



Out 'n' About

Newsletter of the Southland
Natural History Field Club

Vol 10 Issue No. 8 September 2010

Meeting Thursday 9 September 7.30pm
Committee Meeting at 7.00pm
at the Hearing Association meeting rooms, 126 Leet Street

**Pete McClelland will be speaking about his
recent trip to Macquarie Island**

Coming up...

Fieldtrip Sunday 12 September Beach walk! This is our annual walk from Riverton to the main entrance of Oreti Beach. It takes about five hours. Low tide is 10.30am which means we can cross the Waimatuku River mouth without getting wet (snigger). Meeting at the museum at 8am. Contact Lloyd 2130404 if you are interested. Can you help with transport?

Tuesday 14 September Forest and Bird meeting - **James Reardon - Lizard and Frog conservation around the world** - including a year working in Sri Lanka .

Saturday 18 September Fieldclub Aparima River walk, Wreys Bush to Otautau. Suitable if the river is low. Possibility of gull colonies, Black-fronted dotterels and other river life.

Weekend 25-26 September Forest and Bird - **Tautuku working weekend** (Book with Tony Bretherick 2186137 for free accommodation)

Wednesday 20 October 2010 – Forest and Bird talk. Suzanne Krumdiek – find out all about "Transition Engineering - a solution to climate disruption, resource depletion, ecosystem reclamation and population reduction" Look at the Forest and Bird website www.forestandbird.org.nz/whats-on-in-your-area/regions/southland-stewart for any changes to this programme or phone the trip leader.

Sunday 3 October Fieldclub trip. Walk out to Fortrose Spit from the east end of Waituna Lagoon. A four-wheel drive track leads towards the Fortrose Estuary where there is a cluster of fishing huts. This is a chance to do the beach on both the ocean side and the estuary side of Fortrose Spit.

Borland Weekend 8-10 October. I have about a dozen people interested the weekend at Borland Lodge. I have a booking for the weekend of Friday 8 October to Sunday 10 October. This is the last weekend of the September Holidays. Friday night to Sunday afternoon. Cost \$56 for accommodation. Food and transport will be on top of this. Lots of short tracks, good night sky and up to Borland Saddle if the weather is good. Please contact Lloyd if you are keen to come. Can you re-confirm with me before the end of September if you are coming..

Other stuff...

Chaffinch (right): 31 August noted the first chaffinch song at Otatara. The nests are very cryptic and are rarely



seen despite the chaffinch and blackbird being the two most widespread species in New Zealand. Chaffinches decorate them with pieces of lichen which help them blend in with the tree trunk.

Ben Bolt On 21 August eight of us walked up to Ben Bolt, a hill on Bartrum's farm beside the Otapiri Stream. We followed the track to the rocky hilltop and skirted around to another promontory to the west where we had lunch. There is a farm track to the top. There was a splendid view and the weather stayed clear. Some of the party took a shortcut back, straight down the face of the hill, but arrived down safely. The flora is interesting. There is a good range of shrubby coprosmas and ferns, and the mistletoe *Tupeia antarctica*. Fierce lancewood (right) was quite common as well.



We were hospitably received by the family and fed tea and scones before we were allowed to start the hike. For pictures of this and other Fieldclub activities check out our website which can be found on the Invercargill Environment Centre's website.

www.iec.org.nz We are under the sub-heading Groups. Well done Alan Admore for getting both websites up and running.



Frog survey 2011 It has been suggested that good project for the Fieldclub would be a survey of the frog population in Southland. This could be in the form of a pamphlet and reporting sheet to go out to schools and interested people. We are too late of course for baseline data but anecdotally, frogs were widespread in Southland in all suitable habitats before being affected by the worldwide spread of the chitrid fungus about 15 years ago. Since then numbers have dropped off dramatically but there are odd pockets of resistance.

As frogs aren't protected species, DOC has no particular role in their conservation, so a group such as ours could help out..



There are two species – the Golden bell frog or Green frog and the Whistling frog or Brown frog.

More on the continuing rat saga...

Rats generally recycle quite well. Nature's little helpers are the anti-fossil brigade whose job it is to see that dead stuff gets rapidly turned back to soil. Without them, the roads would be covered in dead possums, the paddocks would be full of dead sheep and the bush would be full of fallen branches and leaves. Slaters, huhu grubs, Black-backed gulls, fungi, bacteria and maggots are just some of the guys who help the recycling process along. A dead rat takes only a week in the summer to become a skeleton. Other scavengers soon scatter the bones and then nothing remains. Sometimes the process doesn't work completely and part of the soft tissue remains. Rats specialise in leaving their dried corpses lying around. Egypto-rats, they are called. In Pompallier House in Russell there is the obligatory display of the rat mummies found in the wall cavities and attic when the building was restored. The house is well worth the visit when in Russell, by the way. It was the first Catholic building erected in New Zealand, dating from 1842. I think other important buildings have rat displays as well but perhaps they are kept out of sight for the staff to enjoy privately. Every house has its preserved rats. You may not be aware that as you read this, a withered rat is within two metres of you. A dozen or more shrivelled and hairless corpses lurk in your ceiling, inside the sofa and in forgotten corners of dark cupboards. This is the downside of poisoning, combined with rats' short earthly tenure and of their tendency to seek out warm and dry places in which to set up business and eventually to expire. The same conditions enjoyed by a living rat help to mummify him when he has become an ex-rat – perhaps you could say de-ratified or irrational.

Children appreciate these mummies more than adults. I find that when I visit, the resident child will show me the house-rat. Sometimes they are painted silver or varnished. I saw one done as a Christmas tree ornament once, with tinsel in his ears and a tiny wreath of holly around his neck. Another was used as a back scratcher. Yet another had been stuffed and the body fitted over the door handle 'to keep your hand warm when opening the door'. They are brought in all innocence to the class nature table, where, on observing them, the teacher backs away alarmed, may or may not scream, and summons an old and responsible boy to remove the animal 'right over the back fence thank you'.

In addition to an Egypto-rat I have a Rat-of-Turin. Mortally wounded by the bar on a trap, he was flung backwards onto a sheet of paper where he bled prodigiously. The fur became suffused with blood and as he died he left his image upon the paper. I have no high hopes of making money from him and people do not call, demanding to see him and leaving donations, but I've grown fond of him and share him with select friends.

Newsletter: Phil Rhodes 2144936 p.rhodes@xtra.co.nz

Chairman: Lloyd Esler 2130404 esler@southnet.co.nz

Secretary: Joanne Forbes 2162423