



Birds New Zealand

Birds New Zealand
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Southland Region Newsletter – February 2016

Red-billed Gull Survey

On the 23rd of December OSNZ Southland undertook an aerial resurvey of the Red-billed Gull colonies identified in the Gurr and Kinsky paper in 1965. This is part of the national OSNZ project and built on the flight Richard Scofield did down the east coast as far as Bluff on the 23rd of November as well as ground observations by local OSNZ members. The timing of the flight was later than ideal due to problems coordinating the availability of the plane and observers and it was recognised that some chicks would no longer be at the nest. This had been noted at the two colonies on the back of Bluff Hill on the 20th of December. This combined with some issues over getting the desired observations/photos mean that it was difficult to identify the number of nests accurately.



The flight went along the southern coast checking sites at Pig Island (Tihaka), Pourakino River mouth, Centre Island (Rarotoka), Wakapatu, and Preservation Inlet before cutting back over Solander Island to Codfish (Whenua Hou) then down to the southern titi islands, Doughboy Bay, Halfmoon Bay, the Hazelburg group off Ruapuke and finally Bluff Harbour. Of the 14 sites checked only 3 had birds present; an islet off Centre Island, Fisherman's Rock in Halfmoon Bay and a rock stack in the Hazelburg Group with Fisherman's Rock holding the largest number of birds. A new, albeit small colony was found on the west side of Big South Cape (Taukihepa).

While the results are surprising and disappointing, this helps build the picture of how this species is faring in Southland and it highlights the issue with this species, which New Zealanders consider as common and doing well. It shows that Red-billed and Black-billed Gulls both need a lot more attention before their numbers drop to a critical level.

Thanks are due to Peter Frost and the Projects & Activities Committee for assistance with funding; also to Pilot Cameron Morrison (Southern Wings), and Pete McClelland, Sarah Crump and Geoff McClelland for helping with the photography and the count at such short notice.



New Zealand Plover (South Island Dotterel) Project

We are very pleased to welcome Kevin Carter, who has been appointed to organise the fieldwork on the New Zealand Plover project.

The field season has been going well so far. We now have an additional 11 birds banded this breeding season (plus another 4 earlier last year), including 4 fledglings of known age. The majority of these have been banded on Mount Rakeahua, though nesting birds have been observed on Table Hill, Spot Height 464 and 511 as well. Kevin has been able to record some short-term re-sighting data which has proven very interesting in terms of determining family groupings and fledgling range.

The data is being stored on a spreadsheet on the DOC document management system. Kevin has been doing some file dredging and has collated some of the previous banding records dating back to 1992, though the information is incomplete. He will send us updates as the season progresses.

Kevin will discuss with his contract manager and the local team supervisor the logistics of getting local members up to the breeding grounds, which we believe would be a very valuable trip. The walk in to many of these areas is difficult and so a high level of fitness would be required.

Kevin Carter, Operations Ranger (Biodiversity), Department of Conservation

Birds NZ Youth Camp 2016

Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre

Birds NZ Youth Camp 2016 will run from 22 - 26 April 2016, at the **Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre** on the Firth of Thames. This is a fantastic opportunity for young people to get a hands-on experience with birds and develop skills in bird ecology!

This is a catered residential youth camp, sponsored by *Birds New Zealand* and supported locally by Birds Waikato. There will be a cost to participants but the course will be subsidised from a number of sources. We hope that local Birds New Zealand branches will financially assist any of their young members to attend. However you do not need to be a member to go on this course. We anticipate about a dozen students on the course. The camp is for students Year10 and above. For details go to

http://osnz.org.nz/sites/osnz.org.nz/files/BIRDS_NEW_ZEALAND_YOUTH_CAMP_2016_FLYER.pdf

If you are aware of any young people who may be interested in attending, please draw their attention to the flyer for the Miranda event.

Annual "Great Backyard Bird Count" - eBird

This is the 19th year of the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Join the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) **from 12th to 15th of February**. It's for everyone, from beginner birdwatchers to experts, and anyone can participate from anywhere in the world. How many birds will you find?

Each **eBird** checklist submitted helps the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bird Studies Canada, and the National Audubon Society learn more about how to protect birds and the environment we share.

Together we can make our local birds count!





Sanderling - Three birds still present in early January 2016



Red-necked Stint - Over 20 birds present at head of Awarua Bay



Wrybill - Single bird, head of Awarua Bay, early January 2016

The November shorebird count went ahead as planned at all the usual sites. Coverage was good with seven members taking part, Leanne Cooman, Glenda Rees, David Fortune and Neil Robertson covered the Head of Awarua Bay, Bandy Point, Cow Island and Mokomoko Inlet, Pete and Geoff McClelland visited the Shellbanks, Phil Rhodes had a long tour visiting Fortrose Estuary, Waikawa Harbour, Haldane Estuary and Riverton. Total Counts as follows:

Bar-tailed Godwit – 2130
Red Knot – 0
Ruddy Turnstone – 176
South Island Oystercatcher – 379
Variable Oystercatcher - 8
Red-necked Stint – 23
White-headed Stilt – 46
New Zealand Plover – 2
Pacific Golden Plover – 5
Masked Lapwing – 6
Double-banded Plover - 12
Sanderling – 2
Greater Sand Plover – 2
White-faced Heron – 34
Royal Spoonbill - 109
White-fronted Tern - 99
Caspian Tern - 29

Photos not up to the standard of Glenda's pin-sharp images – but these are frame-grabs from video taken by Neil Robertson at Awarua Bay.

The next wader census will be held on the weekend of the 20-21 February 2016.

If you want to come along, to this or future wader counts, please contact Phil Rhodes (p.rhodes@xtra.co.nz) for details.

Caspian terns

Gary Morgan visited the shell banks in the New River Estuary on 12 December. The Caspian terns were nesting on the western edge of the outer shell bank. There were 10 scrapes with 1 egg, 9 scrapes with 2 eggs and 12 scrapes with no eggs. It looked like they had been washed out in a previous high tide and were setting up again. On 31 December there were no scrapes, eggs or chicks. The high tides must have obliterated them. There is still time to re-nest however.

Lloyd Esler meets Noah Strycher on Tiritiri Matangi – December 2015

Just prior to Christmas I visited Tiritiri Matangi in the Hauraki Gulf. It's regarded as New Zealand's premier visiting spot for bird watchers. I added 12 species to my 2015 list. Saddlebacks were common although more often heard than seen. Tuis are all over the place. I saw some Stitchbirds but they can be tricky to photograph. Kokakos were heard but not seen. A lone Takahe wandered through the long grass and small flocks of whiteheads disported themselves in the shrubbery. Three Spotless Crakes wandered around the edge of a pond on which floated a Brown Teal. Brown Quails scuttled through the low and dry vegetation. Swallows and robins were common. There are no tomtits there – apparently they can't compete with the robins.



Noah Strycher - Big Year 2015 - 6042 species

On the island I met Noah Strycher, an American who is doing a Big Year. (Photo shows Noah left with his New Zealand guide) His aim for 2015 was to spot 5,000 bird species which would have given him the record, surpassing the 4,341 species seen by Alan Davies and Ruth Miller in 2008. He was well ahead of his 5,000 and while on Tiri he ticked off his 5,944th species, the Fernbird. The six he added that day were Rifleman, Whitehead, Kokako, Stitchbird, Robin and Fernbird.

He finished the year in India with 6,042 species out of about 10,000 bird species – 1,701 better than the previous record. On one of his blogs in September he says,

“What does a world record mean? After all, it's just a number. People will go to great lengths for a place in the record books, as a quick glance through the Guinness Book of World Records might attest (they haven't judged my application yet), but why? Sooner or later, someone else will come along and hit a higher mark. The significance is in the journey, of course, and this one's been quite a trip. So far, I've travelled through 27 countries in 2015, from Antarctica to India, and met hundreds of local birders along the way. I've learned that birding is much more universal than most of us realize, and that watching these feathered creatures helps connect people in unexpected ways. Today I had tea with a bishop in India who enjoys birds – he told me this project has inspired him! Who could have guessed?”

Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand 4th Edition



Launched at the OSNZ Conference in 2010, this may well be the final checklist to be published in book form. It is now out of print. All remaining stocks of the book have been distributed to *Birds New Zealand* regional reps. Not too many pretty pictures of birds, well none actually, but an incredibly useful and interesting reference work. This Checklist, like its predecessors, provides a compact guide to the classification and distribution of the birds of the New Zealand region. The Checklist is the official register of all birds accepted as part of the New Zealand avifauna, and is updated every 10-20 years.

Originally sold at \$90, the book is now available for sale at the bargain price of **\$20** excl. P&P. If you wish to purchase a copy please contact Neil Robertson (neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz). To reduce postage costs, I will make copies of the book available at future Field Club meetings in Invercargill.

Future Field Trips and Events

12th – 15th February	Great Backyard Bird Count
20th-21st February	Wader census weekend - contact Phil Rhodes (p.rhodes@xtra.co.nz)

Southland Bird Race Totals – 2015 Final Scores

During 2015, a few members have been holding an informal 'bird race' to find who can see the most species of birds in Southland in a calendar year. Below are the final tallies.

There are two separate lists; (1) birds seen in Southland (Mainland Southland, Fiordland and Stewart Island), (2) birds seen throughout New Zealand. Entering your records on to eBird is strongly encouraged; the final column shows the species count for records entered on eBird.

Name	Southland Total 2015	New Zealand Total 2015	eBird Total (NZ) 2015
Lloyd Esler	90	118	1
Shawn Herron	101	125	120
Pete McClelland	86	122	0
Phil Rhodes	71	84	74
Neil Robertson	108	176*	173*
	*Variation due to different taxonomy. eBird uses "Clements" which does not recognise splits between Campbell and Black-browed Albatross, Northern and Southern Royal Albatross and North and South Island Robin.		

Southland Bird Race Totals – 2016

Name	Southland Total	New Zealand Total	eBird Total (NZ)
Lloyd Esler	60	72	-
Shawn Herron	74	77	75
Pete McClelland	44	49	-
Phil Rhodes	28	53	38
Daniel Cocker	35	83	-
Neil Robertson	83	83	83

Join the Race! If you wish to be included in the 2016 list it is not too late. All you need to do is faithfully (and honestly!!) record all of the species (taxa*) that you see, with date and location of the first sighting. Please email your list(s) to neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz.

Glenda Rees

As many of you will know Glenda suffered an unfortunate accident while visiting Ulva Island late last year. We all wish you a speedy recovery Glenda. In the meantime here are a couple of Glenda's recent photos of one of her favourite subjects – **Black-fronted Terns**.



Can anyone identify the prey item being delivered to the chick?



Recent Sightings

21st October 2015 to 25th January 2016

Back on October 21, Heather Carr reported that there were still 21 **Cattle Egrets** at Settlement Road, Tuatapere.

A juvenile **Grey-headed Albatross** was seen by Matt Jones during a Stewart Island pelagic in early November, also seen during this period was a **Brown Quail** in a garden from Manapouri reported by Neil Robertson. The resident **Red-crowned Parakeet** showed up at Lloyd Esler's property in Otatara and was also heard again at the Scenic reserve in early January. Lloyd also reported this species during his bird counts at Bluff Hill and Omaui.

The **Marsh Sandpiper** was back at Pleasure Bay lagoon on November 8, 9 and 19. A **Black-fronted Dotterel** was reported by Glenda Rees at the Maitava River, at Maitava on November 14.

Brent Stephenson spotted an **Arctic Tern** near the Stewart Island ferry terminal at Bluff on November 18 and he also saw an **Antarctic Prion** during a Stewart Island pelagic.

A **NZ White-capped Albatross** and a **Cape Petrel** were seen well into Bluff harbour not far from the ferry terminal on November 21, also seen on this date was a **Little Black Shag** in Milford Sound by Russell Cannings, possibly a first for this location and there were two **Greater Sand Plover** at the head of Awarua Bay seen by Neil Robertson.

Stewart Island has been a bit of a hot spot for **White-throated Needletail** over the years and another was seen in Horseshoe Bay on November 27.

On 12 December two **Arctic Skua** were seen by Neil Robertson near First Arm in Doubtful Sound and on 25 December Neil had a single **Brown Skua** near the Shelter Islands at the entrance to Doubtful Sound.

A quick evening visit to the head of Awarua Bay proved fruitful for Phil Rhodes and Pete McClelland as three **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** were seen, the first report for a number of years, and what was thought to be a male also putting on a mating display which is something I or Pete had not seen before. To cap off the evening we had good views of two **Sanderling**.

On 11 January, Neil Robertson and Shawn Herron reported a **Greater Sand Plover**, **Wrybill** and three **Sanderling** from the head of Awarua Bay, and **Pacific Golden Plover** and **Lesser Sand Plover** at Bandy Point.

Interesting Doubtful Sound sightings by Shawn Herron and Neil Robertson include the first **Buller's Shearwater** of the season on 6 January, **Wandering Albatross** on 16 January, **Northern Giant Petrel** and a **Northern Royal Albatross** on 21 January, and two **White-faced Storm Petrels** on 24 January.

A good start for the year for Wynston Cooper when a visit to Waipapa Pt came up with a **Brown Skua** and two **Arctic Skua** as well as a **Common Tern**. Wynston we are all envious!

Our latest beach patrol finally came up with some decent finds with three blue penguins, Mottled Petrel, Sooty Shearwater and a couple of sets of wings that have us a bit puzzled.

Happy Birding!

Phil Rhodes – Southland Region Recorder – Birds New Zealand