



NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER

June 2011

Monthly Meetings in Nelson

We meet usually on the 1st Monday of the month, at 7.15 pm in the "Solander Building", Akersten Street, Port Nelson (opposite the red Cruising Club building). Anyone interested is welcome! Contact Stuart Wood 03-544 3932 or Don Cooper 02-544 8109.

Programme from July to Sept 2010

July 4

David Melville will tell us of the recent trip he and Julia made to China to assist in a study of godwits. If we don't ask enough questions he threatens to also tell us about the latest developments with the Waimea cycleway.

August 1

At them moment our fallback position is another DVD from David Attenborough's The Life of Birds. These are always informative and a good basis for discussion

September 5

Ralph Powlesland has offered to talk with us about his studies of shags – 'Shags of mainland New Zealand: how are they coping in the present environment?'. Ralph recently retired from the Department of Conservation where he was a scientist leading the work on many endangered species and associated issues. He also managed to work closely with the society, particularly in Wellington, and fostered members' studies in a wide range of species.

Local sightings

John Campbell has continued to see scaup on the new sewage ponds at the head of the Haven. The record was c.50 birds in mid May and there were still a dozen present in mid June. Don and Willie have been seeing good numbers on the Bells Island ponds this winter – with 70odd present in early June. Weka are still being seen and heard from places they haven't previously been recorded in living memory. The foothills around the lower Brook and Maitai are one such example. Birds have also been seen in the vicinity of Ngatimoti and Orinoco.

Urban birdlife

I was recently asked how the presence of native birds has changed in Nelson city. An interesting question and somewhat embarrassing in that there is no formal monitoring that provides a good answer. Perhaps the Garden Bird Survey (see below) will provide this in future. My feeling is that bellbird, tui, kereru, warbler and fantail are as abundant as ever – possibly more so as shrublands and landscape plantings mature.

Have any native species become less abundant? Many of us will have anecdotal accounts of perceived changes and one I wonder about is morepork. A *Notornis* paper by Colin O'Donnell in 1980 gives a good indication of their abundance at that time in one location. His paper describes the seasonal change in calling frequency showing that April or August would provide the best chance for detection. The Waikato region of OSNZ is planning a survey of morepork

within Hamilton city and this may well be something we try to do here at the same time. They are looking at determining presence or absence from each 1km grid square within the city. If we can develop a technique like this which works well the society's Projects & Activities Committee might then seek to refine this and collaborate with more regions to establish some sort of national benchmark.

There is one native species we should have—the brown creeper. They are present in the near foothills with mature forest cover but don't seem to venture further. I recorded them only once, 30 years ago, on the slopes of the Grampians when they were feeding on the seed of a silver birch. I wonder if anyone has records of brown creeper coming down the valley from the Brook Sanctuary, down Marsden Valley or even down the Maitai to the golf course or Centre of NZ.

Whio in the Wangapeka

The Department of Conservation has the goal of establishing eight secure sites for blue duck around the country with at least 50 pair in each. The Wangapeka/Fyfe catchment is one of these and two techniques are being used to try and reach that goal. Stoat trapping attempts to provide protection along 67 km of riverbed within the site and eggs from other nests are removed for artificial incubation and return of the young when they are less vulnerable. This year a 1080 operation is planned by the Animal Health Board to control possums over most of the site and it is expected that whio will benefit from the death of rats and subsequent secondary poisoning of stoats. This should provide more thorough protection than can be provided by trapping only. Transmitters have been fitted to 12 resident females to monitor the expected improvement in nesting success and their survival through the following moult.

Interesting band recovery

Someone recently phoned in with a band recovery which they read as D-111111. The banding office responded saying that this band had been fitted to a saddleback near Stewart Island by Don Merton in 1972! Quite a record for both longevity and dispersal for this species. The band was eventually handed in and proved to be one of those large readable bands D-11. It was just that the number had been printed on three faces of the band and read as one long digit. In the end it turned out to be just a boring gannet from Cape Kidnappers.

Problem wildlife

Many of you will have read in the news that the white heron which was a regular visitor to the Mapua wharf failed to arrive this year. It was affectionately known as Hamish. About the same time several folk on the Waimea Plains had 'trouble' with a white heron pillaging their goldfish ponds. Most of these ponds were too big to cover in netting and where this was attempted it only succeeded in capturing the bird. The bird was taken back to the coast, some 20 km, but not far enough to stop it promptly returning. The heartache experienced by some of these pond owners was considerable and suggestions to enjoy the visitor and just buy some more fish were not well received.

The number of problem bird incidents could lead to the conclusion that these species are becoming more abundant—or is it just that we are encroaching on more of their habitat and becoming less tolerant. Examples at this time of year usually include: falcon vs doves, falcon vs free-range chickens, kereru vs fruit tree buds and kea vs forestry gang equipment.

Ingrid and Peter's wedding

Given that there are no fancy graphics or stunning photos in this newsletter we can spare a little space for important social gossip. Ingrid and Peter's wedding has to rank. Despite a weekend of pretty wet weather they managed to organise the ceremony during a brief window of sunshine on the beach at Totaranui. Our congratulations and best wishes to the happy couple.

The annual OSNZ Conference

Chris Petyt represented us at the regional meeting (passing through en-route to Mongolia). At other times during the weekend David Melville presented a workshop on moult and Robin Toy gave a brilliant paper on his work helping to establish kiwi in the Rimutaka Ranges. The two days of scientific papers was a change to the normal conference format and proved very successful. Keep an eye on future editions of Southern Bird for the various reports presented over the weekend.

A website you will enjoy

The society's new website <http://osnz.org.nz/> has been possible through the work of Bruce McKinlay and Pieter Demmers with sponsorship from T-Gear. This is very logical and quick to navigate and has a lot of key information about the society. As time goes on it will have links to more information. Please let Ingrid or myself know if you have any difficulties. By the end of this month you will also be able to use that website to take you to the new Notornis website. This has provides a very effective and rapid search for any published material. It is intended that members will have immediate access to this material with non-members having a one year delay for the full download of papers.

While you are on the computer, have a look at the on-line forum <http://www.birdingnz.net/> which provides up-to-date entries on bird sightings and an opportunity for wider ornithological discussion on whatever takes your fancy. For starters, just check out the posts and photos of the shore plover at Plimmerton.

<http://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=1227>

NZ Garden Bird Survey

The survey, organised nationally by Eric Spurr, involves spending one hour sometime between 25 June and 3 July recording the highest number of each bird species seen in your garden (or local park) at any one time during the hour. The size of your survey area is flexible with some done from a kitchen window. This is the 5th annual survey. Results of previous surveys are on the website. <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/> Last year, silvereyes were the species counted in greatest numbers nationally, followed by house sparrow, starling, and blackbird. However, numbers varied regionally, with silvereyes more abundant in the south of the country and house sparrows more abundant in the north. Last year more than 4000 people took part in the survey and Eric is hopeful that even more people will participate this year.

More information and recording forms are all available on the website but if you need assistance please call Peter.

The mid winter wader count

This was scheduled for the weekend of 18+19 June but weather limited the ability to get good counts at all sites and it was not possible to visit Farewell Spit at all. Rob Schuckard will be in touch with revised plans for the next spring tide.

Some counts were done early in the following week and I've been hearing reports of many godwit and oystercatchers tucked away feeding on flooded paddocks rather than on the normal roosts. Several observations of cattle egret too which is in contrast to recent years when they have been virtually absent from Nelson.

Nelson/Golden Bay Region Contacts

Our regional representative, Stuart Wood, is still overseas but other contacts are as follows:

Regional Recorder: Don Cooper, Ph: 03-544 8109, doncooper@actrix.co.nz

Wader counts and band records: Rob Schuckard, Ph: 03-576 5371, rschckrd@xtra.co.nz

Newsletter: Gail Quayle stagefrightmusic@paradise.net.nz but Peter Gaze
gaze@slingshot.co.nz for this issue