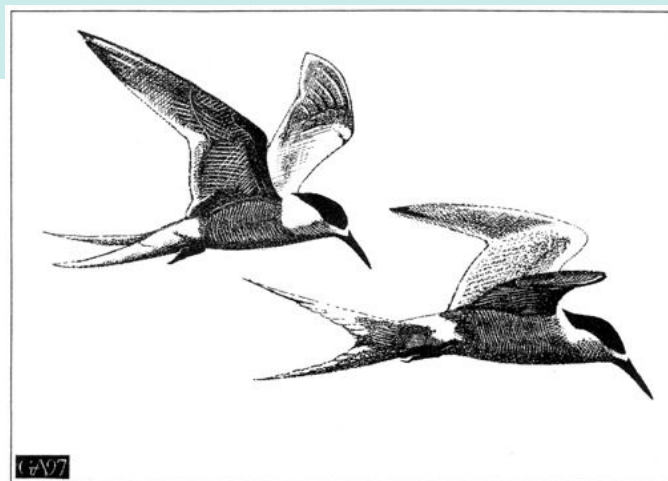


# Tara



## Special points of interest:

- > Welcome to the new Tara
- > Beach patrol reports and experiences
- > A visit to Rotoroa
- > Rare sights, The buff-breasted Sandpiper

## Welcome to the new Tara

I have absolute pleasure in welcoming you to *Tara*, the newsletter of the Auckland Region of Birds New Zealand, the Ornithological Society of NZ. It is two-and-a-half years since the last *Tara*, and I am very aware that there have been many sightings and snippets of news that have slipped by since then. I hope that such aspects of our regional birding can again be disseminated with this re-launch of our newsletter.

The production of *Tara* has always been a voluntary exercise – this is still the case, and I am indebted to our new editors Shanti and Sarah for taking on the task. As enthusiastic as they are, their editorial job will still be dependent on contributions from members. So please help them to produce the newsletter for you by sending in your reports, articles, photos – an expectant readership awaits!

Mel Galbraith  
(OSNZ Regional Representative, Auckland)

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## The history of *Tara*

Regional meeting news-sheets have existed since the formation of OSNZ in 1939. Auckland took a further step in 1976 when a regular bulletin was initiated. This was the brain child of Doug Booth who was its editor for the first three years, during the term of Sylvia Reed, our Regional Representative from 1969 until 1982. Senior figures in the Society were luke warm or even opposed to the publication but it was well received and liked by members.

Quarterly issues were to be produced and the name Tara was chosen so as to feature a distinctive bird common in the Auckland region. The bulletin became a record of activities and a medium for storage and dissemination of bird counts excreta and also of the various projects carried out by individuals or groups of members who would be encouraged to publish their results in Tara. There was no intention of competing with Notornis but there might be room for a local journal as was proved for a number of years until the enterprise unaccountably ran out of steam. From June 1976 to June 1994 in all 73 issues of Tara appeared. There were four further editorships after Doug Booth, namely those of Robin Child, Betty Searle, Geoff & Julie Arnold and Michael & Tane Redwood. Most issues opened with reports of the region's monthly meetings. Typical contents were surveys of islands or mainland sites, the results of wader counts and beach patrols, and descriptions of field trips or other special occasions. Member's accounts of their travels locally, further afield or overseas were a rich source of information and a nice way of sharing these experiences. Notes of bird behavior or unusual sightings added spice to the contents.

Tara had 106 contributors during this 18 years of existence. The most prolific author was R B (Dick) Sibson, a founding members of the Ornithological Society, whose 56 items included literary pieces and some excellent poems. Others to publish 15 or more articles were Doug Booth, Robin Child, Pat Crombie, John Dowding, Mike Graham, Sylvia Reed, Amyas Ringer, Betty Searle and Michael Taylor. This was before the onset of electronic publishing. Pages were typed and cyclostyled – a tedious and messy process that was replaced by photocopying in later years. Tara was produced as a booklet, initially A5 sized, expanding to A4, then reverting to A5 when the photocopying method allowed the pages to be shrunk. Pale blue covers featured the name 'TARA in bold letters above a drawing of the White-fronted Tern. Three cover designs were specially drawn by our artist member Geoff Arnold: A single hovering tern was depicted on numbers 1 to 46, a small flock from 47 to 61 (the A4 copies), and a sitting bird among shells on the final issues.

Costs were covered by a small subscription (thus not all members choose to receive Tara while copies went to some who did not belong to OSNZ). Copies were lodged with the National Library, and the former Auckland Regional Council. Auckland Museum holds a complete series and there is a full set among the Regional archives held by the present writer. This set and that in the Museum is accompanied by an index covering copies 1 to 25 together with a listing of the contents of all 73 copies, issue by issue.

The new Tara will actually be the third series to bear the name. A lone issue headed TARA Newsletter of Auckland Region O.S.N.Z. appeared in August 2003 at a time when the RR position was shown as vacant. Compilation was taken on by Suzy Phillips who produced a sequence, once or twice per year from January 2004 to February 2012. These have the TARA heading alongside the original sketch of the tern in flight. Bulletin production has made great advances since the 1970s, with advances allowing a highly professional appearance and copiously illustration by photographs – but even those early Taras are well worth preserving and re-reading.

## Beach patrol experiences



**“In total we found 37 birds!!! It was sad but exciting at the same time.”**

**-Hayley**

**From left to right:** Nicholae, Dorian, Harrison, Hayley, and Samantha—Summerlands Primary School  
Photo credit: Maria Galbraith

On Saturday the 9<sup>th</sup> of November a number of students from Summerland Primary School joined the Muriwai beach patrol and had a great experience. Together with Mel Galbraith, they enjoyed an educational experience and were overwhelmed with the number of birds found, including a number of short tailed shearwaters, a Buller's shearwater and a white-capped albatross. The students were shown how to identify seabirds and all reported back with great enthusiasm. A great way to inspire the new generation of future ornithologists!

Shanti Morgan

## A visit to Rotoroa



A guide to Rotoroa island for the public and visitors.

roosting boxes ahead of the first transfer of Saddlebacks later in the year. Our own object was to take a break, explore the island, enjoy its natural history, and of course study the bird life. To this end we visited the four sandy beaches and walked most of the tracks including those to the rival Telecom and Vodafone cell-phone tower vantage points and to the Chris Booth sculpture. This feature overlooks the southern coastline. Twisted pohutukawas mark the northern headland with its view of Pakatoa island.



One of 40 Saddlebacks (*Philesturnus carunculatus*) that have been translocated to Rotoroa Island.

Tony Whitehead (2008)

[www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz](http://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz)

The Hauraki Gulf island of Rotoroa (owned by the Salvation Army since 1908 but now leased) lies east of Waiheke and north of Ponui. It became a conservation park in February 2012 under the management of a trust in partnership with the Auckland Zoo. Rotoroa is about two kilometres long, with an area of 82 hectares (200 acres). A system of roads and tracks has been created; pines and palms (except for one historic avenue) have been removed. Newly planted areas of native vegetation are well-established. Patches of grassland remain open and are kept clear by mowing. Pohutukawa trees have been planted in some of these areas. Three small ponds have been formed. Rats were successfully trapped or poisoned and subsequent bait drops have eliminated the mice. Weka are present but may in future be excluded from a part of the island to allow skinks to flourish there. The stage is set for the introduction of up to 20 species of native fauna. Rotoroa is open for day visits or stays of up to three nights, with visitors taking their own supplies. Directions can found on the web. John & Karen Staniland and Michael Taylor went there by the 360 Degrees ferry service which on 6 April also chanced to be conveying a zoo party whose mission was to install

At the end of a long, dry summer the bird life was rather sparse. Wekas, both seen and heard, were the special feature, being widespread and needing to be kept out of the house. They outnumbered Pukekos but the two rail species intermingled without dissent. We had been met on the wharf by White-fronted Terns and a high-tide flock of Variable Oystercatchers numbering 24. The adjacent Home Bay foreshore held a VOC pair with a late youngster, as well as a lone NZ Dotterel. We found VOC pairs on other beaches so perhaps these hold their territory throughout the year. Cont pg 4.



Over the next three days we tallied birds wherever we went, and the accompanying list shows the species we found with the (generally low) numbers that were counted. Starlings followed by Mynas were the most numerous, with flocks of each. The island had a resident pair of Magpies with one juvenile, like-wise Harriers, and a lone pair of Paradise Shelducks. We heard a Morepork each night, saw Kingfishers frequently, and were interested to encounter Spotted Doves. At the northern tip of the island John caught sight of a pair of Dunnocks and we also saw two Yellowhammers and several pairs of Skylarks in that vicinity. We checked our records with our hostess Jeanine who agreed that only a solo Tui had stayed after the flax flowering was over. She confirmed the absence of resident Song Thrushes, and also of Blackbirds - so maybe our one glimpse was of an arrival from nearby Ponui. Besides birds, we noticed a few Monarch butterflies, Small Whites in the flax beds and many Common Blues among the numerous grass moths. There were Asian Paper Wasps everywhere. These aside, almost every aspect of our Rotoroa experience was positive.

The weather was fine and hot, with clear skies at night for star-gazing away from city lights and haze. We spent a very interesting four days, leaving the island by the Sunday evening ferry from Coromandel to Auckland. Special thanks are due to Phil and Jeanine, who are the custodians of the island, for their generous help and advice and for their enthusiastic response to our many questions about Rotoroa.

By Michael Taylor

‘almost every aspect of our Rotoroa experience was positive.’

## Bird counts from the Rotoroa trip

Gannet	Red-billed Gull	Yellowhammer 3
Pied Shag	Caspian Tern 1	Chaffinch 3
Little Shag	White-fronted Tern 20	Greenfinch 13
Spotted Shag	Spotted Dove 4	Goldfinch 40
White-faced Heron 1	Morepork 1	House Sparrow 30
Paradise Shelduck 2	Kingfisher 18	Starling [many]
Mallard 1	Skylark 6	Myna 70
Harrier 3	Welcome Swallow 20	Magpie 3
Weka [40]	Blackbird 1	
Pukeko 10	Dunnock 2	
Variable Oystercatcher 33	Grey Warbler 3	
NZ Dotterel 1	Fantail 15	
Spur-winged Plover 2	Silvereye 40	
Black-backed Gull	Tui 1	



Weka on Rotoroa may be removed to allow skink populations to increase  
D. Houston (2009)

## Happy Birthday Graham!

One of our Auckland members, Graham Turbott, celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this month - we are delighted to extend our best wishes to Graham on this occasion, and to take this opportunity to acknowledge his contribution to ornithology in New Zealand.

Journalist Steve Braunias once described Graham Turbott as a legendary ornithologist – and a quick look at Graham’s accomplishments confirms this indeed. Following a formal education as a zoologist, Graham’s took up positions at the Auckland Institute and Museum and then Canterbury Museum. He later returned to Auckland Museum as Director (1964-79). Graham took part in many pioneering ornithological expeditions to isolated NZ islands that most of us just dream about – including the Three Kings, Chatham, Bounty, Antipodes and Auckland Islands.

Graham was a foundation member of the Ornithological Society and also served as President (1949-53), North Island Vice-president (1947-49, 1957- 58) and Councillor (1953-55). In 1977 Graham was awarded a QSO for Public Services, and he received the OSNZ Falla Memorial Award in 1988. Graham was elected a Fellow of the Ornithological Society in 1996 in recognition of his distinguished service to ornithology in New Zealand.

Graham is well known for his co-authorship (with RA Falla and RB Sibson) of the influential *Collins Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* (1966, 1978), and of course has authored many research publications.

Mel Galbraith.

For more information, see: Robertson, C.J.R. (1997). Ornithological Society of New Zealand Inc. Election of Fellows. *Notornis*. 44(2): 192-132.

Photo of a New Zealand white-fronted tern, as seen in the artwork of Tara, the namesake of this newsletter.

Galbraith (2012)



## Rare sights: A Buff-Breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*)



Photo credit: Bill Abbott (2014)

*Tryngites subruficollis* (Cabanis, 1857)

Order: [Charadriiformes](#)

Family: [Scolopacidae](#)

New Zealand status: [Native](#)

Conservation status: [Vagrant](#)

Other names: grasspiper, buffbreasted sandpiper, buff breasted sandpiper



Photo credit: Bill Abbott (2014)

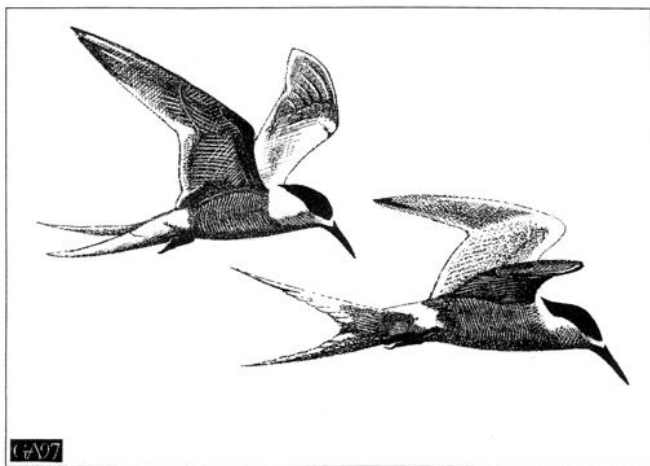
This Buff-breasted Sandpiper was seen by our own Auckland regional Birds NZ members, Helen Smith and Gwen Pulham. This is the first record of the species for New Zealand, and is our Tara “bird-of-the-issue”. The sighting has been submitted to the Records Appraisal Committee for consideration.

“The Buff-breasted Sandpiper breeds annually during the northern summer on the high Arctic tundra in North America and Siberia, and is one of around 40 Arctic breeding migratory wading bird species known to reach New Zealand. It is the only species in the genus *Tryngites*, and the only North American wader species with a lek breeding system. It typically migrates to South America in the non-breeding season, but has reached Australia several times. There is a single yet-to-be-accepted record from New Zealand, with a single bird reported from the Kaipara Harbour in March 2014”

For more info on this bird refer to <http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz/species/buff-breasted-sandpiper>







## OCTOBER

- 7 **Monthly meeting 7.30pm: Mel Galbraith (OSNZ)**  
*26<sup>th</sup> International Ornithological Congress (Tokyo) and Hokkaido wetlands*
- 4 Muriwai beach patrol: contact Mel Galbraith (4801958).
- 10/11 Motutapu Island survey. Accommodation at Education Camp, contact Mike Graham ([sharen.graham@ihug.co.nz](mailto:sharen.graham@ihug.co.nz) or 8175537).
- 18 Shakespear Regional Park survey: contact Michael Taylor (8496336).

## NOVEMBER

- 1 Muriwai beach patrol: contact Mel Galbraith (4801958).
- 4 **Monthly meeting 7.30pm: Peter Fraser (Auckland Zoo)**  
*The changing and evolving role of Auckland Zoo as conservation advocates*
- 8 Mangawhai Harbour wader census (HT 0903): contact Gwenda Pulham (4805535).
- 9 Firth of Thames wader census (HT 0950): contact Adrian Riegen (8149741).
- 22 Kaipara Harbour wader census (HT 1116): contact Adrian Riegen (8149741).
- 23 Manukau (HT 1158) & Waitemata Harbour (HT 0846) wader censuses: contact Adrian Riegen (8149741).

## DECEMBER

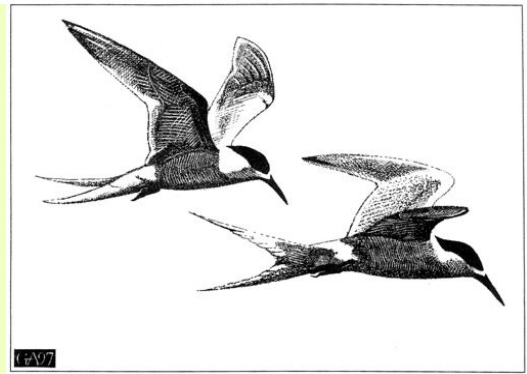
- 2 **Monthly meeting 7.30pm:**  
**Annual quiz (Michael Taylor, quiz-master) and Christmas festivities.**
- 13 Muriwai beach patrol: contact Mel Galbraith (4801958).

## 2015

- 20 Jan Annual picnic – Western Springs Park: contact Chris Thompson (4789781).  
Meet at the Auckland Zoo car park off Motions Road, Western Springs. Picnic from 6pm; walk around lake and wetlands starts at 7pm.

# Tara

Further information on meetings, venues and activities:  
Mel Galbraith (Regional Representative)  
mgalbraith@unitec.ac.nz / ph. 4801958 (AH)



OR ...



... go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)  
... set up your own account,  
... search for *Birding Auckland*  
request to be added to the  
group!

Thank you for contributing to the first (new) issue of Tara, we appreciate all your help and enthusiasm. It has been a busy six months in the Auckland region from Muriwai bird counts, to dab chick surveys. The next 6 months has an even busier schedule, and we look forward to keeping you up to date. Keep sending us through your articles, pictures and any news you think may be of interest.

A special mention must be made to Michael Taylor who has had a considerable input into this issue.

Thanks again,  
Shanti Morgan &  
Sarah Killick

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**For further information on the ornithological society please refer to  
[www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz)**