

The Wrybill

**Newsletter of the Canterbury Region,
Ornithological Society of New Zealand**

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To members on e-mail:

This issue of The Wrybill will be sent by postal mail to members not having an e-mail address. If you would prefer a paper copy please ask. The newsletter will also be placed on the OSNZ website.

**What's on at OSNZ Canterbury:
January to June 2012**

Indoor Meetings

Evening Meetings take place at 7.30 pm on the last Monday of the month at the Mahaanui Area DOC office, 31 Nga Mahi Drive, off Blenheim Road, Sockburn. Plenty of parking is available.

MONDAY 27th February: David Melville, wader specialist and OSNZ Councillor, has been doing more interesting work in the Arctic and China.

MONDAY 26th March: Brief AGM and members night. Please let one of us know if you have short items to present on birding you have done recently.

MONDAY 30th April: "From The Cape to The Bluff and Beyond – Birdwatching Sites Through New Zealand." Nick Allen's eagerly awaited presentation on his sites guides.

MONDAY 28th May: John Dowding will talk about the effect of the 'Rena' catastrophe on waders in the Bay of Plenty.

MONDAY 25th June: Mike Bell on The Chathams and the bird programmes going on there – a talk long postponed from the snow of last winter.

Field Trips

SATURDAY 11th February: February wader count at Lake Ellesmere. Meet 9 am at the far end of Embankment Road. Contact Jan Tel: 322 7187 or Colin Hill Tel: 325 5891 if you are coming, so Jan can let you know of any changes due to weather. Late-comers phone Bev's mobile: 027 318 4713.

FRIDAY 9th March: 5.30 pm 'Farewell to the Godwits.' This long-running City Council organised event is very much enhanced by having us there to answer the questions of random people lining up to view

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the birds. It isn't at all like talking to large groups. Just one-to-one or two. Nice evening out. Come and try it!

FRIDAY, SATURDAY, SUNDAY, 27/28/29th April: Weekend at Twizel with Ron Nilsson, who used to work there on the Black Stilt programme. Staying at a couple of houses owned by members. More details later. Contact Ron Tel: 338-8936, ronandsue@paradise.net.nz

SATURDAY 19th May: Banks Peninsula Reserves Survey continuation. Magnet Bay Reserve is the planned target. Contact Jan.

SATURDAY 9th June: Winter Wader Count, Lake Ellesmere. Start half an hour later at 9.30 am from far end of Embankment Road. Contact details as for February above.

ADVANCE NOTICE 2/3/4 June: OSNZ Annual Conference and AGM, Bay of Plenty.

Ron Nilsson A Way with the Birds

Ron was born during WW2 and spent his earliest years in Hawkes Bay. He attended boarding school in Dannevirke. Classmates recall him leading expeditions in search of the rare peripatus. His early interest in native flora and fauna created a childhood dream to join the New Zealand Wildlife Service. With no wildlife positions available when he left school his first job was as a technical trainee at Wallaceville Animal Research Centre, near Wellington. Later Ron transferred to the Invermay Research Station in Mosgiel from where he joined the OSNZ in 1957.

Ron moved to Dunedin in 1965 and I first met him when I joined the Otago Tramping Club at about that time. He was well known in tramping circles for his strong interest in the natural world and his particular expertise with birds. At that time Ron was especially interested in the Kakapo. I was part of an expedition of 9 people who joined him on what was to be a visit to Poison Bay in Fiordland, south from Milford Sound. We spent many days at the Alpine Club hut at the Homer tunnel waiting for the weather to turn from the NW so that we could travel to the bay by fishing boat. We waited for a week. With time ticking away and university calling us back we decided to divert the trip up the Harrison Valley instead and we were duly offloaded in Harrison Cove. We were

only the second ever party to explore this valley. Navigation presented quite a challenge as there were no tracks and dense bush with tricky waterfalls to negotiate. Sadly the exploration of this valley yielded no sign of Kakapo. Little did we know at that time that the last of the Kakapo lived so close. Ron's interest in Kakapo would bring him back to this area with spectacular and profound results in the future.

Finally in 1970 Ron was able to realise his dream and joined the Wildlife Service. He initially worked in Turangi at Lake Taupo and then in Murupara, SE of Rotorua, where as a Field Officer he helped start Blue Duck studies in Urewera National Park. In 1971 he transferred to Dunedin where he was appointed to the Fauna Conservation section of the Wildlife Service. During his years in Dunedin Ron was able to work on a number of our iconic endangered species including Takahe, Black



Photo: Rob Evans
The friends a few years on. Ron and Jill at a OSNZ Field Trip at Mount Peel, October 2010

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Robin, Kakapo, Black Stilt, S.I. Saddleback and Yellow Eyed Penguin. This work took him from places as far afield as Maud and Stephens Islands in the Marlborough Sounds to the Subantarctic Islands. His expeditions included searches for lesser known species like Black Petrels, South Island Bush Wrens, Stead's Bush Wrens, Laughing Owls, White-breasted Shearwaters, Orange-Fronted Parakeets, and Great Spotted Kiwis. He was the first to search for and find South Georgian Diving Petrels on Codfish Island.

From Dunedin Ron was involved in early work on the Takahe. Takahe had been rediscovered in 1948 in a valley in the Murchison Mountains by Geoffrey Orbell. Later the Wildlife Service established that the birds were widespread over the Murchison Mountains with about 250 birds remaining. Ron participated in monitoring colour banded birds in the wild. Single eggs were taken from 2 egg clutches and transferred to the Burwood Rearing Unit near Te Anau. Ron captured Takahe for translocations to other places. Takahe can now be found on Tiritiri Matangi, Mana, Maud and Kapiti Islands.

In 1972 Brian Bell led a 3 month expedition to survey the bird life of the Auckland Islands with Ron as his second in command. This was the largest ever scientific expedition to leave New Zealand. It included 29 scientists from many disciplines. All of the islands in the Auckland Islands group were surveyed and Disappointment Island was visited for the very first time. On Adams Island, which is the second largest in the group and free of all introduced species of animals and plants, there was a first time visit to the western side of the central ridge. Observation of the western tussock slopes showed them to be occupied by a very large, previously unknown Wandering Albatross colony. Between 1972 and 1986 Ron was fortunate to have visited all of the NZ Subantarctic islands, some several times.

Ron led the first Kakapo expedition into the Esperence Valley in Fiordland in 1974 when the population was thought to be zero. Between 1974 and 1977, 18 male Kakapo were found in Fiordland but no females were located. In 1975 Ron discovered the soon to be famous Richard Henry in the Gulliver Valley. Richard Henry was to make a crucial contribution to the genetic

diversity of the Kakapo breeding programme before sadly passing away in 2010 aged over 80 years. The rediscovery of a population of about 200 birds on Stewart Island in January of 1977 made it possible to begin the program to conserve the species. Close monitoring of the population to the east of the Tin Range revealed over the next 5 years that feral cats were decimating the Kakapo population. A decision was made to move all the birds from Stewart Island to Little Barrier and Maud Islands. Later, the entire population was moved to Codfish Island and the population now numbers over 120 there and on Anchor Island. This is a triumphant outcome for the only breeding population in the world of this unique species. From a tiny population with no known females in the late 1970's there is now an increasingly viable population.

In 1965 there was a rat plague on Big South Cape Island and at the last minute some 30 South Island saddlebacks were rescued and placed on 2 small predator free islands in the Southern Muttonbird Islands group. Between 1971 and 1986 Ron led a team that surveyed many of the Titi Islands for birdlife and as a result evolved an improved management technique for S.I. Saddleback which involved catching the birds, looking after them for up to two weeks, sexing them and then translocating them in the correct sex ratio to islands that were free of predators. By the end of the project refined techniques had reduced captivity time for the birds from 2 weeks to 2 days. Eventually more than 300 birds were moved to at least six new islands. This was ground-breaking work and a first in the world for multiple island translocations.

Ron considers his greatest contribution to conservation to be all the early work done to establish Codfish Island, laterly to become known as Whenua Hou, as one of New Zealand's premiere island sanctuaries. Work began in 1972 with one of the first visits to Codfish Island since the 1930's. Ron was looking particularly for Cook's Petrels and found almost none due to the island having large, predatory populations of Weka, possums and kiore. Cook's Petrels have only 2 populations in the world. The second population on Little Barrier Island had been hammered by feral cats, so the potential of this

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southern population was very important. The 1800 hectare Codfish Island provided a potentially pristine ecosystem already supporting large populations of Kakas and Parakeets, both being good indicator species for forest health. It became critical to intervene and remove the predators. Weka are not endemic to Codfish but were introduced in the early 1900's by muttonbirders as a food source. Ron managed the logistics of the programme to remove all 3010 Weka from Codfish Island. This project involved nearly 300 volunteers over more than 5 years. Possums were removed later as were the kiore introduced by sealers in 1840. The work was intended to allow Cook's Petrels to breed unhampered. The result was a pristine haven for a notably diverse range of endemic species, most notably Kakapo in recent times..

No early ornithologists ever visited Stewart Island and early naturalists like Cockayne only recorded flora while Guthrie-Smith and Edgar Stead only visited tiny sections of the island. No lists of birds were made. Over a 4 year period from 1977 – 1980 Ron organised and led full surveys of the birdlife of Stewart Island. Remote areas were monitored and surveyed for 6 weeks each winter seeking sign of Kakapo and recording all other birdlife present. These areas had never been surveyed before nor since.

In the 1970s, nothing was known about the Black Stilt population, distribution or breeding of this endemic high country bird. Ron led a project that initially monitored the population during winter when the birds moved away from their high country rivers to feed on the lower deltas of the large lakes. About 50-60 birds were counted at the start of this project and it was learned that about 5% of the population actually migrated from the Mackenzie Country in winter. In 1980 the population crashed to around 27 adults and Black Stilts became the world's rarest wading bird. In response Ron created a team to intensively manage the population by, ironically, incubating eggs at the Twizel Maternity Hospital and translocating chicks. The team was to eventually set up the breeding centre at Twizel which included building large snow-shedding aviaries. By

1986 there were 70-80 adults in the wild population. The techniques developed to manage this species were a first in the world used for wading birds.

In 1986 Ron moved to Christchurch with the Wildlife Service which became part of DoC in 1987. He remained with DoC until 1992. During this time, much work was done on the Chatham Islands. An earlier Wildlife Service monitoring trip to the islands highlighted the fact that there were only 5 Black Robins left on Little Mangere Island. These 5 individuals were moved initially to Mangere Island and later, most were translocated to Rangitira Island off South East Island. Ron spent many trips to Rangitira working with cross-fostering of the robins over a 5 year period. The methods used here benefitted from the experiences and techniques pioneered with Black Stilt and South Island saddleback populations. The population of Black Robin has exceeded 250 members making it one of the outstanding success stories of conservation management.

Ron was involved in habitat management on Mangere Island, personally planting many thousands of *Olearia traversii* cuttings to provide a good canopy for the endangered and endemic Forbe's Parakeet. In the early 1990s he participated in a survey to try to locate the breeding areas of the Chatham Petrel and subsequent to these surveys much work has been done with great breeding success for the species.

Ron has calculated that over many trips he has spent a total of 5 years on Codfish Island and 3 years on the Chathams.

In recent years Ron has become best known for his passionate belief in the continued existence of the rare wattle bird, the South Island Kokako. The last acknowledged sighting of South Island Kokako was in 1967. Ron's interest in the species began with Wildlife Service surveys in the Catlins in 1971. In subsequent years the search was taken to NW Nelson and Stewart Island. Over the last 30 years Ron and other dedicated believers have spent many weekends every year responding to credible sightings from one end of the South Island to the other. The haunting call of the Kokako has been heard in a number of locations. With Ron and the team unable to

produce what is considered definitive proof of the bird's continued existence DoC relegated the bird to the status of extinct in 2004. Ron still regularly receives interesting sightings from a variety of people and is gradually building up a extensive picture of potential places for more searching. There have been over 140 encounters recorded with Kokako since 1990 including some very recent ones of birds that appear to be juveniles of the season. Ron is presently Chairman of The South Island Kokako Charitable Trust which was set up to provide funding and resources for the continuing search. This has been aided by the setting up of a website called "Grey Ghost" (www.greyghost.org.nz) where people can register their encounters.

Since leaving DoC in the early 90's Ron had been involved in a variety of projects. He spent 5 summers working for Project River Recovery in the Mackenzie Basin. This project involved the rehabilitation of braided river environments after the establishment of the hydroelectric dams in the region. Project activities included the removal of willow and Russell lupin and predator trapping. Ron's task was to research all the birds in the braided river study areas. Next Ron had the opportunity to study Westland hard beech forest at Granville Forest. The brief for the contract was to assess and monitor the total resource and how to maintain it for at least 100 years. This forest is now part of the DoC estate. Ron was the RR for OSNZ for 3 years while working for a private company and he is now happily retired.

What is perhaps significant about the telling of this story of Ron's birding career is all of the stories, activities and achievements that have been left untold. What is missing is the often high drama around conducting pioneering work in remote and hostile environments and in often perilous conditions. What is perhaps even more remarkable is that no lives or limbs were lost in the process of saving so many of New Zealand's beloved avian fauna. Ron is still waiting for an elusive Grey Ghost to pose for a great photograph and drop a feather in his hand. He expects that his long held faith will be rewarded very soon.

Jill West

Bird Outing with the Experts

After picking up Sheila Petch at her home and Enfys Graham from where she was staying on Centaurus Road we headed for SH75. First stop was to check if there were any turkeys at Ataahua. Eight were seen in a paddock and it was then on to Birdlings Flat. There was a light drizzle and cold wind blowing, but not many birds at sea. On Lake Forsyth we could see 3 Crested Grebes, Spotted and Pied Shags and Canada Geese. Two Banded Dotterels were seen on the beach plus some Red-billed Gulls. We drove on to Catons Bay but the lake was very rough and only 3 Black Swans and a few Scaup were seen.

On our way back to Kaituna Lagoon we drove up Prices Valley Road and saw 20 Sulphur Crested Cockatoos and heard Bellbird and Grey Warbler. At Kaituna we saw the usual waterfowl plus Little and Black Shag, Caspian Tern, 4 Royal Spoonbills and 7 White Herons, which were all in the same area.

We tried in vain to find Cattle Egret, firstly on Embankment Road and then Lake Road, Lakeside where I had seen 36 three days before, but in typical birding style none were to be seen. We did see 3 Pied Oysercatchers and some White-faced Herons in a paddock.

With a total of 43 species on our list it was



Photo: Bev Alexander
Sheila and Enfys search for Cattle Egret

decided to head for home. A very enjoyable day had been spent with two very enthusiastic and knowledgeable women with a total of 150+ years of birding!

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Enfys is a former member of Canterbury OSNZ and now resides in Wellington. She was Regional Rep for Canterbury in 1985-86. Paul Sagar met Enfys in 1967 on a Labour Weekend Study Trip in South Canterbury. Initially she did not attend many trips because she was a widow, working and looking after a large family. In the late 70's and early 80's she attended many trips with her son, Dominic. In the mid 70's she took part in a weekend trip to look for Hutton's Shearwater which meant walking up a mountain in the Kaikoura Ranges for 7 hours. Others on the trip included Geoff Harrow, Dick Jackson, John Warham and Marj Davis.

Bev Alexander

Recent Sightings

June: 7th Colin Hill and Steve Wratten found 1 Gull-billed Tern among the more common birds at Yarrs. 6th Andrew Crossland reported 62 Black-fronted, 92 White-fronted and 9 Caspian Terns at Kaitorete Spit. 11th Jan Walker and Bev Alexander saw 29 Cattle Egrets in the Drains Road area. Timberyards Point had 5 White Herons and several Crested Grebes and Coopers Lagoon 21 Mute Swans and 2 Crested Grebes. 18th Nick Allen's count in his section of the Winter Wader Count covering Embankment to Yarrs Flat included 1 Gull-billed Tern, 4 INTERMEDIATE Egrets in a group, 1 Cape Barren Goose and 2 dark Stilt hybrids. 19th at Kaitorete Spit tip Phil Crutchley, Niall Mугan and Scott Butcher picked up 1 Red-necked Stint, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Knot, 13 Turnstones, 6 Wrybills, 91 Black-fronted, 126 White-fronted, 9 Caspian, 2 Gull-billed and 2 White-winged Black terns (including one in breeding plumage). Crescent Island included another 7 Turnstones and 10 Caspian terns and at Kaituna they found 9 White Herons. Andrew saw 1 White Heron and 1 Bittern at Wolfes and elsewhere in Canterbury counted 173 Crested Grebes and 1597 Scaups at Lake Forsyth; 3106 SIPO, 110 VOC, 183 Pied Stilts, 84 Banded Dotterels and 240 Godwits on the Avon-Heathcote Estuary; 1 pair of Cirl

Buntings at Victoria Park and 2 pairs at Charlesworth Wetland. 20th Keith Harrison saw 1 Cattle Egret flying among Black-backed Gulls at Cust. 21st Doug Arthur saw 33 Cattle Egrets at West Coast Orowaiti Lagoon and commented there seemed to be "a few about after an absence of several years."

July: 10th Sheila Petch and Bev Alexander found Cattle Egrets as follows: Embankment Road, 1; Rushbrooks Road, 12; corner of Lower Lake Rd, Timberyards Rd and Johnstons Rd, 23. Also 13 Royal Spoonbills were seen at Lower Selwyn Huts. 18th Steve and Colin had 3 Bar-tailed Godwits, 2 Royal Spoonbills, 1 Hybrid Stilt (white face and vent) and 1 Variable Oystercatcher at Greenpark and 5 Mute Swans and 1 Hybrid Stilt (white face, vent and lower belly) at Embankment. They also encountered 25 Banded Dotterels and c.200 Pied Stilts, together with lots of mud.

August: Andrew passed on a report of a possible Little Eagle at Puahua Valley on 9th and on the 10th at Kaitorete Spit tip he counted 5 Red-necked Stints, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 4 Gull-billed Terns, 1 White-winged tern and a probable Yellow Wagtail on the 4WD access track. 13th Bev found 20 Wrybills at Ashley Estuary. On 14th Nick Allen saw a probable Cattle Egret at Styx Mill Road which Jan confirmed as likely as Niall Mугan saw 11 birds in this area in fields near Cavendish Road in early July. Andrew said 8+ birds had been in paddocks on Cavendish Road opposite Sturrocks Road for 2-3 months until snow had moved them on. 20th the large number of species found on the OSNZ local branch Mystery Tour included 250 Black-fronted Terns, 30 returned Wrybills and a Hybrid Oystercatcher at Ashley Rivermouth, a White Heron at Taranaki Stream, a Little Owl at Kaiapoi Pa Road and 2 Black-fronted Dotterels looking like nesting at Brooklands Lagoon. 21st Jan had a possible Cirl Bunting in her garden. On 19th Bev found 1 Cattle Egret on Cavendish Road. Returning on the 25th to see if it was still around, the white shape she observed in the same place turned out to be a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo. 27th Eric Spurr reported seeing a Kereru eating the leaves of a large-leaved kowhai in his garden in Rangiora, only the second time in 28 years he had seen one in his garden. 31st Sue Lovett

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said for about a week she had been hearing a possible Shining Cuckoo in Robinsons Bay, Banks Peninsula (although this led to discussion about the possibility it could have been a Song Thrush or Greenfinch). On a recent trip to Arthur's Pass Dave Riddell's list included a Blue Duck at Pegleg Creek in Arthur's Pass and a nesting pair of Crested Grebe at Lake Pearson. Some concerns were expressed this month about a decrease in numbers of fantails and silvereyes at bird tables (also chaffinches and yellowhammers), after the heavy snowfalls, although bellbirds did not seem to have been affected.

September: At Yarrs-Jarvis on 5th Steve and Colin found 22 Banded Dotterels (1 immature), 15 Pied Oystercatchers, 110 Bar-tailed Godwits, all in winter plumage, and 10 Gull-billed Terns, 8 in winter plumage and 2 in adult plumage. 7th Jan's visit to Embankment Rd yielded 6 Gull-billed Terns and approximately 200 Bar-tailed Godwits, possibly all the over-wintering flock from the Avon River which had moved to the lake. 9th Frances Schmechel received three separate reports from people who had heard Shining Cuckoo(s) in Akaroa. 12th Colin and Steve found 50 Caspian Terns, 2 Cape Barren Geese and 570 Pied Stilts at Greenpark, 100 Pied Stilts at Embankment and 7 Gull-billed Terns, 84 Pied Oystercatchers and 48 Bar-tailed Godwits in the Yarrs, Embankment, Greenpark area. Andrew found 99 Bar-tailed Godwits on the Avon/Heathcote, at least 14 with residual breeding plumage, indicating new arrivals, with 104 birds there the following day. The Cathedral out of action, the bells were tolled at St Paul's Anglican Church in Papanui to celebrate the Godwits' return. On 15th there were reports of a Tui in Victoria Park, Cashmere and another at Elizabeth Park some days later. 16th Jan, Bev and Sheila heard a Shining Cuckoo in Waipara river bed. 17th Grant Bawden found a number of flagged birds among Godwits at Lake Ellesmere and 14 Red-necked Stints, 7 Turnstones, 1 Curlew Sandpiper and 80 Caspian Terns. 26th Colin and Steve saw 3 Gull-billed Terns at Jarvis Road and 14 Wrybills, 141 Bar-tailed Godwits, 16 Red Knots, 14 Pied Oystercatchers, 6 Banded Dotterels, 1 Hybrid Stilt and 1 Spoonbill at Embankment and on the same day Jan had 338 Godwits in the same area and added 2 Curlew Sandpipers and 4 Black-billed gulls to the list.

27th Sue Lovett (definitely!) heard a Shining Cuckoo at Robinsons Bay. A small Field Trip to New Brighton Spit on 25th found c250 Godwits, with over 11 banded birds present. At the end of the month a report of birds at Ellesmere totalled 14 Red-necked Stints, 7 Turnstones, 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 3 Curlew Sandpipers, 338 Godwits, 30 Knots, 10 Gull-billed Terns and Andrew Crossland found 180 Caspian Terns at the end of Kaitorete Spit. In a report in Kereru News 80 John McIlroy of Akaroa reported the largest Kereru "gathering" seen in the area of 20 birds feeding in a dense patch of tree lucerne 50 x 30 m, and of seeing males displaying aerially for a period of 6 weeks.

October: 1st Anita saw 5 White Herons and 17 Crested Grebes at Kaituna River and Jan reported ~1200 Godwits, with 4 or 5 Juveniles, at Avon/Heathcote high tide roost. 13th at Kaitorete Spit Grant found 3 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 1 Pectoral Sandpiper in full breeding plumage, 22 Red-necked Stints, 12 Bar-tailed Godwits, 200 Caspian Terns, 42 Turnstones, 13 Knots and a Brown Skua. 22nd Jan reported a pair of Tui had taken up residence in Governors Bay. 40 Cattle Egrets were at the Drain Road/Lake Road junction near Leeston, some with very bright breeding plumage. 21st Colin found 27 Red Knots at Yarr's and on 23rd he and Steve found 9 Bar-tailed Godwits, 11 Red Knots, 28 Red-necked Stints, one in stunning summer plumage, 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 23 Turnstones, 200+ Caspian Terns, 23 Wrybills, 6 Banded Dotterels and 78 Royal Spoonbills at Kaitorete Spit. 24th At Glentui Mark McFadden saw a Long-tailed Cuckoo. 27th Jan found 1 "strange, very pale dotterel", 8 Godwits, 4 Gull-billed Terns and 4 Wrybills at Embankment. Returning a day later with Colin and Steve there were 5 Godwits, 30 Golden Plovers, 1 Sharpie, a few Wrybills but no sign of the dotterel and at Yarrs 70 Godwits and 20-30 Knots. [The dotterel was later confirmed as a partial albino Banded Dotterel] 28th Sheila and Grant counted 2000+ Godwits and 11 Red Knots at Avon Estuary. 31st Jan found 25 band combinations among the 2000 Godwits, 1 Knot, 1 Turnstone and 1 bright, possibly juvenile Sharpie. At Kaitorete Spit Niall Muga had 2 Gull-billed Terns, 4 Knots, 22 Red-necked Stints, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Sharpies, 6 Turnstones and 34 Godwits.

November: 7th Colin and Steve found Greenpark to Yarrs very dry with only 7 Banded Dotterels, 112 Godwits, 8 Red Knots, 14 Pied Oystercatchers and 11 Spoonbills seen. 8th Sue heard a Rifleman pair in her garden at Robinson's Bay and reported that Tony of 'Coast up Close' has been seeing good numbers of albatross and other sea birds off Akaroa Heads. Ann heard a Shining Cuckoo at Tutaipatu Lagoon, Woodend Beach, and on 11th heard large numbers of the bird in the Living Springs to Purau area of Banks Peninsula. 14th Brent Stephenson had 23 Cattle Egrets at Rushbrooks Road, near Drain Road, Lake Ellesmere where only 10-11 birds had been seen previously. 15th Martin Oelderink saw a Tui in Port Levy. 19th Steve saw 16 Cattle Egrets between Drains and Lake Roads. 20th Ann heard a Shining Cuckoo in the city at Riccarton Bush. 30th Bruce McKinlay found 11 Lesser Knots at Lower Selwyn Huts.

December: 1st Richard and Sue had at least 3 Tuis in their garden at Robinsons Bay. 8th Bev and Sheila counted 30+ Bar-tailed Godwits, 11 Red Knots, 2 Turnstones, 1 Red-necked Stint and 1 Grey-tailed Tattler (together with 37 other species!) at Ashley Estuary. 9th Jan had a Shining Cuckoo in her garden, the first for a long time, observed eating bugs and singing in a tall gum tree. 11th, Russell Langdon from Ashburton reported that someone had seen a Black-tailed Native Hen at Greenstreet opposite him on the Ashburton River.



Photo: Ann Sherlock
Shining Cuckoo

Volunteers Needed - Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust

Geoff Harrow has informed us that at the time of writing, in November, 4 eggs were being brooded by birds at the Kaikoura Peninsula site and the Trust is now working hard to set up another translocation of a further 100 chicks from the Kowhai colony to Kaikoura Peninsula next March. The DOC permit was still to arrive but was expected soon and the Trust are busy fund raising to cover the cost.

If things go to plan, lots of volunteers will be needed during next March to help with the chick feeding. If you are able to help could you please get in touch with the Trust by email – admin@huttonsshearwater.org.nz or write to Hutton's Shearwater Charitable Trust at PO Box 58, Kakoura 7340 or telephone Lindsay Rowe at 03 319 7211.

Studies on the birds continue. In September 2012 the Trust is planning to do another colour painting of 2000 birds at the Kowhai and Shearwater Streams colonies, followed by a count of the ratio of coloured birds to the uncoloured birds as a second check on the total Hutton's population, as was done about 10 years ago.

Two Masters students at Otago University, helped by the Trust, have made a film documentary on the Hutton's Shearwater colonies in Kaikoura. The Trust is hoping to show the film at the Farewell to the Hutton's Shearwaters on 31st March 2012, an event it will be well worth marking on the calendar.

Arthur Dixon

We were very sorry to hear of the death of Arthur in late October. He had only been a member of the Society for a few years but had impressed all of us who met him with his gentle charm, good humour, friendliness and determination not to let poor health get him down. He struggled to join us on long field trips and attended many meetings at the Doc Office.

Our condolences go to his family.

Spring-time on Vancouver Island - A Birding Paradise

In May this year we visited friends who live on the south-eastern side of Vancouver Island in Canada, in a town called Parksville. With our hostess we took part in four weekly organized bird walks with a group of birders who were most welcoming and helpful. Each week we were provided with a list of birds we could expect to see at each location. If you are thinking of visiting the area around Nanaimo, details can be found on thebirdstore.blogspot.com). We also went to other interesting birding sites with our hosts.

It was Spring-time so birds were in brightly colored breeding plumage. In just over 3 weeks we saw nearly 60 species of birds that were new to us. Some which we found very special were the Red-naped Sapsucker, a type of woodpecker, the brightly coloured Western Tanager, the distinctive Junco, the Red-winged Blackbird, the Chestnut-backed Chickadee and the Bald Eagle. We were delighted also to see two types of Hummingbird, and about ten varieties of sparrow, some quite colourful, and all with distinctive markings and calls.

The photograph, taken by Ralph Hocken, is used with his permission. Our own photos were not good quality, as not knowing the treasures we would find we had neglected to take our best camera.

Henry and Phyllis Paltridge



Photo: Ralph Hocken
Red-naped Sapsucker

Exploring the North Island in the Allen's Birding Caravan

Our recent trip north towing our recently-acquired caravan, a 1976 3-berth Sprite, was a mix between a family holiday and working on a series of bird site maps. Birding as such wasn't really the focus, or I would have seen more species than the 107 I managed to glimpse. Many thanks to all those who provided site information, particularly Gwenda Pulham, Mike Twyman, the Twydles and Paul Cuming.

11/11 Kaikoura-Paraparaumu Beach: After always taking the Interislander, this time we took an early afternoon Bluebridge on a former North Sea ferry. The crossing was fairly flat and uneventful, with most birds close to the Wellington side along an obvious 'tide' line. About half a dozen Salvin's Albatrosses could be seen plus several Westland Petrels, Flesh-footed Shearwaters with tiny numbers of Sooty Shearwater and Fairy Prion. I actually saw Cape Petrel (four) for the first time in a large number of journeys, a species that about a decade ago used to be a common follower of the ship. Fluttering Shearwaters were common, as usual in the warmer months, close to the Wellington shore. A quick look behind the fire station at Plimmerton produced nothing more than a Variable Oystercatcher, and a Shore Plover on a sign.

12/11 Paraparaumu Beach-Whakapapa: We stopped on the journey north and uphill at the next estuary to the north of the Manawatu River – that of the Rangitikei River at Tangimoana. I was told to park by the dump as the last bit of the road is a bit rough, and walk the five minutes to the boat ramp (a real man-zone) and a view over the estuary. It was definitely very ho-hum in comparison to its neighbour to the south with just a few Pied Stilts, Bar-tailed Godwits and a couple of distant Royal Spoonbills. I was distracted on the way back by a dark brown shape seemingly doing a solo waltz in the rushes next to the track. Through the bins the shape turned into a Bittern. It struck the water a couple of times and brought up an eel, which promptly started trying to unscrew the Bittern's beak from its head. I stood gobsmacked and got a couple of rushy photos before the bird finally turned its

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attention from food to threat and flew off.

Turning right at Bulls we ground our way over hill and dale to the Whakapapa camp site situated in the delightful surrounds of a Mountain Beech forest next to a rushing mountain stream. I had time to explore the bush around Lake Rotopounamu, hearing Kaka distantly and seeing Dabchick on the lake, and also some reaches of the Tongariro River, finally catching up with Blue Duck at Beggs Pool. A partial Black-backed Magpie near Rangipo Prison was a bit of a surprise.

13/11 Whakapapa-Takapuna: My sleep was unfortunately not troubled by the sounds of Brown Kiwi or Morepork, and I rose early to have a quick look round Whakapapa. The Fernbirds were present, though a bit quiet, in the turpentine scrub near The Chateau and Skotel and Rifleman and Whitehead were quickly found along the Ridge Track. The Blue Duck sometimes seen on the river near the bridge wasn't, however.

Setting off north, and more downhill now than uphill we were taken off course from an intended Hamilton lunch stop by our GPS and ended up on the horrible Hwy 31, which winds like a snake and surely traverses more hills than SH3. Lunch was on the side of the road in Pirongia – one of a number of small towns along this road, all with no real facilities, but the young Welcome Swallows and Blackbird nest by our caravan were a fortunate distraction. We made two detours off SH1; to Lake Hakanoa in Huntly, which is obviously better in winter for wildfowl; and Sandspit Road in Waiuku, about the only publicly accessible roost in the south Manukau Harbour. Here the tide was out, but some Godwits and Knots were out in the bay, just to prove there were waders around. Hyeza and Olivia stayed in the car eating ice-cream. For the next few days we stayed just back from the beach in the camp ground at Takapuna, serenaded by such species as Common Myna and Spotted Dove. Surprisingly a Blackbird had young in a nest in the base of a forest cabbage tree right by the ablution block path.

14/11 Takapuna: I met up with Gwenda Pulham and headed north for a couple of hours

to the shores of the Kaipara Harbour at Tabora for a look at the roost area at the northern end of Big Sand Island. I'd heard about 'causeway bay' where the crossing to the island is made. I was expecting a man-made structure covered in slippery weed akin to memories of the crossing from Marazion to St Michael's Mount, walked a few times in my distant youth during Cornish summer holidays. There was, however, no causeway – or for that matter a castle – just flat sand. It is merely the last part of the bay behind the island to be covered by the tide. The tide was not a spring one and much mud and sand was still uncovered at high tide, but we still saw a few thousand Bar-tailed Godwits and Knots, plus 13 Little Terns and two Sanderlings, the latter associating with similarly coloured Wrybills.

15/11 Takapuna: We visited the Auckland Zoo in the morning, Olivia enjoying meeting the elephant and hippos and me enjoying the new native aviary complex Te Wao Nui, especially the huge forest aviary. A quick visit to



Photo: Nick Allen
Te Wao Nui native aviary, Auckland Zoo

Tawharanui in the afternoon to look properly at the lagoon area brought decent looks at about 10 Brown Teal and a Brown Quail.

16/11 Takapuna: Hyeza took an Auckland tour on which children were not allowed so I took Olivia on a tour of some birding sites close to the city. First stop was Shakespear Regional Park, which was closed due to a recent poison drop following completion of the predator-proof fence across the end of the Whangaparaoa Peninsula. Given the amount of song, Tui are doing well in the area. Next it was on to the South Kaipara Peninsula, where little was on

Lake Kareta. This formerly interesting lake is now used for water-skiing, and there were no Australian Little Grebes on show. In contrast a new wetland that Gwenda had tipped me off about was full of waterfowl, including both species of small grebes and a colony of Pied Shags. The Tuparekura Wetlands are below a new subdivision, where sections are selling extremely slowly due to the economic downturn and the distance from Auckland (fuel being expensive these days for the Remuera tractors and Mercs of potential buyers). A quick detour was made to the Ark in the Park on the way back to Auckland, where the most interesting sighting was a Tui on the road ahead of the car. I'd previously considered this species entirely arboreal. Last stop was the urban Waiatarua Wetland in the suburb of Remuera. A former water treatment site, the wetlands and plantings held New Zealand Scaup and Grey Teal amongst more common species.

17/11 Takapuna-Waipu Cove: Takapuna Golf Course is right next to the Northern Motorway, and is not the quietest of places. I followed Hyeza around in a golf cart for nine holes, watching the morning peak traffic queues and birds such as Tui, Eastern Rosella, Spotted Dove and Barbary Dove whilst she satisfied her golfing addiction. (Nice bit of co-operation here! Ed) Golf was followed by the relatively short drive to Waipu via a Kookaburra-less Matakana.

After dropping off the caravan Olivia and I explored the estuary at Mangawhai, missing birds such as Little Egret and Banded Rail, but catching up with Fairy Tern. I wondered at its flappy, seemingly ineffective flight whilst hunting, in comparison to the more powerful clipped wing beats of the Little Terns I'd seen a few days before. Some ponds adjacent to a new subdivision (The Sanctuary) on the edge of Mangawhai Heads held a couple of Aussie Little Grebes.

18/11 Waipu Cove-Whangarei: As soon as the gate to the camp was opened I headed out to look around the Waipu Estuary just to the north. New Zealand Dotterels, Variable Oystercatchers and Bar-tailed Godwits were found close to the river mouth, along with a White Heron. A Fairy Tern was harder to find, but one was eventually located fishing the lagoon well south of the mouth. Ormiston Road Pond is in the hills

behind Waipu village and has a reputation for being an easy place to see both species of small grebes, at least apart from in winter. I saw both species easily, plus a Brown Quail at the edge of the road nearby as a bonus.

After breakfast we headed north again another short hop to Whangarei, with a short stop on the way to check out Ruakaka, which was devoid of pesky windsurfers. On an afternoon off from birding I was surprised by a DoC Kiwi Zone sign at the Quarry Arts Centre on the western outskirts of the city.

19/11 Whangarei: We struggled north to Kerikeri in the Bay of Islands through all sorts of roadworks and a 'fun run' (not too many people smiling in the heat!) and eventually to Aroha Island, where for a few dollars we were served morning tea and sticky muffins and treated to the song of Tui and soothing Barbary Doves. On a walk around the island (actually more like a peninsula) Royal Spoonbills were seen roosting on an island just offshore. Coming back to the causeway a sharp 'kik' or two in the mangroves alerted me to two Banded Rails having a bit of an altercation. One shot off, whilst the other sauntered around the pneumatophores, wading in shallow water and giving great views.

An after lunch visit was made to the Manginangina Boardwalk through a stand of Kauri trees in the Puketi Forest. I heard, but didn't see Tomtit, and saw New Zealand Pigeon. Paihia Beach was visited on the way back to Whangarei for Olivia to have a bit of a paddle. The Gannets diving just offshore were a bit distracting. Then it was off to Russell for a bit of history, fortuitously seeing a Weka career across the road in front of the car close to the Orongo Bay Motel.

20/11 Whangarei: Hyeza again succumbed to the urge to hit a little white ball around a grassy wasteland and I dragged, shouldered and carried Olivia up the Peach Cove Track on Bream Head. Starting through paddocks and tea tree scrub, close to the top the forest became better in structure and species and I heard and saw Tomtit and Kaka. Before descending into Peach Cove the track followed a razorback ridge with dizzying drops on both sides.

A small roost next to the log export wharves and

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oil refinery at Marsden Point is one of the few publicly-accessible places to view waders in Whangarei Harbour. I got there at high tide (not a spring one unfortunately) and found 60 Bar-tailed Godwits at the end of the beach (including 7 juveniles), which stayed until two dropkicks decided to walk through them before sun-bathing on the wildlife refuge island, despite having almost the whole beach in which to perform mindlessly without disturbing the birds. Continuing an industrial theme the next stop was Limeburners Creek on the outskirts of Whangarei, which has an impressive mangrove boardwalk, but unfortunately few birds when we visited.

21/11 Whangarei-Omokoroa: It was a long drive to the Bay of Plenty. With strong winds (which persisted for the remainder of our North Island stay), crossing the Auckland Harbour Bridge was a bit on the dicey side. In the southern suburbs of Auckland we hung a left to head for Kawakawa Bay and the Seabird Coast. This route is not nearly as fast as the motorway, but much more scenic and has more birds. A short stop at the Stilt Ponds brought a couple of interesting species among the stilts - a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and a Gull-billed Tern.

We arrived at Omokoroa, our base for the next few days, late afternoon. The camp ground has its own hot pools, and luckily is well placed on the edge of Tauranga Harbour for visiting wader roost sites, the closest of which is only a ten-minute walk away.

22/11 Omokoroa: The whole day was taken up visiting the Whinray Scenic Reserve in the Motu, way up past the Waioeka Gorge. The area is trapped for pests and Brown Kiwi and Weka are present. The lack of poison (and thus the presence, no doubt, of lots of rats) has seemingly led to a lack of small birds and the place is a bit silent and disappointing. The scarcest bird I heard was Tomtit. On the road out to Matawai I spied the rear end of a Weka hastening in to the roadside verge. This was no doubt one member of the remnant of the formerly large Poverty Bay population.

23/11 Omokoroa: Re-tracing some of our tracks we headed back into the north-eastern

Waikato to visit a couple of birding sites there that I'd managed to miss on our previous two visits to the area. The Howarth Memorial Wetland is on the edge of Te Aroha, and has a good reputation for wildfowl and Bittern. I dropped off Hyeza and Olivia in the town and they relaxed in the park with its hot pools and nearby interesting shops while I hoofed it around the wetland. Unfortunately the place is full of willow and swamp cypress, such that it mostly resembles a cross between a European and North American swamp forest. I half expected to see an airboat doing donuts in the little open water still existing. Some interesting birds were present though - a Royal Spoonbill and a pair of Dabchicks.

The next site was the Southern Enclosure of Maungatautari deep in the middle of nowhere. The predator-free project here is very impressive, but there is still a way to go before bird densities are anything like those on Tiri or at Zealandia. The forest is pretty good though - certainly better than most other predator-fenced reserves. I walked the Rimu Loop Track whilst the wind roared through the canopy. There were plenty of Tui, but only a few Kaka, and Stitchbird was only seen near the feeders in the vicinity of the tower. I climbed the 81 steps to the top but saw little, probably because of the howling gale.

24/11 Omokoroa: A day mostly spent in the Rotorua area doing the tourist thing, with a visit to the Agrodome where Olivia was invited to milk a cow and managed to squeeze out a couple of drops, and Te Puia (Whakarewarewa) with its mudpools and geyser. I managed a quick trip to Lake Okareka to try out the boardwalk and hide, seeing Dabchick and Scaup, but nothing scarcer. On our return to Omokoroa I managed to get out at high tide to the best easily-accessible roost at Matahui, briefly seeing about 2000 Bar-tailed Godwits before they were forced off their sand island by a surprisingly still rising tide, probably assisted by low atmospheric pressure.

25/11 Omokoroa-Dannevirke: A cancelled ferry meant we had one less day in the North Island. I had planned to have a few leisurely hours visiting some Hawke's Bay bird sites, staying in Hastings, but plans had to change.

Again we headed for the Volcanic Plateau

stopping at Taupo for morning tea. By the wharves I heard Tui alarm calls and looked up to see a Falcon being harassed by a couple of them. Next was the rather boring SH5 where I missed the small native forest reserve I wanted to stop at for lunch. It didn't seem to be signposted at all. We eventually stopped at the Esk Forest rather late. The Westshore Reserve in Napier brought a couple of Black-fronted Dotterels and four Royal Spoonbills. A little twitch followed with a short detour to the three long-staying Plumed Whistling Ducks in Taradale. The other sites close to Clive had little of interest on them; then it was on south through a worsening gale to get as close to Wellington as possible. After a worrying drive where headwinds had our speed down to 50 kph we stopped at Dannevirke, where the council camp ground was thankfully in a well-sheltered hollow.

26/11 Dannevirke-Kaikoura: The wind having abated, the drive to Wellington was uneventful. The ferry trip was a bit rough to begin with, with a four metre swell outside the harbour making Hyeza very green. She felt better when we move away from the front windows of the Straitsman and went amidships. It was amazing how much the horizon moved through those picture windows. As on the trip north, most action was crammed around a tide line, again mostly White-capped Albatrosses and Westland Petrels. But also this time a Pomarine Skua, which I saw successfully get a Black-backed Gull to cough up an offering, and a tern with black wingtips and more open flight than White-fronted that must surely have been a Common Tern.

Nick Allen

Droppings from the Regional Rep

Do Spoonbills nest at Lake Ellesmere? Is there a Black-tailed Native Hen [an Australian species also known as the Barcoo Bantam] running around up the Ashburton River? These and other questions are the stuff of being a Regional Rep. for OSNZ. In a few days time the former question may be answered. On Maimai. The Hen question is anyone's guess. But there are a few twitchers out there who are interested and some of them are North Islanders. The rarities are usually up their way so it is nice to get a bit of fame down here.

On the farming programmes I keep hearing about the wonderful growing season it has been. Around Christchurch weeds are doing spectacularly well and surprising though it may seem, this is good for birds. All plants have been flowering really well locally providing nectar for Bellbirds and Silvereyes. Fantails were hammered in the snow, but other insect eaters are prolific. Grey Warblers, Shining Cuckoos and the introduced insectivores like Dunnock are well represented. Most birds feed insects to their chicks and it looks like being a good breeding season.

Shining cuckoos have been heard in Riccarton Bush and even in our garden at Kennedy's Bush. Also at home there have been fledglings from at least 2 Blackbird and 1 Thrush nests and baby Dunnocks have been seen too. The Bellbird seen collecting nesting material has not appeared again, and although 3 males are singing a lot there is no sign of family activity. We have invested in tamper-proof rodent bait boxes [from Wrightsons], which have meant the rat and mice population keep on getting the chop. However the 'Henry' possum trap with its gas-powered bolt that can kill 12 times before needing re-loading, has yet to kill a pest. It needs relocating to a more possum friendly tree.

The other important topic this autumn and winter has been the influx of vagrants from Australia. This was after the pronounced 'wet' following the prolonged drought in Southern Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Gull-billed Terns [10] at Lake Ellesmere, White Herons in groups of 9 and 5, and Intermediate Egrets [4], also at the Lake and now the Black-tailed Native Hen near Ashburton are all from Australia, whereas the Yellow Wagtail at Kaitorete Spit seen by Andrew Crossland is a bird from the Russian Far East. Which of course is where all the wader migrants come from, like Red-necked Stint, Red Knot, Sandpipers, Turnstones, etc. All except the Godwits, those amazing birds, which come straight from Alaska.

Jan Walker

NOTE: Because of lack of space, for Canterbury Regional Contact Details please see any previous issue of The Wrybill.

