



# TARA

Newsletter of Auckland Region OSNZ

January 2008



*The 2007 Auckland OSNZ Student Prize in Ornithology was awarded by Mel Galbraith at the December meeting. Pictured is winner Annette Evans (left) with Mel Galbraith and runners-up, Audrey Setiawan and Ellery McNaughton (right). (Photo: Suzi Phillips).*

## Student prize in ornithology for 2007

The Auckland Student Prize in Ornithology for 2007 was awarded to secondary school student, Annette Evans from Marist College in Mt Albert.

The prize, intended to encourage student interest in ornithology, is organised and sponsored by the Auckland branch of the Ornithological Society.

Two other biology students, Ellery McNaughton from Birkenhead College and Audrey Setiawan from Rangitoto College, were joint runners up.

The prize winner, Annette Evans, will have a week on an ecology and bird study field course in January, run by the Miranda Naturalists Trust on the Firth of

Thames. The prize includes a year's student membership to the Ornithological Society.

The Miranda residential field course includes daily field trips and talks on coastal marine ecology, botany, ornithology, birding photography, coastal and wading birds, and practical skills such as mist-netting, processing and banding land birds, as well as taking part in cannon netting of waders for banding and research.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for Annette to get some first-hand knowledge of ornithology and meet others

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# New Regional Rep for Auckland branch

## TARA - Newsletter of the Auckland Region of OSNZ

Auckland Branch OSNZ meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm in the **Environmental Sciences Building** in the grounds of **Unitec on Carrington Road in Point Chevalier**. Enter via Gate 1 or 3 and follow signs to building 23. There is ample free parking. (Map available from Suzi). Admission by donation.

### VISITORS AND FRIENDS ALWAYS WELCOME

#### Regional Representative

Mel Galbraith, Ph 480-1958 (a/hours) or email melgar62@slingshot.co.nz  
62 Holyoake Place, Birkenhead.

#### TARA Editor:

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#### Regional Recorders :

##### **Landbirds, Waterfowl & Rails;**

Suzi Phillips, Ph 09-479-5395 or email suzi@dialogue.co.nz

##### **Waders, Herons, Spoonbill & Egrets;**

Adrian Riegen, Ph 814-9741 or Email riegen@xtra.co.nz

231 Forest Hill Rd, R.D.1, Henderson.

##### **Seabirds, Gulls, Terns & Shags;**

John Simmons, Ph 828-8642 or email johnsimmons@clear.net.nz  
4 Bamford Place, Avondale.

#### Census and Surveys

All members are invited to take part in the OSNZ Auckland branch census and surveys that take place during the year. There are always experienced regulars on these trips and they welcome new members to get involved in identifying and recording the birds. For wader and shorebird counts, the group usually meets about two hours before high tide. Contact the organiser (whose name and phone number appears alongside the survey or census date) to find out what time and where to meet. (See Activities Programme).

Auckland ecologist Mel Galbraith, is the new OSNZ regional representative for the Auckland branch. Mel replaces Suzi Phillips who has served as regional rep since taking over from David Pye in 2003. Suzi will continue to edit this newsletter and take over Mel's role as regional recorder of landbirds, waterfowl and rails which he has done since 1996. Mel is a senior lecturer in ecology at Unitec's School of Natural Sciences where he teaches ecology, restoration ecology, and ornithology. Last year he was also appointed to the Council of the NZ Ecological Society.

Mel has a wealth of birding experience and is well-known for his contributions to ecological restoration around Auckland, especially on Tiritiri Matangi Island, and now as a trustee on Motu Kaikoura and a member of the Trust's management board.



*Mel Galbraith*

## Student Prize - from page 1

who have an enthusiasm for bird study and research," says Auckland OSNZ spokesperson, Suzi Phillips.

"Annette's entry showed that she already has a strong interest in bird study and the potential to take this interest more seriously in future studies."

"We hope that she will also consider a career in ornithology, perhaps as the focus of university studies in ecology or conservation," she says. "And we look forward to all the place-getters taking part in our meetings, surveys and field trips."

The two runners up for the student prize, Ellery McNaughton and Audrey Setiawan, each won a year's student membership to OSNZ - also sponsored by the Auckland branch.

# Seabird transfer first for Motuora



The first ever seabird transfer between Hauraki Gulf islands was successfully completed in November, in a bid to establish a colony of Common Diving Petrels on Motuora Island, north of Auckland. Twenty four petrel chicks were moved from Little Wooded Island beside Tiritiri Matangi Island to Motuora. They were placed in specially built burrows on Motuora where they were hand fed for several weeks until they fledged.

The transfer was led by the Motuora Restoration Society in partnership with the Department of Conservation. The project is a key part of restoring the ecology of this 80-hectare public conservation island. Motuora Restoration Society chairperson Ray Lowe, said the seabird transfer was the culmination of years of hard work by volunteers and a huge achievement for the community conservation group.

"It's the first native species transfer the Society has undertaken and we're very proud of it. My appreciation and thanks goes to the dedicated volunteers that made it happen," he said.

The Diving Petrel chicks, mostly around six-weeks-old, were fed daily on a diet of pureed tinned sardines until they could leave the burrows to fish for themselves. When the birds are ready to breed in two or three years-time, they will return to the island to dig their own burrows.

DOC island programme manager Richard Griffiths, said returning Diving Petrels to the island was a key step in restoring the island ecosystem.

"Burrowing seabirds are like the engine room of the ecosystem – they provide nutrients from guano and food scraps etc that fuels plants and insects, which in-turn feed reptiles and other birds."

Motuora would have had extensive seabird colonies in the past with a number of shearwater and petrel species breeding in burrows throughout the island, said Mr Griffiths. Only the Grey-faced Petrel still breeds on the island.

The transfer is the start of a three-year programme to bring about 250 Diving Petrels to Motuora and establish a self-sustaining colony there. It is part of a restoration plan that has seen most of the island re-planted with native trees, and introductions of North Island Brown Kiwi, Shore Skink and Duvaucel's Gecko. Other seabirds and native species are also planned to be re-introduced in future. .

Common Diving Petrels (*Pelecanoides urinatrix urinatrix*) are non-migratory and remain in seas near breeding colonies throughout the year. They feed on krill and copepods, dive frequently and swim after prey underwater using their wings for propulsion.

It is estimated that more than one million pairs of these diving petrel breed on New Zealand islands from the Three Kings to Campbell Island. The species is not threatened, but like many seabirds has suffered declines because of human disturbance.

The Diving Petrel was selected for the first seabird transfer to Motuora because the biology of the species is well known and transfer techniques have already been trailed on Mana Island, near Wellington.

Seabird colonies on Motuora in the past would have included sooty shearwater, flesh-footed shearwater, fluttering shearwater, diving petrel, grey-faced petrel, white-faced storm petrel and perhaps also Cook's petrel and Pycroft's petrel. (Liz Maire, DOC)

## Black-billed Gulls at Manukapua



(Photo: Suzi Phillips)

### Highlights from Kaipara

For the Kaipara Wader Census at Mataia on Saturday (24/11/2007), we reached the viewing point and got a satisfactory count before the rain.

The birds at the roost among the mangroves were: Godwit 280, SIPO 135, Caspian Tern 13, Black-back Gull 12 (probably nesting), White-faced Heron 40. At sea were: Black Swan 200 (approx. as some were hidden by mangroves). We looked south from the vantage point over Araparera which was devoid of birds.

I followed Shane Hood along the farm road, then rode down the steep track on the back of his quad bike to reach the look out over Mataia. Put up a couple of Brown Quail on route and saw the Fernbird habitat. **Michael Taylor.**

At the Kaipara Wader Census on Saturday Gwenda Pulham and John Simmons went to a site to the east of Manukapua (Big Sand Island) and counted among others, five tern species. They were ; 1x Common Tern (*longipennis*), 1x Fairy Tern, 4x Caspian Tern, 8x White-fronted Tern and 45x Little Tern.

When the counters arrived back at Tapora Hall to hand in census sheets, we compared notes and found that the Common Tern had been at their site from 10.55 to 11.10 then left and returned at 12.25. Gwen saw it well both on the ground and in flight and was able to positively identify it.

Meanwhile Martin Sanders and I had been counting at the southern end of Big Sand Island and saw an unusual tern bigger than a little and smaller than a white-fronted. It had a very bold black carpal bar plus other diagnostics carefully noted by Gwen and matching my notes. It arrived at mid-day and stayed for 10 minutes or so - surely the same bird you would think. There's a history of movement between these sites on a big tide. **Phil Hammond via Birding NZ.**

Three of 12 Black-billed Gulls (above), seen at Manukapua in October were banded with R-RM, making them 7+ years old.

The group of Black-billed Gulls was seen by Judy Bendall and Suzi Phillips at the southern end of the sand island off the tip of Okahukura Peninsula on the Kaipara Harbour.

Tony Habraken did a check on his records and found that the gulls were part of a small group banded in 2000. He says there were only 26 banded in that year with that co-hort and 13 (half of them) have been seen and individually identified at one time or another away from the Kaipara.

"I assume these three are still hanging about in their natal harbour and it's not impossible for them to be ones I've seen locally down here (in the Manukau)."

"In fact today (Oct 26), I had one down in the Manukau - one that I have seen here before," says Tony. "If you get a good close-up of a band or two, that would be rewarding, and could prove really useful."

### Mongolian Dotterel sighted

A Mongolian Dotterel was the highlight of a visit to Big Sand Island (Manukapua), at the end of October last year by Phil Hammond, Gwenda Pulham, Tony Moore, Eliane Lagnaz, Will and Emlyn Perry, John Woods, and Bill Abbott.

Their visit was timed for a big Kaipara tide. They saw; 1x Terek Sandpiper, 1x Mongolian Dotterel, 18x Red-necked Stints, 46 x Golden Plover, 150 x Turnstone, and 9x Little Terns. Also seen but not counted were; Banded Dotterels, (including a family of 2 adults and 2 juveniles), New Zealand Dotterels, Godwits, Knots, SIPO, VOC, Caspian and White-fronted Terns and gulls.

Flags seen included 2x Yalu Jiang Godwits, 4x Victoria Godwits, 2x Chongming Dao Knots, and 12x Victoria knots. A few individually colour banded Knots were also recorded and reported to Adrian Riegen. (Report from Phil Hammond via Birding NZ).

# Bellbirds noted in Shakespear Survey



Male Bellbird. (Photo: Suzi Phillips)

The planned survey of Shakespear Regional Park on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula took place on Sunday 28th October, after it was postponed by two weeks to escape inclement weather.

A group of Auckland OSNZ members drove north for an 8 am meeting at the Waterfall Gully entrance of the park. From here we set out singly or in pairs to tally the birds in six allotted areas by the 'free-range' method (also employed in our surveys of Cornwall Park which is a similar size).

As expected, Pukeko was the most numerous species. The score of 533 includes young birds, but could easily be an under estimate.

Our list shows that the park harbours native and in-

roduced birds in healthy numbers with 40 species (41 if a solitary turkey is added). We were unsure whether the tally of four harriers represents a single pair whose individual birds were seen by different teams.

The Brown Teal which had recently been on the lake was absent. We missed Brown Quail, but recorded Bellbird and Shining Cuckoo.

**Species list**, with numbers: Blackbird 63, Black Swan 1, Bellbird 3, Californian Quail 12, Caspian Tern 2, Chaffinch 23, Fantail 5, Goldfinch 105, Greenfinch 19, Grey Warbler 42, Black-backed Gull 50, Red-billed Gull 94, Harrier 4, House Sparrow 35, Kingfisher 16, Magpie 22, Mallard 3, Myna 57,

NZ Dotterel 1, NZ Pigeon 13, Paradise Shelduck 15, Peacock 11, Pheasant 9, Pied Stilt 20, Pukeko 533, Rosella 69, Shining Cuckoo 1, Silvereye 34, Skylark 19, Song Thrush 44, Little Shag 6, Pied Shag 2, Shoveller 1, Spur-winged Plover 34, Starling 50, Tui 59, Variable Oystercatcher 16, Welcome Swallow 48, White-faced Heron 4, Yellowhammer 28 Total = 1573 (40 species)

**Participants:** Kathy Barrow, Gwen Pulham, Gillian Eller, Richard Baker, Chris & Peter Thompson, Geoff Arnold, Stuart Chambers, Richard Chambers, **Michael Taylor (organiser).**



Pukeko on eggs at Shakespear Regional Park. (Photo: Michael Taylor).

# Tui and Whitehead most numerous in Tiri survey

The annual spring bird count on Tiritiri Matangi Island, now in its 22nd year, involved 13 Auckland OSNZ members and friends in November.

The transect markers were put out on the Friday afternoon (November 23) by Sandra Morris and Sharen and Mike Graham, who enjoyed this preview of the island in perfect weather that continued throughout the weekend.

The island was looking great - still quite moist with several coastal Pohutakawa in full flower. These flowering beacons attracted a constant stream of birds that moved in and out in a high speed game of feed and chase.

Our records show that Tui and Whitehead were easily the most common and widespread birds, followed by Bellbird and Kakariki.

Saddlebacks were in good numbers along with Stitchbirds and Brown Quail - the latter generally paired-up for breeding and more widespread than we have observed in a long time. Several of the bigger male birds have been colour banded and it will be interesting to see if any eventually turn up on the Gulf Harbour golf course where they have already established themselves.

Fern Bird records were obtained from several transects, indicative of another species enjoying the environment of the island.

We did record Grey Warbler on a few occasions, but are quite convinced that competition from big numbers of so many other species limits their presence. They - and Shining Cuckoo - are far more abundant on neighbouring islands such as Motuora and Motutapu where we operate similar surveys without the influence of translocated bird species.

We will be writing up the results of a full 20 years in the New Year, but as a preview can report our data clearly suggests some species now seem to have peaked after a period of steady increase.

Overall it looks like this may be a general trend that is difficult to explain purely on the basis of the raw data.

Our surveys cannot, for example, quantify the impact of the bigger Morepork population, but recovery of leg bands in nest sites suggest this has now become a significant control on the bird population.

This is totally understandable given there are no rodents and the remnant invertebrate population is subject to immense pressure from the big bird numbers.

Morepork around home in Titirangi largely feed on



*A Whitehead on bracken fern near the Ridge Track on Tiri. (Photo: Suzi Phillips).*

wetas, stick insects and moths which do not seem to be in any great abundance on the island.

This Morepork presence and activity is a good thing on Tiritiri, because other birds will adapt to their threat which will enhance their survival chances when relocated into places such as Ark in the Park where there are many more Morepork.

Tiritiri Matangi Island will remain a dynamically changing environment that will be of much local and international interest for many years into the future.

Our on-going bi-annual bird survey work is already regarded as providing valuable data about island restoration projects. The data will become increasingly valuable with time for Tiritiri and is already recognised as an important reference for other islands such as Motutapu that aspire to follow the Tiritiri model in their own way. **Mike Graham**

## Dabchick on salt water

I got a surprise when I went to the salt water inlet between Papakanui Spit and the top of the South Kaipara peninsula (Waionui Lagoon) in October to see a NZ Dabchick in the channel.

I have seen other small grebes in bays or sheltered sea overseas, but I can't remember having seen a NZ Dabchick in salt water before. It was definitely a dabchick not any other grebe species - I got close enough with my scope to see all details. It was an adult in breeding plumage.

It was there when I arrived and I watched it for half an hour. It was still there when I left at 5pm. During that time it dived at least half a dozen times, (mostly when I wasn't close, so it wasn't just getting away from me), but I could not see what it was eating. I would not usually report a dabchick, but did for this one because it was in salt water. **Phil Hammond.**

# Winter visits from Wandering Albatross

August 2007 was an interesting month for Beach Patrollers. John Simmons and his team picked up the first of three Wandering Albatross on the monthly Muriwai Beach Patrol.

A week later another wrecked Wandering Albatross was discovered on Whatipu Beach by a group including Suzi Phillips. (See Tara of September 2007).

This bird was a brown phased juvenile bird and to the delight of everyone was carrying a metal British Trust for Ornithology numbered band.

The band details were passed on to the NZ Banding Office and Auckland Museum, and from there to the BTO's Banding Office who are having trouble getting the details from the bander.

Sharen and Mike Graham recovered the bird with the help of the ARC Ranger and it now takes up most of the space in the Auckland Museum freezer. It's wingspan was measured as 3.03m. This BTO band al-

most certainly means the bird originated from the South American deep south - probably somewhere around South Georgia.

The third part of this albatross report originated from a front page picture of a big and beautiful white bird in our local newspaper the Western Leader.

The bird was picked up in a weak state off a west coast beach and taken into Bird Rescue where it was wrongly identified as a "Royal" Albatross, but later confirmed (by CJR Robertson) as a Wandering Albatross. The bird was well looked after by Bird Rescue and was successfully released back into the wild.

It would be interesting to look at weather records for the southern oceans last July and August to see if anything extraordinary happened that might have caused these albatross to arrive in a distressed state in Auckland waters. Mike & Sharen Graham

## Birding around Auckland - Tahuna Torea

**Tahuna Torea is a small coastal wetland reserve beside the Tamaki River and accessed from the end of West Tamaki Drive. In this report, Dr Michael Taylor outlines some of the highlights of bird watching at the reserve.**

Tahuna Torea retains a good variety of birds and provides excellent viewing for visitors. It has the added feature of the resident population of ducks and pukekos that are much appreciated by families who bring young children to the reserve.

A nesting colony of the Little Shag (*Phalacrocorax brevirostris*) has been established in the willow tree growing in the main pond adjacent to the West Tamaki Drive carpark.

There were six nests in November with young birds fledged from two of these and nestlings being fed in others. This native species differs from the Australian Little Shag by occurring in two different plumage forms; either white-fronted or black except for a white-throat (which is the predominant phase in New Zealand).

It is another example, (akin to the Pied Stilt and the Black Stilt), where this country's bird has 'all-black' tendencies. I am studying this aspect by recording and photographing the birds and their young at the nests.

A pair of Paradise Shelducks has nested in the reserve and raised young in 2007. On November 11, two almost fledged birds were feeding in the duck pond watched over by the adult female shelduck. The young of Pukekos and Mallard/Grey Ducks were also present at that time.

Pied Stilts (2 or 3 pairs) have nested in the salicornia beds near the fish-trap pools. I will be making further visits to follow the progress of these birds.

Sightings of two uncommon and retiring species were reported (Robin Child to MJT) during October. One was a brief view of a small bird believed to be a Marsh Crake, and the other was a sighting of a Banded Rail - a bird which has been observed before at Tahuna Torea but is seldom seen. Such finds should be an indication that the maintenance of the reserve and particularly the measures to control predators of ground-dwelling birds are having a positive effect.

The book "Tahuna Torea: tip-site to Nature Reserve" by Chris Barfoot was launched in St Heliers in December and is available at most book sellers.

# New spring survey for Motutapu Island

The prospect of future introductions of birds to Motutapu Island has prompted the first of what is hoped to be annual surveys on the island.

In September last year, a group of OSNZ members led by Mike and Sharen Graham, undertook the bird population survey at the request of the Motutapu Island Trust.

Motutapu Island has an active supporters' Trust with an obvious enthusiasm and energy. They have already established a plant nursery and significant areas of tree planting, as well as ongoing weed and pest control activities and new walking tracks. Over the years there have been various Management Plans for the island produced by DOC. More recently a strong partnership between DOC and the Motutapu Restoration Trust has developed and these plans are being updated.

Among many influences on the planning is the likelihood of a DOC instigated project

of total pest eradication on Rangitoto and Motutapu Islands. Such an exercise has the potential to allow introductions or re-introductions of native flora and fauna - including birds.

Motutapu Restoration Trust trustee Bridget Winstone approached Auckland OSNZ to ask for assistance in establishing regular bird surveys.

Mike and Sharen Graham agreed to organise the surveys and were joined by Emma Stanyard and partner Kevin Pearson, Geoff Arnold and Paul Asquith for the week-end of 29-30 September 2007.

Motutapu has some wonderful coastline and there are many areas of wetland and remnant patches of native forest, now enhanced with significant areas of planting. It was decided to focus bird counts in such localities and three well separated areas were selected for the study: Home Bay, the Education Camp Area, and the Plant Nursery Area.

The Rotary Centennial Track was added as a fourth "bush" location because of the environmental quality of the location. It is the Motutapu Island equivalent of Wattle Valley on Tiritiri and is a great achievement

and credit to all who planted the area then built the track. The survey team was organised into three pairs and did 27 different counts in 10 separate areas. The size of the island meant some transportation was required to achieve this, so a DOC vehicle was made available to help with such logistical issues.

The areas were surveyed transect style with distance sampling rules, recording everything heard or seen while slowly walking through the areas without any of the traditional distance limits.

Apart from individual transect records, an overall Check List of species was compiled with 40 different birds listed by the end. There were some obvious omissions that locals knew were present such as Shining Cuckoo, Pheasant and some of the in-shore seabirds. It is thought the total species list will be about 50 different birds.

Birds of interest included two pairs of New Zealand Dotterel on one of the coastal



*NZ Dotterel chicks like these from Motuihe Island were also present on Motutapu Island. (Photo:Emma Stanyard.)*

transects, one pair with chicks, a Pied Stilt incubating on a nest on the tide wrack - Oystercatcher style, and a Reef Heron in the area of the Education Camp. Tui were recorded, but were not common as were Kereru. The most common birds on the island would be Pukeko, Paradise Duck, House Sparrows, Goldfinch and Mynas in that order.

Grey Warbler were in full song and 2, 3 or more pairs were recorded on almost all transect counts. Motutapu is easy to reach and visit from Auckland as Fullers ferries go to Rangitoto and Home Bay on certain days every week. Details of the established count transects are being put on to Google Earth type aerial pictures and will be made available to OSNZ Auckland members if individuals want to go over during the summer to explore and count some birds.

We have agreed to repeat the survey every year at this sort of time and look forward to taking more OSNZ members next time. As additional incentive the accommodation facility at the Education Camp Lodge is vastly superior to the over-crowded Bunk House on Tiritiri. **Mike Graham** (Edited).

**Contributions welcomed for the next TARA - please send in your bird sightings, snippets, articles and photographs for use in TARA to; Suzi Phillips, Auckland OSNZ, Private Bag 1, Helensville 0840, or email to [suzi@dialogue.co.nz](mailto:suzi@dialogue.co.nz)**