

KUAKA



Welcome to the newsletter of the South Auckland Branch of Birds NZ

Te Kahui Matai Manu o Aotearoa

Issue 61 – September 2024

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This month our theme is the matuku-hurepo/Australasian bittern.

Do put the **Great Matuku Muster** dates in your diary if you have access to wetland habitat that may have a matuku present (even if only on the day). The dates are 14 Sept, 19 Oct, and 16 Nov. **The key date is 19 October** so if you only have one day, please try and make it then.

The image on the right is from the Bittern Conservation Facebook page which is well worth a visit.

**Our next meeting will be on Tuesday
Oct 8 at 7.30pm**

Would you like to contribute to our newsletter – whether to supply a drawing or photo, detail of a sighting, or maybe an article or two – just drop an email to the editor.

We would love to hear from you.

PROGRAMME FOR 2024

Monthly Meetings: held on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Papakura Croquet Club, 1 Chapel Street Papakura. Meetings start at 7:30. Visitors welcome. \$3.00 donation to cover costs please

Oct 8	Monthly meeting	Taneal Gulliver on bellbirds, dabchicks and mallee fowl
Oct 19	Great Matuku muster	check out www.lovebittern.com
Nov 3	Wader & Spoonbill Census	Firth of Thames
Nov 12	Monthly Meeting	Kristal Cain will tell us about her studies on rifleman calls
Nov 16	Great Matuku muster	check out www.lovebittern.com
Nov 17	Wader & Spoonbill Census	Manukau
Dec	TBA	End of year BBQ

RR REPORT FOR SEPT 2024

Sue is overseas this month and unable to contribute her 'bit' for the newsletter. So, I have hunted out this cute matuku-hurepo image for you to enjoy.



A bittern chick. (CREDIT: Matt Herring/Bitterns in Rice)

UPDATE ON THE PANGURUMGURU/STHN GIANT PETREL

As you will be aware, in July Kate, our Awhitu correspondent, found a southern giant petrel in dire condition — thin, weak, and unable to stand. Kate took the manu to Bird Care Aotearoa, in Green Bay, who, in turn, contacted the Zoo veterinary hospital for further assessment.

Priscilla Northe, from Auckland Zoo, has given this update on the progress and release of the manu.

When the petrel arrived, a physical exam was carried out and blood tests were performed. These indicated the bird was suffering from severe malnutrition and dehydration resulting in the kidneys struggling to function. The petrel initially required intensive care, including intravenous fluids and gradual tube feeding to prevent refeeding syndrome. This is a dangerous condition that can arise from introducing food too quickly after a period of starvation and must be carefully managed to avoid severe electrolyte imbalances or other complications.



Our skilled vet team provided a heavily padded bed (as this species spends little time on land and would otherwise develop foot issues) and gentle physiotherapy. As its condition improved, swimming sessions were gradually introduced to help with strength building. During the process of recovery, the petrel's diet changed to introduce a diluted fish slurry, then full-strength slurry, and finally to whole fish - which it eagerly started to consume on its own



All of this mahi was to ensure the petrel would be strong enough and have sufficient body weight for a successful return to the wild, and we are thrilled to report this bird made a full recovery! It received a final health check by our vet team and at the same time a microchip was placed, and the bird was banded by a professional bird bander. With the support of the DOC, the petrel was taken by boat to the open waters beyond the Noises Islands and released on 12 August.



SPEAKER FOR SEPT 2024



John Sumich, a retired GP from W AK, has a deep-rooted passion for wetland conservation. This dedication has led him to make a significant impact to preserving NZ's unique biodiversity. John was an inaugural trustee of Matuku Reserve Trust, what is now Matuku Link - protecting Auckland's largest wetland.

John has been on a mission to gather information about the cryptic and highly mobile Australasian Bittern. He started the "OK Boomer" campaign, connected with national and international bittern researchers, and formed the Bittern Conservation Trust. His work focuses on understanding the bittern population and addressing threats such as sediments, eutrophication, toxins, and predation.

The manu is of course perfectly camouflaged for its preferred habitat (raupo wetland) and from a distance it can be difficult to identify individual birds. The Bittern Conservation Trust is developing an AI app that will be able to find variation in the birds colouring from photos taken (rather like identifying individual zebra or tigers), allowing individual bittern to be tracked across the motu.

Work has also been done to determine if drones can be used to find individuals and nesting sites and what the sensitivity of the birds to the drones is. This is allowing nest sites to be found and monitored.

The Bittern Conservation Trust was formed in 2023 to encourage a collaborative approach to

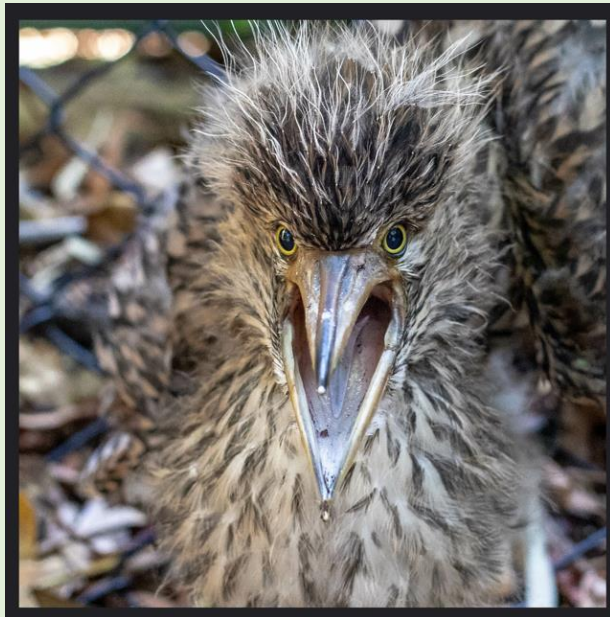
conservation of the manu and to promote habitat protection/restoration. Their website is at www.lovebittern.com and their Facebook page is [Bittern Conservation New Zealand](#).

Which brings us to the Great Matuku Muster. It has become clear from the limited banding and satellite tracking of individuals, that these manu are very mobile and can move several kilometres from wetland to wetland (or drain). It has also become clear that the number of birds reported does not reflect the reality of the actual number of these manu still extant - the same individuals have been observed visiting 20 sites in a month. Concerned at the rapid decline in numbers and the now obvious multiple counting of individual birds who move from location to location, the Great Matuku Muster has been developed.

We all need to get out there, at the same time, on the same day, and record the location of any booming we hear – active human listening! This will be done in the evening for one hour from sunset. The days are: this Saturday, Sept 14; Saturday Oct 19; Saturday November 16. If you have a wetland near you and want to join in go to www.matukulink.org.nz/great-matuku-muster-2024 scroll down the page and watch John's instruction video.

If you can't do it on Sept 14 don't worry too much. It is the October 19 count which John wants everyone to be ready and prepared for. Hopefully the weather plays along, giving us a clear, windless evening so we can hear the matuku booming.

Don't forget to vote Bittern for Bird of the Year



Angry Bird

Wild Australasian Bittern chick walked up to me and decided to give me some serious attitude.

Image: Monkeys with cameras



Great image from Gavin Klee



Hūrepo or Matuku, Australasian Bittern, (*Botaurus poiciloptilus*)
A painting from about 1844 of the Australian Bittern by English artist and ornithologist [John Gould](#)

HOW DID THE BITTERN GET ITS NAME?



Who but a fisherman knows the haunting boom of the bittern?

According to several sources (as advised by Copilot), the name derives from *bitour*, or *botor*, from the Old French *butor* which is perhaps from the Gallo-Roman *butitaurus*, from the Latin *butionem*. The modern English form, bittern, dates from around 1510.

According to Pliny the reference to *taurus* is because of its booming voice which resembles a bellowing bull – perhaps a Eurasian species of bittern has a louder voice than our local species – this cartoon suggests that is the case!

The scientific name for the Eurasian Bittern is *Botaurus stellaris*. The second name meaning starry, refers to the species speckled plumage.

The Australasian Bittern is *Botaurus poiciloptilus*, a name given by the German zoologist Johann Georg Wagler in 1827.

According to Copilot's research, "poiciloptilus" is derived from Greek roots. "Poikilos" means "varied" or "spotted," and "ptilon" means "feather." So, *poiciloptilus* roughly translates to "spotted feather" or "varied feather" in English.



NZBirdsonline describes the Australasian bittern plumage as beige with dark brown streaking and mottling. Ebird describes it as strongly patterned with upperparts dark brown, underparts streaked. Birdlife Australia says the upper parts are patterned dark brown, buff and black, and underparts are streaked brown and buff.

Botaurus stellaris



Image from animalia-life.club

Botaurus poiciloptilus



Image by Glenda Rees





Australasian bittern



By [J. G. Keulemans](#) in [Buller's A History of the Birds of New Zealand](#)

BITTERN ON THE BRINK???

Wendy Hare

As a child walking down the road to catch the school bus it was a regular treat to find a bittern - frozen, large beak pointing skyward, almost taller than me, pretending it wasn't there. A generation later my niece and nephews enjoyed that same privilege as they too trod the gravel road to and from the bus. That wetland still remains, largely intact in the embrace of the Whenuakite River [Coromandel Pen.], as it curves around Harebridge Farm thanks to the husbandry of my brother Ralph and family farmers before him.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for the rest of river, where in many places pasture reaches right down to the waters' edge. A circumstance reflected throughout NZ with more than 90% of our former wetlands lost, mostly to agriculture. Those which remain are in a sorry state through poor water quality and invasive species.

Australasian bittern/matuku-hurepo is a flagship species for our wetlands. At 75cm in length [white faced heron is 67cm] it is a large bird, its streaked plumage, shy nature and cryptic behaviour mean that there is much we don't know about its lifestyle.

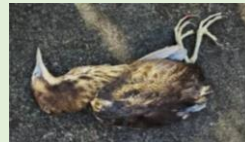
What we do know, and have known for years, is that the population is in steady decline, now believed to be only 800 birds throughout Aotearoa. A 2021 estimate suggested as few as 125 pairs remain.

The matuku-hurepo cousins across the Tasman are classified as "threatened", with estimates are of ≤1000 individuals. Habitat destruction and climate change are the major risks. New Caledonia has less than 50 individuals. [Overall the global population is estimated at c.1,600 mature individuals – Birdlife.org]. Hard to imagine that from the early

1900's there are descriptions of flocks of bittern 100 strong across NZ.

But it gets worse, let me explain: drones with thermo-imaging cameras can now fly known bittern hotspots on early spring mornings searching for the birds and their nests. Last seasons' search of 1300ha (27 wetlands) in prime habitat in Bay of Plenty, Waikato, Northland and the Coromandel yielded 50 adults, but only three nests. Plenty of pukeko and kahu nests were located. Two of the bittern nests were in Bay of Plenty in an area that has been managed for bittern for the last two decades.

The third was in a harbour on the Coromandel, a place which has the unenviable distinction of having lost at least four bittern to road kill in the last twelve months. And in my own back yard, near Hot Water



Beach, another bittern lost its life on the road, mere months ago.

On one nest the female (who has sole charge) was observed off the nest for up to five hours at a time, presumably in search of food, leaving her offspring highly vulnerable.

Past survey methods have focussed on counting booming males, as the females are much more difficult to find and track. This new survey technique strongly suggests the females are faring even worse than their males. It looks like chicks aren't doing well either. Starving chicks, as yet unable to fly, have been regularly handed in to DOC Tauranga, having been discovered emaciated in harbourside gardens. We don't know for sure, but the anticipated lifespan of our bittern is 10-11 years, so unlike kakapo, we don't have a long time to work this out

MATUKU IN TE AO MAORI

Turi was the captain of the Aotea waka who settled near Patea in Taranaki. When he left the pa to go fishing or to work in the gardens, to ensure enemies were unaware of his absence, and also so he could take all his people with him rather than leave any behind to guard the pa, he placed a matuku in it so that when any one came they might hear the cry of the bird – hu, hu, hu – and assume the pa was occupied.

To strengthen the matuku in its defence of the pa, Turi uttered the following karakia to strengthen the manu:

<i>Ko te Matuku I hea</i>	The matuku from whence
<i>Tee Matuku I Wai aua</i>	the matuku of Wai aua
<i>He Matuku, a ha te Matuku</i>	the matuku, what of the matuku?
<i>Matuku tau tiaki, tau aroaki</i>	the matuku, the guardian, the overlooker
<i>Tau aro aki</i>	the rustler of wings
<i>Te waka rongona manawa</i>	the imitator of the hum of men
<i>Te korero te wakarongona a te</i>	Let your voice resemble
<i>Wananga, waka tikaia</i>	that the enemy may be deceived
<i>Kia tika</i>	Be quite correct; be perfectly correct
<i>Wahatonu hia kia tonu hau e</i>	
<i>Kia tonu</i>	your imitation
<i>Ko te Matuku I hea</i>	the matuku from whence
<i>Ko te Matuku I Waingongoro, etc</i>	the matuku from Waingongoro (This is repeated for all local rivers)

When the matuku heard this incantation of Turi, he was strengthened to hu, hu, hu in the pa, and thus those who came, on hearing his voice and thinking it was Turi, were afraid and fled away.

Richard Taylor, 1855: Te Ika a Maui; or New Zealand and its inhabitants. pp 119-120



Image credit: ils.nsw.gov.au/riverina/project/bringbackthebunyip

Most often the matuku boom is linked with grief. In the waiata *Whakarongo e te rau* (attributed to Timotu of Ngati Ruanui) a lamenting singer compares themselves to the matuku:

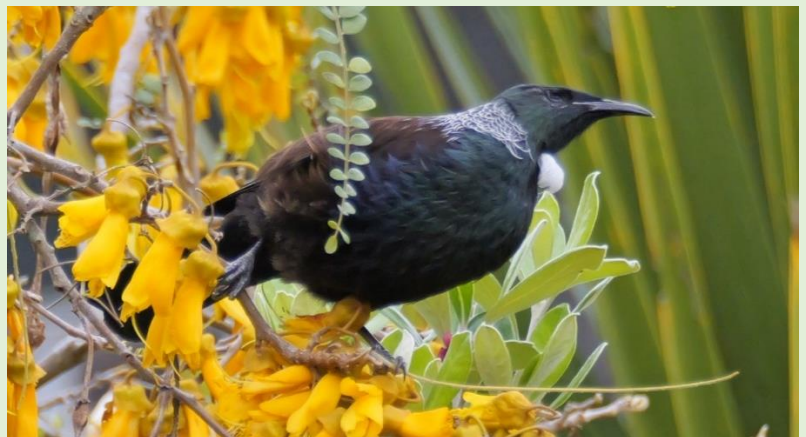
<i>E maero au nei</i>	I am an angry spirit
<i>E kaahue keo ana i te waru</i>	A kahu screaming in winter
<i>Kei te mantuku e hu ana i te ropo hu hu</i>	A matuku hooting in the swamp

SIGHTINGS

- Phil Hammond found a tuturiwhatu/NZ dotterel nest on Parareku Island (Karaka Harbourside) with three eggs. There was concern that the nest was at risk from commercial lawn mowing
- Three kahu/harrier, over four days, were caught in a live-capture cat trap baited with rabbit. It is thought they were last season's youngsters; all were skinny, and hungry
- The first pipiwharau/roa/shining cuckoo for the spring has been heard – up Awhitu Pen.
- Anna reported that the karoro/blackback gull colony of the W coast of the Awhitu Pen. is all but deserted. No nests seen, and only a handful of birds nearby
- The kuaka are back. They are pouring into the Manukau as you read this
- The torea have all but gone, back to their Sth Is breeding grounds
- David reported the following sightings from Kidds this week: a curlew, 3 whimbrel, 14 tuturiwhatu/NZ Dotts, 7 turnstone, 140 ngutu-pare/wrybill, 8 red-necked stints
- Two of the tuturiwhatu were flagged: one from Whatipu the other from Clarks Bay
- A far eastern curlew spotted just north of Thames roosting with a flock of VOC
- There is a matuku nest in the general area of Whitford
- 16 cattle egrets were seen at Piako



Egret at Bottletop Bay today
Photo: Mike Clark



One-eyed tui spotted at the Botanic Gardens
Photo: Mike Clark

MEMBER PROFILE – *The Harty's*

Tom and Hazel Harty became members of the Ornithological Society in 1967, after being rounded up by Ross McKenzie the South Auckland Regional Representative at that time. They were regular attendees at the South Auckland meetings until about five years ago, when various ailments affected their mobility.

While they were not extremely active birders, they did enjoy birds and the environment in which they lived. Tom and Hazel frequently attended campouts of the Royal Australasian Ornithological Union arranged in various areas of Australia.

Tom, through his friendship with Dick Veitch a Wildlife officer for the Wildlife Service, participated in several expeditions as a volunteer. There were several trips to Fiordland searching for the final Kakapo in that rugged mountainous country, and the transfer of Saddlebacks to Cuvier Island and later from Cuvier to Mercury Islands. On the later trips the writer was also involved. Hazel was a secretary at Loan & Mercantile store in Papakura until she got married to Tom and produced a son and daughter. In 1990 she became the

memberships secretary of the Society and also served on the Council of the Society, serving in both roles until 2002. Tom worked for Air New Zealand in Auckland.

During the first atlas of the Birds of New Zealand the Harty's were involved in organising AGM conferences on behalf of the Society in smaller regions around the country to encourage members travelling to and from the conference to complete bird lists.

Hazel passed away earlier this year and Tom has recently moved out of the family home in Ramarama into a rest home in Hamilton to be closer to his son. During the cleaning out process of the house he donated his collection of bird books to the Society and these are the ones that have been brought to recent meetings for people to acquire. The rest of them will be taken to Miranda to be sold at the upcoming open day in October.

On top of the other activities, Hazel was a very skillful spinner and weaver, and often graced our meetings in colourful jerseys that she had created.

David Lawrie

[All the best for the future Tom, from Wendy]



Images: Gavin Klee

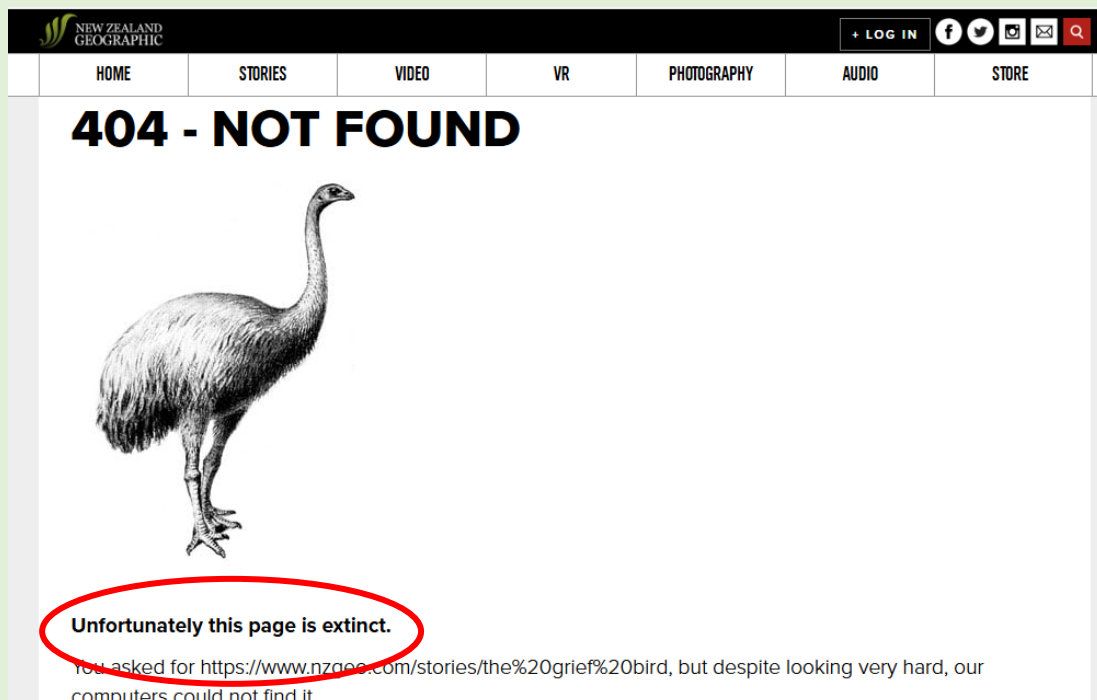
JUNE WADER CENSUS RESULTS

The Firth of Thames census was held on 30 June. A total of 13,970 manu were reported. The most common species were poaka/pied stilts of which 3,262 were counted. Torea/SIPO came in second at 2,995 individuals, ngutu pare/wrybill were third with 2,324. Amongst the others seen were a reef heron, moho pereru/banded rail and a glossy ibis.

The Manukau Harbour census was held on 23 June, with a total of 29,050 manu counted. At 12,374, Torea/SIPO were the most abundant species. Followed by 4,174 poaka/pied stilts and 1,747 ngutu pare/wrybill. Whimbrills, ruddy turnstones, and red-necked stints were among those counted.

Thanks to everyone who turned out for the counts.

The next census will be the Firth of Thames on November 3.




NEW ZEALAND GEOGRAPHIC

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404 - NOT FOUND



Unfortunately this page is extinct.

You asked for <https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/the%20grief%20bird>, but despite looking very hard, our computers could not find it.

You have to laugh!

Thanks for reading Kuaka issue # 61, September 2024

Would like to contribute to our newsletter - whether you just want to supply a drawing or photo, or maybe even an article or two – just drop an email to the editor.

Hope you enjoyed the read

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