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for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)

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

Expedition to the Bounties

The Bounty Islands are one of the premier subantarctic nature reserves in New Zealand, and the primary breeding site for several seabird species, yet few people know much about them. An expedition to the Bounties was mounted last summer, spearheaded by Gerry Clark, to find out more about the wildlife that inhabits these remote islands. Gerry is well known in yachting circles for his adventures around the southern oceans in his 30 foot sloop the SRV *Totorore* (Sailing Research Vessel; *Totorore* is the Maori name for the Antarctic Prion).

The expedition consisted of four "legs". The main purpose of the expedition was to collect information on the Fulmar Prion, a small seabird about which very little is known and which breeds in large numbers only on the Bounties. The trip had to be done in legs due to the length of time people were available to go and also due to the limits of what could be transported on the yacht. There has been only one other scientific expedition to the Bounties, which was 20 years ago in November 1978.

The Bounties, although swarming with bird life and seals, is an inhospitable place for humans. There is no fresh water and no vegetation other than lichens, algae and moss. The 15 to 20 granite islands and rock stacks rise abruptly out of the ocean, with much of the interface between land and sea being sheer cliffs. They were discovered and named in 1788 by William Bligh, after his ship the *Bounty*, while on the way to Tahiti to collect breadfruit trees for the West Indies. It was later that his crew mutinied. The Bounties are now a protected nature reserve.

The voyage from Lyttelton Harbour to the Bounties took some three and a half days sailing. I had dreaded the sailing part, and this was my first overnight trip. The accommodation on the boat was quite compact, with most of the storage

in small compartments in the walls. I found the gimble stove fascinating, and watched it as I lay in my berth trying not to be sick. The stove is hinged and is the only safe place to set liquids, which stay in their containers quite happily despite all the wild swinging of the stove - which in reality is staying flat while we are swinging around it.

After arriving at the islands we shuttled the gear over with an inflatable dinghy to Proclamation Island, our base for a month. On the first trip, Marinus (the sailing crew for the leg 1 was on) and Andrea had to subdue a territorial bull fur seal before being able to go up onto the landing site. Not easy on a small rock platform with nothing but surging ocean and a rubber dinghy behind you and a roaring bull seal in front of you. Because of the bull, Andrea stepped off the dinghy onto a rock shelf, but a bit too far back and went up to her neck in sea water.

After the gear was landed, Andrea and I set up camp, while Gerry and Marinus anchored near the islands. Unfortunately the anchorages around the Bounties are treacherous and, during the four weeks of our stay, three anchors were lost - a big blow since the expedition was a private one and the funds raised didn't cover all of the costs. On the bright side however, that was the only major hiccup during our leg.

The camp was set up on a flattish shelf of rock, one of the only ones on the island. We brought most of our fresh water with us, but also used a hand-pumped desalinator. All the washing was done in salt water. We cooked on a two burner camp stove (burritos, pasta and couscous featured prominently in our diet). The sleeping pads (Thermarests) were very comfy, which was fortunate since the bit of ground under mine was actually rocks stacked up to make it flat. Towards the end of the trip the mollymawks were



Fulmar Prion, Proclamation Is.

Photo Frances Schmechel



Salvin's Mollymawks "at home".

Photo Frances Schmechel

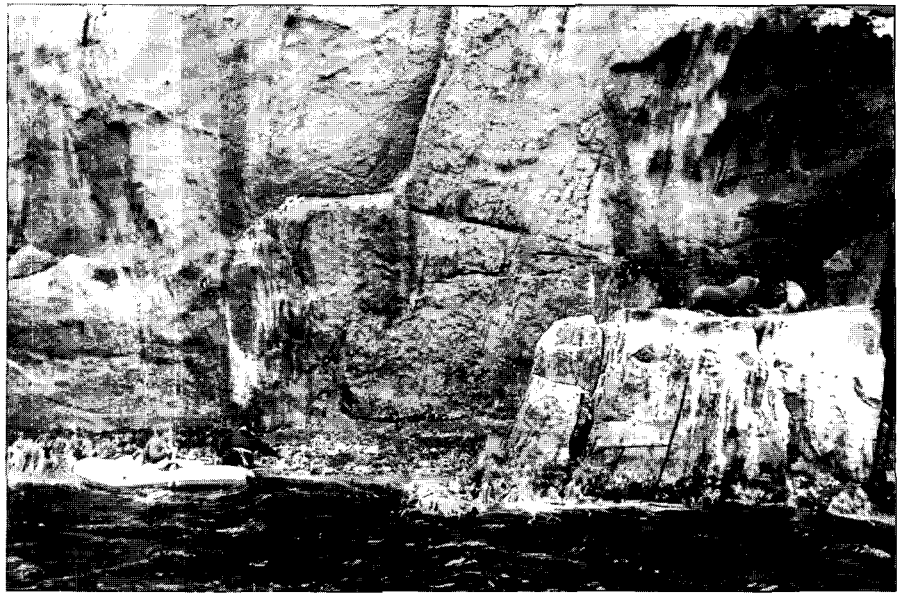
taking up residence right in camp, roosting on the buckets where we stored our gear and on the rocks I had moved to anchor one corner of my tent. Occasionally the mollies landed on the tents or tried to take off from them, a bit disconcerting when you're inside them.

Only six species of birds breed in any numbers on the Bounties - Salvin's Mollymawks, Erect-crested-Penguins, Fulmar Prions, Antarctic Terns, Cape Pigeons and Bounty Island Shags. What they lack in diversity is made up for in sheer numbers - every nook and cranny is occupied with birds. All of these species had chicks while we were there. Unfortunately the mollymawk chicks vomit fish oil if sufficiently worried, and



Erect-crested Penguin and chick, Proclamation Is.

Photo Frances Schmechel



Landing site, Proclamation Is.

Photo Frances Schmechel

our clothes and gear smelled unbelievably by the time we left. We often had to get quite close to molly chicks in order to reach prion nests.

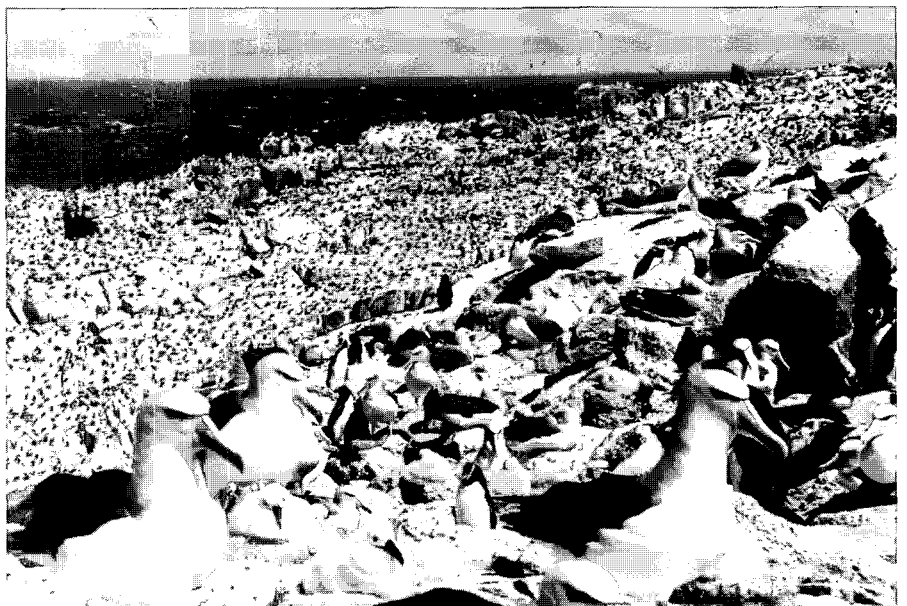
We also saw a few Black-backed Gulls, a Spur-winged Plover (probably blown way off course from somewhere on the mainland), a few Starlings (they seem to be everywhere in the world), and a lone (lost?) Rockhopper Penguin (they breed on the Antipodes, to the south of the Bounties).

The Erect-crested Penguins are fierce parents and attack gumboots, legs or anything that moves. They have a vicious bite, followed by an even more painful flipper whack for the unwary. They also have defense and greeting calls that are deafening. Fortunately the guard stage ended during our stay, and walking became easier and more peaceful as parents spent more time out at sea, leaving the chicks to fend for themselves.

The deserted penguin chicks either hid in crevasses or formed little creches.

Our work was concentrated on a study area set up by Jacinda and Sandy during the second leg of the expedition. The main focus was the prions, beautiful little blue-grey seabirds which nest in the rock cracks and crevasses. The chicks were small dark grey balls of fluff. One near our camp was so much fluff and so little weight that it kept getting blown out of its nest during a wind storm. We returned it several times, the final time after the wind died down, and it was doing well a couple of weeks later when we left.

We also monitored molly and penguin pairs in the study area to determine chick survival and attendance by the adult birds. We followed the hatching success and growth of Fulmar Prion chicks, did a census of prions on almost half the island, and collected seals and insect



Space is at a premium - Proclamation Is.

Photo: Frances Schmechel

samples for other researchers. During the second leg (November), Sandy and Jacinda did a census of all the mollies and penguins on Proclamation Island (about 3,000 of each).

The four weeks on the island flew by. We had mostly very good weather, including a few very calm days and even some calm hot weather - unusual for that latitude. The rain kept us in for a few days and one day we had a hail storm. Most days there was some wind, occasionally quite strong - to be expected in the Roaring Forties.

The trip back took five days because we got caught in a gale. We ended up at Kaikoura and had to motor back for a day. Fortunately we had great weather that day so could sit outside on the deck and enjoy the sun and the scenery. Hector's Dolphins rode in the bow wave as we were coming into Lyttelton Harbour - a lovely end to an amazing trip.

FRANCES SCHMECHEL

WANTED - EDITOR NOTORNIS

Due to the impending departure overseas of the current Editor of Notornis, applications are invited for the position. Publication of the Society's journal is one of the key aims of the Society, and the Editor's role is therefore an important function.

The Appointment is an honorary one, for a term to be determined by Council.

A position description and person specification may be obtained from the Secretary.

Applications close on 31 August 1998.

Christine Reed
Hon. Secretary
OSNZ
P.O. Box 12397
Wellington

Award to Don Merton

Conservationist Don Merton has received an international award which places him alongside such environmental luminaries as Jacques Cousteau, Sir David Attenborough and Jane Goodall. The United Nations Environment Programme has announced that he had been elected to the prestigious ranks of its Global 500 roll of honour.

A pioneer in the management of New Zealand animals facing extinction, Don Merton is best known for his role in the rescue and recovery of some of the world's most endangered birds. These

include the Echo Parakeet of Mauritius, the Noisy Scrub-bird of Western Australia, the Black Robin, Saddleback and Kakapo.

His citation says no other conservationist has been involved in as many bird rescue programmes.

Courtesy of *The Dominion*.

1998 Scientific Day Talks

The gathering of around 100 people on Saturday 30 May at the Airport Hotel in Wellington was treated to an outstanding collection of speakers and topics. The morning presentations were devoted to ornithological activities taking place in the Wellington region.

Allan Munro outlined results of surveys of Moreporks in the region. Part of the organised surveys of six species (Morepork, Eastern Rosella, Tui, Bellbird, NZ Kingfisher, NZ Pigeon) over three seasons, this threw up interesting material. For example lows were recorded in winter, with highs in September to January. Populations appeared to be fairly resident, including those in Wellington city. Calls were recorded from 4.52 pm to 8.20 am.

Janice Woon outlined corresponding results from the Eastern Rosella survey. Initially Crimson Rosellas were more frequent in the Wellington region, as demonstrated from data in the Provisional Atlas of the 1960s. Eastern Rosellas appear to have replaced them. Flock sizes increase throughout the year until the onset of the breeding season, when birds presumably break into pairs for nesting. Birds fed on a quite extraordinary range of food sources, dominated by ground feeding.

Ralph Powlesland reviewed work on five studies involving shags in the region. Allan Munro's monitoring of a Black Shag roost at Melling shows a summer peak and a winter low. Other work appears to demonstrate that there are two distinct populations of Black Shags ("riverine" and "coastal") in the region, with slightly differing breeding seasons. The Melling shags appear to be riverine. Ralph and Peter Reese are continuing their study of Black Shags breeding at Pencarrow. Mortality is high from the c.30 nests in the first year, but from there on there is 67-100% survival per year. 64% of second year birds attempt to breed, but their success rate is much better in the third year. Stephen Sharp, Raewyn Empson and Ralph Powlesland's monitoring of the shag roost at Karori Reservoir covers four species, mainly Little and Little Black. These show a peak in winter and a low in summer, nesting as they do from August onwards elsewhere. Little Blacks are thought to breed in the Rotorua lakes area. Pied Shags nesting at Makara since the colony was established in 1996 came next, with a peak in spring and autumn. Lastly Little Shags at Lindale near

Waikanae, which started nesting in 1993 (one nest) and grew to 24 in 1997 when the study started, has produced good information from Ralph and Jean Luke so far.

Jim Lynch, deputy chairperson of the Karori Sanctuary proposal, stepped in at short notice to explain his vision for the project. The plan is to create a representative sample of the ecosystem of the area as it was, located only two kilometres from the CBD. High technology was involved in the development of the eventual 8.5 km long, absolutely pest-proof fence. To date, five minute bird counts are providing a baseline, fund raising is progressing well, and the fence is expected to be completed by the end of 1999. The trust has 1500 members, the support of the city council, all the necessary resource consents, and expected opposition to it has died away. After eradication of all pests in the sanctuary (expected to take a year), introductions of species such as kiwi, Bellbird, Whitehead, robin, tomtit and parakeets will take place, with endangered species in due course. Jim's obvious enthusiasm and commitment to the project left us in little doubt that his stated objective of eventually creating similar projects for every town and city in New Zealand will soon become a reality!

Robin Fordham (see below) drew together themes relating to the ornithology of the region and in general between what was taking place in the 1960s and the present. The few key players and few rules of the past have been replaced by urgent imperatives, often based on research for management. Low cost, low tech., descriptive work has given way to expensive, complex and highly analytical studies. After these thought-provoking insights, his warning about lack of resources, plus that the need for study has never been more desperate, were sobering.

Raewyn Empson produced good news about the effects of the rat eradication process on birds on Kapiti Island. First considered in 1992, the eradication of rats on the island represented an area ten times greater than any previous attempt. The plan was evaluated in 1993, then 1996 saw application of baits by air and land, with some bait stations on offshore islands. Call rate surveys and telemetry of Little Spotted Kiwi and Kaka indicated little effect due to the drop. Robins, some of which were transferred to Mana Island as a back-up (where they are thriving), lost around 50% of their population but soon bounced back, and current survival of species such as Stitchbird is looking good. While not yet declared officially mammal-free, Kapiti's prospects look positive.

Colin Miskelly continued with developments in the ecological restoration of Mana Island. While

appearing somewhat featureless from the mainland, there is a lot on the island now and more planned for the future. He detailed substantial, innovative and committed restoration of forest, wetlands and seabird colonies. Mouse-free since 1989, introductions have included Takahe, Kakapo and Little Spotted Kiwi as part of the species' recovery programmes, plus North Island Robin and current work on diving petrels and gannets. He discussed the possible addition of analogue species to replace lost species, such as Rock Wrens and a snipe subspecies.

Graeme Taylor took us through current work on the establishment of a Common Diving Petrel colony on Mana, describing attempts to date as "absolute proof that Murphy's Law does exist". Techniques include playing tapes of diving petrel (and Fairy Prion) calls, powered by solar panels, to attract birds to artificial burrows, and Enfy's Graham and others' nurse-maiding of chicks transferred from the Brothers in the Marlborough Sounds. Refinement of the "krill smoothies" fed to chicks was complicated by problems with freezers breaking down, but eventually 80% of chicks transferred in a second attempt fledged. A prime purpose is to establish exactly when birds make the decision that a site is their home, with the ultimate aim of establishing new colonies of critically endangered seabirds in new, safer localities.

After lunch, and despite competition from the rugby, a good number heard Brian Bell start out with details of two national censuses of Caspian Tern colonies at a 20 year interval (1973/74 and 1992). Around 1,500 pairs appear to have contracted to around 1,000, though colonies are notoriously affected by weather, especially high tides. Most colonies are with other gulls and terns. It was worrying that predation by Red-billed Gulls was often a problem during the actual census, and the problem may be growing with increasing human disturbance, especially early in the season.

Lloyd Esler described the birding at Daffodil Bay, Invercargill Estuary. Highly entertaining, Lloyd described the pine forest, grassland, fresh water and estuarine habitats and their birds, favoured by school groups. Severe winters in the area are "enough to drive a chap into warmer shorts". Though sound educational objectives are the goal, Lloyd cannot resist telling students about the spoonbills, all of which are female, accompanied by their male forkbills - an example of cooperative feeding, by which the males stab flounder with their bills.

Rob Schuckard followed up on information presented at the Nelson AGM on King Shags. Recent information shows that the birds were once distributed the length of New Zealand and he traced European historical reports. Seven years of his surveys of the colonies have

produced a substantial body of data. There are approximately 524-626 birds in colonies plus a few at roosts during the breeding season. Mortality and recruitment appear to indicate that they are more or less in balance.

Andrea Booth talked about the breeding ecology of the Fulmar Prion at the Bounty Islands. Her fascinating slides showed the mind-blowing difficulty of access to these wind-swept rocks, where lichens and algae form the plant cover. The Bounties are the breeding stronghold of the Fulmar Prion, and this was only the second study on the species, which established laying dates. This study collected data on such things as hatching dates, chick growth rates and feeding rate. Prions are unusual in that they are active by day - the mean was 1.2 visits per day, with up to five per nest. Weights showed that birds were also coming in to feed chicks at night.

Frances Schmechel brought us up to date with current and proposed management of Chatham Island Oystercatchers, including marram and predator control, fencing, and the provision of tyres on beaches to reduce losses of nests by flooding! The focus of her work was on establishing the carrying capacity of habitat as well as how to enhance marginal habitat. Food is probably not a problem in this species - oystercatchers often have a pool of non-breeders waiting for available breeding territory, whereas Chatham Island Oystercatchers appear to breed as soon as they are able. The hurdle to successful breeding in this species is the egg phase, not the chick phase

Brent Stephenson introduced his work on Moreporks on Mokoia Island. He discovered that the birds had small (1.7 - 4.6 ha) ranges for an owl, and roosting and activity ranges differed. There were some dispersal and movement events. Small ranges probably come about from Moreporks' insectivorousness, the mild climate, habitat quality and lack of competition from other owls.

Lastly Kerry-Jayne Wilson rounded off a splendid day by discussing threats to Chatham Petrel breeding success from competition by burgeoning populations of Broad-billed Prions on South East Island. The 50 known burrows of Chatham Petrels have low fledging success, and c.55% of the failures are due to prions. Prions are the first to breed, are more numerous and are present for much of the year, returning from their annual absences when petrel chicks are very young. 94% of prions in occupation of a burrow will return in subsequent seasons if they are relocated. Burrow turnover is also very high - up to 10 visiting birds per burrow in a season - which makes management very difficult. Peak interference of petrel chicks was in the latter part of March, predominantly between 2.00 and 4.00 am. A glimmer of hope to the problem has been

provided by a semi-barrier at burrow entrances - petrels have a high motivation to enter because of the chick inside, whereas prions may be put off. The real solution however is the provision of additional safe breeding habitat for prions on other islands, in order to take intense pressure off the sole existing habitat for both species.

Thanks must go to the speakers, and especially to Ralph Powlesland who put a fascinating programme together and for unobtrusively ensuring that the day went smoothly, despite (or perhaps because of) dire warnings of what would happen to speakers who went over their allotted time.

TONY CROCKER

Somes, Mana, Kapiti What of the 60s, and what now?

The following was a presentation as part of the Scientific Day enjoyed by members during the annual conference and AGM in Wellington over Queen's Birthday this year.

I should start by saying I'm an old Wellingtonian who grew up here. I'm going back 38 years to comment on ornithology on our three big islands - Somes, Mana and Kapiti, and contrast it with the present, although I'm well aware that a lot of people here are more familiar with Wellington than I am now. I'm going to make generalisations that I don't claim will all be new, and I'm not sure I will cover all the issues. But many of you will visit the islands tomorrow, and it could be useful to recall past conditions and attitudes, and not take the *status quo* for granted.

For me ornithology began in the Kawekas in 1959 with Graeme Caughley and Ash Cunningham, and in Wellington in 1960 with Fred Kinsky and Ron Balham. Until 1966 I studied Black-backed Gulls as a full time student with Ron, my shrewd and benevolent supervisor, and visited Somes, Mana and Kapiti fairly often. Since then I've been teaching and researching birds as well as other things.

The three islands are significant. On the whole west coast of the North Island there's nothing bigger than Mana or Kapiti (apart from Australia), and for the bottom half of the North Island they are the three main islands, now all run by DoC.

To start, I'm going to look briefly at the islands as they were in 1960, then go through some themes relating to the start of the 1960s and the end of the 1990s.

Firstly Somes Island. Somes was closed to the public in the 60s when it was the stock quarantine station for the nation. One officer and his family lived there. Transport was by *Matu*, a small

tug. There were a few run-down buildings and the lighthouse. Visitors to Somes were rare and needed permission from the Department of Agriculture. Fred Kinsky did his pioneer Blue Penguin study there. He skirted round elephant seals in the sea caves, and also banded Red-billed Gulls. I worked on Black-backs which were plentiful, and banded a lot. What I was able to clarify by banding was that the Somes Island Black-back colony was inflated by human influence, and that the population was very sedentary. Also, Somes is a very windy place and I proved category Force 10 on Lyall Watson's chart many times when trying to catch gulls at night. Fred and I were the only bird people to use Somes. Sometimes I helped the quarantine officer drive bulls and pigs up the road. Once I dehorned a cow, and put down a sheep, because the Ag. Dept vet couldn't or wouldn't do it - I never understood why. Apart from that, watching the birds was sheer pleasure, either from a hide, or at night under the trees near the lighthouse.

Mana Island was farmed for a long time before John Gault had it in the 60s. I got there in John's boat *Tutanekai* or on commercial fishing boats. Mana ran sheep. There were one or two farm buildings. As for native vegetation there were patches of tauhinu scrub and little else. But there were lots of giant weta, and cave weta (in the long drop). The gulls nested on the slopes and stony beaches, and we frequently got pooped on while banding the fledglings. Once a giant ocean sunfish came ashore by the jetty - 14 feet by 8 feet it was. It went out again on the next tide. Funnily enough I've seen only one other sunfish in my life - at the Palliser Spit gull colony - and it was a different, much smaller species - the very rare oblong sunfish. No other bird or biological work occurred on Mana then. Now, Mana supports numerous buildings, a legacy of a stock quarantine initiative that failed, and reforestation continues. Robins and Takahe have been introduced.

As for Kapiti in the 60s, I camped at the north end where a Black-back colony was spread around the edge. Landings were made with Bill Miers' boat *Bellbird* or with friends in a small dinghy. The north end had the lagoon with the old canoe, and Maori cultivated areas, lots of Weka, and a Red-bill colony that nearly met the Black-back colony. Norway rats were numerous. Of course Kapiti, apart from the north end, has been a state-owned reserve for a long time. I was not often in the reserve but I don't recall any other large scale bird studies at the time. Now there is a lot going on, including important work on Kaka, Hihii, Weka and kiwi.

I'll now run through some themes connecting ornithology in the early 60s and the late 90s.

Important influences

In the 60s the Wildlife Service was the major influence in Wellington and had some very wise ornithologists. Also Bob Falla and Fred Kinsky were at the Dominion Museum. One of them was scary if you disagreed with him - the other wasn't. The Departments of Agriculture and Lands & Survey were landowners, with influence too. Now DoC has extensive powers over land and the biota, and in my view is seriously underfunded for its responsibilities. Effectively DoC controls all research on native species, and can enhance or hinder bird work. This power tends to rest with individuals in the conservancies and needs exercising with wisdom and skill. In part that will require sufficient collaboration with ornithologists outside DoC. In the current structure a national perspective on species can be lost.

Rules and Attitudes

In the 60s there weren't many rules governing work on birds, but permits to land were necessary. Sometimes verbal agreements were sufficient. There was no such thing as an Animal Ethics Approval. Animal welfare is much better now and still improving. So is the safety of workers which was pretty much a non-issue in the 60s.

In the 60s Maori views weren't considered. Now Maori myths and attitudes are considered for reasons of cultural sensitivity. The ultimate test of this dimension, along with all other information, is its survival value to the species. Cultural harvesting is especially problematic. Luckily there have been no sit-ins or occupations (so far as I'm aware) on the three islands - excepting the north end of Kapiti.

Students and Technology

In the 60s the community of bird students was small. In fact there were hardly any. In 1961 I was the only one in Wellington, and possibly New Zealand. All the research students on land vertebrates knew each other. Now it's nearly impossible to know all the bird students, and scores of land vertebrate students, personally.

In the 60s local bird issues were worked on by locals. Now local problems on Mana and Kapiti may be worked on by people based far away, for example in Otago or Auckland. Research in the 60s was pretty cheap. Now it's costly and corporate sponsorships are common. In the 60s the beach patrol and nest record schemes were run literally out of shoe boxes. That was how I met my good friend Brian Boeson. Calculators were mechanical - in the advanced models you turned a handle and rang bells. Computers didn't exist, and words and data were tediously recorded on mechanical typewriters with three or four carbon copies. Now with remote

monitoring and molecular and physiological techniques, for example, ornithology can be highly technical. Not only that but the hypotheses and questions, and analyses, are very sophisticated.

Research Strategy

In the 60s, apart from game birds, ornithology was largely descriptive and done for knowledge's sake. There was outstanding cooperation, with good will and "free" help. Perhaps not all decisions were sound, but it was good to establish base lines. Conservation was not a driving force in research and was in its infancy. Most ornithology was *not* directed straight at management. Now however ornithology is much more coordinated, structured and applied. There is heavy emphasis on 'management by research' and 'recovery plans'. Conservation is a profound imperative.

Now, also, emphasis in government-funded research is on "need to know" for management. Clearly this is driven by resources, but from an academic standpoint it is unfortunate and unwise. "Need to know" information for management, and information that would be extremely useful to know, is not part of a straight continuum, but rather a loop. One sort feeds and illuminates the other. The truth is that short-term research on small, apparently do-able bird problems can lack meaning without wider effort, the outcome can be spurious, and it is poor science.

Research Directions

In the 60s again, apart from game birds, there really weren't research foci in ornithology. Now there are strong forces that shape it. For example, islands and "mainland islands". Now islands are the only places where certain work can be done, some birds having disappeared from the mainland. Restoring habitat, cleansing habitat, and enriching habitat is occurring on Somes, Mana and Kapiti, and is very important. Reintroduction of species has become a very powerful focus, but was hardly considered in the 60s, and the label "reintroduction biology" wasn't used. But conditions on the mainland for many birds have deteriorated sharply since the 60s, for instance Hihii, kiwi, Kokako and Saddleback, and continue to do so. Now, however, warnings are sounding about the downside effects on invertebrates of placing birds willy nilly on islands. There needs to be a balance across the groups that need conserving. There is also captive breeding now, and wonderful attempts to establish novel colonies, for example on Mana with gannets and diving petrels.

Threats

In the 60s we were relatively unaware of the serious threats facing birds. For instance we knew there were mice on Somes and Mana, and rats and possums

on Kapiti. And mustelids, rodents, cats and hedgehogs, pigs and goats around the Wellington coast. But there was not enough concern to stimulate strong action. Now there is a hair trigger awareness to mammal predators. Thanks to DoC and others, there have been, and are, extensive mammal control programmes on the islands. On Kapiti, however, the north end remains a weakness. Illegal trade in birds is also a real threat, that didn't exist possibly in the 60s, but these days is something to watch out for.

Authorised killing of native species is another threat. For example the Black-Backed Gull colony is actively killed in Wellington. Part of the reason given is its effect on other species. Since other native species also affect other species, but are not killed for it, the remedy is applied unequally. In the case of the gulls, *people* generate the problems and that is the end that needs treating. Given the varied heavy pressures already bearing on many birds, killing any native species is a soft option, but a dangerous step on the slippery path to extinction. There are examples of this all around the world. Strict separation of subspecies or races in breeding programmes when numbers of a species is low and falling fast is another potential threat. Slavish adherence to this approach would be silly, when survival of whole species is at stake.

Education

In the 60s there was little advocacy for birds or public education beyond permitted trips to Kapiti and Wildlife Service posters and signs. Somes and Mana were closed. Now Somes is wide open to the public, Kapiti receives large numbers of visitors by permit, and talks and tours are possible. There are risks in this - we have to assume responsible behaviour by the public, and as the rugby broadcasters say "that's a big ask"! The best thing now is that students of all ages can take learning trips to Somes and to some extent Kapiti. Recruiting passionate ornithologists can only be good.

In summary, the advances in ornithology on Somes, Mana and Kapiti in 38 years are many and exciting. But the need to study and conserve birds has never been more desperate. I began with a sunset slide because the 60s are gone. However New Zealand has a great flock of young ornithologists who have lots of skills and who will grow in experience and wisdom. The problems for us all concern dollars and priorities. Let's hope we can solve them.

ROBIN FORDHAM

Matiu - Somes Island field trip

Two days after the Scientific Day at the 1998 Conference and AGM in

Wellington, and after the previous day's disappointing cancellation of trips to Mana and Kapiti, twenty four members, guided by Reg Cotter, were delighted to be out on a calm, sunny Wellington Harbour heading for Matiu - Somes Island.

Fluttering Shearwaters sped past the boat and it was easy to spot the small groups of Blue Penguins on the glassy waters. As we came into the wharf we disturbed forty Little Black Shags which we later watched diving for fish below the western cliffs.

Other birds noted on the reefs and stacks surrounding the island were Spotted, Little and Pied Shags, Variable Oystercatchers, Black-backed Gulls and three long-time resident Canada Geese.

As we climbed the track, Reg pointed out the monument to those adults and children who had died here when the island was an immigrant quarantine station last century. Resident ranger, Richard Anderson, expanded on the history of the island when he talked to us - the early Maori occupation, its uses in European times as a human quarantine station, an enemy alien camp in two world wars and its eighty years as an animal quarantine station. Three years ago DoC assumed responsibility for its management and is restoring it to something of its original state. To this end much planting of local species has taken place, organised by Lower Hutt branch of Forest and Bird. We were shown the healthy seedlings in the nursery and areas of planted and regenerating bush. Richard pointed out the need to balance historical and natural values.

Land birds at present are largely European species, but it is hoped to attract and reintroduce some of the original fauna when the habitat can again support them. A start has been made with giant weta from Mana and tree weta. Tomtits, Tui, Bellbirds and NZ Pigeons are envisaged and, in the long term, some of New Zealand's more threatened species. Perhaps even seabirds such as Fluttering Shearwaters will be introduced. The potential is there, and we came away convinced that Matiu has an exciting future in store, to match its colourful and interesting past.

STELLA ROWE

Nominations for Regional Representatives 1999

Each region of the Society shall have a Regional Representative who will be an Officer of the Society and as such is responsible to the Council for the management of the region. Each RR shall serve for one year (from 1 January 1999) and is eligible for re-election.

Nominations for the Regional Representative of each region of the Society will close with the Secretary (P.O. Box 12397, Wellington) on 31 July 1998. The nomination paper for each RR must be signed by two financial members of the Society from that region and must be consented to in writing by the person nominated, who must be a financial member of the Society.

If more than one valid nomination is received by the Secretary a postal ballot will be held among the financial members of the region. If no nomination is received from a region, Council may appoint an RR for the 1999 year.

CHRISTINE REED

Secretary

Why I Go On Beach Patrol

In March 1960 Mum and Dad gave me my first copy of Roberts' *Birds of Southern Africa* for my fourteenth birthday. I treasure the book to this day and still occasionally add to the hundreds of hours' use I have made of it over the years. At 14 I was already a keen young bird watcher, but what really fascinated me in the book were the black and white prints of birds in the very front which I could not comprehend in landlocked Zimbabwe.

We were at least 300 miles from the nearest coastline and well over a thousand miles from Cape Town, where most of these black and white birds seemed to be recorded.

In that same year I found a wonderful book in the library entitled *The Wandering Albatross* that described in well written detail the biology of this remarkable bird. I remember thinking that one day I would work out a way to see them - and all the others. Seabirds for me became the Dream Birds.

It wasn't a dream I worried about, because finding 100 different species in a day's birding in Zimbabwe wasn't all that difficult. Two years later however it took on a different dimension as we sailed out of Cape Town in the early evening on the purple-hulled *Windsor Castle* on our way to the UK.

Before it got light I was on deck with my heavy Barr & Stroud 7x50s waiting for the birds. By that time we would have been 300 miles north of the Cape but still in the plankton-rich Benguela current which runs up the Namibian coast. I can easily recall the excitement of it now. As the light came there were my black and white birds. And as the light continued to come the birds were still black and white - just like the Roberts prints!

It was both exciting and hard work. Exciting in that for the first time I experienced the absolute exhilaration of watching birds that made flight an art form. Hard in both keeping up with them and in identifying them.

As so often happens I met another bird enthusiast. An elderly man who had done this before, so between us we chalked up Wilson's Storm Petrel - a little black job with a white rump - Cape Pigeon in good numbers and a bird I've not seen since that we called "Schlegel's Petrel". Today it is more commonly known as the Atlantic Petrel *Pterodroma incerta*, a medium-sized brown and white bird not unlike our White-headed Petrel.

But first prize was a Wandering Albatross which followed the ship for about two hours. I couldn't take my glasses off this amazing bird with the effortless flight, and I was no different 30 years later on board the *Monarch* in Dunedin Harbour as two Royals gybed in front of us en route to their nests on Taiaroa Head.

But it's not all nostalgia. My beach patrol story is also about inspiration from others and about achievement.

Every month I take with me to Muriwai Beach Sharen's well worn 1978 edition of the New Zealand field guide. Years ago the Waikato branch of OSNZ organised one of the best weekends we've ever had with the society at a lodge near Raglan and Mt Pirongia. Mike Imber was the guest expert at the "Seabirds Workshop" and brought with him a fine collection of our offshore birdlife.

Mike did a brilliant job explaining the finer points of these "black and white" birds, and I made short notes next to the plates in the field guide - wing, tail and bill measurements, feather patterns, and even when and where we might find them. We use the old guide and these notes every month, and I can't see that changing.

Also inspirational to me was Pat Crombie. Pat was "front line" when it came to beach patrol birding. No sterile academic environment for Pat! Give him a maggot-riddled, stinking, twisted mass of feathers and slime and he would quietly examine and untwist the pieces. He'd calmly point out different features, including sternum shapes, as we watched from a distance, and lead us logically to another "C" Sooty Shearwater.

All of the above is very well, but given the miles Sharen and I have walked on beaches there is definitely a need for the occasional pay-back. And every now and then we get it.

In 1983 we picked up a green bottle with a name and address on a piece of flimsy paper. We sent off the details of where and when we had found the bottle and were rewarded with a lovely letter and photographs from a lady in Blacktown near Sydney. Her young daughter had conceived the idea when they were on a summer cruise holiday

in Vanuatu and the bottle was thrown into the sea from the ship as they left the island.

We have been rewarded by having spoonbills land on the beach next to us. We've seen Whimbrels, New Zealand Dotterels, godwits, and had Kerguelen Petrels flying above the huge Muriwai surf as we walked. We've picked up exhausted racing pigeons and escaped roller canaries - twice. But there is one pay-back better than all the others.

For all beach patrollers there is the possibility of picking up a dead bird with a leg band, and that is the ultimate pay-back because then we can share a social as well as a visual identity. And it happens.

I was with a birding group on Bardsey Island off the coast of Wales banding Manx Shearwaters. Six weeks later one of our banded birds flew into a spotlight on a fishing boat off the coast of Argentina. In Zimbabwe we banded some Red-billed Teal that lived on the farm dam. Nine months later we received the band of one that had been shot in Ethiopia, thousands of miles away in north east Africa. In Zimbabwe we found a European Swallow with a leg band from Poland.

On Muriwai we have in the past found wrecked gannets banded at the local colony that were useful in terms of establishing the age of these breeding birds.

This year we recovered two birds with leg bands. The first was a Caspian Tern that was ringed as a juvenile on the Kaipara Harbour some eight months earlier. The most recent, in May of this year, a Sooty Shearwater banded as recently as the month before by Graeme Taylor on a small island at Bethells Beach. It didn't get far, and we wonder why because it was superficially such a big and healthy-looking bird.

But the interest doesn't end there. Knowing of breeding shearwaters and petrels at Bethells Beach on the west coast of Auckland, Graeme Taylor and a few of us locals have been looking for other sites. The good news is that we now know that Grey-faced Petrels are breeding at a number of sites on the coast at Bethells, Piha and Kerikeri, and remarkably at the tip of Cornwallis Park peninsula that juts out into the Manukau Harbour.

20 Grey-faced Petrels have been banded at this site, but the most amazing event was catching one and finding a band already fitted. The bird in question had been banded in 1971 on Whale Island - way off to the east in the Bay of Plenty.

Beach patrolling has already made a major contribution to ornithology in New Zealand and will undoubtedly continue to do so. I would encourage OSNZ members to support this unique method of studying our offshore black and white birds.

MIKE GRAHAM

Beach Patrol Scheme in 1997 - preliminary report

This report concerns the results from 450 cards sent to the beach patrol convenor up until 1 April 1998. In 1997 3,084 km were patrolled by OSNZ members and friends. This distance is well under the average of 4,007 km per year travelled during the period 1970-1994. Only five coastal sections had more than 100 km of beaches patrolled in 1997. These were Northland West (1,199 km), Auckland West (413 km), Northland East (517 km), East Coast North Island (118 km) and Southland (202 km). No cards were submitted from West Coast, Fiordland or Outlying Islands coastal sections.

Dead seabirds found in 1997 totalled 5,266. This is much fewer than the average of 9,382 dead seabirds found per year in 1970-1994. Of the coastal sections where greater than 50 kms were covered in 1997, Southland had the highest rate of recovery at 5.86 birds per km. This was closely followed by 5.61 birds per km on Taranaki beaches. The lowest rate of recovery was on East Coast North Island beaches, with 0.69 birds per km. Well done Hawkes Bay members for pursuing regular patrols in unrewarding circumstances.

Unusual finds included one Snares Crested Penguin found in February on a Southland beach (fourth record for the scheme), one White-capped Noddy on an Auckland West beach in January (fifth record for the scheme) and one Black-bellied Storm Petrel found on a Southland beach in December (seventh record for the scheme). A Long-tailed Skua was also found on an Auckland West beach in January.

Although fewer birds than average were picked up in 1997, several species had larger wrecks than normal. There were 139 Mottled Petrels picked up on beach patrols. This is the largest number recorded since the start of the scheme and is more than twice the previous highest annual total. 83 Yellow-eyed Penguins were found dead on beaches in 1997. This is also the highest number reported since the start of the scheme. However many of these birds were found by the public and handed in to the Otago Museum. The numbers are therefore higher than would be expected from regular beach patrols from OSNZ members. Other species with higher than usual numbers recovered were Wandering Albatrosses, Buller's Mollymawks, Australasian Gannets and Fiordland Crested Penguins.

Several species of seabirds were wrecked in smaller numbers than usual. Only six Cook's Petrels were recovered. This is the lowest total since 1972. 15 Little Shearwaters were found on

beaches. This is the lowest number reported since 1976. Other species with lower than usual totals were Buller's Shearwaters, Little Shags and Black-backed Gulls. The latter total might reflect the reduced numbers of this species in the North Island after intensive gull control programmes in the 1990s.

The weather in 1997 was characterised by strong easterly winds in the north in late summer and autumn, with severe tropical cyclones passing close to New Zealand between January and May. In southern New Zealand, seas were calmer and warmer than usual during summer. From October to December, very strong southerly and northwesterly winds developed as a result of the El Niño weather pattern. These contrasting weather patterns may have contributed to tropical birds being found early in the year and Southern Ocean species washing ashore in early summer.

GRAEME TAYLOR
Convenor

Nest Record Scheme - report for the year ending 30 April 1998

This year, 27 members and friends contributed 162 cards covering 21 species, bringing the grand total to 24,284 cards. To date, 145 species are included in the scheme. Despite the national gull and tern colony survey, very few Colonial Nest Record Cards (12) were submitted for these species.

The number of contributors to the scheme was relatively low (only about 2% of New Zealand members), but it was good to get cards from several new observers. The diversity of species (21) was also low this year, and, probably for the first time in the history of the scheme, no cards were submitted for common garden birds such as finches, Song Thrush or Silvereye. However, on the other hand, a quality collection of 97 cards was again received for Brown Kiwi nests studied by Pat Miller during a Kiwi Recovery Programme project in Northland.

The major contributors, in terms of numbers of cards, were: Pat Miller (95), Bruce Mackereth (17) and Tony Crocker (14).

Information from the Nest Records Scheme on Morepork breeding biology has been used this year by Brent Stephenson for his Masters thesis.

No progress has been made on computerising the Nest Record Scheme data as I have been catching up on a backlog of other tasks.

Many thanks to all of the contributors to the scheme and to those who have encouraged members to take part.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS IN 1997/98:
David Baker, Hugh Clifford, Rogan

Colbourne, Tony Crocker, Paul Cumming, Raewyn Empson, D. Fastier, Peter Howden, Jeroen Lurling, Bruce Mackereth, Pat Miller, Mike North, Sheila Petch, David Pye, Ian Reid, Hugh Robertson, John & Stella Rowe, Peter Schweigman, Edith & Peter Smith, Alan Tennyson, Tertia Therley, Jamie Wood and Bev Woolley.

LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED IN 1997/98:

Brown Kiwi 95, Tokoeka 2, Black Shag 2, Royal Spoonbill 2, Feral Goose 1, Pukeko 6, South Island Pied Oystercatcher 1, Variable Oystercatcher 5, Pied Stilt 4, NZ Dotterel 12, Banded Dotterel 3, Black-backed Gull 8, Red-billed Gull 1, Black-fronted Tern 3, Caspian Tern 3, White-fronted Tern 1, Blackbird 1, Grey Warbler 1, NZ Robin 7, Starling 3, Kokako 1.

HUGH ROBERTSON
Nest Record Scheme Convenor

S.W Pacific Island records - 1997/98

A request in the March 1997 issue of *OSNZ News* for information on Norfolk Island received replies from nine members of OSNZ and a member from the RAOU (Birds Australia). Their submissions covered 1979 to 1997, with data on 76 species seen on, or over the sea close to, the Norfolk Island group, including 12 species not previously recorded from the group. A report incorporating the data is now nearing completion.

During 1997/98 the scheme also received submissions, which are held on file, relating to the following island groups -

Vanuatu for March 1991
Cook Islands for Oct-Dec 1992
W. Samoa for Sep-Oct 1993
Fiji for Aug 1994

A copy of a published report on petrels in French Polynesia has also been deposited with the scheme for reference purposes.

Information provided in response to a request from the Birds Australia Rarities Committee in 1997 led to new evidence which permitted the reassessment of an albatross in Norfolk Island in 1985 and 1986 and its formal acceptance as Australia's first Laysan Albatross.

JIM MOORE
Convenor, S.W. Pacific Island
Records.

Banding Liaison Officer report 1997/98

This year has been quieter than usual, which I guess is a good sign. No problems or general concerns were brought to my notice by members, and there has been only a trickle of enquiries. Banders seem to be satisfied with the way the Banding Scheme is being run.

During the year I received from the Banding Officer four applications for banding permits for comment and recommendation:

- Sheila Petch and Tony Crocker: to band Black-billed Gull chicks with area and season colour/metal band combinations on the Ashley River and at Peacock Springs near Christchurch (see *OSNZ News* 86).

- Jacinda Amey: to band Fulmar Prion adults and chicks with metal bands on the Bounty Islands during the summer of 1997/98.

- Lloyd Esler: to band Black-backed Gull chicks with metal bands at the colony on Tiwai Spit, Bluff Harbour.

- Jamie Wood: to band Black-billed Gull chicks with area and season colour/metal band combinations at two colonies on river beds near Invercargill.

All were eventually approved. As usual some of the applicants provided so little information about their proposed banding that it was not clear what they were planning to do or why. In these cases the Banding Officer (and/or B.L.O.) had to ask for more detail. It would be appreciated if future applicants would at least list the objectives of their study, and give a detailed description of what they planned to do, as well as some indication of how they intended to use their results.

CHRIS CHALLIES
Banding Liaison Officer

University Liaison

Ornithology has from its inception been blessed with gifted amateurs, people who observe birds because of their love for and interest in them, with no other reward for this than the satisfaction of doing something of great intrinsic interest and pleasure. On the other side field ornithology is often demanding and generally time-consuming. What better then than to attempt to harness these two streams by seeking to bring the amateur and the researcher together. A useful initiative from the President.

My job for the Society over the past year has been to begin this process. It has been pretty low key to date, and in the absence of any reports of a positive return, probably without success. I have

begun as requested, by obtaining information about student research projects from each of the universities, or more exactly, from the majority that responded, and forwarding this on to the editor of *OSNZ News*. The next step, devoutly hoped for, would be that members, on reading this long list of projects, would offer to help where appropriate.

Has this happened? Not that I know of.

So we need to do a number of things. To publicise the value of help by members in the universities, to encourage members to approach students whose work interests them, and somehow to get some feedback on what has happened or what might happen.

In the meantime I will get another listing of projects for this year. And this time when sending for this information from each relevant department I will offer the list of Regional Representatives so that some contact might be achieved.

EUAN YOUNG

OSNZ Library - annual report

The Library continues as usual to service a large circulation of members with a variety of journals.

The journals are now boxed which facilitates shelving and finding information. Numerous requests are dealt with through the Interloan service, plus requests from our own members.

Several new books have been acquired throughout the year, some reviewed and some donated - a list of these is available on request.

Once again my thanks go to Lyn Duff for her invaluable help and to Janice Chong for her support. The reshelving of the journals should be accomplished over the coming month.

KATHY BARROW
Librarian

CSN - a reminder

The deadline for material to be in the hands of the island collators is 31 August. Anything received later will be held over until next year.

In the first instance, members should send their material to the appropriate Regional Recorder, who is responsible for collating the region's contribution. In order to have time to complete this task, Regional Recorders need to receive members' contributions by 31 July.

The CSN year runs from 1 July to 30 June, so now is the time to extract all those observations from your notebooks.

To assist with the process, below is a list of the Regional Recorders to whom the appropriate observations should be sent.

Far North: Janet Snell, 1/17 Collingwood Street, Whangarei.

Northland: Pauline Smith, 11/31 Ford Ave, Kamo, Whangarei.

Auckland: Mel Galbreath, 62 Holyoake Place, Birkenhead, Auckland, Ph. (09) 480 1958.

South Auckland: Pam Agnew, 3 Dianne-Louise Drive, Bucklands Beach, Auckland, Ph. (09) 535 4222.

Waikato: David Riddell, Woodlands Road, Gordonton, R.D.1 Hamilton.

Bay of Plenty: Paddy Latham, 72 Simpson Road, Papamoa, Ph. (07) 542 0406.

Gisborne/Wairoa: Geoff Foreman, 6 Rimu Drive, Wairoa, Ph. (06) 838 8370.

Taranaki: Rosemary Messenger, Upland Road, No2RD, New Plymouth, Ph. (06) 756 7496.

Manawatu: Ian Saville, 23 Duke Street, Feilding.

Wanganui: Tom Teasdale, 33 Paterson Street, Aramono, Wanganui, Ph. (06) 343 9992.

Hawkes Bay: Margaret Twydale, 124 Nelson Crescent, Napier, Ph. (06) 835 6563.

Wairarapa: Colin Scadden, 15 Madden Place, Masterton.

Wellington: Reg Cotter, 1 Bolton Street, Petone.

Nelson: Gail Quayle, 6 Tressillian Ave, Nelson, Ph. (03) 545 0456.

Marlborough: Bill Cash, 67 Lakings Road, Blenheim, Ph. (03) 578 6594.

West Coast: Bruce Stuart-Menteith, P.O. Box 36, Punakaiki, Ph. (03) 731 1826.

Canterbury: Jill West, 59 Strickland Street, Spreydon, Christchurch, Ph. (03) 337 1151.

Otago: Alun Baines, 41 Marion Street, MacAndrew Bay, Dunedin, Ph. (03) 476 1022.

Southland: Lloyd Esler, 64 Herriot Street, Invercargill, Ph. (03) 217 9060.

New Members

The Society would like welcome all new members who have joined since the start of 1998:

Sue Beauchamp, Edward Clarke and family, Hilary Adams, Mr & Mrs Tim Holmes, Kirsty Chambers, Robin Gardener-Gee, Gill Harker, Paul Asquith, John Simmons, Kevin Parker, Emma Ross, Maureen Peskett, Andy Pettit, Stuart Vogel, David Wright, Samuel Brown, Cheryl Meier, Shinichi Nakagawa, Sue Moore, Mrs S. Barker, Odette Singleton, Annette Assen, Robert Stone, Merryn

Bayliss, Mike Dickson, Julie Carter, John Heffernan, Ross Leger, Celine Albrecht, Chris Richmond, David Thompson, Mark Rossiter, David Wallace, Neville Todd, Lucy Anton, Sarah Gibbs, Jim O'Malley, Brian Thomas Harding, David Bush, Tui de Roy, David Haldane, Shane Handcock, Moira Pryde, Kirsty Moran, Gillian Pollock, Katrina Bonnington, Stuart Lauder, Paul Simmons, Bruce Kirkman, Wendy Sullivan, Beverley Alexander, Helen Pickering, Varda Zakay; Science Fair Winners Mathew Cornelissen, Wendy Sullivan, Nicholas Sigglekow; Overseas - J. Alan Theall, Ann Preston.

HAZEL HARTY

Membership Secretary

Donations

The Society wishes to acknowledge all those who have made a donation, and thanks you for your support.

Dr Michael Fitzgerald, Phil Moors, Mike & Sharen Graham, Cheryl Doyle, Tony Beauchamp, Ross Leger, Bill Campbell, Jean Mackenzie, Peter Howden, Janet Drake, M.I. Taylor, Mrs S. Barker, Willie Cook, Rob Schuckard, Gillian Eller, G.R. Brown, Peter Grant, Mark McFadden, Roy Weston, David Baker, W.A. Watters, Shinichi Nakagawa, Neil Cheshire, Margaret Bishop, Patrick Buxton, Celine Albrecht, Mark Nee, Kenneth Buchanan, Kay Haslett, Helen Cook, J.P.C. Watt, Mandy Ridley, Ron Goudswaard, Geoff de Lisle, Graham Hunt, Carl Hayson, Tony Habraken, Mr & Mrs D.M. Stracey, Margaret King, Colin Miskelly, Lois Wagener, Mrs I.M. Cater.

HAZEL HARTY

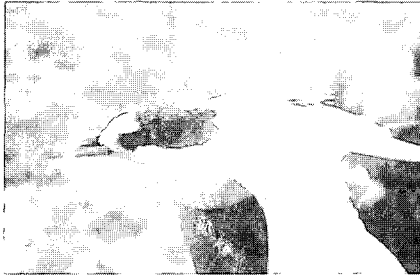
Membership Secretary

A First for Fairy Terns

In the ongoing management of the New Zealand Fairy Tern, concern about the possibility of a gender bias in the population has occupied the minds of those involved with the species, because a bias could affect the long-term viability of the population. Sexing terns is, therefore, a high priority for the Recovery Plan Programme.

As part of my research through the Ecology Group at Massey University, permission was sought from the Department of Conservation to catch and obtain small blood samples from both chick and adult Fairy Terns. Using genetic sequencing techniques with DNA, the sex of each individual will be established.

The chicks were a relatively easy matter, as samples were taken when they were banded before fledging. Until now



Fairy Tern in eclipse plumage. Notice the mottled crown and black on the bill.
Photo: John Dowding

catching adults had neither been needed nor officially conducted in New Zealand. The choice of which technique to use was controversial, but noose matting was the best option to try as it would have the least risk of injury.

I approached John Dowding, who has perfected this technique for his New Zealand Dotterel work, and has a wealth of experience of it over the past ten years or so. Accepting the challenge, John and I tried our first run on Bird Island, Waikiri Creek, on 23 February. Unfortunately things did not go our way. Although five terns arrived and settled on Sandy Foreshore of Bird Island, juvenile Black-backed Gulls were chasing the flighty pre-migratory waders and all five terns flew away. Not perturbed by this experience, we had another go at Te Arai Canal, Mangawhai on 3 March.

John needed the terns to walk over the mats, which is difficult as they usually fly when disturbed. Approaching them on his stomach near the shoreline was not effective as the terns just flew several metres away, and the mats had to be reset. However, once they were settled beside the canal, John found that by approaching them slowly on foot the terns flew only a short distance away. With tremendous patience and perseverance from John, two adult Fairy Terns were caught.

This was very exciting because the birds were already banded. John and I were especially elated with catching one of them since it was from a pair I studied during the 1997/98 breeding season, and is therefore an extra bonus for my observational work and a known female.

Neither bird seemed unduly stressed by the experience, though John received a few good pecks. Dr Bert Westera helped by taking samples of blood, which went well. An hour after high tide, three terns arrived at Bird Island and, to my delight, both trapped birds were among the three, as well as an unbanded bird. Both birds seemed well, and this sighting was a welcome relief to us all concerned about their well-being after their experience.

SARA TREADGOLD

Unusual Waders near New Plymouth

On 22 February I visited the Waiongana Rivermouth in the course of my regular checks on the birds to be found there. The Waiongana is a small stony river with a lagoon and a large area of stony foreshore exposed at low tide. It is approximately 14 kms from New Plymouth and ten minutes walk from my home.

Associating with a small flock of Pied Stilts was a wader I had not seen before. It was about half the size of a Pied Stilt, generally white below and brownish above, with a straight bill and long legs. It had the distinctive habit of holding its body still but pumping its neck and head up and down. When in flight its legs trailed well beyond the tail, and a white rump and white 'V' up the back were particularly noticeable. It was actively feeding on the foreshore among rocks and small pools of sea water left as the tide receded. I was later joined by David Medway and together we observed and photographed what was identified as a Marsh Sandpiper. I saw it on a number of occasions but it left the area in about mid March.

On 28 February at the same locality I saw another bird which I did not recognise flying rapidly along the foreshore. It settled beside adult and juvenile Pied Stilts, being of similar size to the latter. It was very wary and difficult to approach, and called with a loud "tuu-tuu-tuu" whenever it took flight. I managed to get some reasonable photos which, together with my notes taken at the time, confirmed it was a Greenshank. I saw it only on that day.

There is no record of either species having previously been seen in this area.

PETER FRYER



Marsh Sandpiper in flight. Waiongana River mouth 22 Feb. 1998.

Photo: David Medway.

Nankeen Kestrel at Farewell Spit

On 26 April we observed a Nankeen Kestrel at the bay-flat south of the airstrip on Farewell Spit. It perched at the top of a piece of driftwood, elevated above the drowned mudflats. The crown was chestnut-brown with a clearly visible dark eye-stripe. The saddle and upperparts were alternate brown and fine black stripes going from the neck downward to the upper shoulders. The terminal black band on the tail was also clearly visible. The kestrel had a bluish bill and yellow legs.

It caught a prey item which looked like a crab or big insect. We slowly approached to within 15-20 metres. Nankeen Kestrels are scarce non-breeding visitors to New Zealand, recorded from most regions. There are a few records from the Nelson-Marlborough area.

HENK HEINEKAMP, ESTHER,
EWEN & ROB SCHUCKARD

Volunteers Needed

In September of this year, I will be starting a three year study for my PhD research investigating the causes of mortality at different life stages of braided riverbed birds in the Mackenzie Basin. The species I will be working with include Banded Dotterels, South Island Pied Oystercatchers, Pied Stilts and Black-fronted Terns.

Volunteers are needed to help with monitoring nesting attempts, banding birds, radio-tagging chicks and juveniles and radio-tracking tagged individuals. The study season runs from September to January and volunteers will be needed throughout this period.

I am aiming to secure a food and accommodation allowance of \$150 per week, but funding is not available to pay wages.

Volunteers will learn a range of bird handling and observational skills, and there may be opportunities to work with the Department of Conservation on other projects in subsequent seasons if good bird skills are learnt. Due to the nature of the work and the time it takes to become familiar with the species, preference will be given to volunteers who can offer their services for at least a month.

If you are interested, please contact me for further details on (03) 435 0375 (work) or 435 0587 (home).

RACHEL KEEDWELL

Kawhia Harbour
Census Results
Waikato OSNZ
93 to '97

	Winter					Summer				
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Black Shag	5	5	-	2	3	15	2	3	1	7
Pied Shag	42	60	55	131	45	39	34	39	110	37
Little B Shag	50	26	9	-	1	-	2	-	-	-
Little Shag	60	1	3	5	-	6	1	2	1	5
White-f Heron	61	47	32	69	22	72	32	55	89	16
Reef Heron	3	2	4	2	1	1	1	-	1	-
Spoonbill	17	31	32	47	40	5	7	2	11	2
Black Swan	6	63	c2000	95	>250	110	>122	99	382	>305
Paradise Duck	2	-	-	2	2	46	10	107	88	2
Mallard	284	c360	141	399	117	10	7	10	27	45
Harrier	2	5	-	-	-	1	1	-	4	2
SIPO	c1716	c3263	c1777	1929	>1968	819	>726	1033	735	778
VOC	13	4	5	7	6	10	6	16	12	12
S W Plover	-	15	53	26	7	-	2	34	21	19
Banded dotterel	409	340	c450	210	c350	-	-	5	2	3
NZ Dotterel	5	2	9	6	9	6	6	12	7	4
Whimbrel	-	1	3	-	1	-	-	-	10	7
Godwit	306	c600	185	194	c267	3883	>3610	3050	2094	>4000
Pied Stilt	229	364	224	380	c110	45	28	70	>60	92
Hybrid/Black Stilt	8	10	10	13	11	1	-	-	-	-
SBB Gull	257	28	64	50	48	82	31	130	83	197
Red-billed gull	91	16	100	56	97	68	>66	124	>98	78
Caspian tern	29	-	21	24	8	57	5	12	78	64
W f Tern	20	-	1	-	-	65	4	5	10	9
Kingfisher	2	5	6	24	8	5	1	1	8	2
Gannet	1	1	6	2	9	1	-	-	-	1

Aotea Harbour
Census Results
Waikato OSNZ
93 to '97

	Winter					Summer				
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Black Shag	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	1
Pied Shag	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	3	-
Little B Shag	1	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Little Shag	4	-	9	5	-	1	-	-	2	3
White-f Heron	4	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	12	1
Reef Heron	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1
Black Swan	20	-	-	-	1	84	65	110	274	>11
Paradise Duck	6	-	278	2	-	3	-	2	20	7
Mallard	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Harrier	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
SIPO	342	-	1034	700	550	420	120	260	4	243
VOC	2	-	-	-	3	2	-	-	2	2
S W Plover	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-
Banded dotterel	-	-	33	55	8	-	-	-	2	3
NZ Dotterel	-	-	-	2	4	-	-	-	2	5
Godwit	176	-	95	165	46	1280	c1000	810	1950	c1750
Pied Stilt	11	-	50	175	13	-	-	-	7	-
SBB Gull	35	13	6	8	11	-	14	4	5	13
Red-billed gull	25	-	32	42	18	5	16	-	38	29
Caspian tern	6	-	30	23	2	2	15	19	17	10
W f Tern	-	-	-	-	-	40	12	-	28	2
Kingfisher	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-
Gannet	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	3	-

Waikato Harbours census - 5 yearly update

This compilation of Kawhia and Aotea Harbour shorebird census figures follows on from the December 1987 and June 1994 *OSNZ News* updates respectively. OSNZ members, DoC, friends and volunteers carry out biannual counts for both harbours, one in June, one in November. Their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. These winter/summer figures are presented in the tables.

Points of interest over the last five years are:

Kawhia: White-fronted Tern numbers are consistently low, apart from in 1993. This leads one to speculate if the summer of 1992/93 was a good breeding season for them. If they have survived however they have certainly not stayed on the harbour - at least not on census days. In the 1980s it was not uncommon to count 300+ White-fronted Terns.

Numbers of Little Black and Little Shags were high in 1993, but lower since then. Black and/or hybrid Stilt numbers remain a constant feature in winter, one particular bird returning in each of the last three years. Winter numbers of Royal Spoonbills are rising, with many birds having colour bands on their legs. Paradise Shelducks use the harbour mainly in summer, while Mallards move in during the winter.

Aotea: White-fronted Tern numbers were sporadic in summer, non-existent in winter. Pied Stilts don't appear to use the harbour as much in summer.

Possible inter-harbour movements: Godwit numbers at Kawhia in the summer of 1996 were low, which coincided with a high count at Aotea.

Weather: High winds at Kawhia affected both the 1994 counts, and also affected both 1997 Aotea counts. On more than one occasion nests on Te Motu sandbank belonging to gulls, terns and dotterels were washed away in front of participants' eyes.

Rarities: Kawhia - Wrybill, Lesser Knot, Red-necked Stint, Arctic Skua, Australasian Bittern, Cattle Egret, Banded Rail, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Black-billed Gull, Eastern Curlew, Turnstone. Aotea - Lesser Knot in 1994 - there were usually 1-3 in every 1980s summer census at Aotea.

PAUL CUMING

Rabbits and Harriers

What effect will the reduction of rabbits have on the population of the Australasian Harrier since the introduction of the rabbit calicivirus?

The diet of the Australasian Harrier is well known - both carrion and live prey, from dead sheep, road kills, frogs, lizards, large insects, ducklings to name most of the diet. The introduced rabbit is the other and important part of their diet.

A statement by the manager of the Regional Pest Services in the *Otago Daily Times* of 22 May: "Predators such as ferrets, feral cats and even hawks have increased in number since the rabbit calicivirus epidemic..." has not been substantiated, and I doubt if one can see in such a short time that the hawk (harrier) has increased in numbers.

Susan and I spent Easter in the Maniatoto, but didn't see any rabbits, live or dead. We did a tally of rabbits, harriers and road kills. A simple check from Naseby to St Bathans gave one harrier per 9 km. The Pigroot was somewhat better with one per 5 km, but more than 50% of that figure were dead harriers, killed while feeding on dead possums, I suppose.

Alan and Connie Wright did see one live and one dead rabbit between Dunedin and the Haast. They did a similar exercise, a harrier/km ration - Dunedin motorway - Palmerston 1/8.5, Palmerston - Ranfurly 1/3.2, Ranfurly - Cromwell 1/4.2, Cromwell - Wanaka 1/2.9.

I would like to suggest that we do this sort of exercise over a number of years to see if we will spot a change. Select a stretch of road you will use regularly and keep counting. Record road kills and harriers.

PETER SCHWEIGMAN

Falcon chases Heron

"Falcons are fierce and fearless predators of live prey, especially small birds.... They will also take large birds...even White-faced Herons...." - *The Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* (Heather and Robertson).

Loud calls, hoarse and urgent, late on the evening of 1 March 1997, in the Te Anau camp grounds, made such a commotion that not only ornithologists raced outside to find out the cause. We watched fascinated as a White-faced Heron dived between caravans, tents and trees, closely followed by a New Zealand Falcon, both twisting and turning in headlong flight.

We pursued the pair, seeing the falcon eventually bring the heron down to the ground some distance away. By the time we reached them, a well-meaning camper had rescued the heron, which turned out to be a young bird still with a few patches of down on the neck, which also bore puncture marks, probably from the falcon's talons. Later another camper told

us he had seen the falcon knock the heron from its perch in a pine tree.

So our lucky heron was taken over the road for DoC to look after, though we did not hear what kind of reception it got. The falcon meanwhile had flown into a nearby tree where it sat for half an hour on one leg, the other drawn up into its breast feathers. It was very dark, possibly a young bird.

STELLA & JOHN ROWE

Marlborough travel notes

On 18 April it was overcast with a very strong south-easterly wind. On the seaward side of Lake Grassmere small groups of three to seven Black-fronted Terns were beating along the edge of the sea directly into the wind.

Later in one paddock adjacent to the road on the south side of Grassmere there were approximately 1,000 Black-fronted Terns roosting. About one in 20 had full black caps, while the others were in various stages of moult. The flock was put up by a harrier, which circled and settled further from the road. Most of the flock was still there one and a half hours later.

In the small lake close to Marfell's Beach there were five Chestnut-breasted Shelducks. This was where they were seen in 1984, and it is the area planned for the new Clifford Bay ferry terminal.

The level of Lake Elterwater was reduced by about a third by the drought. On the muddy margins 12 Banded Dotterels were seen.

PAULINE JENKINS & ROSEMARY HEATHER

Waimana River Valley mainland island

We had a rare opportunity to visit to Waimana River valley on an overnight trip in March. The purpose of the trip was to study kiwi and other bush birds in the Otamatuna Reserve. We went with Brent Beaven, a DoC field officer who is conducting a scientific project to monitor the progress of kiwi within the reserve, radio transmitters being used as an aid to finding the birds.

The nine members of the party were made up of Kawerau Rotary members, and three overseas exchange students from Kawerau College. The OSNZ members who had shown an interest in the trip all pulled out prior to the day of the event.

We met Brent on the early evening of Friday 13 March. The weather was cloudy but looking quite good, and though the forecast was for heavy rain for the area there was no sign of that - just as well I hadn't heard my answer phone message from Brent about the predicted rain. We followed Brent up to the ranger's hut, where we left our cars, then Brent ferried two groups in turn in the DoC vehicle.

The walk started about 2 kilometres upstream from Ogilvie Bridge and was quite steep most of the way and very slow going for those of us who hadn't carried a pack for a while. After we had climbed to about 720 metres, we were taken along the ridge to the DoC hut, hidden away in a gully. The hut was very well equipped with solar-electric lighting, gas cookers, spacious areas and very comfortable bunks. The hut was built about a year ago and replaced a small, ill equipped, dingy hut, which was still there just below the new one. It was after 8 pm and dark when we arrived, so we didn't fully appreciate the spectacular setting and the amazing surrounding scenery.

The Otamatuna Reserve is a mainland island, where about 2,000 hectares is treated for special predator control, so that the forest can revert back to more or less its original state prior to human interference and alien mammal introduction. It is bordered by the Waimana River to the west, the Waititi Stream to the east, the north is Te Pona A Pita Track and south the Lion's Hut Track. Poison bait traps are evident throughout the reserve, targeting rats, possums and mustelids.

After a rest and a cup of tea, Brent took us out onto the ridge to call the kiwi and to attempt to see them feeding at night. We could hear them talking to each other but they ignored us. We were all up early the next morning. The bird life around the hut was very apparent as soon as the sun brightened the sky. There were North Island Robins, Tomtits and Riflemen busy all about the hut, and we heard Kakariki and Kokako occasionally in the distance. Brent used a tape recording in an attempt to attract Kokako. We did hear them but none were seen. Brent also spent some time picking beetle larvae out of a bowl of meal and used them to feed the robins, which came in very close for these tasty morsels.

After breakfast we set off as a group onto the ridges to locate the kiwi, using the radio receiving equipment and Brent's dog Cracker, who is being trained to locate the birds when fitted with a muzzle. Cracker is a very special dog, a springer spaniel, bought from a kennel in Australia as a pup about six months ago. It is now being trained by Brent, which seems to be quite a difficult task, especially as it has taken a real liking for chasing robins. Cracker is certainly a very beautiful animal and was an instant friend to all the members of our party -

especially the girls who though Brent was far too hard on it. When it put on its most pathetically hurt expressions it was very hard to refuse it anything, like coming into the hut, eating biscuits and chasing robins. I don't think we made Brent's task any easier.

The removal of predators and browsers from the habitat has the result of allowing the vegetation to grow more prolifically than it had been. The bird life in this particular mainland island has recovered to such an extent that there are now more birds per hectare than in any other part of the North Island. Native birds which are common include robins, tomtits, pigeons, Whiteheads, Silvereyes, Grey Warblers, Riflemen, Fantails - Fantails were previously rare in the area but are now well established. Shining and Long-tailed Cuckoos had been common over summer but had now departed for the year. Less common birds include Kokako, Kaka and parakeet species.

We were successful in detecting two kiwi during the morning - each were weighed and measurements taken of the bill and tarsus. One of these was the kiwi which had lost a foot and had been treated and cared for by Bill Sloan for about two months, and released into the reserve about six weeks prior to our visit with a transmitter attached. The bird was surviving very well in the wild, having gained weight and the bill having grown longer. We took our time on the ridges, photographing kiwi and robins, and feeding beetles to the latter. The Kokako continued to be heard but they remained elusive despite the tapes.

We lunched at the hut, then packed up and set off downhill. The rain set in part way down the hill but we didn't mind.

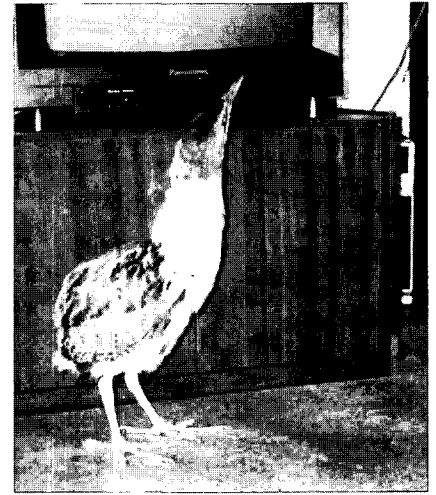
We finished off the day by visiting Bill Sloan in Opotiki. Bill is looking after a young Wandering Albatross which was suffering from an injured leg and unable to get back to the sea from the beach where it was found. This was a fitting climax for a special 24 hours for us all. The overseas exchange students will have learned about an aspect of New Zealand wildlife which hopefully they will remember and talk about for years to come.

JOHN BRIERLEY

Once bittern...

It was about the first week of December 1996 that "she" turned up - a large, ugly chick, no feathers, just brown down, fluff and stubble, a large beak and incredibly large, green legs and feet. She was about the size of a plucked bantam.

Being townies, we didn't know what it was. We popped it into a cardboard box and took it up and left it under a large macrocarpa tree which had grey herons nesting in it - thought it must be their's. Two days later, it turned up again, standing on the lawn. We brought it in



Australasian Bittern "Sky" pointing.
Photo: Beryl Wade.

and fed it chopped up sprats (boy did it love those!). We spread newspaper all over the caravan, put a box on its side with straw and gave it water. When it was hungry it would stand at the window, beak pointed to the sky, and I would rush down with more chopped up sprats.

I rang the Otorohanga bird house a few days later and said could I bring it over. We did and were promptly told it was a bittern, and to let it go into the swamp. We fed it well, this time with chopped up meat as well, and let it go. Two days later we were in the garden and there, waiting, was "Poppet" as we'd named her. So I picked her up and took her in, fed her and let her go.

This started a routine which lasted for the next two months, when she got too big to pick up without getting scratched by her claws. Also you could tell she thought it undignified. After this we would take her plate and pop it down in front of her whenever she appeared. This was usually twice a day, but, if a storm was coming, up to five times a day. Then she would disappear until the wind eased.

She was shy but not frightened, not being agitated by being handled, though she could lunge with her beak. She ate insects and we even saw her with a small mouse. Until she learned to fly, at around four months, she would walk around the house and up to higher ground if a storm was brewing.

Towards the end she was staying away for two to four days at a time. We nearly missed her when she didn't come back. Then, quite unexpectedly, she turned up on 26 April and carried on as if she had never been away. When I go out in the morning to let the hens out and feed the pig, she is usually walking down the far side of the stream, heading for her bridge to come over for her breakfast.

She is very shy of strangers and disappears into the willows. We have had people staying and she has turned up for her meals, as long as it's only myself or my husband that goes out to feed her.

BERYL WADE, Kawhia.

Motunau Island

Ridding North Canterbury's Motunau Island of aggressive South African boxthorn is a high priority for DoC. Technical Support Officer Euan Kennedy says seabirds die when they are impaled on the long thorns of the dense shrubs - 30 Fairy Prions were found on a recent survey.

Senior Conservation Officer John Trotter says control measures, such as poisoning of stumps with herbicide and cutting down the weed, had proved very successful over the past two years, as part of a five year programme. Although its original plant cover has gone, Motunau is classified as a nature reserve and is one of the few significant seabird nesting islands on the South Island's north east coast. The island is home to Fairy Prions, Sooty Shearwaters and White-faced Storm Petrels, as well as around 40 other breeding or visiting species and a rare, original population of lizard species. Motunau is also the last stronghold of the White-flipped Penguin, a form of Blue Penguin peculiar to Canterbury.

Boxthorn reduces the area for seabird burrows, and may also obstruct penguins in their climb from shore to their burrows. Researchers have even greater difficulty making their way through it. The total area cleared will be assessed annually.

Courtesy of *The Hurumui News*.

Cornwall Park Kaka

Setting off from the Cornwall Park Kiosk carpark (in Auckland) for an afternoon stroll on Saturday 17 May 1997, I heard a distant but very distinctive "skraark", and I looked up to see two dark, fluttering shapes. Huh?!.. *Kaka* in the middle of Auckland city?!

Disbelieving, I pursued them as they slowly made their way around the western side of the park, towards "Olive Grove". In a small pocket of olive trees nestled on the hillside, these two Kaka quietly rested, preened, picked at branches, and occasionally nibbled on the soft, dark fruit.

They were joined later by a third bird, which announced its arrival with a loud "skraark". None of them were seen to have leg bands. I spent about 45 minutes watching the Kaka pair from a distance of about four metres. They seemed quite accepting of my presence, and weren't bothered at all by occasional passers-by walking their dogs only eight metres below. They were always wary though, and did retreat when I attempted to take a closer look.

I left just after the third arrived, having of course left an open invitation and detailed directions to my native "backyard" bush...!

CAREN SHRUBSHALL

Aspiring's Highest Inhabitants

When you rise at 3 am and climb up the flanks of our most famous glacial horn, Mt Aspiring (3,028 m.) you don't expect to see much other life. It's stark and desolate. Towering rock buttresses and boilerplate schist slabs are capped by a glistening sheath of wind sculptured ice. A place where climbers pause, then beat a rapid retreat to greener climes below the snowline.

On an ascent in January, we paused at 2,350 metres to enjoy the dawn light and observe the shadowed "A" cast by Aspiring's silhouette. It was too early for butterflies and too dark to see weta flipping across the ledges. We revived sagging bodies on food and drink.

A sudden shrill sound caught my attention. It was not a dawn chorus, but a rather resonant solo recital by one of New Zealand's most elusive birds - a Rock Wren. This puffball of a bird, the size of a golf ball, bobbed vigorously on a grey schist slab, excited or agitated about our presence. With deft wing movements, a blur of olive and grey sped from rock to rock, repeating its mesmeric dance.

I remember two Skylarks at 3,000 metres calling and winging on warm thermal updraughts from Aspiring's rocky north face. But here was a resident bird, over 1,000 metres about its familiar habitat of boulder fields and sub-alpine vegetation below the snowline (1,400-1,900 metres). Could it survive? How high on Aspiring could it find shelter and nourishment? The 1960 Hillary Physiology Expedition on Ama Dablam found humans could not adapt to the thin air of high altitude above 5,500 metres. Was this Rock Wren searching for its territorial limits like an Everest climber, or was it just displaced, caught by a wave of rising wind?

My eyes were drawn to other signs of life. One of the advantages of repeating a journey many times is that you begin to look past the broad vistas to the detail - the lined crevasse patterns, the changes in snow crystals. We felt vulnerable on the exposed rock buttresses of Aspiring's north-west ridge, but carried rope, food and storm jackets. The bird must eat, but it carried no pack!

I hauled up on my hand, jammed in a crack, to find it shared by a flowering plant. My curiosity was aroused. Even with its petals closed tight to the night cold air, the *Ranunculus buchananii* is a spectacular and hardy high alpine plant. Was this Aspiring's highest flower? Fifty metres on was a cushion plant, *Pygmaea thompsonii*, a mound of green, tightly packed and showing only leaf tips and short-stemmed January flowers. It resembled a hedgehog encountering a predator; in the *Pygmaea*'s case, the full brunt of a Southern Alps storm.

The flower trail led up narrow ledges to three *R. buchananii* clinging to the back of a wide crack at 2,380 metres. Sheltered from wind, out of reach of such dangers as rockfall or climbers' boots, these superb specimens found their niche as Aspiring's highest flowers. For the next fifteen minutes the Rock Wren kept us company as we climbed towards the peak. Its shrill call and occasional flit past our plodding bodies reminded me that we were both eco-tourists on the brink of our habitat.

GEOFF WAYATT

Regional Roundup

Northland

The west coast beach patrol for May has been the most profitable for the last three months, with higher numbers than usual of Blue Penguins and a variety of other species. A Southern Skua, a White-chinned Petrel and a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross were interesting finds in the previous two months, and a Kaka was found on the east coast recently.

The west coast is all patrolled on the same day by dropping people at intervals to walk along approximately 34 kms of interesting and varied coastline. The longest stretch walked is about 14 kms and the shortest about 5 kms, so we are able to suit all levels of fitness!

A survey of the inland lakes at Pouto was carried out as usual at the end of February, and the dune lakes will be covered at a later date.

Six members had a pleasant visit to the Miranda Shorebird Centre in early March - and yes, it rained some of the time as usual! We saw four of the five Marsh Sandpipers and a good variety of other species so it was well worthwhile.

During April the post breeding survey of Fairy Terns was carried out. The birds proved to be elusive with only eleven being located during the weekend.

At our February meeting Leigh Honnor and Katrina Hansen gave an informative talk, illustrated with slides and a video, about their work monitoring the breeding of Fairy Terns at Mangawhai and Waipu.

Janet Snell was elected deputy Regional Representative at our AGM in March, and a meeting was held in April to decide the most effective way of recording live bird counts while carrying out our usual beach patrols. We are now trailing a method using maps to indicate the location and number of all birds seen. It is felt that this information would be useful in the event of an oil spill or other catastrophe.

(Lorna Simpkin)

South Auckland

Winter is always that time of the year when large white birds appear in our region and this year is no exception. Elaine Ward has reported three Cattle Egrets, two Royal Spoonbills and a White Heron from Conifer Grove in recent times. Nine Cattle Egrets were seen at Piako on 2 May, increasing to 38 by census day on 14 June. Viv Rutherford reported one at Awhitu on 20 April, possibly a fresh arrival, and one was recorded at Miranda on 26 April, with two being seen later on 22 May. The Aka Aka area hasn't been checked at the time of writing, but no doubt the Cattle Egret flock is back in residence there too.

Autumn is usually a good time to see NZ Dabchicks appearing on small lakes and sewerage ponds around the region, although the only record from South Auckland is of the two which frequent Wattle Downs Ponds at Manurewa.

On a visit to Kidds, Karaka, in mid-April, David Lawrie saw the Broad-billed Sandpiper, Greenshank and White-winged Black Tern, all of which had been present there since at least February. There were also good numbers of Curlew Sandpipers (21), Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (8) and Red-necked Stints (22). No doubt they have now all departed for winter.

It was a record year for Marsh Sandpipers at Miranda, with a total of eight being seen on 5 May. This total had steadily built up from the first individual being seen on 28 December, then five on 1 March, six on 5 April and so it went on.

In the middle of industrial Onehunga, Tappers Yard continues to be a favoured spot for a pair of New Zealand Dotterels, and on 8 June David Baker also counted 36 Banded Dotterels and 84 Pied Stilts with them.

Beach patrols continue each month with varied success. A diverse selection was found in May, however, with a total of 37 seabirds of 14 different species being picked up. These included a Black Petrel from Sunset Beach, a Grey-faced Petrel and a Hutton's Shearwater from Kariotahi, among the more usual Sooty and Fluttering Shearwaters and Blue Penguins. Winter is always a good time to find prions, and often we will pick up at least four species of these.

(Pam Agnew)

Waikato

OK, so how many regions can boast a White Tern since the last *OSNZ News*? A live White Tern was found in a farm paddock near Taupiri, north of Hamilton, on 1 May. It was delivered to Hamilton later that day but was dead the next morning. Then two of our members on beach patrol thought they were going to top this novelty, when they found the footprints of a large, heavy land bird in the sand. After careful measurements of these footprints they

went searching in the sand dunes for the owners. Pulses racing, and thoughts of knighthoods and instant fame for being the discoverers of the last moas, they came back reality when they surprised the birds. Hey, moas can't fly, can they? No, but would anyone have a use for the measurements of turkey footprints?

Royal Spoonbills and Cattle Egrets have been arriving in their usual haunts lately.

Our first 1998 evening meeting, in February, followed the usual informal format of convenors reporting on the activities in their spheres, and members' reports of interesting happenings since we last met. However Paul Cuming, our beach patrol convenor, expanded his report into a very interesting session on most of the species that had been found in recent patrols. He used slides from the OSNZ collection, and this brought home to us again what a wonderful resource is available to all members through this collection. It's there to use.

Our February field trip was to see waders at Kidds farm, which is at Karaka on the Manukau Harbour. We were joined by six members from Auckland region and two from Northland. This is a prime birding area and a wide range of species presented themselves to a wide range of binoculars and telescopes. When the tide was nearing its peak, birds from other parts of the harbour gathered to join the throngs already at the high tide roosts. The long strings of waders, wavering up and down as they flew, looking like pieces of string on a current of water, were truly impressive.

The March field trip was also to see waders, as we joined the annual "Farewell to the Birds" at the Shorebird Centre of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust on the Firth of Thames. This is always a good outing, and this time the guest speaker was John Walsby, who writes a natural history column for the *NZ Herald*. One of the highlights at Miranda this autumn has been the presence of Marsh Sandpipers, half a dozen of these birds having been around for a long period.

We held our regional AGM in March, followed by Frank Bailey speaking on birds of paradise. The diversity of these fascinating birds was striking, and Frank gave much interesting history of their discovery and exploitation for collectors and the fashion industry of the day.

Pureora Forest was the venue for our March field trip, with some members overnighing there so as to enjoy two days, while others came for only one or other day. Terry Greene and the DoC staff there provided a wonderful programme. By showing some of their everyday work, they filled us with admiration for the skills required of wildlife researchers/managers. We saw Kaka nests being checked high in ancient trees, and had the chance to radio-track recently fledged juveniles. We were able,

at ground level, to watch a fledgling in its nest high above us, through the use of video equipment installed there. The weather was fine, the bush was magnificent, Kokako were active and NZ Robins were numerous.

Our annual pre-shooting season of Lake Waahi near Huntly was carried out in April using two boats. The most uncommon sighting was of three NZ Dabchicks, a species not previously recorded in the ten years of this census.

The speaker at our April meeting was John Innes of Landcare Research, speaking on the predators and competitors of Kokako and Kukupa. He made extensive use of video footage from surveillance cameras at nests of these two species, and also at nests of robins and tomits. This brought home very dramatically the depredations of introduced mammalian predators such as rats and possums, but also caught predation by harriers and Moreporks. It was a graphic reminder of some of the threats our birds face, day by day and night by night.

Another field trip in April was to Rotorua. Much of the day was spent on Mokoia Island, which is now one of the most easily accessible places to see Stitchbird, Saddleback and NZ Robin. After returning from the island we spent the remaining time on the lake shore checking out scaup, dabchicks and the many species of gulls, shags and ducks.

Banding has continued in our Grey-faced Petrel project, with many interesting recaptures, including the first recapture of three and four year old birds which were banded as chicks in this project. The regular censuses of Hamilton and Forest Lakes have shown the usual seasonal trends, with duck numbers increasing at shooting season time. At Forest Lake, duck numbers were about 100 in March and April, to about 3,400 in May. The May census at Hamilton Lake was notable for showing four shag species (Black, Pied, Little and Little Black), while at Forest Lake two half grown Australian Coot chicks were perhaps another indication of late breeding in this benign summer/autumn.

Our March-May patrols of Waikato west coast beaches have not been enormously productive, but still enough to keep the interest up. From north to south we have done Waikorea, Carters, Raglan, Ruapuke, Kawhia and Taharoa, with most being done several times. The nearest of the beaches to Hamilton is 45 minutes, the furthest two hours.

In the period under review we patrolled 60 kms of beach, which means 120 kms of walking. We found 62 birds, but the most unusual find was a live Yellow-bellied Sea Snake at Ruapuke. Incidentally, when you read the annual summary of beach patrols statistics in *Notornis* you won't be able to identify our efforts, because beach patrol regions

are not the same as membership regions. All "our" beaches are in either "Auckland West" or "Taranaki".

(Hugh Clifford)

Bay of Plenty

New Zealand Dotterels had a successful season in the Opotiki area this year. Eleven pairs were closely monitored by Andy Glaser of DoC on three local river estuaries - the Waitahi, Waioeka and Waiaua. Nine of these pairs fledged 14 chicks. Two of the four pairs at the Whangaparoa Estuary (near Cape Runaway) fledged three chicks, plus a probable 3-4 at Ohiwa. 20 chicks must have fledged from the area this year. Seven of the chicks at Waiaua were banded, so it will be interesting to look for them in the Ohiwa flock. 15 mustelids were trapped at Waiaua.

Two Marsh Sandpipers, two Pectoral Sandpipers and two or three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were at the Kaituna Cut lagoons in February, and a Common Sandpiper was at Matata on 5 April, plus two Black-fronted Dotterels on 3 and 10 May. On the field trip to Lake Tamureni a Spotless Crake performed for a tape of its calls, and six Cattle Egrets were near Awaiti Lagoon on 2 May.

Monitoring in the Takaputahi area produced 15 Blue Ducks in the 26 kms covered - three breeding pairs, a single parent, a single male and seven juveniles. The population appears to be declining from a peak of 40 birds in 1994.

Kokako in Otamatuna Mainland Island reserve continue to benefit from the intense pressure exerted by DoC on predators. Nine pairs attempted to nest, seven were successful, producing eleven chicks. The two pairs that had their nests looted were soon rebuilding. Visitors to the area are impressed by the increase in other endemic birds which are also benefiting from the predator control exercise.

Birds treated by Bill Sloan recently include a Weka chick which at a week old had become separated from its parent in a storm. After being fed hard boiled egg and brooded on a hot water bottle, it began to eat virtually anything, including the Chinese Quail which was sharing the aviary! It was released near where it was found at 12 weeks of age.

A kiwi with a broken leg eventually had to have it amputated. Eleven weeks later it was released with a transmitter, and when checked six weeks after that it was found to be thriving. A juvenile Wandering Albatross with an injured leg initially fared well on a diet of pilchards but deteriorated after two to three weeks and eventually died.

(John Brierley)

Volcanic Plateau

The Volcanic Plateau region has recently been reactivated by Kerry Oates of Ohakune. An inaugural meeting was held at the home of Patrick and Mary Buxton on 23 March and attended by nine members. Since then we have been actively canvassing for new members, through write-ups and articles in the press. Our RR Kerry is presently carrying out vermin eradication work on the Pitcairn group of islands. In the meantime I am handling his job and my own as regional recorder.

My first bird report of any significance is the appearance of a Black Petrel on my doorstep. A kind local couple, Brian and Louise Dunn, had found it at Carter Holt's timberyard in Taupo, kept it in a water bed overnight and brought it to me. I measured it and am at present allowing it to recover in my tunnel house, before setting it free somewhere along the coast.

Other sightings include a NZ Falcon at Raetihi on 13 March, NZ Pipits throughout the Ruatiti Valley, and 50+ Yellowhammers at Five Mile Bay, Taupo.

Kerry has been busy with annual Blue Duck research on the Maunganui-a-te-ao River, and kiwi at Waimarino Forest. Tory Makan and Morley West have been active in recent months with volunteer work on Mokoia Island. Jan Drake and Michael Sadlier have been counting waders and wetland species at various localities around the region.

We are looking at a census of dotterels in the region - Banded and Black-fronted - which could be combined with other species such as Fernbird and Spotless Crake. We have also appointed coordinators for such things as nest and moult records, newsletter articles and production and wader/gull censuses.

(Patrick Buxton)

Gisborne/Wairoa

There have been a lot of interesting and unusual sightings in our region of late. These began with a Kookaburra in a Gisborne garden, reported by Ian Cook. A Wairoa duck shooter alerted me to a "different" dabchick on the estuary area of the Tahaenui Stream. It turned out to be a Hoary-headed Grebe, and had been present for some weeks. A very large, obvious bird on Whakaki Lagoon was a Mute Swan.

New Zealand Dotterels continue to breed regularly in the region. The two pairs just south of Young Nick's Head once again did well. Five birds were at Muriwai in January and birds bred on Portland Island and at Mahia.

Though the long dry spell has broken at last, it has had a huge impact on the Wairoa waterfowl and waders. The coastal lagoons, so favoured during the winter, are all dry except for Patangata and Whakaki, the latter of which is down to

about a tenth of its usual size and crammed with birds. Earlier, waders had moved to the rapidly shrinking lagoon, with 300 Bar-tailed Godwits forming the bulk of the flock. A few Lesser Knots were present for a while but moved on. Present also were 18 Pacific Golden Plovers, nine Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, two Wrybills, and a Curlew Sandpiper came and went. The largest count of Banded Dotterels was 165, a large number of Caspian Terns for the region (19; perhaps four pairs breeding on Portland Island had something to do with this) and Pied Stilt numbers climbed to over 800.

Other waders over the summer were six Asiatic Whimbrels at Maungawhio, a Greenshank and 11 golden plovers near the Waipoua rail bridge, 40 Turnstones on Portland Island in November and a Grey Ternlet off Tolaga Bay in February.

Since my records begin at Whakaki Lagoon the highest numbers I have recorded are: 1,800 Paradise Shelducks, 1,900 Grey Teal, 1,500 Pied Stilts, 38 Caspian Terns, 18 Pacific Golden Plovers, 414 Black-billed Gulls, and even four Variable Oystercatchers. At present a conservative estimate of 1,000 Welcome Swallows continually work the exposed mudflats and shallow water. By contrast the Black Swans have left - too shallow! Canada Geese are down to about 400, but there are plenty on nearby paddocks. Up to eight Royal Spoonbills are present, with another 12 at Wairoa.

Nearby Patangata Lagoon has been home to 11 NZ Dabchicks for some time now, and 94 Little Black Shags were present on 9 May.

A tramp into Sandy Bay, Lake Waikareiti, on 16 and 17 May was worthwhile. I recorded Kaka twice, as well as parakeet sp., Rifleman, Tomtits, Grey Warblers, Fantails, NZ Pigeons, Silvereyes, Tui and Bellbirds. The most interesting observations were at night. A male North Island Brown Kiwi began calling close by the tent from 10 pm to 1 am and again from 5 am to 6 am. A female also called briefly, and a second, more distant male joined in. A NZ Pigeon was also busy feeding in the trees in the dark above the tent from 4 am until dawn, with small pieces raining down on the tent. The bird moved around a lot in a small area. The trees were silver beech, tawari (with flower buds) and kamahi. A pair of NZ Robins shared the campsite with us until we packed up and moved on.

One of the five Royal Spoonbills at Whakaki over summer had only one leg, and therefore was unable to feed using the usual method of sweeping the bill from side to side while walking forward. The bird solved the problem by making one downward sweep of the wings to give lift while moving the good leg forward, continuing to sweep with the bill. This was a continuous, rhythmic movement, allowing the bird to move forward at a steady pace. Perhaps this

method set it apart from the others, and it always fed and roosted alone, even though the other four birds were nearby.

(Geoff Foreman)

Hawkes Bay

Recent bird reports have not been particularly numerous, but those that have come in have been interesting ones. John Adams from the Napier DoC office rang Wayne Twydale with a report from a property in Pakowhai about a bird roosting near the homestead. It was first seen three years ago, returning each winter. The description fitted that of a Nankeen Night Heron. Wayne, Margaret, Christine and Jim visited the site the following Saturday and, sure enough, that was what it was. We had clear views of the heron perched 5-6 metres in a cypress tree. It was an adult bird with the white breeding plume at the nape of the neck. No leg bands were present so it was unlikely to be an escapee. With the establishment of a small breeding colony on the Whanganui river it is possible that the birds disperse during the winter.

A particularly confiding White Heron has arrived in the region. It was first reported in a letter to the editor in the *Daily Telegraph*, having been seen on 15 May perched on the deck handrail of the Napier Public Library, then roosting in the adjacent street trees, to the dismay of the Starlings trying to settle down in *their* trees! It was photographed by the press on 16 May feeding on goldfish in Clive Square, Napier city, and was very closely approached. On the Monday morning Murray Jeffries phoned Wayne to say that he was watching a White Heron (same bird?) feeding on goldfish in a courtyard pond in the Ahuriri Shopping Centre. Movement and traffic noise didn't disturb it in the least. This pond was about 1.5 metres in diameter in the paved courtyard - how did the heron find it? From time to time it walked over to a shop display window and watched its reflection!

A Little Egret has been in the Clive/Haumoana area since at least 2 April. Two NZ Falcons were seen at Blowhard Bush on 13 April. Six NZ Dabchicks were present at Westshore Lagoon on 31 March. Wayne and Margaret saw a White Heron and an Australasian Bittern at the Bell Street channel, Clive, on 24 May. Also present was a Pied Stilt banded by them in 1989. 44 Royal Spoonbills were at the Ahuriri Estuary on 29 March, rising to 61 on 12 April. Two were colour banded. Information from the Banding Office shows that they were banded as chicks in Marlborough in 1996, and had consecutive metal band numbers, indicating that they may be siblings.

Dry summer conditions rewarded those who ventured out in the cool of the evening to Westshore Lagoon. Several sandpiper species were feeding on top of the floating vegetation - present were

small numbers of Red-necked Stints, Pectoral Sandpipers, a Curlew Sandpiper, golden plovers and Bar-tailed Godwits in an area not usually used by them. Once again White-winged Black Terns returned, this time four, one being in full breeding plumage.

Our trip to Horseshoe Lake has not yet eventuated due to many members being unable to attend. The Opepe Bush trip was attended by six members. It began as a visit to the soldiers' graves, then continued with a leisurely walk along the bush track. Tui were very vocal, and three were seen in a lancewood eating berries. Riflemen were heard but not seen. Other birds seen were Whiteheads, Grey Warblers, Fantails, a Dunnock, a pair of Tomtits, a singing Bellbird and, to add to the interest, fungi in many forms and colours.

(Wayne Twydale)

Taranaki

A visit to Hawera's oxidation ponds and Nowells Lakes, situated on a South Taranaki coastal farm, was the February field trip. Bird numbers have been much higher than usual in both areas. One reason may be the drought conditions experienced in central and eastern regions. Species seen included NZ Dabchick, Grey Teal, NZ Shoveller, and a White-winged Black Tern and a Royal Spoonbill.

Other February records of note are a Marsh Sandpiper, a Black-fronted Dotterel, and a Greenshank, all seen at Waiongana rivermouth. At Lake Rotokare, South Taranaki, three NZ pipits were seen.

At the March meeting the matter of disposal of sludge at the Bell Block oxidation ponds was discussed. Our group decided to forward a submission to the New Plymouth District Council on what we considered the best option for the future use of the area as good bird habitat.

The March field trip turned out to be a "bush bash" in the Makino Conservation Area, North Taranaki. Although bird numbers were low, all the common bush birds were present. Members survived the day following their experienced leader, who was heard to comment that at all times he knew exactly where the party was!

The speaker for this month was Ian Dudding, who gave an informed illustrated talk on his recent visit to Poland and Finland.

As part of the WEA programme, Barry Hartley gave an interesting talk on the marine park. Excellent slides were shown of bird and plant life, as well as the marine life of the area.

Two field trips were held in April. On the 13th members visited the Bell Block oxidation ponds and went on to the nearby Waipu Lagoon area. 23 species

were recorded, the most unusual for this area being five Grey Teal. On the 18th members visited a QEII Trust swamp and bush covenant in Pokohura. 17 species were seen or heard, the most conspicuous being Fantails.

The May meeting took place in the DoC New Plymouth office. Bryan Williams from DoC described his ongoing work in the New Zealand-wide bat recovery programme. Now based in the Waitaanga Forest, Bryan showed some interesting slides. The highlight however was a short video, produced by highly specialised cameras, of bats leaving two particular roosting sites after dark. The film is used when counting bat numbers in any one site. The May field trip will be to Waitaanga Forest, but we will be looking for birds, not bats.

(Rosemary Messenger)

Wairarapa

El Nino is continuing to have a severe effect upon the Wairarapa. Duck shooters are reported as having poor results. There is little seed head left on pasture land and therefore it could be a very difficult winter for bird species dependant on this food source.

Our group has had an interesting three months. At the February meeting we had a slide evening and discussion on waders. The following Saturday we had a trip to the Manawatu River estuary at Foxton Beach to observe some of the birds we had discussed, and saw Wrybills, SIPO, Variable Oystercatchers, Banded Dotterels, Caspian and White-fronted Terns, Bar-tailed Godwits, Lesser Knots and Pacific Golden Plovers. Unfortunately fishermen, motorbikes, dogs and other beach users kept the birds disturbed and away from our close proximity. The godwits, knots and golden plovers were developing their breeding plumage and some were quite spectacular.

The March meeting involved a local duck expert, Jim Campbell. Jim has developed a waterfowl haven on his farm. He has been successfully breeding several of New Zealand's rare and endangered ducks. Unfortunately the field trip was cancelled due to showers and a severe gale. We have been promised a trip later in the year.

Local members at the April meeting gave talks on their studies of parrots of the Wairarapa - Kaka, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos and Eastern Rosellas. The following field trip was to a known site for Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Unfortunately they were not there at the same time as we were, but we had an enjoyable morning nonetheless.

In the local newspaper of late was a White Heron which has been regularly in Masterton. It has been chased out of at least one goldfish pond. The last sighting was in Kotuku Place!

(Miles King)

Manawatu

Early March saw the departure of most of the waders at the Manawatu Estuary, though four Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, the Grey-tailed Tattler and all 20+ Pacific Golden Plovers stayed until the end of March, and three Red-necked Stints were unusually still present until at least 29 April.

A large flock of up to 1,000 White-fronted Terns attracted several Arctic Skuas in March, with a maximum number of 11 on the 28th. Other seabird highlights were four Wandering Albatrosses and four Buller's Shearwaters past Foxton Beach, and a juvenile Australasian Gannet on three dates at the end of April - we normally only see adults.

The best birds by far have, unfortunately, been at Lake Omana, which does not have public access. A group of three Glossy Ibises were seen in both March and April and may well be resident in this area, since they were also noted in early 1997. A Pectoral Sandpiper was also at the lake on 16 March, but there was no repeat of last year's flock. And finally, a female Chestnut-breasted Shelduck was found on 28 March, staying through April and being joined by two more, both females by the 26th - just in time for the duck shooting season.

(Ian Saville)

Nelson

There has been a pleasing influx of new members this year, some of whom are likely to lower the average age and raise the general enthusiasm of our members.

A field trip to Maud Island was well attended. The highlight was an inspection of Kakapo chicks via a remote video set-up. Takahe, giant weta and native frogs were also encountered before Rob Schuckard took us back to the mainland in the teeth of an approaching westerly storm.

In May we had a weekend in Golden Bay where the emphasis was on wetland species. No Banded Rails or Marsh Crakes were located, but we had good viewing of Little Egret, White Heron, Royal Spoonbill and a very obliging Australasian Bittern.

Work on Farewell Spit continues.

(Peter Gaze)

Canterbury

Canterbury activities have include searches for the hundreds of Black-billed Gulls which were banded this year. Two were found at the mouth of the Rakaia River in late May and one at Lake Forsyth in early June. A few others have been reported locally (see March *OSNZ News*) but there is much head scratching about where the rest are. Apparently large rafts of Black-billed Gulls are sometimes seen at sea - perhaps our banded birds are hiding in their midst?

During the search for Black-billed Gulls in late May two White-winged Black Terns were seen at Coopers Lagoon and a further two at the Rakaia mouth. The June trip to Lake Forsyth resulted in 45 Southern Crested Grebes, nine Royal Spoonbills and a White Heron. A remarkable 20 Fantails were in a single tree at Peacock Springs in May.

In and around Christchurch Bellbird sightings have been particularly frequent this year and a study is underway by Andrew Crossland. Andrew has also reported over 3,000 NZ Scaup in and around the city. They used to be uncommon in many areas around Canterbury, but numbers appear to be up this last decade.

Sightings of NZ Pigeons are being collected by Ron Nilsson to pass on to other groups trying to better understand their movements and numbers, with the hope of increasing numbers on the future.

The February meeting was members' night and several members brought slides. Tony Crocker presented a challenging quiz which Don Hadden won (congratulations!). Ron Nilsson showed slides at the March meeting of one of the last big expeditions in the 1970s to the Auckland Islands. Over 20 members participated and the logistics looked amazing. At the next meeting in April I shared some slides from the Bounty Islands expedition in 1997/98 - with four island based members, quite a contrast. The May meeting involved a workshop describing several mystery species. It was a great way to learn some of the terminology and sharpen up the observation skills, as well as interact with other members.

(Frances Schmechel)

Otago

At our April meeting we were treated to an armchair tour of New Zealand's subantarctic islands (including Macquarie Island, which is politically Australian). Tony Hocken has been ship's doctor (and occasional barman) on four trips to the subantarctic, using the opportunity to photograph the islands and some of their wildlife. Starting at the Chathams, we journeyed without seasickness to the Bounties, the Antipodes, Macquarie, the Campbells and the Aucklands. Tony's slides were absolutely wonderful, especially those of the birds. We were able to pick out various diagnostic features of species most of us have never seen.

Tony's talk was followed by a brief AGM. Our current RR Peter Schweigman had indicated previously that he did not want to continue in that position, and nominations for a successor were called for. Louise Foord, our current branch treasurer, was the only nomination forthcoming, and her nomination papers are being forwarded to the OSNZ secretary.

Peter will have been our Regional Representative for 15 years, a long time in anyone's book. It is largely thanks to his efforts that the Otago region has its current national profile. People who have never been to Otago know of Peter and his work: he is Mr Spoonbill Census. Today many of us cannot look at a Royal Spoonbill (or even a local Variable Oystercatcher) without scrutinising its legs for bands. A vote of thanks to Peter for his long, generous service was passed with acclamation, and he was presented with a weighty parcel of bird books as a token of our appreciation. Of course old RRs never disappear - Peter will continue to be an enthusiastic worker in the Otago region.

(Hamish Spencer)

Southland

The Cattle Egret total this year is again a modest one with about 50 birds, mostly in ones and twos, scattered throughout Southland from Fiordland to the Catlins. There are at least 24 in the regular Wallacetown flock, ten of which remained through last summer.

We have an Oriental Cuckoo resident in Queen's Park. It has been observed for several weeks, roosting in a *macrocarpa* hedge and flying down to take worms on the golf course fairway. It is a striking bird, rather like a falcon. There was an excellent photograph of it in the *Southland Times*. A Pallid Cuckoo has been reported twice recently from the vicinity of Riverton.

Our annual survey of beach wrecks at Mason Bay, Stewart Island, produced 250 juvenile Sooty Shearwaters and only a handful of other birds, including two mollymawks and a few Mottled Petrels and prions. There were at least 60 NZ Dotterels parked in the sand flats behind the beach.

The greater part of the migratory waders departed about 20 March. Small flocks of overwintering Turnstones and godwits are common. We have had no sightings yet of our colour banded Black-billed Gulls.

Beach patrols have been rather unproductive this year, the only unusual finding being two Buller's Shearwaters, rare in our waters. An albatross humerus from a beach patrol here a couple of years ago has been made into a flute by Hirini Melbourne and Richard Nunns and feature in their CD *Te Ku Te Wbe*.

A Mongolian Dotterel has been seen in Awarua Bay. There is a full lutino Kakariki on Codfish Island, and a full albino NZ Pigeon near Coopers Creek on Sandy Point has been around for several years. Codfish Fernbirds have bred successfully on Putauhinu Island, one of the Muttonbird Islands. This is an important step in preparation for shifting the birds prior to the rat eradication on Codfish. Magpies were observed killing a Tui close to seaward Bush, and a Myna was seen by Tony Crocker in Gore.

We had a recent request to identify a bird - about Blackbird size, grey with purple legs and a black nape and takes bread out of the hand. We await the photograph eagerly!

(Lloyd Esler)

Chatham Islands

Over the last dying months of summer there have been three exciting observations which have dominated bird watching down here is the Chathams.

The first is the sighting of an Antarctic Tern from a fishing boat at Ocean Bay (along the Port Hutt coastline). The bird was seen flying over and around the vessel whilst working crayfish pots. The tern was identified as an Antarctic as it was in full breeding plumage. The nearest breeding grounds for the species are the Bounty Islands directly south of the Chathams. The bird was seen after an extended period of southwest winds. Although the species occurs in the subfossil record, this is the first live sighting in the Chathams.

The second major observation is another first record of a tern species for the Chathams. Throughout the second half of the summer a Little Tern was present in the lagoon. It took several weeks to track the tern down to positively identify it. However, finally, after several brief glimpses, we were able to get within four metres of the bird roosting with a flock of White-fronted Terns. Half the island knew that we were after this mystery bird and were pleased when we identified it as a new bird for the islands.

Perhaps the most exciting record is that of a Taiko at sea in Pitt Strait. On a trip from Mangere Island to Owenga, about a third of the way across the strait I spotted a large, dark petrel ahead of the boat. The bird flew towards the boat, and then passed along the side within a few metres (c.4-5) and continued south. The close proximity of the bird and my previous experience of this species in the Tuku Nature Reserve made a positive identification as a Taiko possible.

This is the first time that I have seen a Taiko at sea, in over 70 boat trips around the Chathams in the past three years, and will be one of only a handful of world-wide observations.

These three observations over the past summer show that the Chathams are still turning up many exciting records, and that the islands' ornithology is along way from being understood. However the longer we spend watching birds, the more we are piecing together.

(Mike Bell)

What's On



Northland/Far North

Evening meetings. Advisory Services, Alexander Street, Whangarei. Ph. Lorna Simpkin (09) 437 2076.

28 June - winter census, Whangarei Harbour - ph. Richard Parrish; Kaipara Harbour - ph. David Crockett (09) 435 0954.

3-5 July - winter census, Far North. Ph. Richard Parrish.

9 July - evening meeting, Motukawanui Island planting.

July - passerine mist netting. Ph. Ray Pierce (09) 437 5711.

July - Motukawanui Island planting. Ph. David Crockett.

8-9 August - visit to Tiritiri Matangi Island. Ph. Lorna Simpkin.

10 September - evening meeting, Shining Cuckoo call survey.

8 October, evening meeting.

22 November - Whangarei Harbour census. Ph. Richard Parrish (09) 436 1988, Kaipara Harbour census. Ph. David Crockett.

28-29 November - Far North harbours census. Ph. Richard Parrish

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

Evening meetings - first Tuesday of the month (except January), Kohia Teachers' Centre, 272 Jervois Road, Herne Bay. Ph. Gwenda Pulham (09) 480 5535.

22 November - Kaipara Harbour summer census. Ph. Adrian Riegen (09) 814 9741.

Muriwai Beach patrol - Sundays following meeting. Ph. Mike Graham (09) 817 5517.



South Auckland

Evening meetings - Papakura Croquet Clubrooms, Chapel Street, Papakura, 7.45 pm. Ph. David Lawrie (09) 238 8407.

14 July - evening meeting, birds of Tiritiri Matangi Island.

11 August - evening meeting, Cabbage Tree Island.

5-6 September - weekend trip to Tiritiri Matangi Island. Ph. Pam Agnew (09) 535 4222.

8 September - evening meeting, Gambia and Hong Kong.

13 October - spring migration in Texas.

8 November - Firth of Thames summer census. Ph. Tony Habraken (09) 238 5284.

10 November - Coromandel kiwi recovery programme.

21 November - Manukau Harbour summer census. Ph. Tony Habraken (09) 238 5284.

5 December - Caspian Tern colony visit, Waikato R. mouth. Ph. David Lawrie (09) 238 8407.

Beach patrols of Kariotahi and Sunset Beaches, Port Waikato, on 25 July, 16 Aug, 13 Sep, 10 Oct, 14 Nov, 13 Dec. Ph. Pam Agnew (09) 535 4222.



Waikato

Evening meetings, DoC conference room, London Street, Hamilton. Ph. Hugh Clifford (07) 855 3751.

12 July - Hamilton lakes census. Ph. Barry Friend for Hamilton Lake (07) 834 6729, Brian Challinor for Forest Lake (07) 855 2561.

15 July - evening meeting, speaker to be arranged.

25 or 26 July - Mt Kakepuku counts. Ph. Paul Cuming (07) 856 3891.

9 August - Hamilton lakes census.

19 August - evening meeting, Black-billed Gulls.

23 August - Cattle Egret survey. Ph. Nick Dunckley (025) 782 374 for Rangiriri, Martin Day (07) 827 3047 for Lake Ngaroto.

16 September - evening meeting, Pitcairn Island.

20 September - field trip to be arranged. Ph. Hugh Clifford (07) 855 3751.

11 October - Miranda Shorebird Centre. Ph. Bev Woolley (07) 856 9340.

21 October - evening meeting, rehabilitation and breeding of harriers, falcons and owls.

Mt Karioi 5 min. bird counts and monthly beach patrols of west coast beaches. Ph. Paul Cuming (07) 856 3891

Hamilton Lake counts - second Sunday of the month. Ph. Barry Friend (07) 843 6729 or Brian Challinor (07) 855 2561.

Bay of Plenty

28 June - winter wader census, Tauranga Harbour area. Ph. Paddy Latham (07) 542 0406.

18 July - White Island and Volkner Rocks. Ph. John Brierley (07) 323 7458.

14 November - Mt Tarawera and surrounds. Ph. John Brierley (07) 323 7458.



Volcanic Plateau

7 September - evening meeting, venue TBA. Pitcairn Islands. Ph. Kerry Oates (06) 385 4235.

14 November - Banded Dotterel survey, Mt Tarawera. Ph. Kerry Oates.

7 December - evening meeting. Ph. Kerry Oates.

Gisborne/Wairoa

Taranaki

Evening meetings - first Tuesday of the month (excluding January), Taranaki Museum, Ariki Street, New Plymouth. Ph. David Medway (06) 758 0370.

Manawatu

Wanganui

Hawkes Bay

19 July - Black-fronted Terns, Napier to East Clive. Ph. Christine McRae (06) 879 9136.

16 August - Horseshoe Lake. Ph. Christine McRae.

Wairarapa

21 June - Harrier and 5 minute bird count. Ph. Miles King (06) 377 5252.

8 July - evening meeting, Red Cross rooms, Masterton. Calls, silhouettes and identification. Ph. Miles King.

25 July - mid winter pond and lake count. Ph. Miles King.

Wellington

Beach patrols - Jean Luke (04) 293 5601.

Mapping scheme - Hugh Robertson (04) 385 8407.

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

Nelson

Marlborough

Canterbury

19 July - Count of Southern Crested Grebes and cockatoos. Ph. Ron Nilsson.

27 July - evening meeting, Middleton Grange School, Riccarton. The Antarctic Peninsula and the Falklands. Ph. Ron Nilsson (03) 338 8936.

8 August - Searching for colour banded Black-billed Gulls. Ph. Sheila Petch (03) 348 1889.

24 August - evening meeting, Mainland Islands - the Hurunui. Ph. Ron Nilsson.

19 September - South Canterbury captive breeding of waterfowl (including Blue Ducks). Ph. Ron Nilsson or Sheila Petch.

Labour weekend - Kaikoura region field trip.

West Coast

Otago

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

19 August - evening meeting, evolution of shag behaviour.

21 October - evening meeting, Takahe and their bones.

15 November - summer wader count. Ph. Ken Gager (03) 487 6670.

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

Weekends May - August - Silvereye banding. Ph. Peter Schweigman (03) 455 2790, Mary Thompson (03) 464 0787, Jim Wilson (03) 476 3235, Robin banding, ph. Peter Schweigman.

Southland

Evening meetings, Southland Museum, second Wednesday of even months. Ph. Lloyd Esler (03) 217 9060.

Beach patrols - each weekend during winter. Ph. Lloyd Esler.

20 June - winter wader count. Ph. Lloyd Esler.

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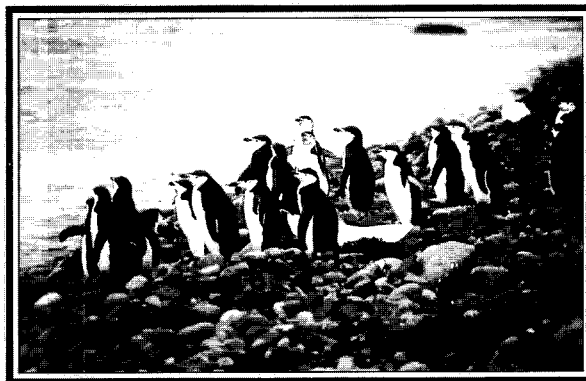
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