



Out 'n' About

Newsletter of the Southland
Natural History Field Club

Vol 10 Issue No. 9 October 2010

Meeting Thursday 14 October 7.30pm

Committee Meeting at 7.00pm

at the Hearing Association meeting rooms, 126 Leet Street

This is our AGM

**Gary Morgan from Environment Southland will
be speaking about the state of Southland
rivers**

We have reached ten years old. A cake has been made for the occasion. If you feel inspired, you are invited to bring along additional food items to help round out the evening.

AGM

Election of officers
Financial report and subs
Chairman's report
Ideas for the next 12 months
General business

Coming up...

Fieldtrip Saturday 23 October. Dry country around Cromwell and Luggate. 8am start. This the Saturday of Labour weekend. \$15 for driver. Let Lloyd know if you are interested.

Fieldtrip Saturday 30 October. Trip to the Blue Mountains led by Winston Cooper. 8am start. We will be heading to the Beaumont end of the range for where a road leads up into the forest. Chance to see beech forest and possibly yellowheads. Let Lloyd know if interested \$10 for driver.

A reminder from Ros Cole from DoC

For all you "out and abouters" this summer, the local Department of Conservation office has asked field club members to be on the look out for any deceased **Hectors Dolphins**. They are keen to retrieve any found washed up on beaches and to keep them secure from the tide if possible.



Then phone DoC and they will come and collect it, in any condition and in any area, no matter how remote.

Ros also mentioned that the department is bleach marking NZ sea lions this year in an effort to gauge how many are in Southland and ask for us to keep our eyes open for any that are bleached with letters or numbers or maybe just large blobs as they seals may have rolled

over and smudged the markings.

You could draw a rough sketch of the “blob”, all markings are lower back over the pelvis.

Also any observations of any other marine mammals alive and swimming or dead and stinking would be much appreciated. Ros mentions a report of an emaciated leopard seal reported from Stewart Island and Riverton. So be on the look out.

Bird of the month

I remember many years ago when the sight of a Royal Spoonbill in Southland would create much excitement with the local birding fraternity. But such has been the increase in numbers of these majestic birds that they are now accepted as just part of the landscape.

There are now a number of breeding colonies around Southland and probably some that we are not even aware of.

From their earliest breeding site at Omaui Island they have now spread to: Pig Island located just off the Riverton coast; a small islet off Tikore Island; False Island on Surat Bay and DoC has reported them breeding in Awarua Bay.

After dispersing at the end of the breeding season they can be seen in good numbers in the lagoon near the Roger Sutton Boardwalk and also on the Oreti River down from the boat ramp at Sandy Point.

It is interesting watching the nearly fully grown juveniles still chasing and begging food from the adults, the youngsters and still a slightly dirty grey colour and smaller than the adults.

There has been some banding of chicks done on Omaui Island in the past and there are still a good number of adults wearing their colour bands.

They have been observed on Stewart Island and no doubt there will be a breeding colony reported in the future, such is the rapid spread of these birds around New Zealand.

Phil Rhodes

Recent trips:

Beach walk The beach walk from Riverton to the main entrance was accomplished on 12 September. Ten walkers made the distance with only one casualty – a cut foot. There wasn't much washed ashore. The main object of interest was the head and skeleton of a 2.5m Yellowfin tuna. I retrieved the head later and took a plaster mould from it. This is the largest bony fish found in Southland waters although a few shark species get larger – the Basking shark, White-pointer and Porbeagle.

Aparima River. The walk down the Aparima River on Saturday 18 September was cancelled for obvious reasons if you remember that this was the day the stadium collapsed. It is still a possibility for a summer excursion with gull colonies, Black-fronted dotterels and other river life.

Fortrose Spit On Sunday 3 October eight of us did a 13km hike from the east end of Waituna Lagoon along a four-wheel drive track to the Fortrose Estuary and back along the ocean side of the peninsula. It was a fine and pleasant

day but the going was a little tough on the soft sand. We were surprised at the size of 'Big Bend', the informal whitebait-mining town that has developed on both side of the Mataura river just before it reaches the estuary. Some of the structures have graduated

from 'fishing shacks' to well-appointed lodges and are presumably pushing the rules about what can be built by squatters on the Queens chain. It was pleasing to see the extent of the golden sedge pingao which is otherwise rare on the Southland coast. The beach was devoid of much flotsam but we did find a large very dead sealion – about a three-quarter sized male.



Other stuff...

Don't eat the yellow snow In the big snowfall of 18 September I noticed that the snow under my alder trees was distinctly yellow. This is pollen which has been dislodged from the catkins by hail and snowflakes, settling on the white blanket. I melted a saucepan full of lightly packed snow and got half a saucepan of water. This shows that the snow must have been at the extreme end of density. Alternatively I could have weighed a measured volume of snow without going to the trouble melting it.



Spotted shag Neil Robertson

The photo here was taken in Dusky Sound near Anchor Island. These shags appear to be numerous here, with groups of 20+ on some small islets. Note the distinct blue sheen to the nape, back and rump. Is this perhaps indicative of *Strictocarbo punctatus stedi* (Stewart Island population) rather than *S. punctatus punctatus* which occurs on the east coast of the South Island and further north. The Robertson and Heather field guide shows no Spotted Shags in the south west corner (Fiordland) but the Atlas (1999-2004) shows presence in a few squares in Preservation Inlet, Chalky Inlet and Dusky Sound. The sighting on 25 August on the Shelter Islands at the entrance to Doubtful Harbour was the first I have seen in this area (I have been a regular visitor here

since 2006 and almost daily since spring 2008).

Perhaps we are starting to see an increase in their range northwards up the west coast. It will be interesting to see if there are more occurrences through the summer.

New pigeon signs in Otatara Here's a good idea. Russell and May Evans have been doing sterling work looking after orphaned and damaged tuis and pigeons. The commonest cause of pigeon injury is flying into windows. They see the sky reflected in the glass or try to take a short-cut through the house and come to grief. Car strike is another problem. If drivers go a little slower and take notice of the pigeons feeding on trees overhanging the road they may be able to save a life. The council has provided Otatara with pigeon signs. Let's hope they have the desired effect.

Formalin Anyone know where a small quantity, a litre or thereabouts, of formalin can be obtained? This is needed for preserving starfish before drying them. Keeps the bugs out and the smell in. Formalin bleaches things but it is an excellent preservative. It is toxic and regarded with horror these days but it used to have a wide range of uses.

Birds of the World. Do you know anyone who would make use of Birds of the World? This is a set that came out in weekly parts in the 1970s. Ten binders full.

Rats and me, or rats and I, whichever is the more grammatically correct – the continuing saga...

We had several rats at school when I was at Tweedsmuir. One I called Li-Chin and I told the children it was a Chinese whistling mouse. I seemed to be the only one who could make the whistling mouse actually whistle. They never realised it was me.

One boy was in love with the rat and used to keep it in his shirt. He also used to suck its tail which was never a good idea. "Don't do that Ben, it's not hygienic. You might give him a disease."

Li-Chin was taken home for the holidays by various children. One of the parents rang me on the first holiday evening. "This Chinese whistling mouse... It looks a lot like a rat." "Ahh caught at last," I thought. "Does a Chinese whistling mouse eat the same food as a rat?"

"Yes," I assured him, "anything you would feed a rat you can feed a Chinese whistling mouse." Li-Chin shared the cage with a guineapig. It was as dim-witted as any other guinea pig. It used



to charge around the cage scattering the straw. The rat would gather an armful of straw and build a nest and the guinea pig would barge through it and wreck it. A dozen times a day the rat would patiently rebuild and his messmate would demolish it again. There was no friction between them, just an acceptance of the inevitability of obstacles on the one hand and carelessness on the other.

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

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

Secretary: Joanne Forbes 2162423