



THE  
**ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**  
OF NEW ZEALAND  
(INCORPORATED)

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*Otago Region Newsletter 7/2011 August 2011*

**A Week in the Ross Sea**

In February this year I had the good fortune to spend a week in the Ross Sea onboard the Heritage Expeditions ship 'Spirit of Enderby'.

The birds of the Northern Ross Sea were dominated by the distinctive Antarctic petrel. This bird about the size of the Cape Petrel was seen singly and in large groups. The Snares cape petrel and beautiful snow petrel was also present. As we closed with Cape Adare, our first landing, in dense fog, giant petrels and polar skuas were in evidence. Landing from the Zodiac the



bouquet of adelie penguin hit the senses. The breeding season was effectively over with some late desperate chicks still present but those adelie adults present were moulting. Giant petrels were present on the beach as were about 30 polar skua and two Wilson's storm petrels.

From Cape Adare it is two days steaming to McMurdo Sound in good weather. We were not so fortunate but spent three days punching into a strong southerly blast with 8 m swells and storm force winds. Birds were mostly absent during this time with only the occasional polar skua, cape

petrel and antarctic petrel present. Eventually the wind dropped, the sea subsided and we landed at Cape Royds. Birds present were again adelic penguins at the end of the breeding season or adults starting to moult. A group of about 100 polar skua were present looking optimistically at the penguins. That afternoon at Cape Evans both skuas and penguins were present but in much smaller numbers. That night we anchored in McMurdo Sound with the expectation of visiting what passes for civilisation the next day. However our plans were again disrupted with a katabatic wind developing in the morning and moving large amounts of ice floe around rapidly and putting the ship at risk. So we moved swiftly north and on the way passed a small group of Emperor penguins roosting on an ice floe.



That afternoon we visited Cape Bird the site of one of the major adelic penguin colonies in the Ross Sea. About 1000 moulting penguins were present on one section of the beach with about 50 skua in attendance. One of my fellow passengers couldn't understand why he was being attacked by a skua until he realised that he'd almost walked over a late skua chick. We finished the day by cruising along the Ross Ice Shelf in a gale with a wind chill of  $-28^{\circ}\text{C}$  with the sun setting over Mt Terror.

Over night we arrived back at Winter Quarters Bay and landed for a day visiting McMurdo Station, Scott Base and Hut Point. A small group of adelic were present down the slope from Scott's Hut and some skua were in attendance. That evening as the 'Spirit of Enderby' left McMurdo Sound we took advantage of the breakout of ice from the recent storm to sail south. The storm we had endured in the Ross Sea had lead to a major break up of ice in McMurdo Sound and for the first time in 15 years Scott Base had a beach front as opposed to an ice shore. We were cautiously able to sail as far south as 77° 54' south. A group of 100 Emperor penguins were on ice flows here and watched us with some engagement. Also present were snow petrels and 2 polar skua. The ship was able to nudge right up beside the ice flows and we spent a good 40 minutes just watching penguin's dive into the water leap back onto ice floes and generally congregate. As we moved out of the sound the ice that we had crunched through on the way in had reformed into pancake ice and we broke a new channel. That night we headed north for Inexpressible Island and the Italian Base at Terra Nova Bay but conditions were too icy for any landings and so we continued north into the Ross Sea and back to Campbell Island.



I was impressed by the size of the penguin colonies which although mostly empty were still significant areas of land. The total absence of albatross and all petrels except for three was totally unexpected. I'd never realised that these birds did not go that far south.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## Ornithological Snippets

While out walking on Swampy on 19 July I noted a falcon land on some bent over sedges beside a pond. The falcon was about 100 m away and as I approached it took to the wing and flew generally towards me but what caught my eye and ear were the 20 redpolls which followed it. The air was cool and so the falcon was beating its wings vigorously to gain height (as opposed to gliding or soaring). The flock of redpolls extended from about a metre behind the falcon to about 10 metres behind and were in a loose aggregation. They kept up a continuous series of contact calls. The falcon did not respond to my whistles and flew over me and headed north into the sun. I guess it is an example of knowing where your enemy is.

### Bruce McKinlay

It's likely in July that a small number of South Island pied oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus finchi*) flow back either as individuals or pairs to either their valley feeding / breeding sites or waiting for the mountain snow to clear. Images of these two oystercatchers were taken at Butchers Dam Thursday 21st July.



To my knowledge / observation, oystercatchers don't breed at or around Butchers dam / Flat Top Hill. The residents of the valley nest mainly in lowland rural locations though there has been a pair regularly nesting at the Alexandra Golf Course. Small numbers of oystercatchers nest in the cushion herb fields at or below the summits of quite a few of the Otago block mountains. I have yet to see oystercatchers nesting in the tussock zones.

### John Douglas

On 29th July, while stuck in a traffic jam on the southern approach to Waihola ! a NZ Falcon of indeterminate age/sex flew across the road and over the lake. Also on the lake a raft of approximately 200 Scaup.

On 30th July, an adult male Greenfinch with a white head was seen briefly at our garden feeder (Balclutha). The rest of the plumage was normal, and the head was pure white apart from a trace of yellow immediately around the eye.

**Richard Schofield**

On Saturday 13th August a falcon flew NE over the bush over the kaka feeder at Orokonui on the kaka track. Approximate time 11am. Caused alert calls among Tui. Also seen by the Kaka feeder as he was at the feeder at the time.

**Valerie Fay**

## **Upcoming Meetings and Events**

### **Otago Peninsula Bird Survey – a new initiative**

The Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group (OPBG) is a group of local landowners working to enhance biodiversity on the Otago Peninsula by removing pests. Possums are the initial focus and the intention is to reduce possum numbers to such low levels that they are no longer a threat to the Peninsula's natural values. Both vegetation and bird monitoring will be undertaken to evaluate the long term effectiveness of this pest control programme.

Twenty four 1km transects have been identified and the procedure involves 1 or 2 people walking a transect, identifying and recording the birds seen and heard as they go.

On the next page there is a map of the Peninsula showing the transects on public land. If any OSNZ members would like to help with this survey, your skills would be most welcome. I can email you the descriptions of each transect and the Excel recording sheet.

**Moira Parker** (for the Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group)  
email moiraparker @clear.net.nz



Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group Bird Survey Transects

## **Field Trip to Styles Creek Reserve, Broad Bay,**

Frank Peppers has invited members of OSNZ to visit their covenanted piece of remnant bush. He is keen for us to compile a list of species. We will meet on Sunday 11 September at the top of Matariki Street at 1.00 pm. Frank will meet us and show us where the tracks start. For car pooling, please phone Mary 464 0787.

## **Weekend Field Trip to Awarua Bay and Waituna Lagoon, 12/13th November, 2011**

This area of Southland is a hot spot for a variety of migratory waders that we don't normally see on Otago (stint, turnstones, golden plover, sandpipers, etc) and also NZ Dotterel. Many Fernbirds are also in the area. The tide this weekend in November is suitable for observing roosting birds; the high tide is 4.30 pm so we would head out to the bay about lunchtime. This means we could leave early Saturday morning from Dunedin (some participants may like to travel down on Friday evening). The plan is for us to stay for the Saturday night at Beach Road Holiday Park, which has tourist flats and cabins that seem adequate. (Alternatively, participants could arrange their own accommodation.).

On the Sunday there would be several possible trips depending on interests: Waituna Lagoon, which is under threat of "flipping" because of high nutrient levels (bittern have been seen here) and walkways at Daffodil Bay on Sandy Point, the new lagoon at the former refuse site, Bluff Hill for seabirds or in any of the many reserves in the area. There is certainly plenty to interest everyone so would be great to have a goodly number come along, and for the weather to cooperate. We have invited the Dunedin Forest and Bird to join us on this field trip. Members of the Southland OSNZ will be guiding us.



Please contact Mary Thompson (464 0787) [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz) if you are likely to be interested in coming so that arrangements can be put in place, especially for accommodation.

## eBird needs us

New Zealand  
eBird



I hope we'll all spend one of the days when you can't get out watching birds to check out eBird <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand>. Register and get started by entering your latest notebook records; browse the information articles and try some of the tools. In October, instead of our regular Indoor Meeting we plan to have a hands-on session in the Zoology Computer lab where Bruce McKinlay will take us through using eBird in real time, online, but to get the best out of this session you must already be registered - don't forget your password and have tried entering your observations.

So please give it a go and be prepared for our special session on eBird on Thursday 27 October. Note change of day for our Indoor Meeting.

## Notices and Business

### Mail out of monthly newsletters

A huge thank you to Ken Gager who has copied and mailed out our newsletter for many years; he would like to step down now, so a volunteer is needed for this job. It has decreased in size to about 15, due to email newsletters, but is greatly appreciated by those without email. Let Mary know if you can help with this.

### Gull and Tern Roosting and Nesting Sites in Otago

Marcia Dale has kindly taken on the job of coordinating this study, (see last month's newsletter) Thanks Marcia. The map of locations will be put together soon by Graeme Loh, Derek Onley, Chris Lalas and Marcia. We would welcome any information about roosting or feeding sites of black-billed gulls and black-fronted terns and nesting sites of white-fronted terns.





## Tui or bellbird with coloured leg bands



You may well get asked by members of the public about tui or bellbirds with coloured leg bands. More than 250 birds have been banded in Wakari over the last three autumns, and they can turn up anywhere in Otago. Some Wakari tui have gone to Oamaru, and one to Papatowai! I am keen to get reliable reports of sightings – from these we can learn a lot about tui movements and longevity.

Each bird has a numbered metal band on its left leg, and a unique combination of three colour bands, one on the left and two on the right (please record left leg then right leg, top to bottom: the order is important). The tui colour bands are mostly white, yellow, red, green, or blue (there are a few orange or grey-black). Bellbirds may also have orange or purple bands.

A digital photo, even a blurry one, is good for confirmation.

If the enquirer is interested, and especially if they have details of all three colour bands in order, please ask them to contact me at [murray.efford@otago.ac.nz](mailto:murray.efford@otago.ac.nz).

People without email can leave a message at 03 476 4668 or send a note to 60 Helensburgh Rd, Wakari, Dunedin 9010. Sometimes I'm away and cannot deal with phone messages. **Murray Efford**

## **The Otago Branch is to host the OSNZ Annual Conference and AGM in 2013**

A steering committee is required for this. The various tasks are: finding venue for Scientific days, council meetings, dinners, etc; finding discounted accommodation; Registration; Scientific Days programme, Field trips, overall programme. Volunteers to help with any of these tasks would be greatly appreciated; let Mary know your interest.

**Mary Thompson**

## **Request for Blue-eyed shag samples for DNA analysis.**

We have a Genetics honours student working on Blue-eyed shags with us in Zoology this year. We are looking to increase the number of samples we have for this study, and wondered if anyone held any frozen (or ethanol preserved) samples of Stewart Island shags, or if you could think about us if you ever happen across any reasonably fresh beach wrecked Stewart Island shags (any birds would be passed onto DoC or the Museum, if they want them, after we took a small piece of tissue for the DNA work).

We (well, Rob Schuckard really!) have finally got a sample from the King Shag, so we want to add more Stewart Island shag samples to compare it with.

If you happen to have any samples, or if you happen to come across some on your travels, please contact Martyn Kennedy, Department of Zoology, University of Otago ([martyn.kennedy@otago.ac.nz](mailto:martyn.kennedy@otago.ac.nz)).

Thanks for any assistance you can provide.

**Martyn Kennedy**

## **Email Newsletters are in glorious colour!**

Many of you will have received a pdf copy of this Newsletter by email as well as mail. It is quite a big job to photocopy, collate, address and post the newsletters so if you are happy to receive the newsletter **only by email**, or if you would like to but do not, please send your email address with your request to: [mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz](mailto:mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz)

## Programme 2011

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street at 8 p.m.

- Wednesday, 24 Aug Indoor Meeting Kat Manoo  
More about the Fairy Prions at St Clair
- Sunday, 11 Sept Survey of Styles Creek Reserve, Broad Bay.  
Meet at Matariki Street, at 1.00 pm.  
Phone Mary (464 0787) for car pooling.
- Wednesday, 28 Sept Indoor Meeting Bruce McKinlay  
Bird experiences in the Sub-Antarctic.
- Sunday 9 Oct Hawksbury Lagoon, 10.30am  
contact Derek Onley (482 2831)
- Thursday** 27 Oct Special Indoor Meeting. Bruce McKinlay  
Hands-on introduction to eBird. Note date and  
day but usual Zoology venue at 8.00 pm.
- Sunday 6 Nov Summer Wader Count, High tide 1.42pm 1.9m  
Coordinator, Peter Schweigman (455 2790)
- 12 and 13 Nov Weekend Field Trip.  
Awarua Bay and Waituna Lagoon.  
Contact Mary Thompson, 464 0787
- Wednesday 23 Nov Indoor Meeting. Neville Peat  
The Rich Legacy of Richdale

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, [derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)

Many thanks to all who contributed.  
Final date for copy for next newsletter 21 September