

# *Out 'n' About*

Newsletter of the Southland  
Natural History Field Club

**Vol 11 Issue No. 1 February 2011**

**Meeting Wednesday 9 February 7.30pm**

**Note that for several reasons this is a Wednesday and not a  
Thursday**

**7.30 at the Hearing Association meeting rooms, 126 Leet  
Street. Committee meeting 7pm**

**New member Dr Ghazally Ismail will  
talk about**

**Biodiversity in Borneo**

Coming up...

**World Wetlands Day** at Waituna - Saturday 5 February.

Book for the bus from Invercargill 9.30am - \$5 includes bbq. See full details under Events on [www.sern.org.nz](http://www.sern.org.nz) or to register for the bus or the bbq lunch please email [g.munro@woosh.co.nz](mailto:g.munro@woosh.co.nz) or ph Gay Munro on 239 5827 by Wednesday, 2nd February.

Also on the day will be the official launch of the new Southland Community Nursery website. You can have a sneak preview at [www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz](http://www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz) but we will be adding to it so keep watching. If you have any suggestions or resources you would like added to it (in time!), let me know. The main section that we will add to is the "Places to Visit" section.

**Summer Wader Count**

February is our summer wader count month and this year we are looking at two possible dates that are Sunday, February 13 with high tide at Bluff 9.12am or Sunday, February 27 with a high tide at 9.50am

We hope to cover the usual main roosting areas such as the head of Awarua Bay, Cow Island (Awarua Bay), New River Estuary and some other sites depending on how many helpers we get. Anyone interested please phone Phil Rhodes on 217 7699 or e-mail [p.rhodes@xtra.co.nz](mailto:p.rhodes@xtra.co.nz)

**Mavora Lakes** Saturday 26 February 8am start. Phone Lloyd if keen. A day exploring the lake fringes and some of the shorter walks around the North and South Mavora Lakes. \$15

**Forest and Bird trip Waipapa Point** – Saturday 12 February Commemorative pingao planting with the Ericson Family 9.30am Car pool from museum. Visit to James Pirie's QEII Covenant at Tokanui in afternoon. Leader Brian Rance, ph 213 1161. [rances@ihug.co.nz](mailto:rances@ihug.co.nz)

This newsletter is the place to report those little snippets of natural history news. This includes rocks, weather, space, plants, birds and insects etc... Lots of short articles please, perhaps with a photograph...

## A seabird on a Lake



Neil Robertson from Te Anau sent this photo taken by Helen Blake on December 10 of a Broad-billed Prion flying along the Lake Manapouri shoreline.

Not one of the more common sights at Manapouri although there have been a number of reports of seabirds around the southern lakes previously and of course Mottled Petrels breed on an island in Lake Hauroko.

Broad-billed prions are widespread and abundant breeding in the South Atlantic as well as southern New Zealand and the Chathams.

It is one of the more common species picked up on our beach patrols and easily identified

by its large wide bill (grotesque according to the bird guides) a little bit harsh I think. It is also known as the Whale bird. Its diet is mainly copepods and other crustaceans but it will also eat small fish and squid.

## **Beach master in the making**

On a recent field club trip we walked along Surat Beach and there were a number of New Zealand Sea Lions snoozing on the beach including this young bull seal. He ignored us but caught sight of another young bull along with a female making their way out of the surf and onto the beach. He immediately roused himself and charged toward the intruder chasing it back into the sea. Wynston Cooper advised that the young bull was practicing defending his portion of beach ready for the real battles in the years ahead.

There were also good numbers of seals on Cannibal Bay.

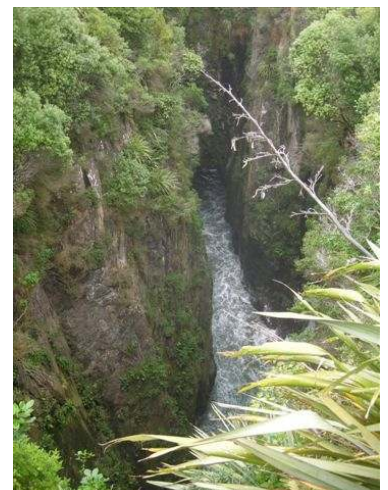
### **Deep Cove,**

On Saturday 8 January we had a very pleasant trip to Deep Cove. 15 Fieldclub members and friends took the early ferry across Manapouri to West Arm and boarded the bus for Wilmot Pass. We checked out the Mount Cook buttercup there which had just finished flowering but there were plenty of other flowers, notably on the Native broom *Carmichaelia sp.* We called at the Stella Falls for lunch then continued down the road to the top of the old Doubtful Sound Track. This track originally extended from West Arm to Deep Cove but was largely destroyed when the road was constructed. We followed it down for about an hour to the twin outlet tunnels for the power scheme. We crossed the



tailrace on the new bridge provide by Meridian Energy which gives access to the Helena Falls. The spoil from the tailrace excavations has been landscaped and planted, although a natural regrowth of the colonising species tutu dominates. We walked along the westernmost road in New Zealand to the wharf – the largest cantilever wharf in New Zealand – and took the bus back to West Arm. A full day and an enjoyable one.

**Catlins trip** On 15 January we had an excursion to Jacks Blowhole and Surat





Beach. A pleasant day with a fair mileage covered. The blowhole is spectacular. It's about 15 minutes walk from the carpark

### **Robyn Harper has sent in a report on her recent Subantarctic trip**

I did to the Sub-Antarctic Islands in Nov-Dec last year. My Mum and I travelled with Heritage Expeditions. We were unable to zodiac around The Snares due to stormy westerly conditions. However, Enderby Island was a delight. The NZ Hookers Sea Lions were beginning to gather their harems. While on Enderby, some young males practised their territorial advances on us! We had a few heart-stopping moments. My everlasting impression of Enderby is the diversity of flora and fauna. Yes, the Mega-herbs were in their prime, with magnificent flower heads. I enjoyed observing and photographing the Auckland Island Teal as they preened themselves among the kelp.

Through another storm in the Furious Fifties as we approached Macquarie Island. The King, Royal and Gentoo Penguins were quite unconcerned by human beings wandering around their beaches. I was astounded by the size of the Elephant Seals. They weren't particularly endearing as they were moulting and making rather disgusting noises. The scientists at ADARE Base were very interesting to talk to. The rabbit eradication programme on Macquarie is soon to commence. If the Australian Govt wanted to recoup some of the cost of this programme by recovering pelts. The fur is the thickest I've ever seen on rabbits. Obviously an adaptation to the environment.



After another two days at sea we sailed into Perseverance Harbour on Campbell Island. Seeing the size and geography of this island bought home to me the scale of the rat eradication programme there. Its success all the more rewarding for those involved. You would enjoy the gamming displays by the Southern Royal Albatross. Again, these young birds were delightful. One circled



above myself and another lady, coming closer with every turn, until it was just two metres above us. The sound of the wind as it whooshed by was like a glider sailing overhead. We were simply 'blown away' by this experience. We were sure these huge birds were playing with us. Auckland Island Teal on Enderby Island (right) and Albatross gamming on Campbell Island (left).

**Black oystercatcher swimming.** On 20 December I visited the Tokanui River mouth. There was a group of Black oystercatchers on the rock platform and as I approached, they flew across a channel and settled on the other side – all except one which elected to swim. The paddling was energetic but the progress was slow as they don't have webbed feet. If you have seen pukekos swimming you will know what I mean.



**Arctic skua.** These birds seem to be getting more numerous around New Zealand. On 25 December I saw an Arctic skua flying along Oreti Beach, looking for trouble. Skuas harass other gulls and terns, forcing them to drop any food they are carrying. The Arctic skua looks like a gull but it is a more nimble flier and has a longer tail with the central tail feathers projecting beyond the rest of the tail as you can see in this photo.



**Giant petrel.** A GP was picked up dead on Orepuki in November by Margaret McFarlane and Rob Raill. It had an Australian band and probably comes from Macquarie Island. It will be interesting to get the details

**Red-billed gulls.** On 27 December I observed Red-billed gulls flying along the marram-

covered dunes at Mason Bay, obviously looking for something. Cicadas! There were quite noisy and the gulls are probably homing in on the sound. I saw several attempts at catching cicadas. The photo shows a low flying gull on a mission.



**Cuttlefish bone.** On Mason Bay on 27 December I found a number of cuttlefish shells, or gladii, better known as cuttlefish bone. This is the soft and chalky shell of an octopus-like animal. It's the buoyancy organ and popular with keepers of caged birds as it is a good source of calcium. The cuttlefish doesn't live in New Zealand waters but the shells drift down on tropical currents. They are pecked by albatrosses, nibbled by fish and bored into by various things so they are pretty chewed up by the time they arrive. Amongst the large battered shells, I found four very small and intact ones. They



had a fresh smell and I would guess that they are very recent and haven't drifted far.

Perhaps cuttlefish live in our waters after all.

**Crimson speckled moth** Found recently at Clifton was this Crimson speckled moth *Utetheisa pulchella*. It is a large moth with striking markings. It is worldwide and a migrant so this one may have been blown over from Australia.



**Reef heron.** One seen by Eric Black at Barracouta Point on 16 December.

**Caspian terns.** 19 chicks at the estuary colony on 5 January, all close to flying.

**Mokomoko Inlet.** The 'Moke' has been a bit neglected as a possible wader habitat. On 4 Jan LE, Phil Rhodes and Wynston Cooper spent a couple of

hours walking around the inlet to get an idea of the bird population. The figures were: SIPO – 365+, Spoonbill – 7; Godwit – 165+; White faced heron – 10; Mallard – 11; Paradise duck – 2; Pied stilt – 25; Spur-winged plover – 5; Red-billed gull – 5; Black-backed gull – 10; Back shag – 1. Others heard were fernbird, fantail and kingfisher.

### **Next instalment of The Rats and I**

Otago Museum has a 'rat king'. This is an oddity which appealed to the Victorian appreciation of the macabre. A rat king is a cluster of rats with knotted tails, supposedly resulting from an overcrowded nest, but that seems pretty unlikely. The rats were almost certainly caught and knotted and then sold off to collectors of curios. A rat king could be maintained alive for some time apparently. It would slowly move across the floor as a pulsating squealing mass in the direction of food. You can imagine letting one loose under a rat-phobe's bed. Actually, there is a name for 'fear of rats' – musophobia, not to be confused with musaphobia – fear of bananas. I'm scared of the green ones (bananas, not rats) in case someone forces me to eat one at gunpoint. There are no green rats, in fact very few green mammals. One of the sloths is greenish, apparently this comes from the algae that grows in its fur. See what happens when you get lazy!

The Otago Museum rat king is preserved. I remember that some of the rats were well dead and presumably as they died off they were dragged around rather than being bitten loose. Rats are fighters and cannibals so it is hard to imagine a rat-king living in peace.



Having another rat tugging on your tail is going to promote a violent squabble and death to one combatant, surely.

A good example of rat cannibalism comes from Ian Gamble. A trap in his ceiling went off one night and a certain amount of thrashing around indicated that it had done its task. The noise continued for a long time however. When Ian checked in the morning, there was half a rat in the trap. His mate had decided to get the takeaways while they were warm. One way of getting revenge on your enemies I suppose.



**Flax flowering.** It's been a bumper year for flax. On Stewart Island however, I noticed that almost all the flax flowers at Island Hill were dead on 26 Dec. They were drooping and shrivelled from something that had struck them about three weeks beforehand. I suspect this was a late frost but it must have been a heavy one to have done all that damage. Young bracken shoots were killed as well. The photo shows dead flax heads.  
Stop Press: There was a frost in Invercargill 9/12, perhaps that was it!

**Mason Bay** Anyone interested in a trip to Mason Bay, Stewart Island 14-15 May? Ferry to Oban, watertaxi to Freshwater and walk to Mason Bay. Kiwi-spotting in the evening. Sunday – Beach patrol, picked up by plane afternoon on 15 May 4pm. Probable cost around \$270 : (Water taxi \$50, Ferry \$66, Plane \$145)  
Contact Lloyd Esler [esler@southnet.co.nz](mailto:esler@southnet.co.nz)

**For sale** South Island Birds \$10 and Natural Otatara \$5



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