



Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 11/2016 November 2016



Chatham Island Mollymawk

photo Mathias Dehling

The Vivienne J, the smaller of the Monarch Wildlife Cruises vessels made two trips out past Cape Saunders to the deeper waters and offshore canyons on 16 October and 13 November. Graeme Loh went, of course, and amongst the rest were five keen birders who especially made the trip down from Christchurch to take part.



Campbell Mollmawk

photo Mathias Dehling

Birds seen on the first trip were royal albatross, Chatham Island, Campbell, Salvin's and shy mollmawks, northern giant petrel, cape pigeon, white-chinned petrel, mottled petrel, sooty shearwater, Buller's shearwater, diving petrel, grey-backed storm petrel, fairy prion, broad-billed prion, blue penguin, black-backed gull, red-billed gull, white-fronted tern and Otago shag.



Noted also was a yellow-eyed penguin at Saunders Canyon 16km SE of Cape Saunders. It zoomed around the boat, leaping and diving and seemed to be feeding between half and two metres down. Way out of range for benthic feeding, the bottom being 350m below. Water temperature 11.6degrees vs 12.8 near shore. The water was quite green and not very

clear, which is unusual this far off shore. There were a few other seabirds at this location and it was not a general feeding site.

Mathias Dehling's other photos included the following:-



Grey-backed Storm Petrel



Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters



Antarctic Prion



Broad-billed Prion

Prions and Sooty/Short-tailed shearwaters are not the simplest of birds to identify and there is a bit of hopefully good humoured discussion going on about the identification. Watch out for the next edition of the newsletter.

Hunting for Robins on Mopanui



On the morning of the 5th of November eight of us gathered on the misty Mopanui to help Jill Hamel to survey her 5 hectares of native regenerating forest. Jill had noticed a few robins on her property and had assumed that they had probably flown over from the neighbouring eco-sanctuary, Orokonui. She asked us to do a more thorough survey of the forest to get a more accurate number of the robins in the area.

We split into groups of two and surveyed approximately 400 metre plots, using play-back robin calls. The bush was more dense and steep than most of us expected but we succeeded in encountering four male robins in total! Jill was quite pleased. Andrew and Craig will be returning later in the year to discover if the males we saw have successfully mated and produced offspring. Others who would like to help in revisiting the robins, please get in touch with Mary in first instance maryt@actrix.co.nz

Additional observations from the trip include; harrier, kaka, rosella, rifleman, bellbird, grey warbler, brown creeper, fantail, tomtit, silvereye, blackbird, song thrush, starling, dunnock, chaffinch, greenfinch, redpoll, goldfinch and one cheeky shining cuckoo who called but never showed itself.



photo Craig McKenzie

Overall it was quite a success and we are eager to see what information more surveys on Mopanui can bring. **Abbi Virens**

Seabird Watch Field Trip

An enthusiastic group of Birds NZ, and Forest & Bird members, friends and neighbours met Graeme Loh above the St Clair cliffs on Saturday 12 November at 8pm for an exciting trip to the fairy prion and sooty shearwater nesting sites. It was a very calm evening under the spell of the supermoon, and while it was still light we walked along the cliffs to a viewing point where we could look south east to see the Tunnel Beach peninsula, and north west to view the cliff ledges containing some of the nesting boxes Graeme has placed there for fairy prions. From that safe vantage point it was clear what a steep drop it is to descend by rope to the nest sites, and how narrow the ledges are on which Graeme and his volunteers carry out their monitoring. No access for predators there!

We then headed back along the cliffs to look down on the predator-proof fence area that prevents stoats and rats from preying on other fairy prion nests on the cliffs, and sooty shearwater nests on the steep grassy slope



above. Inside the fence we sat among the loudspeakers that transmit seabird calls each night to attract prion and shearwater, while hoping to catch a glimpse of returning birds after dark. The bright moon appeared frequently among scudding clouds, showing us all off to any returning bird, and the calm sea may also have encouraged birds to stay out for longer, so we didn't glimpse any of these elusive creatures this time, although we think we heard a couple. It was a wonderful way to spend an evening. Graeme was an excellent host - bringing visual aids to enhance his talk, guiding us carefully around any potentially treacherous areas, and enthusing us with his knowledge of and care for these lovely little birds which are relatively rare on the mainland. It was an excellent evening.

Sue Galloway

Ornithological snippets

Francesca Cunninghame heard a **shining cuckoo** on the evening of the 17th October from Otakou towards the end of the Otago Peninsula. She also reports that her father Bob heard the first one at Signal Hill on 18th October, which this is later than in previous years.

Nicholas Allen (via Ebird) recorded 120 **chaffinch**, 80 **rifleman**, 15 **NZ robin**, 30 **brown creeper**, 10 **yellowhead (mohua)** and a single **yellow-crowned parakeet** on part 1 of the Routeburn Track, Mount Aspiring.

Graeme Loh reported the following: **Reef heron** on Cosgrove Island 19 Oct 2016. The first I have seen for ages. **Mohua** at three locations on the East Rowallan Burn above Otways clearing. Plenty of **robins** there. 23 October. 20 **black-fronted terns** feeding above pasture at Papatotara, near Tuatapere, none seen at the Waiau River mouth 23 October 2016. Whitebaiters were crowding at the Waiau River mouth 23 October 2016. 20 **Red-billed gulls** and 35 **white-fronted terns** were also feeding along with one **royal spoonbill**. What were the birds like during the pre-human whitebait runs? Any whakatoaki? And with the 35 knot southerly sunny day 9 Nov several **sooty shearwaters** were coming into the harbour channel down to Wellers Rock. Also from the Vivienne J 13 Nov. 7 **Cape pigeons** feeding off a floating **red-billed gull** carcass in the harbour channel off Taylor Point.

And under the heading **Spring is for Scrapping** : **Black stilt** attacked by two **spur-winged plover** pair as it flew downstream Ahuriri River above chain Hills. 17 Sept. Two **variable oystercatchers** very vigorously attacking **white-faced heron**, south side of Tautuku Peninsula 18 Oct. Female **falcon** with prion in claws at Prion fence St Clair, 31 Oct. Male **falcon** harassing hawk above Isadore Rd St Clair golf course 5 Nov. **Black-backed gull** persistently harassing a sooty shearwater along a feeding tide line 5 km east of Taiaroa Head. 30 Oct 16. Skua behaviour or just generally cranky?

Any observations to richard@pconnect.co.nz, please compiled by **Richard Schofield**

A birdwatching report in Moeraki on 18/11/2016 Lei Zhu

Yesterday was sunny but windy – it was a good weather for birdwatching. I and Yue decided to made our second visit to Moeraki. Moeraki is located ca. 70km north of Dunedin, and it is a well-known hotspot for watching penguins and other seabirds. We really enjoyed our first visit last month so we were happy to go there again.

On our way there we stopped at Shag Point and spent half an hour there watching the countless Red-billed gulls. Most of them were incubating in their nests while few individuals were flying against the strong wind. On the cliff, I managed to see a few White-fronted terns gliding just 10 metres away – it was a perfect distance for watching and photographing! There is a colony of New Zealand fur seals in this area. A number of fur seals, including some puppies, were enjoying the sunshine on the rocks beneath the cliff. Before leaving this lovely place we saw a Spotted shag and four Otago shags flying by. We also attempted to find other species of terns such as Black-fronted terns or Caspian terns, however, we failed...

After watching a beautiful Swamp harrier and a lot of active Skylarks on the way, we arrived in the carpark of the Katiki Point Lighthouse, Moeraki at around 4.30pm. The garden in front of the lighthouse (next to the carpark) was full of passerines: a group of gorgeous Redpolls, along with a few European goldfinches, Chaffinches, Starlings and a Dunnock, were foraging on the lawn within and outside the garden. After doing some photographing we continued the short trail down to the penguins place. Along the path, a couple of Song thrushes were playing with two juveniles. We soon got to the viewpoint for the penguins and immediately spotted our first Yellow-eyed penguin. It was peacefully lying on the ground in front of us – the distance was just five metres! We then searched the slope and found two more Yellow-eyed penguins and a lonely Variable oystercatcher moving slowly on the beach. Penguins were Yue's favourite birds (actually she has a lot of favourite birds...) so we spent quite a while watching them. Further on we moved to the end of this peninsula along a short trail. Last time a Yellowhammer was seen here by Yue but nothing was found on the grassland today. The tip of the peninsula is an excellent place for watching seabirds. We found some Black-backed gulls and Red-billed gulls nesting on the grassland or on the rocks along the slope. NZ

fur seals were also sleeping in this area, so we had to keep distance from both bird nests and fur seals... Unfortunately, I still managed to find that a few foreign tourists got very close to the nests of Black-backed gulls, which obviously disturbed their incubations. Given this, I personally suggest that it might be helpful if some signage could be put up here in order to caution visitors not to get too close to the nests. We tried to search the sea for some petrels or albatrosses, however, we only had brief views of three sooty shearwaters and one northern giant petrel in a distance.

On our way back to the viewpoint of Yellow-eyed penguins, we found another couple of penguins and a few Otago shags flying over our heads. At the viewpoint, the three penguins were still staying at the same place where we saw them on arrival. On the rocky shores beneath the cliff near the viewpoint, there were 14 Spotted shags with at least eight nests on the rocks. Their nest sites were unapproachable, so these smart shags did not worry about curious tourists and photographers... After the wonderful birdwatching in the wind with five penguins seen in total, we drove back to Dunedin city for the delicious dinner including rice noodles and dumplings!

Lei Zhu



Rhipidura (Fantail) species



I came across an article about Papua NG birds. In the list of species a Black Fantail was mentioned. The only Black Fantail that I know is a colour variation of the NZ Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*).

Looking up in a checklist of the birds of the World, I indeed came across a fantail in Papua NG with the nominate form *Rhipidura atra*. While looking into it, I counted a total of 40 *Rhipidura* species in the world. Since a number of species had subspecies, I made a count of these as well and came up with 125 subspecies.

Our NZ Fantail had a total of 15 subspecies, while the Rufous Fantail, one of the Australian Fantails , had 35 subspecies.

No doubt a headache for serious twitchers, which I am not.

Peter Schweigman

Notices and Business

Birds New Zealand (OSNZ) Subscriptions 2017

Those of you on email will have received notification that the annual membership subscriptions are due 1 January 2017 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 encourage you to pay your subs now before you forget. Remember that you can pay subs online. Thanks.

Mary Thompson, Regional

Representative.

Tomahawk Lagoon Bird Counts

This is our ongoing project to get as many counts as possible throughout the year entered on eBird so that this data will be available for analysis for years to come and contribute to knowledge of changes of bird numbers and distribution over time.

So whenever you find you have time, the weather is nice, and you want to do some birdwatching, head to Tomahawk; the large lagoon can easily be observed from the road (Tomahawk Road just past the bridge) and the smaller lagoon is reached down Oregon Street (further along on the left), then down a driveway to "Walkway". There have been only 4 recent visits recorded on eBird so get birding. There are very few ever for January to April.

How to enter your bird observations on eBird. Go to eBird NZ website <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand/>

Submit Observations. You will need to create an account (if you haven't yet registered)

Sign In

Identify the Location. Find it on a Map. Enter New Zealand (NZ) (choose from drop-down box). A map of NZ appears; Where did you bird? Enter Tomahawk Lagoon. Select Tomahawk Lagoon, Dunedin, Otago from Drop-down box

A map showing Birding Hotspots at lagoon will appear (you may need to zoom in or out to get a good view. Click on the Birding Hotspot in the middle of the large lagoon. Chosen location: Dunedin –Tomahawk Lagoon [OR Click on Birding hotspot in middle of smaller lagoon;\Chosen location Upper Tomahawk Lagoon] {For subsequent submissions you will

find Dunedin Tomahawk Lagoon in the drop down box in your Choose from Your Locations} Click Continue

Complete Date and Effort

(usually stationary count for a set amount of time for a total count of all waterbirds). Put Birds NZ survey in the comments box. Click Continue

Complete checklists with numbers of all the species you saw. You are asked, "Are you submitting a complete checklist of all the birds you were able to identify? Click Yes (or No if there were a lot of ducks miles away or you didn't count everything). Click Submit. Make any corrections or additional information as prompted)

Mary Thompson

eBird Otago

In the latest edition of the eBird news they carried this article on eBird Mobile and I thought it worth bring it to everyone attention. If you want any support with eBird please get in touch.

Getting Started with eBird Mobile

Want to keep track of your sightings on eBird, but don't have the time to enter them on the computer after birding? No worries—eBird Mobile makes it easy to record the birds you see in the field, and seamlessly link these observations with eBird—a global online database of bird records used by hundreds of thousands of birders around the world. This free resource makes it easy to keep track of what you see, while making your data openly available for scientific research, education, and conservation.

eBird Mobile is the only app that passes information directly from iOS and Android devices to your eBird account on the web. It should be easy to use (we think so!), but we've authored this comprehensive guide that should help with any questions. The app is available for free on both the Google Play and App Stores.

Tweeting gets the word out about birds via Twitter

If you have had any interesting bird encounters, please remember to email Helen Taylor as soon as possible at helen.taylor@otago.ac.nz. Helen is on the council and is also running the Birds NZ twitter feed. She can take your news and tweet it out to all our followers.

Birds NZ would like to be able to tweet out interesting bird sightings to illustrate the knowledge and expertise within the society, and to encourage our followers to get out there with a pair of binos or a scope and track down some exciting species.

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 November 23 Nic Rawlence and Martyn Kennedy.
"Identification of the Otago Shag".

Please bring some festive food for an end-of-year supper. (Possibly use an appropriate bright colour.)



Sun November 27th Summer Wader Count. High tide 15.27 at 2m.
Contact Peter Schweigman
<peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz>

Sun January 29th Sinclair Wetland Summer Survey. Carpool leaving Dunedin at 8.30am. To join the team, organize transport, and for more information contact Mary Thompson 464 0787, maryt@actrix.co.nz

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Christmas & New Year are exhausting enough without having to produce a newsletter, so please don't send the editor or Mary anything until mid January. Unless you are offering to give a talk next year.