

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND INC.
ANNUAL REPORT ON BEHALF OF COUNCIL FOR 2023

It is my privilege to present this report on behalf of the Council to the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Birds New Zealand).

It has, again, been a good year to be President of the Society. We have been focused on supporting the implementation of the NZ Bird Atlas Project and continuing to advance our Society strategy.

Deceased Members

During the period of this report, I have been notified of the deaths of the following members:

Mel Galbraith (Auckland)
John Allen (Auckland)
Phil Rhodes (Southland)
Hazel Harty (South Auckland)
Bruce Stuart-Menteath (Canterbury/West Coast)
Kerry Walshe (Marlborough)

If members are aware of others, it would be appreciated if their names could be brought to my attention.

Council meetings

During 2023, Council met four times; three via Zoom and once at the NZ Bird Conference in New Plymouth. Much of the business transacted has been summarised in my columns in *Birds New Zealand*. Ongoing themes in our work have been: managing the Society's finances; management of the Society's website; continuing the implementation of health and safety practices in the society and expanding the range of publication types being hosted by the Society through the new series of occasional and historical publications on the website. Importantly, Council continues to monitor the implementation of a communications, membership and fundraising project to build the Society's profile and membership which will be rolled out over the next three years.

Strategically over the next year our priorities remain to continue to maintain careful oversight of Society finances; the rolling out of the Society's membership recruitment and awareness project; continuing to ensure that our constitution is robust into the future; filling vacancies on Council and in the Regions and, of course, maintaining high standards of practise in the science of ornithology.

A new crop of Young Birder's has made contact. We shared information about what had been done in the past and helped them access some of our old social media accounts. They have worked to figure things out for themselves. Eleanor Gunby on behalf of Council has offered advice/support as required.

I am very grateful that Johannes Chambon agreed to be co-opted as the Society Secretary. Jo has compiled comprehensive meeting agendas and minutes. The role of Society Secretary is essential to the smooth running of Council and consequently to the Society. It is a pleasure working with Jo and I'm grateful that he has agreed to be nominated for a full three year term.

Council was advised by Pete McClelland of Southland that the Regional Representative Phil Rhodes was very ill. We received a nomination and acted quickly to award Phil a Meritorious Service Award to recognise his work as a leader in Southland not only as the Regional Representative but for supporting projects and his peers in Southland.

Council's work programme has included a lot of effort on revising the Society's Constitution to meet the increased legal requirements of the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. This will be voted on later in this AGM.

The focus of this work for a revised Constitution is on the Governance and Administrative requirements of a Society such as ours. We have specifically not addressed the objectives of the Society. Once we have reregistered the Society pursuant to the new Act, it will be appropriate to review and update the Objectives of the Society. I will be promoting this as a block of work for the incoming Council.

Council was pleased to note that as at 1 May 2024 the Society has 1,316 current members, which is an increase of 21 members compared to May 2023. A total of 190 new members joined our Society in 2023. We have undertaken the design and printing of new stickers and branded postcards. These are available from your Regional Representative if you wish to share them at community events.

Health and Safety

Regions continue to run safe and enjoyable field activities. Based on the Regional Representatives reports, last year the Society ran 168 field trips (158 in 2022) and there were no reported incidents (four in 2022).

Partners

Society activities and our ability to build our projects have been supported by our ongoing relationships with T-Gear Charitable Trust and Toi Toi Wines. Additionally, we have long term commercial relationships with Pivotal Press, Swarovski Optik and Heritage Expeditions. The website development company Xequals has continued to enthusiastically support the Society's activities through development work and webserver hosting of our website. I acknowledge the support from these partners and look forward to building further relationships with them.

We have continued to contribute as an active Constituent Organisation of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

The New Zealand Bird Atlas has also benefited from the contribution of Department of Conservation 'Tier one' monitoring data which has provided vast amounts of bird census data from the NZ backcountry. Data from 2019-2022 has been shared into the Atlas portal. I'm also pleased to be able to acknowledge the ongoing partnership the Society has with the George Mason Charitable Trust, who support the David Medway Scholarship. At the invitation of Mr Mason we have started to develop an MOU to underpin this partnership. At the request of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand we have transferred the management of the Pacific Islands Bird Conservation and Research Fund to direct Society control.

Publications

Dr Craig Symes stood down as editor *Notornis* and Dr James Savage based at the Southern Institute of Technology has moved into the role. In 2023, a major change for *Notornis* was the decision to cease printing *Notornis* as a paper journal and to publish a professionally laid out journal online only. Such a change reflects international practice and will significantly reduce our mail out costs. I do acknowledge however that for some members the hard copy was very precious thing to have in your hand. In addition to gaining online access to specific papers members may also download a full digital version of *Notornis* from our website.

Much like 2022 the journal continues to attract and publish important ornithological manuscripts on birds in New Zealand and the South Pacific. 2023 was also notable for the first abstract to be published in te reo Māori.

Michael Szabo has had another successful year as editor of our quarterly magazine *Birds New Zealand*. Heritage Expeditions, Swarovski Optik and Northern Territory Bird Specialists continue to be regular advertisers in the magazine. Michael continues to liaise with Solomons Tourism. In 2023 they offered to host a fifth visit from a new *Birds New Zealand* representative, which was very successful.

Social media

Facebook made major changes to its service and algorithm in 2022, meaning that the way posts are shared was much more restrictive. It also changed the way new followers are counted - ie, instead of giving an exact number, it not only shows them per 1000. Weekly summaries provided by Facebook for the period April to December 2023 report no less than four thousand people were reached each week by posts on the Society's Facebook page. As part of efforts to expand our reach, we have introduced a regular e-newsletter. Using the facilities in the membership database we are now able to reach all members having an email address. I encourage you to forward the e-newsletter to family and friends in the hope that they will read, enjoy it, and join the Society. In among his work for the Society on *Birds New Zealand* media Michael has organised new membership promotions. These are raising the profile of the Society on Facebook and some Regions are using them in their newsletters.

Membership Secretary

Koshy Yohannan has continued in his role as Society Membership Secretary. The Membership Secretary and web support officer continue to take the lead on ensuring that the membership database is tidy and up to date. This makes reporting on membership numbers a dynamic business and it requires care to be able to accurately compare figures across years.

The Society's investment in the updated membership database continues to provide flexibility in communicating with members, providing for conference registrations, and has reduced the amount of work required to manage the membership database. We have implemented a change to members' renewal date for their membership to bring it more in line with a one-year gap from their joining date rather than forcing them to renew on a quarterly date that may be a lot closer than one year from their original joining date.

New Zealand Bird Atlas

The New Zealand Bird Atlas Team based at Wildlife Management International in Blenheim has continued to champion the New Zealand Bird Atlas. This AGM marks the end of this five-year project which has provided a real impetus to get out and record the birds of New Zealand. By January 2024, 400 000 Atlas checklists had been completed reporting 307 species of bird in New Zealand; 96% of grid squares had some data reported for them. 1622 atlasers had contributed 129 500 direct observational hours to the project. So, thank you to you all. This has been a massive project and it is down to you and your friends who did all the work.

We have continued our partnership with Toi Toi wines who have provided sponsorship for targeted visits to several under-surveyed parts of the country. In 2023 this included support for expeditions to the West Coast, Northland, Southland, East Coast and Central Otago.

Beach Patrol Scheme

2023 is the first year when statistical information about birds found dead on New Zealand beaches can be reported using data extracted from the Beach Patrol records submission system that was installed on the Birds New Zealand website in 2022. Ian Armitage reports that the system continues to function well. 760 records were submitted in 2023. A significant increase in patrolling in 2023 – the highest for 10 years – is attributed to the popularity amongst members of the new website-based Beach Patrol records submission system.

1,369 kilometres of coastlines were patrolled by 54 members, their relatives, and friends. 3,229 birds of 55 species and sub-species were counted, including land and wetland species, comprising 638 adults, 1,701 juveniles and 890 birds of unknown age. 2,868 birds (94%) were recorded amongst 21 species where ten or more birds were counted.

There were no major wrecks of birds in 2023. 1,583 (52%) of all birds counted was the sooty shearwater in Southland, including 1,544 juveniles (recent fledglings). Respectively, the second and third most frequently counted species were fluttering shearwater (208), of which 82% were found in Northland East, and fairy prion (204), found on most North and South Island beaches. Little penguin (186) was found on many North and South Island coastlines, but mostly in Northland East, 81%. No dead seabirds were found to have been affected by marine oiling in 2023. Eight seabirds (six species) were entangled in fishing lines, regrettably, three of the birds were three species of albatross. The distances patrolled, the number of birds counted and the number of birds per kilometre for 2023 are above 10-year and 20-year averages.

Moult Scheme

Micah Scholer reports a quiet year with no requests for data and few new observations being submitted. Future work to coordinate submissions with the DOC Banding database FALCON is required to ensure that records are captured across New Zealand. Due to family and professional commitments Micah has stood down as Moult Recording Scheme Convenor, I thank Micah for his efforts and leadership.

Nest Recording Scheme

Roger Sharp reports that 2023 has been the best year for quite a few years and is optimistic about ongoing support for the scheme. There were 23 submissions in 2023. Species reported are variable oystercatcher, kereru, morepork, greylag goose, song thrush, welcome swallow, song thrush, silvereye, dunnoek and fernbird. Roger notes that he is receiving more records by email and more photos to go with the record cards.

National Wader Census

Adrian Riegen reports that during the 2023 winter census a total of 90,663 waders of 17 species were counted, down from 99,553 waders of 20 species counted in June-July 2022. The lower number can be partly accounted for by some major areas not being counted, including Parengarenga, Houhora and Rangaunu Harbours in the Far North and the North Kaipara Harbour. The Hawkes Bay, Raglan and Harbours in the Waikato and Lake Wairarapa were also missed this winter. The main reasons for these not being counted, was a lack of people, problems caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in January and lack of boats. Making direct comparisons with previous years is challenging.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher numbers have been declining steadily over recent years but the winter 2023 count of 45,200 was lowest on record. Overstaying bar-tailed godwit numbers were down by about 10% with 9,420 compared to 10,231 in 2022. The banded dotterel count of 5,779 was up from 4,926 in 2022. Red knot numbers were even lower than the 632 in 2022 with just 525 counted in 2023 continuing the worrying downward trend. The 467 counted in the Manukau Harbour were 74% of the total count. Wrybill numbers are reasonably steady with 4,534 counted in 2023, with 2,251 on the Manukau Harbour and 1,791 on the Firth of Thames combined accounting for 92% of the total count.

The 2023 Summer Census counted a total of 133,994 waders of 25 species compared to 128,274 counted in 2022. This is an increase on the previous two summer counts. National coverage was quite good, but the key Far North sites were not counted. Coverage of some smaller areas particularly along Auckland's east coast are increasingly well covered and although numbers at each site may not be particularly high, these counts show the importance of small sites for a range of wader species, particularly Bar-tailed godwit, Pied and Variable oystercatchers and New Zealand dotterel.

Bar-tailed godwit numbers were down to 79,340 compared to the 2022 count of 81,769. The 24,935 Red knot counted was an improvement on the 2022 count of 21658.

Banding Liaison

John Stewart reports a significant amount of activity being carried out by Society Members as part of the Society Wildlife Act Authority; during 2023 22 projects were active. Reports have been received from the on-going projects and these have been used to submit the mandatory report to the DOC Permissions Team Leader at Hamilton. These reports show the wide range of species banded and the numbers of Society members who are increasing or maintaining skills.

The process relating to the renewal of our Authority for a further ten years has been initiated with DOC. John has also been active as a member of the DOC Banding Advisory Committee, in the last year he has assessed 74 applications from banders for certification at various levels.

In addition, John has organised several banding sessions where I have been assessing candidates for certification who have otherwise been unable to obtain the necessary references. John has given notice that he wishes to stand down as Banding Liaison Officer for the Society. I thank John for his work on behalf of the Society, and his leadership in

training and supporting banders in New Zealand.

Checklist Committee

The Society Checklist Committee has had a lesser workload since the publication of the fifth edition Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand. They have continued to compile amendments to the Checklist and will be publishing an update later this year.

I thank the Checklist Committee: Natalie Forsdick, Colin Miskelly (Convener), Ricardo Palma, Nic Rawlence and Alan Tennyson for their ongoing efforts.

Records Appraisal Committee

The online Unusual Bird Report (UBR; <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/rare-birds/>) reporting system continues to be the main source of reports received.

A total of 135 UBRs was received in 2023 and assessed between March 2023 and February 2024. This is the largest number of submissions received by the committee in a single year, up from the previous high of 124 UBRs received in 2018. Of these 135 UBRs, 112 (83%) were accepted by the committee. The sole addition to the New Zealand list during 2023 was the Asiatic subspecies of gull-billed tern (which some authorities treat as a separate species from the Australian gull-billed tern that regularly reaches New Zealand). The committee also accepted the first live sighting of streaked shearwater.

The current RAC membership is: Andrew Crossland, Elizabeth (Biz) Bell (Secretary), Colin Miskelly (Convener), Ian Saville, Ian Southey and Alan Tennyson. Additionally, Paul Sagar is a co-opted member of the committee, and provides independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. I thank all members of the Records Appraisal Committee for their work and commitment to this committee.

Web Support

The web support work undertaken by Roger Sharp supports the MembershipWorks system which is the Society's administrative database, and the work of the Executive Officer and the Membership Secretary.

This past year has seen a reduction in the amount of membership work in the Web support role. Requests from members for help this year relate to logging onto the system due to password errors, and with people trying to register their attendance at the conference. Roger has also been available to help new Regional Representatives obtain access to their region's email by redirecting the region mail. Very much a behind the scenes role Roger plays an important role in keeping our website, and email communications working; thank you.

Scientific Committee

The Scientific Committee continues its major work of reviewing the research proposals for the many schemes the Society administers. In particular, their advice is requested to review the Birds New Zealand Research Fund, the David Medway Scholarship, the Marj Davis Scholarship, and the Pacific Islands Bird Conservation and Research Fund. Advice was also provided on several Projects Assistance applications submitted by Society members. The quality of these assessments is comprehensive and thorough. The 2023 applications

covered a diverse range of topics and have the potential for some excellent research on NZ Birds.

I acknowledge the work of the Committee members: Ilse Corkery, Terry Greene, Rod Hay, Kevin Parker, Graeme Taylor (Convenor), Matt Rayner, Zoe Stone, Natalie Forsdick and Paul Sagar.

Graeme Taylor also represents the Society on the World Seabird Union. Graeme reports that Chris Gaskin has been active as a New Zealand Region Representative of the WSU board. The Next World Seabird Conference is scheduled for 2025 in Hobart.

Regional Representatives

One of the tasks I enjoy each year is to review the annual reports that the Regional Representatives prepare each year. These reports are an amazing resource and a fascinating summary of the years efforts. In my once over review I was able to count 47 Regional Projects that are being led by Regions and Regional Representatives. This is an amazing result. Much of this work contributes to significant advances in our understanding of birds, their habitats, and changes over time. The reports from 2023 are no exception and they show a Society that is busy and at work throughout New Zealand.

Regional Representatives are an essential network for Council to understand the expectations of the membership and to ensure that matters are raised and debated with and by Council. The Society cannot function without the ongoing commitment and hard work of the Regional Representatives. On behalf of Council, I thank you all.

Thank you

At the end of this Annual General Meeting my term as President ends. It's been a wonderful six years and before that working with Richard Holdaway and David Lawrie as a Council Member and Vice President.

To make the Society a success many members -you- put your hands up and offer skills and time to make things happen. In addition to all the Convenors and Regional Representatives it is the members who get out there with cameras, notebooks and apps and observe, argue as to the right total number and record, so thank you.

As normal the high level of support and prompt service provided by the Society's Executive Officer, Ingrid Hutzler, continues. Throughout 2023, Ingrid kept supporting Regional Representatives, scheme convenors and Councillors. In addition, Ingrid continues to effectively manage the Society's various funds, grants, and sponsorships, keeps the website content up-to-date, and assists with conference arrangements.

I also acknowledge the ongoing support and work of Council. All councillors have contributed to supporting the work of Council and have ensured that we have robust discussions and make quality decisions as a result, thank you.

Thank you to you all.
Bruce McKinlay
President.