

No.93 **December 1999**

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

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

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

OSNZ News

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Rare Birds Committee

In 1998 I was appointed by Council to be Convenor of the Rare Birds Committee from 1 January 1999. At its meeting in Christchurch last June, Council appointed the following six additional members to the committee for a term of three years as from 1 July 1999 - Brian Bell, Brian Gill, Paul Sagar, Peter Schweigman and Graeme Taylor. The President is an ex officio member of the committee.

Pertinent details relating to reports dealt with by the former committee for the period 1992-1998 inclusive have never been published. Council has resolved that those details will be published periodically in *OSNZ News*, commencing next year, until this backlog is cleared. In addition I intend to write a separate account for publication in *Notornis* which will deal with those significant records from among the 1992-1998 reports (and there are several) which have not already been separately published, or are not going to be separately published, by the observers themselves.

Three very significant reports received in 1998 have yet to be dealt with by the new committee. They involve the first possible record of the Common Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea* based on a bird found freshly dead in Canterbury in March 1997, the probable first sighting of a Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* at Lake Ellesmere in August-September 1997, and the probable first sighting of a Stilt Sandpiper *Micropalama bimantopus*, also at Lake Ellesmere, in September 1998.

27 reports have been received by the committee in 1999 so far. Most of them have been appropriately dealt with, but there are a few significant sightings which have yet to be determined by the

committee. They include possible Pink-footed Shearwaters *Puffinus creatopus* off Kaikoura in December 1998 and February 1999, and a possible Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* at Papakanui Spit in January-February 1999.

A full account of the 1999 reports dealt with by the committee will appear in the next issue of *OSNZ News*. Also, in future, pertinent details will be published in *OSNZ News* every six months relative to the current status of reports before the committee, and an annual account will be published in

Notornis dealing with the more significant records accepted by it during the previous calendar year.

The committee will over time be reviewing, *inter alia*, the "Unusual Bird Report" form currently in use, and the list of species to be reported to it. In the meantime observers should continue to follow the present procedure and to use the present "Unusual Bird Report" form, which should be available from Regional Representatives and is available from me.

Please do not hesitate to direct any

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc)

Nominations for Council

Under the provisions of the new Constitution, the following Council members retire in May 2000, and nominations for a three year term are hereby called for, to fill the vacancies created.

Mr C.J.R. Robertson
Mrs H. Harty (Membership Secretary)
Mr G. Taylor
Mr P. Schweigman (co-opted)
Mr D. Crockett

Nominations close with the Secretary on 28 February 2000, and must be signed by two financial members and consented to by the person nominated. Retiring officers are eligible for re-election.

Notices of Motion

Notice of any motion to be considered by the 2000 Annual General Meeting must reach the Secretary before 28 February 2000 in writing and must be signed by the mover and seconder.

The 2000 OSNZ Annual Conference and AGM will be held in Napier on 3rd to 5th June 2000.

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

queries you may have to your Regional Representative or to me, and to send in your reports for consideration by the committee.

DAVID MEDWAY
Convenor, Rare Birds Committee
25a Norman Street
New Plymouth
Ph. (06) 758 0370

Conference and AGM 2000

Napier, 3-5 June

Venue and Accommodation

The venue is The Dome, Marine Parade, Napier. Accommodation is at the Masonic Hotel, and backpackers accommodation is available at Waterfront Lodge on Marine Parade if this type of accommodation is desired.

Travel arrangements

Hawke's Bay members will be available to meet arriving members from the airport, or other terminals (provided these details are communicated to us on the registration form) and arrangements will be made to assist on departure.

Council and RRs' meeting

Council and Regional representatives will meet from midday on Thursday 1 June and all day Friday 2 June, with joint meetings on Thursday evening and on Friday. These meetings will take place at the Landmark Hotel.

Contributed papers and posters

Submissions for additional presentation of papers on Sunday 4 June, either orally or in poster form, are invited. Any topic relevant to ornithology in New Zealand or the South Pacific region will be considered. Talks should be 15 minutes long with 5 minutes for questions. Please send your submissions with your registration form or email Brent Stephenson on B.M.Stephenson@massey.ac.nz.

Atlassing field trips

In line with the instruction in the last *OSNZ News* (September 1999) "From the President's Desk" the field trips for the AGM will take the form of atlassing. As many private cars as possible need to be available. So if you are planning on travelling to the AGM by private vehicle be prepared to use it for atlassing purposes on Saturday and possibly Monday and please note on your registration whether or not you will be able to provide transport, and if so how many passengers you can take.

Other activities

We will run a photographic competition and more details will be provided with the registration for the AGM.

Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.) 61st Conference and Annual General Meeting

3-5 June 2000

The Dome, Marine Parade, Napier

Programme

Thursday 1 June

- 1200 Lunch
- 1300 RRs' and Council Meeting
- 1800 Light meal
- 2000 Joint RRs' and Council meeting

Friday 2 June

- 0900 RRs' and Council meeting
- 1200 Lunch
- 1300 RRs' and Council meeting
- 1500 onwards - registration
- 1800 onwards - social evening
- 1900 light evening meal available
- 2000 Council meeting

Saturday 3 June

- 0800 Late registration and briefing on atlassing trips.
- 0900 Leave for atlassing
- 1800 Dinner
- 2000 AGM

Sunday 4 June

- 0900 Conference paper presentations
- 1230 Lunch
- 1400 Conference paper presentations
- 1700 Social hour
- 1830 Conference Dinner

Monday 5 June

- 0830 Atlassing trip to Boundary Stream Mainland Island

Contact details
Margaret Twytle, OSNZ Hawke's Bay, 124 Nelson Crescent, Napier or Brent Stephenson.

Email:
B.M.Stephenson@massey.ac.nz

Millennium photographic competition

Following the success of past photo competitions held at Ornithological Society AGMs, a competition will also be held at the Millennium Conference and AGM to be held in Napier on the 2-5 June 2000.

There will be two categories for entry:

35mm Slide

35mm Print

Entry will be \$3 for as many entries as desired. Entries are restricted to birds photographed in New Zealand, no overseas photos please. All entries will be treated with care, but no responsibility will be accepted for lost or damaged entries. Expect to see some of the best slides and prints in future editions of *OSNZ News* (or whatever it will be called?). Fabulous prizes will be awarded to the best of each category.

All slide entries will be shown on the Saturday evening, and all prints will be on display over the weekend. Prints should be mounted on card with a name and caption displayed at the bottom of the print. It is up to photographer to decide what size print they enter.

Please fill out the form below and post with your entries and entry fee to:

Brent Stephenson
1110 Allenby Street
Hastings
Phone (06) 8734111

Email:
B.M.Stephenson@massey.ac.nz

Millennium photographic competition

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

No. of slide entries enclosed:

No. of print entries enclosed:

Entry fee enclosed: **\$ 3.00**

Kerguelen Petrel in Dunedin

On the morning of 7 September 1999 I noticed a dark grey petrel circling over Chisholm Park golf course, Dunedin. Conditions were cold and wet with a strong sou-wester. The bird landed, so I examined it in the hand, made mental notes and replaced it, having no means to transport it. The next morning I went back, found the bird dead and retrieved it. With the aid of reference books, Kim and I independently identified the bird as a Kerguelen Petrel.

Peter Schweigman measured and photographed the bird. He and Derek Onley agreed with our identification. The specimen is now in the Otago Museum as OM1850. David Medway, convenor of the Rare Birds Committee, also confirmed the identification based on our reports and Peter's photographs.

The only Kerguelen Petrel in Otago Museum is a mounted bird with no collection data. I can find no reference to Kerguelen Petrels in Otago in *NZ Bird Notes* or *Notornis* 1939-1999, so the Chisholm Park specimen is a new record for Otago.

JENNY MORRISON

Farewell Spit Swift

At 1.40 pm on 13 November 1999 I noticed what was obviously a swift of some sort flying about the lighthouse reserve area on Farewell Spit. I watched it for a considerable time as it flew over, and sometimes between, the large pine and macrocarpa trees growing there.

It flew more or less in circles of varying sizes, at heights which ranged from about ten to 50 or 60 metres. Its generally dark colouration with whitish throat, square tail and white undertail coverts were clearly seen on the many occasions it passed over me. It was markedly different from the Welcome Swallows which were sometimes also in view at the same time.

The swift continued to circle over the lighthouse area throughout the rest of the afternoon. It was last seen at 6.45 pm and was not present the next morning. Rob Schuckard, Willie Cook, Jillian Pollock, Richard Stocker and Patsy Garrett, who I was with at the spit, also had excellent views of the bird when they returned from banding gannet chicks at the colony on the shellbanks.

The fast flying swift was not easy to photograph. Nevertheless the accompanying illustration clearly shows the whitish throat, and the diagnostic square tail and white undertail coverts of a Spine-tailed Swift. There can be no doubt about its identity.

This appears to be the first definite record of a Spine-tailed Swift at Farewell Spit. Chris Petyt (*Farewell Spit - A Changing Landscape*) says Perrine Moncrieff mentions in a letter that during world War II Spine-tailed Swifts appeared in large numbers at Farewell Spit, among other places. I know of no evidence to support her statement. Lance McCaskill (*NZ Bird Notes* 1 (1943):38-40) documented the exceptional number of Spine-tailed Swifts seen in New Zealand during the summer of 1942-43, but includes no records from Farewell Spit. An unidentified swift was seen at the spit in March 1976 (*Notornis* 26 (1979):206).

DAVID MEDWAY



Spine-tailed Swift at Farewell Spit. 13 November 1999.

Photo: David Medway

Aberrant Banded Dotterels

From the birding-aus newsgroup in July come the following reports of paler than normal Banded Dotterels (Double-banded Plovers once they reach Australia). A bird at Werribee Treatment Plant, west of Melbourne, was "all off-white except for dark eyes and normally coloured black and chestnut bands. Head, back, wings and tail were all off-white. It was actively running about like the others but would be chased off when it went too close to one of the others" (Michael and Penny Hunter). Tania Ireton reported that it was probably the same bird seen for a number of years at Werribee.

Tim Reid followed up with a report of a Banded Dotterel present for the previous weeks at South-Arm Neck (in south-eastern Tasmania). The bird had "a washed out sandy colour, instead of the normal brown, to its upperparts and head. It has a single very washed out breast band (the upper one)."

**REMINDER
SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR
2000 ARE NOW DUE**

Tern over the Tasman

A Little Tern, banded as a chick near Lakes Entrance in Gippsland, Victoria, in February 1999, has been seen on the Manukau Harbour. The band number was read by Tony Habraken on 25 October.

Little Terns in south-eastern Australia come from two distinct populations - one that breeds in the area and another that breeds only in the northern hemisphere but which visits the Australian coastline. Unless they are banded or seen breeding, it is not possible to ascertain from sightings of free adult birds which population they are from.

The species is uncommon in New Zealand, although it has been recorded in small numbers at the Manukau Harbour over the years. This is the first record of a Victoria-bred bird being seen outside of Victoria.

CLIVE MINTON/ADRIAN RIEGEN
courtesy of *Galab* 40

Colour flagged Barwits

From 4-10 September, Bob Gill and Brian McCaffery observed staging Bar-tailed Godwits in western Alaska on the

southern Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Earlier aerial surveys indicated that the delta supported thousands of godwits, and we were not disappointed on our recent trip. We estimated at least 9,000 along the 10 km stretch of coastline where we worked.

By following foraging flocks, as well as working high tide roosts, we had a chance to scan many thousands of legs for colour flags. We made dozens of observations of flagged godwits during our week in the field, including at least 28 different individuals. Our preliminary conclusions indicate that we observed 12 individuals from south-eastern Australia (orange flag), 8 from north-eastern Australia (green flag) and 8 from New Zealand (white flag).

A proposed link to wintering grounds in New Zealand and possibly eastern Australia had heretofore been based on reports of only three marked birds obtained during the previous 45 years. This information confirms that the Alaskan breeding population of about 150,000 birds is distinct from those breeding elsewhere in Asia and that Alaskan birds winter in both Australia and New Zealand.

Further our failure to see any birds that were marked on non-breeding grounds in north-western Australia (over 5,000 marked to date) supports the idea of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway having at least two distinct populations of Bar-tailed Godwits, which are segregated from each other during almost their entire annual cycles.

BOB GILL
courtesy of *Galab* 39

Common Tern ID - a response

Ian Saville's note on a Common Tern sighting (*OSNZ News* 90) got me looking through my slides again (refer *OSNZ News* 87). Confusion with White-fronted Terns is the least of the problems with Common Terns - separating them from Arctic is the "nasty" bit.

I prefer photos to paintings for identification. Unless the artist has considerable experience with a species in the field it is impossible to capture the true jizz of a bird and even then must be able to capture it on paper.

The recent *Photographic Handbook to the Seabirds of the World* (Enticott and Tipling) does not show an Arctic Tern in mature non-breeding plumage, and does not show a mature Common Tern subspecies *longipennis*, the subspecies most likely encountered in New Zealand.

Juvenile terns of most species are incredibly variable in their plumage pattern. Have a look at any group of immature White-fronted Terns, and I believe Arctic and Common Terns to be equally variable in plumage, making separation a nightmare.

Even with adult Common Terns in New Zealand in November and December there is considerable variation in stage of moult, with three birds in late November 1987 having almost full breeding plumage to almost complete moult into non-breeding plumage.

In December 1988 I located a Common Tern in non-breeding plumage, plus a bird in juvenile plumage which seemed to fit the description of a

young Common Tern in Harrison's *Seabirds of the World* in having dusky secondaries, rather than the pure white of Arctic Tern young birds. Photos sent to the RAOU during the production of *HANZAB* were confirmed by their experts as being of an Arctic Tern juvenile.

The *Photographic Handbook* gives the Arctic juvenile as having a whitish tail and secondaries, as is clearly visible in my bird.

No wonder I am confused with separating these birds. Anyone sighting a "commic" tern really needs to get good photos to be able to identify adults - juveniles are seemingly worse. At least with adults if you can get a good sighting of a bird in the air you have chance, the

Wader Flagging Protocol

The Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme, administered by Environment Australia, along with other parties, has recognised that there is a need to coordinate all colour marking activities for migratory birds throughout the East Asian-Australasian flyway. If the principles embodied here for shorebirds are accepted by all bird banding schemes and researchers, it would then be appropriate to also attempt international coordination of all colour banding in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Proposed Colour Flag Allocations for the East Asian - Australasian Flyway

Region	Colour	Name
1	Blue/Green	Alaska, US
2	Yellow/Black	Kamchatka Peninsula, Russian Far East
3	Yellow/White	Amur River region, Russian Far East
4	Blue	Northern Japan
5	Blue/White	Central Japan
6	Blue/Orange	Southern Japan
7	White/Orange	Korean Peninsula
8	Blue/Yellow	Dandong-Tangshan, China
9	Green/Orange	Yellow River Delta, China
10	Green/Blue	Jiangsu, China
11	White/Black	Shanghai-Zhejiang, China
12	White/Blue	Taipei-Kaohsiung, China
13	White/Yellow	Guangdong, China
14	Blue/Black	Hainan-Guangxi, China
15	Yellow/Green	Vietnam
16	Black/Blue	North Philippines
17	Black/White	South Philippines
18	Black/Green	Gulf of Thailand
19	Black/Yellow	Singapore, W Malaysia
20	Orange/Black	Bangladesh
21	Black/Orange	Java, Indonesia
22	Green/White	Papua New Guinea
23	Yellow/Orange	Southwest Australia
24	Yellow	North-west Australia
25	Yellow/Blue	Darwin region, Australia
26	Green/Yellow	Gulf of Carpentaria, Australia
27	Green/Black	Central Queensland Coast, Australia
28	Green/Green	Brisbane region, Australia
29	Orange/Green	New South Wales, Australia
30	Orange	South-east Australia
31	Orange/Blue	Tasmania, Australia
32	Orange/Yellow	South Australia
33	White	North Island, New Zealand
34	White/Green	South Island, New Zealand

The process that will follow will be: 1) assessment by national banding scheme, 2) notify liaison group of application, 3) approval by national banding scheme, 4) registration on national and flyway colour marking registers.

per ADRIAN RIEGEN

Arctic having a much narrower black edge to the primaries.

Having probably close to a hundred slides of Common Terns taken in New Zealand and in Australia, I am reasonably sure that I can separate adult "commic" terns, though I have only three shots of adult Arctic Terns (identified by Chris Corban - though to me the legs look far too long, even if the more rounded head shape looks atypical for Common Terns I have seen).

Back to Common Terns, some birds have noticeable white shafts to the dark primaries, under the right light conditions at least. The white on the more rounded head of Arctic extends further up the crown, with a more diffused separation line between black and white, based on looking through more books and photos sent to me from Victoria. Leg length may be physically longer on Common, but exposure depends on state of feathering on the belly, Non-breeding birds of both species seem to have blackish leg colouring.

Like I keep repeating, nasty!!!

BRIAN CHUDLEIGH

First National Twitchathon

Fifteen teams took part in the first national twitchathon held in October 1999. Altogether 130 species were seen or heard by the participants from Northland to Southland.

Embarrassingly, the team that identified the highest number of species (86) and, therefore, winners of the *Porphyrio mantelli* Mantelpiece Monstrosity were The Plains Wanderers led by myself. The first team to submit a list of more than 50 species were the Waiongana Wanderers from Waitara, who won a bottle of wine.

Only two teams saw kiwi, the Wairoa One-day Wonders were partly deafened by a Brown Kiwi calling outside their tents, and Little Spotted Kiwi was found by the Kapiti Kiwi Kounters. Likewise, only two teams saw penguins, the Tinny Tickers, and the Kapiti Kiwi Kounters, both having Blue Penguin on their lists.

The rarest vagrant species was the American Golden Plover seen by the Southern Auks. Most teams saw the common introduced species, most shag and duck species, and the commoner waders. Species notable by their absence were the larger penguins, Blue Duck, Brown Teal, NZ Falcon, Brown Quail, Whimbrel, Yellow-crowned Parakeet, and Kokako. Maybe these species will be seen in any future twitchathons, given more prior notice of the event in future for organisation of teams. The full list of results follows.

Team name	Region	Team recorder	Species total
M&L&2Ps	Northland	Prue Cozens	49
-	Auckland	Kathy Barrow	56
Southern Auks	South Auckland	David Lawrie	49
Bell-Birds	Bay of Plenty	Margaret Brierley	51
Wairoa One-Day Wonders	Gisborne/Wairoa	Geoff Foreman	65
Waiongana Wanderers	Taranaki	Peter Fryer	55
Arapaepae-Awahou	Manawatu	Peggy Mallalieu	57
Brent & Sav	Manawatu	Ian Saville	75
Wairarapa Wanderers	Wairarapa	Miles King	34
Wairarapa Ornith. Society	Wairarapa	Jenny Doring	36
-	Wellington	Brian Harding	40
Kapiti Kiwi Kounters	Wellington	Colin Miskelly	46
Tinny Tickers	Wellington	Pasi Hyvonen	65
Plains Wanderers	Canterbury	Nick Allen	86
Southland Turkeys	Southland	Lloyd Esler	43

The secret to success in a twitchathon is prior planning and sticking as much as possible to a schedule on the day. To see lots of different species, you have to visit lots of different habitats. Accordingly, the Plains Wanderers started at dawn on the road, picking up mainly common species on the way to Kowhai Bush near Kaikoura to look and listen for bush birds. This was followed by two hours in a boat off Kaikoura and a quick look for waders on the rocky shore on the Kaikoura Peninsula.

It was then the long drive to the estuarine habitat at the Ashley Estuary, calling in at St. Anne's Lagoon near Cheviot on the way for a few waterfowl. Next stop was Wolfes and Embankment Roads at Lake Ellesmere for some different waders.

The team was now running just over an hour late, so the original plan to go into the mountains was dropped for staying local and mopping up some species that had been around recently in the farmland, bush and lake areas at the base of Banks Peninsula. The day ended after dark at Hart's Creek listening to the booming of bitterns, and a Marsh Crake responding to a taped call.

In the organisation for the big day for the Plains Wanderers a list of birds was produced, stating where they would be expected to be seen on the day, so it was obvious what species had been missed. As always on a twitchathon, some birds just won't appear on cue. One aspect of twitchathoning is knowing when to give up any hope of seeing or hearing a particular species so that by moving on, more birds can be found. It is of little use waiting two hours for one bird to show itself, when ten new species can be seen down the road. Luck also has a large part to play, both with the birds themselves and the weather. It should also be remembered that the primary object of a twitchathon is to

enjoy a full day of mad birding and to have a bit of fun.

I thank all the teams for taking part, and I hope you all enjoyed yourselves despite some truly atrocious spring weather. I'm looking forward to the second national twitchathon, hopefully in the year 2000, and I promise not to win next time!

NICK ALLEN

Wairoa One Day Wonders

Of course we picked the only day in October to have lousy weather. A strong, cold southerly came through on Thursday. The rivers and estuaries were in flood, and all the usual birds went missing, but, as this was the only day available to us as a full team, we persisted.

We established camp by tramping two hours from the Urewera National Park Headquarters on Saturday afternoon and set up tents in the snow at Lake Ruapani.

Early Sunday morning Moreporks were everywhere. Then at 4.20 am a male Brown Kiwi came up the track calling every few seconds, one deafening call right outside our tent - a very good start to the day.

Light rain had set in by daybreak, but the dawn chorus began - Blackbird, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, and Greenfinch. Where were all the natives? They finally got started while we had breakfast and packed up camp, and soon Grey Warbler, Fantail, Tomtit, Rifleman, Whitehead, New Zealand Kingfisher, New Zealand Pigeon, Tui, and Bellbird were added to our list. We had to stop for five minutes on the track out to watch a Robin in full song. By the time we

arrived at Park Headquarters, only one "certainty", Yellow-crowned Parakeet, was missed.

A 60 km dash back to Wairoa followed, ticking off open-country birds, with the addition of NZ Scaup, Grey Duck, and Australian Coot at Tuai. Pheasant and California Quail - two more certainties - had, however, been missed. We "always" see plenty of them on the Lake Road, but not today!

Back home to discard the packs, and to grab pre-prepared lunch and thermos flasks, we then headed for the Wairoa Estuary. It was a dismal sight, in full flood. The Royal Spoonbill and just about everything else was gone. Only a forlorn-looking Australasian Gannet and a couple of Rooks were present on the bar.

The weather was closing in again, but it was off to Mahia, stopping at Whakaki Lagoon, now in total gloom. At least we saw Grey Teal, Shoveler and Canada Goose, but probably missed other birds in the murk. A quick look at Patangata Lagoon for the NZ Dabchick, which has been present for about two years, but no dabchick, another miss. The weather was a bit clearer at Mahia, but there were not many birds about. We did succeed with the lone Pied Shag at The Cactus, but all those rare waders were gone. Even the ever present Whimbrels were missing.

Mid afternoon saw the final throw of the dice, off to Gisborne. At the Waipoua rail bridge the water level had dropped, mud was exposed, and there were plenty of birds at last. Twenty-three Royal Spoonbills flew by and lifted the spirits. Two certainties, Pacific Golden Plover and Pied Oystercatcher, had gone since last week, but new arrivals were Red-necked Stint, New Zealand Dotterel, and two Black-tailed Godwits, along with the more expected Wrybills, Bar-tailed Godwits, Variable Oystercatchers, Pied Stilts and Banded Dotterels.

As we walked back along the railway line in the fading evening light, a Pheasant called, so we finally picked up one of our missing "certainties". The final tally - 65 species, not what we had hoped for, but, in the conditions a good count. Home, tired and worn out, we were already planning for next time - 70 for sure, maybe 75, who knows...

GEOFF FOREMAN

Gannet/shearwater interaction

In October 1999 I was on a nature tour of the Queen Charlotte Sounds. We were not far from Picton when we

noticed an Australasian Gannet, and what looked like a shearwater, dive into the water. We first saw the birds close together in the water, the gannet then took off and the shearwater followed slightly behind and below. The gannet didn't fly particularly high, maybe 10 metres, and they then dived in unison, hitting the water at the same time. On motoring closer we could tell the other bird was in fact a Fluttering Shearwater.

The skipper commented that he had witnessed this behaviour before, sometimes with several shearwaters following a gannet. I also spoke to an English birder who had witnessed the same behaviour from the Interislander ferry, within a couple of days of my sighting, and had never seen such behaviour back home. It raises the question of whether the shearwater was feeding on scraps from the gannet or other startled fish. It must have been gaining some benefit from the association.

TONY WILSON

Big Appetites in Tairua

Some friends were watching a White Heron in a paddock close to the Tairua Harbour when it launched itself off the ground and intercepted a Song Thrush which was flying overhead. They then watched as the heron proceeded to rip the thrush apart and eat it. I have a picture of the heron holding the thrush taken with an Instamatic camera which clearly shows the heron but you need a bit of imagination to identify the thrush.

My wife Carol was one day watching a mouse outside from the kitchen window when a NZ Kingfisher swooped down and snatched up the mouse. It then carried the mouse to the neighbours clothesline where it proceeded to bang it repeatedly from side to side on the clothesline wire before swallowing it in one piece.

TONY WILSON

Millennium Slides

The slide library has been fairly busy since June, with slides on loan to Volcanic Plateau, Auckland, Waikato and Southland regions.

Tom Sanders, an American author/photographer, has kindly supplied 60 slides of birds he photographed while here recently. These slides are top class, so if you are doing a talk, please keep the slide library in mind. Cost is \$5 total.

PAUL CUMING

Notornis Back Numbers

The *Notornis* back numbers now reside at Whatawhata. Please send all correspondence regarding the slide library and back numbers to:

PAUL CUMING
Private Bag MBE 381
Hamilton

Special Wader issue

Limited copies of the special Sibson and Heather memorial issue of *Notornis* devoted to wader study in New Zealand are still available. Cost is \$20.00 (or US\$20.00 for overseas, including post and packaging. Overseas orders can also be paid for using Visa or Mastercard).

PAUL CUMING

National Wetland Trust

Recently the National Wetland Trust of New Zealand was established by its founding trustees. This Trust is an initiative from the Waikato Conservation Board, originally as a millennium project.

The priority task of the Trust is to establish and maintain a wetland centre for public education and appreciation of the value of wetlands. The centre will be used as a repository of information on wetlands generally and the wetlands of Waikato/Hauraki in particular.

In addition the Trust aims to:

- Promote research into wetlands, their flora and fauna, wetland processes and wetland values
- Establish wetland trails
- Advocate good management, restoration and creation of wetlands
- Liaise with iwi, the community, local government agencies and business organisations to achieve a cooperative approach to solving the problems of wetland management
- Further the aims of the Trust by fostering public membership

The first annual general meeting of the Trust will be held in Hamilton on 2 February 2000 when the first working Trustees will be elected. It should be noted that the Governor-General has recently agreed to act as the Patron and it is hoped that he may be able to attend the launch.

The Trust has recently entered into an agreement to purchase a property in Rangiriri that could be used as a centre. Fund raising is currently under way to try to reach the purchase price in the

short time frame before settlement. Membership applications are also being canvassed at \$10.00 per family.

DAVID LAWRIE
Chairman
52 Mill Road
R D 2, Pukekohe
Email: mlc@ps.gen.nz

Research Students Available

The School for International Training (SIT) is a US-based educational organisation that runs study-abroad programs for third-year university students in over 50 countries around the world. SIT's New Zealand program, based at the University of Waikato, focuses on natural and human ecology, human impacts on the environment, and conservation and management issues.

As part of our core curriculum, students must complete an Independent Study Project (ISP) conducted over a 4 week period. The purpose of the ISP is to provide the student with an opportunity to pursue, in depth, a long-standing or recently acquired interest in a particular aspect of New Zealand. The project must be of academic interest and utilise appropriate methodologies. The student's research must involve fieldwork and primary data collection. Student projects can cover a wide range of topics, including behavioural or population studies of particular species, conservation and management, predator control, human impacts, invasive introduced plants, etc.

If you are conducting field research and would like assistance in your study, or if you would like to design a study in which one of our students could participate, please contact us as we may be able to provide a field worker for your study. Projects can be short-term (ie. the 4 week period available), or long-term (in which a succession of students over numerous semesters help collect data for a longer study). Generally speaking, the periods of time available to our students each year are from mid-April to mid-May, and from mid-November to mid-December.

As a "Project Adviser" you would be expected to help design the project, help answer any questions the student might have during the fieldwork period, provide feedback for the student during the report writing process, and evaluate the final written project. For these services you would receive an honorarium of \$250. Our students are fully funded by the School for International Training and can provide

for their own room and board expenses during the study period.

If you have a particular study in mind, or if you have any further questions about the ISP or about our program in New Zealand, please contact us at:

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Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress

27 June - 2 July 2000, Brisbane.

Birds Australia is presenting the 2nd Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress (SHOC) to be held at Griffith University in Brisbane next year. This congress aims to bring together southern hemisphere ornithologists from around the globe to discuss research and conservation of birds in a distinctly southern fashion. With plenary speakers and symposium organisers confirmed from southern Africa, South America and Australia, SHOC will be a truly international event. This major congress will be hosted by the Queensland Ornithological Society.

Eminent ornithologists will give six plenary addresses:

Dr. Mark Burgman, AUSTRALIA: Population viability analysis for bird conservation

Dr. Alan Kemp, SOUTH AFRICA: Sustainability of avian populations

Dr Pablo Yorio, ARGENTINA: Seabird conservation

Dr. Eleanor Russell, AUSTRALIA: Avian Life Histories

Dr. Phil Hockey, SOUTH AFRICA: Southern approaches to migration

Dr Manuel Nores, ARGENTINA: Species richness in the Amazonian bird fauna from an evolutionary perspective.

As well open sessions, the programme includes the following symposia:

Megapodes: past, present & future
Ratite biology

Threatened species recovery programs in the Southern Hemisphere: are they working?

Life history and ecology of Southern Hemisphere seabirds

Shorebird migrations between the hemispheres

Biogeography - Gondwanan radiations

Systematics of Southern Hemisphere groups

Birds on the edge: fragmentation and disturbance

Mating systems and co-operative breeding

Southern Hemisphere migration: mirror image or new paradigm?

Ecology of birds in human-dominated landscapes

Seabird conservation issues in the Southern Hemisphere

Southern perspective on avian life histories

Physiological correlates of avian life histories

Details of the conference and symposium organisers can be found at the SHOC 2000 website: <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/shoc>. Information can also be obtained from the SHOC 2000 Congress Secretariat: Conventions Queensland, PO Box 4044, St Lucia South Qld., Phone: +61 (0)7 3870 8831; Fax: +61 (0)7 3870 9514;

Email: shoc2000@conqld.org.au.

To take advantage of the reduced early-bird registration rate, be in quickly!

Australasian Wader Studies Group conference

Brisbane, July 2000

As an aside to SHOC, the AWSG will be holding a one day conference on Sunday 2 July in Brisbane, Australia. The theme of the AWSG conference will be long distance wader migration between the hemispheres. Additionally, a two hour session on the same theme will be held within SHOC on 1 July.

The programme is still provisional and speakers are being added. Topics planned include summaries of the migrations of Red and Great Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits in the East Asian Flyway, races of Bar-tailed Godwits in Australia, satellite tracking of Eastern Curlews, wader departures from NW Australia in March and April, conservation implications for long distance wader migrants in Asia, and physiological changes in waders prior to long distance migration.

International topics awaiting confirmation are the migration of Bar-tailed Godwits and Bristle-thighed Curlews from Alaska, and feeding studies of Hudsonian Godwits in Argentina.

Anyone interested in further information about the AWSG conference should contact Jim Wilson, 13/27 Giles

NZ Falcon Survey

A survey has been operating for the last five years to locate and monitor New Zealand Falcon nest sites, in order to record details of habitat and fledging success. The Raptor Association and Department of Conservation, with assistance from others, have been monitoring sites to obtain data which could indicate the stability of the population throughout its range. This information could also indicate the need for a management plan for the species.

To date 28 nests have been monitored, but there are other known sites for which we have no information. Assistance with this survey is sought from OSNZ members, who should contact me if interested. Nest site locations and information will be given to OSNZ members who would like to participate in the survey.

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Rarebits



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

Brown Kiwi - Kiwi listening was carried out by staff and volunteers in Northland in May for the sixth successive year. 23 sites have been monitored annually. Since the baseline year of 1995, average call counts have declined by 35%, an average of about 10% per year.

This decline has not been consistent across the four Northland kiwi regions. In the northern region there has been an overall increase of 11% since 1995, while the greatest decline (44%) has been in the Bay of Islands region.

There have been no local "extinctions" since 1995. All sites which had kiwi present in 1995 still had birds present in 1999. Overall trends in call counts, however, have been downward. Serious decline has occurred at some sites, eg. Katui and Mimiwhangata. At managed sites, and some apparently unmanaged sites, birds appear to be holding their own. Results from study areas around the North Island suggest a good correlation between call counts and the number of birds present, and the method appears to be a good indicator of numbers.

An examination of responses to

specific management regimes is now being carried out. Factors that could affect kiwi numbers include type and intensity of pest operations, degree of dog problems and human issues.

Meanwhile North Island Brown Kiwi are to be reintroduced into Boundary Stream Mainland Island using Operation Nest Egg techniques - removal of eggs from incubating males which are taken into captivity for hatching and rearing. Chicks will be released into the wild when they have reached one kilogram in weight, a sufficient size to handle stoats.

The project is in the first stage of the reintroduction programme. Five male kiwi have been translocated in the Kaweka Forest Park, and have been monitored since late June to detect the onset of nesting. So far field staff have confirmed two nesting birds, with the first chick due to be hatched in early September.

The possible impact of hedgehogs on the success of kiwi reintroduction is concerning, and a report was commissioned from an independent researcher. The report concluded that food competition from hedgehogs will reduce the future density of kiwi within Boundary Stream, but will have no short to medium term effect on the reintroduction. An effective control regime to manage hedgehog populations will be required in the future.

Brown Teal - Brown Teal are not doing too well on Great Barrier Island. After two years' study Dave Barker and his trusted team-mates Bob and Gus have confirmed that Brown Teal populations are under significant threat from a variety of sources.

For instance, the results of both years show that grazing wetlands in a controlled manner will result in significant improvement of feeding and breeding areas for Brown Teal. The data also illustrated circadian patterns in habitat use also varied, with teal requiring good cover during the day. However habitat use also varied according to season, which implies that controlled grazing should aim to provide appropriate feeding areas at specific times during the year. As a result Steve McGill, local area manager, will embark on establishing an appropriate grazing regime. We believe that this will significantly contribute to relieving the plight of Brown Teal on the island.

Brown Teal also have predator problems. Cats appear to be a smaller problem than initially thought because of the availability of rats and rabbits throughout most of the year. However Pukeko are one of the major threats to Brown Teal ducklings, while free-

running dogs have a significant impact on adults. Sam Ferreira developed an age-specific demographic model using clutch sizes, hatching rates, duckling survival and adult survival rates recorded by Grant Dumbell during 1985-87 as well as those recorded in Northland by James Fisher. Sam's models predict that the Brown Teal populations at Okiwi Station on Great Barrier Island will halve in the next ten years.

The models clearly demonstrate that the most significant variable was adult survival rate, followed by juvenile survival rate. It also illustrated that if adult survival rate could be improved from 63% to 71% an increasing Brown Teal population will result. To obtain the same result by manipulating juvenile survival rate, values need to change from 55% to 79%. All is not doom and gloom, because we believe that adult and juvenile survival rate is related to dog predation. Managing dogs will result in significant positive effects on population growth rates. However managing dog owners is easier said than done.

Our biggest weakness in making these claims is our assumptions of variables in the models. Dave is spending this season verifying those variables. He has 20 radio collared females which he is following during the present breeding season. We will be able to calculate clutch sizes, hatching success and survival of ducklings and juveniles. We are at present evaluating adult survival rates from an enormous database of banded birds established during 1994 when the first adult birds were banded.

Rainbow Lorikeet - We estimate that around 150-200 lorikeets, from birds released by an individual breeder for some years, are now present in the Auckland region, with sightings from Clevedon to Whangaparaoa. There are a number of hotspots and birds have been breeding in the wild.

Consequently in July the species was declared an "unwanted organism" under the Biosecurity Act 1993, with special exemptions for the keeping of birds in secure aviaries. Heavy penalties now exist for the release of birds: 5 years and/or a \$100,000 fine.

The conservancy will be undertaking a programme of live recapture, handing birds onto commercial operators for return to captivity. Where capture is impractical the bird will be controlled. A Rainbow Lorikeet "protection" group (The Rainbow Trust), led by the person implicated in the original release, is actively opposing the removal of birds from the wild.

Kokako - Kokako recovery has gathered pace in Te Urewera National Park, with 50 chicks fledged this 1998/

99 breeding season. Kokako recovery forms part of the Northern Te Urewera Ecosystem Restoration Project, a mainland island where staff aim to restore a 50,000 hectares area of forest in the medium to long term, starting out from a core area of 1300 ha.

During this year's census, 102 Kokako were located in the Otamatuna study area, compared to 35 in 1996. Most importantly Kokako breeding pairs increased from eight pairs in June 1994 to 28 pairs in 1999. Each pair is producing in excess of two chicks per season. However staff have observed that birds are now dispersing to repopulate areas beyond the boundaries of Otamatuna. Eight Kokako were located in the adjacent Ogilvie's Ridge area, where no birds have been seen since 1993.

Pest control programmes to protect nesting Kokako are also being run in two nearby areas, Mangaone and Onepu. In the Mangaone area, 50% of Kokako nests successfully fledged chicks, and the number of pairs doubled at Onepu in the 1998/99 season.

A survey of the Waikokopu area in the northern Ikawhenua range identified this as a new area requiring protection. Kokako pair numbers in this area have halved in the last three years, making the species vulnerable to local extinction. A protection programme is planned to enhance the remaining population and reverse the current trend.

Common Diving Petrel - A banded Common Diving Petrel that washed up dead on a Waikanae beach in July was transferred to Mana Island from the Sugarloaf Islands as a chick in 1997. Because this is the time of year when diving petrels return to nesting colonies to prospect for burrows, this find bodes well for breeding attempts on Mana. Some recent sign of fresh burrowing at the artificial colony on Mana Island may also be from transferred birds returning to breed.

Kapiti birds - a second round of "post-rat" five minute bird counts was done by a team of Ornithological Society members on 17-18 July. Several species were found have increased dramatically in conspicuousness from July counts undertaken in 1991-94, particularly kakariki (up 152%), NZ Robin (103%) and Bellbird (53%). All three species were also more conspicuous in April 1999 than in previous years.

Saddlebacks were up 35% in July, but the April count was not significantly different from previous years. All these species nest in sites vulnerable to rat predation, and some (eg kakariki) may benefit from reduced competition for fallen fruit and seeds.

Species that decreased in conspicuousness over both sets of counts to date were Silvereye, Tomtit and Tui. Of these species, Tomtit is the only species likely to have suffered much rat predation at nests. Tomtits have been declining on Kapiti for the last two decades, presumably owing to competition from Robins as forest succession progresses. Silvereyes and Tui tend to fluctuate wildly in conspicuousness on Kapiti, and we would be surprised if their counts remain low during the three year count period.

The team was surprised how quickly Weka have recovered from the poisoning operation in 1996.

Fiordland Crested Penguin - South Westland area, West Coast conservancy and Southern Regional Office have conducted a census of adult Fiordland Crested Penguins throughout July in study sites at Jackson Head and Monro Beach. The work is part of an ongoing ecological study initiated in 1994.

In 1994, 1998, 1999 (and intervening years during nest and chick surveys) all adult Tawaki have been banded with RH flipper bands and band numbers recorded of those already banded. Initial results from 1998 suggested that adult survival was lower than expected. This posed some questions - are birds not returning to the same site owing to disturbance, do they breed every year and are large numbers of birds losing their bands?

According to the study at Jackson Head has been extended with a sample of both banded and unbanded birds being marked with a transponder implanted subcutaneously. When interrogated with a reader, the ten digit code is displayed on a LCD screen.

Initial results from 1999 look promising for Tawaki survival. Birds that have not been seen since they were banded in 1994, 1995 or 1997 have been resighted this year at both Jackson Head and Munro Beach.

Okarito Brown Kiwi - This breeding season 46 kiwi have transmitters attached. So far we have eight eggs, and the first is due to hatch by mid September.

After initial training on blood sample taking techniques, we now have 37 samples waiting to be sent away for DNA analysis. This is part of the research to determine the taxonomy of all kiwi. It is also an opportunity to look at the relationships within the trios.

One member of a trio was recaptured in May 1999. Its bill had grown five mm in ten months, confirming our suspicions that it is a

juvenile - the first (live) one ever confirmed in the wild.

Following an aerial 1080 programme for possums, we let chicks on the forest to see if there are any additional benefits for kiwi. Of an initial sample of 11, two are still alive and both weigh over 1000 g and mostly have been sheltering with their parents in the breeding burrows. The juveniles released in December 1997 and 1998 have all successfully settled back in to the forest. Chicks from different years have been recorded sharing the same burrow. There has only been one known death in the last two releases - a juvenile who appears to have died from a beating by an adult bird, probably her parents.

Project River Recovery - Tracking predator-carnage remains a popular summer time activity in the Mackenzie Basin. Here we report on who-done-it videos, Black-fronted Tern breeding success and the predator-proof fence which isn't but does its job.

We now have good quantitative data on who or what is killing Banded Dotterel eggs. Last season we moved half of our cameras to Black-fronted Terns, to see whether tern nests suffer similar fates - a slightly tricky question because of the non-independence of tern nests. That said, initial results suggest that the same predators are doing the damage at both dotterel and tern nests. Overall, for 61 videoed fatalities at dotterel and tern nests, the scores are: cats 24, ferrets 14, hedgehogs 12, stoats 3, magpie 1, others (sheep, humans, parent birds, unknowns) 7.

The videos mainly tell us about predation on eggs and incubating adults but also give us a glimpse on chick mortality in their early days. Our 61 fatalities include predations on six clutches of chicks at nests - one by a magpie.

Two of the egg fatalities were desertions immediately following cat visits to tern nests. Two were desertions of unknown cause, though we suspect predators at nearby (unvideoed) nests. One of the useful spinoffs of the video work is that we can pick up any change in predator guild as a result of the RHD-induced rabbit decline. Over the next few years we'll continue to put half of our cameras on Banded Dotterels, as controls, and half on Black-fronted Terns.

Last summer Rachel Keedwell began her PhD research into Black-fronted Terns in the Mackenzie Basin. She monitored their breeding success from egg-laying through to post-fledgling survival in the Ohau River. However this first season's results don't paint a very rosy picture. A total of 247 nests were monitored, of which 45% hatched at least one chick.

Predators were responsible for the failure of 25% of eggs but based on video evidence at some colonies, predators were probably also responsible for the desertion of another 23% of eggs. Chicks also had a hard time and, although difficult to monitor their survival, Rachel estimates that 9-31% of hatched chicks made it to fledging.

Results suggest a minimum of 38% of juveniles die within two weeks of fledging. Stacked up these figures indicate an adult tern has approximately 5% probability of successfully rearing one young in a season. The successful offspring then have to survive another two years to adulthood and reproduce to be able to add to the population.

This research will continue for another two seasons. Hopefully with increased sample sizes and more years of data, we'll get a more complete picture of the population trends of this threatened species and begin to develop management tools to assist in any population decline.

In other research, Norway rats, two cats, a weasel and two Kahu were trapped and mice were tracked inside the Ruataniwha wetland that is surrounded by a predator fence. This is not a surprise as mammalian predators have been caught irregularly inside the fence since its construction in 1993, but it is a concern that they can out-fox the fence.

However the more important question is does the fence and some trapping provide gains for the birds using the wetland? Nest survival inside the fence for Banded Dotterels (for which we have good sample sizes) was 88%. This is significantly higher than outside in 1998 (69.3%) and historically (59%). Chick survival is a lot harder to monitor, because chicks are running and hiding within hours of hatching. Our small sample sizes indicate that chick survival was higher inside the fence, but we need to put more effort into chick monitoring to get worthwhile measures.

Takahe - The 1998/99 Takahe breeding season in the Murchison Mountains was successful in terms of increased adult population numbers (124 birds), and increased numbers of pairs (47). 34 pairs nested to produce 27 chicks (alive in February). The total Takahe population numbers increased from 192 to 214 birds, an 11.5% increase.

Nesting in the Murchisons began in October, following the fourth mildest winter on record, and stretched through until the end of February. Also the 1998/99 summer was the hottest on record and had the highest tussock flowering (80% of tussocks) in 27 years of monitoring.

This season we found a total of four dead birds. The juvenile survival and breeding recruitment study continued, with another eight captive reared birds released in two locations in the mountains in November and another 14 wild juveniles banded. The number of captive reared birds also increased, with 26 birds in pairs. However wild Takahe still make up the majority of the breeding population (46 birds).

Other significant events include the first official season of the Takahe egg and chick mortality study - 13 pairs were monitored in the McKenzie block. An increased effort in deer ground control resulted in a greatly increased harvest of 186 deer. There was also the development of a new monitoring and management regime. The mountains are to be divided into experimental treatment areas and one minimum disturbance area, to help test the effectiveness of our management practices. This will begin next season.

This year 15 chicks were raised at Burwood. Seven eggs and seven chicks were transferred from the Murchisons. Four eggs died leaving ten chicks. Three of the five Burwood breeding pairs nested, producing 14 eggs from which five chicks hatched and were reared.

This season the four Takahe island sanctuaries (Maud, Mana, Kapiti and Tiritiri Matangi) had a total of 59 Takahe, containing 17 breeding pairs. These produced 47 eggs from 24 nests. 27 eggs were fertile, 15 hatched but only six chicks survived longer than a month. To mix genetic stock, five birds were transferred between islands.

Review

Birdwatching in Australia and New Zealand. By Simpson, K., and Wilson, Z. 1998 New Holland, Sydney. 206 pp ISBN 1 87633 406 1 (softcover) \$34.95

At first glance this is an Australian book about Australia. From the Blue-faced Honeyeater on the cover to the 100 or so photos within, most of which are of Australian species, it provides a comprehensive guide to becoming a birdwatcher in Australia. But closer examination reveals that it will be most useful to the New Zealand reader as well.

Why do we become birdwatchers? How do we become birdwatchers? It has been my experience that among the birdwatching fraternity there is considerable diversity of age and background. There is also an extremely broad spectrum of enthusiasm ranging from the zealous 'twitcher' at one end of the scale, to those for whom birds are merely a passing interest. But it is a fact that birds are likely to be present almost

everywhere we go, whatever we may be doing in the course of daily life. Even taking just a passing interest in birds can make their presence a bonus attached to almost everything we do. Seeking to identify what we are seeing becomes a challenge and a point of interest. But the authors of this book express their desire to encourage readers to watch birds not just for identification, but also out of interest in their activities and their environment.

An introductory section on 'Becoming a Birdwatcher' is followed by chapters on Habitats, Family Likenesses, Identification, Light and Shade, Sound, Daily Routines, Flight, Breeding Behaviour, and Seasonal Routines. Together these provide a wealth of information on how to go about identifying that bird you have just seen for the first time. For instance a general knowledge of which species or even families are likely to be found in which habitat, serves to eliminate immediately many contenders. One would be unlikely to find a grebe perched in the forest canopy, or a raptor swimming on the estuary. Likewise, knowing something of family similarities of general appearance and behaviour will facilitate identification of that individual species.

A good chapter on sound covers not just birdcalls and song, but also other non-vocal sound which can be just as useful for identification. The sound of wings, scrabbling in bark, raking leaf litter or the patter of falling leaves and buds can all help sort out the bird one is trying to identify. It is here however that the New Zealand reader is reminded that this is a book primarily about Australia, for among all the species listed as examples of various sounds, only the Kea and Blackbird are mentioned.

But the basic cognitive tools for bird identification outlined in this book apply everywhere. So while the bulk of the book focuses upon Australian examples of species and habitats, much of it remains relevant for this country.

Moreover, many species are common to Australia and New Zealand, both those occurring naturally and those that have been introduced. Thus the Australian Grey Fantail, Pied Shag, Buff-banded Rail, Black Swan, Eastern Rosella, Grey Teal, White-faced Heron, Silveryeye and Welcome Swallow to name just some of those illustrated, all occur on this side of the Tasman - albeit sometimes with slightly different common names.

There are several sections which follow an actual expedition into the field. Thus a 'Walk in the Rainforest' takes the reader along, describing the various sights and sounds of this habitat,

along with how the authors go about observing and identifying specific birds. Similarly a bird-watching tour of Kakadu National Park, and a walk around the coast and estuary at Plimmerton, north of Wellington, will be of some interest to the New Zealand reader.

Finally the very fact the book is dominated by Australian species and conditions will make it extremely useful to anyone planning a birdwatching visit to Australia. This would include experienced birders as well as the beginner.

KEITH WOODLEY

Regional Roundup

Compiled by Helen Donaldson

Far North

The August meeting was held at the DoC office in Kerikeri and the guest speaker was Conservation Officer Steve McManus. Steve gave a detailed talk on the history of Kokako in Puketi Forest and a rundown of the management that will occur this financial year. Everyone who attended learned a lot about the plight of the birds, and many had seen or heard Kokako at Puketi over the years. In-depth discussion on the night branched out into other things such as the effect of predators and the best methods of controlling them.

Yet again bad weather hampered access to Motukawanui (Cavalli Islands) for annual tree planting. I think the plants spent four weeks on the island awaiting the planting party! The clash of dates with other activities and the approaching drier season meant the work needed to be done fairly quickly so the DoC staff from Kerikeri and Waipoua offices spent a day on the island during the week planting and picking up rubbish. A great day was had by all and I think we will have a few more DoC volunteers for our annual planting next year.

A dead turtle was found amongst seaweed and debris by Catherine MacDiarmid on 7 August 1999 on 90 Mile Beach during beach patrol. It was identified as a juvenile Loggerhead Turtle. This species is found throughout the tropics, and ventures into temperate waters. It is an occasional visitor to New Zealand and there have been about 12 records since 1950. It is currently in the DoC freezer awaiting taxidermy, and I have to say that I have never smelled anything quite like it!

(Leigh Honnor)

Northland

Our region is favoured with beautiful beaches which yield interesting results on our monthly beach patrols, and the last four months have been no exception. On the West Coast in August we found 39 Blue Petrels, 91 Kerguelen Petrels and three Antarctic Fulmars, one of which was still alive but died while being carried off the beach. In September we found 60 Blue Petrels, 39 Kerguelen Petrels and 23 Antarctic Fulmars. October gave us the biggest surprise with 97 Antarctic Fulmars and 7 Kerguelen Petrels. In November we found 23 Antarctic Fulmars, all quite decayed, and it is likely they came in soon after the previous beach patrol. The largest beach wreck on the November beach patrol was a 20 metre fishing trawler aground in the surf! Fortunately it was refloated a couple of days later.

At the end of August 15 members stayed the weekend at Tiritiri Matangi Island and the weather was perfect with good views of all the bird species on the island. Some saw two Kaka at the northern end of the island which was a first for our group on Tiritiri Matangi.

Shining Cuckoos were first reported in the Whangarei area on 16 September 1999 and are now very numerous, calling persistently in both city and forested areas. Two Dollarbirds were sighted on 30 October 1999 in the Twin Bridges area on the Kaikohe to Tangiwahine road by Laurie and Allison Howell. The Fairy Terns have two nests at Waipu and one at Mangawhai at the present time and the season looks to be getting off to a good start. One bird, not seen for six years, has reappeared at Mangawhai.

David Crockett has returned from Chatham Island for a few weeks' break before returning for the usual December through until February working party. Eight Taiko now have transmitters attached and a sub colony has been found about one kilometre from other burrows. The most exciting event is the return of a bird, banded as a fledgling in 1993, to the breeding burrows - the first of the banded fledglings to do so.

I am sure the new millennium has many more interesting discoveries in store for us.

(Lorna Simpkin)

Auckland

At the October meeting Jonathon Miles from DoC gave a presentation about the research into the biology of, and threats to, kiwi. He showed slides taken over the seven years he has

studied kiwi at Lake Waikaremoana, and also showed video clips which included colour footage of a newly hatched chick, both in its nest and emerging from the nest.

At Mangawhai the Fairy Terns nested earlier than in previous documented years. Eggs hatched on 17 November, and banding took place on 4 December. At the Waipu Estuary a three-egg Banded Dotterel nest and a Caspian Tern colony with 98 scrapes (including some completed nests) were observed at the beginning of September.

Daryl Jeffries (who is doing an MSc at University of Auckland) and Gwenda Pulham saw the predation of a Banded Dotterel nest by a New Zealand Dotterel. The Banded Dotterel continued to incubate the remaining egg. Then they saw it happen again at high tide on another day. NZ Dotterels were seen with young chicks in the area in late September.

In September a beach patrol on the West Coast covered 27 kms. 113 birds of 16 species were recovered, of which about half were prions.

Two New Zealand-marked Knots were recently recovered by hunters in Siberia. This is further west for these birds than was expected.

At Wenderholm the North Island Robins which were transferred to the park in June have had a good survival rate and are currently breeding. At the beginning of October there was one hatched nest, and five other females sitting on eggs.

The annual census on Motuora Island was completed in the last week of September, and there were increased numbers of Silvereyes and Tui. It is thought they have been attracted by the large amount of flowering karo on the island (which pleases me as I helped plant it!). The newly planted areas were looking good and four juvenile kiwi were released from the zoo as part of Operation Nest Egg in mid-October. A Shore Plover pair were breeding early in November.

There was concern at the sighting of 9 Rainbow Lorikeets at Manly on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula, as they are very close to Tiritiri Matangi Island.

This year on "our" estuary the Fairy Terns have fed on the incoming tide, (about half tide) almost opposite our house. Usually they have fed further down the estuary where there is a bifurcation and a sand bank, but as the sandbanks change so do the feeding habits.

(Rae McGregor)

South Auckland

Our September meeting was addressed by Dick Veitch on his thoughts and observations on the Galapagos Islands. This proved to be interesting, not only for his photos, but also because of the perspective of observations of Dick. For those of you who are wondering what Dick now does in his retirement, the short answer is that he appears to flit from international conference to international conference. In between times he has turned his hand to wood turning and is busy scrounging pieces of wood wherever he travels.

David Stonex was our speaker for the October meeting and he showed us some remarkable photos of the wildlife of India and Nepal. The main thrust of his visit was to search for the tigers and he obtained some amazing photos of his encounters with this large animal. He also had a wonderful series of bird photos although these were incidental to the main purpose of his visit.

Just to show the versatility of the South Auckland region the November speaker was Keri Neilson who talked to us about the skinks and geckos found in the upper North Island area. This was a timely reminder to ornithologists that there are creatures other than birds that we should be observing during our journeys. There is clearly so much yet to learn about the distribution of these reptiles and often birdwatching takes us into their prime habitats.

There have been some interesting observations made in the South Auckland area in recent months. The first is that the American Golden Plover that has been present for the past two years has returned again this year. The only outstanding item relating to this sighting is for David and Tony to complete the rare bird report to enable it to be officially recognised.

There has also been interesting developments on the tern front. A couple of years ago Tony Habraken and Adrien Riegen banded a little tern during a mist netting evening on the Manukau Harbour. Last year there were strong suspicions that this bird had turned into a Fairy Tern but it disappeared before reaching full breeding plumage. This winter it returned with another tern that was also banded. This caused much confusion as there were no known Fairy or Little Terns in New Zealand that had been banded with a single metal band only. This mystery was partly solved a month ago when Tony managed to read sufficient numbers on the band to enable it to be identified as an Australian Little Tern banded as an immature on the Gippsland Coast of Australia. This was the first long distance band return of this Australian sub-species. The

current theory is that the Fairy Tern may also be of the Australian sub-species and Tony and Gwenda Pulham are planning to visit the breeding grounds early in the new year to see if they can recognise these birds.

There are good numbers and a variety of waders at both the Manukau Harbour and the Firth of Thames. The census in the Firth of Thames was completed recently with the main rarities being two Terek Sandpipers at Miranda and a new gull and tern nesting site near Thames.

The Manukau census is due to be completed in the near future and we are all hoping for a fine day to make viewing conditions more pleasant than the usual wind and rain.

(David Lawrie)

Waikato

Our September speaker left us deeply thoughtful. Jim Dahm of Environment Waikato spoke about threats to our coastal environment. The territory of this regional authority extends to both east and west coasts in this part of the country. It therefore includes the Coromandel Peninsula whose beautiful beaches and estuaries are almost synonymous with intensive development now. It was sobering to hear about the transition from pre-human times to about 30 years ago; then to today; and to what they will probably become in future. The development in the last 30 years has been amazing, and the pace of it is not really diminishing. There is not just housing developments on beach fronts, but canal developments of estuaries as well.

Even without significant changes in ocean levels, the sea operates to its own timetable, eating away the land at times, and building it up at others. Dramatic illustrations of this were shown, using some old coastal subdivision plans, and the number of those sections that have disappeared today. Also dramatic were plans of some recent subdivisions, with an indication of the number of sections that can be expected to disappear to sea for a few years at some time in the future, even if great protection works are put in place. These expensive protection works of course would change sandy beaches to rocky shores, even if they did hold back the sea.

So if you see a lovely undeveloped beach somewhere, enjoy it and memorise the view now. Then in a few years time you will be able to amaze your descendants with descriptions of what it was like before it became just another street of houses, fronted by massive heaps of rock to protect them from the encroaching sea.

Our October meeting featured Carolyn King speaking on a recent visit to Finland which included a trip to a research station in the far north. The diversity of birds and mammals in this hostile environment was fascinating, as were the inter-relationships between them and their predators.

A weekend trip to the Rangitoto Range in September was a chance for some members to enjoy the continuing results of the restoration programme there.

Our usual field trip to the Miranda Shorebird Centre for the Spring Migration Day was as enjoyable as ever. Kevin Smith of Forest and Bird was a stimulating speaker. The fine day brought out a large crowd of visitors, and many of them made good use of the telescopes and identification expertise which were made available on the shellbank.

Our regular monthly surveys of three lakes in Hamilton and Cambridge have continued, with no unusual sightings or trends. But Barry Friend did report a delightful episode, involving a duckling that someone had rescued from a road accident. The human foster-parent had brought the bird to Hamilton Lake for its exercise and training in life skills. He had a plastic decoy duck fastened to the end of a stick, which he pulled through the water. The decoy was followed by the foster duckling, which in turn was followed by a smaller duckling which must have thought this family was better than its own. When swimming training was over, the man slowly towed his decoy out of the water to his vehicle, with the two ducklings following. We have no sequel to this story, but perhaps every day a few more ducklings will join the end of the procession? Until the man has to change his car for a bus?

Beach patrolling produced very little from February to June, but July to October was a different story. Various prions have been numerous at times and Blue Petrels too. Kerguelen Petrels have had a hard time of it, and Antarctic Fulmars have been dying in unusual numbers. Other attractive southern visitors have been Cape Pigeons and White-headed Petrels, and an occasional Antarctic Petrel. A Hutton's Shearwater was an unusual find for our Waikato coast.

Cattle Egret numbers have been checked several times at some of their usual haunts. There were still some of them around on 3 November 1999 and a flock of 34, mostly in breeding plumage, impressed some observers at Ohinewai that day. The following day there was a sighting of three Royal Spoonbills at the unusual location of Lake Whangape. Banding assistance has been given to a masters degree study of

Blackbirds at Waikato University, and a useful pool of banded birds now exists there.

(Hugh Clifford)

Taranaki

At the September meeting Barry Hartley gave a brief history of the Queen Elizabeth II Collier Covenant. This area is inland from Eltham and covers 222 hectares. The Taranaki branch will be undertaking monthly bird surveys of this area and Lake Rotokare. Peter reported that his Oriental Pratincole sighting had been confirmed and the meeting concluded with Peter Fryer giving a talk on the ecology and plumage of White-fronted Terns.

At the October meeting Barry Hartley talked to members about the Australian Magpie. Also at this meeting it was reported that the first series of data had been collected from the Collier Covenant. One disappointing result was the large number of introduced predators present, including feral cats, rats, stoats, ferrets and possums.

In November the first interim report of Lake Rotokare Bird and Habitat Survey was completed. The meeting ended with a lively discussion on whether the term mollymawk should be replaced with albatross.

In August field trips included Pungareere Stream, Rahotu and Kina Road beach area. A variety of birds were seen on this exposed western coastline, including three New Zealand Dotterels. Nine beach wrecks included penguins, prions and Common Diving Petrels.

In September the monthly field trip was to Collier Covenant, where members established listening stations along ridges. Shining Cuckoos were heard as well as the usual bush birds. At Lake Rotokare Spotless Crakes and Fernbirds were heard as well as North Island Robins (possibly the first in this area). Banded Dotterels in breeding plumage were present at Waiongana River mouth.

In October one Blue Petrel was found dead in a coastal paddock and an Antarctic Fulmar was found alive in the port area, but died shortly after. A field trip to Barrett Lagoon was held also in October. On 6 October 1999 a Long-tailed Cuckoo was heard calling on Waitaanga Saddle. On 31 October 1999 four Royal Spoonbills were at Mokau, and two were recorded at Lake Ratapiko. White-fronted Terns have started nesting on an island in the Marine Park and Fluttering Shearwaters appear to be quite common off Taranaki shores.

(Rosemary Messenger)

Hawke's Bay

Local birding of late has had some interesting moments, such as a New Zealand Falcon in August at Rod Neverman's parents Meeanee property being harassed by the black phase Fantail which has been present for some months now. Needless to say, the falcon completely ignored the fantail.

On 2 October 1999 Christine and Jim recorded the first wader arrivals at Ahuriri. There were 64 Bar-tailed Godwits, 20 Golden Plovers and one Lesser Knot. Several Pied Stilts were nesting at the Southern Marsh, and most interesting of all, a Reef Heron was feeding near Pandora Bridge. A solitary Reef Heron used to appear regularly each winter at Ahuriri, but has not been seen for many years. Is this one a youngster tracing its roots?

Christine and Jim also report the last sighting of Cattle Egrets which are now starting to colour up - 30 beside the Taihape Road near Fernhill on 2 October 1999.

Murray Jeffries notes that the Little Egret at Clive is still about, and is now sporting two beautiful neck plumes. Murray has also been active on the Little Blue Penguin front. Although many of us have been aware of the presence and possible breeding of penguins at the port end of Hardinge Road in Napier for some time, it took Murray to check them out. On 1 October 1999, just on dusk, Murray saw or heard at least 12 birds.

John Adams of DoC has seen two White-winged Black Terns during October - one in full breeding plumage. Both birds were in the vicinity of Waitangi, at the Ngaruroro River mouth. It seems that these birds overwintered here, having been seen from time to time.

Taking advantage of the Hawke's Bay Showday and Labour Day weekend, several members travelled to Lake Waikaremoana and stayed at the lakeside motor camp. Local walks included the Lake Waikareiti and Aniwaniwa tracks, as well as a short climb up to the giant rata on the Mount Ngamoko track. Most bush birds we expected to see were seen, including Tomtits, Whiteheads, Grey Warblers, Riflemen and North Island Robins. Two Kaka were heard, and one seen, on the Waikareiti track, as well as a good view of four Yellow-crowned Parakeets. Tui and New Zealand Pigeons were particularly plentiful in most areas we visited. At Papakorito Falls some members saw a New Zealand Falcon chasing an Australasian Harrier. Redpolls were also present in the falls area. It was most convenient to be able to view a Shining Cuckoo in a kowhai tree outside our cabin door! The Shining Cuckoos were heard in all areas we visited. At the

lake edge beside the camp were small numbers of Scaup. To complete the effect, a Morepork called beside the camp!

The following species have been found during beach patrols since the last newsletter: Marine Parade - two patrols, but nothing found. Ellison Street to Awatoto - one Black-backed Gull, one Black-billed Gull entangled in a short length of fishing line. Waitangi to Clifton - four Black Shags, three Black-backed Gulls, one Black-billed Gull, one Sooty Shearwater, one Hutton's Shearwater, one Cape Pigeon, one headless Gannet, one Mallard Duck, two Magpies, one Morepork wing. Ocean Beach - one White-capped Mollymawk strangled by a length of fishing net.

(Wayne Twytle)

Manawatu

Early spring in the Manawatu has been notable for some very unusual seabird records. In competition for top billing are two Antarctic Fulmars found alive on Hokio Beach and a white morph Southern Giant Petrel (and a Cape Petrel) flying past Foxton Beach - all in the peak seabird period of mid-late September. A breeding plumaged New Zealand Dotterel was at the Manawatu Estuary on 11th Sept, and an adult Pied Shag was at the same site from mid-October for at least 4 weeks - both quite rare birds here.

September/October beach patrols on our southern beaches produced an unusually large number of Antarctic Fulmars. As well as the live ones above, we collected 12 recently deceased along with two Broad-billed Prions, five Cape Pigeons, five Blue Petrels, seven Common Diving Petrels, 13 Fairy Prions and four Fluttering Shearwaters.

Returning Arctic waders at the Manawatu Estuary have been unspectacular so far, with average showings of Red Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits, 12 Pacific Golden Plovers, up to four Red-necked Stints, a fleeting visit by a Pectoral and three Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and a couple of Turnstones. Most unusual were the five Curlew Sandpipers through the second half of October. This species has been very scarce recently, the last record - of a single bird - was 3 years ago. Up to two Little Terns were also present in Oct.

Two Manawatu teams took part in the October twitchathon. Why do birds, regularly seen in a location, not appear during these events?

Members of OSNZ and around thirty members of the public came to an open

day at the Manawatu Estuary on 6 November, organised as part of the Horizons M.W. (Manawatu, Wanganui Regional Council) Festival of the Environment. Studies of water quality, life in the mud, estuary plants, wader migration and identification, and invasive weeds, were all available.

In addition to OSNZ displays, others were provided by the Levin Native Flora Group, Horowhenua Forest and Bird, Department of Conservation, along with practical sessions by Horizons M.W. staff.

We had locally produced checklists (in colour) of birds most likely to be seen on the day. Posters, charts and maps explained both Arctic migration routes and the migration of Wrybills and Banded Dotterels throughout New Zealand. Large photographs of the more common estuary visitors made up our part of the display area. Several members had telescopes set up at the high tide roost and spent the morning showing the birds off to the public.

(Brian Tyler/Ian Saville)

Wellington

With the fence completed around the Karori Reservoir, a new "canopy walkway" at Otaki Native Botanic Garden, and the policy of the Forest and Bird branch to "bring back the birds", things are looking up for residents of Wellington who are interested in our natural heritage.

In September Christine Reed gave us

an update of the recovery programme for Black Stilts. There seems to be no relief from the perennial problems facing this elegant species - hybridising, predators, habitat alteration and hydro development.

October's meeting provided a smorgasbord of accounts of the activities of three members: Peter Reese off-shore at Kaikoura, David Cornick at Pauatahanui, and Ralph Powlesland at Lindale, where he is monitoring the nests of Black Shags. Ralph's timelapse video tapes of two or three sites supplied very interesting evidence of nesting behaviour.

The following month, Glen Holland brought news of progress in the captive breeding programmes at Mt Bruce. Both Campbell Island Teal and Shore Plovers are doing well and the Stitchbirds are breeding. Some of the Kaka which were released into the wild in the Mt Bruce neighbourhood have bred after two years. Kokako released on Kapiti and Tiritiri Matangi are breeding, and chicks of the Grey-faced Petrel are being hand-reared by staff.

Closer to home, on Mana Island, members' efforts have been rewarded with the exciting news that eight juvenile Diving Petrels have arrived (four of them banded at Mana) and a non-banded pair is breeding. Apparently 50 more chicks will be translocated from Brothers Island later in November.

Wellington members joined Manawatu branch again last year on 6 November 1999, at the Foxton estuary. Among species noted were Pacific Golden Plovers and Pectoral Sandpipers.

On 20 November 1999, about ten members travelled over the Rimutaka Range at the invitation of OSNZ Wairarapa. Local expertise led to sightings of, among others, Bar-tailed Godwits, Banded Dotterels, Pacific Golden Plovers, possibly a Grey Plover and an Australasian Bittern, on the mudflats of Lake Wairarapa. A useful reminder of a very different habitat that is available for just a little effort. Our thanks to our neighbouring branch for this friendly opportunity.

(Rod Orange)

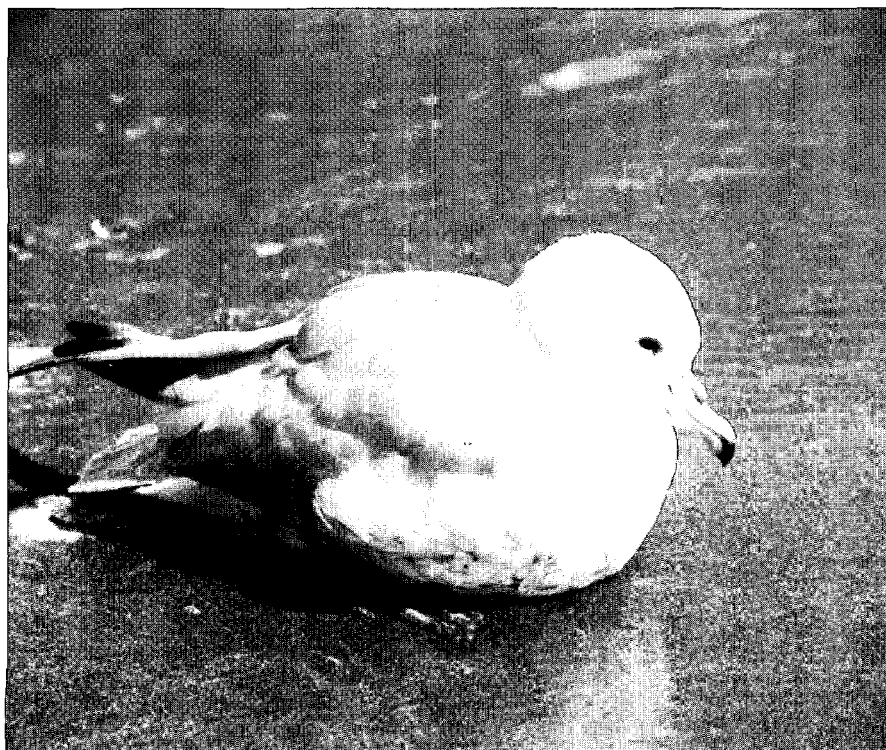
Canterbury

Members have ventured far and wide across Canterbury as part of their OSNZ branch activities in the last few months. Field trips have taken members to South Canterbury, Banks Peninsula, Lake Ellesmere, and the new wetlands around the Christchurch city area, and the monthly meetings have presented speakers back from ventures in South Africa, Australia, South America, Antarctica, as well as local projects.

A group went to South Canterbury at Labour Weekend to monitor bird populations at Gunn's Bush Camp, near Waimate, as well as visiting several other bush areas, the Waitaki River mouth, Washdyke Lagoon, and Ki-Wainono Lagoon. The birds seen included Black-fronted Dotterels, Wrybills, Tomtits, Red-necked Stint, and a Siberian Tattler.

In November, a small group visited the Hinewai reserve on Banks Peninsula, where they practised doing five minute bird counts, and enjoyed the regenerating bush cover in a 1000 hectare corner of the seaward side of the peninsula. Gorse is being beaten into submission by the native forest growing up through it, and the birds are coming back. Among the birds seen and heard were Bellbird, Brown Creeper, Tomtit, Grey Warbler, Fantail, and Rifleman.

Ashburton members came north to join Christchurch birdwatchers in a day-long tour of Christchurch's new urban wetlands, where the city council's policy of redeveloping waterways and building ponds beneath known bird flyways is paying off, with a serious increase in the city's bird population. The tour was led by Andrew Crossland, of the City Council, who has been a vital factor in the council's redevelopment policy. The day ended with a walk around the Travis Wetlands, a large open area in north-east Christchurch, which the council has bought and is turning into a network of reserves, walks, and ponds. Counts done since 1989 show a very strong response from the birdlife.



Antarctic Fulmer, Hokio Beach.

Photo: Brian Tyler

Otago

At the evening meeting in early November, the park manager of Willowbank Wildlife Reserve, Paul Rushworth, spoke about the very successful kiwi breeding programme at the reserve. The meeting heard an introduction to kiwi breeding biology, and the park's methods and on-going research.

Frances Schmechel told of her previous year's visit to South Africa for the International Ornithological Conference, a wader conference, visits to the Durban area, and then a wader expedition in Broome, North West Australia.

Colin O'Donnell and Jane Sedgeley spoke about their visit to Tahiti, Easter Island, and Brazil where they joined a group at Manaus for ten days boating up the Amazon.

Jonathan Banks talked on his recent visit to Antarctica, where he had been checking penguins for lice for use in his speciation research.

The year of activities ended with the wader count, and a barbecue afterwards at Colin and Cherry Hill's farm near Lake Ellesmere, but the usual banding sessions with the Black-billed Gull chicks were abandoned this year because the flooded riverbeds in the region had wrecked any serious nesting attempts by the gulls. One colony in the Okuku River bed, with an estimated 200 chicks, was virtually wiped out a few days before the banding was due to go ahead.

Crested Grebes have over-summered on Lake Forsyth for at least the second year in a row, with four birds present, two of which were displaying near a patch of raupo bringing hopes that they may breed in the future. Two Chestnut-breasted Shelducks have been seen on this lake.

The wader watchers have turned up two Black-tailed Godwits on the Avon-Heathcote, a Hudsonian Godwit on Greenpark Sands earlier in the spring, and a resident Whimbrel at the Ashley Estuary. The usual waders are present on Lake Ellesmere in somewhat higher numbers than last year, but then Greenpark Sands isn't a dustbowl this year.

White-winged Black Terns continue to be a feature of the Mid-Canterbury coast, with birds seen at the Waipara RM, Cooper's Lagoon the Rakaia RM, and the Ashburton RM.

Finally, a resident of Kaituna Valley on Banks Peninsula reported an Oriental Cuckoo.

(David Clarkson/Nick Allen)

Malcolm Foord and several others saw a New Zealand Falcon at Beaumont Bridge over the Clutha River on 14 August 1999. Twelve days later, he saw another, high up on Mt Teviot. On 22 September 1999 on Signal Hill, Bob Cunninghame heard his first Shining Cuckoo of the season.

Royal Spoonbills, like most heron and stork species, prefer mixed breeding colonies. On Green Island they mix with Little Shags and have done that from the first breeding attempt in 1988. On 16 November 1998 the spoonbill colony on the northern slope of the island was inspected and a total of about nine nests of the Little Shag and 12 nests of the Royal Spoonbill were counted. It was interesting to find a nest of each species only 85 cm apart, at the same height, 1.5 m above ground level. Both nests contained old healthy chicks, the Little Shags had three chicks, and the Royal Spoonbills had two chicks. The incubation period for Little Shags, surprisingly, is not known, but for Royal Spoonbills, this period is about 25 days. The site was visited again on 17 December 1998 when both nests were empty, with no sign of the chicks dead or alive. Presumably, both incubating adults of the two species sat more or less happily at pecking distance from each other for just over three weeks, with no detrimental effect to the hatching of the offspring.

Ten members and friends from Dunedin and Invercargill took a second chance to participate in a beach patrol of Mason Bay in September. It involved a lot of travelling from Bluff to Halfmoon Bay by ferry, on to Freshwater Landing at the head of Paterson Inlet by water taxi, and then walking for four hours to the DoC hut at Mason Bay. Bush birds seen and/or heard at Halfmoon Bay and during the walk to Mason Bay included Kaka, Tui, Bellbirds, Tomtits, Fernbirds, Silvereyes and Robins. The beach patrol, which covered the full length (ten kilometres) of Mason Bay, recorded 87 dead birds, the majority of which were juvenile Buller's Mollymawks. Other species recorded were Antarctic Fulmars, Antarctic Petrels, Cook's Petrels, Diving Petrels, Kerguelen Petrels, Broad-billed Prions, Fairy Prions, Cape Pigeons, Stewart Island Shags, Black-backed Gulls and Little Blue Penguins. The identifications ranged from certainties to probabilities depending on the freshness and completeness of the recovered carcasses, which ranged from recently dead to plumage and skeletal remains.

Live birds seen at Mason Bay were Black-backed Gulls, Red-billed Gulls, Variable Oystercatchers, Antarctic

Fulmars, Banded Dotterels, and Pied Shags which are breeding near a pond in the flats behind the dunes. No New Zealand Dotterels were seen either on the beach or on the gravel flats behind the dunes.

Many signs of Kiwi were seen - footprints, droppings, and beak holes - and the birds themselves were seen during moonlight searches, although none were observed in the daytime on this occasion.

The final day was spent exploring the sand dunes, crossing Big Sand Pass in the morning and climbing Big Sandhill in a gale in the afternoon. The return to Invercargill was by light plane from the beach in the late afternoon. Fortunately, persistent driving rain stopped in time for the two planes to land and load, but the engine of one failed to start for the return flight. Exchanging batteries, starting an engine and then returning the batteries, resolved the predicament. The flight back to Invercargill revealed the extreme ruggedness of the northern Stewart Island landscape.

(Peter Schweigman / Frank Austin)

Southland

Ian Southey noted his first Long-tailed Cuckoo for the year at Borland Lodge on 19 October 1999.

Beach patrol reports include several Blue Petrels, Kerguelen Petrels, Antarctic Fulmars and Antarctic Petrels.

Following several days of scanning Jennings' deer farm at Awarua, Roger Sutton was the lucky one who spotted the first flock of migrant waders on 28 September 1999 at 4.30pm. By 5.30pm they had shifted away. Checking at high tide the next day, I found several hundred South Island Pied Oystercatchers on the paddocks but only two Bar-tailed Godwits. I counted about 1200 godwits and a few knots on Jocks Roost instead. Normally there is frantic feeding on the paddocks as the birds recover their bodyweight after the long flight. The relaxed behaviour this year could be due to the very strong westerlies in the previous week which may have given the birds an assisted passage with less energy expenditure than usual.

A check on the waders at Awarua Bay on the evening of 29 October 1999 gave the following results: 700 Bar-tailed Godwits, 80 Knots, 100 Turnstones, 20 Red-necked Stints, 20 Pacific Golden Plovers, ten South Island Pied Oystercatchers, three Banded Dotterels, three Curlew Sandpipers, two tattlers and a Black Oystercatcher.

On 31 October 1999 several members did the annual flight up and down the major Southland rivers looking for colonies of Black-billed Gulls. A pleasant two and a half hours, but very few gulls to show for it. There were only a handful of colonies representing a drastic decline in gull numbers since last year. There was one very large colony about ten kilometres upstream from Wrey's Bush. On the afternoon of the flight we checked this one out from the ground and found it to be easily accessible although you have to cross the river. This is the colony that we will band this year.

For the last two years we have counted Black-fronted Dotterels on the Aparima River between Wrey's Bush bridge and Otautau. In 1997 there was one seen and last year the river level was too high to allow for a safe walk down the river so we walked from Riverton to the Waimatuku River mouth instead. On Labour Day several members set off to look at the Aparima River but it was too high to cross safely. However they found an interesting stretch of river between Fairfax and Otautau. It had a nesting colony of several hundred Black-billed Gulls, several pairs of agitated Black-fronted Terns, Pied Stilts, Banded Dotterels, oystercatchers and plovers. There were also Paradise Ducks, Mallard Ducks, Shovelers, a Black Shag and a Caspian Tern. The Black-billed Gulls had mostly eggs and small chicks with only a few mobile chicks. In 1998 our colonies were mobile and ready for banding on 12 December, so we are more than a month earlier. There is still potential for floods to wipe out the colonies.

Lloyd Esler

WHAT'S ON!



Far North

11 April meeting 7 pm at DoC office Kerikeri

Beach Patrols at Karikari on 13 February, 12 March, 16 April

Beach Patrol at 90 Mile Beach on 31 January, 26 February, 25 March, 29 April

Contact John Dawn (09) 407 8658 or Isobella Godbert (09) 407 8058 for beach patrols.

Northland

29-31 January lake survey far north Janet Snell (09) 438 4240

10 February meeting 7.30 pm David Crockett (09) 435 0954

4-5 March Pouto Lakes survey David Crockett (09) 435 0954

9 March AGM meeting

11-12 March Whangarei Harbour survey Richard Parish (09) 436 1988

25-26 March census New Zealand Dotterel Richard Parish (09) 436 1988

13 April meeting

West Coast Beach Patrols on 15 January, 12 February, 18 March, 15 April

East Coast Beach Patrols on 18 January, 15 February, 21 March, 18 April

Taranaki

Evening meetings, Taranaki Museum, Ariki Street, New Plymouth, 7.30 pm.

Dates for 2000 are 1 February, 7 March, 4 April, 2 May, 6 June, 4 July, 1 August, 5 September, 3 October, 7 November and 5 December.

Wellington

Beach Patrols Jean Luke (04) 293 5601

Harbour Survey, 2nd Sunday of the month 1-3 pm Ros Batcheler (04) 479 4095

Canterbury

February 19, Field trip to Ashley Estuary and Mini Twitchathon. Contact Nick Allen phone 03-312-7183.

28 February: Members' night, with slide shows, birding quizzes, discussion on the mapping and monitoring scheme.

March 19, Kennedy's Bush. Demonstration of bush monitoring techniques to be used for the national monitoring scheme. Meet at the Sign of the Bellbird at 9 am. Ron Nilsson, phone (03) 338-8936.

27 March: Canterbury branch AGM, plus Amanda Byrne on South Island Robin in the Marlborough Sounds. Nominations are called for the post of Regional Representative.

April 15: Ellesmere, Farewell to the Waders. Meet at the lake end of Embankment Road 9 am. Colin Hill, phone 325-5891, Email: cherryhill@xtra.co.nz

May 1: Practical bird science, with tuition from the experienced members.

May 21: Halswell area and Whitewash Head, searching for Cirl Buntings. Nick Allen (03) 312 7183.

Evening meetings are held at Science Alive! Moorhouse Avenue, beginning at 7.30 pm.

Otago

February field trip Southland waders Louise Foord (03) 467 5041.



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