



NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER

February 2013

Regional Representative
Gail D. Quayle,
6 Tresillian Ave,
Atawhai . 7010

Regional Recorder
Robin Toy,
78C Little Sydney Rd
Motueka

stagefrightmusic@xtra.co.nz
Ph 035450456

twotoys@xtra.co.nz

MEET AND GREET

Footage of dabchicks in Takaka, gannets on Farewell Spit, Caspian Terns in the Waimea Est, great spotted kiwi in Kahurangi NP and other shots of holiday birding were projected to 14 people gathered for our first monthly get-together. And there was plenty of chat on other bird issues. A warm welcome to Richard Wells to our flock.

e.Bird The following weekend, 11 members sat at computers while Robin Toy took control of the power point hot seat and guided us through the steps to in-putting data. He will be checking our progress!

SONG THRUSH

'And hark! how blithe the Thrush sings' wrote Wordsworth, but my neighbourhood thrush hasn't uttered a note for weeks. Two juveniles were being fed by a parent during the first week of February but then they seemed to be left to their own devices even indulging in sibling rivalry when one found a morsel and the other thought they should have it. I'd helped with the foraging by putting out scraps of fruit so there should have been plenty to go round.

Mac Harwood from Upper Takaka sent in this observation and ends with a question.

'One day spring 2011, I was at our dining table near a ranch-slider looking out onto the lawn and noticed a thrush with a chick under a silver birch tree. The mother or father appeared to be telling the chick what to do and pushing him/her around. This caught my eye. The parent flew off and about 30 seconds later the chick flew onto the concrete patio 15 metres away in front of the ranch-slider about 3 metres from where I was sitting.

I had presumed the parent had gone away to collect more food and was wondering whether the chick would be fed on the patio. The chick was sitting in the sun not moving around, then all of a sudden it took off, landing at the same spot under the silver birch tree. About 5 seconds later an adult arrived back to feed the chick.

I pondered how the chick knew when to fly back to the same spot its mother or father was about to arrive back at?

Sheep communicate with each other from about 300 metres, do birds do the same?'

BIRD OF THE MONTH: Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) First liberated in 1862, (NZ). Send me your stories of this jaunty walker.

A COUNTING EXERCISE

Don C has been doing some maths from his photos of a stunning spectacle of a huge raft of **fluttering shearwaters**. This is what he saw last week.

'I was near the Old Domain on Rabbit Island when saw birds just off the Mapua channel and through a scope I tracked back along the flock as it stretched (unbroken) to a point near the Moutere Bluffs at the end of McKee Domain.

I also took video footage and made a careful note of its length, and from a line drawn on a map I estimated it to be in the region of four kilometers!

I moved to the west end of the beach as the birds made their way parallel to the shore line heading in a westerly direction towards the airport/Tahuna ?

The name 'fluttering' is very apt as they lurch forward a few meters and plunge for food. With these large numbers one envisages a hoovering operation in this feeding mode.

Fishermen present were a bit taken aback and said the birds were feeding on bait fish,(small pilchard).

In company were a few white-fronted terns diving into the mass who were then attacked from a couple of Arctic Skuas in their usual spectacular duelling fashion.

This was by far the largest flock I have ever witnessed and up to date I haven't found a local 'birder' who saw this spectacle. My guesstimate of birds has to be in the 10,000 region.



A fraction of the flock, could be one tenth of total, note the closeness to the shore.

A VISIT TO CHEETHAM SALT FIELDS ADELAIDE 17JAN 2013

Paul and Marina Bennett sent in this fabulous account.

We have a son who is a professional cyclist and as we had yet to see him race in a world tour, this summer's 'Tour down under' in Adelaide seemed like a good opportunity. However it's pretty hard to go somewhere just to watch cycling when there are birds to be seen!

Prior to our visit I had managed to contact Trevor and Heather Cowie of the South Australia Ornithological Association. By good fortune this active birding group just happened to be doing a species count at the Cheetham salt fields NW of Adelaide the day after our arrival and invited us to join them.

The salt fields are a large series of pans contained by berms and dykes and used for commercial salt extraction from seawater. They are a superb wader habitat. The company who owns them seems a tad paranoid about access though, and we met Trevor at 6.00 outside the locked gate to go through our "induction" This consisted of filling out seemingly endless forms and disclaimers and ensuring that we were wearing safety glasses, long pants and a high vis jacket. This was fine in the cool of morning but as the day progressed and the temperature climbed through to what was reputed to be 46C it became a little more challenging.

While Trevor and Hazel waited for the rest of the party, we wandered into an area of grass and scrub to look for white winged fairy wrens. None were calling, although we met several later in the day. Returning we were introduced to the 15 or so birders who had now arrived. Many more had stayed at home because of the heat. It was pretty hard to spot the Australian amongst the variety of expats. Most were British and Marina and I spent a pleasant few minutes identifying town of origin from the various accents. A fine group of people though, who went out of their way to make us welcome. We were disappointed however to learn that we'd missed a hobby that flew low over the group while we were looking for the wrens.

We set off in a motley selection of 4 WD's but as we made our way through the 2nd locked gate Trevor decided he had lost the keys. This sent everyone into a bit of frenzy, as we now appeared to be locked in the salt fields. Various options were discussed, none of which meant much to us, so we spent some time studying a small area of (presumably salty) mud covered in red capped and red kneed dotterel and red necked stints. The red capped dotterel is a particularly handsome bird and appears intermediate in body form between the smaller dotterels and the larger plover types

The key had still not been found and the solution at this stage appeared to be 'ignore it and it will go away' so it was into Trevor's 4WD and onto the fields.

The first thing that strikes you is sheer numbers. When you have scoured the wetlands in Napier, looking for a solitary sharp tailed sandpiper, seeing hundreds in a day has to impress. As we drove through we came to deeper pools, where there were large flocks of banded stilt as well as the Australasian pied stilt with which we are familiar here. These two birds are surprisingly easy to confuse in the field, particularly when the banded is out of breeding plumage, but they are completely different species with the banded belonging to a separate, monotypic genus. It was interesting to note that the banded swam like the avocets, which were also there in good numbers.

Cont....

As we drove deeper into the salt fields the species count continued to climb, with marsh and curlew sandpiper, whimbrel, eastern curlew, grey plover and greenshank quickly added. Several (nesting?) groups of fairy tern were seen at close quarters. This is the first time I have been able to get close enough to view one and know that it wasn't a little tern. There were also large numbers of whiskered as well as Caspian and a single crested that flew overhead. At the far side of the fields the terrain became grassier and we met several parties of the stunning white winged fairy wren. At this time of year the males are still in nuptial plumage and the contrasting white wing patch seems to intensify the blue, making it appear even brighter than on other fairy wren species.

Pelicans, both spoonbill species, hoary headed, crested and Australian grebes and all cormorants except the blackface (which can be seen in numbers a few kilometres away at Port Adelaide) and many others species were sighted- 74 in total.

A very late lunch was taken in the shade of the only "trees" for miles--- A few scraggly, and to me unidentifiable bushes. One of our party, who snuck off for a toilet stop came rushing back with tales of a large brown snake. Being, at one stage in my life, a bit of a herpetologist, I went to investigate, but of course it was long gone.

During the course of lunch Trevor organised the count for the day. What it lacked in precision it made up for in humour. Basically Trevor went through the species list; someone would call out an approximate number they reckoned to have seen, followed by general discussion, derision and good natured abuse. Somewhere at the end of this, Trevor recorded a figure that appeared to cause the least amount of controversy.

After lunch the birding continued. To be honest we were pretty much over it. This was our first day in Adelaide and 8 hours out in the 46C heat had definitely taken its toll. Fortunately someone managed to locate a key and we found ourselves exhausted and, despite litres of water, somewhat dehydrated back at our car with a 200k drive up to the famous Gluepot reserve and a 5am start ahead of us.

A great day's birding, with 6 personal "firsts" but as is so often the case, not one without clouds on the horizon –The red necked stint numbers were down on last year –due possibly to habitat destruction on migratory stop overs and the future of the salt fields themselves is uncertain. Production stops in 2020 and although part is scheduled to become a wildlife reserve, a considerable area is earmarked for "reclamation" (consider the thinking behind that word!!) as a housing development.

We would like to thank the SA birding group and in particular Trevor and Heather Cowie who really went out of their way to give us an unforgettable day. In fact my long suffering wife assures me that the last time she had such a great day out was when I romantically took her birding to the Melbourne sewage treatment plant while she had a stomach bug!

We visited several other birding sites during our brief stay. Some were far more productive than others –so if anyone is heading that way feel free to contact us for a few recommended spots.

Paul Bennett bennett.fam@xtra.co.nz

Below: photo by Paul; avocets, (definitely not on Nelson Haven!).



Parish Notices

As yet I've been unable to secure a dynamic speaker for March, William and Kate are too busy decorating a nursery, so again we shall have to talk among ourselves, but I'm sure many of us have plenty to say so come along on Monday 4 March with photos as props. Remember April's meeting is the 2nd Monday because of Easter.

Thank you to those of you who have renewed their subscription for the year, - now would be a good time to check if you fall into that category or not!

PROGRAMME 2013

We meet **usually** on the 1st Monday of the month, at 7.15 pm in the "Solander Fisheries Building", Cross Quay, off Akersten Street, Port Nelson (opposite the red Cruising Club building). All birders are welcome! Contact: Don Cooper 03-544 8109 or Gail 03-5450456.

Monday, 4 March
Indoor Meeting

Come and share notes

Monday, 8 April
Indoor Meeting
(2nd Monday in April)

Speaker to be advised

Thanks for this month's contributions. Contributions for the March newsletter: please email or phone by 24 March

Gail 035450456, stagefrightmusic@xtra.co.nz