

Birds NZ Youth Camp 2018 (16-22 April) – Trip Report *(by Michael Burton-Smith)*

Well, I am now comfortably sitting on my Intercity bus ride back to Hamilton after another hugely successful Birds New Zealand youth camp. For those of you who aren't aware, this year's camp was organised by Lloyd Esler for Stewart Island and Fiordland, and a huge shout out to him for making the whole thing happen. Before I write this post, I'd also like to thank all the other adults who contributed to the organising and running of the camp, and the participants who made the socialising and birding come together beautifully.

For me the trip started two days earlier than for everyone else, as I spent Saturday night in Auckland with Oscar Thomas. We caught up with **Spotless Crake** at Tuff's Crater in downtown Auckland - it is a really magical place and I highly recommend checking it out. We snuck into Mangere before our flight on Sunday morning, but there was nothing of note. We flew to Christchurch to meet with Eleanor Gunby and Amber Calman, and did some pre-birding camp birding. The **Grey-Tailed Tattler** and **Black Stilt** were both present at the Ashley River Estuary, though we couldn't find the Cirl Bunting or Little Owl later that evening. The following morning on our drive to Dunedin we stopped in at Oamaru for **Otago Shag** and Katiki Point for Yellow-Eyed Penguin. We dipped on the penguin, but a seawatched **Buller's Albatross** was nice compensation.

Meeting up with other camp members at Dunedin Airport, we slipped into the minivan and struck out for Invercargill. Brief stops at Lake Waiholo and Gore revealed no surprises. We checked into our accommodation and met up with the other attendees (who had been out looking at Brown Creeper and Fernbird but I'm not sure where...). An easy going night of get to know and the first day of camp was done.

Day two started early, with some of us leaving at 7:30 for Bluff Harbour and others arriving around 45 minutes later. We set up scopes and seawatched, and the albatross in the harbour seemed an ominous warning of what was to come. The seawatch revealed **Salvin's, Buller's and White-Capped Albatross**, as well as **Sooty Shearwater**.

The ferry crossing was very dicey, but good numbers of the usual seabirds, plus a **White-Headed Petrel** over the back of the boat. After all of five minutes on Stewart Island and it already felt like we'd had all four seasons. Bright sun was quickly contrasted with a light drizzle, followed by hail and strong winds. It was so cold that hard rain never fell, just hail. At one point it fell so hard for so long, one of us made a hail-angel on the bowling green...

The first day's excursion was over to Mamaku Point, a predator-fenced sanctuary near Oban. The track was not really a track, and due to bad weather bird numbers were pretty low. The highlight was certainly seeing the dense undergrowth that you just don't get to experience anywhere on the mainland. With a couple of the other young birders, I walked back to our accommodation in Oban so we could see more of the island - what a beautiful place! Birds weren't exactly screaming diversity, but there were good numbers of **Redpoll, Dunnock, Tui, Bellbird, Kaka, Kakariki, Kereru** and **VOC**. It was also cool to see good numbers of **Red-Billed Gull** right through the camp, without having the standard scream-in-your-face-to-get-food behavior.

That evening it was off to Acker's Point, which was really quiet except for a single grounded **Sooty Shearwater** in what we were told is a fairly inland place to get them, which is pretty cool. There was also a **Little Penguin** coming ashore. Some young birders went out that evening and saw **Southern Tokoeka**, though I had stayed back at the campsite for that one.

Day three of the camp and we were off to Ulva Island, where there were remarkably few birds. One group got a diurnal **Tokoeka**, and the rest all got relatively similar stuff. Bird numbers were low for all

species, but all of the island's specialities were seen. These included **South Island Saddleback, Yellowhead, Brown Creeper, Weka, Stewart Island Robin, & both Parakeet sp.**

In the afternoon following Ulva, we headed out on a half-day pelagic. The notable species were as follows:

Sooty Shearwater	300
Snares Crested Penguin	1
Yellow-Eyed Penguin	2
Buller's Albatross	14
White-Capped Albatross	71
Southern Royal Albatross	4
Northern Giant Petrel	2
Cape Petrel	12
Prion sp	2
Procellaria sp	3
Common Diving Petrel (probably)	15
Spotted Shag	2
Foveaux Shag	49
Westland Petrel	2
Hutton's Shearwater	2

The following day was far more relaxed. Some of us went to Ulva Island and some went to check out the local beaches. George, Amber and I booked ourselves in on a personalized tour with Rakiura Water Taxis - we just told them what we wanted to do, payed \$25 each and did it. We went out and around Acker's Point, stopping out at the very tip to bring in the seabirds. A **Northern Giant Petrel** flew past, and we had **9 Sooty Shearwater, 23 White-Capped Albatross** and **2 Buller's**, all without chumming and only about 50 meters offshore. We then went around some rock stacks looking for tern roosts, but only found **White-Fronts** along with **Foveaux Shags** on Big Rock.

In the afternoon, we split into groups to go to various conservation projects around the islands. I was on the weeding team, and amazingly, I really enjoyed it! On our way back, we asked our driver if he could take us to the Stewart Island Sewage Ponds. A slightly easier security system compared to that of the mainland was navigated well, though standing at such a point where the water from the ponds was being whipped up in our direction by the wind wasn't optimum. There were some beautiful **Grey Duck** on the ponds, along with good numbers of really pure **[b][b]mallards[/b][/b]**.

That evening a small group of us, including me this time, got incredible views of a young **Tokoeka** up at Trail Park, another highlight of Stewart Island for the list.

The following morning and it was straight to the wharf for our ferry to the mainland. Amazingly, a **Cook's Petrel** was literally sitting right there on the wharf, which provided the first excitement of the day. The tired bird was returned to the water by Ian Southey without too much damage being caused. The ferry ride back did not reveal anything exciting, nor did any stops between Invercargill and Borland Lodge.

At Borland Lodge, however, there was a **Chestnut-Breasted Shelduck**, as I am sure you have seen on ebird and earlier posts on this site. The bird was about 250 meters up the road from the lodge, and was spotted by David Thomas and George Hobson from the car. Everyone saw the bird, and it was seen over each of the three days we spent at the camp. A long evening scout out revealed no Little Owl, though Morepork were present in numbers.

Day two and we headed over to Milford Sound. We couldn't find a Crested Grebe at Te Anau, and the bush at Lake Gunn was quiet. That is probably because the birding party was a little large and rowdy

to hear the good stuff. Monkey Creek had **Kea** and **Blue Duck**, and Kea were also present at the Homer Tunnel and The Cascade. We did not see Rock Wren, however. Milford Sound was great, with the resident **White Heron** showing well, **Weka** calling and a good mix of ducks and shags as well.

The last day started early for a pack out. We had **Fernbird** up close at Rakatu Wetland, along with big numbers of waterfowl. Nugget Point was a good seawatch, with a **Northern Giant Petrel**, a **Southern Royal Albatross**, and good numbers of **Buller's** and **White-Capped Mollymawk** and **Sooty Shearwater**. The **Otago Shag** were also present.

And that was it, the end of camp. Pretty much all our stops are visible on ebird. Just look up my account (Michael Burton-Smith) and scroll through the checklists for more details.



Photo taken by Sophie Mephan