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Otago Region Newsletter 5/2024

May 2024



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/birdsotago/>

Ornithological Snippets

As well as another sighting of a bird at Tomahawk on Global Big Day, 2 **Marsh Crane/Kotoreke** were heard at Moke Lake on 17 May. An apparently pure (though no bands seen) **Black Stilt/Kakī** was at Katiki Reservoir on 6 May. A banded **Banded Dotterel/Pohowera** (double-banded dotterel?) seen by Georgina Pickerell at Pleasant River Estuary on 11 May had been banded at her nest on the Cass River Delta on 19 October 2020. This bird had also been seen at the same location on 13 May 2023.

Little Black Shag/Kawau tūi continue to be seen, with 1 in Otago Harbour and 6 at Karitane on 4 May, and a further 5 at Kaikorai Estuary 18 May, with 9 there on 19 May. A **White Heron/Kōtuku** at Romahapa on 4 May was trying its best to not look like a duck.



On 14 May Kath Danaher had a sighting of a pair of **NZ Falcon/kārearea** (male and female) on a kill in the Otago Polytech quad on Harbour Terrace. She wonders if this pair might be resident in the area?

2 **Kea** near Clyde on 19 May were well outside their normal range, while 10 **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** at Ratanui (Catlins lake) 18 May were less unexpected. Finally a **Tui** at Rocklands Station near Clarks Junction on 28 May were over 24km from nearest previous eBird sighting.

Please send any interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

eBird News

The fieldwork for the NZ Bird Atlas finishes, on 31 May. Check the Atlas effort map to locate squares that could use more coverage – I recommend filtering by species, as well as effort hours. Nocturnal coverage is also still required, and don't forget that the April Atlas challenge is nocturnal grid-square related. To qualify, all you have to do is submit complete nocturnal checklists to grid squares that have had no nocturnal effort so far year round in the Atlas eBird portal. Each unique grid square on this list that you enter nocturnal data into gives you one entry into the draw. So if you submit data to five grid squares that have had no year-round nocturnal effort, your name goes in five times. Remember your checklists must include counts for every species reported (no X's!) and should follow the best practices outlined [here](#). If you don't hear any species, that is still valuable data, so please do submit those lists!

Richard 027 281 8701 or cluthaphotos@gmail.com



NZ BIRD CONFERENCE & BIRDS NZ AGM

Nelson, 1 to 3 JUNE 2024

The Trafalgar Centre, Nelson



BirdsNZ Otago Branch News

This year, Birds NZ Otago meetings will return to the **Benham Seminar Room**, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street, Dunedin.

A reminder for members, the ground floor doors to the Zoology building **will be locked at 7.30**. Please ensure you arrive in time to enter the double doors, at the rear of the car parking area.

Wader Count

There will be a high tide of 2.01M at 10.57am at Dunedin on Sunday June 30th. In case of bad weather the reserve day is July 21st at 3.49pm at Dunedin when high tide will be 2.04M. Contact: **Maree Johnstone** mareej@kinect.co.nz
my usual, as I hitched westward on Saturday morning 13th April to join the Birding Group in Alexandra.

Call for Applications - 2024 Birds NZ Research Fund

We are now inviting applications for this year's "Birds New Zealand Research Fund". Applications close on **15 June**.

Details are available on birdsnz.org.nz/funding/birds-nz-research-fund/ and a news item is available at birdsnz.org.nz/news/bnzrf/

Newsletter notes from the RR

As we head into winter, the Australasian Crested Grebe / *Pūteketeke* are leaving the inland lakes. The mystery of where they go in winter continues. Birders are encouraged to keep an eye open for winter flocks of *Pūteketeke*.

The bird atlas project is in its very final few weeks, its been a mammoth effort led by Richard so let's try to get out to make these last few weeks count – bonus Auroras for those who do nocturnal lists are possible!

Conference is approaching on King's Birthday weekend, if anyone would like me to keep an ear open for projects of interest, let me know.

Also, the Society's manual has been amended and updated in relation to the code of conduct for the photography of birds, members can update themselves following this link:

Code of Conduct for the Photography of Birds:

birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Code-of-Conduct-for-Photography-of-Birds-Guidelines.pdf

Happy birding! **Dawn**

How many spoonbills are there in NZ?

National Royal Spoonbill Census 2024 taking place this winter

The great Otago search is scheduled for Saturday 13 July

Royal spoonbill arrived naturally from Australia about 100 years ago, and now breed in New Zealand and are considered native. They have become a spectacular and enjoyable addition to our estuary bird life.

Birds New Zealand has the rare opportunity to accurately document the increase in the population of this new coloniser. In 1979 only 26 royal spoonbills were found in the whole of NZ. Over the last 2 decades their numbers have increased by about 10% per annum. The last census in 2012 recorded 2361 birds. Another systematic, coordinated, full census is planned to take place in the winter of 2024. This will provide the latest numbers and the rate at which the royal spoonbill population is increasing.



Photo credit: Nick Beckwith

Each Birds NZ Region is asked to include this census in their programme. **Our Otago Region will carry out a count of spoonbill in Otago on Saturday 13 July** (bad weather back-up day, 14 July). Most of 'our' spoonbills head north for the winter but from various anecdotal reports it seems more are hanging around for the winter. At the last census in 2012 we only found 4, so the challenge is to find more!

Please reserve the 13 July in your diaries for the spoonbill census. We will need teams to survey Blueskin Bay north to Pleasant River, Peninsula harbours and bays, Catlins area, etc. Look for more details in June newsletter.

Please let me know if you wish to help with the census in Otago.

Mary nzmaryt@gmail.com

Spoonbill Survey Coordinator

Tomahawk Lagoon Birdwatching Event

Everyone who showed up at Tomahawk Lagoon on 28 April as part of the Wild Dunedin festival were treated to a warm sunny day, perfect conditions for the morning's bird watching. As with previous years, many Birds NZ members turned up to share their birding knowledge, enthusiasm and telescopes with members of the public – about 41 people in all. Telescopes were set up along the footpath on the edge of the lagoon, at a range of heights so

everyone, even pre-schoolers, could get a good view of the birds there. It made for a very relaxed and successful morning.



The water level in the lagoon was a little high, with only small patches of exposed ground for birds to roost. But it was just right for the pied stilts to feed and roost.

Variable oystercatchers, 3 species of shag and a white-faced heron also put in an appearance, and all three species of gull were present.

The waterfowl included mallard,

black swan and paradise shelduck. A couple of hungry harriers caused commotion amongst the starlings on the opposite side of the lagoon at one point. Twenty bird species were seen in total during the morning.



Massive thanks to everyone who came along to help and special thanks to Fiona for counting the people and Sila for counting the birds. More of Sila's photos from the morning can be seen on the Birds Otago Facebook page.

George Pickerell

eBird Global Big Day



Photo credit: Sila Viriyautsahakul

Meet Team Swan Song - noun. : a farewell appearance or final act or public statement. from the legend that a dying swan sings a beautiful song.

Our team name is dedicated to the black swan that fell out of the sky less than half an hour into our Otago big day effort. Eight of us set off at Sinclair Wetlands shortly after sunrise, but birds were conspicuously few and far between. Two swans came circling over the wetland.

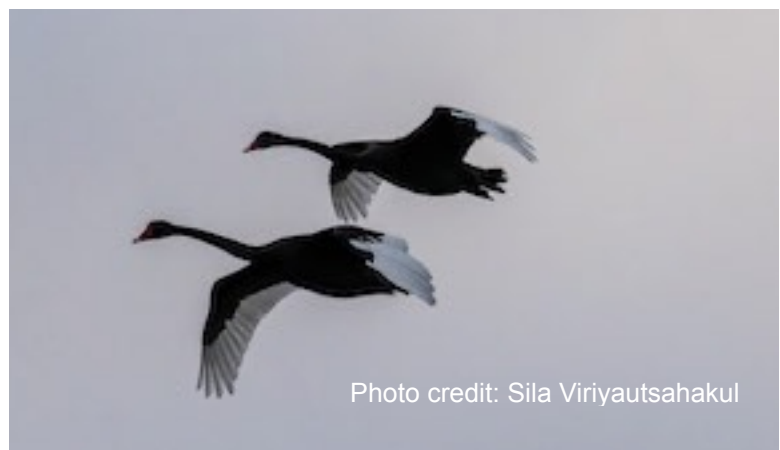


Photo credit: Sila Viriyautsahakul

Before we knew it, there was a loud bang then a splash into the lake. A grim start to the big day and a reminder to be cautious during duck hunting season. The only ducks we actually saw there were a few distant mallards but thinking back, they could have been decoys!

In response to this we moved down the road to scope out Lake Waihola itself, and immediately spotted amongst the masses of black swans, a single mute swan that stood out like a sore thumb. I first saw this bird here in 2021 and it remains the only individual I've seen in Otago despite good numbers in Canterbury to the north.

Government Track was the next stop, a gradual but lengthy climb into the remnant beech forest of Waipori, where two species of kākārīki had been reported, hard to find in this part of the region. Tomtits, pīpīpī/brown creepers, pīwakawaka/fantails and a kārearea/falcon kept us company.



Photo credit: Oscar Thomas

Eventually we locked onto their chattering calls, and Sila somehow managed to spot a pair of red-crowned parakeets/kākārīki sitting pretty in the canopy. Turns out we walked for 14 kilometres!

The next leg saw us heading back over Three Mile Hill into Dunedin to resupply, before moving out to the coast. Aramoana proved bountiful as ever, practically doubling our species account within the hour. Cawing kororā/little penguins were playing hide and

seek along the edge of the Mole, and across the harbour we could make out no less than 26 big fluffy white sheep on Taiaroa Head (no wait, they might have been northern royal albatross chicks).



Black-billed gull. Aramoana.

Photo credit: Oscar Thomas

Not far out to sea we also picked up southern royal, white-capped, and Buller's albatrosses. I made a last-minute mad dash in the fading light to find a skylark during a toilet break, and we shifted inland to Orokonui Ecosanctuary, where we picked up calling kākā and Haast tokoeka/southern brown kiwi after dark.

A few noteworthy finds and a few silly misses (shoveler, rosella, spoonbill) but we ended on a respectable 63 species given less than 10 hours of daylight! The highlight however came after the sun set, when the sky lit up with dancing beams of red, purple and green. Wistfully, we imagined that among it all was the spirit of the swan, going to a better place. A swan song.

Thanks so much to Ela Hunt, Janina Castro, Sila Viriyautsahakul, Ava Thomas, Harriet Hartley Pollard, Diego Carena-Santiago, Chris Castro and Nick Beckwith for the company and birding!

Atlassing with Richard Schofield

Dawn's RR report gave notice of a single day expedition to some sparsely covered New Zealand Bird Atlas squares in Otago on Sunday 28th April 2024. Richard Schofield was to be leading the field trip. We were making our way home to Dunedin after a short weekend in Wānaka and volunteered to join him. We arrived Middlemarch at the appointed time of 10:00 am and found Richard in the Kissing Gate café with Maree and Penny, poring over topo maps of the area. Richard decided that he would take Holly and me with him, while Maree and Penny went together in another direction to cover a separate 10-kilometre square. Nobody was expecting any particularly exciting birds and most of our species were going to be exotics, but there was a chance of New Zealand Pipit and possibly Kārearea.

We left our car outside the Kissing Gate and set off with Richard towards the Mount Stoker area to the south-east of Middlemarch. It occurred to me that the car contained arguably the most prolific NZ atlasser and the least prolific (myself). Richard was modest about this label being applied to him and claimed that it depended on how the term was defined (most checklists, most species, most squares covered, whatever) but there was no doubt that we had plenty to learn from him. And so it proved; one valuable technique was to switch my eBird app from Australian / American names to "proper" New Zealand names. So now the eBird app on my phone calls it a Grey Warbler instead of a Gray Gerygone – YES!

Just beyond the intersection with Three O'clock Road and Bray Road we reached "Roadsende" (real name). The plan was that Richard would walk back along the road while we stayed put and did a 10-minute bird count and then drove his car back for a kilometre, passing him on the way, and then did another 10-minute count while he caught up and helped with our second count. He, of course, was doing a count during his one-kilometre walk, creating 3 checklists within one kilometre. Holly did the recording into eBird for me – it really is quite useful to have a companion recorder and it made the activity more exciting for her too. We repeated this pattern in various parts of the area until we had run out of time before a 1.00 pm rendezvous with Maree & Penny at Sutton.

After the rendezvous and debrief we set off again in different directions, Penny & Maree into another square, while we went to cover another part of the square that Penny & Maree had been counting. More of same for Richard and Holly and me in the Nenthorn Road area including Butter and Egg Road. How on earth do places get names like that? We did encounter some locals through the day. They regarded us with a variety of reactions from indifference through curiosity and borderline suspiciousness but they all seemed to realise that we were harmless enough.

Holly & I ended the day with 11 checklists which we shared with Richard when we got home. One of those checklists had only one species (Australasian Harrier) and the maximum was twelve. All together Holly and I recorded 20 species including 13 exotic, 4

native and 3 endemic. We missed the NZ Falcon that Richard spotted during one of his walks while we were concentrating on the single Harrier that we could see. He even sent me a text about that Falcon but my text notification was switched off and so I missed it. We also saw Pipit from the car while we were on the move; I think Richard captured them somehow for his checklists, but they were not on our checklists. Richard delivered us back to our car and carried on into Central Otago to do more atlas work. We heard later that Penny & Maree also got home safe and that they too had seen Kārearea. Ah well!

This was the first time either of us had done this type of census. It was a pleasure to spend time in the field with such an atlas enthusiast. Holly enjoyed it too: she was impressed by some of the features of eBird and I am hoping to recruit her again as an eBird scribe.

William Perry

Ticking off Some Squares Atlas(t)



I (Penny) had the pleasure of joining Richard, Maree, Will and Holly for my first atlassing experience. The plan for the day was to do multiple bird counts within data deficient squares throughout Pukerangi and Middlemarch. With the 5-year atlassing period soon coming to a close, it was important to cover some squares with no counts.

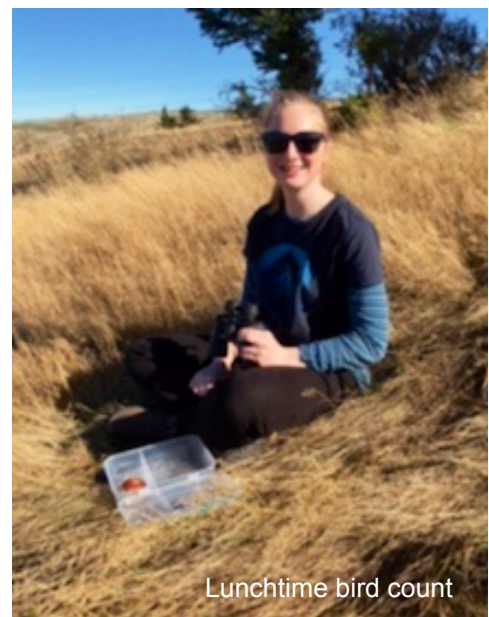
We started the day with a coffee at Kissing Gate café to discuss the plan of attack. It was great to see paper maps spread across the table. Being from a cyber generation, it was refreshing to see these in use and the chosen navigation device for the day! Richard assigned us squares and pointed out some promising habitat to survey. Then we went our separate ways, with Richard, Will and Holly in one car and Maree and I in another.

I expected a bit of a walk, but to my surprise the surveys were all roadside. Once we had reached an allotted square we drove along the road until we found birds or birdy habitat and stopped to do a count. It was quite easy to identify suitable stops as waterways and trees were sparse amongst the tussock and paddock grasses. It's hard to get sick of Central's rugged mountain skyline and herds of rock tors dotted amongst the grasses. I had to fight the urge to scan the rocks for lizards!

The first counts were mostly introduced passerines: goldfinch, redpoll, skylark, starling and dunnoek. Although, we did find a pond filled with paradise shelduck, Australasian shoveler and a couple of grey teal. Conveniently, we came across some locals on bikes who guided us to a small pond at the edge of their property. With their guidance we were able to add Eurasian coot to our list.

We all met up around midday after covering our first squares to discuss plans for the rest of the day. It was also a great opportunity to take a squinty photo in front of a road sign.

For rest of the day Maree and I travelled along the Old Duston Road in Maree's little town car. Maree did well navigating the 4WD track, there were some deep ruts in places! We got some surprised looks and a couple of laughs from locals in utes, they didn't expect to see us so far along the road. The journey was well worth it when we sighted a kārearea (NZ falcon) cruising overhead and couple of pipits darting along the road.



Lunchtime bird count

I'm very grateful to have ended the weekend with a fun group of people, immersed in an incredible landscape.

Penny Jacks

Otago Statistics for the Global Big Day 2024

This year's event took place on 11 May. Twenty observers submitted 78 unique checklists, with a total of 73 species, which at the time of writing means Otago tops the rankings, one species ahead of Canterbury. To the best of my knowledge, the only records worldwide of Southern Brown Kiwi, Red-crowned Parakeet/Kākāriki and Yellowhead/Mohua were in Otago

Programme 2024

Birds NZ Otago meetings have returned to the **Benham Seminar Room, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street, Dunedin**

Birds NZ Otago Monthly Meeting Zoom Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83922655184?pwd=QapM32iZ0YWPrKuNYdCKPWwaYS36eg.1>

Meeting ID: 839 2265 5184

Passcode: 633186

May	Tuesday	28	Bradley Shields	Zero Invasive Predators from mountains to sea
June	Tuesday	25	Shanta McPherson	Titipounamu/riflemen on Otago Peninsula
June	Sunday	30	Wader Count	High tide 10.57am Dunedin
July	Saturday	13	The great Otago Spoonbill Search To join a team please email Mary nzmaryt@gmail.com	Backup day 14th July
July	Tuesday	23	Dr Emma Williams	Birds beyond borders: Mobile threatened species
Aug	Tuesday	27	Vanessa Barry	Buller's albatross population genomics

Regular Field trips are held, usually on first Saturdays or Sundays. Check for details within the newsletters. We carpool for these trips and share expenses.

Suggestions for locations for field trips and atlassing trips, and offers to help lead trips would really be appreciated, please contact Dawn birds.otago@birdsnz.org.nz

Contributions for the next newsletter should reach the editor by **25 June** sodlin@gmail.com

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