



Studying NEW ZEALAND'S BIRDS

OSNZ®

**NELSON REGION NEWSLETTER
SEPTEMBER 2010**

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Spring has officially arrived, and those with an interest in potatoes would have celebrated Spud Monday with a planting or two. Thank you to all who have supported and contributed to our local newsletter. Don's email address is now correct, with my apologies! This will be a bumper spring edition with several worthwhile new projects described. Gail D. Quayle.

SHOW AND TELL

Our Speaker for September, Ron Moorhouse gave a great talk to 15 members, on recent conservation of kakapo, with photos and graphs, covering feeding issues to genetic diversity. Artificial insemination may play an important role. The kakapo population at the moment stands at 122, from an all time low of 51 in 1995.

BIRDS SCENE

Unusual, interesting, new records, and, dismal or cheerful observations from our members.

Nelson Haven wetland area may be able to report a first with the possible breeding of a pair of **black-fronted dotterel**. First reported by Peter Field on 30 June, they were spotted regularly thereafter, by Peter, Don and Willie, and both birds were seen foraging and preening on 10 Sept by Gail.

The rather elusive **dabchick** was last seen on 31 July by Peter F.

Weka watch

Weka sightings are being frequently mentioned. (See Nelson newsletter March 2010). On 4 Sept David and Julia saw one run across the road near Kikiwa. Willie heard weka most nights while farm sitting on the west bank of the Matakitaiki recently, and in the past 15 months, out of 18 trips through Murchison and Shenandoah. I've seen single roadside weka on 6 occasions from Dough Boy Creek to Pea Soup Creek, one as a road fatality.

Also, Ken George reports a cheeky weka entering a café at Havelock, from the back entrance. It steals food scraps, and evidently its favourite is the pastry from sausage rolls! Send your sightings to Pete, pgaze@doc.govt.nz

Willie and the wrybills

Willie keeps a good watch on the birds around Bells Island, and in May, out on the shell banks counted 50 wrybills, including the regular winter visiting female dubbed GM (grandmother) banded in the Upper Tasman in Sept 1998. The numbers swelled to 76 on 14 Aug. and by now most would have headed south. Counts in previous years have been higher.

RECOVERY DISCOVERIES

Recent sightings and recoveries of bands, tags and flags.

A **white fronted tern** was involved in an aircraft strike at Wellington Airport in July/August 2010. It was banded by George Wilkinson and Jenny Hawkins on 22 December 1981 as a chick in the Nelson Boulder Bank colony. George reports another recovery from the same batch of birds, (banded with a metal and yellow plastic band) from New South Wales Australia.

On 1 Sept David and Julia Melville saw a female **bar-tailed godwit** at Bells Island Shellbank, with a GREEN flag on the right tibia – the flag was engraved 'HC'. It was banded as a 2+ female 19/09/2009, at Geoff Skinner Reserve, Wellington Point, Queensland, with no sightings since the original banding.

OUT AND ABOUT

Local **waders** will have to be alert if they want to stay out of OSNZ netting and banding exercises. **David Melville, Rob Schuckard** et al will be setting up in spots around our coastline, so if you want a hands on experience with these birds contact David or Rob, - they may be coming to an area near you.

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If **bush birds** are your thing, contact **Pauline Samways** if you would like to be part of the 5 minute bird counts on Flora Track. The November dates are, Tuesday 2, Monday 15, and Thursday 25. These dates can be negotiated slightly. It usually takes most of the day. We meet at the car park at 9am, stop at 20 stations for 5 mins counting on the way in, and repeat on the way out. psamways@clear.net.nz Ph 03 5287257

UP AND COMING PROJECTS Fernbird Translocation

From Peter Gaze. In 2008 David Medway published a short note on the first record of South Island fernbird as described by Forster on one of Cook's visits to Long Island. This island in Queen Charlotte Sound has been free of rats since 1997 and a range of species have been re-introduced. These include little spotted kiwi, saddleback, parakeet and tuatara. It may be a good idea to bring fernbird back to the island, in particular, that swampy low-lying promontory on the western side where they were first seen. Brian Bell first alerted me to this possibility and I have since confirmed that a ready supply of these birds is available and that the translocation should be technically feasible.

I am putting this idea forward as a project Nelson and Marlborough branches of the society might like to run with. Be warned - the approval process and the planning can be more time consuming than the hands on aspects - but I can provide guidance with this. The next step would be for a few committed individuals to lead the project. Those who are keen to take a leading role should contact Peter at (wk) 5463161 or pgaze@doc.govt.nz

Observations at black-fronted tern colonies

From Peter Gaze. Many readers will be aware of attempts by the Department of Conservation to control predators at black-fronted tern colonies on the Wairau. We do know that some of the most significant damage occurs during the day by harriers and black-backed gulls and this year measures are in place to reduce their impact over a 12 km stretch of river. It will be very important to know whether these measures make much of a difference by determining what predators (if any) continue to devastate these colonies. DNA testing of predator saliva on egg shell is useful but only if there are any egg fragments left in the nest. Video cameras set at the nest provide excellent confirmation of what has happened but with only a few cameras available it is all too easy to miss the action. Even when we get good footage its impossible to determine the extent of that predator's activity.

One answer to this dilemma would be to supplement this surveillance technology with some basic observations and just sit and watch the colony. This hasn't been done yet because it seems so chancey for the observer to be at the right colony at the right time. It may not be that chancey though because both harriers and gulls will spend a lot of time at a colony prior to doing the damage - just the presence of these species would be informative. If this idea appeals and you have some time during October and November please contact pgaze@doc.govt.nz or phone (wk)5463161.

Adele and the robins

Birdsong Trust has asked OSNZ to help them monitor the success of their robin translocation to Adele Island. At this stage 27 October has been set aside for a day's monitoring. Four lucky members will have transport arranged to and from the island., from Kaiteriteri at 9am and returned there at 4pm. If you have an interest in this one please contact Peter, pgaze@doc.govt.nz or phone (wk) 5463161.

MOTUEKA GODWIT FEST

The telescopes arrived on time, the people arrived on time, high tide had arrived but started to leave again, the rain arrived just long enough after the people had squinted through telescopes and the children their plastic binoculars. May be a few godwit had arrived, maybe not. The people left, happy to have been part of this event. The displays, talks and activities at the Motueka Memorial Hall were a great success. Thanks to the godwit team, especially Pauline.

FROM GOLDEN BAY

Ken George

If you Nelson-siders are looking for something to do on a weekend- there has long been lively (and noisy) **New Zealand Falcons** in Pohara in Golden Bay. They can be readily seen (and heard) on a daily basis all year round in the area. They roost in the tall trees on the big rock bluffs surrounding the stretch of coastal road running past the Pohara Hall/Tennis Court and Bowling Club. If you sit down and wait either on the beach there or the grass verge, sooner or later you'll see one, two or even more. The Tarakohe Quarry is just around the corner further to the east (the old Golden Bay Cement Works) and on a recent morning the workers were using explosives in the quarry. After one particularly loud bang I counted seven falcons in the air above the trees - obviously agitated by the bang. The birds themselves are very noisy - in fact I've often wondered, given that they're hunting birds, how they manage to actually sneak up on any prey given the amount of advance warning they give of their presence. There are also hundreds of passerines, mostly finches, in the area and hills above Pohara. I assume they're the staple diet for the falcons. And while you're waiting for the falcons to turn up you can look seaward- there's always a local population of non-migrating godwits, terns, shearwaters, shags, gulls and the occasional reef heron. And after a spell of birdwatching - you're only a couple of hundred meters walk along the beach from an excellent local cafe (The Blue Penguin) for a coffee, a nice lunch or a cold beer....."

THE ROVING BIRDWATCHER

On Stilts

I didn't get to see the local black stilt (with a tuft or two of white) earlier in the year and, an individual was recorded on the Motueka Sandspit during the June wader count but daughter Kelly, now living in Motueka, (a previous junior OSNZ member and shortly to produce her own junior), regularly saw it in the estuary during summer. It was her keen eyes that spotted a resident black stilt near Ashburton in March a year earlier when living in that district. So I started travelling along the inland Maronan Road from Ashburton to Geraldine with a stop alongside a deer paddock just east of Mayfield intersection, to peer through the fence into a muddy corner. On 3 April 09 along with several spur winged plovers and a white faced heron, were two stilt. One black with coloured bands on both legs and the other a pied, with white hind neck. Using Ray Pierce's classification, between node A and B. They were there again on 31 July 09.

On 3 September I saw two stilts again. One, a black stilt, this time I couldn't detect any bands, the other with a black hind neck, and closer to a hybrid plumage. I understand a black stilt had been seen in other localities near by, during that summer/autumn. How many black stilts did Ashburton have? On 18 September the area had dried up and no birds were present, was dry again on 23 October, but on 6 November puddles were back and two pied stilt were there. No birds at all were there on 10 and 21 January, 26 August, and 5 September this year even though the area was damp and puggish.

There's not much chance of seeing black stilts as you hurtle past Twizel but one or two might be seen on the river bed below the Ahuriri Bridge, near Omarama, if you are driving slow enough. Stop off in Twizel for a few days though, and other than paying your tourist dollar to the captive rearing unit, black stilt and or hybrids can usually be seen in most months, in the tarns before Lake Poaka or in the shallows of Ohau River, down below Ohau C powerstation. Look for birds with an aerial. While foraging it sticks out behind them, even trailing in the water but it doesn't appear to be a hindrance.

Outside of the McKenzie country, keep a look out for roving black stilts, often in the undesirable company of a pied or hybrid stilt. I'll be watching the Motueka Estuary this coming summer, probably while on baby sitting duties.

GDQ

LOOKING AHEAD

In September and October some birds will still be settling into summer haunts. Listen for the first shining cuckoo, or long tailed cuckoo if you're lucky enough to be in the right area. Spotted shags will leave our waters in great droves, vacate Fifeshire Rock and Haulashore Mole. Do they go east or west? A few may stay to hold the fort over summer. White fronted terns will be noticeable around the coast, and caspians. Gannets will mostly be over in Golden Bay. Send me your stories. GDQ

PROGRAMME 2010

We meet usually on the 1st Monday of the month, at 7.15 pm in the "Solander Building", Akersten Street, Port Nelson (opposite the red Cruising Club building). Anyone interested is welcome! Contact Stuart Wood 03-544 3932 or Don Cooper 03-544 8109.

Monday 4 October	Indoor meeting Speaker to be confirmed
Wednesday 27 October	Adele and the robins
Monday 1 November	Indoor meeting Speaker to be confirmed
Saturday and Sunday 6 and 7 November	Wader count Add 8 and 9 Nov for Farewell Spit
Tuesday 2, Monday 15 and Thursday 25 November	Flora Track 5min bird counts

Thanks to all who contributed.

Contributions for the October newsletter: please email or phone me by 8 October. Gail 03 5450456 stagefrightmusic@paradise.net.nz