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## *Birds New Zealand*

### *Otago Region Newsletter 6/2016 June 2016*

#### **Ornithological snippets**

The most unexpected bird in this report was undoubtedly a **Light-mantled Sooty Albatross** at Ettrick on 30th May (BirdingNZ report via Paul Jacques); another of this species was seen in Invercargill a few days previously, following strong winds.



Roy Johnstone and Jim Young came across and photographed this bittern in a roadside ditch by Catlins Lake on 10th June. Richard Schofield saw the only **Cattle Egret** for the period near Lake Tuakitoto on 6th June. A few minutes earlier he watched a **NZ Falcon** flying over farmland near Kaitangata. Alan Baker saw a **Falcon** in the podocarp forest on Mt Cargill on 2nd June; he watched it for half an hour as it rested and preened on a branch in the sun. Lala Fraser also reported a Falcon at Smiths Creek (Hereweka Harbour Cone Block beside the Bacon

St Track) on 14th June. The bird "was kek kek keking around us. At first

up towards the Cone, then around the tall kanuka and finally in the macrocarpas bordering Jane's. I know that Neville Peat has recorded falcon calls in this area, but as far as I know they have never eventually nested here." Finally on 6th June, 3 **Brown Creepers** visited Alan's Roslyn garden, not far from the Town Belt.

**Richard Schofield**

## **Noodling around Melbourne**

For Easter this year the family organised to go to Melbourne to catch up with Tess who is now living there. After we had bought the tickets I was invited to a Birdlife Australia workshop on the conservation of migratory shorebirds. So I had my first two ever trips to Melbourne a week apart.

For Easter we rented a car from the airport and headed to Geelong (pronounced J'long by the locals) and then headed out to the ocean highway around the coast. The first birds seen were the obvious locals; magpies, mynahs and rowdy parrots of various species. The first interesting new bird was a New Holland Honeyeater at a lighthouse. The next day we were on the coast near Port Fairy and present were black swans, chestnut teal, pied shags and pelican. We then headed inland and the numbers of birds dropped right away as did any scenery and the land looked like a volcanic boulder field on the Canterbury Plains. An exception was at Colac a small country town where I got onto to a fantail...

The next bit of birdwatching was in the Botanic Gardens in Central Melbourne where spur-winged plover, grey teal, noisy miners, willie wagtail, and magpie-larks all competed for attention. In the trees little raven, corella, crescent honey-eater and rainbow lorikeet always advertised their presence. Although in downtown Melbourne the Botanic gardens are easy to access and provide plenty of habitats for a variety of birds.

About a week later I was able to participate in a Victoria Wader Study Group cannon netting trip to Yallock Creek (on the road to Phillip Island) capture flag and band red-necked stints and apply geo-locators to a small number of them. There was a group of about 30 of all ages including about six young Kiwis who were living in Melbourne. The day was led by the legendary Clive Minton who although in his eighties is still a dominating presence at all stages in the process. We set up the net; retired for lunch and then were racing back to the shore to first cover the stints in

the net, then extract them and get them all settled in capture boxes. It was a successful day with about 300 stints, one banded dotterel and a potential little stint captured. We also saw white heron, crested tern, Australian kite and a skylark. They were promptly processed and then we headed back to Melbourne tired but pleased at such a good day.

The next day I along with Tess got into the Dandenong Ranges for the morning. The Dandenong are a range very close to Melbourne which is a National Park made up of forest remnants of Eucalyptus forest. I was lucky to get a glimpse of a lyrebird through the dense understory and rosellas, lorikeets, fantails and the local version of the grey warbler (a brown gerygone) and fantail were all present.

The next day I headed south from Melbourne to the Mornington Peninsula. There were lots of sites to visit and I started at Flinders which is on the South coast. Present on the foreshore were: grey teal, little back shag, Australasian gannet, white-faced heron, Australian ibis, pacific gull (but no black backed gull), silver gull (better known as red-billed gull), crested tern, superb fairywren, little wattlebird, magpie, welcome swallow, spotted dove and red-browed firetail. Further along the coast short-tailed shearwater were visible off shore of Cape Schanck. I then went inland to the tall forest core of Mornington Peninsula National Park. Galah, crimson rosella, red wattlebird, grey fantail, pink robin, eastern yellow robin and a blackbird were all seen in a short walk.

I finished the day by heading inland to a water supply reservoir called Devil Bend. Although the water levels were low there were still plenty of birds present. I started here by seeing an Australian kestrel, and then while walking along the shore black swan, pink robin, eastern yellow robin (again), musk duck, Australasian little grebe, black shag, black-faced cormorant, white-faced heron, dusky moorhen, Eurasian coot, spur-winged plover, spotted dove, superb fairywren, noisy miner, magpie, fantail, little raven and blackbird.

Next day back on a plane back to Dunedin. Having a rental car or a friend to go to places is pretty essential beyond the city. Within Melbourne public transport is comprehensive and frequent but not particularly cheap. There's lots to see and do for bird watching. My thanks to Ken Gosbell who invited me on the cannon netting trip.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## **A diverse flock of research presentations at the annual Birds New Zealand conference**

This year's Birds New Zealand annual conference took place in Napier, at the fantastic Museum Theatre Gallery. It was wonderful to see familiar faces and newcomers alike coming together for two days of talks on all things ornithological. Presenters ranged from university professors to voluntary enthusiasts to museum curators and everything in between. The seabird crowd were out in force, but forest birds and waders featured too. One thing common to all the talks was a real sense of passion and enthusiasm for avian research, and an emphasis on the importance of understanding more about New Zealand's



Napier's Museum Theater Gallery

birds in order to ensure their conservation and long term survival. If you were unable to attend this year's conference or you'd like a reminder of what went on, here is a brief overview of some of the research presented and the key themes and findings.

A major theme at this year's meeting was habitat use and nesting requirements. As habitat destruction and fragmentation continues apace in New Zealand and internationally, understanding the habitat requirements of our birds is imperative to effective conservation. This is equally true of coastal, wetland and forest species and there were a large number of presentations on this theme. Chifuyu Horikoshi from Massey University explained how her radio-tacking data showed the importance of pine forest edge habitat to New Zealand falcons/kārearea. Clear cut areas are good hunting grounds, but mature pine stands are better for remaining hidden – the edges of clear-cut areas offer the best of both, making them prime falcon real-estate. Talking of real-estate, Johannes Fischer from Victoria University explained what makes a good nest-site for South Georgian diving petrels. These birds need front dune habitat to nest in, which has become scarce following storm-induced erosion on Codfish Island/Whenua Hou – the only breeding site for the species in New Zealand.

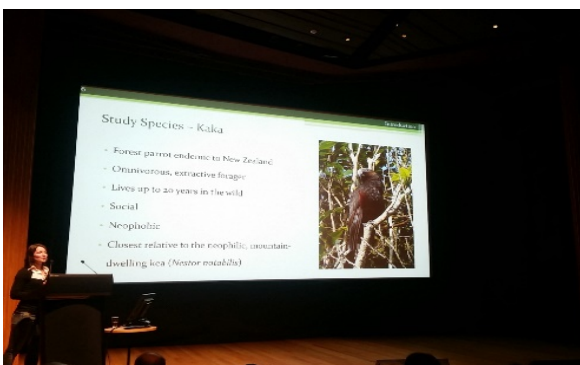


A tiny treasure in Kay Griffiths' talk

In happier news, Kay Griffiths reported back on the translocation of rifleman/tītīpounamu to the tiny A'Deane's Bush reserve in Hawke's Bay. Translocations have not been undertaken to such small sites before and it was unclear whether there would be sufficient habitat, even for one of New Zealand's smallest birds. Happily, two years since the translocation, there are at least 9 pairs of rifleman established with juveniles

and Kay is looking for people to come and do more research on these tiny taonga. Meanwhile, Emma Williams is continuing her research at Massey University on Australasian bitterns/matuku and showed how tracking these incredibly elusive birds over 18 months had revealed a great deal regarding their use of a complex network of wetland habitats near Lake Whatumā.

Climate change is another threat to birdlife globally. Rachael Sagar and Brendan Dunphy (both from the University of Auckland) illustrated how climatic shifts can have serious implications for seabird species using two different species as examples. Rachael's work on mottled petrels/korure showed that climatic cycles have a big impact on chick growth, with chicks in La Niña years faring far worse than those in El Niño years – likely due to higher availability of better quality food. Conversely, Brendan's research on sooty shearwaters/tītī suggested that El Niño was a bad weather system for muttonbirds, causing higher than usual post-migration mortality. Clearly the impacts of climate shifts can vary between species, highlighting a need for better understanding of the risks and management implications of climate change for avifauna.

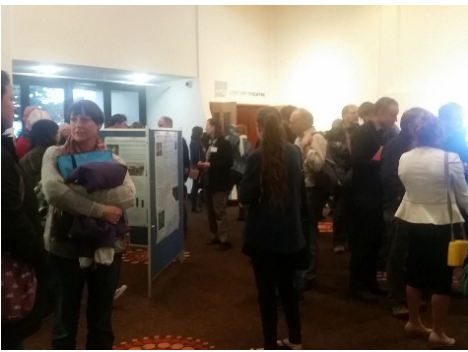


Julia Loepelt talks kaka cognition

On a lighter note, there was some very entertaining research on behaviour presented by Julia Loepelt from Victoria University. Her PhD involved setting puzzles for crafty kaka and she found that while juvenile birds would quickly learn to solve the puzzles, adult birds just couldn't crack it. Apparently you really can't teach an old kaka new

tricks. In a similar vein, Megan Freisen showed interesting evidence of voice matching in grey-faced petrels/ōi, suggesting that seabird vocalisations may not be as simple as they are traditionally perceived to be.

One of the most exciting aspects at this year's conference was perhaps the amount of cutting-edge technology being employed to find out more about birds. Stephanie Borrelle from AUT showcased the drones she's been using to create high resolution remotely sensed imagery of seabird islands; Helen Taylor from the University of Otago reported back on her fieldwork sampling hihi semen and measuring the swimming speed of individual sperm cells using a novel mobile laboratory; Hendrik Schultz from the University of Auckland talked about the tiny miniaturised trackers he's been using to follow the movements of and activity patterns of brown skuas. Rachel Goddard from the University of Auckland and Paul Scofield from Canterbury Museum have both been using equipment traditionally associated with hospitals to look inside birds – Rachel has used MRI scanners to examine sooty shearwater respiratory systems and Paul is using CT scanners to generate 3D models of penguin fossils. Finally, Kate Lee from the University of Auckland previewed some innovative work sequencing hihi genomes to generate high density genetic marker panels. Kate will be using these markers to examine genetic diversity in hihi that could be important for their future adaptation and survival.



The well-attended poster

The research innovation and dedication on show at this year's conference was both interesting and inspiring. It was also encouraging to see so many presentations – there was such a high number of abstracts submitted that this year, for the first time, the conference featured a dedicated poster sessions. This was hugely popular and gave everyone an opportunity for lively discussion

before heading to the conference dinner. The breadth of research on show also highlighted how much important work is funded by Birds New Zealand. If you're in need of research fund, keep an eye on the website for the next round of research grant applications. Hopefully some of the research funded in this round will be showcased at next year's conference, scheduled for the 3rd-4th June 2017 in Te Anau. Based on the quality of this year's conference, Te Anau will be an event you won't want to miss!

**Helen Taylor**

## **The Anderson's Inlet roost**

reached its sixth birthday this week (8th June), and an appropriate present was a first sighting of a kingfisher, sitting on the standing stone nearest the road, watching the low tide flat for prey. This brings the number of species seen on the Roost up to 16. According to eBird, Bruce McKinlay saw 2 kingfishers at the Inlet in April, the first record that I know of for this species in Andersons Bay Inlet. I did not see any kingfishers during my 100-circuit survey of the Inlet in 2007. A couple of months ago, though, I was told of a pair up Somerville Creek, seen by a local resident.

**Jill Hamel**

## **Beach Patrol in Dunedin**

Not that it is a common activity in Dunedin or even the Otago coast, beach patrolling is still fun and can be productive. It is also a chance to get out and have a look around. My recent forays along from Lawyers Head to St Clair esplanade have not been productive in terms of numbers (three birds in two patrols: a total of 6.6 km) but picking up a fresh Antarctic Fulmar was a real highlight.

Antarctic fulmars are, according to the Field Guide, a “locally common native” in New Zealand but are circumpolar in distribution and breed on the Antarctic coast and adjacent islands.



They have been recorded in New Zealand between mid May and the end of November. Antarctic fulmars are easily identifiable as they are a larger bird with a diagnostic pale bill with a black tip. The individual I picked up had a darkish tail which might indicate a juvenile. An incentive to walk along our beaches!

**Bruce McKinlay**

## Notices and Business

### **Report of NZ Bird Conference and Regional Representatives Meeting**

I attended the conference from Friday to Monday in Napier over Queen's Birthday Weekend. The weather was superb as you know so sitting inside for most of 3 days was a little frustrating, but it was offset by some excellent birding in between.

Soon after arrival on Thursday, RR for Hawkes Bay, Bernie Kelly took Bruce and I to a small wetland reserve just behind the Ngaruroro/Tutaekuri River stopbanks. First glance showed shovellers, grey teal, mallard, black swan and Canada Geese, but within minutes Bruce has spotted a bittern resting in the rushes on the side of the pond – only my third sighting of bittern and this was just a 100 or so yards away and it stayed there for quite a while then moved off when we weren't looking. It would have been good to wait 'til evening when it may have fed around the edges. Bernie says up to 7 have been seen at one time in this wetland in winter(not breeding). There were also dabchicks on the pond and 2 black-fronted dotterels, both good to see for Dunedinites.

Then on Friday morning 4 of us RRs headed out to the Ahuriri Estuary to do some birding before the meeting. This wetland was huge before the 1931 Earthquake but the land rose about 2m and only a small area remains but it is very near Napier city, has a walkway and cycle tracks, and it was easy to see a great range of waterbirds and waders. Special to us were the Little Black Shags (also little pied and black present for comparison), 8 NZ Dotterel, 5 spoonbill and a dozen or so godwits as well as SIPO, white-faced herons, and dozens of kingfishers catching crabs.

After 2 days of Scientific papers (report elsewhere), the field trips were keenly anticipated. I went on the day trip to Boundary Stream, which is a predator-trapped mainland island in the hills inland from Tutira. Whiteheads, rifleman, bellbird and tui naturally inhabit the area but kaka and kokako and kiwi have been reintroduced. Our group saw all these species. The kokako were singing beautifully out of sight in the top of a huge kamahi, but we stayed watching and listening and after about 15 minutes there was some action. Others birds flew in and this family party



began feeding on the berries and bouncing about on the branches as kokako do. One bird was a young one with pink wattles so we think we were watching a family group of at least 5 birds. Our lunch stop was at the Lake Opouahi Kiwi Crèche about 20 k down the road from Boundary Stream. Young chicks are collected from the Kaweka Ranges (an incredibly demanding job finding nests) and raised in the fenced crèche until old enough to be put in Boundary Stream or back in the mountains. We had close-up views of a 2 mo old chick.

### **RR Meeting.**

This started with a briefing by the President, David Lawrie. The next conference will be in Te Anau and the 2018 in Northland so they will both be drawcards for us. Bruce McKinlay remains as Vice-President and a new Council member is Helen Taylor, who is a research fellow at Otago and a member of our branch so we look forward to having Helen more involved with branch activities when her research allows. She is charged with re-vamping the marketing strategy of Birds NZ, focusing on using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to get our name out there. Possible national projects are being explored by the Scientific Committee and include a Dabchick survey, penguin census (with Forest and Bird) and an extension of eBird called Bird TreNZ.

We heard reports: on a successful 5 day youth camp held at Miranda with eleven 12-16 year-olds – the next generation of ornithologists; the results of the red-billed gull survey (26,000 pairs now compared with 40,000 in 1965); unusual bird reports (UBR) now listed on OSNZ website (<http://rare.birds.org.nz/>), so you can check out what has been recently seen in your area.

We discussed the importance of entering our birding data on eBird because this is a key tool for long-term monitoring, conservation prioritization by local bodies, etc.

Ideas for marketing Birds NZ at regional events was discussed - banners, posters, egg and nest displays, etc. This is along the lines of our involvement with Wild Dunedin festival and Botanic Garden bird watching.

**Mary Thompson**

## **eBird Otago**

I found this piece below on the Birds New Zealand web page and thought it might encourage members to activate/reactivate their interest in eBird.

### **Why we use eBird**

A real-time, online checklist program, eBird has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird provides rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution at a variety of spatial and temporal scales. Birds New Zealand launched eBird New Zealand in May 2008 and already it has become a huge hit.

eBird's goal is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. It is amassing one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence. For example, in 2006, participants reported more than 4.3 million bird observations across North America.

The observations of each participant join those of others in an international network of eBird users. eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists. In time these data will become the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution across the western hemisphere and beyond.

To read more and register visit <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand>

Read more about eBird and avifaunal monitoring by Birds New Zealand eBird and monitoring by OSNZ (Scofield et al, 2012) **Jim Wilson**

**Errata** - (silly mistakes). That White Heron at Tomahawk has caused considerable problems. For me that is, as editor. Not only did I spell the photographer of the excellent photo of the heron, Bruce Cathro's name wrongly (it's only got one "h") but Nick Allan was consciencious and kind enough to point out that I'd also called our Cairn's correspondent Alan, instead of Andy Anderson. Apologies all round.

Nick then went on to wonder why the b&w photo was along side the reminder about the Winter Wader Count. Was it May's ID quiz? True, it could have been and for those who thought so, the gentlemen are Sib Sibson (left) and Ross McKenzie, bird-watching in the 1960s at the limeworks at Miranda in the Firth of Thames; hence the relevnace to the wader count. Or should that be that Dick Sibson? **Derek Onley**

## 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.

- Wed June 22nd** Susan Walker  
A report on the state, trends and vulnerability of NZ's endemic birds.
- Sun Jun 25-Jul 3** NZ Garden Bird Survey
- Sun July 10<sup>th</sup>** Bird watching Walks, Dunedin Botanic Garden, 1pm to 4pm; an event offered by us as part of the International Science Festival. If you can help with walks or look after the display in the Information Centre, please let Mary know: 464 0787.
- Saturday July 16th** Sinclair Wetlands Winter Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 9.00 am. Backup Sunday July 17th. To join the team, organize transport, and for more information contact Mary Thompson 464 0787, [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz)
- Wed July 27<sup>th</sup>** Craig McKenzie. "Birds through the lens." Followed by AGM and discussion of future projects.
- Wed August 24<sup>th</sup>** Chris L alas, Population trend in Otago shags – fluctuations or decline?

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: July 21.