



## NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER MARCH 2013

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### CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE AVIAN KIND.

Autumn has come around again and feathered fauna are moving around again. Some northwards, some off-shore and some just to the nearest coast. **Shining cuckoos** move silently through our region on their way north, fattening up on caterpillars, especially in kowhai trees and kowhai hybrids in suburban gardens. The last reported sighting I have is from Atawhai on 2 March. **Waders** have been head down fattening up on estuary worms before their flights to China. Janet Thorp sent in this great photo of a nicely plump godwit at Marahau in February.



**Royal Spoonbill** numbers have swelled, and **white herons** can be spotted again. Ingrid recorded an early white heron on 26 January at Rabbit Island Inlet, and I recently was pleased to see one inland, foraging in a stream near Ohau C power station, (L. Benmore), on 25 March.

## CLASSROOM STUFF

Rob Schuckard held the attention beautifully of Clifton Terrace primary pupils in two power point presentations on godwits, migration and marking, with an audible response from the audience to the photo of a cute fluffy chick! As the school overlooks Nelson Haven they have adopted the godwit on their mission statement poster - Expanding Horizons. The questions were intelligent and not always easily answered! (A bit of background support was provided by Willie and myself). Thanks Rob.

And over in Motueka, St Peter Channel primary school has produced a stunning book on godwits on the Motueka Sandspit.

## STARLING

A recent edition of the English *Country Living* magazine recommended a 'sight to see', at various UK spots, a murmuration of **starlings** - the spectacular autumn and winter gatherings of birds whirling and twirling en masse in the evenings before settling down to roost for the night. Some years ago I sat at the carpark looking out to Fifeshire Rock on late evenings in autumn (to watch the spotted shags coming in), and would see our own murmuration over the bay heading to Rabbit Island area and perhaps inland a bit to Waimea West. But Willie observes that numbers have dramatically dropped in recent years. Mac Harwood, Upper Takaka, notes: "We built a shearing shed in 1956 and spring 1957 starlings took up residence to see if it suited their style. A few chicks arrived and survived but ever since the shed has been visited all year round. In Lynnette Moon's book "*Know your NZ Birds*" 2006, she mentions this all year nest site visiting but what I find intriguing is the bringing in a grass straw all year for no particular purpose when they visit. The straws are dropped all over the wool room, on the wool and the floor yet the wool bale room and the grating area are straw free. Very few chicks survive now due to stoats and feral cats."

**Also** from over the Hill, Ken George notes **falcon** are back in Pohara after being noticeably absent for a couple of years, and sent in his account of **terns versus skua**. 18 March "Spectacular aerial combat display by 2 skua harassing a group of a dozen locally common white fronted terns, plus a couple of black backed gulls right on the beach here in Pohara. At least a dozen people on the beach, many walking their dogs, stopped to watch the display of aggressive aerial agility by the skua. The group of terns had been dive fishing and the skua started chasing the terns and making them drop their catch, which the skua quickly caught. The incredible speed and agility of the skua was something spectacular to observe. For over an hour the skua chased the terns, and a couple of times attacked a couple of black black gulls who just happened to blunder into the field of battle. The skua flew fast at the gulls and rolled over to present their feet to the gulls as they approached them, similar to a hawk. Very impressive, mean looking bird. One flew over me - only a couple of meters above. Another thing I noticed, at the end of each short tern chasing spell, which would only last for about 30 seconds, the skua would drop down to water level and fly along just above the water for about 50 meters until they slowed to a deep stop and landed on the water. The water landings look quite different from the way the gulls normally land on the water. Some of the terns had a go at the skua also, so the engagement was not all one sided."

**BIRD OF THE MONTH: CHAFFINCH** *Fringilla coelebs*

Introduced on several occasions during the 1860s and 1870s to both North and South Islands. According to *'Checklist of NZ Birds'* now the second-most widely distributed bird throughout the three main islands of NZ except for the SI mountain tops. Do you have some interesting notes?

**NOW WE ARE SIXTY**

Someone gave me this funny parody written on AA Milne's lovely *'Now We Are Six'* (of which there are now four generations of editions in the family), but being 60ish in an **albatross** colony is no mean feat and gaining attention. Peter Besier sent in a cutting from *The Guardian Weekly* 15.02.13. On Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, at the end of the Hawaiian Island chain, **'Wisdom'**, a **62** year old **Laysan albatross** hatched a healthy chick on 3 Feb. She is the world's oldest-known living wild bird, edging out the second-oldest known albatross to breed, **'Grandma'** a 61yr old **Northern Royal**. But Grandma was last seen on Taiaroa Head three years ago, now presumed dead. (A Doc information sheet cites her age was 62!) Wisdom has been through 6 leg bands. Retired scientist Chandler Robbins who administered her first band in 1956, picked her up again in 2001 with scientists estimating her age at 49. But she could be several years older. – 'The tangled record-keeping that frustrates scientists has kept Robbins going at age 94.' "I'm trying to straighten out the record," he said."It takes a lot."

**NEXT MEETING**

Come along to our monthly meeting on 8 April to see **Dave Buckton's** photos of the **Snares** and hear of his involvement with Doc work, and also to catch up with what's happening on our own doorstep, who's seen what, where.



**'Almost Synchronised'** Photo by Willie Cook, Waimea Estuary.

### 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, 8 April  
Indoor Meeting

Dave Buckton and The  
Snares Islands

Monday, 6 May  
Indoor Meeting

Speaker to be advised

Queen's Birthday weekend  
OZNZ AGM and Conference  
Dunedin.

Monday 10 June  
(2<sup>nd</sup> Monday )

Speaker to be advised

Thank you to this month's contributors.

Contributions for the April newsletter please email or phone by 26 April

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