the severe winter, seem to be around in healthy numbers, as are Spur-winged Plovers, but there is no sign on the Cattle Egrets. Local bush areas have intact canopies but the understory has been wiped out in many places.

In late September we began by checking the Black-billed Gull colony at Kauana - the largest colony in New Zealand in 1995. It had shifted, but there was another colony of about 3,000 pairs a kilometre further downstream. It has since been washed out twice. A flight of two and a half hours revealed 17 colonies, mainly on the Mataura. There are other rivers still to be surveyed, plus the region's White-fronted Terns.

Some interesting local sightings include Pukeko feeding on fresh water mussels in a ditch at Merrivale, a Pied Shag grappling with a large seahorse wrapped around its neck, until it was dislodged and finally swallowed on Stewart Island, a Sooty Albatross picked up at Mason Bay, possibly a first for Southland, and a Buller's Shearwater at Oreti Beach, another first.

(Lloyd Esler)

Chatham Islands

The onset of summer has brought some interesting observations and new discoveries on the Windy Isles. A beach patrol

in October along Waitangi Beach produced a Salvin's Prion, a new species for the Chatham Islands. Other species found on the beaches include Grey Petrel, Blue Penguin, Buller's Mollymawk, Pitt and Chatham Island Shag, giant petrel and a Wandering Albatross banded as a breeding adult in the Antipodes Islands in 1969.

On Mangere Island a White-faced Storm Petrel was found in a burrow. Although without an egg, the nest chamber was well formed and it is undoubtedly a breeding burrow. This is the first record of a White-faced Storm Petrel attempting to breed on the island. Several other adults were seen ashore, so it is likely that this species is in the early stages of colonising the island.

A census of Chatham, Pitt Island and Black Shags (only these species breed on the Chathams) is underway. It is planned to cover as much of the island as possible (including offshore islands) in order to get a good idea of the status of the shags in the Chatham group.

The eight Cattle Egrets are still present on the island, and continue to range widely to feed (last sighting 8 November). Perhaps they prefer the Chathams to either mainland New Zealand or Australia, and who can blame them?

(Mike Bell)

What's On

Northland/Far North

Monthly beach patrols of Dargaville beaches (Prue Cozens (09) 437 0127), 90 Mile Beach and Karikari (Isobela Godbert (09) 407 8058, John Dawn (09) 407 8653) and the east coast (Jean Hawken (09) 438 1985, Lorna Simpkin (09) 437 2076).

Auckland

4-11 January

- Kaipara Field Study Course.

Ph. Gwenda Pulham (09) 480 5535.

South Auckland

Waikato

11 December -

evening meeting, DoC Conference Room, London Street, Hamilton.

Christmas pot luck dinner and social night. Ph. Bev Woolley (07) 856 9340.

19 February -

evening meeting - Members' night - bring slides and photos.

23 February -

Waders at Kidds Farm, Manukau. Ph. Shirley & Folkert Nieuwland (07) 856 2045.

19 March -

evening meeting. Birds of Hawaii. Ph. Bev Woolley (07) 856 9340.

Monthly beach patrols of west coast beaches. Ph. Paul Cuming (07) 856 3891

Bay of Plenty

15 December -

Blue Ducks and Weka near Opotiki. Ph. Bill Sloan (07) 315 7489.

January -

date tba. Ohiwa Harbour area. Ph. Malcolm Hutton

Gisborne/Wairoa

Taranaki

Manawatu

Wanganui

Hawkes Bay

8 December -

Christmas barbecue. Ph. Christine McRae (06) 879 9136.

Wairarapa

7 December -

Lake Wairarapa and Christmas barbecue. Ph. Colin Scadden.

Wellington

Beach patrols -

Jean Luke (04) 293 5601.

Mapping scheme - Hugh Roberston (04) 385 8407.

Karori reservoir - Colin Miskelly (04) 472 5821 (work).

Nelson

Marlborough

Canterbury

24 February -

evening meeting, Middleton Grange School, Riccarton. AGM and members' night. Ph. Sheila Petch (03) 348 1889.

1 February -

Waipara River survey. Ph. Tony Crocker (03) 352 4530.

9 March -

Bush bird survey, Christchurch and surrounds. Ph. Ron Nilsson (03) 385 8080.

7 April -

evening meeting. John Warham on early days in ornithology.

12 April -

Farewell to the waders. Ph. Kathleen Harrison (03) 322 9699.

Anzac Weekend -

weekend on West Coast, combined with Nelson and Canterbury regions.

West Coast

July 96 - June 97 -

Weka road kill survey. Representative samples for each month, including status of dead birds, presence of dwellings, other road kills and vegetation types. Casual information welcome. Information to Bruce Menteth, P.O. Box 36, Punakaiki.

Otago

Evening meetings -

3rd Wednesday of even months, Otago Art Society building, 8 pm. Ph. Peter Schweigman (03) 455 2790.

14 December -

Yellow-eyed Penguin count. Ph. John Darby (03) 476 1676.

6 February -

Royal Spoonbill census of Otago population. Ph. Peter Schweigman (03) 455 2790.

19 February -

evening meeting, Graham Loh on the Arctic.

Southland

5 February -

evening meeting, Southland Museum. Ph. Lloyd Esler (03) 217 9060.

6 February -

Summer wader census and spoonbill count.

Beach patrols - most Friday evenings. Ph. Lloyd Esler.

Black-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern survey- many areas still to cover. Ph. Lloyd Esler.

DEADLINE FOR THE MARCH ISSUE IS 10th FEBRUARY