

The Wrybill

Newsletter of the Canterbury Region,
Ornithological Society of New Zealand

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May 2016

What's on at OSNZ Canterbury:
May to July 2016

Field Trips

May 14 – Seabird watching at Kaikoura. Meet in the Belfast Pub carpark at 9 am to drive up to Kaikoura. We will be stopping at Saint Anne's Lagoon on the way. We will meet Richard Else and Hazel Watson at 1:30pm at Point Kean, where they will help us with seabird identification. Contact Jan.

June 11 – Winter Wader Count at Lake Ellesmere. Meet at 9:30 at the end of Embankment Road to get into teams. From there, each group will be sent to cover a certain section of the lake. Only waders and a few other species need to be counted this time. Contact Jan if you want to go, the more helpers the better.

July 23 – Ashburton Lakes Waterbird Count. Meet at Mount Somers at 9am to scatter to different lakes. Contact Jan if you want to attend.

Indoor Meetings

Evening Meetings take place at 7.30 pm on the last Monday of the month at Mahaanui Area DOC Office, 31 Nga Mahi Road, off Blenheim Road, Sockburn. Plenty of parking is available.

May 30 – Mike Ashbee, a bird photographer, will share some of his photos of both North American and New Zealand bird species.

June 27 – Vikki Smith and Rob Lawry from the Malborough Falcon Trust will talk about their work, specifically with falcon Tappe at the University of Canterbury.

July 25 – Biz Bell from Wildlife Management International. This talk will be confirmed at a later date as Biz is currently in an area where internet access is unavailable.

Rambles

Thursday May 12 – Botanic Gardens. If it is wet we will visit the museum instead. Meet at 9:30 am by the DOC information centre. Please note the change of day to Thursday for this ramble.

Tuesday June 14 – Lake Roto Kohatu. Meet in the carpark off Sawyers Arms Road at 9:30 am.

July's ramble's date and location will be confirmed a little closer to the time.

For all rambles, contact Bev if you wish to attend.

Seabird Watching in Kaikoura

Kaikoura is a famous destination for anyone interested in seabirds, and that is certainly what attracted me to the area when I came to New Zealand last July. Most visiting birders come here to get up close to albatrosses and other tubenoses on a tour with Albatross Encounter, but I was also keen to see how productive land-based seawatching from the coast here could be.

Point Kean, on the end of the Kaikoura Peninsula, was an obvious place to try, with a high viewpoint on an exposed outcrop of land. My first visit there on 29th July 2015 showed clear seawatching potential. In strong southerly winds there was a constant movement of birds offshore, including a variety of albatrosses, hundreds of Fairy Prions and Fluttering Shearwaters and, best of all, a Grey-faced Petrel which came racing past surprisingly close to the headland. In the literally hundreds (thousands?) of hours I've spent watching seabird passage in the UK, I don't ever remember it being this good!

Since then I have done more than 70 seawatching sessions from Point Kean, mostly with my partner Hazel. Amazed that almost no one else seemed to be seabirding here, we started a weekly Saturday Seawatch event, inviting the public to join us looking for seabirds and cetaceans. While much is already known about birds off the Kaikoura coast thanks to the regular Albatross Encounter tours, it became clear from our Point Kean observations that many interesting seabird movements are just not detected from the boat. For example, shearwaters and prions passing through Kaikoura waters are not usually interested in the chum and are consequently under-recorded on the tours, but were regularly seen from our elevated viewpoint. We also found that the largest and most interesting movements of birds occurred on the roughest and windiest days - conditions in which the tour boats are unable to operate. The downside to viewing seabirds from the land, is that they are inevitably much more

distant, making some similar species difficult or impossible to separate, even with a scope. One disadvantage at Point Kean is that seabirds pass well beyond the end of the rock platform, at least 700m away. Nonetheless, with experience most seabirds can be identified, although it always helps to have strong winds pushing them within reasonably comfortable viewing range.



Richard Else with visitors at *Saturday Seawatch*.

Whenever high winds do occur, seawatching here is likely to be good. During strong southerlies on 10th January I estimated 4600 Fairy Prions, as well as hundreds of Buller's and Sooty Shearwaters heading north past Point Kean in little over half an hour of observation. Almost as soon as the wind died down, the passage of birds petered out.

On 17th February, Hazel and I were giving a talk about shorebirds when the northeasterly wind outside picked up to more than 100km/h. As soon as we were able to get away, we rushed down to Point Kean expecting some mega seabirding. When we arrived, the waves were crashing over the fur seals and into the car park and, while it was difficult to keep the scope steady in such violent conditions, we found a little shelter crouching among the swaying bushes. There were puzzlingly few albatrosses to be seen, but there was a steady northward passage of Sooty Shearwaters and, much to our surprise, Cook's Petrels! The odd Cook's Petrel is very occasionally recorded by the tour boat off Kaikoura, but the 26+ that we counted in ninety minutes that evening was unprecedented.

The Wrybill - May 2016

Another good day was on 8th April, when we had strong southerly winds early in the morning. I only got to the point after the wind had started to ease, but there was still a lot happening out there and a fishing vessel just north of the peninsula was also attracting a lot of seabirds. In less than two hours I saw seven species of albatross, at least 140 Common Diving-Petrels, 350 Buller's Shearwaters and a Brown Skua. On 19th April a big fishing trawler came past the point while we were seawatching and we could count a minimum of 210 albatrosses (of at least six species) and 250 Westland/White-chinned Petrels (too distant to be identified) following in its wake!



A White-capped Albatross and some distant shearwaters flying past Point Kean.

Another good spot for seawatching is at the Goose Bay lookout, about 15km south of Kaikoura. Here you have a good view out over the deep water of the Kaikoura Canyon. Seabirds that are just passing through seem to cut across the entrance to the bay too far away to see them properly, but many others linger in the bay to feed. On our first visit on 17th December 2015 we counted 138 albatrosses of six species. White-capped (59) and Salvin's (60) were by far the most numerous. On another visit on 6th April we counted 147 albatrosses from the same spot, but 142 of those were White-capped. The changing species composition with the seasons has been fascinating to observe. This is also a good place to spot cetaceans. When Pilot Whales and Bottlenose Dolphins were present off Kaikoura in early January, we were able to watch them from the Goose Bay lookout (although the spotting scope was definitely required) and the resident Sperm Whales can often be seen from here.

Our most intriguing seabird discovery has been large gatherings of Arctic Skuas on the northern side of the Kaikoura Peninsula. On 16th January we were eating fish and chips in the car park of Whale Watch, when I glanced up and noticed a flock of dark birds taking off from the sea. I grabbed the scope from the car and was surprised to see that they were all Arctic Skuas - 39 of them together on the water. From then on we visited the site repeatedly and the evening gathering of skuas was a daily occurrence. On 28th February we counted 88 of them, but even this high count was surpassed on 17th March when a minimum of 103 were present! To our knowledge, this sort of skua concentration has not been recorded in New Zealand before. We are still not sure whether this is a pre-migratory gathering of birds getting ready to set off north, or just a nightly roosting spot for the local skua population. Even as I write this in late April, we are still seeing dozens of skuas congregating here in the evening, but surely they will be migrating soon.

Living in Kaikoura for the year has been an exciting opportunity to learn and discover more about the area's renowned seabirds. Having been lucky enough to combine a lot of both land- and boat-based observation, I have been able to enjoy these birds at super-close range with Albatross Encounter, and watch their large-scale movements from the cliff tops during windy weather. There is still plenty to learn about the seabirds here. That Encounter have added two new species of albatross to the Kaikoura list just in the last six months (Grey-headed, found by myself and skipper Gary Melville last October, and the Atlantic Yellow-nosed in March) shows that, with seabirds, you just never know what could turn up.

I definitely recommend land-based seawatching from Kaikoura, especially in rough weather. If the boats get cancelled because of gale-force southerlies, get down to the headland with your spotting scope quick and you will still get to witness some amazing seabird action!

Text and photos by Richard Else

Miranda Youth Camp

During the April school holidays I attended the Birds NZ Youth Camp. This time the camp was at the Miranda Shorebird Centre. Unlike the camp at Mana Island last year, it didn't rain every day, which I was pleased about. It's hard to watch birds when your binocular and scope eye-pieces are covered in rain drops.



Eleanor getting ready to band. Photo by Ray Buckmaster.

Over the three full days and two half days spent there, the group of eleven youth took part in a wide variety of activities. Out of these, my favourite would have to be mist netting. We were supposed to have one day of mist netting and one day of cannon netting, but the birds weren't roosting in any of the right places so unfortunately cannon netting couldn't go ahead. I was a bit disappointed because I'd been looking forward to it, even though it meant lugging load after load of gear across a muddy creek, but at least we got to do some more mist netting. While I did band a few birds, I spent most of my time watching the mist nets and extracting birds from them when they eventually flew in. As it was the first time I'd extracted, I was slightly nervous in case I moved the wrong strand of netting and strangled the bird by mistake. But after the first few birds, I began to feel which piece of net I should move and how much I could move it. If I get the chance I'd definitely be keen to do more banding and even work towards getting my banding permit.

Another highlight of the camp was the Kokako count in the Hunua Ranges, even though this was the one day it rained. We split into four teams, each with an instructor, and walked a designated trail in search of Kokako. My team went up a bait line. At certain points, we stopped to play Kokako calls and write down what playback we heard. Listening to the calls alone was amazing, but we even got a distant view of one bird which was even better.

This was not the only count we did during the course, as we also took part in the WekaWatch Weka Survey. During the survey, each group walked to a set point and sat quietly for an hour and a half, recording all the Weka they heard by writing down the information and plotting the bird's location on a map. I also saw some Eastern Rosellas and a New Zealand Pipit, as well as hearing a Morepork. During the count we didn't actually see Weka, but earlier that afternoon we went to somebody's house to be told about the history of the survey, and a Weka was on the lawn outside.

Of course, you can't go to Miranda without looking for waders. We went out to the hide a few times, and also once to Ray's Rest, which is along the coast from Miranda. There were plenty of interesting species to be seen, like the Pomarine Skua, Arctic Tern and Marsh Sandpiper. But my favourite find was easily the four Black-tailed Godwits we saw on the last day, including one in breeding plumage. I was also lucky enough to see one of them flying off and caught a view of it from behind.

Besides banding and birding, we had other activities, as well as talks on subjects like threat ranking, band reading, and counting techniques. One activity involved using sharpies to colour wooden shorebirds for Miranda's Flock project. Miranda want to have one thousand birds in their flock by March next year, which will then be used to promote shorebird conservation to the public. I have no artistic talent, but I don't think the bird I designed – a Banded Dotterel in non-breeding plumage – turned out too badly. People could identify it, which was a good sign.

Another activity was used to follow up the band reporting talk and prove that bands aren't always easy to read. Some banded 'birds' were set up in a fenced off area of the centre, and it was our job to write down their combinations in a certain period of time. Sounds easy, right? Well, it would have been, except that they used tricks to make it harder, like putting shiny black bands on shiny black legs, and hiding metal bands at the top of the leg. I didn't do too badly, though. A vet also came in one day to dissect two birds for us, a Harrier and Pied Shag. I don't remember the other dissection I've attended smelling this bad, but it was fascinating to see the inner workings of the bird.

All in all, I had a great time. Many thanks to all the tutors, organizers and the other participants for making it an amazing course. And thank you, once again, to Birds NZ Canterbury for your financial assistance that allowed me to attend.

By Eleanor Gunby

Halswell Quarry Ramble

In March nine members braved an overcast and cool morning to walk around the wetland area at Halswell Quarry. But before we did this we checked out the willow tree beside the Ranger Headquarters for possible Little Owl or Kingfisher nest holes. Nothing positive was found. A variety of waterfowl was observed on the pond, along with a juvenile Black Shag (or was it a juvenile Pied Shag?) sitting on a tree branch overhanging the water that had us guessing for a while. It was good to be able to view at close quarters the different plumage of male Mallards and possible hybrid Grey Ducks. A delightful Grey Warbler was heard singing in a tree but took a while to see. The Quarry is a nice place to visit with its variety of habitat and open places. The plantings are well established now and promising plenty of food sources.

By Bev Alexander

Recent Events Roundup

Our first evening meeting of the year was a member's night, where members shared their recent birding experiences. And what a variety there were. Nests, feathers, dead birds and eggs had been collected and were presented for discussion and possible identification. Della Bennet spoke about her research into the feeding patterns of Hutton's Shearwaters during the breeding season at Kaikoura. Her results seem to indicate that they aren't feeding close to the shore at Kaikoura at all and she's keen to do more research using GPS to find out exactly where they are going. Nick Allen played some of the bird calls he's recorded on the Sunshine Coast in Australia, and several people shared photos – from Pegasus Wetlands where a Japanese Snipe was seen last year, a Kaikoura pelagic, a twitch in Auckland and, interestingly, of a group of Riflemen in the Nelson region attacking one single Rifleman.

Our AGM was held in early April. Thanks again to those who served on the committee last year and to those who volunteered to do so this year. Following the AGM, Murry Cave, a west Coast photographer and President of the Photographic Society of New Zealand. He first introduced the PSNZ's Nature Code of Conduct. It was reassuring to hear the efforts made to try and avoid stressing the subjects of those amazing bird photos we enjoy. Murry then shared some of his favourite birding locations on the West Coast as well as many great action shots of birds that he's taken. He ended the evening looking at the White Heron, a species he has focussed on in both research and photography.

April's meeting (held in May due to Anzac Day) featured a thought provoking talk by Andy Roberts from the Department of Conservation. Andy shared his role in bird conservation work in Southland, including with the Southern New Zealand Dotterel, Kakapo, Campbell Island Snipe and Campbell Island Teal. He also compared these largely successful efforts to work being done with two threatened species in Canterbury – the Orange-fronted Parakeet and the Kaki.

The Wrybill - May 2016

Numbers of these species are not recovering as hoped and the discomfiting question we were left with is how to get the best return for a limited conservation dollar and when/if it is appropriate to leave some species to their fate and reallocate that money to other species.

In February a large number of Canterbury members took part in the Waihora Ellesmere Trust's annual bird survey at Lake Ellesmere. This was the fourth year the survey has been conducted and the total number of birds has declined every year. The fall in the number of waterfowl, especially Mallards, is most noticeable. Numbers for other groups such as shags and herons have varied over the years while numbers of New Zealand waders were close to 2013 figures after being higher in the intervening years. More details and the complete figures can be found at WET's website – <http://www.wet.org.nz/projects/2016-te-waihoralake-ellesmere-bird-count/>.

March's planned field trip – seabird spotting from the Port Hills – was cancelled due to uncooperative weather. In April we ventured into the bush around Peraki Bay. The actual reserve we were looking for proved to be elusive but everybody enjoyed the drive on a lovely autumn day. Good numbers of Brown Creeper were seen as well plenty of as other more common natives such as Kereru, Silvereyes and Bellbirds.

Bev's mid-week rambles continue to be enjoyed by all participants. This year we've ventured to Brooklands Lagoon, Halswell Quarry and The Groyne. A beautiful morning at Brooklands was notable for what we heard – Bellbird, Grey Warbler and Shining Cuckoo – as well as what we saw – Kingfishers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Australian Shovelers, Caspian Terns and South Island Pied Oystercatchers among others. It was a cold windy day for the Groyne visit but we still managed a respectable 23 species. Surprisingly no sparrows or Grey Teal were found but there were two coots with three young juveniles. We also noted that all of the Mallards seemed to be hybrids.



A White-Faced Heron. This is one of the many stunning photos displayed during April's talk. Photo by Murry Cave of Murry Cave photography.

Upcoming Bird Surveys

Bird surveys are always great to take part in, and there are two taking place in the upcoming months. The Global Big Day, held on May 14, is a very easy count to take part in. To contribute, simply go out birding like normal, keep a checklist of the birds you see and hear, and then put your list up on Ebird. Once on Ebird, your data is automatically collected, along with other lists from all over the world. Last year, over 6,000 species were recorded, and they hope to beat that number this year.

The other survey coming up is the New Zealand Garden Bird Survey, run annually by Landcare Research, will be from June 25 and July 3 this year. To contribute, simply spend an hour counting the birds you can see and hear in your garden. Write down the greatest number of each species you've recorded at any given time, and submit your information either online or in a printable form.

Recent Sightings

**Canterbury and West Coast Bird Report
March-May 2016**

This report covers the period 1st March to 1st May and is compiled from reports posted onto the Birding NZ internet discussion site and eBird. Your regional recorder would welcome news of any interesting bird sighting, unusual behaviour or searchable sources of other sightings. Email christchurchnzbirder@gmail.com.

Key to letters after bird names:

A = all reported occurrences (for rare/scarce species or escaped/released species etc)

S = significant numbers/occurrences (for species regularly encountered in the regions)

V = vagrant

Great Spotted Kiwi (A) Hawdon Shelter, Arthur's Pass NP: 2 heard 3/2 RE & HW. Arthur's Pass summit: 1 bird called twice 10.30pm 24/4 BM.

Feral Goose (S) Washdyke Lagoon: 70 20/4 PS.

Cape Barren Goose (A) Lower Styx Road: 2 15/3 PC.

Mute Swan (A) Pegasus Wetlands: 11 (4 adults towards south end of wetland, 2 adults & 5 immatures at north end) 14/3 BA; 4 16/3 RE & HW.

Muscovy Duck (A) Westlake Ponds, Halswell: 1 domestic type 15/3 BA, 3 3/4 NA. Probably released at the site.

Australasian Shoveler (S) St Anne's Lagoon: 22 12/3 AS. Pegasus Wetlands: 16/3 32 RE & HW. Kaikoura Oxidation Ponds: 50 21/4 RE&HW.

Grey Teal (S) Westlake Ponds, Halswell: 2 with 4 small young 15/3 BA. This species usually breeds June-January (NZ Birds Online). Sandy Point, Avon-Heathcote Estuary: 226 13/3 PC. Washdyke Lagoon: 884 22/3 PS, 759 20/4 PS.

New Zealand Scaup (S) Pegasus Wetland: 68 16/3 RE & HW.

Peafowl (A) Factory Road, Saltwater Creek: 7 19/3 EG. A small feral population has been present in this

area for a number of years.

Australasian Crested Grebe (A) Lake Tekapo (camp ground bay): 1 23/4 NA.

Little Penguin (S) South Bay, Kaikoura: 13 rafting offshore at dusk 1/4 RE, 19 27/4. Kaikoura town waterfront: 2 just before dusk 23/4 RE&HW.

Erect-crested Penguin (V) Goughs Bay: 1 5/3 AC. This is a reportable species to the RAC.

NZ White-capped Albatross (S) Goose Bay: 142 rafting just offshore 6/4 RE & HW – almost all of the albatrosses in the raft were this species. Point Kean, Kaikoura: 131 passed over 95 minutes from 4pm 19/4 RE & HW.

Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross (V) Albatross Encounter took photos of a bird on 13/3 initially identified as a Grey-headed Albatross, but later after quite a debate, the consensus view is that it was an Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross. The species is a reportable species to the Records Appraisal Committee. Tiny numbers have visited and bred at the Chatham Islands.

Buller's Shearwater (S) Albatross Encounter pelagic: 300 25/3 AE. Point Kean: 350 passed south over 105 minutes from 9.15am 8/4 RE.

Sooty Shearwater (S) Point Kean: 1,650 heading north past the point at a rate of about 55 per minute for an hour before suddenly petering out at about 7.15pm 12/3 RE & HW.

Short-tailed Shearwater (S) Albatross Encounter pelagic: 600 22/3 AE, RE. Point Kean 100 passed by over 105 minutes from 9.15am 8/4 RE.

Common Diving Petrel (S) Point Kean: over 50 passed in an 80-minute period from 5pm on 2/4 RE & HW, 140 over 105 minutes from 9.15am on 8/4 RE.

Wilson's Storm Petrel (A) Albatross Encounter pelagic: 1 25/3 MD.

Grey-backed Storm Petrel (A) Posted on Facebook by Ailsa Howard, and forwarded to Birding NZ by Oscar Thomas: "Here is a very unusual visitor. As part of the Hutton's Flysafe week crash-landed birds are being brought into the "Hub" by the Kaikoura Community and researches alike. On Sat morning Ted went out to pick up a bird had been phoned in from the local supermarket, and realised immediately it was not Hutton's, and was unlike any

The Wrybill - May 2016

bird he'd ever seen.

To cut a long story short, he brought it into our HSCT meeting to check out what to do with it. Well the meeting had to delay getting underway for an hour while a collection of enthusiastic seabirders worked to identify it and release it back to the sea. Here it is: Grey-backed Storm Petrel. A tiny creature of the big ocean, rarely seen, and certainly not at the supermarket. 15g of birdie, compared to 350g for Hutton's. A teeny tiny and wonderfully unusual bird."

Little Black Shag (A) Kaiapoi Ponds: 9 (all flew in to the lake together and seemed to be feeding in the same area; they flew away when I walked by) 15/3 BA. Bromley Oxidation Ponds: 6 20/3 PC.

Black Shag (S) Ohau Stream mouth, N of Kaikoura: 1 flying along coast 26/4 RE&HW.

Pied Shag (S) Lake Forsyth at Birdlings Flat: 55 11/3 JC.

Spotted Shag (S) Point Kean: 199 19/3 RE&HW, 300 26/3 RE&HW, 200 19/4 RE&HW.

Rocks near New Wharf, Kaikoura: 600 15/4 HW.

Albatross Encounter pelagic: 500 31/3 AE.

Australasian Bittern (A) Pegasus Wetlands: 1 was watched for an extended period of time 20/4 BA.

White Heron (A) Barrys Bay: 1 13/3 JC. South Bay, Kaikoura: 1 13/4 AS, RE&HW. Ashley Estuary: 1 1/5 NA.

Reef Heron (A) Point Kean: 1 19/4 RE&HW, 1 24/4 RL.

Cattle Egret (A) The Lake Road, Lake Ellesmere: 3 3/3 BA & JW.

Royal Spoonbill (S) Ashley Estuary: 14 6/3 SA, 23 19/3 EG, 21 21/3 DT. Sandy Point, Avon-Heathcote Estuary: 39 13/3 PC. Kaikoura: 35 flying north along the coast at 1pm 14/4 RE & HW (flying in V formation and presumably migrating). Kaikoura: 11 roosting on rocks between New Wharf and Fyffe House 25/4 RE&HW.

Marsh Crake (A) St Anne's Lagoon: 1 foraging in open on mud 12/3 AS (video-recorded).

Australian Coot (S) Styx Mill Walkway: 38 14/3 SLLT, 59 2/4 SLLT.

Black Stilt (A) Ashley Estuary: 1 6/3 SA, 1 16/3 RE & HW, 1 19/3 MA, 1 19/3 EG, 1 21/3 DT, 1 25/4 BA. 1

1/5 NA. This is the same individual bird that has wintered in the bay adjacent to Waikuku Beach township for a number of years. Tasman Fan, Glentanner: 2 16/3 JI, 8 26/3 'Cookeman', 13 15/4 RD. 2 distant birds 23/4 NA. Releases of captive birds have taken place at this site this year.

Banded Dotterel (S) Embankment Road: 150 3/3 EG. Ashley Estuary: about 250 6/3 SA. Kaikoura Racecourse: 83 14/3 HW, 73 15/3 RE & HW. Point Kean: 30 16/4 RE & HW. Washdyke Lagoon: 42 20/4 PS.

Black-fronted Dotterel (A) St Anne's Lagoon: 10 12/3 AS, 5 19/3 EG, 30 6/4 AS. Extensive mudflats are exposed when the level of this lagoon is low due to drought. The species has been recorded previously at this location in similar conditions, however 30 is an exceptional and unprecedented count for Canterbury. Washdyke Lagoon: 4 20/4 PS.

Wrybill (A) Embankment Road: 2 3/3 EG, 30 19/4 BA & JW.

Whimbrel (A) Ashley Estuary: 1 6/3 SA.

Turnstone (A) Ashley Estuary: 3 16/3 RE&HW. Point Kean: 18 19/3 RE & HW, 62 26/3 RE & HW, 50 2/4 RE & HW, 70 7/4 RE & HW, 12 13/4 RE & HW, 12 16/4 RE & HW. Baxters Reef, South Bay, Kaikoura: 6 21/3 RE & HW.

Red-necked Stint (A) Embankment Road: 19 3/3 EG, 45 (or possibly up to 50) 19/4 BA & JW.

Subantarctic Skua (V) Point Kean 1 8/4 RE. This species is reportable to the RAC if seen north of the Otago Peninsula.

Pomarine Skua (A) Albatross Encounter pelagic: 1 6/3 AE.

Arctic Skua (S) Richard Else and Hazel Watson, birders from the UK residing in Kaikoura at the moment, discovered a regular large evening gathering of Arctic Skuas on the sea offshore of the Railway Station/Whale Watch office. Their first count was on 16th January, and the species has continued to come in before dusk in fluctuating numbers since, with the highest count being 103 on 17th March. Though views were distant, requiring a telescope to see them, the skuas were always solely Arctics, with no others of the family amongst them. Very few birds were present at dawn the following

The Wrybill - May 2016

mornings.

Their counts have been as follows:

39 26/1, 28 17/1, 27 23/1, 4 27/1, 25 23/2, 88 28/2, 20 9/3, 103 17/3, 8 18/3, 4 19/3, 12 26/3, 53 28/3, 18 31/3, 39 2/4, 72 13/4, 35 21/4, 47 23/4, 48 28/4.

A message from Richard posted on Birding NZ

“Hazel and I have done a lot of seawatching (more than 60 sessions) from Point Kean this summer (including a weekly 'Saturday Seawatch' event where we invite the public to come along and look for seabirds and cetaceans with us) and we have seen surprisingly few other birders up there, considering how much potential the site has. We have also noticed that the most interesting seabird passage usually happens on the days when it is too rough and windy for any of the tour boats to go out, and would therefore probably go unrecorded without land-based observation. I would also suggest that, for species such as passing shearwaters that are not usually attracted to the chum, you would have a better chance of seeing them with a scope from the cliff top where you have a view over a very wide area of sea. You don't quite get such close views as you would on the boat though!

There is certainly still a lot to be discovered about seabirds around here. “

Black-billed Gull (S) Paua Rocks: 320 10/3 RE.

Baxters Reef, South Bay, Kaikoura: 700 1/4 RE. Point Kean: 600 16/4 RE & HW. Beach adjacent Kaikoura Oxidation Ponds: 900 21/4 RE&HW, 400 25/4 RE&HW. The Tanks Road, Mayfield: 2,454 in paddock newly sown with grass 27/4 PH.

Red-billed Gull (S) All large counts came from the Kaikoura area. Paua Rocks coast south of Kaikoura: 500 10/3 RE. Point Kean, Kaikoura: 550 19/3 RE&HW, 400 26/3 RE&HW, 500 7/4 RE&HW, 1,000 13/4 RE&HW, 2,400 16/4 RE & HW, 5,000 19/4 RE & HW, 500 24/4 RE&HW. Baxters Reef, South Bay: 500 21/3 RE&HW, 1,000 1/4 RE. Halfmoon Bay, coast north of Kaikoura: 550 29/3 RE&HW.

Albatross Encounter pelagic: 600 31/3 AE, 500 2/4 AE, 500 4/4 AE.

Caspian Tern (S) Ashley Estuary: 12 6/3 SA.

White-winged Black Tern (A) Andrew Crossland

gained nice views of a non-breeding plumaged bird just upstream of the Rakaia Bridge on SH1 on 14/3.

Black-fronted Tern (S) Near Mayfield: 1,200 were feeding on and over newly-tilled paddocks 8/3 PH.

White-fronted Tern (S) Ashley Estuary: about 400 6/3 SA, 250 16/3 RE&HW. Lake Forsyth at Birdlings Flat: 140 11/3 JC. Point Kean, Kaikoura: 140 12/3 RE&HW, 285 19/3 RE&HW, 300 26/3 RE&HW, 300 2/4 RE&HW, 400 13/4 RE&HW. Baxters Reef, South Bay: 340 1/4 RE. South Bay, Kaikoura: 120 about 1 km offshore 9/4 MB, 350 13/4 RE&HW. Albatross Encounter pelagic: 200 28/3 AE. Kaikoura, offshore from railway station: 111 28/3 NM. Hurunui RM: 200 28/3 BA.

Morepork (S) Hawdon Shelter: 3 heard 2/3 RE & HW. Near Mt Fyffe Road/Schoolhouse Road intersection on the Kaikoura flats: 1 heard 22/3 HW. Fyffe/Palmer Reserve, Kaikoura: 1 or 2 heard, 6.40pm 21/4 RE&HW. Mount Cook township: 1 near information centre 23/4 NA.

New Zealand Falcon (A) Stony Bay Saddle, Banks Peninsula: 1 ad 1 imm 17/3 PC. Bush Gully, Clarence River valley 1 m 1 f 29/3 NM. Point Kean 1 imm 8/4 RE. Hooker Glacier Track, Mount Cook NP 2 16/4 RD. Cave Stream 1 10/4 RL.

Kea (S) Hawdon Valley: 4 flew over 3/3 RE & HW.

New Zealand Robin (S) Wilderness Lodge Arthur's Pass (Cora Lynn): 2 18/4 MS.

Rook (A) Kaikoura Racecourse: 1 flew over (photographed) 15/3 RE & HW.

European Starling (S) Donegal House, Kaikoura: 4,000 came into roost 9/3 PC.

Australasian Pipit (S) Wigram Retention Basin: 1 11/4 NA. Motukarara: 1 16/4 PC. South Bay to Atia Point, Kaikoura: 2 27/4 RE. Ferrymead Historic Park: 1 1/5 NA.

Cirl Bunting (A) Victoria Park main driveway: 1 m 1 f 1 imm 3/3 PC.

Observers:

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The Wrybill - May 2016

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