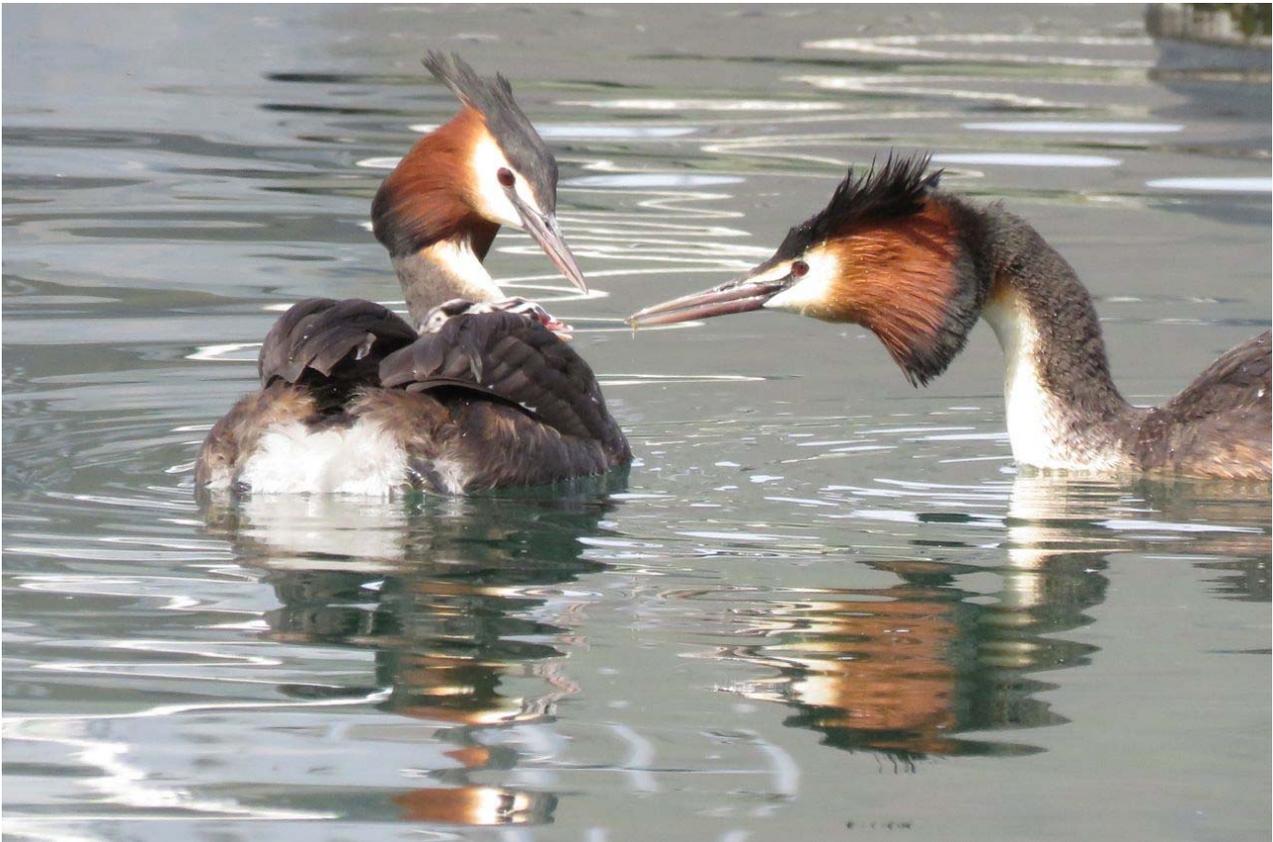


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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 1/2016 January 2016



Grebes at Wanaka

Feeding chicks with tiny fish

I made a trip to Wanaka on 18 and 19 November last year to have a close look at the nesting grebes in the Wanaka Marina. The weather was perfect - sunny and calm. Each floating pontoon/walkway in the marina has a floating nest platform attached by chains to the end of the pontoon. These have been designed and erected by John Darby. They are sheltered from waves from the lake, and rise and fall with lake level. There are 10 here and three more anchored directly to the lake floor (to test whether they can handle rough water). There was constant activity in the inner marina near

the shore. I counted 18 birds in this bay and another 19 out further on the lake. I saw mating activity and one egg being laid; birds diving for water weed and bringing additions to a nest – John says this “nest building” activity occurs a few days before the eggs are due to hatch; one bird had two chicks on its back and other bringing tiny fish and occasionally feathers for the chicks; 7 nests had eggs (close to hatching) and watched sitting birds rearranging them from time to time; vacated platforms were contested for by new pairs; pairs in courtship displays; juveniles hanging around. John Darby kindly met with me in the morning and gave me close-up looks at all the nests; John assists the birds by deepening the nest so eggs don’t roll out and some platforms have wire frames to deter attacks by harrier hawks. All egg numbers and lay dates, hatch dates, etc are recorded. This season there have been 17 pairs and 35 chicks fledged so far. It is not known where the fledged chicks and/or their parents end up – in other bays around Lake Wanaka?



Changing over chick minding duties



Rearranging eggs in nest



Mating



more weed for the nest

Mary Thompson

Ornithological snippets

This report covers the period 20th November 2015 to 22nd January 2016.

A **Chukor** was found by the side of The Remarkables Road near Queenstown on 7th December by Leslie Feahey. It flew off when he stopped the car to look at it.

A single **White-chinned Petrel** was seen by Carol Hasenick from the Monarch cruise on 2nd January. Meanwhile at Karitane on 10th January Derek Onley found one **Flesh-footed Shearwater** and 20 black & white puffinus shearwaters (**Fluttering or Hutton's**) among the gulls, terns and 4 **Arctic Skuas**.

Len Buchanan counted 42 **Royal Spoonbills** at Kaikorai estuary on 6th December, and 60 were seen at Nugget Point by Zuni Steer on 28th December. A **Kaka** was seen by Derek Onley at Waitati on 21st December, a couple of kilometres outside the Orokonui Ecosanctuary while 4 **NZ Falcons** were observed in Wanaka by Craig Turner on 18th December. Jim Wilson reported 3 **Cirl Buntings** at Blackley's Dam in the Maniototo on 4th January and Douglas Long reported a male in the Cadrona region on 22nd.

Richard Schofield has taken over the compilation of Ornithological Snippets for the newsletter, so from now on please send all records to him at Richard Schofield richard@pcconnect.co.nz. However, also remember to enter your birding records on eBird.

Richard Schofield

Red-billed Gull survey

“Any wind will be coming off the land, so it shouldn't be too bumpy.” Famous last words. I trusted the pilot, as I tend to, but as we bounced across Molyneux Bay towards Nugget Point I wondered if this was the best on offer. However the weather forecast throughout our window of opportunity was not too special, so I tightened the seatbelt and made sure all equipment was within reach.

I'm not sure if I had volunteered, or just failed to say no quickly enough, but I was tasked with checking the coastline from (but not including) Nugget Point to Bluff Harbour, including the islands in Foveaux Strait if

we had time (or more to the point, fuel), to find, photograph and (later) count all red-billed gull colonies, as part of the OSNZ national survey. It sounds straightforward in theory, but difficulties became apparent when I asked to have another look at a colony of white birds at Cannibal Bay, and the horizon swiftly tilted vertical. The birds turned out (no pun intended) to be white-fronted terns, but checking through the photos later found half a dozen gull nests among them. Any white birds were checked out and photographed (binoculars were next to useless in the turbulence), but most were black-backed gulls or spoonbills.

Any colonies were to be located with GPS, but the units, which had worked perfectly on the ground, refused to cooperate in the air, so I had to rely on good old Google maps, and the time from the camera, to pinpoint the colonies. Another technical hitch occurred about half way along the coast when, in an attempt to avoid redecorating the inside of the plane, I stuck my head out of the window (as you do), but when I retrieved it I discovered that my glasses had gone for a swim! Fortunately my distance vision is better than close work, so we continued the mission.

Then came the hard work – counting the birds from the photographs. In most cases the entire colony could be seen in one image, but at the last site there was a lot of vegetation concealing birds from different viewing angles, making it tricky to work out which birds had been counted and which hadn't. In the end five colonies were found, ranging from six to about 250 nests. They were all in relatively inaccessible places; most had black-backed gulls lurking on the periphery, and one former colony was occupied entirely by black-backs. No red-billed gulls were found further west than Shades Beach, near Waikawa.

It was quite interesting checking through the photos and seeing what other species were present. The most obvious were spoonbills (three sites) and Stewart Island shags (two), but close searching revealed feral pigeons, Canada geese and a single white-fronted tern amongst the gulls.

Richard Schofield

Spoonbills at Wainono

On Boxing Day, Sue Galloway and Mary Thompson went to Wainono and visited the spoonbill colony that we have been monitoring for a couple of years now. This time we accessed it with a demanding walk across farmland, with kind permission from the property owner who is very interested in the birds in the wetlands (part has been placed in QEII trust).

The colony in the dead willows at the north west end of the lagoon where the Hook River enters was still active. Twenty four adult birds were present. 23 nests were seen but not all were occupied. 7 had a sitting bird; 2 young with dark bills, (near fledging?) on one nest and one on another nest; one adult with very young chick; one adult with one young with yellow bill. The numbers were lower than last year. It is not known if chicks succumbed to the 30+ degree temperatures of the week before.

There were 4 Little Shag nests with 5 chicks at various stages. Unfortunately there was no sign of Glossy Ibis this year. (Three fledglings have been seen at Wairau lagoons near Blenheim marking first successful breeding in NZ; see:-

<http://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=5141&sid=5b552c0dba34730b7aba14d96e363206>)



Update on Anderson Bay Roost



There is another hybrid stilt, similar to the one Mary Thompson saw in August, using the Roost at Andersons Bay Inlet this summer. At first sight, it looked to have white wing secondaries, but when it flies the wings are fully black and the rump and flanks white. Some of the white flank feathers, with several long black feathers, flick up over the folded wing. The neck and breast are black, but the belly and under tail coverts are white except for a bar across the cloaca.

This hybrid was seen feeding, with 1 or 3 pied stilts, late afternoons near the Marne Street hospital nearly every day 11 to 20th January on the incoming tide. About 2 hours before high tide at the Dunedin wharves, the stilts fly on to the Roost, where at present they are obscured by long grass. They stay there until nearly 4 hours after high tide. I know the hybrid is a female adult, as I saw it mating with a pied stilt on 16th January. She also defends the nearby mud flat as it is exposed with the outgoing tide, chasing away a pied stilt who I know from its markings is not her mate. I assume that the stilts consider the Roost to be a possible nest site, and we will be leaving the grass undisturbed in the meantime. Given their timing and the number of gulls and rats known to use the area, success seems unlikely.

The Roost has definitely improved the acceptability of the Inlet generally to pied stilts. During 2008, prior to the Roost being built, I checked the Inlet twice a week (total of 100 counts), and I saw only one pair and two single pied stilts on three very separate occasions - just transient visitors. By 2010, there were one or two pied stilts on or near the Roost nearly every time I visited. In December 2010, I saw a newly fledged juvenile with a pair of adults, and have seen juvenile stilts brought to the Roost by their parents nearly every summer since. In February 2013, there was a flock of 10 piers feeding on the little delta by the hospital. Over the new year 2014-15, there was a pair with three fledglings over several weeks. And now there is this mixed pair which seem to think the Roost is a suitable nest site, though given their timing and the number of gulls and rats known to use the area, success seems unlikely.

The Roost has become very acceptable to most local species, and at full high tide, it may hold the only birds on the Inlet. It is a pretty sight, when the tide is coming in on a summer evening, to see the stilts, a lone variable oystercatcher, and the local mallard flock of a dozen or so steadily work their way along the tidal edge of the mud towards the Roost and trundle up the ramp. A pair of spur-wings usually fly in fussing and calling, and if the fishing has been good that day a lone black shag may post himself on the outer end, near a few little shags on the railings. Up until the summer of 2011-12, there would also have been a family of Paradise ducks with 3-5 ducklings padding up the ramp, but the shelducks have failed to rear a brood on the Inlet over the last three summers.

When krill swarm in the Harbour, the Inlet fills up with gulls, and the red-bills very noisily take over the roost, which seems to deter the shags but not the waders and ducks. When there is a run of small fish up the Harbour (juveniles of yellow-eyed mullet and others), spotted shags follow the run in, fishing as they go. If it is high tide and the birds flow over into the inlet, the Roost can be loaded with spotted shags for a day or two, particularly with juvenile spotted shags who failed to make the hair-pin turn-around and go back out to sea.

During 2014, I read about conservation efforts at Tauranga to enhance nesting sites for white-fronted terns on a derelict bridge. This is the only common species of the Inlet which I have never seen use the Roost. Watching these terns during Harbour surveys had convinced me that they

like to stand around on old wooden structures. In February 2015, I got Clearwaters Otago to construct a small square solid wharf on the outer end of the Roost, using timbers (thank you, Heritage NZ and DoC) from the historic Hakataramea Bridge, which had been demolished the previous year. So far the mini wharf is favoured by red-billed gulls and a solitary black shag, but I still hope to see the terns there in their own sweet time.

Jill Hamel

Tomahawk Times



Red billed gulls concentrated in larger numbers inevitably cause conflicts with other birds and people.

More red billed gulls than usual are around Tomahawk, and elsewhere. This is probably due to climate change and El Nino causing behaviour changes, not an increase in actual numbers. Even in the streets, change is obvious. Two boys with too much pizza quickly attracted a flock of more than 60 gulls to a suburban driveway. Previously that would draw in 20 to 30 gulls. Not the moment to hang out laundry or wash the car. Some red billed gulls are aggressive at people on footpaths.

Late last July, a few red billed gulls swooped at a white heron in the Eucalyptus tree by Tomahawk hall. The heron faced the gulls and opened its bill. Also in July, seven red billed gulls aggressively chased a white heron as it swerved flying above houses over more than 300m distance. A white heron is often at lower lagoon, smaller than the heron which frequented house roofs and driveways last year.

Hundreds of red billed gulls gather at lower Tomahawk Lagoon, especially at night. Bruce McKinlay counted more than 1000 red billed gulls there one day. On New Years Day at 9.25pm, a very calm still night, there were more than 360 red billed gulls at lower lagoon, including many on a newly exposed sandbar made by the drought. The gulls were just standing, walking about, and arguing, not feeding like other birds nearby. Two pied stilts with a juvenile, six royal spoonbills, a variable oystercatcher, a white faced heron, two pukekos, and a rabbit were all busy feeding nearby. There were also more than 165 paradise shelducks near the bank.

January 1 night walk continued to Tomahawk Beach, where a small female sea lion was dozing. Two variable oystercatchers and a solitary pied oystercatcher ran on the sand, while three white fronted terns dived over the surf edge. After 10.00pm, most of the more than 300 red billed gulls crowded on the sports ground were totally unafraid of a solitary human walking close by. They liked the cricket pitch, maybe because it is central in the field and gives a wide view over open surrounding land. Several gulls were very aggressive, swooping close and calling at me, a strange experience at night in an empty sports field. That ground was "reclaimed" from a tidal lagoon long ago, now gulls crowding there is another reclaiming. Total red billed gulls seen at lower lagoon and the sports field were more than 660, plus more on the beach and flying off Lawyer's Head.

If you see a large black bird on power lines in Tomahawk streets, look again, it may be a well travelled tui. A pair of tui range widely through local streets and gardens, and they especially like a large Eucalyptus tree near the lagoon, maybe because it is higher than any other perch and a good place to watch and sing from. At times one bird is feeding among bush near the lagoon, while the other watches from high in the tree. Bellbirds are vigorously pursued, and there is a lot of loud patrolling with whirring wings, including in response to people.

One tui has only one white throat poi, although it has its full adult plumage.

A lone tui perched silently on power lines in the street, where red billed gulls swooped and called at it. The tui flew off the wires, and a gull chased it, calling loudly, and the tui went into a macrocarpa in a garden. Maybe the gulls see a perched black bird as a possible threat, and then that seems confirmed by the tui's wide spread wings in a confident flight style.

In October and November, a single shining cuckoo called from the ngaio and nettles jungle on the far shore of upper lagoon, and from the pines plantation. There were less shining cuckoos around than in previous years.

A pair of harriers hunt mallard ducklings around Rushes Island in the upper lagoon, with one hawk swooping at the shrieking ducks while the other glides 40m overhead. Long overhanging rushes form a wide tunnel of refuge around the island. The harriers then alert spur winged plovers to scramble and attack off the farm hillside.

Two royal spoonbills frequently visit Raupo Cove in upper lagoon. Sometimes at lower lagoon there are eight spoonbills, a white heron, a little shag, bright plumaged shoveler ducks, welcome swallows, and a pukeko with two chicks all within the same small area. **Andrew Austin**

Notices and Business

Birds New Zealand (OSNZ) Subscriptions 2016

Those of you on email will have received notification that the annual membership subscriptions are due 1 January 2016 and others will have received notices via Birds NZ mailing. It is all too easy to overlook this during the Christmas New Year period so I am sure there are quite a few of us who have forgotten to pay (actually 43!). Remember that you can pay subs online. Thanks.

Mary Thompson, Regional Representative.

Student Conference Support

The Otago Branch of Birds NZ decided to offer a grant-in-aid of \$200 for an Otago student member to attend and present a research paper at next year's NZ Bird Conference in Napier. We hope this will encourage students to consider attending the conference and furthering their interest in bird research. Application details can be obtained from the Regional Rep. maryt@actrix.co.nz . The details will also be circulated to relevant departments of the University. Applications close 1 February 2016.

Books for Sale

The following books were recently given to me with the wish that they be given a good home. They are now for sale to Otago Region members for the prices as listed.

Title	Author	Publisher	Date	Edition	Price
NZ Sea and Shorebirds	LA Duff	Forest and Bird	1940	1	\$50
The Distribution of Birds in Dunedin	B McKinlay	OSNZ Otago	1995	1	Donation
Cape Rodney to Mangwhai Heads: interim Report on Coastal Resource Area		Auckland Regional Authority	1974	1	Donation
The status of New Zealand Endangered Birds	JA Mills & GR Williams	Royal Zoological Society of South Aust	1979	1	Donation
Rangaunu Harbour Wildlife Survey	M Bellingham & A Davis	NZ Wildlife Service	1983	1	Donation
Kauri Forest Management Review	JC Halkett	NZ Forest Service	1983	1	Donation
Wildlife and Wildlife Values of Northland	CC Ogle	NZ Wildlife Service	1982	1	Donation
The Red databook of NZ	GR Williams & DR Given	Nature Conservation Council	1981	1	Donation

If you wish to be the proud possessor of one of the rare titles on a no return basis then be in quick by ringing me on 0272891477. First in first served. All funds will go to the Regions coffers. **Bruce McKinlay**

2016 NZ Bird Conference and Birds NZ AGM

This annual event will be held in Napier (Hawkes Bay) at the Museum Theatre Gallery, Marine Parade, during Queens Birthday Weekend 4-6 June 2016.

The conference will comprise two days of scientific papers and workshops, with field trips to local birding highlights on the third day. The AGM will be held on Saturday afternoon. A variety of workshops are planned for the Sunday morning (use of GPS, triangulation methods for locating birds by sound, historical books at Napier Museum), followed by

estuary) on Monday. These are excellent get-togethers and a trip to Napier in mid-winter sounds a good idea.

The deadline for Earlybird registration (only \$95) is 31 March. Please register online or ask Mary Thompson for a print version if you don't have computer access.

19th Great Backyard Bird Count, 12–15 February 2016

This is an international birding effort for everyone, from beginner birdwatchers to experts, and anyone can participate from anywhere in the world. You just have to count number of each species of bird seen in a

particular location during 15 minutes. You can count for longer than that if you wish! Count or estimate the number of individuals of each species you saw during your count period. Count birds in as many places and on as many days as you like – one day, two days, or all four days. Submit a separate checklist for each new day, for each new location, or for the same location if you counted at a different time of day. Then enter each checklist on eBird and all those between the 12th and 15th February will be used by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bird Studies Canada, and the National Audubon Society learn more about how to protect birds and the environment we share. Last year 147,265 checklists were submitted, and over 5000 species and 18 million individual birds seen. More information at <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/get-started/>

New addition to the Indoor Meeting Programme.

At the AGM it was suggested that we should have at least one session during the year where any member can give a short 5 – 10 minute presentation about anything birdy that has captured their interest: special birds seen, unusual behaviours, great photographs taken, etc. So we are going to try this idea out at the March Indoor Meeting. For it to be a success we need offers, so if you would like to be added to the list of speakers for the evening contact Mary (464 0787). Just put your images for presentation on a memory stick.

We still need more speakers or topics for Indoor Meetings later in the year. If you would like to talk at an Indoor Meeting or if you have suggestions please let Mary know (464 0787). Ideas for field trips, especially if you are willing to act as a leader/organiser, would also be greatly appreciated.

Ebird Update

Unfortunately eBird have changed the options to explore data and I will no longer be able to report on our birding progress against other years. If anyone knows how to get access to this data please let me know.

However eBird has a new feature you may find interesting. If you click on the “Explore Data” tab you will find a new feature labelled “Target Species” this is located on the right hand side in the box labelled “Species”.

In this feature you can build a list of birds you will find at a new location that you might be travelling to or on your standard birding beat/s. You can see splits of the Target Species list by either the current year or “life” meaning across all your reported observations that apply to the location you are looking at.

If you need help with this new feature or any other part of eBird please feel free to get in touch.

Jim Wilson

More Colour Banded Birds



Black-billed gulls with bands such as “M13” have been banded in the north of the South Island this breeding season. Birds carrying white bands were caught at colonies on the Wairau River, yellow bands are from the Clarence River and red from the Buller.

Black-fronted terns have either coloured bands or flags with a two-letter combination such as “AB”. Terns with white bands or flags are from either the Wairau River or Wairau Lagoons, whereas yellow banded/flagged birds have been caught on the upper Clarence or Acheron Rivers.

For more information see:-

<http://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=5266&p=26290#p26290>

Programme 2016

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

- Sat January 30th** Sinclair Wetlands Summer Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 8.30 am. Backup Sunday January 31st. To join the team, organize transport, and for more information contact Mary Thompson 464 0787, maryt@actrix.co.nz
- Wed February 24th** Hamish Spencer. Experiences the birds of south eastern Brazil and the southern Amazon.
- Wed March 23rd** Bird Briefings - a chance for any member to give a 5–10 minute talk about anything birdy that has captured your interest over the summer: special birds seen, unusual behaviours, etc. Contact Mary 464 0787 to be added to the list of speakers for the evening.
- Wed April 25th** John Darby. A personal account of the Great Crested Grebes of the Wanaka Marina.
- Wed May 25th** Neil Robertson
Birds of China and Tibet (plus fabulous videos)
- Wed June 22nd** Susan Walker
A report on the state, trends and vulnerability of NZ's endemic birds.

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: Feb 18th.