

BIRDS NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

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BIRDS

NEW ZEALAND

Te Kāhui Mātai Manu o Aotearoa

PUBLISHERS

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Email: secretary@birdsnz.org.nz Website: www.birdsnz.org.nz

Editor: Michael Szabo, 6/238 The Esplanade, Island Bay, Wellington 6023.

Email: editor.birdsnz@birdsnz.org.nz Tel: (021) 819 660

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2024 Peter Schweigman Memorial Royal Spoonbill Colony and Nest Count

Two Royal Spoonbill nests were found at Wairau Lagoon in 1979, before breeding began on Otago's coast in 1984. Birds New Zealand organised a 2013 nationwide survey that found 20 colonies with 614 nests. We now expect there are more new colonies. This Nov/Dec a new nationwide survey will take place to locate their colonies and count numbers of birds in attendance and active nests. You can help by reporting the locations of possible colonies: where you have observed nesting behaviour such as stick carrying, courtship displays, or birds gathering in remote areas near or over water. To get involved please contact your regional representative (<https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/contact/>) or Survey Coordinator Mary Thompson: nzmaryt@gmail.com

toi toi

NEW ZEALAND WINE

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COVER IMAGE

Royal Spoonbill Kōtuku-ngutupapa

Photo by Mike Ashbee: <https://www.mikeashbeephotography.com/>

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Gouldian Finch photographed by Luke Paterson



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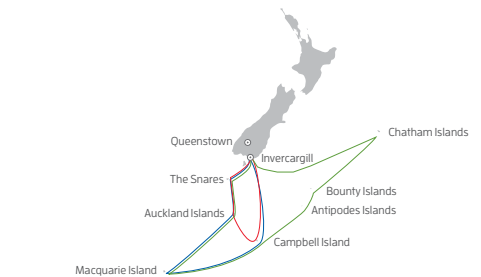
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From the President's Desk

2024 New Zealand Bird Conference & AGM

I extend my thanks to the Nelson conference organisers and all those who contributed for all their efforts that resulted in a successful conference weekend in June – the highlight of the annual Birds New Zealand calendar. It's always inspiring to hear the research work going on to better understand our birds and their habitats.

Congratulations to all of our speakers, and our award winners, especially Colin Miskelly and Raewyn Empson, whose long-standing contributions to the Society and to ornithology and conservation saw them awarded a Fellowship of the Society and the Robert Falla Memorial Award, respectively. We also heard news of the recognition of members Murray Williams, Colin O'Donnell and Dianne John for their contributions to ornithology and conservation in the King's Birthday Honours List.

At the AGM, the first full revision of the Society's Constitution in our more than 80-year history was endorsed by the assembled members. I'm grateful to Council, and especially to Ian Armitage, for their work ensuring that this key document outlining the governance of the Society meets the new legislation requirements of the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. Shortly following the AGM, the Society's re-registration with the Companies Office was confirmed.

With 230 attendees, this was our largest conference to date, and Nelson provided a great venue and fine weather. I enjoyed the field trip to the Wakapuaka Ponds (Nelson's wastewater treatment plant) thanks to our knowledgeable guides and the very calm conditions – we had great views of more than 30 species, including Marsh Crane.

I'm pleased to announce that our 2025 conference and AGM will be held in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland over King's Birthday Weekend (31 May–2 June). With the conference committee already hard at work, we can be confident of an excellent weekend celebrating ornithology.

Council Meeting

At the quarterly Council meeting prior to the conference, we gratefully received reports from leaders of our various committees and national schemes, demonstrating their huge efforts in coordinating these, and facilitating membership participation in a range of ornithological projects. We welcomed Mark Ayre (Nelson Regional Representative) to Council, and following the meeting completed the flock by co-opting Martine Darrou for the year ahead.

After more than 10 years, our support from T-Gear Charitable Trust draws to a close at the end of this round of the Birds New Zealand Research Fund. We are grateful for their support of the BNZRF, which has seen more than 100 ornithological research projects receive funding, including many led by researchers just starting their ornithological careers. The Trust's support also contributed to the modernisation of our operations, including website development and membership promotion efforts. While we are sad to be parting ways, we look forward to the opportunity to establish new partnerships in the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our regular advertisers, Heritage Expeditions, Swarovski, and NT Bird Specialists, for their ongoing support of the publication of our quarterly members' magazine, as well as Toi Toi Wines for their sponsorship of Atlas expeditions, and Potton & Burton and Faunatech for their donations of prizes for award winners at our Nelson AGM. I encourage you to support them in turn.

Completion of the New Zealand Bird Atlas (2019-2024)

The 2024 conference also marked the end of the five-year NZ Bird Atlas project, our nationwide citizen science programme tracking the distribution and abundance of the manu of Aotearoa. At completion, over 441,000 checklists had provided data to more than 97% of the established grid squares covering the country. We are grateful to all those who have submitted checklists contributing to this dataset.

Outstanding contributors were awarded Meritorious Service Awards at the Nelson conference. The project's success would not have been possible without your participation, the leadership of Atlas champion Dan Burgin and the team at Wildlife Management International, and the support of Toi Toi Wines in getting expedition teams to so many hard-to-reach locations around the country. I look forward to seeing the outcomes of these efforts in publication next year.

While the Atlas project has been completed, you are still able to submit your checklists to the *eBird* NZ portal – these data hold a lot of potential for future research. In addition, you can use the skills gained through the Atlas surveys to contribute to new or existing Birds New Zealand projects, such as the Peter Schweigman Memorial Royal Spoonbill Colony and Nest Count, local wader censuses, beach patrols, and more. If you do, please remember to be alert for any birds showing signs of avian influenza (H5N1) and to be cautious if you encounter sick or dead birds, and to avoid contact with them.

I'm writing this column from Montreal at the start of my journey back to Tāmaki Makaurau. In my role as a conservation genetics researcher at Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research, I had the great privilege of traveling to attend the 3rd Joint Congress on Evolutionary Biology in Montreal, attended by over 2,300 people. With 13 concurrent streams of presentations and more than 12 hours of activities each day, it was a hectic week that left me feeling inspired and invigorated!

Thanks to the kindness of colleagues in the USA (and new friends in Canada) I also had the opportunity to enjoy a few days of birding, including a memorable day in Quebec thanks to the kindness of a stranger on a train. While the Black-capped Chickadee was the most ubiquitous bird of the trip, my most memorable sighting had to be the hour that I spent observing a Bald Eagle in Yellowstone National Park. North America's complement of large raptors left me awestruck!

– NATALIE FORSDICK, PRESIDENT



▲ Natalie Forsdick is Birds New Zealand's new President.



▲ Graeme Elliott speaking at the 2024 NZ Bird Conference in Nelson: Michael Szabo.

2024 NZ Bird Conference & AGM

Birds New Zealand's 2024 NZ Bird Conference and AGM was held in Nelson, 1-3 June. It was our largest annual conference to date, with over 230 people attending the high-quality scientific presentations, discussing new bird research, and catching up with friends. Keynote speakers included Graeme Elliott and Kath Walker on their 33 years of monitoring albatrosses on Antipodes and Adams islands, and Dan Burgin on the completion of the five-year NZ Bird Atlas project. The 38 presentations covered diverse subjects including monitoring of Little Penguins and Great Spotted Kiwi, satellite tracking of Kaka and Kea, restoring seabird populations, genomics in bird conservation, the taxonomy of cuckoos, albatrosses and prions, results of a new nationwide Black-billed Gull census, and much more across a range of bird species and habitats.

The minutes of the AGM are included in this edition on page 12. During the AGM, Bruce McKinlay announced that Council member Colin Miskelly had been elected as a Fellow of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand for his distinguished bird research and service to Birds New Zealand, and that Raewyn Empson had been chosen for the 2024 Robert Falla Memorial Award for her contribution to ornithology and conservation, particularly in the Wellington region. He also presented Meritorious Service Awards to Richard Schofield, Stephen Legg, Kirsten Olsen, Wendy Hare and Nigel Milius for their major contributions to the Society's NZ Bird Atlas project.

Te Arawhetu Waipoua won the *Notornis* Student Author Award (*Hand-rearing and translocation trial of the critically endangered kuaka Whenua Hou*) and Stephen Rose won the *Notornis* New Author Award (*A PCR-based assay for screening substrates for Aspergillus fumigatus for application in kiwi hatcheries*). Jonathan Rutter won the Student Talk Award (*Immersion regularity predicts vessel following by albatrosses*), Annemieke Hamilton won the People's Choice Poster Award (*Longevity records of New Zealand birds from banding data*), and Johannes Chambon won the Student Poster Award (*Survival modelling of the Critically Endangered Chatham Island Tāiako*).

Outgoing Nelson Regional Representative Paul Griffiths



▲ Meritorious Service Award recipients: L-R: Outgoing President Bruce McKinlay presents 2024 Meritorious Service Awards to Richard Schofield, Stephen Legg and Kirsten Olsen: *Michael Szabo*.

presented the conference photographic awards to Carol Bates (1st Open category), Christopher Tuffley (2nd Open category), Oscar Thomas (1st Bird behaviour; Bird moult; Banded bird), Marie Louise Ward (2nd Bird behaviour), Geoff De Lisle (2nd Bird moult), Annemieke Hamilton (2nd Banded bird), and Rob Jones (3rd Open bird; Banded bird). Oscar Thomas and Johannes Chambon both attended the conference with assistance from the Fledgling Fund.

Bottles of wine donated by Toi Toi Wines and books donated by Potton & Burton (*Kākāpō* and *Takahē* by Alison Ballance) and Heritage Expedition (*Galapagos of the Antarctic* by Rodney Russ & Alex Terauds) were presented to conference award and photo competition winners, Faunatech song meters were donated to the best student talk, student poster and raffle winners, and Nelson City Council sponsored a conference branded cotton bag for each conference attendee.

Sunny, mild weather on Monday 3 June made for very enjoyable field trips to Flora Saddle, Waimarama Brook Sanctuary, and coastal sites near Nelson. Birds New Zealand warmly thanks the conference organising committee (Mark Ayre, Michelle Bradshaw, David Melville, Alison Balance, Kevin Parker, Rob Schuckard, Krystal Cain, Robin and Sandy Toy), photo competition committee (Rebecca Bowater, Annette Cunningham, Jenny Edwards, Craig Martin, Paul Griffiths), field trip leaders (Mark Ayre, Robin and Sandy Toy, Paul Fisher), and the prize donors. Abstracts of the presentations, talks and posters are online here: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Conference-Programme-with-abstracts.pdf>

The 2025 annual conference and AGM will be held in Auckland over King's Birthday Weekend (31 May-2 June) at the Novotel IBIS Hotel, Ellerslie. Further details will be available later this year.



▲ Award Winners L-R: Carol Bates (1st Open category photo award), Christopher Tuffley (2nd Open category photo award), Colin Miskelly (OSNZ Fellow), Annemieke Hamilton (People's choice poster award), Richard Schofield (MSA), Marie Louise Ward (2nd Bird behaviour photo award), Johannes Chambon (Best student poster award), Te Arawhetu Waipoua (*Notornis* best student author award), Kirsten Olsen (MSA), Bruce McKinlay (President), Jonathan Rutter (Best student talk oral presentation award), Rob Jones (3rd Open bird and Banded bird photo award), Oscar Thomas (1st Bird behaviour; Bird in moult; Banded bird photo awards): *Michael Szabo*.

Giving the Gift of Birds at Christmas

Are you looking for a Christmas gift to give to someone special? You can gift them a 2024 Birds New Zealand subscription for just \$1.75 a week to help foster a lifetime appreciation of birds (only 90 cents a week for students). Please send an email to membership@birdsnz.org.nz and we will send you the Gift Voucher, or visit our website for more details: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/membership/donate/gift-a-membership/>

Falla Memorial Award, A.T. Edgar Junior Award & Meritorious Service Awards

Nominations are called for these awards and should be with the Birds New Zealand Secretary (secretary@birdsnz.org.nz) or (P.O. Box 834, Nelson, 7040) by 31st December 2024. Nominations should be on the standard forms which can be found on the website here [birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Awards-Guidelines.pdf](https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Awards-Guidelines.pdf) or obtained from your regional representative (RR) or the Society's Secretary. The Awards Committee will consider all nominations and its recommendations will be forwarded to Council for consideration at its summer meeting. More information on OSNZ award procedures is available from your RR, the Society's Secretary, or the website: [birdsnz.org.nz/research/#awards](https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/research/#awards)

Making a difference with a donation

Birds New Zealand is working to ensure a better future for birds, but we also need your help. We are a registered charity (CC 41020) so tax credits are available for donations made in NZ in the following two ways:

* Deposit a donation into our bank account: 02-0290-0164715-00

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* *Residual Legacy*: Leaving a gift of all or part of your net estate (what remains after all taxes, specific gifts to family and friends, and the cost of administering the estate have been paid) expressed as a percentage or share of your estate. To discuss this, please contact our Executive Officer Ingrid Hutzler: eo@birdsnz.org.nz

Donations

We warmly thank: Natalie Forsdick, Alison Balance, Stephanie Maunsell, Sharon Alderson, Sian Luckie, Holly Perry, Pauline Priest, Anja Kohler, Wendy Fox, Darion Rowan, Susan Hunsberger, Janice Swanwick, Judi Lapsley Miller.

New address on bird bands

1.8 million bird bands have been manufactured for the NZ National Bird Banding Scheme, each with a unique letter and number combination. The return address has changed over time (ie, SEND DOMINION MUSEUM NEW ZEALAND or RETURN WILDLIFE SERVICE GOVT. BLDGS. WGTN. NZ). The current address is SEND DOC BOX 108 WGTN 6140 NZ. Many birds still wear bands with old addresses. With the increased use of internet searching/reporting, we have changed the band address to "REPORT BIRD BAND NEW ZEALAND" (or variations for different band sizes). Please continue to report all bird band sightings to: app.birdbanding.doc.govt.nz or bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz
MICHELLE BRADSHAW, BANDING OFFICE

New Waikato Regional Representative

– Jeanette Brooker

Jeanette Brooker is the new Waikato Regional Representative, taking over from long-serving RR Bruce Postill, who has moved to Christchurch. Her mother's interest in birds started Jeanette on her birding journey, but it wasn't until a colleague took her birding while she was living in Ecuador that her interest deepened. When she moved to Sudan, she continued birding, including in various eastern African countries. Her husband Basim is a keen photographer so they make a good team as she spots the birds and he 'shoots' them with his camera. As the new RR, she is keen to grow the region's membership and to offer more bird identification opportunities.



▣ Jeanette Brooker.

New Southland Regional Representative

– Pete McClelland

Pete McClelland has stepped up into the RR role for Southland, which he previously shared with Phil Rhodes for some years before Phil's untimely death last year. Pete came through the Wildlife Service and then joined the Department of Conservation (DOC) in 1987. He was based in Invercargill with DOC for 25 years with his main focus on managing the Subantarctic Islands before leaving DOC to set up on his own doing conservation-based contracting, mainly on island eradications. He has worked around the world removing invasive species, especially rodents. He also works closely with the Rakiura Titi Island Administering body to protect and enhance the southern Titi Sooty Shearwater islands under their management. A member of OSNZ and Birds New Zealand for 40 years, he works with a small enthusiastic team in Southland undertaking local bird surveys, including the recent NZ Bird Atlas project, and promoting bird research and protection. Being a level-three bird bander he also trains enthusiastic locals.



▣ Pete McClelland: Joe Bliss.

New members

We warmly welcome: Dianne H Brunton; Nakita Hurne; Rebecca Bodley; Brendan Corbett; Luis Ortiz-Catedral; Mike Bickerdike; Liam Taylor; Prabu Raju; Joy Paxton; Rebecca Ward; Simon Ingram; Aiden Kerr; Sarah Stenfert; Uri Arad; Allison Dunlop (Auckland); Adam Jenkins; Dan Godfrey; Timothy Yang (Bay of Plenty); Heidi Allan; Christian Cosgrove; Josh Overend; Mark Hansen; Nicola Glubb; Jenny Brookes; Helena Quilter; Mitch Thorn; Georgia Skelton; George Illiffe; Samuel David Hood; Paul Devlin; Rory McNamara; Hannah Rizzi; Neil Gilbert; George Nicholas; Samuel Wilyams (Canterbury); Matt Culf (Far North); Callum Taylor; Vivian Lee; Royce Mills; Ian van Tets (Manawatu); Jenny Keene (Marlborough); Naomi Middleton; Diane Dowle; Chris McLennan; Christine Foote (Nelson); Kimberley Phillips (Northland); Sarah Forder; Ava Thomas; Yi-Pei Chung; Ulises Cabrera Miranda; Emma Guglietta; Ludovic Dutoit; Christine Sumner; Mya Gaby; Elizabeth Franklyn (Otago); Teresa C Zhou; Amy Mills (Taranaki); Islay McDougall (Waikato); Stephanie Maunsell; Matthew Moore; Wendy Griffiths (Waikato); Shiree Breden; Theo Gerritsen (Wairarapa); Tony Stoddard; Darragh Maister; Kerrie Kubisch; Christopher Hynes; Richard Littauer; Roger Smith; Tas Vámos (Wellington); Trudy Harrington (West Coast).

New Council member – Mark Ayre

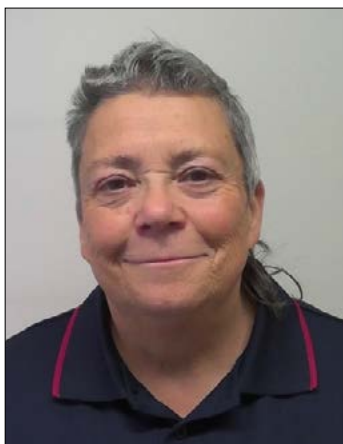
Mark has been an avid birder for almost his entire life. He was a teenage volunteer warden at the popular Titchfield Haven RSPB nature reserve in England. He moved to New Zealand in 1980 and since then has mostly lived in Otago where he was chair of the local Forest and Bird Branch and active in bird conservation, especially of the Mohua. He also managed and maintained trapping and monitoring programmes in the Haast region and Makarora Valley, and is involved in bird surveys and bird counts for the Department of Conservation and other groups. He is also a birding guide, working for global bird tour companies such as Nature Quest on their NZ tours. In 2021 he moved to Motueka, where he enjoys the bird life at the local sandspit. Since becoming the Nelson Regional Representative, he has led several guided walks there. He was also a member of the organising committee for the 2024 NZ Bird Conference held in Nelson. He is keen to use his people and birding skills to involve young people and foster an interest in birds through hands-on activities and birding camps.



▣ Mark Ayre.

New Council member – Martine Darrou

French by birth and a New Zealander by choice, I live in the beautiful seaside community of Waikouaiti in east Otago. Birding has been my passion for most of my life, from a young age while mountaineering in the Pyrenees, taking photographs, and feeding the birds there in winter. Later, I joined the French Society for Ornithological Research, participating in research and conservation outings. While completing my professional studies in France I also worked part-time as a nature guide in the Pyrenees. My experience in research and conservation stems from my professional work with the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). As a (co-opted) Birds New Zealand Council member, I would like to use my social, intellectual and organisational skills to assist the Society in any way that will help devise and implement strategies to protect and restore habitat for birds. I also have a wish to work with any general conservation programmes, to assist in efforts to educate the public about birds, and to give others a chance to experience the restorative powers of birding.



▣ Martine Darrou.

MARTINE DARROU

Tui sightings increase in Canterbury

There has been a significant increase in the number of Tui recorded in gardens across the Canterbury region, with a 210% increase in reported sightings over the past decade according to Senior Researcher and NZ Garden Bird Survey Co-ordinator Dr Angela Brandt. This means the number of Tui reported in Canterbury has grown exponentially over the past decade compared to the rest of NZ, according to new figures from the 2023 State of New Zealand Garden Birds report by Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research.



▣ Natalie Forsdick speaking at the 2024 conference: Michael Szabo.

Natalie Forsdick is the new President of Birds New Zealand

Natalie Forsdick is the new President of Birds New Zealand who succeeds Bruce McKinlay after his second three-year term ended at the Society's 2024 AGM in Nelson. She is the second woman to become President of the Society, following Beth Brown's term from 1983-88. Natalie served for three years as Vice President after three years as a member of the Birds New Zealand Council. She was awarded the Best Student Presentation award at the 2017 Birds New Zealand conference in Te Anau for her talk on the conservation genetics of the Chatham Island Black Robin. In 2017 she received a grant from the Birds New Zealand Research Fund for her research on the evolutionary history of Australasian stilts. More recently, she has applied her research training as an active member of the Birds New Zealand Checklist and Scientific Committees.

She has an MSc (Hons) in Biological Sciences (University of Canterbury, 2016) and a PhD in Genomics (University of Otago, 2020). She has worked for Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research since 2020 as a conservation genomics researcher. Her research involves studying the DNA of threatened species to understand their evolution and to inform conservation management. Currently she works with a range of species, including birds, insects, and plants. While she can occasionally be found collecting samples in the field, her time is mostly spent extracting DNA in the lab, or analysing genetic data from the office.

Natalie is eager to lead Birds New Zealand in a new phase of activity following efforts to deliver the NZ Bird Atlas five-year project. She is dedicated to promoting the Society to ensure continued growth, providing opportunities for members to participate in data collection and bird observation projects, and supporting bird research.

New Vice President – Ian Armitage

Birds New Zealand Council member Ian Armitage is the new Vice President. Ian has enjoyed an interest in birds since childhood and being a Wellingtonian three of the locations he best remembers watching and learning about birds in the 1950s were when tramping in the Tararua and Remutaka ranges and the Pencarrow Lakes near the Wellington Harbour entrance. His keen interest in birds and forests led him into a career in forestry with the former NZ Forest Service. During the 1980s he was appointed to advisory positions for forestry development and conservation in Samoa and elsewhere in the South Pacific and South East Asia. Since 1991 he has been an independent consultant in forestry development in Asia, especially China.



▣ Ian Armitage.

He joined the OSNZ in 2001 and was Wellington Regional Representative for six years, becoming a life member in 2004. He contributed to the organisation of the 2006, 2011 and 2019 annual conferences hosted by the Wellington Region and led the Wellington Harbour Bird Survey (2008-2010) and surveys of Pauatahanui Inlet (2012-2024). Ian joined Council in 2012, and has been a keen contributor to and supporter of eBird since it was introduced. He also contributed to the design and construction of the new digital database for Beach Patrol records, and contributed to the recent review of the Society's constitution which was adopted at the 2024 AGM.

Beach Patrol Scheme 2023 Annual Report

This 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 management system installed on the Society's website in 2022. This system continues to function well with small technical improvements made during the year. A total of 691 records were submitted for 2023 and 1,087 km of coastline was patrolled by 54 members, their relatives and friends. A total of 3,055 birds of 55 species and subspecies were counted, comprising 514 adults, 1,695 juveniles and 846 birds of unknown age. A total of 2,868 birds (94%) were recorded among 21 species where 10 or more birds were counted.

There were no major wrecks of birds in 2023. A total of 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%. Noteworthy seabirds recorded were Antipodean Albatross (2, Northland East), Black-browed Albatross (2, Northland West and Canterbury North), Blue Petrel (4, Northland West and Auckland West), Fiordland Crested Penguin (1, Southland), Kerguelen Petrel (2, Northland West) and Red-tailed Tropicbird (1, Auckland East).

Eight seabirds (six species) were entangled in fishing lines in six Beach Patrol districts. Three of the birds were albatrosses (Wandering, Light-mantled Sooty, Buller's). Nineteen species of land and wetland birds (44 birds) were counted, 1.4% of all dead birds counted on coastlines, with the most notable being an Eastern Cattle Egret (Taranaki) and two North Island Kaka (Northland East and Bay of Plenty). 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. Looking broadly over all species, the number of birds found per kilometre of beaches patrolled appears to be increasing since 2010.

IAN ARMITAGE, BEACH PATROL SCHEME CONVENER

Records Appraisal Committee 2023 Annual Report

RAC Secretary Elizabeth (Biz) Bell continues to provide timely and efficient administrative support, and Paul Sagar continues to provide independent assessment of Unusual Bird Reports (UBRs) submitted by RAC members. Paul was also co-opted to the committee to cover Colin Miskelly's absence while he was walking Te Araroa Trail from November 2023 to March 2024, and Biz Bell was acting convener. The online UBR reporting system continues to be the main source of UBRs 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 RAC in a single year, up from the previous high of 124 received in 2018. Of these 135 UBRs, 112 (83%) were accepted. The sole addition to the New Zealand checklist during 2023 was the Asiatic subspecies [*affinis*] of Gull-billed Tern (which some authorities treat as a separate species from the Australian Gull-billed Tern [*macrotarsa*] that regularly reaches New Zealand). The committee also accepted the first live sighting of Streaked Shearwater. The online database of UBRs provides almost immediate feedback on UBR submissions and decisions, as well as a searchable database of all submissions and decisions dating back to the 1960s. A paper reporting on the 210 RAC decisions from 2021-22 was published in the June 2023 issue of *Notornis* [Miskelly, C.M. et al 2023. Vagrant and extra-limital bird records accepted by the Birds New Zealand RAC 2021-2022. *Notornis* 70: 60-73]. I thank Biz, Paul and my fellow committee members for their efficient support during 2023, and particularly for covering for my absence while I was away.

COLIN MISKELLY, CONVENER

National Wader Census 2023

Winter Census 2023: A total of 90,663 waders of 17 species were counted during the June-July 2023 wader census, 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. South Island Pied Oystercatcher (SIPO) numbers have been declining steadily over recent years but the winter 2023 count of 45,200 was lowest on record. The 3,977 Variable Oystercatcher (VO) counted in 2023 were almost the same as the 3,792 counted in 2022. The VOC count is not a true reflection of the total population as many stay at the breeding grounds during winter and are not counted. Bar-tailed Godwit numbers were down by about 10% with 9,420 compared to 10,231 in 2022. Five sites, Kaipara Harbour, Manukau Harbour, Firth of Thames, Tauranga Harbour and Farewell Spit hold around 70% of overwintering godwits each year.

The Banded Dotterel count of 5,779 was up from 4,926 in 2022. The winter strongholds were Kaipara Harbour 844, Lake Ellesmere 733, Tasman Bay 722 and Manukau Harbour 588. Only the Southern NZ Dotterels that move to the South Island in winter were counted and the 58 counted in 2023 was the best since 60 were counted in June 2019. 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. The Ruddy Turnstone count of 214 was 100% improvement on the 106 counted in 2022, with the majority in the Manukau Harbour, Farewell Spit and Awarua Bay, Southland. 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. Uncommon winter waders included, 5 Whimbrels, 1 Black-tailed Godwit and 1 Terek Sandpiper.

Summer Census 2023: A total of 133,994 waders of 25 species were counted during the November-December 2023 wader census, 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 do at least show the importance of small sites for wader species, particularly Bar-tailed Godwit, VOC, SIPO, and NZ Dotterel. The Coromandel, is particularly good for these four species and all key sites there were counted in November 2023.

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 21,65. Strongholds for Red Knots continue to be Manukau Harbour 9,200, Kaipara Harbour 6,938, Farewell Spit 6,160, Firth of Thames 1,772 and Tasman Bay 314 which together account for 97% of all Red Knots counted. Ruddy Turnstone numbers were up again in 2023 with 1,777 counted compared to 1,404 in 2022 and 1,309 in 2021. Their strongholds were Southland 417, up from 115 in 2022; Kaipara Harbour 334; Tasman Bay 305; Manukau Harbour 280; and Farewell Spit 150, down from 415 in 2022, but 293 were counted there in February 2024. Red-necked Stint numbers were up to 64 compared to the 2022 count of 42 but still well down on historical numbers. This summer 167 Pacific Golden Plover were counted, compared to 162 in summer 2022. Only 19 Whimbrel were counted. The only other Arctic wader species to reach double figures was Sharp-tailed Sandpiper with 15 individuals. Uncommon summer waders included: 5 Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Eastern Curlew, 2 Greater Sand Plover, 1 Hudsonian Godwit, 1 Sanderling, 1 Grey-tailed Tattler, 1 Great Knot and 1 Marsh Sandpiper.

ADRIAN RIEGEN, NATIONAL WADER CENSUS COORDINATOR



Matuku-hūrepo, Foxton Beach: Imogen Warren/NZ Birds Online.

Understanding the decline of Australasian Bittern in Aotearoa New Zealand

The Australasian Bittern *Matuku-hūrepo* has undergone dramatic population declines over the last few decades, resulting in their listing as 'threatened-nationally critical' by the Department of Conservation (DOC). It is thought they are affected by a lack of prey due to the loss and degradation of their wetland environments, but there is currently a lack of knowledge regarding the role of diet in the decline of this species. Identifying the diet of bitterns and how it has changed is important for developing and implementing targeted conservation strategies.

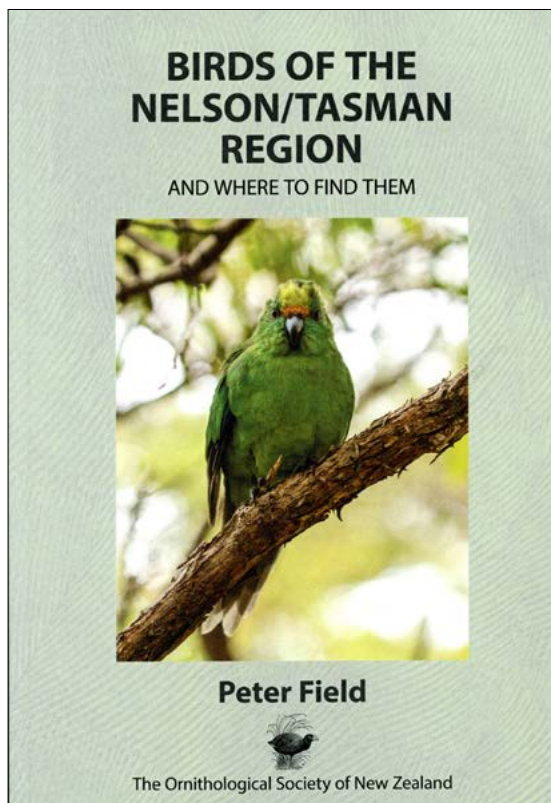
The aim of my research is to identify whether bittern population declines are due to dietary changes over time by comparing feather growth patterns and stable isotope values in both historical and contemporary populations. I am also evaluating whether changes in habitat quality may have contributed to bittern distribution changes. My study has three objectives: (1) determine whether changes in bittern distribution over the past 50 years is correlated with changes in the extent and vegetation structure of wetlands, (2) determine whether there is a correlation between water quality and the presence of bittern in contemporary wetland environments, and (3) examine whether levels of nutritional stress in bitterns differs between wetlands that vary in quality and over time.

To compare changes in wetland habitats, I am using data from all three NZ Bird Atlas projects to analyse changes in bittern distributions over time. This allows me to identify wetlands in which bitterns remain and those from which they have disappeared. I am then using satellite imagery to identify changes in vegetation coverage over time, and collecting water samples to analyse various water quality measures (e.g., turbidity, pH, nitrate and phosphorus levels) to see if they differ between sites with and without bitterns. To compare the diets of bittern I have collected feathers from historical (sampled from museum study skins/mounts) and contemporary feathers (sampled from live or deceased birds) ranging in dates from 1886 to 2023. For each feather, I first conduct ptilochronology, which is the measurement of growth bars along a feather, and that are known to be related to nutritional condition of a bird.

This will be used to determine whether bitterns have undergone changes in feather growth patterns over time due to changes in their diet. Lastly, I am performing stable isotope analysis of carbon and nitrogen and compound-specific stable isotope analysis of nitrogen in amino acids on feathers to determine whether bitterns have undergone trophic positional changes over the past century. This will tell me whether dietary changes may have contributed to the population declines of bitterns and what we would need to do to restore wetlands to a level that would support this species again.

My studies are conducted in collaboration with DOC, National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, and the University of Canterbury. I thank Birds New Zealand and the 2024 David Medway Scholarship for their generous support of this research.

VANESSA KENNARD



Birds of the Nelson Region and where to find them

The Birds New Zealand 2023 Projects Assistance Fund awarded a \$2000 grant to the Nelson Branch for the publication of this book written by Peter Field. The branch also obtained sponsorship from the Forest & Bird Nelson Branch which allowed for a print run of 335 copies, enough to also give a free copy to all those attending the 2024 annual conference. This also had an unexpected spinoff with a joint meeting between Birds New Zealand and Forest & Bird to launch the book, and it is now anticipated that our branch's regular meetings and field trips will benefit from this connection. A PDF of the book will be freely available from the Birds New Zealand website's "Birding Locations and Maps" page, and members will be able to purchase a hard copy from our branch. We also plan a second print run to stock local retailers.

PETER GAZE

Monitoring NZ Dotterel breeding success on Motuihe Island

The endemic Tūturiwhatu Northern NZ Dotterel is threatened by coastal development and activities, and site management is key to their conservation. Motuihe Island (Hauraki Gulf), pest-free since 2004, was identified as a priority site for dotterel management. NZ Dotterels breed regularly on Motuihe Island but breeding success in recent years seems to be lower than that from earlier records. This project builds on the work of the volunteer team that worked closely with the Motuihe Island Trust and DOC ranger to monitor dotterels on Motuihe over the 2023-2024 breeding season. This study aims to understand determinants of breeding success and failures to support NZ Dotterels on Motuihe Island. To achieve the objectives, fortnightly surveys will be performed throughout the breeding season (August 2024-February 2025) to monitor breeding progress. Where possible, trail cameras will also be set up to evaluate chick shelter utilisation and to identify threats to breeding success. The 2024 Projects Assistance Fund grant will go towards transport and equipment costs. This support will facilitate the participation of volunteers and improve our monitoring capacity.

HUI ZHEN



❑ L-R: Maria Clement, Sharen Graham, Rob Jones, Craig Martin, Mark Ayre, Alison Ballance, Pat Crowe.

A Marlborough birding weekend

Six Nelson members (Sharen Graham, Mark Ayre, Craig Martin, Rob Jones, Maria Clement, Alison Ballance) popped over to Marlborough for a weekend of birding at some of Blenheim's lakes and wetlands 29-30 June. They were joined by local members and birders Pat Crowe, Bill Cash, Mike Bell, Dan Burgin and Samantha Ray who suggested the itinerary and were excellent guides. The midwinter weather was calm and sunny. Day one involved a circuit of Grovetown Lagoon, a visit to Taylor Dam, and several short jaunts at the start of the Wairau Lagoons track and the Kotuku Track across to the Opawa River. Day two saw an early start to visit privately-owned Lake Pinot (a vineyard irrigation pond), private land at the south end of Lake Elterwater and a stint at the Lake Elterwater jetty by SH1.

Grovetown Lagoon was notable for hundreds of Welcome Swallows hovering and hawking at the water surface. The birding highlight for us all was a 20-minute encounter with a Marsh Crake, sunning itself in the open in a patch of raupo next to the road at Taylor Dam, well found by keen-eyed photographers Rob and Craig. We enjoyed watching the crake as it preened, wandered around, slid down a raupo leaf, foraged and snoozed. Its green bill and long green toes were notable, as was its tiny size (half that of a Blackbird!) and dapper appearance. A delightful time with a bird described as one of New Zealand's most secretive.

We saw Black-fronted Dotterels and Cirl Buntings at the start of the Wairau Lagoons walk, plus mixed flocks of more than a thousand finches - including Yellowhammers, Goldfinches, Redpolls, House Sparrows and Chaffinches - feeding on the *Salicornia* flats.

At Lake Pinot our group recorded 4 grebe species: 2+ Australasian Little Grebes, 2+ Australasian Crested Grebes, 25+ New Zealand Dabchicks, and 1+ Hoary-headed Grebe. Grebes were also a feature at Lake Elterwater: 1 Australasian Crested Grebe, at least 9 NZ Dabchicks and - most excitingly - 5 Hoary-headed Grebes. Maria glimpsed another crake (possibly Spotless) which we were hoping to see, but perhaps a Marsh Crake? Hopefully one of her photos will confirm which. A side excursion on the way home out to the Wairau Bar included a sighting of 23 Royal Spoonbills. All up we recorded 45 species. And the greatest number of individuals recorded in one checklist was 5,101. Many thanks to Pat and Dan who recorded and shared the eBird checklists.

Everyone agreed the best bit of the trip was the company and camaraderie, particularly getting to know members from a neighbouring region. The Nelson crew are encouraging the Marlborough team to head their way and be hosted and guided in return. We're keen for a repeat visit to see if we can find the Spotless Crake that eluded us on this visit.

ALISON BALLANCE

Murray Williams receives New Zealand Order of Merit

Dr Murray Williams was made an Officer of the NZ Order of Merit in the 2024 King's Birthday Honours list for his services to wildlife conservation and science. He has worked in bird research and conservation for more than 60 years. He was editor of *Notornis* (2003-2006) and a member of the Birds New Zealand Council (2010-2013), and was made a fellow of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) in 2021. He became the leading researcher of NZ's living and extinct waterfowl species, and his research was published nationally and internationally, including as author or co-author of 30 papers in *Notornis* (1963-2021).

He has also been involved in research, leadership, organisational and editorial roles with several other professional organisations, including the NZ Ecological Society and the International Ornithological Congress. He helped establish and implement conservation programmes within the Department of Conservation (DOC) for NZ's endangered waterfowl, most notably the Whio Blue Duck, and was instrumental in helping to increase their numbers. He was also involved with DOC's Kākāpō Recovery Group, including as editor of a compendium on the history and current knowledge of Kākāpō as of 2006.

He also developed and taught NZ's only postgraduate Master of Science degree in ecological restoration at Victoria University of Wellington (2005-2010) and served as a trustee of Ngā Manu Wildlife Trust in Waikanae (2015-2020). He says the highlight of his career was seeing the rapid rise in commitment and expertise of community conservation and restoration groups.

Colin O'Donnell receives New Zealand Order of Merit

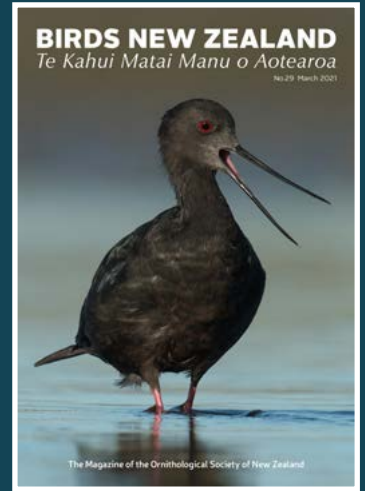
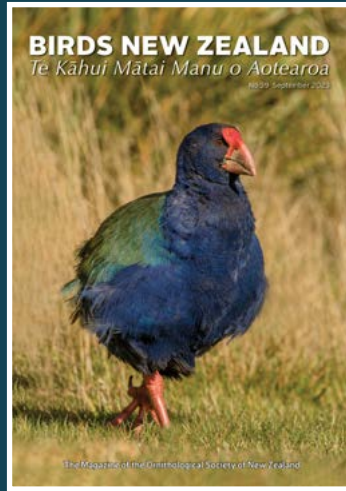
Dr Colin O'Donnell was made a Companion of the NZ Order of Merit for his services to wildlife conservation. He received Birds New Zealand's Robert Falla Award in 2016 and a Junior member award in 1976. He has been a scientist with the NZ Wildlife Service and DOC since the 1980s, carrying out many studies of aquatic birds and contributing significantly to the protection of Canterbury's braided river systems, where the endangered Black Stilt, Wrybill and Black-fronted Tern breed. He leads DOC's Threatened Species Research workstream and was contracted by Environment Canterbury in 2000 to conduct an inventory of indigenous birdlife on Canterbury's rivers. As a volunteer, he compiled bird sightings from the South Island and outlying islands for publication by the OSNZ from 1987 to 2000.

Dianne John receives New Zealand Order of Merit

Dianne John was made a Member of the NZ Order of Merit. She has been an active member of Birds New Zealand, highly involved in the Marlborough Branch for over 20 years including serving as a committee member (2005-2016). She is also very active in conservation in Picton and was a founding member of Picton Dawn Chorus. She says her love for studying birds 'took-off' after moving to Marlborough in 2001. "I got involved with the OSNZ and got all these opportunities to do amazing voluntary work with them and now it's an absolute passion, and my world would not be as it is without birds in my life," she told the Marlborough Express.



❑ Murray Williams.



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New OSNZ Constitution

I am pleased to advise members that a new constitution for the Ornithological Society of New Zealand was approved by Government authorities (Companies Office, Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment) on 24th June 2024. Motions to adopt a new constitution, and revoke the Society's earlier constitution were voted on and endorsed unanimously at the AGM held in Nelson on 2nd June 2024. Legislation defining the rights and responsibilities of all clubs and societies and those who run them has undergone a long-overdue revision, resulting in enactment of the Incorporated Societies Act 2022. The new Act provides a new legal framework that determines how all incorporated societies will now be governed. It is this change that provides the background to the assembly and approval of a new constitution for the Society.

The Society's earlier constitution served us well for many years. Despite the new requirements, I am pleased to say that several important sections of it will continue unchanged, or nearly so. These include the name of the Society, objects (objectives), powers of the Society (expanded in the new Constitution), the procedure for election of councillors, membership categories (two amendments), role and powers of the Council (now expanded), matters concerning Council meetings (slightly expanded), arrangements for setting subscriptions, management of committees, regional organisation, and the procedure for amending the constitution.

Numerous new provisions are included in the new constitution concerning new requirements for membership, the removal of councillors, the disclosure and management of conflicts of interest, the conduct of meetings, financial management, the management of annual general meetings, managing the resolution of disputes, insurance, and 'winding up'. The new constitution is posted on the Society's website: birdsnz.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Constitution-2024.pdf. I encourage you to look at this new set of rules that is expected to provide a sound foundation for the governance of our Society for many decades to come.

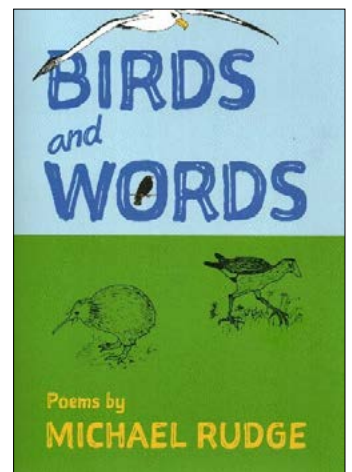
NATALIE FORSDICK, PRESIDENT

Birds and Words book review

We derive our enjoyment of birds in many ways; by sight, sound, even smell (though not always quite that enjoyably!). Then there is the printed word or illustration – an evening flicking through or reading a book, or the astonishing amount of information now available online. A lesser referenced delight, however, comes from the reading of a bird-centric poem. Does Samuel Coleridge's *Rhyme of the ancient mariner* come to mind? Denis Glover's *The magpies* where you get to mimic the call? And what about Jacqueline Sturm's *As the godwits fly*, or Brian Turner's charming *Against the grain* from his *Boundaries* collection?

Newly to hand is a real poetic charmer: *Birds and words*, a collection of 22 short poems cleverly crafted with a focus on each species' idiosyncrasies. Through the poems and quirky illustrations, the lives of a selection of native and introduced birds are presented with fun and style – the garden hopping Blackbird, Kea in the mountain tops, kiwi snuffling the forest floor, albatross endlessly soaring in Southern Ocean gales. My particular favourite: *Fantail/Piwakawaka* wherein each of its five, brief verses is laid out in the shape of the fan tail. Author Michael Rudge offers encouragement to younger readers with a glossary to convey his intended meaning of the deliberately unusual poetic words he uses. Nice touch! The book is available for \$25 (incl p&p) via email: rudmik56@outlook.com

MURRAY WILLIAMS





█ Birds New Zealand Council and regional representatives (L-R): Johannes Chambon (Secretary), Pat Crowe (Marlborough RR), Natalie Forsdick (President), Oliver Druce (Wairarapa RR), Annemieke Hamilton (Wellington RR), Keith Woodley (Councillor), Ian McLean (Auckland RR), Paul Cuming (Bay of Plenty RR), Kirsten Larsen (Manawatu RR), Colin Miskelly (Councillor), Ingrid Hutzler (Executive Officer), Bernie Kelly (Hawke's Bay RR), Dawn Palmer (Otago RR), Anita Spencer (Canterbury RR), Ian Armitage (Vice President), and Mark Ayre (Nelson RR and new Councillor). Outgoing President Bruce McKinlay arrived later that day so is not in this photo: Michael Szabo.

Minutes of the 84th Annual General Meeting of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc) held at the Trafalgar Centre, Nelson, 2nd June 2024

Present: 140 members including 6 Council members. Bruce McKinlay (President) welcomed everyone. The agenda and summary of reports were displayed on screen.

Apologies: Paul Garner-Richards, Eleanor Gunby, Bill Cash, Jennifer Wasley, Geoff & Raewyn Foreman, Johannes Fischer, Gwenda Pulham, Don Cooper, Sue Frostick, Peter Fryer, Helen & Steve McGill.

Motion: *That the apologies be accepted.* Bruce McKinlay/Johannes Chambon. Carried.

Recent deaths: Mel Galbraith, Phil Rhodes, Bruce Stuart-Menteath, Hazel Harty, Kerry Walshe, John Allen, Jane Forsyth.

Minutes of 2023 AGM: The previous minutes had been circulated online. The President read a summary.

Motion: *That the minutes of the 83rd AGM held in New Plymouth in June 2023, as circulated, be accepted as a true and accurate record.* Bruce McKinlay/David Lawrie. Carried.

President's report: The President read out the annual report for 2023, thanking the regional representatives, Council members, the Executive Officer, and all those who volunteer for the Society for their outstanding work. There were no questions.

Motion: *That the President's report be accepted.* Bruce McKinlay/David Melville. Carried.

Matters arising: There were no matters arising from the minutes or the President's report.

Treasurer's report: The report consisted of the Treasurer's Report, the Independent Assurance Practitioners Report, the Independent Reviewers Report to those charged with Governance, and the 2023 Annual Financial Report. The 2023 accounts have been completed and audited and are available on the website. There was a surplus for the year of NZ\$70,599 mostly due to a transfer of funds from Forest & Bird for the Pacific Islands Bird Conservation and Research Fund (PIBCRF). The President read out the Treasurer's report that had been previously circulated online. There were no questions.

Motion: *That the Treasurer's report and financial statements be accepted.* Bruce McKinlay/Colin O'Donnell. Carried.

Nominations for Council: Johannes Chambon (Secretary) announced the results of the Council elections. The following nominations were received for three-year terms: Natalie Forsdick for President, Paul Garner-Richards for Treasurer, Johannes Chambon for Secretary, Ian Armitage for Councillor, Mark Ayre for Councillor. There was no excess of nominations therefore those members were elected. Ms. Martine Darrou was co-opted for one year.

General business: Notice was given to members that the Constitution of The Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. be amended at the 2024 AGM to be held in Nelson. Four notices of motion related to the new constitution were received by the Secretary in accordance with the Society's present Constitution and advised to all members in Birds New Zealand magazine, Issue #41, March 2024.

All five Notices of Motion were voted on and passed:

Motion 1: moved/seconded by Bruce McKinlay/Ian Armitage. Carried.

Motion 2: move/seconded by Bruce McKinlay/Ian Armitage. Carried.

Motion 3: moved/seconded by Bruce McKinlay/Ian Armitage. Carried.

Motion 4: moved/seconded by Bruce McKinlay/Ian Armitage. Carried.

A fifth notice of motion was received regarding an increase in the subscription rate.

Notice of Motion 5: In terms of Rule 6.1 of the Society's Constitution, Notice of Motion is given to members that the rate of subscriptions for all classes of Society memberships be amended.

Questions on Motion 5: Patrick Crowe asked if the increase is justified given the surplus described in the Treasurer's report. The President noted most of this was a one-off increase due to the transfer of the PIBCRF from Forest & Bird to Birds New Zealand. David Lawrie added that many Society projects are supported by grants and donations, so it is important to have a decent income from subscriptions to help the smooth running of the Society. Elizabeth Bell noticed a mistake in the table showing the present and proposed rates of membership subscriptions. The current rate for students is \$40 and for groups \$160. Kirsten Olsen asked when subscriptions were last increased. The President replied that there was a modest increase at the 2021 AGM. Stuart Nicholson asked how many members the Society currently has. The President replied, around 1300. Colin O'Donnell asked if Council had considered a rate for unemployed or retired people. The President replied that Council had not worked on this yet, focusing on constitutional changes, but it would be looked into. One member (unidentified) asked why it was not possible to get a life membership before 40 years of age. The President replied that a life membership would not be sustainable for the Society to service if it was open to younger members. Dawn Palmer asked if the family membership is additional to the ordinary one. The President replied, yes, it is. Natalie Forsdick commented that if the Society had not received the PIBCRF funds from Forest & Bird, the Society would be in deficit this year.

Motion 5: moved/seconded by Bruce McKinlay/Paul Garner-Richards. Carried.

Awards: The President presented the 2024 awards (see report on page 5). Colin Miskelly received a standing ovation when it was announced he had been elected a Fellow of the Society. David Lawrie thanked Bruce McKinlay for his work during six years as President. Bruce also received a standing ovation.

The meeting closed at 4:45pm.

Minutes compiled by Johannes Chambon.

Link to AGM files: <https://www.birdsnz.org.nz/other-events/past-conferences-and-abstracts/agm-files-2024/>



▣ President Bruce McKinlay presents Colin Miskelly with his certificate at the conference: Michael Szabo.

Colin Miskelly Elected as a Fellow of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand

Through his keen life-long interest in birds, enquiring mind and immense enthusiasm for the science of ornithology Colin has been an active member of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand for most of his life, joining at the age of 13. As a teenager Colin once saw a poster featuring Takahē, Black Robin and Kākāpō with the headline Wanted: Alive. He wondered then if he would ever see these critically endangered species in his lifetime, or if they would become extinct before he did. We all now know that these three iconic species are very much alive today.

Some years later, Colin took a bottle of port to the summit of Rangatira Island in the Chatham Islands to celebrate his 21st birthday, watching the sunset, alone. The rest of Don Merton's pioneering Black Robin conservation team had left the island that morning for Christmas. Colin enjoyed the rare privilege – unmatched by anybody else at that time – of watching the growth of a new family of Black Robins. In that breeding season, 1983/84, the Black Robin population doubled from nine to 18, launching an era of world-leading bird recovery programmes for New Zealand and a lifetime of bird research and conservation for Colin. Since then, Colin has significantly advanced understanding through his meticulous research of the conservation biology and ornithology of many species of New Zealand indigenous birds, including endangered species.

Commencing with ecological research on snipe on the Snares Islands for his doctorate studies at Canterbury University, Colin showed how an improved understanding of the biology of this little-known group of endemic birds could be applied effectively for achieving the translocation of birds from one site to another. The knowledge and experience gained from his Snares Islands studies provided the confidence to plan the translocation of other groups of birds to pest-free sites, including islands, notably of species that are rare or endangered in their natural habitats. Particular examples are eight species of burrow-nesting seabirds in the family Procellariidae (fulmars, petrels, prions, shearwaters). That these translocations were successful is testament to Colin's ambition and knowledge to make a meaningful contribution to reducing the conservation threat ranking of several seabird species.

Since 2008 Colin has been a member (and formerly chair) of a panel that regularly reviews the conservation status of

New Zealand birds and has co-authored all reports published since 2008. This work has informed the Government and others on the priorities for protection and conservation and continues to provide a sound basis for planning seabird translocations. Colin was the lead author of a comprehensive review entitled *Conservation translocations of New Zealand birds, 1863 - 2012*. To provide an authoritative source of information that will enable birds to be reliably identified he was the concept originator and project manager of *New Zealand Birds Online – the digital encyclopaedia of New Zealand Birds*. He wrote many of the species accounts and continues to edit the website. It continues to be a popular source of reliable information and regularly receives more than one million online views annually.

Recognising that ornithology has been a prominent part of natural history science in New Zealand, Colin contributed to a special issue commemorating 150 years of the *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, published in 2013. The chapter is entitled *Colonial ornithology in New Zealand—the legacy of the New Zealand Institute*. Building on numerous field visits Colin has substantially increased knowledge of the occurrence, distribution and ecology of birds living in the Chatham Islands and in New Zealand's subantarctic islands. He was lead author of *Chatham Islands: heritage and conservation* and of *Lost gold: ornithology of the subantarctic Auckland Islands*. *Lost gold* was the winner of the 2021 Whitley Award for science and conservation awarded by the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales. Both publications consolidate contemporary literature on the conservation biology of many bird species in these island groups.

At the forefront of efforts to ensure that the identity of New Zealand bird species was up-to-date Colin led the detailed and time-consuming compilation of the fifth edition of the *Checklist of the birds of New Zealand*, published in 2022. Like its predecessors, the aim was to provide information on the nomenclature, taxonomy, classification, distribution (current, historical, and fossil) and status of the birds of the New Zealand region. It is the most comprehensive of the various checklists produced by the OSNZ, covering 427 species, including post-Pleistocene extinct species. Colin put a huge amount of time – day and night – into the formation of the weblinks of the online version to ensure the checklist was accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date.

In addition to these significant publications Colin has been a regular and prolific contributor to new research published in *Notornis* for many years, indeed there are few issues recently when a paper or short note from Colin has not been published. Colin has been the author or a co-author of 52 papers, 33 short notes, five letters, one book review and was the lead author of one occasional publication published in *Notornis*.

With his cheerful personality, enthusiasm and willingness to share his knowledge of birds Colin has encouraged and supported his friends, colleagues, and members of the public to become careful observers of birds and to encourage them in a range of studies. He is a keen advocate for and promoter of the Society. He has been a Councillor since 2010, and continues to be so. He has been Convenor of the Records Appraisal Committee since 2011, and Convenor of the Checklist Committee since 2021, having been a member of both committees for several years beforehand. Colin is employed as the Curator of Vertebrates at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Council is of the unanimous view that Colin Miskelly has rendered distinguished and outstanding service to New Zealand ornithology for more than 35 years through a wide range of studies and his consistent and determined promotion of ornithological science, and for his support of many people who have become careful observers of birds. Colin has also provided long-term leadership as an influential office holder in Council and in two specialist committees thereby substantially increasing the scientific standing of the Society and of strengthening its governance. Council is delighted to Elect Colin as a Fellow of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.

Raewyn Empson receives Robert Falla Memorial Award

Raewyn Empson has made a substantial and ongoing contribution to New Zealand ornithology and conservation, particularly in the Wellington region. Her conservation career began in the NZ Wildlife Service, and she was a foundation staff member, based in the Wellington Conservancy, when the Department of Conservation was formed in 1987. Although her conservation work included plants, reptiles and insects, she was mainly involved in bird conservation throughout her government career, including close-order management of Black Robin, Hihi, Takahe, and Kokako.

Throughout her career, Raewyn's forté was project management; the more complex and more high profile the project, the more she rose to the challenge. Throughout the early 1990s, she organised a complex series of field trials preparing for the eradication of two species of rats on Kapiti Island, and careful monitoring of seven threatened bird species considered potentially vulnerable to accidental poisoning, using colour-banding and radio-telemetry. These trials culminated in the successful eradication of rats from the island in 1996, the largest forested island in the world at the time to be cleared of rats.

Following her extremely competent management of such a complex eradication project, Raewyn was appointed to DOC's Island Eradication Advisory Group, serving as a core member for more than two decades, providing advice on pest mammal eradication projects throughout NZ and overseas. Soon after, she was seconded to Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (now Zealandia Ecosanctuary), to organise and lead the eradication of up to 14 introduced mammal species soon after the predator-free fence was installed there in 1999. That led to a permanent position as conservation manager there, which she held until her retirement in 2016. During that time, she organised and led translocations of 12 bird species, including organising capture teams on Tiritiri Matangi, Kapiti Island, and various mainland sites, plus releases of four captive-reared species.

She also found time she also made the most of conservation volunteer opportunities overseas, including a visit to Mangaia Island in the Cook Islands in 1992, that led to two papers on the Tanga'eo or Mangaia Kingfisher, co-authored with Stella Rowe and published in *Notornis*. Raewyn has now co-authored six papers in *Notornis*, at least five bird papers in other journals, and is a prolific author of wildlife management reports and best-practice manuals.

Raewyn was the OSNZ National Secretary (1990-1998) and has served as Treasurer for the Wellington branch, as well as being part of the branch's senior leadership group for many years. However, Council considers that her greatest contribution to NZ ornithology has been as an inspiration, trainer, mentor and guide to a generation of early career conservation managers, researchers, and volunteers. In addition to demonstrating and teaching people management and wildlife management skills, Raewyn's sheer ability to get things done through careful planning, leadership and bringing the best out of her team members, has been hugely influential in the careers of many who have themselves gone on to make significant contributions to ornithological research and conservation. Accordingly, in recognition of her significant contributions to NZ ornithology and sustained service to the Society, Council has determined that Raewyn Empson shall be presented with the 2024 Robert Falla Memorial Award.



▲ Raewyn Empson

Peter Schweigman – bird man of Otago

For decades, Peter Schweigman was synonymous with the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) in Otago. Peter was a crucial part of the Otago ornithological scene. He was a mentor to many who are now themselves active in bird studies and conservation and he introduced countless members to the adventure and enjoyment of studying birds. He was Otago Regional Representative from 1984-1998 and a member of the Society's Council from 1998-2000. He was also awarded OSNZ's Meritorious Service Award in 2001.

Peter leaves a legacy of many significant datasets that contribute to our understanding of how bird populations have changed over the decades, particularly in Otago, including Black-fronted Dotterel, Cattle Egret, Australasian Bittern, Glossy Ibis, Royal Spoonbill, South Island Robin, Silvereye and Sacred Kingfisher. He was a leader in developing many bird studies in the Otago Region, coordinating and collating the data for the wader surveys for several decades. He also coordinated the Otago Harbour study for the surveys in 1977-78 and 1988-89.

Peter was a keen and experienced bird bander, and a dedicated re-sighter of banded birds. He banded robins, oystercatchers, dotterels, Silvereyes, godwits and spoonbills. The banded Silvereyes showed the pattern of dispersal Dunedin gardens. His resightings of colour-banded Bar-tailed Godwits on the estuaries of Otago, originally marked at Warrington and returning from Alaska, alongside the work of colleagues throughout NZ, contributed to our understanding of their site-faithfulness. He also worked as an honorary curator at Otago Museum from 1992-2020, identifying thousands of specimens of bird mounts, study skins, nests and eggs.

Peter was a champion of the Royal Spoonbills, and was the main instigator for studying the increase in their numbers and expansion of nesting colonies in NZ since the early 1980s. He banded 60 nestlings at the Green Island colony, which involved 18 boat trips to the island from 1994-2005. He cajoled and enthused Birds New Zealand members throughout NZ to report sightings of these banded spoonbills. He spent countless hours on Otago's windswept estuaries resighting banded birds. This all paid off with over 1,000 resightings reported and meticulously collated by Peter for over 15 years. The pattern of resightings showed that adult spoonbills in NZ undertake repeated seasonal inter-island migration, moving north in winter, then relocating south again in summer to breeding sites. This work resulted in a scientific paper in *Notornis* with colleagues Bill Cash and Mary Thompson.

When a colony was discovered on Maukeikei Island near Dunedin in 1984 Peter began to document new colony locations and gather information about nest numbers. He coordinated eight nationwide counts between 1991-2012, and Birds New Zealand continues his work with the latest census this past winter.

This coming summer Birds New Zealand is once again organising a systematic count of colonies and nests. The Society proposes to recognise the lasting legacy that Peter leaves to NZ bird studies by naming this survey *The Peter Schweigman Memorial Royal Spoonbill Colony and Nest Count, 2024*. It is the end of an era for Otago Birds with the passing on 17 June 2024 of Peter Schweigman.

MARY THOMPSON & BRUCE MCKINLAY



▲ Peter Schweigman with spoonbill chick: Ilke Sohle.



Wairarapa Atlas Expedition

The Atlas co-ordination team was excited to help organise the final Toi Toi Wines funded NZ Bird Atlas expedition to the Wairarapa region over ANZAC weekend (24-28 April). There was an amazing response with 15 keen people registering to join the expedition, plus Wairarapa RR Oliver Druce led a small group of local members to complement their efforts. The expedition team achieved a fantastic amount over a relatively short period recording a total of 68 bird species and uploading 675 checklists. The team included Kirsten Olsen (Manawatu RR), Stephen Legg, Emma Chan, Chris Bycroft, Christopher Tuffley, Becky and Archer Mawson, Peter Fryer (Taranaki RR), Steve and Helen McGill, Jan Keast, Arthur Hyde, Annemieke Hamilton (Wellington RR) and Jaz Hamilton, and Sian Luckie. We would like to thank everyone who took part, especially Kirsten and Stephen for taking the lead in the field, and to Toi Toi Wines for their generous sponsorship and kind donation of wine.

The expedition team met in Dannevirke, with members traveling there from Kapiti, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington, Rotorua, Auckland and various parts of the Wairarapa. The team met each evening to allocate Atlas squares to each of six sub-groups. Their routes and squares had been planned in advanced by Dan Burgin and Kirsten Olsen. Everyone was very eager to start at dawn to make the most of the short daylight hours. Some groups stayed out until late to do nocturnal counts, while others came back to base for dinner and left later to undertake nocturnal counts.

"Back at camp each evening, we shared highlights and observations over a glass of wine. It was nice to share each team's highlights, since the atlasers on this expedition had such a wide range of birding skills, knowledge and experience," says Kirsten Olsen. Highlights included sightings of Lesser Redpoll, Royal Spoonbills, Whiteheads, NZ Tomtits and Spotless Crakes. Rooks were reported on 32 checklists and one of the last checklists included 13 Banded Dotterels, 16 NZ Dotterels and a Ruddy Turnstone. The expedition team added 30 species or more to two grid squares, 20-29 species to 16 grid squares, 10-19 species to 25 grid squares, and 1-9 species to 48 grid squares.

Wairarapa RR Oliver Druce says the expedition team made an outstanding effort to get to all the unlikely places and cover all habitats. "There is very little original bush left in the whole of eastern Wairarapa and southern Hawke's Bay, so low counts of Whitehead and Rifleman were expected despite populations being known in eastern Wairarapa. We were pleased to see Common Myna don't seem to be advancing with nothing south of a line from Dannevirke to Weber. The dominance of open country species was not unexpected but there were also healthy numbers of NZ Fantail, Grey Warbler, Tui, Bellbird and Kereru."

NZ BIRD ATLAS TEAM

Hazel Harty (nee Fielding) Obituary

Hazel (Huz) was born in 1939 in Otaki. Her family moved to Papakura in the early 1950s. After high school she worked as a secretary at Loan and Mercantile in Papakura before she married Tom Harty in 1960. Following the wedding she worked at a local farm for some years and then became a mother to a boy and a girl. By this time the family were living at their house in Ramarama where Tom still lives today.

While Hazel and Tom were not dedicated birdwatchers, they appreciated birds and were quickly rounded up by Ross McKenzie, the South Auckland Regional Representative of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) at the time. They joined the OSNZ in 1967 and maintain their membership (now Birds New Zealand) to the present time. They were part of a large group of people that Ross McKenzie gathered as members of the OSNZ, including the writer and a Past President, Beth Brown. Tom and Hazel provided much encouragement to us younger members and always made sure that birdwatching was fun even while gathering important information.

Hazel was a skillful spinner and weaver of wool and usually undertook her own dyeing of the materials. Those of us with longer memories will remember her turning up to AGMs with colourful clothing that she had created herself. These bright jerseys were finished with her mop of red hair.

Hazel became the Membership Secretary of OSNZ in 1990. At the same time, she joined the OSNZ Council and served in both roles until 2002. As Membership Secretary, she put in practice the skills she had acquired as a secretary at Loan and Mercantile and developed a membership file card system that is still held in the Society's archives. Hazel and Tom maintained the store of back copies of Notoris and other Society publications from 1988 for circa 20 years. To store the large volume of material they built a small shed in their backyard which has only recently been emptied. Paul Cuming took over as the distributor of published Society records, although Tom and Hazel still held the materials and sent them to Paul as required.

Members who joined during Hazel's time as Membership Secretary will remember that when they first joined the Society, Hazel would send a welcome letter along with several Society publications as a welcome pack. This act generated much good will among new members and was a great initiative. During the first NZ Bird Atlas project the Council decided that one way of encouraging surveys in under-represented areas was to arrange for the annual conference to be held in smaller provincial centres. Tom and Hazel were therefore enlisted to organise a number of conferences in smaller centres and as members came and went from the conference, they completed bird checklists along with organised field trips during the conference. As a two-person organising committee, Tom was charged with finding the venues and accommodation and Hazel undertook the finer details, such as arranging food and the dozens of other small tasks that require someone with a great attention to detail.

Hazel's voluntary service was carried out in the background and she never wished to appear in the limelight, but she always achieved wonderful outcomes for the Society.

DAVID LAWRIE, PAST PRESIDENT (2009-2018)

Lake Wānaka crested grebe killed by plastic

A Pūteketeke Crested Grebe at Lake Wānaka has died of starvation after two pieces of plastic got stuck in its digestive tract. An autopsy by a Massey University vet found the largest piece was 5.5cm and restricted the passage of food into the bird's gut. It was found dead ashore in Bremner Bay. "The reality is there's just a huge amount of rubbish going into the lake," says local conservationist John Darby, who started Lake Wānaka Grebe Project ten years ago to help increase numbers there. When walking his dog around Wānaka, he regularly finds large numbers of dumped plastic bottles and cans, recently finding 23 plastic bottles by Wānaka Yacht Club and 12 by the rugby fields.



▲ Grey-headed Albatross, Otago Canyons, 15/5: Oscar Thomas.



▲ Blue Petrel, Otago Canyons, 11/7: Oscar Thomas.



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▲ 1. King Penguin, Oreti Beach, Southland, 12/7: Danny 'Deow' Owen; 2. Yellow-eyed Penguin, Wairau Diversion, 23/4: Patrick Crowe; 3. Black-browed Albatross, Wellington Zoo, late April: Jude Turner/Te Nukuao Wellington Zoo; 4. Brown Booby, off Makara, 19/3: Jonathan Delich/Cook Strait Charters.

Bird News

Some sightings have not received official acceptance by Birds New Zealand's Records Appraisal Committee (1st April 2024 – 1st September 2024).

Much of the autumn/winter excitement was provided by pelagic seabirds supported by a scattering of vagrant waterfowl and waders. Among the waterfowl, 2 self-introduced colonisers from Australia showed signs of increasing. **Hoary-headed Grebe** sightings included 9 at Lake Elterwater on 6/6 and 1 at Lake Pinot in Marlborough on 30/6, and there was a new NZ high count of 39 **Australian Wood Ducks** at the Playhouse Ponds near Mapua on 1/6. All 4 species of grebe that breed in NZ (Hoary-headed, Australasian, Crested, NZ Dabchick) were seen at Lake Pinot on 30/6, which may be the first time all 4 have been recorded together at a single NZ site.

Less numerous but now seemingly annual in NZ, a drake **Northern Shoveler** returned to Pegasus Wetlands from 2/4 to 24/7, while another was seen at Lake Elterwater on 26/4. A quartet of **Plumed Whistling Ducks** was still present at Mawheraiti near Reefton on 15/3 and a lone **Chestnut-breasted (Australian) Shelduck** was spotted near Glentanner on 25/3. A **Brown Teal** found at Travis Wetland (Christchurch) on 3/5 that stayed to 30/5 turned out to be the first Pāteke seen in the area for at least a decade. After some photo-sleuthing to decipher the leg band it was identified as a 12-year-old male that had escaped from one of the captive breeding wetlands in Ashburton, about 100km south of Travis Wetland.

That was nothing compared to the distance a **King Penguin** must have swum from Subantarctic Macquarie Island to reach Ōreti Beach (Southland), where it was found on 12/7. Later that day, DOC staff reportedly moved it "to a quieter location where

it would be less likely to be disturbed by people and dogs". There was an unconfirmed second-hand report of a possible **Emperor Penguin** at Tewaewae Bay "the week before". An immature **Erect-crested Penguin** found ashore moulting on Pitt Island on 20/3 was found dead on 24/3, possibly killed by a feral cat. A **Yellow-eyed Penguin** found at the Wairau Diversion on 23/4 was taken into care at the South Island Wildlife Hospital for rehabilitation before being released back into the wild at Banks Peninsula.

The regular 'Petrel Station' pelagic boat trips from Tutukaka out past the Poor Knights Islands organised by Scott Brooks produced a steady stream of winter wonders, helping to raise temperatures aboard: 2 **Snowy Albatross** (*D. exulans*), 3 **Wilson's Storm Petrels** and 27 **Grey Ternlets** on 23/3; 2 **Hutton's Shearwaters**, 1 **Black-bellied Storm Petrel**, 1 Wilson's Storm Petrel and 43 Grey Ternlets on 22/4; 1 **Campbell Albatross** and 5 Wilson's Storm Petrels on 27/4; 1 Campbell Albatross, 3 Wilson's Storm Petrels, 1 **Antarctic Prion**, 1 **Brown Skua** and 21 Grey Ternlets on 11/5; 2 Campbell Albatross, 1 Brown Skua and 11 Grey Ternlets on 19/5; and 2 Campbell Albatross and 8 Brown Skuas on 27/5.

During a 65km transect out past the Otago Canyons by the University of Otago's *Polaris II* on behalf of NIWA on 15/5, Oscar Thomas chalked up more winter wonders, including 1 **Grey-headed Albatross**, 1 **Light-mantled Sooty Albatross**, 1 **Antarctic Fulmar**, 1 **Soft-plumaged Petrel**, 7 **White-headed Petrels**, 26 **Grey Petrels**, 7 **Grey-backed Storm Petrels** and 8 **Black-bellied Storm Petrels**. A pelagic boat trip from Port Chalmers to the Otago Canyons organised by Oscar Thomas on 22/6 recorded a new NZ record of 11 albatross species (**Northern Royal**, **Southern Royal**,



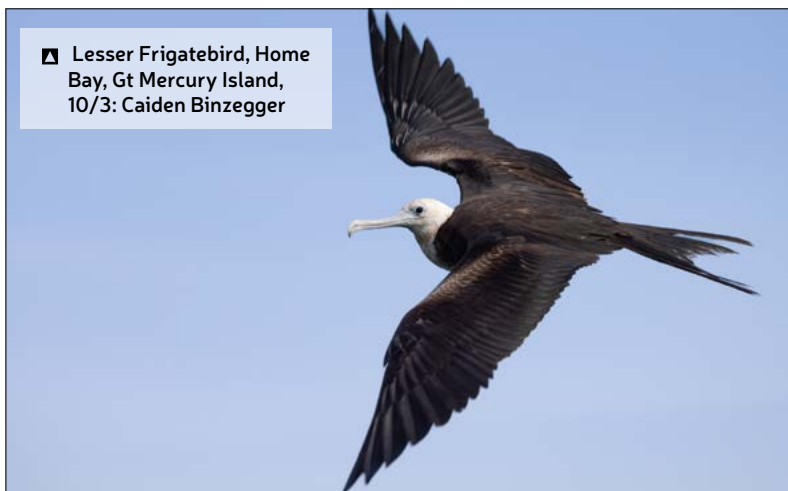
▲ Snowy Albatross (*D. exulans*) Photo by Scott Brooks.*



▲ Brown Skua attacking Buller's Shearwater, Poor Knights Islands, 27/5: Stephen Collins.



▲ Thin-billed Prion, Otago Canyons, 11/7: Oscar Thomas.



▲ Lesser Frigatebird, Home Bay, Gt Mercury Island, 10/3: Caiden Binzegger

▲ * Snowy Albatross (*D. exulans*), Poor Knights Islands (23/3). Sandy Bartle comments that the relatively deep, long pink bill with pale yellow tip and large overall size of this bird are features of this species; the markings on the wings, state of the primary feathers, and lack of black feathers on the crown suggest a non-breeding (gap year) adult male from the Indian or Atlantic Ocean that is about 30% through primary moult; and on the upper wing, note how the white central patch behind the elbow that is linked to the back forms a conspicuous white wedge. Photo by Scott Brooks.

Light-mantled Sooty, Snowy, **Antipodean**, **Chatham**, Campbell, **Buller's**, **Black-browed**, **White-capped**, **Salvin's**) plus a quartet of Grey Petrels. Another one of his pelagic boat trips out there on 11/7 recorded 1 **Blue Petrel**, 2 **Thin-billed Prions**, 1 Grey-backed Storm Petrel, 1 Antarctic Fulmar, 1 Grey Petrel and 1 White-headed Petrel.

Further north, a very weak juvenile Black-browed Albatross found grounded on Wellington's south coast in late April was taken into care at Wellington Zoo where vets found it had swallowed some plastic items that had got stuck in its stomach. After they removed the items, the bird was rehabilitated before being released back into the wild in late May. A Light-mantled Sooty Albatross found alive ashore west of Dargaville near Mahuta on 26/5 was also taken into care (fate unknown), while a Grey-headed Albatross washed up dead on the Kapiti Coast on 4/6.

There was a spate of beach-wrecked Antarctic Fulmars from mid-May into early June found between Makara and Whangaehu involving at least 6 birds. One was also found alive ashore at Pouto Point, Northland, on 1/6, and 1 was found dead on Brighton Beach, Christchurch, on 22/6. Three live birds were seen offshore from Sandfly Bay (Otago) on 27/5, 3 from the Cook Strait ferry on 31/5, 1 off Kapiti Island on 7/6, and 2 at sea off Kaikoura the same day. A **Mottled Petrel** that came ashore alive but underweight on New Brighton beach (Christchurch) in early June was taken into care (fate unknown). A beach-wrecked White-headed Petrel was found alive at Waikanae Estuary on 16/6 but after being taken into care and assessed by a vet it needed to be euthanised.

A **Brown Booby** with a bluish bill was seen at Muriwai gannet colony on 5/3. Then one with a yellowish bill was seen on a boat 14 miles off Timaru on 16/3. Then Cook Strait Charters skipper Jonathan Delich reported that a Brown Booby with a yellowish bill landed on his boat on 19/3, south of Mana Island, and stayed aboard for a couple of hours while he motored back to Seaview

Marina in Wellington Harbour where it hopped onto the wharf and took off, flying back out to sea. The long-staying **Lesser Frigatebird** seen on and off at Whangapoua and Great Mercury Island from 19/1 was last reported there on 13/4.

There was an unconfirmed report of a **Nankeen Night Heron** heard near Franz Josef on 17/4. From April to July, 11-13 birds were recorded at Upokongaro near the Whanganui River, including two juveniles. A juvenile Nankeen Night Heron was photographed in Ohakune township by the Mangawhero River on 11/5 and a nest found in the vicinity. One was also recorded calling (undated) in the watershed between the Mangamahu Stream and Turakina River. These reports suggest they are increasing in number. A trio of **Little Egrets** was regular around the Ōmokoroa Peninsula (BoP) 17/5-17/7 and a duo was seen about 30km away at Maketu (BoP) on 6/7. A flock of 10-15 **Eastern Cattle Egrets** was seen in flight near SH3 about 3km before Kai Iwi near Whanganui on 12/3. Up to 7 were seen by Whangaehu Beach Road (Whanganui) from 30/4-30/5, 4 were at the southern end of Horseshoe beach on Stewart Island on 28/5, and 1 was near Waitotara estuary (South Taranaki) on 6/6. An **Auckland Islands Rail** chick photographed by a remote trail camera on Adams Island may be the first photo of this species in the wild as all existing published photos seem to be of birds in captivity, or in the hand.

The long-staying pair of **Pectoral Sandpipers** at Hokio remained to 28/3, while a **Sanderling** was at the Ashley River Estuary 25/2-3/3 and a Great Knot was at Pukorokoro Miranda 27-31/3. A nicely coloured-up **Hudsonian Godwit** was seen at Little Waihi on 31/3 and 7/4, and the arrival of winter brought an unusual record of 5 **Marsh Sandpipers** at Southern Marsh in Napier found during the winter wader survey there on 16/6. A **Terek Sandpiper** seen in Awarua Bay (Southland) 22/6-31/7 was a nice find but the American **Semipalmated Plover** found at the north end of Big Sand Island (Kaipara) the same day was one for the record books, being only the 4th or 5th NZ record.



Common Tern with red bill, Ashley Estuary, 12/4: Adan Colley.



Semipalmated Sandpiper, Big Sand Island, 12/7: Ben Ackerley.



Eastern Common Tern with dark bill, Ashley Estuary, 22/3: Adam Colley.



Arctic Tern with red bill, Ashley Estuary, 4/4: Adam Colley.



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1. Grey Petrel, out past Otago Canyons, 15/5: Oscar Thomas; 2. Juvenile Nankeen Night Heron, Upokongaro, 23/4: Eddie Bright; 3. Hudsonian Godwit, Little Waihi, 31/3: Tim Barnard; 4. Great Knot, Pukorokoro Miranda, 29/3: Caiden Binzegger; 5. Grey Plover, Big Sand Island, 29/6: Warwick Allen; 6. Sanderling, Ashley Estuary, 24/2: Ben Ackerley; 7. Auckland Island Rail chick, February 2024: theylooklikeus, iNaturalist NZ; 8. Common Tern with partial red bill, Ashley Estuary, 3/3: Ben Ackerley.

It was joined by a **Grey Plover** on 29/6, with both birds staying until at least 17/8.

Among the scarcer tern species reported were 3 **Australian (Gull-billed) Terns** photographed at Manawatu Estuary by Foxtan Beach, 7-8/4. A lone bird was seen at Motueka Spit on 7/4 and then 3 were seen there on 25/5 and 3/6. Further north, 1 was at Pukorokoro Miranda on 28/5. A **Whiskered Tern** visited Te Wai Parera 'big pond' near Waituna Lagoon on 14/3 while another put made an appearance at the Stilt Pond at Pukorokoro Miranda on 8/5. Two **White-winged Black Terns** visited the Nelson Boulder Bank on 7/4 followed by a lone bird on 22/4. Another was seen hawking over Bromley Oxidation Pond, Christchurch, on 30/5 and again in late June. Three were seen in paddocks in mid-Canterbury on 27/6, 1 with a flock of 84 Black-fronted Terns (BFTs) at 552 Christys Road and 2 with 19 BFTs at 303 Le Bretons Rd feeding over ploughed paddocks. The next day, 1 was seen at the Tukituki River mouth near Haumoana and there was a report of regular sightings of 1-2 at the Ashburton River mouth (undated).

A dark-billed **Eastern Common Tern** (ECT) was seen at Waikanae Sandspit on 16/3 and 21/3. Another dark-billed ECT was photographed several times at Ashley Estuary between 25/2

and 24/4. Yet another Common Tern was photographed there on 3/3 but this individual had some red on the bill and red legs. Then on 1/4 another bird was photographed with a more distinctly red bill and red legs, followed by repeat sightings there until 12/4. Could this latter bird have been a first NZ record of a **Western Common Tern**? An Unusual Bird Report has been submitted.

An **Arctic Tern** with a dark bill and red legs was photographed at the Ashley Estuary on 16/3 followed by a different looking Arctic Tern with a red bill and red legs that was photographed there on 4/4. A potential Arctic Tern in breeding plumage with a red bill was reported as it flew north past the Cook Strait ferry on 12/5 between Tongue Point and Red Rocks.

Notable North Island sightings of **Kaka** included 1 at Mt Maunganui on 8/6, a duo in Gisborne by Somerton Road on 11/6, and 1 at Somerville (East Auckland) on 17/6. In the South Island, 2 **Kea** were seen flying over the road between Clyde and Alexandra on 19/5, well away from the nearest known populations. Lastly, 2 **Common Mynas** were filmed in Christchurch's redzone by New Brighton Road on 3/3 and there was an unconfirmed report of 2 in Heathcote Valley in late June.

Sources: Unusual Bird Reports, BirdingNZ.net Forum, eBird NZ, New Zealand Birders Facebook group, Regional Roundup, iNaturalist NZ.



▲ Banded Rail, Waimea Inlet, 2/6: Oscar Thomas.



▲ Antarctic Fulmar, Otago Canyons, 11/7: Oscar Thomas.



▲ White-winged Black Tern, Nelson Boulder Bank, 31/5: Oscar Thomas.



▲ Oscar Thomas speaking at the 2024 NZ Bird Conference, 2/6: Michael Szabo.

Fledgling Fund recipient – Oscar Thomas

I've been going to the Birds New Zealand annual conference since I was 15-years-old and this year's in Nelson was the biggest and best yet. Nelson is at the opposite end of the South Island from where I live, so it's a 12-hour drive from Dunedin. This year my partner Ela Hunt and I took the opportunity to bird our way there, joined by two other passionate birders Bradley Shields and Noah Fenwick for most of the trip. Maybe we could reach 100 species? Not likely, we thought.

On day one, we saw a Kōtuku/White Heron and a Karearea/NZ Falcon near Moeraki, and three toroa/albatross species from Katiki Point. Bortons Pond near Duntroon also proved fruitful with a couple of vocal Kotoreke/Marsh Crakes and a Black-fronted Dotterel on the mud. Coming into Te Manahuna Mackenzie we spotted a Pūteketeke/Australasian Crested Grebe and Kawau Tūi/Little Black Shag on Lake Ruataniwha, the latter a local rarity. We left Twizel before sunrise in search of Chukar. Although we combed Mt John for hours, we just couldn't find any. Spirits not yet dampened, we made haste to Christchurch and popped in to see a lone male Pāteke/Brown Teal at Travis Wetland, then on to Lewis Pass for the night where a Ruru/Morepork sang us to sleep.

Descending into sunny Nelson the next day it was a balmy 16°C. En route we were delighted to make a record high count of 39 Australian Wood Ducks at the Playhouse Ponds near Mapua. Next up was a stroll around Brook Waimārama Sanctuary for a shot at their Kākāriki Karaka/Orange-fronted Parakeets. Although prolific, they are still mostly keeping to the upper reaches of the beech forest there, and we sadly didn't have long to search. Boulder Bank was the local hotspot, and we made several visits. Restricted access didn't stop us from scoping a flock of Wewea/NZ Dabchicks on the ponds, and a White-winged Black Tern. Bradley also scoped three unseasonal Arctic Skuas offshore, and I called a Reef Heron from the car.

Post-conference, we toured Golden Bay led by Bradley, who grew up there. Bay of Plenty RR Paul Cuming was a welcome addition to our number on this leg, as we birded our way right

up to the Top of the South. In Motueka we were lucky to watch Marsh Crakes and Australian Gull-billed Terns alongside fellow conference-goers Max, Maria, Te Arawhetu and Johnathan. Cape Farewell yielded seabirds and a lovely pair of Pihoihoi/NZ Pipits. A night was spent at Mangarākau Swamp Lodge, where we heard Mātātā/Fernbirds, a Kakaruai/SI Robin and Pūweto/Spotless Crake. The kitchen overlooks the wetland, and while making dinner a distinctive stocky bird flapped past the window. "Bittern, bittern, BITTERN!" We chanted so the others could run over and glimpse it just in time. What luck to spot one of our most endangered species while cutting onions! After dipping twice at Māharau, I was happy to finally see a Moho Pererū/Banded Rail in the South Island next to Waimea Inlet.

Going back to Dunedin we had some success in Marlborough with flocks of Cirl Buntings and Hoary-headed Grebes, followed by an unforgettable trip off Kaikōura. On a two-hour boat trip, we had exceptional encounters with a Parāoa/Sperm Whale, seven Paikea/Humpback Whales, hundreds of dolphins, a Southern Giant Petrel, two Antarctic Fulmars, and many other seabirds. Our tally sat at 96 bird species for the trip. One last push for 100 saw us try for Northern Shoveler at Pegasus wetlands in Christchurch right on dark. No dice. That's okay though, when you add in the mammals, we reached 103 species!

My thanks to Birds New Zealand for a Fledgling Fund grant to attend this year's conference and speak about my Master's project on the movements and plumages of the critically endangered Pukunui/Southern NZ Dotterel. I was also privileged to win the conference photo competition in three categories; bird behaviour, bird moult and marked bird. The grant was invaluable for me to be able to get to Nelson and learn some incredible insights into recent advances in bird conservation and research. See you all in Auckland in 2025! You can find a full list of the birds we saw on our checklists here:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/246181>

OSCAR THOMAS



FAR NORTH

For our branch's final NZ Bird Atlas field trip, we visited Karikari Peninsula on 31/5 and since then we've had 2 trips along 90 Mile Beach. On the 18/6 trip we counted 566 SIPOs (more than usual), 250+ Welcome Swallows, 220 Red-billed Gulls and 12 NZ Dotterels, but we found relatively few birds there on 23/7 with only 245 SIPOs, 41 Red-billed Gulls and other species also in smaller numbers.

We all enjoyed doing the winter Royal Spoonbill census, recording a total of 1,292 birds around the whole district, mainly north of Kaitaia with the highest count at Unahi. Kevin Matthews reports also seeing 37 Cattle Egrets and 4 Kotuku White Herons there on 30/7. We also saw 2 Kotuku at Aurere and an Australasian Bittern at Taipa on 25/7. Other reports of Australasian Bittern included 1 at Waitangi Wetlands (Kerikeri Inlet) on 4/6, another at the stream mouth by Dick Ulrich Road on Karikari Peninsula on 7/6 plus a solitary Wrybill, and others at Whangaroa and Opua.

Kevin Matthews visited the Parengarenga area on 25/7 where he saw 350 SIPOs, 150 Banded Dotterels and 1 Reef Heron at Paua and 10 Banded Dotterels, 12 NZ Dotterels showing mating behaviour, and a Variable Oystercatcher nesting at Waikuku. Kevin also reported seeing circa 3,000 shearwaters flying off East Beach on 9/7, and about 200 were seen off Cable Bay beach on 23/7. Lastly, 2 adult Eastern Barn Owls and a juvenile have been seen recently near Kaitaia, and Fernbirds were heard at a number of locations at Kaimaumu on 24/7. - ISABELLA GODBERT

NORTHLAND

Three local members have presented their work to us in the past quarter. Pat Miller talked about the birds and fish he has recorded on his beach patrols, including White-capped and Grey-headed albatrosses and both giant petrel species (undated reports). He has also measured and, in some cases, corresponded with experts about the fish he has found. Robyn Wilson talked about her ornithological experiences in India, and Kathy Mitchell spoke about her leadership role in selecting and feeding petrels during translocations of Chatham Island Petrels from Rangatira Island to Mangere Island.

Scott Brooks has been busy with his pelagic seabird trips out at 'The Petrel Station' past the Poor Knights Islands (see Bird News, page 16). My winter monitoring shows that the rural House Sparrow and Starling populations have not recovered substantially from losses in the 2022-23 wet stormy summer. Members were busy in June with 5-minute bird counts for Tiakina Whangarei. This meant our Royal Spoonbill census had to wait until July. The weather was poor that weekend but those doing high tide and low tide counts completed all the surveys. We counted 52 sites and 360 spoonbills. Our most problematic survey sites were in the northern Kaipara Harbour, but we knew that Tony Crocker had covered some sites there before we went out. We thank Tony for letting us know where he went. - TONY BEAUCHAMP

AUCKLAND

Our Michael Taylor Memorial Guided Bird Walk at Cornwall Park on 12/3 attracted 25 participants and recorded 19 species including

California Quail, Ring-necked Pheasant, Kereru/NZ Pigeon and 25 Eastern Rosellas. Our winter Ambury Park Guided Bird Walk on 7/7 attracted 35 people including guides with highlights including 1,104 Bar-tailed Godwits, 8 NZ Dotterels, 920 Pied Stilts, 1,000 Wrybill, 284 SIPOs, 10 Caspian Terns and an impressive 296 Royal Spoonbills. We also had a display at a planting day at Orangihina Reserve (Te Atatu) on 15/6.

Shorebird censuses of our regional harbours took place in June, with South Kaipara on 22/6, Manukau and Waitemata harbours on 23/6, and Maungawhai on 29/6. Results for South Kaipara Harbour included 10,974 SIPO, 117 VOCs, 2,437 Pied Stilts, 51 NZ Dotterels, 724 Banded Dotterels, 183 Wrybill, 24 Ruddy Turnstones, 230 Red Knots, 2,215 Bar-tailed Godwits, 3 Red-necked Stints, 1 Eastern Curlew, 259 Royal Spoonbills, 246 Black-billed Gulls, 67 Caspian Terns and 19 NZ Fairy Terns.

The nationwide Royal Spoonbill winter census was undertaken at the same time. While it is too early to advise of numbers, small numbers of spoonbills were found in places they had not been previously recorded in national counts, including Karekare Beach (1), Gulf Harbour Country Club (3), Whangapoua Estuary on Aotea/Great Barrier Island (6) and Port Albert (6). Our Pakiri Beach Patrol on 19/5 found 2 Little Penguins, 2 Buller's Shearwaters, 2 Flesh-footed Shearwaters, 2 Hutton's Shearwaters, 1 Fluttering Shearwater, 1 Grey-faced Petrel and 1 White-faced Storm Petrel. West coast beach patrols also went ahead at Muriwai Beach South and Karekare Beach. The generally settled weather has been kind to the birds with none found in June and just 2 Australasian Gannets, 1 Sooty Shearwater and 1 Short-tailed Shearwater found at Muriwai Beach South on 11/5.

A Semipalmated Plover was found at Manukapua/Big Sand Island in the Kaipara on 22/6 and then a Grey Plover at the same location on 29/6. A Cattle Egret was seen in Taupaki on 15/7, which is a new location for the species. A White Heron was seen along State Highway #16 south of Helensville on 5/8. An unwelcome sighting was 2 feral Rose-ringed Parakeets prospecting for nest sites at Coyle Park in Pt Chevalier on 25/7. Auckland Council have been alerted. - IAN McLEAN

SOUTH AUCKLAND

Our speakers in recent months have been Sandra Anderson from the School of Biological Sciences at Auckland University, who described how loss/reduction of native bird populations is resulting in weakened pollination and dispersal of seeds of our larger native plants. Alex Wilson from the Department of Conservation spoke about DOC's captive breeding trials for NZ Fairy Terns, with the 2023/24 season resulting in the successful hatching of 18 chicks, 13 of which fledged (including 4 captive reared birds). Lucy Hawley from Auckland Airport gave us insights into the work of the wildlife rangers there, whose main task is to mitigate and manage the risk of bird strike. They use a variety of methods to keep birds away from the runways, including a drone 'falcon'.

Members have also been busy conducting winter shorebird censuses on the Manukau Harbour, Firth of Thames and Coromandel

Peninsula, and surveying Royal Spoonbills in conjunction. We recorded just over 1,100 spoonbills at 45 locations around South Auckland.

In June, a Little Egret was seen at Karaka Harbourside and another at Matarangi. Flocks of 300/400 Spur-winged Plovers were reported from Ardmore Airfield (obviously an aviation hazard). Sightings of White Heron singletons have been reported at Whitford, Port Waikato, Auckland Airport and Mangere, Matarangi, and Wattle Downs over the last couple of months. The Wattle Downs Farm Reserve ponds have turned up some interesting records including a pair of Black Swans with 5 cygnets on 28/7, and a White-Winged Black Tern seen on 28/7 and 4/8. Black-billed Gulls are sometimes seen there, some of which are banded: 1 at Pukorokoro Miranda in 1997, 1 at Clarks Bay in 2001, and 1 at Kidds in 2020, all reported by Tony Habraken.

Sixteen Caspian Terns were spotted in a flock on the west coast of the Awhitu Peninsula, a large number for this location. An Australasian Bittern was seen near the road on the way to Port Waikato, and a large flock of Sulphur Crested Cockatoos (40+) was reported from the Hunua district. Lastly, a Southern Giant Petrel found on Orua Beach, Awhitu, was taken to BirdCare Aotearoa. After being transferred to Auckland Zoo, it is doing much better. - SUE FROSTICK

WAIKATO

Hot on the heels of the Waikato experiencing its first Royal Spoonbill breeding success, the first winter of the nationwide Royal Spoonbill census saw 20 Waikato birders scouring coastal harbours and inland wetlands. In all we recorded 140 birds, with the highest number coming from coastal sites. The surveyors also encountered other white objects including 4 Cattle Egrets near Te Kauwhata and 2 more on the Hauraki Plains south of Patetonga. Kotuku were recorded in the Huntly area and at Te Kopuku, south of Pukorokoro Miranda. Other notable sightings included 2 dark morph NZ Fantails in Hamilton and a small flock of Rooks in the Paeroa area. These birds have been present for several years and may now be the last flock in the Waikato. The west coast harbour surveys were conducted in early June with highlights being a single Black-billed Gull (rare for Kawhia), a Whimbrel, and at least 4 Reef Herons. - RUSSELL CANNINGS

BAY OF PLENTY/VOLCANIC PLATEAU

Mild panic set in with a looming deadline of June 2024, being the last gasp to get any NZ Bird Atlas grid squares sorted. So, off we went to mop up the mess! Absentee data got targeted for their elusive avian booty, plus any winter-deficient spots. Areas near Tarawera Falls, Blue Gum Bay (Matakana Island), Murupara, Galatea and Reporoa all getting raided. Thanks to John Heaphy at DOC, we have just added off-limits Karewa Island to the in-period dataset. While our region was one of the least covered in the land, with our membership scattered to the winds, we did manage to do more than I anticipated, despite only having 2WD vehicles. I've learned to balk at farmers saying we'd be fine going down that single 1km dirt race.

Three BoP members attended the Nelson conference and AGM, and were treated to an amazing range of topics, posters, photographs



■ Immature Southern Giant Petrel, Nicholson Canyon, Wellington branch pelagic trip, 14/7: Michael Szabo.



■ Wairarapa Atlas expedition team members (L-R): Christopher Tuffley, Annemieke Hamilton, Kirsten Olsen, 26/4 (see page 15): Stephen Legg.

and a general bird-a-geddon of data. A post-conference trip to Golden Bay and Kahurangi National Park was a bonus, led by superguide Bradley Shields. Our winter wader census in June provided some clarity over where we should be focusing on our upcoming Royal Spoonbill census. Nearly 750 Bar-tailed Godwits and nearly 140 Red Knots were overwintering in Tauranga Harbour. Ohiwa was home to nearly 400 godwits, and over 200 Banded Dotterels, reported Meg Collins' team. Maketu/Little Waihi had 75 godwits.

We had a great Royal Spoonbill census run by Laurie Donald and Warwick Buckman, with 265 birds recorded. The Thornton (Rangitaiki River Mouth) area has been fruitful of late, with Andrew Roussel confirming 10 wintering Black-fronted Terns there. Traditionally this is the northeastern-most limit for this species. Tim Barnard also spotted 2 Cattle Egrets nearby. Andrew also spotted 2 Weka chicks there. Another recent Weka sighting at Te Teko and Awakeri last year proves this range expansion isn't just a few birds. Andrew completed his triumvirate with a grand picture of a Kotuku scoffing a rat near Kaituna Wetland, Maketu. Someone please sign-up that bird to Predator Free 2050!

- PAUL CUMING

GISBORNE/WAIROA

Wet and cold weather has dogged our region all winter including another recent devastating flood in Wairoa and the Taruheru River again sweeping up over its banks. Nevertheless, a small number of members undertook the winter wader survey on 21/6 amidst heavy intermittent showers with the 2 nearby sites of Te Wherowhero Lagoon and Waipaoa River mouth being done simultaneously. This was to avoid possible double counting, especially for the Royal Spoonbill count. A total count of both these sites saw 58 Bar-tailed Godwits, 14 Royal Spoonbill and notably 46 Banded Dotterel, 39 Wrybills, and 110 Black-billed Gulls.

The winter wader count to Table Cape, Mahia Peninsula was walked on a sunny 8/7 undertaken by 7 enthusiasts, including Taylor, a representative from the Gisborne District Council, and our clued-up youngest member, 7-year-old Juniper. Both are great additions to the team. Along here 18 Bar-tailed Godwit were counted, a remarkable 61 Banded Dotterels and a dense flock of 48 Variable Oystercatchers. A Wairoa resident reports having Kaka at their

property for about 2 months, at first a solitary bird but now a pair.

- RAEWYNN & GEOFF FOREMAN

TARANAKI

In early May, 78 adult Grey-faced Petrels were banded at the Rapanui colony in Taranaki. These join 21 chicks banded in December, at the same time several sites around the South Taranaki coast were investigated. The results suggest birds may be nesting as far south as Oakura and possibly further. One wonders at the implications of this for the proposed offshore wind farms in South Taranaki waters. Also in May, Dan and Sam from WMIL assisted by Wild for Taranaki and some of our local members held well-attended bird identification courses in New Plymouth and Patea. Dan also gave us a list of NZ Bird Atlas squares in our province lacking data. Three of us set out to rectify this before the project ended.

In early June to co-ordinate with Waikato, we set out to census Royal Spoonbills in north Taranaki. Two of the group drove straight to Awakino and worked back to New Plymouth while the rest of us started at Waiwakaiho and headed north, counting 2 birds at Urenui, 1 at Tongaporutu, 5 birds at Awakino, and 15 at Mokau (technically in Waikato but easier for us to access). Then in the first weekend of July we headed south, tying in with Whanganui and Wellington. Two members started from the south and headed north, while 10 of us started from the north and headed south. It was an enjoyable day with perfect weather, but despite a reliable report of a flock of 20 seen flying around the Waverly area earlier in the week there was only 1 seen at Lake Waikato (close to Waverly) and 1 at Waitotara River estuary in the late afternoon. This was a 316km, 10-hour round trip, but once again visiting sites we have never been to before. Mary Thompson, census co-ordinator, informed us there were 8 birds recorded in 2012 and 24 in 2024.

- PETER FRYER

HAWKE'S BAY

This winter our branch has been able to get out for our regular field trips. In May, we combined a visit to Boundary Stream and Lake Opouahi with our AGM where we saw the usual suspects in both places: Toutouwai/Ni Robins, Korimako/Bellbirds, Tūi, Popokatea/Whiteheads, Tauhou/Silvereyes etc on the Tūmanako loop at Boundary Stream; and

Pāpango/NZ Scaup and Weweia/NZ Dabchicks at Lake Opouahi. An entertaining and efficient AGM was completed in the shelter at Lake Opouahi, a great venue for it.

June saw an excellent turn-out to complete our winter wader census. Highlights included 5 Marsh Sandpipers at Southern Marsh and decent numbers of Kuaka/Bar-tailed Godwits, oystercatchers (Tōrea, Tōrea Pango) and dotterels (Tūturiwhatu/NZ, Pohowera/Banded, Black-fronted). In July, we did our winter Kōtuku Ngutupapa/Royal Spoonbill census, coming up with a grand total of 37. The main areas they were seen were the Scrapes at Ahuriri Estuary (9), Clive River mouth (10), and the Haumoana and Beach Rd lagoons (11). There were also 7 birds at Lake Whatumā. Special thanks go to Jim and Christine for getting all the way down to Herbertville, only to find that Wanstead Lagoon was flooded.

Interesting sightings included a Spotted Dove just south of Pakipaki in late April, possibly the furthest south this species has been seen in Hawke's Bay. Three Tarapirohe/Black-fronted Terns were seen in the Tukituki estuary in early May. At least 8 Tarapiroe and a White-winged Black Tern in winter plumage were seen near Clive in June. Lastly, an observation by our RR Bernie of a Moho Pererū/Banded Rail in wetlands north of the Napier airport in May caused quite a bit of excitement.

- THALIA SACHTLEBEN

WHANGANUI

Winter is always a quiet season here, enlivened by the sporadic appearance of some altitudinal migrants. Welcome Swallows Warou are now abundant along the coast. Christopher Tuffley recorded at least 30 over the lagoon at Koitiata in late June, while Bill Fleury and Peter Frost counted 27 crowded on a farm powerline at Kaitoke in early July. Christopher also reported a Lesser Redpoll at Koitiata during his June visit and Peter Frost saw 1 at Whangaeahu in mid-May. Kerry Oates reported many NZ Pipits Pihioi on a recently logged site inland from Whanganui, possibly also a winter aggregation.

Several teams took part in the nationwide winter Royal Spoonbill Kōtuku ngutupapa census, covering local estuaries and coastal lakes. Only 4 birds were recorded, all on the Whanganui River. That was fewer than in 2012, but almost certainly reflects local movements, as 3-7 birds were seen at 2 of the sites a week earlier (none seen on the day).

Seven Cattle Egrets continue to grace the pastures on 2 farms at Whangaehu from where egrets have been recorded since the mid-1980s.

Paul Gibson and Jim Norris, with occasional inputs from others, continue monitoring the Nankeen Night Herons Umu kōtuku at pokongaro. The birds were seldom seen once nesting ended in mid-March, presumably reflecting normal covert post-breeding behaviour. Recently, however, 11-13 birds have been recorded, including 2 juveniles. In mid-May, a recently fledged juvenile was seen and photographed at Ohakune and Paul Gibson found a nest in the vicinity. Kerry Oates recorded 1 calling on the watershed between the Mangamahu Stream and Turakina River. Allied to reports over the past decade of birds being seen on the Turakina River, this suggests the population may be slowly expanding. Bird numbers on Whanganui Estuary are currently low: many Sacred Kingfishers Kōtare are present, but apart from Pied Stilts Poaka (including a hybrid), and 3 overwintering Bar-tailed Godwits Kūaka, little else. Paul Gibson's book has raised awareness of godwits, inspiring a group of local Tupoho artists, the Kūaka Collective, who are involved in the Whanganui District Council's Streets for People initiative. Their Kūaka-Bar-tailed Godwit Public Arts Project has decorated the bus shelters at the hub on St Hill Street in Whanganui with translucent decals celebrating the annual migration of godwits from Alaska to Aotearoa New Zealand and back. These incorporate Māori designs and colours mirroring Te Taiao (nature), along with motifs from the Yup'ik people of Alaska, where the godwits breed, and some of Paul's photographs, information and a poem. A Yup'ik delegation visited Whanganui earlier this year, among other things to see the godwits on their wintering grounds and observe the start of the birds' return migration.

- PETER FROST

MANAWATU

Twelve members from our region went out to the usual 8 sites for the winter wader counts (22, 24 & 28 June), observing 43 SIPOs, 42 VOCs, 262 Pied Stilts, 1 NZ Dotterel, 49 Banded Dotterels, 118 Spur-winged Plovers and 47 Bar-tailed Godwits. Our region also took part in the nationwide Royal Spoonbill| Kōtuku Ngutupapa census with 13 of us searching 22 sites on 6/7. We recorded spoonbills at 6 sites: 3 sites around the Manawatu River and Estuary (12, 2 & 9 spoonbills), Ohau Estuary (6 spoonbills), and counts of 7 and 1 at two lagoons on private land. During the census Stephen Legg and Kirsten Olsen also found a White Heron Kōtuku at each of the 2 lagoons on private land but it is uncertain whether the 2 sightings were of the same bird or 2 different birds.

Our monthly meetings have been a success with 16 attending our June meeting where Kara Macdermid gave a talk about the NI Robins Toutouwai that were translocated to Turitea Reserve in 2021, and 18 attended our July meeting where Caitlin Lavery gave a talk about protecting the Pihoihoi NZ Pipits along the Te Ahu a Turanga Highway project. Both talks stimulated interesting discussions. At our August meeting Cleland Wallace will give a talk about the daily Tui migrations in the Manawatū revealed by the Atlas project. At our September meeting on Weds 11/9 Associate

Professor Phil Battley will give a talk entitled 'Red Knots reluctantly reveal their secrets', and at our October meeting on Weds 9/10 Christopher Tuffley will give a talk about his Jan/Feb 2024 Chatham Islands trip.

- KIRSTEN OLSEN

WAIRARAPA

Our May field trip was to Glenburn on the wild east coast and a walk to Honeycomb Rock. We clocked up 37 species as our last contribution to the Atlas project including a huge flock of Canada Geese. More pleasing were our encounters with Black-fronted Dotterels, NZ Pipits, VOCs and White-fronted Terns. At a random stop on the return journey, we counted 9 Whiteheads. Also in May, we managed to verify long-standing rumours of a colony of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Tracking their racket over several kilometres we had a close fly-by of 16 near Hinakura. A local also assured us that there is a large colony thriving in remote areas nearer the coast.

In June we visited John Keating's property in the foothills of the Tararua Range near Carterton where he has done an impressive 15 years of regenerative plantings and pest control. The results were evident with abundant Kereru, Tui, and Bellbird. Also in July we did our Royal Spoonbill census. For many years there has been a substantial colony (200+ birds) at Boggy Pond by Wairarapa Moana. Our preliminary visit found the trees they used had rotted away and the colony was deserted. Since then, we have been looking for them without success. On 5/7 our team covered all known possibly hangouts in the Wairarapa. We were lucky to overlap with the lake wader survey and 44 Royal Spoonbills were counted on the lake but none were seen at the other sites. We surmise most have left the Wairarapa.

Our July field trip was to the Whakataki River mouth and Castlepoint. The Whakataki lagoon revealed a rich collection of dotterels, shags, terns, and Pied Stilts. Our photographers reveled in snapping a NZ Dotterel and a Banded Dotterel in the same shot. On the skyline walk at Castlepoint we enjoyed magnificent views, winter sunshine and some NZ Pipits.

- OLIVER DRUCE

WELLINGTON

Members in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington are certainly making me proud to be the new RR. Colin Miskelly was elected a Fellow of the Society and Raewyn Empson was the 2024 recipient of the Robert Falla Memorial Award at the 2024 annual conference in Nelson, and Murray Williams was made an Officer of the NZ Order of Merit in the 2024 King's Birthday Honours. Thank you to outgoing RR Johannes Fischer for his work representing the region over the past 3 years, it has been no small feat. I also thank Geoff de Lisle (another former RR) who continues to offer his support, in particular by diligently producing our quarterly regional newsletter. Thank you very much, you have both made this a smooth transition.

Our Royal Spoonbill survey on 6/7 recorded 17 birds (up from the 2012 winter count). On the 14/7 branch pelagic boat trip out to Nicholson Canyon, 20 members had close views of 7 species of albatross and giant petrel, over 100 Common Dolphins and some

spectacular rainbows! At our July meeting Wendy Ambury talked about the LOVE BITTERN! Project. She encourages people around the country to undertake a census of Australasian Bitterns on 14/9, 19/10 and 16/11 at dusk starting 30 mins before sunset and ending 30 mins after sunset, with data submitted in the Conservation Hub app. Our region meets on the first Monday of the month and welcomes any members from other regions who are passing through. You can contact me for further details: birds.wellington@birdsanz.org.nz

I'm pleased the days are getting longer with the tantalising suggestion that summer will once again return, hopefully with more exciting bird sightings and field trips!

- ANNEMIEKE HAMILTON

NELSON

We held a combined meeting with the local Forest & Bird branch on 8/5 to launch the newly updated 'Birds of the Nelson/Tasman Region' book written by Peter Field. Its publication was made possible by a grant from the Birds New Zealand Projects Assistance Fund and generous sponsorship from the local Forest & Bird branch. This updated edition is a huge advance on the earlier version written 35 years ago. A highlight of the evening was a presentation by David Melville which drew on information in the new publication to describe how the status of many species has changed so much over this period.

Then there was the annual NZ Bird Conference! You would think after the stress of organising the largest OSNZ annual conference to date, our organising committee would have breathed a collective sigh of relief and slumped onto their couches. Not so. Perhaps conference 'cabin fever' drove some of us out into the field! Regional activities have included a Tasman/Marlborough combined birding trip over the weekend of 29-30 June. Six members from Nelson (Sharen Graham, Mark Ayre, Craig Martin, Rob Jones, Maria Clement, Alison Ballance) visited some of Marlborough's lakes and wetlands, joined by local Marlborough birders Pat Crowe, Bill Cash, Mike Bell, Dan Burgin and Samantha Ray who suggested the itinerary and were excellent guides. This included a wonderful encounter with a Marsh Crake.

Nelson RR Mark Ayre should have been in Alaska for our July meeting, but that's a long story. However, at the meeting he showed slides from a previous visit so we could see what he was missing. David Melville spoke about a recently discovered Swamp Harrier roost in the Pearl Creek area and Kathryn Richards gave us a report on the Marlborough field trip mentioned above. We hope to return the hospitality to Marlborough members in early Spring. Our August meeting was mainly a workshop-style presentation on feathers and flying, with stations, activities and discussions around the colour, structure and function of feathers and adaptations to flight. Lastly, local sightings of interest included a trio of Australian (Gull-billed) Terns at Motueka Spit and 39 Australian Wood Ducks at the Playhouse Ponds.

- MARK AYRE

MARLBOROUGH

Our branch hosted 6 members from the Nelson/Tasman Branch on 29-30 June,



■ Marsh Crake, near Taylor Dam (Marlborough), 29/6: Rob Jones.



■ Chukar, Mt John (Canterbury), 25/7: Jack Colley.

visiting some of our region's birding hotspots. Highlights included close views of a Marsh Crake at Taylor Dam and about 10 Cirl Buntings at the Wairau Lagoons among thousands of other finches. At Lake Pinot on Bankhouse Estate near the Waihopai River all 4 species of grebe were recorded there at the same time! We believe this is a first NZ record. Our final count was 2 Australasian Crested Grebes, 2+ Australasian Little Grebes, 1+ Hoary-headed Grebe and 25+ NZ Dabchicks. Dave Barker kindly hosted us for lunch at his place at Lake Elterwater and let us view the birds on the lake from his property. We saw a Marsh Crake plus plenty more NZ Dabchicks, Hoary-headed Grebes and Crested Grebes. It was an absolute pleasure to host the Nelson branch, so we highly recommend cross-regional birding trips!

In late June and early July, Mike and Dianne carried out the winter wader counts. Lake Grassmere had plenty of gulls and waterfowl and a single Banded Dotterel. The Havelock estuaries were a bit busier with good numbers of SIPOs, Pied Stilts, Caspian Terns, White-faced Herons and Royal Spoonbills. Thirteen members took part in our winter spoonbill census on 28/7 when we had very good coverage with 16 known-spoonbill sites surveyed from Pelorus Sound to Lake Elterwater. Six sites had spoonbills with a total of 63 birds were counted. We are looking forward to seeing how many we find in summer. - PATRICK CROWE

CANTERBURY

A lone Kākā in Oxford in early August was an exciting find following a series of similar sightings in Canterbury earlier this year. In May, a Brown Teal was found at Travis Wetlands; the first Pāteke seen in the area for at least a decade. After some effort, birders learned it was a 12-year-old male that had escaped from 1 of the captive breeding wetlands in Ashburton.

The Lake Ellesmere/Te Waihora winter wader survey in July turned up an Australian (Gull-billed) Tern at the Lower Selwyn Huts, an unbanded Black Stilt at Muriwai/Coopers Lagoon, 3 Red-necked Stints at Jarvis Road and 18 Black-fronted Dotterels at Embankment Road. However, spoonbill numbers in the surveyed half of the lake were very low compared to the summer.

The Northern Shoveler at Pegasus Wetlands

remained through the winter, staying for its longest period in recent years. Its whereabouts during the rest of the year continues to be a mystery. A pair of Little Egrets continue to reside at the Ashley/Rakahuri Estuary which was notably quiet this winter season. A White-winged Black Tern in winter plumage was spotted at the Bromley Oxidation Ponds in late June. Three more were seen with Black-fronted Terns in 2 paddocks near Ashburton in late June. The Common Myna pair seen near a roundabout in Christchurch's red zone have been targeted by Environment Canterbury. One bird was eliminated and the other was scared away, with local reports including at New Brighton Mall. A Chukar was seen at Mt John in July.

Winter beach patrols yielded a dead beachwrecked Antarctic Fulmar and a live Mottled Petrel that was taken into care. Notable sightings around Christchurch included a NZ Falcon near Styx Mill and Cirl Buntings at Godley Head car park. Our branch has hosted some interesting talks including Bruce Postill's on shorebirds in North Korea and we had a variety of field trips with a banding workshop run by Phil Crutchley at Styx Mill Reserve, a survey of Ashburton Lakes organised by Don Geddes, a Lake Ellesmere winter wader count and a regional Royal Spoonbill winter survey. We also had some birding rambles run by Bev Alexander around Waimakariri and Christchurch. - SAMUEL AMARIS

OTAGO

It is with great sadness that we reflect on the loss of one of OSNZ Otago's stalwart active members, Peter Schweigman, who passed away in June. Peter contributed hugely to Otago bird studies, leaving behind a legacy of data sets. He was a mentor to many, generously sharing his time and field knowledge. I am lucky to have been mentored by him while on OSNZ Otago field trips as a school student. His passing marks the end of an era for our region.

The Atlas project finished but not after dedicated final efforts through trips led by Richard Schofield (Regional Recorder), and a final mission by Richard and Dawn Palmer (Regional Representative) to some zero-effort squares at Lake Whakatipu. Final Otago tally: 35,830 checklists from 343/345 (99%) of regional squares had at least 1 visit; 158 species; introduced European finches (Redpoll,

Chaffinch, Yellowhammer) were the top 3 for distribution, in 91% of surveyed squares. The 11/5 Global Big Day had great Otago representation: 20 observers submitted 78 checklists totalling 73 species. Team Swan Song recorded 63 species while Otago was the only region that recorded Southern Brown Kiwi, Red-crowned Kākāriki and Mohua.

Records of interest: 2 Marsh Crakes at Moke Lake, and 1 at Waitaki intake ponds along with Black-fronted Dotterel, Kākā at Katiki Reservoir, Kōtuku at Romahapa Catlins, and Royal Spoonbill at Dunedin Botanic Gardens. Little Black Shags throughout winter at several sites from Hawkesbury Lagoon south to Ōwaka River, Pied Shag at Lake Johnson and Lake Whakatipu. Karearea pair at Dunedin Polytech and Sacred Kingfisher in central Wānaka. Outside usual range: 2 Kea near Clyde and Tūi at Rocklands Station. Catlin's Sulphur Crested Cockatoos resurfaced: 10 seen at Rātānui. 3 Antarctic Fulmars and a White-headed Petrel offshore from Sandfly Bay. Banded Karearea at Dunedin Botanic Gardens and a banded Banded Dotterel at Pleasant River.

Our winter wader count on 30/6 recorded: Bar-tailed Godwits (slight increase), SIPO good numbers in Catlins and Blueskin Bay, Pied Stilt high Catlins numbers and VOCs high at Port Chalmers. The winter Royal Spoonbill census had 7 teams covering sites from Oamaru south to Haldane, with 13 spoonbills recorded. Otago was well represented at the Nelson conference where several of our student members presented on their work. Dawn Palmer also gave a well-attended Bringing Back the Birds talk at Whakatipu Wildlife Trust Wildside event. - FRANCESCA CUNNINGHAME

SOUTHLAND

It has been a quiet quarter in Southland. Matt Jones saw 4 Cattle Egrets at Horseshoe Bay (Stewart Island) on 27/5 and a King Penguin was reported on Oreti Beach on 12/7. Four members undertook our regional winter wader census in June recording 1,757 birds. Getting enough people to cover the 8 core sites, let alone lower priority areas, is an ongoing issue here but the keen members involved did a great job. In contrast, our winter spoonbill count only recorded a single bird (at Haldane Estuary).

- PETE McCLELLAND

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