

# **-The Wrybill**

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

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**March 2007**

## **Jottings from the RR**

**By Jan Walker**

A lot of my birding time is taken up with spotting Bar-tailed Godwits for colour-band combinations of individual birds. Sheila Petch and I go at least once a month to Brighton Spit to check the birds. This is providing data on a regular basis for the OSNZ three-year study on the movements of Arctic-breeding waders in New Zealand. The study comes to an end this year; this autumn is the last time we need to provide detailed sightings. Nonetheless it will be interesting to carry on for several reasons.

Around Christchurch, godwits frequent estuaries and beaches where the substrate is soft enough to support the type of marine worms and molluscs on which they feed. The Ashley and Saltwater estuaries, Brooklands Lagoon, the Waimakariri mouth, Lyttelton Harbour and Lake Ellesmere all have small numbers. But by far the largest concentration is found at the Avon-Heathcote Estuary, where they are familiar birds, feeding close to the Sumner Rd, at the end of peoples' gardens and sometimes along Brighton Beach.

At the top of high spring tides they have nowhere to feed as the water gets too deep for even a godwit's long bill and they collect together on small sandbanks and sometimes on the ocean side of the Spit-tip. This is the ideal time to see them close-up and get a total count. Nowadays their numbers are reduced to about 1500 over our summer, when the breeding birds are having their winter holidays with us and perhaps 200-300 in the winter [composed of non-breeding and juvenile birds].

In the spring and summer of 2004, 68 birds were caught in cannon-nets and given a colour combination of plastic legbands that give them the appearance of wearing legwarmers. There are two bands on each ankle and a white flag is positioned somewhere on the left leg to mark it as a New Zealand flagged bird. Only 6 of these 68 were not resighted in Canterbury before the autumn migration that year. Two of them went to Ellesmere and one to the Ashley. 6 birds, mainly juveniles, remained here all that 2005 winter and were rejoined by another 49 in the spring.

13 of the 68 were not resighted, though we know one stopped off in the Firth of Thames and has made Miranda her holiday destination ever since. Others may have chosen different resorts. 3 of the 6 not resighted the first summer popped up again the second [2005].

When you consider that these birds travel at least 12000 km during each migration to Alaska, ie. 24000km++ for a round trip, it's hardly surprising that some don't make it back.

55 banded birds were often recorded in the summer of 2005/6. This is 78% of the total. It also includes a bird that was given a transmitter [which was faulty] in Alaska and has a black flag with B1 in white letters, and another bird whose bands show it was banded in the Waimea Estuary in Nelson. This one and 3 others stayed behind that 2006 winter.

This last spring and summer, 2006/7, 52 [75%] of the original banded birds returned, though only 43 [63%] have been seen regularly. A couple turned up after hardly being seen locally at all. B1 came back despite retaining the transmitter, though she had lost the aerial.

Probably only non-breeding adults will remain behind this winter as the birds banded as juveniles will get their adult breeding plumage for the first time and go to see what it's like on the breeding grounds.



Photo: Ann Sherlock

Each spring it's a big thrill to welcome back individual birds, some of which we handled ourselves in 2004. It will be fascinating to see how long these birds live, now we know exactly when a juvenile was banded. The natural attrition of the small banded group will give us some idea of the effect of modern pressures on a godwit population. The main conclusion of the overall study being that Bar-tailed Godwits are particularly site-specific in their wintering areas means that we can look forward to seeing the same ones for quite a while.

Our grateful thanks to David Melville, Rob Schuckard, Tony Crocker, Filipe Moniz, Kay Collyer, Marion Macbeth, Bev Alexander, Bett McClelland, Tom Hanley, Blue Booth and Ernie Shuttleworth for providing help with spotting bands and to Andrew Crossland and Phil Crutchley for counts. Apologies for any omissions.

JAN WALKER and SHEILA PETCH

## **Don Hadden presentation**

On the evening of 24 January 2007 at 6.30 pm Don & Llane Hadden presented a travelogue style talk at the House Of Travel, on the corner of Shirley and Hills Roads, aimed at drumming up some sales for the branch which is co-directed by Lyndon Hadden, Don's son. A number of OSNZ members arrived, but were advised that there would be little in the way of bird material in the presentation to be given that evening. One member did not stay and as it happened missed out on a very interesting evening. Don had bought along some very fine photographs of at least A3 size and these were available

for viewing before and after the Powerpoint and video show. Also present were a number of current and former staff of the Middleton Grange School who wished to catch up with the Haddens again.

Don spoke of the work that he and his wife are doing based at an Aboriginal Mission near the Kimberleys in North Western Australia and of the marine tour guiding on a ship that Don has been involved with in recent times. One thing Don mentioned was just how close fuel stations are in that part of Australia 800 kms between fuel dumps. Short straight roads 500 km or more long all for four wheel drive vehicles only. The Powerpoint presentation demonstrated some of the amazing scenery that tour organisers working that region take parties to. Some rugged gorges reminiscent of parts of Fiordland (without the bush!) Very rugged waterfalls and some excellent geology. Sprinkled throughout were a number of shots of the local flora and fauna, anything from a frilled lizard to a saltwater crocodile, including a number of some of the most venomous snakes found in Australia (and therefore the world). There were a good number of ornithological species as well.

Lyndon noted that the evening turned into something like a Middleton Grange staff reunion much to the pleasure of all concerned. Don had visited NZ at this time to catch up with his grandchildren and other family members. It is my hope that the Canterbury Branch of OSNZ can arrange a talk at some time in the future.

LES McPHERSON

## **What's On at OSNZ Canterbury: March to June 2007**

### **Indoor Meetings**

Evening indoor meetings take place at the Spreydon Bowling Club rooms, down the driveway roughly opposite 80 Domain Terrace, beginning at 7.30 pm. Use the parks down the drive and walk past the tennis courts to the clubroom entrance.

March 26<sup>st</sup> – Branch AGM, followed by a short presentation by Peter Langlands on Unusual Angles on Bird Photography

April 30<sup>th</sup> - An update from Ron Nilsson on where we are, or rather he is, or both, in the hunt for a believable extant South Island Kokako. WE know they are there but do THEY? Ron is always worth hearing and is a great photographer too.

May 28<sup>th</sup> - Our Palaeo-ornithological President, Richard Holdaway will talk about current research and thinking in this field. If you have queries about the relations of our existing birds to those that have gone before, don't miss this one.

June 26<sup>th</sup> - Seabird specialist and boneman, Paul Scofield on his forthcoming trip [in April] to the pirate island of Hispaniola in the West Indies. Appropriately the Black-capped Petrel breeds there.

### Field Meetings

April 21<sup>st</sup> – A chance to track down some of Canterbury's forest birds at Wooded Gully near Mt Thomas. Yellow-crowned Parakeets have been sighted in this area recently. Meet at the picnic grounds on the southern side of the Ashley River at 9.00 am – note that this is adjacent to the bridge which crosses from Rangiora, NOT the State Highway 1 bridge. Contact Jan Walker 322 7187 or [shesagreen@gmail.com](mailto:shesagreen@gmail.com).

May 19<sup>th</sup> – late afternoon meeting to (hopefully!) catch the spectacle of incoming Black-fronted Terns as they join their roost for the night after a day at sea. Plus there will be the usual range of Ashley Estuary birds nearby. This will then be followed by a dinner and get-together at the Gateway Hotel in Woodend. Meet at the Gateway Hotel to car pool to Waikuku at 3.30 pm, before dinner at 6.30 pm. Please contact Bev Alexander (03) 313 7009 or on [birdiebev@xtra.co.nz](mailto:birdiebev@xtra.co.nz) so that she can make a dinner reservation.



Photo: Tony Crocker

June 16<sup>th</sup> - Winter Wader Count, Lake Ellesmere. Meet at end of Embankment Rd. at 9.30am. Warm clothes and gumboots, hot drinks and lunch for later. Contact Contact Colin Hill on 325 5891 or [cherryhill@xtra.co.nz](mailto:cherryhill@xtra.co.nz), or Jan Walker, see above.

## OSNZ Conference - Taranaki

The following from Barry Hartley in New Plymouth, to those of you planning to attend the OSNZ AGM and conference on Queen's Birthday weekend in New Plymouth:

**“Field trip fees appear twice in the Registration form, in Section A and C. Please disregard the field trip cost in Section A; Use Section C to complete the field trip details.**

**We apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused.**

**B A Hartley  
Regional Representative, Taranaki**

### Beach Patrols

Beach patrols generally take place on the first Saturday of the month. They involve a group of members getting together in the morning and spending a few hours working their way up a designated stretch of beach and finding any dead birds that have been washed up, classifying them, and filling in a report card to be sent to the national office. This valuable information is collated to reveal clues about what is happening out at seas.

The Canterbury beach patrols are co-ordinated by Jan Walker. Please contact Jan at [shesagreen@gmail.com](mailto:shesagreen@gmail.com) or 322 7187, to get details of when the next patrol will take place.

## RECENT SIGHTINGS

In the first week of January, Allan Rackham reported seeing a possible BAIRD'S SANDPIPER at Lake Ellesmere. There have been about 4 previous sightings, mainly in the 1970s, of this rare vagrant, all in the North Island. At the same time he saw a HUDSONIAN GODWIT which has stayed on and was still there at the end of Feb.

Many people have since looked for the little sandpiper and Phil Crutchley may have caught a glimpse at Jarvis Rd. Nothing con-

firming has turned up, however, but this is not to say it wasn't there. The lake is so vast and some areas are quite invisible except to birds.

On 8th Jan, Don Geddes spotted a SHORE PLOVER with bands on, at the Rakaia River Mouth. This is thought to be one of those released from a captive-breeding programme in Christchurch onto Centre Is, off Invercargill. He wasn't able to get an exact band combo.

For much of Jan and Feb there has been a SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER 10 km inland up the Ashley River, near Rangiora. It was first seen by Nick Ledgard.



Photo: Tony Crocker

Nick Allen had a BLACK-TAILED GODWIT on his twitch of the Ashley Estuary on 28th Jan. This may be the one that was earlier at the Avon Estuary. There are now 4

EASTERN CURLEWS also at the Ashley, 2 of which may have moved from the Brighton Spit.

On Sun, 11th March, Nick Allen and I went down to Ki Wainono Lagoon, south of Timaru. There we found a HUDSONIAN GODWIT and 2 PECTORAL SANDPIPERS, also yet another of a crop of CHESTNUT-BREASTED SHELDUCK [female]. There is still one at St. Annes Lagoon near Cheviot and still more at Lake Ellesmere. This last originally first seen by Allan Rackham on the same day as his other finds!

There has been quite an influx of Australian waterfowl this summer with Plumed Whistling Ducks in the North Is. and a Wood Duck at Hokitika sewage ponds as well. The dreadful ongoing drought in Oz must have something to do with these movements.

Keith Harrison has reported seeing a pair of BROWN CREEPERS last August [27th] in a pine plantation north of Cust on the south of the Ashley R. This is the first time he's ever seen this native bird so far out of native bush.

On 20th Jan. Don Geddes had a TOMTIT in his garden in Ashburton - another unusual sighting.

In early Feb., Rob Lawrence and some Nelson OSNZers finally found ORANGE-FRONTED PARAKEETS in the Hawdon Valley. They were on the east bank. In previous seasons they have been on the west side. This is Canterbury's and perhaps the country's most seriously endangered bird species, critically approaching extinction with fewer individuals left than the Kakapo. Some captive-bred birds have recently been released on Maud Is-

land.

Rob Lawrence spent Waitangi Day loafing about up the upper reaches of the Otira in Arthur's Pass, and was rewarded in a major way with being joined by a pair of ROCK WRENS who enjoyed his company for ages. This is the second summer these charming birds have been present here. Unfortunately when Nick Allen slogged for two hours up there on 10th March, the birds were not so obliging.

CRESTED GREBES have continued to nest in several places around Lake Ellesmere after their first appearance breeding last summer [2005/6] Pairs are now visible on and off at Harts Creek, Selwyn Huts, Kaituna Lagoon and Lake Forsyth throughout the summer. DoC has been helping them out with some predator control.



Photo: Tony Crocker

There is a GLOSSY IBIS at Travis Swamp for the 10th year at the moment. It is easy to see from the hide. Also, Andrew Crossland and the rangers have seen another MARSH CRAKE. If you want to try for this one, wading a stream is involved and the directions are complicated. Please email [andrew.crossland@ccc.govt.nz](mailto:andrew.crossland@ccc.govt.nz) for details.

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### **Contacting The Wrybill**

The Wrybill is issued to members of the Canterbury branch of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, and to other branches of the society, 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 advertising rate is \$15 for a half A4 page.

Contact details: Editor Tony Crocker is on Christchurch 981 4602, or 021 795909, or email [tony.crocker@clear.net.nz](mailto:tony.crocker@clear.net.nz)



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NZ pipit	2	3	0	3	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
Totals	3389	107	393	23	75	64	240	14	15	0	259	969	10	2	5563

Weather: Fine, cold, overcast in morning, sunny afternoon. 29 observers