



## NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER MARCH 2012

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I don't have a great grape crop this year and it looks like I'll miss out on what I do have, as apparently blackbirds prefer their grapes on the unripe side unlike me. Two blackbirds can steal quite an amount. But ha! I bet them to the blackberries and they can have as many taupata berries as they like.

### Birds scene

The birdy scoop of the month (and perhaps for the year) comes from **Takaka**. On the little Lake Killarney in the middle of Takaka township a pair of **NZ dabchick** have been identified with **two chicks** still being fed. Lake Killarney Reserve, just over two hectares, is under Tasman District Council and their web site says the lake's pest fish species have been eradicated and the reintroduced native species are doing well. The lake itself is possibly spring fed and is 40ft deep in places. No swimming is allowed. The OSNZ field guide classifies NZ dabchick extinct in the South Island, the last breeding was recorded in 1941 on Lake Fergus, Fiordland, though a few sporadic sightings of individuals have been made elsewhere over the years including one on the Atawhai oxidation ponds in June/July 2010. Don unearthed an old Nelson Evening Mail cutting of an article reporting a pair seen on a small lake in the Rockville area in Sept 1975, verified by the Acclimatisation Society of the time. Keep your eyes peeled for these very elusive birds.

Five **spoonbills** were reported from Karamea in Feb, not a usual sighting. Over summer, several members commented on the amount of seabird activity close to shore. Schools of small baitfish have been pursued by larger fish and flocks of **fluttering shearwater**, red-billed gulls, black-backed gulls, white-fronted terns, and dozens of gannet have been in attendance, with a company of skua often harassing the terns. On several occasions this phenomenon (minus skua) moved right into **Nelson Haven** - a notable record for the **shearwaters**. At times the bait fish were forced up against the Boulder Bank providing an opportunity for even the relatively clumsy black-backed gulls to successfully scoop up the little fish.

### **Did they really?**

April Fool's Day is just around the corner, but I'm not going to risk bad luck by telling stories prematurely. The following encounters in our local region are true.

A weka has been seen regularly using a cat door to enter a house to scoff pet food. And a tui has been heard imitating a falcon in falcon territory. And, who has spotted the penguin crossing sign on Rocks Road with a new species for us, a yellow-eyed penguin! DM gets the chocolate fish prize for spotting it first. He also gets to contact to whom it may concern to remedy the situation

### **Show and Tell**

At our February meeting 16 members heard Rob Schuckard talk on a pilot study involving **gannets** on Farewell Spit. Rob, is part of an OSNZ team assisting Gabriel Capuska Machovsky with his PhD study on the feeding ecology of these top predators. Birds about to depart from their nest after an arriving mate comes in are caught and a GPS logger is mounted onto its tail. Gannets disperse widely through the Bays on their foraging trips and information gathered showed the shortage foray to be 45 minutes and the longest three days, as a bird went to Admiralty Bay and back, before taking up nesting duties again.

(1)The Gannet colony at Farewell Spit, (2) and attaching a GPS logger.



## **Weka Whereabouts**

**Watch out, they are Wandering**

Several **Weeks** ago, **Weka** were heard from **Walters Bluff**.

And **Wildlife** problems in the city

The recent abundance of **weka** on the outskirts of Nelson and Richmond has been a problem for some people but now it is becoming a problem for the two councils as they decide what further dog control may be necessary to protect the birds. The impact of dogs on weka and the benefits of weka-aversion training for dogs are unknown. However the deaths caused by poor trapping techniques (and swimming pools) is more evident.

It's great to be able to mention kea and weka more often in the newsletter. It's often said that an indication of the abundance of a small furry animal (read nasty predator) in an area can be ascertained from road kills. Maybe we can use a similar yardstick by counting the number of written items these two get throughout the year!! Perhaps not, but it's encouraging to hear more accounts of birds that have previously been uncommon.

## **Kea**

Two injured kea have been handed in to Natureland this summer and both have been cared for by the wildlife vet Mana Stratton. One bird had to have a leg amputated and the other (which was hit by a truck) had a long haul to recovery. Deciding on the future of these birds was quite an issue, could they survive in the wild – and if not, what were the implications for the future management of captive kea? A further issue was whether either bird might have been at risk of contracting a parrot disease (Pbfd) whilst in captivity and might this pose a risk to wild birds. In the end, the decision was to keep one bird in captivity and the other was banded, transmittered and released on the St Arnaud Range to join two recently fledged juveniles.

A study of kea in Kahurangi National Park following an Animal Health Board 1080 drop showed that no nests were lost to predation. A similar study of whio in the Wangapeka had the same results.

And other problems in the city

I guess there is some pleasure in seeing native species become sufficiently abundant to cause problems. However for those affected it can become a real issue. The Nelson Mail ran a big article on the problem caused by a flock of noisy red-billed gulls in suburbia. Residents are woken before dawn and washing inevitably comes in dirtier than when it went out. This problem has almost certainly been caused by one resident feeding the birds but until this can be clearly shown the council is unable to take action. PG and GDQ

## **Parish Notices**

From Gail:

RR Stuart has had to travel back to Zimbabwe for a spell so I'm holding the reins, as Acting RR, till he returns. So, queries, bird notes, a friendly hello etc can be made to [stagefrightmusic@xtra.co.nz](mailto:stagefrightmusic@xtra.co.nz) or landline, 03 5450456, or come to a meeting, or stop me in the street. Don't wave to me at an intersection, I'll be concentrating on the new rules for a while.

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). All birders are welcome! Contact: Don Cooper 03-544 8109 or Gail 5450456.

### **Next Meeting Monday 2 April.**

An Avian Medley

An opportunity for everyone to show off their photos. Bring along your glossy pics or have them in electronic format. Don can put them up on the big screen. Perhaps check with Don beforehand as to what format he can use. ph5448109 If there's time a David Attenborough DVD 'Life of Birds' will be shown.

Thanks to this month's contributors, next dead line, 20 April. GDQ.