

# APTERYX

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Photos: Detlef Davies (DD),  
Kevin Matthews (KM)  
Michael Szabo  
Angela Wickham

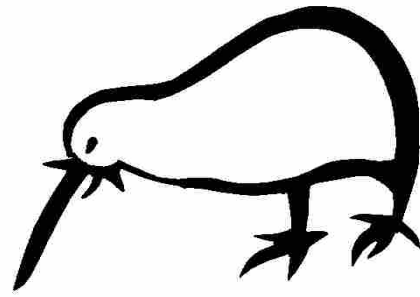
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## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

It's been a great summer for birds. Although we haven't had a shorebird count yet this year, a few of us had a productive day in Rangaunu Harbour just before the main Godwit departure. But the main focus this season has been on seabirds. The 'La Nina' effect over the Pacific has warmed our surrounding seas, moving many tropical seabirds further south than usual. The 4 day Three Kings trip in early March was amazing & 2 local pelagic days out were also very successful. Thanks to the Bushland Trust for lending us the boat for the Walker Island visit on 27 March. Apologies for omitting to welcome Fiona Craig as a new Far North member last year. Welcome, Fiona!

I often circularise news by email such as programme changes, confirmation of times and meeting places of events, etc. If you do not have email, please give me a phone number so I can contact you with this information.

**Detlef Davies**



## NEWSLETTER OF THE FAR NORTH REGION OF THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



Royal Spoonbills – Awanui Wharf, (KM)



From left: Common Tern, White-fronted Tern, Little Tern, Common Tern, Little Tern – Walker Island, 27 March (DD)

**The Far North Regional Officers are:**

<p><b>Regional Representative &amp; 'Apteryx' Editor</b>                  Detlef Davies, 180 Landing Road, Kerikeri                  09 407 3874 <a href="mailto:detlefdavies@yahoo.com">detlefdavies@yahoo.com</a></p>	<p><b>Treasurer</b>                  Isabella Godbert, 67 Waipapa West Road, Kerikeri                  09 407 8058 <a href="mailto:godbert@xtra.co.nz">godbert@xtra.co.nz</a></p>
<p><b>Regional Recorder</b>                  Laureen Alston, 48a Riverview Road, Kerikeri                  09 407 8747 <a href="mailto:lm.alston@actrix.co.nz">lm.alston@actrix.co.nz</a></p>	<p><b>Secretary &amp; Publicity</b>                  Carol Davies, 180 Landing Road, Kerikeri                  09 407 3874 <a href="mailto:carolanndavies@yahoo.com">carolanndavies@yahoo.com</a></p>

**RECENT EVENTS**

We have had just one indoor meeting so far this year when on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February Detlef & Carol gave a talk to just 9 members on their repeat visit to Peru last year. We hope that attendance at meetings will get back to what it has been and we are keen to hear from members and friends who are able to lecture to the group at any level, a recent holiday with some wildlife photos is just fine.

Following a great pelagic trip from Whangaroa Harbour on 5<sup>th</sup> Jan, another left from Opuia on 5<sup>th</sup> Feb, a 4 day trip to the Three Kings Islands went ahead from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> March & another day trip from Whangaroa on 19<sup>th</sup> March. These are written up on pages 5, 6 & 7.

**RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS**

**Detlef Davies**

This covers the Far North region from 18<sup>th</sup> January to mid April 2011. Contributors include: Laureen Alston (LA), Detlef & Carol Davies (DCD), Gary Little (GL) & Asta Wistrand (AW), Kevin Matthews (KM), Anthea Goodwin (AG), Isabella & Derry Godbert (IDG), Dan O'Halloran, Kerry & Jane Walshe, Sid Roberts, Tank Barker & all pelagic participants.



**OP relates to the Opuia pelagic on 5 Feb.**

**3KP relates to the 4 day pelagic to the Three Kings Islands in early March**

**WP relates to the Whangaroa pelagic on 19 March**

**North Island Brown Kiwi** – Present in usual sites, cyclone in January caused some displacement on Purerua.

**New Zealand Dabchick** – Pair displaying on Lake Manuwai 14 March (IDG), up to 13 Lake Waiporohita, present at other regular sites.

**Australian Little Grebe** – 2 Lake Waiporohita 20 March, no doubt at other usual sites.

**Wandering Albatross** – c.20 on 3KP

**White-capped Albatross** – c.25 on 3KP

**BULLER'S ALBATROSS** – 4 on 3KP

**Flesh-footed Shearwater** – good numbers on all 3 pelagics

**Sooty Shearwater** – 4 on 3KP

**WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER** – 3 on 3KP, a great rarity in NZ

**Fluttering Shearwater** – Many on pelagics, also from Cable Bay & Karikari

**Little Shearwater** – 1 on OP, 7 on 3KP

**Black (Parkinson's) Petrel** – seen on all 3 pelagics

**White-chinned Petrel** – 1 on 3KP

**Fairy Prion** – 1 or 2 on OP, none on other 2 pelagics

**Cook's Petrel** – recorded on all 3 pelagics

**Black-winged Petrel** – many on 3KP, 1 on WP

**GOULD'S PETREL** – One confirmed & one or 2 possibles on 3KP

**COLLARED PETREL** – One intermediate phase bird (perhaps 2) on 3KP is believed to be the 1<sup>st</sup> New Zealand record

**WHITE-NAPED (WHITE-NECKED) PETREL** – c.60 seen on 3KP, missed this time on the day pelagics but don't give up, they are out there!

**Grey-faced Petrel** – c.150 on 3KP

**KERMADEC PETREL** – 9 on 3KP

**TAHITI PETREL** – 1 on 3KP is thought to be the first live record for New Zealand waters

**Common Diving Petrel** – A few on 3KP & on WP

**White-faced Storm Petrel** – Featured well on all 3 pelagics

**NEW ZEALAND STORM PETREL** – 4 on 3KP

**Wilson's Storm Petrel** – 1 on 3KP

**Little Penguin** – A few on all the pelagics & several coastal reports



**New Zealand Storm Petrel**

Alive & well in the seas off the Far North.  
Photo from Hauraki Gulf (DD)

**Black Shag** – regularly by Lake Waiporohita & Lake Omapere.

**Little Black Shag** – very mobile flock of 28 on Waipapa River at bottom of DCD garden 12 Feb.

**Pied Shag** – 1 on Lake Omapere 6 April, one of the few regular inland sites

**FRIEGATEBIRD SP.** – 3 reported at sea east of Houhora by skipper Tank Barker on 28 Feb.

**Reef Heron** – Reports from Bay of Islands, Taipa, Walker Island (2), North Cape

**Australasian Bittern** – No specific reports (unless I've missed any, if so, apologies)



Reef Heron on Walker Island (DD)

**Royal Spoonbill** – Awanui Wharf roost: none on 17 Feb, 25 on 25<sup>th</sup> Feb & surely more by now. 20 at Rawene Oxidation Ponds 23 April Late record of 4 on Paewhenua Jetty, Mangonui on 16 June 2010 (Dave Panckhurst)

**Canada Goose** – Up to c.80 Unahi Road, Awanui

**CAPE BARREN GOOSE** – Dan O'Halloran saw up to 11 on Stephenson Island in November last year. Anyone interested in a trip out there let me know. See article on page 8

**Grey (Pacific Black) Duck** – Recorded from Lake Waiporohita, Lake Owhareiti & Rawene Oxidation Ponds

**Grey Teal** – c.60 Rawene Oxidation Ponds 23 April

**Australasian Shoveler** – 4 Rawene Oxidation Ponds 23 April

**Brown Quail** – 4 by road near Kaimaumau 27 March

**Banded Rail** – 3 on Aroha Island causeway 16 April & undoubtedly at other times too. One in the marshes near Kaimaumau on 20 March (KM)

**Bar-tailed Godwit** – c.1,300 Walker Island & 110 East Beach on 20 March (KM), 32 Taipa 17 Feb, 1,200 still on Walker Island 27 March

**Eastern Curlew** – 1 Walker Island 20 & 27 March (KM, DCD)

**Turnstone** – 219 Walker Island on 20 March, 12 there on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Lesser Knot** – c.100 Walker Island on 20 March, some (not really countable) with Godwits on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Variable Oystercatcher** – Max reported 40 Walker Island on 27 March.

**South Island Pied Oystercatcher** – 43 Taipa 17 Feb, 251 Walker Island 20 March, 376 there on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Pied Stilt** – Largest gatherings reported, 162 at Rawene Oxidation Ponds on 23 April & 61 in paddocks by SH10 near Whangaroa Harbour on 20 March. A 'smudgy' hybrid at Kaimaumau on 20 & 27 March (KM, DCD) & one on Tokerau Beach (Dick Ulrich Road) 8 Oct 2010 (AG)

**Pacific Golden Plover** – 1 flew past Walker Island on 27 March (KM, DCD)



Hybrid Stilt (Pied x Black) Kaimaumau (KM)

**New Zealand Dotterel** – Present at many usual beach sites but no counts received  
**Banded Dotterel** – Flock of c.20 at Kerikeri Airport on 3 April (DCD), 1 Taupo Bay 10 April (DD)  
**Wrybill** – 8 on Tokerau Beach on 25 Feb.

**Caspian Tern** – Up to 80 seen on Walker Island & adjacent sand bars including many juvs., also at several other coastal sites.

**COMMON TERN** – 3 on & around Walker Island on 27 March, one in full breeding plumage, the other 2 nearly so (KM, DCD). This is the east Asian race 'longipennis' in which the bill remains black in all seasons & despite its name, it is very rare in New Zealand.



Common Tern in breeding plumage, Walker Island (DD)

**Little Tern** – 9 on Walker Island & adjacent sand bars on 27 March, one in full breeding plumage (KM, DCD).

**SOOTY TERN** – 1 on 3KP, a first for this annual expedition

**WHITE TERN** – 13 seen on 3KP including 4 together

**GREY TERNLET** – 7 on 3KP

**Arctic Skua** – 4 on OP, 3 on 3KP

**POMARINE SKUA** – 1 on OP barely outside the Bay of Islands, 1 on 3KP, close to the Three Kings themselves

**LONG-TAILED SKUA** – 22 on 3KP, mainly adults, some with full tail protrusions

**Skua sp** – one chasing White-fronted Terns off Coopers Beach 17 April (AG)

**RED-CROWNED PARAKEET** – 1 or 2 on Three Kings Islands on 4 March on pelagic trip

**LONG-TAILED CUCKOO** – several heard in Puketi Mokau Reserve 26 Feb (Dan O'Halloran), pair seen at Herekino end of Diggers Valley Rd (GL, AW), one flew into ranch-slider in Rangitane on 19 March but recovered (Kerry & Jane Walshe). One heard Kohumaru Road at 1 am on 25 Feb (AG)

**Morepork** – 2 very obliging birds, often in daylight in the DCD garden in Kerikeri over the last 2 months

**WHITE-THROATED NEEDLETAIL (SPINE-TAILED SWIFT)** – One, well described, with swallows over Doves Bay Road, Kerikeri for a short while on 19 March (Sid Roberts)

**New Zealand Pipit** – no reports in the current period but surely present in usual sites.

**BELLBIRD** – The Three Kings race, endemic to these islands, was heard there on the pelagic trip

**Fernbird** – recorded from Aroha Island, Whangae River basin, the south-west corner of Lake Omapere & Whangaroa Harbour (above Kahoe Bridge).

**North Island Tomtit** – Reports from Puketi Forest (easy to locate at start of 2 day trail) & seen by the big Kauri tree in Waipoua Forest recently.

## PROGRAMME – INDOORS and OUTDOORS

All indoor meetings take place at 180 Landing Road, Kerikeri at c.7.30 unless otherwise arranged. We will endeavour to hold meetings every other month on Thursdays or Fridays and details will be communicated by email. At present we have one meeting fixed: -

Thursday 28 April Kevin Matthews on 'Dune Lakes'. Kevin will tell us about the wildlife and plants of this interesting habitat close to his home north of Kaitaia.

Mon 9 May – The Society will have another display in the entrance of Proctor Library in Kerikeri for two weeks. Assistance and contributions would be welcome.

Sat 21 May – Whakaangi Landcare Trust are holding another one night Kiwi count in the forest north of Hihi. Training will be given. Enquiries to Anthea – 09 406 1533.

Fri to Mon 3 to 6 June - The Society's Annual Conference & AGM will be held at the Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hutt, Wellington.



## THREE KINGS PELAGIC – 2 to 5 MARCH

Detlef Davies

This was a fantastic trip, never to be forgotten for its unprecedented variety of tropical seabirds seldom reaching NZ waters. Organisers were Wrybill Tours (Brent Stephenson & Sav Saville) & participants: Brent Stephenson, Steve Wood, Matt Jones, Detlef Davies, Ian Smith, Igor Debski & Sav Saville with Tank Barker as skipper, all aboard the good ship “Demelza”.

### Wed 2 March. Houhora to North Cape

We slept aboard the first night & left the harbour at 7.15 am in mild weather & a light northerly breeze. Heading north-east, birding began with **Fluttering & Flesh-footed Shearwaters & Black Petrels**, these last 2 being present for most of the trip. Even before the first chumming spot we saw **Cook’s & Black-winged Petrels**, the first **WHITE-NAPED PETREL**, 4 **NEW ZEALAND STORM PETRELS** & 5 **LONG-TAILED SKUAS**! During an hour & a half of chumming close to a deep water shelf, a **WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER** appeared among the Flesh-foots, more **Cook’s, Black-winged & WHITE-NAPED PETRELS** cruised around, **Wandering & White-capped Albatrosses** came past, and another **LONG-TAILED SKUA** & 2 **KERMADEC PETRELS** gave good views before we anchored just off North Cape. That made 15 individual reportable rarities & it was only the first day!

### Thurs 3 March. North Cape to the Three Kings

We left North Cape heading north and west towards the Three Kings in light northerly winds and it became warm & sunny. Lots of commoner species were to be seen and early specialities included 2 **GREY TERNLETS**, 3 more **LONG-TAILED SKUAS**, a **KERMADEC PETREL**, **WILSON’S STORM PETREL**, more **WHITE-NAPED PETRELS** and plentiful **Black-winged Petrels**. Then a distant white dot turned into a **WHITE TERN**, followed by 3 more. We were looking closely at the pterodroma petrels for rarer species and there was an early suspected **GOULD’S**. A moment later Sav spotted a **TAHITI PETREL**, although distant, instantly recognisable by its fast flight & white lower underparts. This was thought to be the first live record for New Zealand. At this point we started chumming and this brought in a good variety including another **KERMADEC PETREL**, a few **BULLER’S ALBATROSSES** and more **WHITE-NAPED PETRELS** which became numerous as we motored on to our anchoring point at the Three Kings, arriving around 6 pm.

### Fri 4 March. Three Kings to North Cape

As we made an early departure from the islands, we wondered what more could be in store for us. A **POMARINE SKUA** was new for the trip, then it was back to those numerous pterodromas again including a strange dark one causing great excitement; it was photographed and claimed as New Zealand’s first **COLLARED PETREL**, an intermediate phase bird with a lot of dark grey on the throat and breast. Another bird which came past reminded some of Stejneger’s Petrel but the only photo was inconclusive, personally I thought it might be another Collared. It became evident that this was a tropical seabird bonanza with lots more **LONG-TAILED SKUAS**, **WHITE-NAPED PETRELS** & **WHITE TERNS**, another **WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER** and then a lovely **SOOTY TERN** made a leisurely fly-by. More chumming brought in lots of

THREE KINGS PELAGIC PHOTO PAGE (DD)



White-naped Petrels (with Grey-faced above)



Kermadec Petrel



Wedge-tailed Shearwaters



Sooty Tern & White Tern



Buller's Albatross



Wandering Albatross

**GREY-FACED PETRELS** (up to 17 at once); a couple of large cetaceans were blowing near the horizon, these were **Bryde's Whales** & we also had a **Mako Shark** beside the boat. Towards the end of the day 3 **Grey Ternlets**, 2 **KERMADEC PETRELS** & a **Reef Heron** added to the wealth of species before we returned to anchor off North Cape.

### Sat 5 March. North Cape to Houhora

We started by heading north from here to make the most of the last day & rarities continued to appear during the morning, **WHITE-NAPED PETRELS**, **LONG-TAILED SKUAS**, **KERMADEC PETREL** & **Grey Ternlets**; eventually we turned east & south to head back towards Houhora. By midday there was another **WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER**, a final **WHITE TERN** & a very close **GOULD'S PETREL** over the chum slick, a definite one this time, and all south of the North Cape line of latitude. By now the weather was changing and we had some rain and moderate winds as we headed for home, c.3 pm.

### Species List - Number of sightings with max at any one time in brackets.

Little Penguin 3 (2)	Collared Petrel 2 (1)
White-capped Albatross c.25 (4)	White-naped Petrel c.60 (3)
NZ (Wandering) Albatross c.20 (4)	Black-winged Petrel c.60 (2)
Buller's Albatross 4 (2)	Grey-faced Petrel c.150 (17)
Buller's Shearwater many (15)	Kermadec Petrel 9 (2)
Wedge-tailed Shearwater 3 (1)	Tahiti Petrel 1 (1)
Sooty Shearwater 4 (2)	Wilson's Storm-petrel 1 (1)
Flesh-footed Shearwater many (30)	New Zealand Storm-Petrel 4 (3)
Fluttering Shearwater many (100)	White-faced Storm-Petrel c100 (30)
Little Shearwater 7 (3)	Grey Ternlet 7 (3)
Common Diving Petrel 2 (1)	White Tern 13 (6)
White-chinned Petrel 2 (1)	Sooty Tern 1 (1)
Black Petrel many (30)	Long-tailed Skua 22 (3)
Cook's Petrel c.50 (2)	Arctic Skua 5 (1)
Gould's Petrel 1 (1) and a couple of possible	Pomarine Skua 1 (1)

### WHANGAROA PELAGIC – 19 MARCH

Detlef Davies

9 of us – myself, Roy Smith, Winnie Poon, Koos & Joke Baars, Derek Bettsworth, Chris & Maria Lamens & Fiona Craig – set off from Whangaroa with Brian Candy as skipper. 7 am to 5.20 pm, wind southerly, 1 – 2 metre swell.

Began with a couple of **Little Penguins** at entrance to harbour, 2 **Common Diving Petrels** & 50+ **Fluttering Shearwaters** (fewer than usual). Soon picked up **Flesh-footed** & **Buller's Shearwaters** & **Black Petrels** which were evident throughout the day. Couple of very close but brief **White-faced Storm Petrels** & c.8 **Cook's Petrels** showed quite well. One or two **WANDERING ALBATROSSES** gave a good & quite prolonged view a few times but did not wait to feed on the berley. One **BLACK-WINGED PETREL** flew past, then several **White-faced Storm Petrels** came to feed on our fish-oil slick & gave great views. Closer to shore, there were a few **Gannets**, **White-fronted Terns**, **Pied Shags**, etc. The change of the wind to southerly no doubt led to the absence of tropical seabirds which had been so evident on the Three Kings trip.

Little Penguin 2	Black-winged Petrel 1
Common Diving Petrel 2	Wandering Albatross 2
Fluttering Shearwater c.50	Australasian Gannet c.6
Buller's Shearwater 30+	White-fronted Tern 10+
Flesh-footed Shearwater 20+	Pied Shag 3
Black Petrel 20+	Caspian Tern 1
White-faced Storm Petrel 10+	Red-billed Gulls
Cook's Petrel c.8	Black-backed Gulls

## CAPE BARREN GEESE

Rob McColl, Detlef Davies, Dan O'Halloran

Rob reports: *"The Committee has accepted the Cape Barren Geese record that I submitted back in 2009 (see attachment). I understand there have been some admin changes and they were apologetic for the delay.*

*I think you mentioned that others eventually saw them but I don't know if the Committee take this into account when they process records. I would be interested to hear from you as to whether there have been ongoing sightings of these birds as I may have seen them again recently!*



One of 2 **Cape Barren Geese** at Hokitika Oxidation Ponds in Nov 2008 (DD). We later heard that they couldn't fly so I guess they didn't make it over from Aussie unaided . . .

*My wife and I walked from Cape Reinga to Auckland on the Te Araroa Trail in October. Camping on a small seepage stream 50 m inland from 90 Mile Beach and about 6 km N of Hukatere on 7 October 2010, we saw 3 geese flying S along the beach at about 20m altitude. They appeared similar to the birds we had seen in 2009 but silhouetted against the evening sky it was difficult to see any detail on the birds. All I can say is they didn't look like feral geese and they had the same slender/elegant appearance we had noted previously."*

As reported in the last newsletter, we saw 2 Cape Barren Geese in flight from Stephenson Island southwards to the mainland during the Whangaroa Pelagic on 5<sup>th</sup> Jan this year. Dan O'Halloran then reported as follows:

*"From reading your notes in Apteryx thought you'd be interested in the following. I spent two days on Ririwha (Stephensons Island) in November helping to set up the bait station regime for the upcoming rat eradication. I noted 11 Geese in two flocks, one based at each end of the island. The trustees I spoke with say the geese have been there for several years, have bred, have been hunted on occasions, and can number up to a couple of dozen."*

It is not known whether Cape Barren Goose has ever occurred in New Zealand as a genuine vagrant from SE Australia (where it is very local) or whether all records relate to escapes from captivity.

## SEA TURTLE OFF PAUA

Michael Szabo

Michael Szabo telephoned us in January to say he had seen a large sea turtle in Parengarenga Harbour. He then reported as follows:

*This is to let you know the turtle I saw in the Parengarenga estuary at Te Paua was probably a **Green Turtle** based on my photo and comment from Brian Gill at Auckland Museum. He cautioned that this species ID was not absolutely certain but given they are the species most often reported in northern NZ waters and the way the "beak" did not protrude from the face, as it does in Hawksbill and Loggerhead Turtles, it looks like it was Green.*

*So please feel free to report it in the OSNZ regional newsletter as a marine turtle sighting identified as probably a Green Turtle on 13 January at Te Paua.*





**12 March - ENVIROFEST, KERIKERI**



Envirofest was organised by the local marketing company **The Creative Edge**. It was a fantastic one day event celebrating ideas, products and services that enable Northlanders to live smarter and cheaper. OSNZ had a FREE site within the framework of community groups. It was a great opportunity to showcase our posters, leaflets, booklets and cards. The focus of the day was on practical solutions which save money and enrich the environment. The stall was visited by many and lots of information about BIRDS was given out & followed up. **Special**

**thanks to Chris Lamens and Anthea Goodwin** who assisted in manning the stall and to **Kaitiaki Department of Conservation** for lending us the display unit. [www.creative-edge.co.nz](http://www.creative-edge.co.nz)

**30 March - ENVIROSCHOOL WORKSHOP.**

I attended a workshop organised by Northland Regional Council involving the work of Enviroschools. Susan Karels and Julie Holt hosted the event which took place at Taheke near Kaikohe. The day gave me an insight into the concept of Enviroschools and a chance to meet representatives from several enthusiastic local schools. The OSNZ in the Far North has always felt it has expertise that can be offered to schools in the Far North. I thoroughly enjoyed the day and I felt it was a chance to network and spread the word about OSNZ. Attendees at the workshop were given an opportunity to take free copies of our publications:

**State of NZ Birds** and **Southern Bird**. [www.enviroschools.org.nz](http://www.enviroschools.org.nz)



**1 April - KIWI LISTENING AT TAWHARANUI**



**Tawharanui  
Open Sanctuary  
Society Inc**

I was pleased I made the journey south to attend this event. Although early in the season for Kiwi listening it was a great chance to catch up with other like minded people. TOSSI was monitoring its Kiwis with a follow on using kiwi dogs to locate the birds. 30 very keen people turned up to help, of which 20 were new to this activity. I did the Ecology trail which was aloud with diurnal bird call between 6 & 7

pm and from 8 pm a few Kiwi calls were heard. This was exciting as the population of North Island Brown Kiwi have only been released back into this area a few years ago. Although it was a long drive it was also great to see old friends and meet new ones. [www.tossi.org.nz](http://www.tossi.org.nz)

**14 – 15 April – OROMAHOE SCHOOL GO TO AROHA ISLAND**

Pauline Stephinson, a teacher at this School and an OSNZ member, contacted Detlef asking if we would like to get involved with their school event at Aroha Island. The school had arranged an overnight camp there and wanted some birding input into the occasion. So I spent a few pleasant hours with the children. In the free time in the afternoon Carol and Ezra, one of the keen ones, spotted a Morepork being mobbed by fantails and blackbirds and a fernbird within a few inches of Ezra's face! This was the first time Ezra had seen these birds. Maybe a Bird Guide of the Future! Later, Detlef & I gave a powerpoint presentation on our project in North Peru & gave the children a taster of the colourful wildlife from the region including hummingbirds, cotingas, poison



dart frogs and dragonflies. [www.oromahoe.school.nz](http://www.oromahoe.school.nz)

## TOUTOUWAI UPDATE (NORTH ISLAND ROBIN) – PUKETI FOREST

Ian Wilson

At the start of this breeding season there were 11 known pairs of toutouwai (robins). The eight closest pairs have been regularly monitored. All are known to have produced chicks. Thirteen fledglings have been seen by monitors and it is believed a number of other chicks have also fledged but have remained hidden in dense vegetation. Six of the thirteen chicks have a mother who was born in Puketi Forest.



Without predator control 80% of nests are predated. The results of this year's breeding is a reflection on the effectiveness of the Puketi Forest Trust's predator control.

Since the Puketi forest Trust started predator control in the forest 1026 stoats, 155 feral cats and 14,784 rats have been trapped.

Eighteen of the thirty birds that were released in 2009 have been seen recently. Of the 30 robins released in 2010 thirteen have been positively identified while there are other robins that are regularly heard and seen at a distance but will not come close enough to have their bands read. Birds from the second release have tended to spread further out into the forest and are not so regularly encountered.

This autumn, when the young should respond to tapes, we will undertake a comprehensive survey of all the areas where robins are likely to be. If you would like to help with this survey please contact Tricia Hodgson on (09) 407 6239. It does not matter if you have not monitored robins before as people go out in pairs and only one needs to have had previous experience.

## DON MERTON

We are sad to report that Don Merton died on 10 April. Don will be well-known to many members as the man who pioneered the rescue of the Chatham Island Black Robin from what seemed inevitable extinction (the population was once just 5 birds) and played a huge part in bringing the Kakapo back from less than 50 birds & dwindling, to a safe haven of well over 100 birds today. His expertise in predator control & cross-fostering was in demand in places like the Indian Ocean islands of Mauritius and the Seychelles which had similar problems in saving their endemic species from predation.

Don's death is a great loss to conservation & our thoughts are with his family.



**Apologies for the late inclusion of this next article from June last year. After two restricted 8-page newsletters, this one is extended to 12 to make room. Janet used to live in the Far North and her narrative will remind us of the great birding sites in the area north of Awanui.**

## BIRD- WATCHING NORTH OF AWANUI

Janet Snell

I have recently spent three weeks in the Far North again in Pukenui minding house and cat. On my way up on 2<sup>nd</sup> June I called in to the Unahi Wharf area just north of Awanui to see if there were any Spoonbills about. Yes. I counted over 200 in the old macrocarpa tree where they like to roost. But as I drove off I could see others roosting on branches that were out of sight from where I was parked and counted from. So there were quite a few more than the 200 I counted. Roosting on piles of an old jetty I counted 10 Little Black Shags in the same area.

The next day on 3<sup>rd</sup> June on a calm sunny afternoon at high tide I counted 658 Pied Stilts standing on the very edge of the water behind the Houhora Tavern. On the same afternoon I saw a Bittern in a paddock just north of the Tavern. It was walking slowly amongst the tall rank grass. It was a very pale colour & seemed a very small & thin bird so I think it must have been a young bird.

Further north on the Henderson Bay Road I counted 75 Sky Larks on the gravel road. On the beach at Henderson Bay I counted 2 New Zealand Dotterel, 1 Little Black Shag, 1 White-faced Heron, 1 Pied Shag, 2 Variable Oystercatchers & 2 Black-backed Gulls & 1 New Zealand Pipit. On the way home I went down Kimberley Road, looked across to Lake Waihopo & counted 113 Canada Geese. I hear from some locals that there are many hundreds of these geese in the Far North now & the Council are considering a culling programme next year sometime.

The following day on 4<sup>th</sup> June on another sunny afternoon I went to the southern end of Rarawa Beach. I counted 105 Variable Oystercatchers, 18 NZ Dotterels, 8 very highly coloured up, and they were fighting and squabbling over territory and partners. I saw 2 pairs copulating. On a dead branch up the creek I saw 19 Pied Shags, 4 Little Shags & 1 Little Black Shag.

I went again to the Unahi Wharf area on 8<sup>th</sup> June on a windy and cold day at high tide and counted over 100 Spoonbills in the macrocarpa tree and over 300 in the paddock on the left as I drove away from the wharf. Next day was again sunny and calm so I decided to go up to Rarawa Beach and walk north around Paxton Point and on to Great Exhibition Bay p to the first creek; I counted 76 VOC, 6 SIPO, 7 NZ Dotterels, 24 BB Gulls, 6 Pied Stilts & 1 New Zealand Pipit all near the area where the creek flowed into the sea.

On a cold day with strong westerly winds blowing (13<sup>th</sup> June) I went with a neighbour Annie Mae Crene up to Spirits Bay. We saw 2 VOCs on the open beach & 8 Pied Shag up the creek a little. In a small pohutukawa tree overhanging the creek we saw one Black Shag & 3 nests in this tree with 2 of the nests occupied by Pied Shag. There is a new ablution block in the camping ground. Cold water showers! We went to Te Hapua in the late afternoon. The sun was shining on the Spoonbills which were feeding all over the low tide area in front of Te Hapua village but they were just too far away to count. While driving down Heath Road in the Waiharara area on 14<sup>th</sup> June we counted 25 Cattle Egrets feeding around the legs of the cattle. They seem to favour this area. This is the smallest number I have counted here for a long time. I have seen a few in the Paua paddocks some years back.



New Zealand Pipit (DD)

On 16<sup>th</sup> June on another calm & sunny day I went up to Paua on the Parengarenga Harbour at high tide to look at the birds in the paddock down Te Pua Road which is a favourite place for birds at high tide. There were 469 SIPO, 65 Banded Dotterels, 37 Turnstones, 1 NZ Dotterel & lots of Chaffinches & Skylarks picking around the outer edge of the group of bigger birds. Then I walked out to Akatarere Point & looked across to Ahiaruhe Shellbank & counted 76 BBGs, 185 RBGs, 2 Caspian Terns, 520 Pied Stilts, 6 SIPOs, 32 VOCs, 8 Little Shags, 2 Little Black Shags, 1 White-faced Heron & 23 Black Swans. After lunch I went up to Tapotupotu Bay where I counted 2 NZ Pipits, 8 Skylarks, 2 NZ Dotterels, 6 RBGs & 8 Brown Quail which to my absolute amazement were very tame. When I was sitting in my car with the door open & my feet out on the grass having my cuppa & my last sandwich they scuttled around the grass beside my feet pecking for crumbs. I sprinkled some more crumbs there, reached for my camera & photographed them right beside my feet. They then went into a dusty area about a metre away to preen & fluff about in the dust. I got out of the car, crawled along on my belly until I was really close & clicked away. The little Quail took no notice of me. They stayed in a little covey of 8 & they were talking & twittering to each other very very quietly all the time. I stayed watching them for about an hour, getting back to Pukenui after dark! And to think I always thought they were just all over drab brown colour. How wrong I was. I saw clearly their mottled chestnut colour above & the fine wavy bars below. What beautiful little birds.



Brown Quail (DD) – but not at the range Janet had them!

Were they hand-reared & released at Tapotupotu or did they hatch there & become used to humans? Some tourist buses call for their picnic lunches there & obviously the Quails connect people with food now. An amazing experience for me & the highlight of my stay in the Far North in June 2010.

## ECUADOR – SEPT - OCT 2010

Detlef & Carol Davies

And finally let's have some colour from South America! We spent 23 days in Ecuador in Sept – Oct last year as part of a longer South American trip which also included north Peru. We were a group of 5 led by Jonas Nilsson, originally from Sweden but now living in Ecuador and who has a vast knowledge of the country's birds. From the capital, Quito, lying high in the Andes, we headed north in our comfortable little bus, targeting the rare & difficult species in the northern high Andes. We began with a hillside location close to the 'Mitad del Mundo' which is the Equator where it crosses just north of the city, here we found the rare White-tailed Shrike-Tyrant. The numbers of species were sometimes too much to keep up with but some of the specialities in the high cloud forest were Bicoloured Antpitta, Moss-backed & Purplish-mantled Tanagers, Fulvous-dotted Tree-runner & Yellow-vented Woodpecker.

Moving east along the Colombian border we were amazed at the huge expanse of intact rainforest over the border, there was barely even a hut to be seen, compared with the often disturbed forest on the Ecuador side. We spent several days on the eastern slopes of the mountains including 3 nights at Wild Sumaco Lodge of which Jonas is part-owner; here the hummingbird feeders attracted at least 15 species of these little gems including 9 I hadn't seen before. The nearby forests were rich with skulking antbirds and furnarids including a preening Sharp-tailed Streamcreeper & flycatchers like the tiny Yellow-throated Spadebill.



Purplish-mantled Tanager



Violet-tailed Sylph

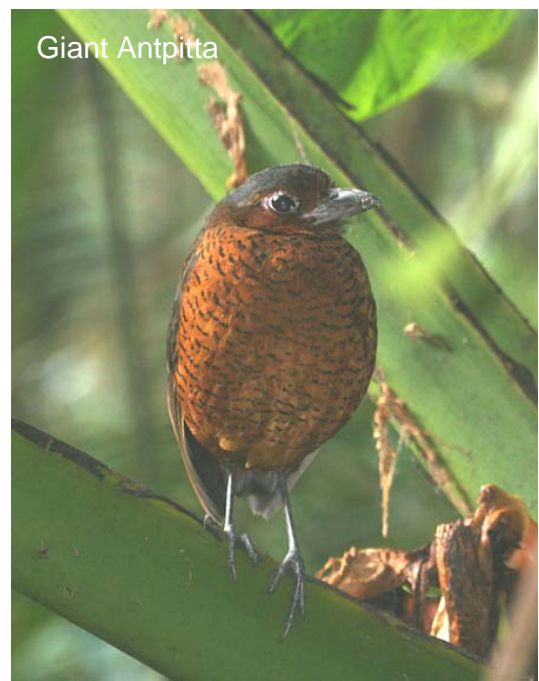
From here we ventured into lower altitude regions along the upper Napo River which eventually flows into the Amazon at Iquitos. Altitude counts for so much in species diversity; a completely different set of species awaited us here, e.g. the Fiery Topaz, Plum-throated Cotinga, Striped Manakin & Pavonine Quetzal. Gareno Lodge was comfortable despite the lack of electricity, however we noticed from roadside cables & equipment that it was 'on the way'.

Then we returned westwards to Quito via two more lodges and passed over the highest part of the journey at Papallacta (over 5,500 metres). From the hot steamy jungle of the Napo we were now in warm hats & gloves as we admired birds like Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe & Many-striped Canastero.

The latter part of the trip on the west side of the country included a visit to the famous Paz de Antpittas where 4 of these skulking species have been enticed out of the forest to feeding stations. The

wettest part of the trip was at Canande, very much a remnant forest in extensive agriculture and still being logged. We reached the Pacific coast briefly on route to Playa del Oro, accessible via an hour & a half's river trip. This lodge was run enthusiastically by the descendants of African slaves and we felt it needed far more attention from birders.

We recorded 631 species of birds (the total for everybody will have been over 650) and many more only heard. There was no shortage of lizards, snakes (including the fer-de-lance), frogs & insects and despite the fast pace and sheer quantity of species, photography was quite successful.



Giant Antpitta



Moustached Antpitta

