

The Wrybill

Newsletter of the Canterbury Region,
Ornithological Society of New Zealand

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January 2010

Droppings from the Regional Rep

Wondering where to start, why not the partiest party of the bird calendar for OSNZ Canterbury? This is of course the Xmas BBQ at Colin and Cherry's Fenland House farm. Around 15 folk rose to the occasion. Five teams went out around the lake before lunch and two later on, much later on, to mop up the left-overs. Nothing exceptional was seen except 3 Bitterns and a small colony of nesting Caspian Terns, neither of which are waders, unfortunately. The event continues to be one of Canterbury's finest, rivaling the Show, Cup Week and an All-Black Test, put together. If that didn't get you reading this, I give up.

Although we failed to find any Tui when we went to Hinewai in September, the birds are reported to be doing well and 4 nests and 2 fledglings have been seen. 30 more birds from Maud Island are due to join the first lot this March. A bird was seen at Diamond Harbour by a member; it may be a wild individual, as no bands were seen. Our mystery outing in October ended up fairly near home at the Ashley Estuary and the advertised picnic became tea and cakes in a local café as the weather was not great.

November's trip was the Ashley riverbed Bird Survey, the only one done this year, once again there was too much water for the October count. Some extra Wrybill were located. The Ashley Counts are co-ordinated by the Ashley/Rakahuri Rivercare Group, but a lot of our members are involved as well. Their Chairman and our member, Nick Ledgard, received a Companion of the Queen's Service Order in the New Year's Honours this month. He will not be taking the knighthood however, but we are very pleased for

him anyway. It was richly deserved. The Ashley/Rakahuri Group also won the Canterbury/Aoraki Conservation Award for 2009.

There are some good outings planned for this year, so do come along even if you haven't done so in the past. We are a friendly lot and not at all competitive, well perhaps a little.....

Some excellent evening meetings took place at the end of last year. Sara Kross, studying Falcons in a Marlborough vineyard, had a fascinating video record of the birds to show their lives in detail. She asked for small-bird experts to help her identify the prey items shown in the film, not that there was much left to see. Richard Holdaway gave two talks, one on Moa and their habitat in North Canterbury, revealed by the Pyramid Valley excavation and the other on how Shearwaters and other migratory seabirds find their way back to their natal burrow sites. Both were exceptional in their detail and interest and we look forward to reading them slowly when in print.

Other events of note have been the award of a Meritorious Service Award [OSNZ equivalent of



Photo: Ann Sherlock
Jan presents Sheila and Ron with their awards

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the Old Blue of Forest and Bird] to both Sheila Petch and Ron Nilsson at the 2009 AGM of OSNZ. I feel we need a better title for this. Old Bird isn't quite right! It was said by the President, David Lawrie, when reading out the citations, that hardly anyone in Canterbury remained to receive an award. He obviously hasn't been here for quite a while to see the new and active lot we are now - when we turn out, that is. The new Projects and Activities section of the national committee has been asking for ideas for training sessions etc that each branch might organize. Nick Allen feels that Canterbury could best do something about riverbed birds and their conservation, given our expertise in this area. More will be happening later about this; expect next summer to be full of learner bird-counters and maybe banders. The BR-aid group is also about to be launched as a society to which people can affiliate. It will enable the dissemination of news and data about birds in riverbeds in a timely fashion.

This year's OSNZ Conference and AGM will be in Nelson at Queen's Birthday Weekend. These events are always lots of fun and an opportunity to learn new stuff from the real experts, plus finding out they are not nearly as stuffy as you thought. The experts, not the birds. The last event held in Nelson had THE most fantastic food EVER at a conference, so they have to repeat that. Hope they read this. The application form was in your last Southern Bird and Notornis, and it will be on the website soon. www.osnz.org.nz

Please do renew your subscription for 2010. A form is on the website www.osnz.org.nz or I can send you one by post. New members still receive a copy of the Atlas of Bird Distribution, until the copies run out.

Sadly two of our members died this year. Eric Spurr's dearly loved wife, Barbara, passed away and Mia Colberts, a Dutch lady who had made New Zealand her home and who invented the Farewell to the Godwits event, also died. On a much happier note, Andrew Crossland and his wife Leah had a little lad, Xavier, but it doesn't appear to have slowed Andrew down much. The OSNZ community is both poorer and richer for these events.

Jan Walker



Xavier Crossland at Andrew's 40th Birthday

Recent Sightings

May: At the end of the month Bev Alexander sighted two Black Stilt at the Ashley River and 2 Cattle Egret, one at Lake Road, Ellesmere and 1 at Tulls Road, Rangiora. There was the first recorded sighting of one of the Tui released at Hinewai, seen at Misty Peak Reserve, a Christchurch City Conservation Reserve which is two ridges from the release site. Andrew Crossland found a juvenile bronze phase Stewart Island Shag at Ataahua, Lake Ellesmere and the unusual sight of 2 Spotted Shag swimming with 183 Crested Grebe, 3414 NZ Scaup and 9 Caspian Tern at Lake Forsyth. Erik Forsyth reported 3 Australasian Gannet diving just offshore at the Ashburton River mouth and 12 Black-fronted Dotterel, a high number wintering here.

June: Peter Langlands recorded on GPS Black-fronted Tern 20 miles offshore. Andrew received two Falcon sightings, one chasing Starlings over the shoreline at Barry's Bay seen by Phil Crutchley and one at Lyttleton Harbour, and a possible Gull-billed Tern sighting at Charlesworth Reserve. Andrew also reported seeing a Caspian Tern flying at roof top level over traffic in Central Christchurch near Hagley Park. Erik sighted 7 Crested Grebe and over 1500 NZ Scaup on Lake Heron and at Lake Hood the high count of 13 Black-fronted Dotterel feeding in a water-logged field. Peter Howden said he had Bellbird on his farm this side of Mayfield, where it is unusual for them to be found.

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July: Erik sighted 2 Cape Barren Geese, 8 Black-fronted Tern and 70 Black-billed Gulls on the south side of Rakaia River Mouth. Peter Langlands got his first sighting of kereru from his home in Hoon Hay, where he has lived for 35 years. He also saw evidence that the expansion of the range of Crested Grebe looks to be continuing with the sighting of Crested Grebe resting on the tide at Moncks Bay, his first experience of this in 30 years of observation in this area. Andrew commented that the only previous sighting in this area of this bird was in 1947 and that it is very unusual to see them on the sea, their usual habitat being brackish coastal lakes. Christopher Moses, on a "Bev Tour", saw 2 Little Owl and 1 NZ Falcon in close proximity, 200m North of Ashley River mouth and 4 Black-fronted dotterel at the Pegasus Town development. On a visit to Lake Ellesmere area Jan, Sheila, Bev and young grandson, Noah, reported 4 Cattle Egret at Drain Road/Lake Road, a Bittern crossing the track at Boggy Creek, 26 Mute Swan and the unusual sights of a Royal Spoonbill and a Bittern in flight at Cooper's Lagoon. In the middle of the month 248 Crested Grebe were counted and seen engaged in courtship on Lake Forsyth, while the Ashburton Lakes count in the same period produced only a few. Falcons were seen by Andrew, who watched a bird crossing over Linwood Avenue, and by Anita Spencer who saw one chase a bird into some rushes, about 2 km West of Birdlings Flat. At the end of the month Jack Davidson counted 12 Cattle Egret in the Arahura Valley on the West Coast and says there are reports of sightings in Haast.

August: In the Lake Ellesmere area Erik found 42 Crested Grebe and 2 Mute Swan at Timberside Road and a White Heron and 3 Spotted Shag at the rocky jetty which he thought might be very unusual. At Coopers Lagoon he found 24 Mute Swan, 1 Cattle Egret and, later in the month, a Bittern in flight. And at Boggy Creek 1 White Heron, several Crested Grebe and 2 stunning male Ring-necked Pheasant. Bev and Jan visited the new lake/wetland at Pegasus Town which was well populated with 12 Banded Dotterel, 2 Black-fronted Dotterel and a Wrybill, possibly making its way south. Iain Johnson visited Coopers Lagoon and with the aid of a recording found a Marsh Crake which he watched for 30 minutes,

another unidentified Crake species and a Bittern. At Ashley River Mouth a Falcon was seen and at Lake Forsyth 1 White Heron and a Crested Grebe in stunning breeding plumage catching the sun. Russell Langdon found a Wrybill on the Ashburton River in the Westerfield area. Andrew (with Phil Crutchley and Niall Mugan) saw 2 Turnstone in breeding plumage, the first of the Arctic migrants to reach Kaitorete Spit and well ahead of the Godwit. Also over 580 Wrybill were seen, possibly from the North Island or forced from South Island riverbeds in flood. Andrew also received from others reports of a possible Long-tailed Cuckoo in Gebbies Pass from a credible source, a Common Myna in St Leonards Park, Sumner, a Ring-necked Parakeet at Little River and Eastern Rosellas in the Port Hills. Steve Wratten reported 6 wrybill, 7 Mute Swan and 900 Black-billed Gulls in the Yarrs, Embankment and Jarvis area of Lake Ellesmere. Bev found a Cirl Bunting at Rangiora and several Crested Grebe at Lake Elterwater, the most Northerly part of the South Island these birds have been seen. And the first of the Godwit returned with 268 counted at the Avon/Heathcote Estuary by Andrew on the 24th August.

September: Jan had a Cirl Bunting in her garden at Halswell and found 2 knots at Avon-Heathcote Estuary. A Black Stilt with colour bands was found at Jarvis Road by Simone Cleland and seen later by Colin and Steve Wratten. Nick Allen saw a Crested Pigeon on Gardiners Road. Sue Lovett sighted a NZ Falcon at Kaituna Lagoon. Bar-tailed Godwit were seen throughout the month, including 3 banded birds at Charlesworth (Jan), and one banded bird at Lake Ellesmere (Colin Hill). At the end of the month Andrew counted 1191 Bar-tailed Godwit on the Avon-Heathcote Estuary and reported 4 or 5 pairs of Cirl Buntings seen on Victoria Park Road.

October: Andrew found 2 Turnstone at the Rakaia Rivermouth. At Kaitorete Spit 25 Red-neck Stint, 12 Wrybill, 1 Bar-tailed Godwit, 4 Caspian Tern and 67 White-fronted Tern were sighted and on the 13th at Lake Forsyth Andrew heard his first Shining Cuckoo of the season. Bev saw a Rook on Lake Road, and 1 Turnstone at the Ashley Estuary. A Shining

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Cuckoo was heard by Sue on the 12th at Robinsons Bay. Erik found 46 Crested Grebe at Lake Forsyth and 2 at Kaituna. Ian Cooper, Okarito Kiwi Tours, South Westland, reported his first Long-tailed Cuckoo of the season. John Allan saw 6 Gannets at Sumner Beach. Jan, Sheila and Bev found around 50 Black-billed Gulls, 20 Black-fronted Tern and 1 Wrybill on the Waimakariri River at Groyne 31 near McLeans Island. The October OSNZ Field Trip on the 17th was a "Mystery Trip" which went North of Christchurch to visit the Ashley River and Waipara Mouth. 59 species were clocked up with rarities at the Ashley of a Far-eastern Curlew, a Whimbrel and possibly a knot, 100 Bar-tailed Godwit, a Shining Cuckoo and sighting of the top of head and eyes of "Bev's" Little Owl on the North stop-bank. At the Waipara Mouth 46 Bar-tailed Godwit, all juveniles, Banded Dotterel with a chick and 2 Black-fronted Dotterel were seen. Jan had been hearing Shining Cuckoos in Halswell since 21st and Bev heard a Shining Cuckoo at Whites Road Reserve on the 27th. At the end of the month Bev found 7 Cattle Egret (9 by November 1st) at Drains Road near Doyleston, four in breeding plumage and 1 in breeding plumage at Tulls Road.

November: Jan and Sheila spotted a few groups of Black-billed gulls looking as though they may be nesting at the lower Selwyn Huts on the far side of the river mouth although this later proved not to be the case, and more Black-billed gulls at Bexley mixed with Red-billed gulls. At Harris Bay, Godley Head, when out with Chris Challies, they found White-flipped Little Blue Penguin, a Gannet and a Reef Heron. Chris said it has a mate but it is not know if these are the Port Levy birds. Ann Sherlock heard a Falcon above the bush on the lower slopes of Mt Oxford. Steve and Colin saw 2 Curlew Sandpipers at Jarvis Road. Andrew Crossland was surprised to find 2 Whimbrel at the Upper Birdlings Lagoon, 2 Pacific Golden Plover, 10 Turnstone and 70 Bar-tailed Godwit. Bev and Jan observed a Little Owl at Harts Creek and 8-9 Crested Grebe conducting courtship displays. Bitterns were booming all around although none were seen. At Timberyard Point Little and Pied Cormorants were nesting on Willow Island. Rob Lawrence spotted 35 Red-necked Stint at

Kaitorete Spit. Jan and Sheila found 1000-1500 Black-billed Gulls in 2 colonies close together at Harewood Crossbank with approximately 750 in the one upstream at a higher elevation which would hopefully escape a big fresh coming down. (See update, p9). 200 White-fronted terns may have been nesting and a pair of Wrybill with possibly 2 chicks were also seen. Reports of what may have been 2 Brolga at Lake Ellesmere were not confirmed. Steve and Colin visited The Spit finding 4 Golden Plover, 5 Turnstone and 20 Red-necked Stint; Kaituna 5 Royal Spoonbill; Jarvis Road 33 Golden Plover, 12 Turnstone and 1 Red-necked Stint; Clark's Road 32 Bar-tailed Godwit and 3 Turnstone and Embankment Road 30 Bar-tailed Godwit, 1 Caspian Tern and 1 Hybrid Stilt. Tony Wilson saw 2 Crested Grebe at Lake Elterwater, where Bev saw birds last summer. At Southshore among the Godwits Jan reported finding 3 flagged in Victoria, 1 in South Australia and 1 in Shanghai, an Oystercater flagged in Nelson and 1 Turnstone. (120 Godwit have now been banded at the Estuary since 2004). The Ashley River Survey on November 21 found more Wrybill than usual, including a pair with two half-grown chicks downstream from the usual monitored stretch of the river. Jan found 2 Red Knot and 125 Bar-tailed Godwit, including one with an unreadable orange flag, between Jarvis and Clarkes. At Jarvis 2 Red-necked Stint and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were roosting together. Steve and Colin's count between Yarrs and Greenpark Sands at the end of the month included 134 Bar-tailed Godwit, 7 Turnstone (a large number for the north side of the lake), 2 Curlew Sandpipers in winter plumage, 1 Pacific Golden Plover, 3 Red Knot, 5 Hybrid Black Stilts (the largest number they have ever seen at the Lake) and 13 Royal Spoonbill.

December: Peter Langlands saw a White-winged Black Tern in full breeding plumage with a small colony of nesting Black-fronted Terns on Harper River/Lillian Creek, where the same species was seen in December 2007. He wondered if there could be a breeding pair. Alan Shaw saw 1 Little Black Shag and 1 Hybrid Stilt at Ashley Estuary and 2 Black-fronted Dotterel with 2 small chicks at the Waipara River-mouth. At Harewood

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Crossbank Jan and Sheila found Black-billed Gulls, Black-fronted Terns and Banded Dotterel, all with chicks and nests. Andrew found a pair of Crested Grebe with 2 half-grown chicks at Clearwater Golf Resort, the first of what he hopes will be a big population expansion of Crested Grebes on ponds and rivers in Christchurch. Colin found 15 Red Knot, 27 Golden Plover, 9 Turnstone and 2 Curlew Sandpipers at Jarvis Road/Greenpark Huts. Francis Schmechel relayed a report of a Black-billed Gull colony on Waiiau River just opposite Rotherham township. From Embankment Road Steve and Colin's findings included 33 Turnstone, 30+ Wrybill, 1 Golden Plover, 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 1 Sanderling (very rare), 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 10 Red-necked Stint, (but no Red Knot). Later in the month after a southerly 46 Golden Plover, 39 Turnstone, 20 Wrybill, 1 Sharpie, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 12 Royal Spoonbill and 9 Bar-tailed Godwit were found to the west of Clarke's. From Embankment to Clarke's Pools Jan and Sheila saw 32 Bar-tailed Godwit, 1 Golden Plover, 6 Turnstone, 7 Red-necked Stint and 50+ Wrybill. Andrew found a Dark phase Pomarine Skua at Waimakariri River mouth. On Boxing Day Jan was at Kaitorete Spit at about 10am and witnessed thousands of Spotted Shag flying in formation from Banks Peninsula towards Taumutu. They settled on the sea, spread out for several kilometres. Between Embankment Road and Jarvis Colin and Steve found 3 Sharpies, 1 Pectorial Sandpiper, 10 Golden Plover, 109 Bar-tailed Godwit, 40 Turnstone and 10 Red Knot. The following day in the same area Jan and Sheila saw 3 Sharpies, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 8 Golden Plover, 8 Red Knot, 22 Turnstone, 18 Red-necked Stint, 1 Hybrid Stilt, 113 Bar-tailed Godwit, hundreds of Wrybill and thousands of Pied Stilt. Greenpark Sands was also "alive with waders". Richard Hurt found a Brown Skua at sea on the north side of Ellesmere outlet at the end of Fisherman's Point, off Pohua Road. Andrew commented that South Westerly conditions seem to bring birds close to shoreline on the leeward (N) side of Banks Peninsula. He had experienced the best shore-based seawatching on Christchurch coastline for a long time, seeing 238 Huttons Shearwater, 1 Cape Petrel, 1 Arctic Skua and 1 Gannet from the base of Scarborough Cliffs. Later the same day Niall

Mugan saw Huttons Shearwater, Cape Pigeons, Giant Petrels and possibly a Pomarine Skua. To round off the month, Steve found 3 Arctic Skua off Cooper's Lagoon chasing White-fronted terns.

Early January: 2 juvenile Pomarine Skua in shore near Waipara River mouth were reported by Steve. Ian McHenry saw a White Heron at Cavendish/Styx Mill Lake. Andrew reported that the normal post-breeding build up of Wrybill at Lake Ellesmere had begun with 261 at Jarvis Road, 19 at Embankment and 1 at Yarrs being seen. 2 Arctic Skua and possibly 1 Brown Skua were also seen at Birdlings Flat. Jan et al found 300+ Wrybill, one banded YBBY, at Greenpark Sands with 5 Hybrid Stilt, 35 Turnstone, 10 Sharpies, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 11 Red Knot, 26 Red-necked Stint and 8 Golden Plover – one very golden. Steve and Colin's numbers for the same area a few days later were 370 Wrybill, 17 Red-necked Stint, 12 Sharpies, 43 Bar-tailed Godwit, 18 Turnstone, 4 Red Knot, 1 Curlew Sandpiper and 1 Hybrid Stilt. Finally, on 17 Jan Serena Sinclair-Thomson reported a white swallow over their pond at Ohaka, N.Canterbury.

Tony Crocker

We are all sorry to say goodbye to Tony, who has now finalised a long held plan and departed for Tauranga on the North Island. Tony is one of those birding enthusiasts who has held his interest since boyhood and as a consequence he has a wealth of knowledge and experience which we are going to miss. He has been a member of our Branch for 17 years and was a welcome participant in activities when time permitted.



Photo: Ann Sherlock
Tony and Jan on a West Coast Lakes Survey

Tony has given us pleasure at many monthly meetings, talking always in a relaxed and very interesting way of the ornithological, geographical, political and social aspects of the many interesting places he has visited in his career.

Tony served time as a Councillor, has been Editor of Southern Bird and was a member of our Branch committee in Christchurch for some years.

We wish you all the best for the future Tony, and hope to see you whenever you find yourself in Christchurch.

Sheila Petch

Notes from a new member from the July and August fieldtrips

My first field trip with OSNZ was up to the high country Ashburton lakes, on a gloriously sharp, sunny day in July. The cold wind whipped across the iced-up lakes, surrounded by snow-covered tussock hills, providing a stunning backdrop to the serious business of counting birds. Some of this district has recently been acquired by DOC and is now being allowed to regenerate, free of large herbivores. Hundreds of lake birds were spotted, and with the aid of Jan's telescope, they could be observed preening and feeding without disturbance. I rediscovered an old pair of fingerless gloves, which are great for whiling away the hours with a pair of binoculars. We visited three lakes and afterwards received a sumptuous veggie soup lunch at a lovely bach overlooking Lake Clearwater.

My second trip was the 5 minute count of bush birds at the Manaia Reserve, Okuti Valley, Bank's Peninsula. The day was grey, foggy and damp. Nevertheless, bellbirds, kereru, brown creeper and fantail were spotted while grey warblers were heard. I have never seen a brown creeper up close. They always seem to flit around too quickly. I counted 3 bellbirds, Jill counted 7, so I guess I need to sharpen my eyes and ears! On the way back we stopped to ponder the increasing number of scaup in the South Island and finished off the day admiring

12 sulphur-crested cockatoos high up in huge, old kahikatea and totara trees. I am eagerly awaiting next month's trip to Hinewai, when I hope it will be a little warmer.

Zuni Steer

BIRDING IN QUEENSLAND, JULY-AUGUST 2009

In Queensland from mid-July until mid-August for a family function, we took the opportunity for birding in about 16 locations in and around Brisbane. We were in Logan City in the south of Brisbane for most of the time, and had a week at Maleny, inland from the Sunshine Coast. We also visited O'Reilly's Rainforest in the Lamington National Park.

Logan City Council has produced three excellent guides for bird-watchers listing areas and birds seen in the Eastern, Central and Western parts of the City. We downloaded them from the Internet and went to eight different sites in these lists.

Most of our birding in Logan was concentrated upon the Slacks Creek corridor, where among the birds we saw were Variegated Fairy Wren, Striated Pardalote, Golden and Rufous Whistler, Nutmeg Mannikin, Brown and Lewins Honeyeaters and Golden-headed Cisticola. In other areas nearby we saw the Red-browed Finch, Red-capped Robin, Straw-necked Ibis, Grey Goshawk, Blue-cheeked Honeyeater, Pacific Baza and Australian Figbird, and with the aid of the zoom on the digital camera and computer magnification were able to identify a distant Hobby. In a stretch of coastal forest at Maroochydoore, a Rufous fantail entertained us for a few minutes before flying off.

O'Reilly's Rainforest, about two hours' drive south of Brisbane, has White-browed and Yellow-throated Scrub-wren, Eastern Yellow Robin and Bowerbirds in abundance. On this visit we were able to sort out the females of the Regent and Satin Bowerbirds. Many Rosellas and Parrots were about, though we looked for the Lyrebird without success.

In the showgrounds at Maleny on several occasions we saw a pair of kookaburras. One

day we visited a very impressive rainforest at Mary Cairncross Park where we had a clear and close view of the often heard Eastern Whipbird and watched it call; the other highlight there was a Wompoo Fruit Dove seen high in the canopy and located by following its eerie call! Catbirds were calling also, but not seen. The Eastern yellow Robin and Yellow-throated Scrubwren were abundant and easy to see in this rain-forest which also has an impressive resource centre at the Park gate.

All in all it was an enjoyable and satisfying trip from a birding point of view.

Henry and Phyllis Paltridge



Photo: Phyllis Paltridge
Female Satin Bowerbird

White-flipped Penguin Colony

At the end of November and early December Dr Chris Challies took interested birders to visit the main White-flipped Penguin colony in Harris Bay, Godley Head. The colony has been growing under his care since 1976 and Chris estimates the bay holds over 70 nests this year, which equates to 200 birds 1-yr or older, and about 90 chicks. The December group saw the range of penguin life. Two eggs were produced from one (abandoned) nest. Chris explained that penguins breeding for the first time were frequently unsuccessful at working together to incubate and feed the chicks. He had left the eggs in the burrow as a way of checking that no predators had got past the predator proof fence into the Bay. Three other nests produced five beautifully coloured chicks with varying amounts of fluffy brown down on the top of their heads and back and Chris showed us the white markings on the flippers which

distinguish these birds from Little Blue Penguins. Two large and very healthy looking younger chicks, still entirely in their infant plumage were also seen. Finally, Chris's well-gloved hand, inserted into the burrow, pulled forth not only a very feisty mother bird, quickly calmed by placing her in a canvas bag, but two tiny chicks only one day old.



Photo: Ann Sherlock
Chris Challies with one of his charges

Chris visits the colony about twice a week during the breeding season from September to January, carefully monitoring each breeding pair and observing non-breeding birds which return to the area. As well as building nesting boxes and cementing them into the cliffs, he conducts predator control. Chris was very interesting and informative about the colony and life cycle of the birds and readily answered our many questions. The pair incubate their eggs in turn for about 37 days and then share the feeding of the young for a further 50-55 days. Initially one bird is left to guard the chicks while the other goes to sea but by the time the chicks reach 15-25 days of age both parents are leaving to find food for their hungry young. Without help from their parents, the young birds decide for themselves when they are ready to exchange their life in a smelly burrow for one at sea. One night the adult birds return to find the nest empty and it is then time for them to feed voraciously to build up their weight before returning to the colony for 15-20 days to moult. This has to be completed by March, after which the birds return to sea, making only occasional visits ashore until the next breeding season.

Chris feels it is a pity more people do not have the opportunity to see the penguins. The

problem with the colonies in Harris Bay is the difficulty of access for many people, as descent to the colony is by a ladder, and lack of space along the rocky shoreline limits the number of people who can view the penguins at one time. The White-flipped Penguin Trust is planning (Christchurch City Council willing) to extend the local breeding range of the penguins into Boulder Bay and establish a much bigger colony there, where there is space. The ultimate aim is to have facilities for the public to view the penguins coming and going from the colony in the evening, as they do at Phillip Island near Melbourne and now at Oamaru. It is felt there would be spin-off benefits for conservation, education and businesses – a win/win situation.

The Trust is in the early stages of putting together a web page at www.penguin.org.nz where you can register your support for this project.

Ann Sherlock

Predator Traps at Ashley River Mouth

A trap setting training session run by DOC on 22nd August at Ashworth's Beach north of Waikuku was well attended by local fishermen, residents and birders. The dunes between Ashley Estuary and Ashworth's Lagoons were once cut off by Saltwater Creek but are now exposed and can be reached not only by people but also by predators. These dunes are used as roosting spots by Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted Terns, both species in need of protection. Variable Oystercatchers, White-fronted Terns, Banded Dotterel, Pied Stilts and possibly Grey Teal and Caspian Tern use the area for nesting.

Volunteers set 10 traps among the sand dunes of the spit and they are being monitored to see whether predators are present on the dunes. Alan Rhodes checked traps weekly during the Whitebait season, the tally being 2 feral cats, one of them enormous, which were found in one particular trap.

Bev Alexander

What's on at OSNZ Canterbury: February to June 2010

Indoor Meetings

Evening indoor 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 at the premises and on the road.

Monday 22nd Feb: Members' night plus a short talk from Dave Bell about the National Falcon Database.

Monday 29th March: Annual General Meeting. Nominations are invited for Committee and Officer positions, but get people's permission before you nominate them. They should be communicated to the secretary, Nick Allen, no later than one month before the meeting please. Ron Nilsson will talk on 'The South Island Kokako Story' after the short AGM proceedings.

Monday 26th April: Kath Varcoe and Liz Burt will talk about their trip to Iceland and other Arctic places.

Monday 31st May: The St Bathans excavation, background and update by Paul Scofield. Paul is investigating the Miocene history of the birds of New Zealand through this site.

Monday 28th June: Black Robin populations and their genetics with Euan Kennedy. This has been the subject of most of Euan's PhD for the last several years.

Field Meetings

Sat 13th Feb: February Wader Count at Lake Ellesmere. 9am Embankment Rd. Contact Jan/Colin. Bring lunch.

Sat and Sun 13th/14th March: Weekend trip in Arthur's Pass, hopefully to see Rockwren in the Otira valley. Contact Bev Alexander. We will stay somewhere for Friday and Sat nights to enable earlier starts.

Sat 10th April: Farewell to the Waders, Ashley estuary, late afternoon, followed by a meal out, perhaps in Kaiapoi. Contact Nick.

Sat 15th May: Banks Peninsula bush bird survey in Doc reserves and other bush areas. Contact Jan. Meeting at Halswell Bowling Club probably at 9am. Bring lunch.

Sat 19th June: Winter Wader Count. Contact Jan/Colin. Meeting Embankment Rd at 9.30am. Bring lunch and warm clothes etc.

Black-billed Gulls – Waimakariri

On 22 December a team of us went out to count chicks at the Harewood and Miners Bank Colonies. At Harewood there were quite a few larger chicks, including some which were flying but also nests with eggs and young chicks. We counted 792 chicks at the Harewood Crossbank colony. At Miners Bank colony we counted a total of 570 adults Black-billed Gulls and 154 chicks. There were still a few nests with eggs as well.

Frances Schmechel



Photo: Frances Schmechel
Nests and Black-billed Gulls on the wing

Sightings PS

Near the Tropical House in the Botanic Gardens there is a Bottle Brush in flower. On 21 January I saw a female Bellbird responding to the VERY LOUD and very insistent calls from her chick, still with yellow gape edges, presumably feeding it with nectar from the flowers. It was great to see proof that Bellbirds are breeding here.

Jan Walker

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Contacting The Wrybill

The Wrybill is issued to members every four to five months. Ideas, suggestions and contributions are welcome. If you have been involved in any birding activity within the region or in some far-flung corner of the country or the globe, please consider writing us something about it. Your information will certainly be worth placing on the record. Digital photos are welcome. The rate for advertising is \$15 a half A4 page.
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Acknowledgement

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ASHBURTON LAKES MID-WINTER BIRD COUNT – 2009															
	L. Heron	Emily	E Maori	W Maori	Trinity	Denny	Emma	Roundabout	Spider/Donn	Nursery	Camp	Clearwater	Lambies	Barossa paddocks	Totals
Date 18/7/09															
%Ice	10	100	5	70	100	90	66	95	100	100	40	85	50		
Crested grebe	18						1				1				20
Black shag	13		1				8				3	1	1		27
Little shag	42										13	7			62
White-faced heron	3						1				1				5
Bittern															0
White heron															0
Black swan	175		46	2		2	3					4	3	17	252
Canada goose	134			89		1	124				23				371
Paradise shelduck	21		10		3	17					2		2	33	88
Mallard	165		58	6			16				22	60	2		329
Grey duck	13						6				2				21
NZ shoveler	18														18
Duck spp															0
NZ scaup	3312		15	1		4	114				135	561			4142
Grey teal	59						3				3				65
Pukeko			1												1
Coot	451														451
Pied oystercatcher															0
Pied stilt	2														2
Hybrid/black stilt															0
Spur-winger plover							1							2	3
Banded dotterel															0
Black-fronted tern															0
White-fronted tern															0
Black-billed gull															0
Back-backed gull	31						6				2				39
NZ Falcon															0
Harrier	4		2				3				1			1	11
Kingfisher															0
Swallow															0
NZ pipit	2														2
Totals	4463	0	133	98	3	24	286	0	0	0	208	633	8	53	5909