

MATUKU

WAIKATO REGION NEWSLETTER

Ornithological Society of New Zealand

February 2011



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Programme

16 February: Monthly meeting. Craig Purvis, DOC. "Birds of the Snares."

February: Kawhia and Aotea census. Dates TBA.

5-6 March: Kokako spotting (and more) in the Rotorua Region. David Bradley, Sandra Valderrama and Dai Morgan organising

16 March: Waikato AGM.

16 April: Autumnal picnic at the Taitua Arboretum. Contact Dai Morgan

20 April: Monthly meeting. Sandra Valderrama, University of Waikato. "Kokako dialects Part I."

18 May: Monthly meeting. David Bradley, University of Waikato. "Kokako Song Dialects, Behaviour, and Conservation."

May: Field Trip TBA.

Hamilton Tui and Bellbirds: An Update

Landcare Research has undertaken biennial counts of birds in 'green' and residential parts of Hamilton since 2004, using 5-minute counts and slow-walk transects. They are mostly done in November but we also count green stations with 5-minute counts in August to get a repeatable check on numbers of winter tui visitors. The number of stations with tui in August increased from 6 (of 101) in August 2008 to 23 in 2010, reflecting what everyone has already noticed – that there were many more tui visiting Hamilton in the 2010 winter. This is undoubtedly due to EW's Halo and other pest control in spring-summer nesting areas since 2007-08.

However most did not stay to nest. Number of stations with tui in November from 2004 onwards has been 0, 3, 5, and (this year) 2. I do think that there are a few more birds attempting to nest this year but they haven't been captured in counts, and it may take a few years for that to happen. Hamilton Gardens staff report that at least one tui nest has fledged already this season on the river bank below the American modernist garden. As of early December there are also tui still in Donny Park, Claudelands Bush, Hammond Park, by the river near Ann St, and we think there is a nest at the University with birds feeding on the flaxes

behind NIWA.

EW has had few recent records of bellbirds. Our chances of finding nests of the translocated birds seem slim indeed now that transmitters are well dead. We would certainly be grateful for any reports of this species in Hamilton and environs.

John Innes

Recent Bird Sightings

Shining Cuckoo: 1 at Tauhei (Pukemokemoke Reserve) on 20 September (David Riddell and Annette Taylor); 1 in Hamilton East on 26 September (Graham Saunders). “

Californian Quail: “We have had Californian quail visiting our garden for the past four years. They are believed to nest in the gully system nearby, and are often seen walking along the street verges and even up the middle of the road! Last year a pair raised three chicks to fledging size, which were frequently seen in our back yard, unperturbed by our presence nearby as long as we stayed still.” (Bev Woolley)

Bittern: 10 seen from the Falls Road lookout, Whangamarino. “And that included a flock (yes a flock) of 5 flying together, quite high and heading towards the centre of the swamp. Amazing.” (Chris Gaskin)

Lake Ngaroto Birds, 26 September 2010

Cattle Egret: 15 on surrounding farm, usual place, old Dromgoole farm on Lake Road, could be seen from road. Didn't go in – cows calving. Birds seen from road and Lake access walkway. Three in good breeding colour.

Black Shag: 2

Little Shag: 1

Little Black Shag: 1

Mallard type ducks: Small numbers in lakeside weed very quiet

Grey Warbler: Common, territory singing

Fantail: Common

House Sparrow: Common on surrounding farms and in lake side scrub

Goldfinch: Common on surrounding farms and in lake side scrub

Greenfinch: 3 in lakeside scrub

Yellowhammer: 1 male, 2 females on surrounding farms

Blackbird: Common on surrounding farms and in lake side scrub

Thrush: Normal numbers, more common on surrounding farms

Starling: Common on surrounding farms

Tui: 1 in lakeside scrub

Welcome Swallow: 2 over lake

Harrier: 3 singles, 1 pair courtship flying and calling over farm.

Birds seen but not confident of ID (against light)

Shining Cuckoo: 1

Fernbird: 1 Interest only! In lakeside scrub

Lake level very high board walk flooded in a number of places and track wet. Ti tree plantings make lake observation difficult. Boat regatta on lake subdued bird behaviour, water birds hidden! No Bittern or Crake species observed.

Martin Day

Shining Cuckoo Behaviour

During Labour weekend at Whio lodge, Whakahoro, (near Retaruke, west of Owhango, adjoining Whanganui National Park) I witnessed a gathering of shining cuckoos in a very old, almost leafless kowhai

tree. (Pigeons were seen stripping leaves and flowers from kowhais in the area.) At one stage I had 4 cuckoos together in the tree, there were more cuckoos in the trees around me, and grey warblers were also present. As I watched, the 4 moved about in the branches, calling continuously, but not the full song. There was lots of very loud “chirring” with just occasional down note calls. What caught my attention was the frequent crouch along the branch with bill pointing forward and wing fluttering, performed by two of the birds. It looked as if they were begging for food but no feeding was observed. If they were recently fledged cuckoos would they beg food from other cuckoos? I thought it may be a bit early for fully fledged young? Or was this a pre-mating courtship ritual? No mating was seen.

Bev Woolley

November 2010 Harbour Census summary

Aotea and Kawhia, 20 November; Raglan 22 November

Species	Aotea	Kawhia	Raglan	Total
Black Swan	442	749	2	1,193
Canada Goose	9	84*	73	166*
Paradise Shelduck	6	31		37
Mallard	15	9		24
Pied Shag	2	14	8	24
White-faced Heron	4	65	9	78
Reef Heron	1			1
Royal Spoonbill		28	5	33
Swamp Harrier			2	2
Lesser Knot		4		4
Whimbrel		7		7
Godwit	1,836	2,545	590	4,971
Ruddy Turnstone		1		1
Variable Oystercatcher	7	27	10	44
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	373	807	146	1,326
Pied Stilt		123	40	163
Northern New Zealand Dotterel	4	3	2*	9*
Banded Dotterel	4			4
Spur-winged Plover		3	42	45
Southern Black-backed Gull	17	126*	62	205*
Red-billed Gull	3	105	24	132
Caspian Tern	3	68	11	82
White-fronted Tern		16	17	33

Juveniles

Canada Goose*: 4 groups of goslings were seen but not counted.

Northern New Zealand Dotterel*: The pair at Raglan Harbour Entrance had 3 chicks which are not included in the above table.

Southern Black-backed Gull*: The breeding colony on Te Motu sandbank in Kawhia Harbour had 7 chicks which are not included in the table.

Caspian Tern*: the breeding colony on Te Motu sandbank had 17 chicks which are not included in the table.

Nomenclature

Godwit: There are three species of Godwit which occur in NZ. Most are Eastern Bar-tailed Godwits; however the level of scrutiny which we are able to use during harbour census is not usually sufficient to determine whether any individuals of the other two species are present. In the above table “Godwit” is used to cover all godwits seen.

Whimbrel: Two subspecies of Whimbrel occur in New Zealand, Asiatic and American. An estimated 90 percent of visitors to NZ are the Asiatic form, so they are the ones we are most likely to see at Kawhia. However the level of scrutiny we are able to use during harbour survey is not usually sufficient to allow us to identify Whimbrels to subspecies, so the term “Whimbrel” is used in the table above to cover all whimbrels seen.

An individual report for each harbour is available if required, providing more detail on the census in that harbour.

Hugh Clifford

Student heaven

It's a busy life for 'ordinary' university students and they often look forward to a relaxing summer break. Not so for Kim Collins! Kim is part of the BSc(Tech) degree at Waikato University and is one of over 110 students who get to do a 3 month summer placement related to their area of study. Kim has a special interest in native birds and their conservation so she has chosen to do a field research project, working with the Maungatautari Ecological Island Trust 'Biodiversity Unit'. She has to collect data and provide a report on the outcome of their kaka reintroduction programme on the mountain.

Kim was busy focussing on the kaka reintroduction programme, monitoring two known nests and homing in on a third 'probable' nest (and she had seen a flock of 17 birds!) – when the MEIT biodiversity team asked her to help with another project. That was to go to Maud Island with them to help test a 'kakapo barrier' on the famous bird Sirocco (the ideal test bird, being very human oriented). The Xcluder® fence is great for keeping pest-mammals out – but if any rats or stoats or cats do perchance gain entry (e.g. by fence-breach or perhaps deliberate sabotage), they can actually get out again quite easily (it's a one-way barrier) which is a good feature to have. But that means kakapo (flightless but good climbers) might also get out, and the trust needed to test that – and if necessary find a way of stopping them, while still giving the rats/cats/stoats the opportunity to self-evacuate if they so wished (and research has shown that test-rats in the test situation certainly do want to get straight back out again). So any kakapo barrier will need to be pretty smart.

So in November Kim found herself on Maud Island for three nights with the team, to challenge Sirocco with a variety of fence barriers.

Maud will be Sirocco's summer home for the foreseeable future, where he can't get into too much trouble when his testosterone is raging during the breeding season (if you've been living under a rock and haven't heard, Sirocco tries to mate with people). There is a resident ranger family living on the island – and when he's been there in the past, Sirocco has excavated his display bowl on their lawn and boomed at their bedroom window all night. They're very tolerant people.

Daryl Eason, a member of the DOC kakapo management team, was also on the island – and he was a big help to us, doing most of the handling of Sirocco during our testing. On arrival, we immediately constructed our small test pen close to the bunkhouse, and began our testing on the first night. Sirocco couldn't have been more obliging. He first of all showed us that he could easily climb to the top of the fence (on the inside) just as it is, with no additional barrier. So we then challenged him with our series of barriers, from easy (to encourage him to keep on trying) to hopefully impossible. He never gave up.

We eventually beat him, but it took a little more ironmongery (coloursteel) than even Don Merton had expected (Don had looked at our prototypes beforehand). If we had simply gone for a basic flatiron strip, that strip would have to be 440mm wide to stop him! But Rod Millar (with the help of Murray Westgate) had come up with a cunning configuration incorporating two bends, which has enabled us to achieve what we want with a strip only 230mm wide (although we will need an additional triangle of flatiron on each post). That configuration also provides a gap between the kakapo barrier and the fence mesh, through which stoats and rats can pass (allowing invaders to self-evacuate if they wish). It also gives the barrier rigidity, avoiding the need for additional framing. So we now have a kakapo-proof barrier that works, but of course it won't be cheap to apply it to 40+ kilometres of fence – and there are several other steps to work through as well, before we can actually reintroduce kakapo to the maunga.

It took all of the 3 nights that we had allowed, to complete all the tests – and we then gave Sirocco free range over the island. After all that harassment we thought we wouldn't see him for dust – but he then followed us on a two-hour night walk around the island, like a pet dog. He totally captivated us, what a remarkable bird. The success of the research project was due largely to his cooperation and dogged persistence. And after living with him for three nights, we miss him.



Two people involved with the fence trials on Maud Island. Sirocco is the short green person eating the apple; the other is Kim Collins. Photo: Phil Brown.

Kim returned from Maud and resumed her kaka work, and was also able to help Massey University PhD student Kate Richardson with fieldwork to look at aspects of the hihi reintroduction programme to the mountain. Kate has already collected some very promising data on survival, breeding and recruitment – which indicate that Maungatautari is very likely to become only the second self-sustaining population in the world, of this very threatened and unique species. Little Barrier Island/Hauturu is currently the only such population, as all the other (translocated) populations need human help to survive (with supplementary feeding, next boxes etc).

Apart from her work with Sirocco, Kim says one of her highlights for the Maungatautari work has actually been seeing the family group of five takahe – the two adults, the grown chick from last season (doing 'aunty' duties), and the two young chicks from this season being well looked after by all three adults in their swamp habitat.

Chris Smuts-Kennedy

Hamilton Lake Census dates 2011

The Lake census takes place every month on the **SECOND SUNDAY** starting around 10 am. It is rarely cancelled. Come and join us to count the Coot, Ducks, Geese, Cormorants and other birds that may be present. No previous experience is needed and you can just join us for the pleasant walk if you don't want to count. No need to ring the organiser – just come along and enjoy!

FEBRUARY 13th
MARCH 13th
APRIL 10th
MAY 8th
JUNE 12th
JULY 10th
AUGUST 14th
SEPTEMBER 11th
OCTOBER 9th
NOVEMBER 13th
DECEMBER 11th
JANUARY 8th 2012
Phone Barry Friend, Tel 843 6729

We meet near the “Verandah” cafe–restaurant & function centre at the water’s edge near the benches and duck-feeding platform. There is usually parking available at this time. Notebooks, Instructions, & pencils are provided. Ducks, Coot & Pigeons are counted using a hand clicker. We take about two hours, starting at the peninsula just past the children’s play area walking in an anti-clockwise direction at a very slow pace observing the birds, fauna, water quality, changes around the park, activities and botany. Please come along and join us as we observe, discover, learn and record.

Hamilton Lake Census, Sunday 9th January 2011

Present: Barry Friend & Stella Rowe, 10.00 am – 12.00 pm

SPECIES OF BIRD	ADULTS	JUVENILES	TOTAL
COOT (10 families)	128	12	140
MALLARD DUCKS	1109		1109
FARMYARD / CROSS DUCKS	3		3
CANADA GEESE	9		9
DOMESTIC WHITE GEESE	16	7	23
KINGFISHERS (Heard)	1		1
PUKEKOS (8 FAMILIES)	89	21	110
(LARGE) BLACK SHAG (CARBOS)	19		19
LITTLE SHAGS	2		2
WELCOME SWALLOWS	19		19
SPUR-WINGED PLOVERS	4		4
FERAL ROCK PIGEONS	226		226
WHITE DOVES	1		1
Other: Blackbird, Chaffinch (H), Fantail, Goldfinches, 1 Magpie, Mynahs, Silvereyes, Sparrows & starlings.			
DEAD 1 Mallard duck 1 Goldfish type fish.			
SICK: 3 Mallard ducks. (Not in total above)			

Previous weather: Mainly warm, hot and sunny. Some very humid days. Temperatures around 25 – 30C during day. Dry. Some light rain last night dampened conditions.

Today's weather: Fine, with a southerly cooling breeze. A few white clouds, warm with some hot sunny spells.

The first census of 2011 didn't reveal any unusual birds but we really enjoyed the fresh air and sunshine. Lots of birds in front of the restaurant both Coot and Mallards. We could hear lots of pigeons that we could not see as was often the case with the Pukeko chicks. Even so, the Pukekos won the chick count with 21, the Coot having 12 chicks. The Coot had the most families, however a pair of adults mostly had only one chick, whereas the Pukekos had mainly two to four chicks in their families.

It was a good day for shags with a total of 21 counted although only two species were present; Carbos and Little Shags. We observed a Large Black Shag eating a catfish and a bit of a squabble broke out when another shag approached. We found it difficult to separate the adult white Domestic Geese from the juveniles – going on eye colour and last month's count we think that there are still seven juveniles. They have grown up very quickly.

Conditions: Visible water level still quite low in places revealing lots of mud that all the birds were coping with very well! We had bread today and there was no shortage of takers – all seemed quite hungry. When I put the bread bag down, one cheeky Pukeko helped itself to a slice and ran off. The Geese made their presence felt by grabbing hold of my shorts and giving them a tug several times. They certainly ain't shy! No visible signs of botulism in the quality of the water but we did see one dead Mallard duck, a dead fish and three sick Mallard ducks. At least five to eight canoes on the water (Yesterday there were lots more). A model yacht and a model boat were about to be launched. Not as busy with people as I had expected. Lovely high flowering yellow water lilies along the board walk side, Kahikatea flowering and some nice Mimosa tree types also in flower. A large branch of a tree has fallen off on the other side of the road through the lake just past the old golf course.

Our next census is on Sunday February 13th. Ciao for now.

Barry

South Island Pied Oystercatchers on northward migration

The South Island Pied Oystercatchers which winter in the North Island and go south for breeding, return north from December onwards. As of 17 December this summer, our beach patrollers have already reported several sightings. On 16 December at Taharoa Beach, three flocks comprising 6 birds, 34 birds and 10 birds were seen, between mid-morning and early afternoon.

Then on 17 December at Waikorea Beach a flock of 5 was seen at about midday.

Such reports are most likely to come from our beach patrollers, as these ones did. But we are interested in such reports from anyone who is on any of our Waikato beaches over the summer (and indeed in the winter too, for the southward migration).

The sort of information to observe and record includes: name of the beach, date and time of the sighting; approximate location (e.g. "near north end of Ruapuke Beach"; or "near Waimai Stream"); number of birds in flock; approximate height, and line of travel (e.g. "about 2 metres above ground level, going straight along the tide line", or "at about 40 metres height and climbing steadily, heading inland in a north easterly direction"; weather conditions at the time.

When you do see a flock watch it until it is out of sight, to try and see whether it appears to be continuing along the coast or whether it heads inland to take a short cut to some unknown destination.

Often the first indication that there is a flock passing by is hearing their calls, but some flocks pass by silently. If you do hear a call or two, scan the sky all around because they may even be directly above you, and quite high up.

It is a matter of chance whether we are on the beach on a day and at a time when a flock or flocks is passing. It is also less likely that we will hear/see them unless we have that possibility in mind. Nevertheless we have accumulated numerous sightings in our beach patrol records over the years, and are keen to continue this

process of adding to our knowledge of SIPO migration on our piece of coast. Please send such reports to our Beach Patrol Convenor (who is currently Hugh Clifford).

Beach Patrols – some December results

From feast to famine for the birds, and famine to feast for the beach patrollers?

Most of 2010 has apparently been a very benign year for the seabirds, as beach patrollers have found very few dead ones on most patrols on Waikato beaches. This means there has been lots of hard yakka for the patrollers with not much reward, trudging all those weary kilometres with very little to show for it.

Then suddenly the patrollers got their Christmas present, in the form of plenty of smelly birds to drool over (not so good for the birds of course to finish up like this, but these things happen).

The weather has been very fine, warm and calm through November and early December but something has evidently not been right for birds' health out at sea during that time. The results of 3 patrols during four days (14-17 December) are shown below.

The species names are as shown in the "*Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand, Fourth Edition 2010*", Some of the names seem unfamiliar (e.g. Blue Penguin is now Little Penguin; White-capped (Shy) Mollymawk is now New Zealand White-capped Albatross), but these are now the official names and we should try to get accustomed to them.

Species	Number of dead birds found		
	14 December Ruapuke (7.5km)	16 December Taharoa (7.5km)	17 December Waikorea (5.5km)
Little Penguin	8	17	7
New Zealand White-capped Albatross	1		
Grey-faced Petrel	1		
Salvins/Antarctic Prion			1
Fairy Prion	2	12	3
Prion sp.		1	
Buller's Shearwater	38	56	45
Sooty Shearwater	5	5	10
Fluttering Shearwater	36	72	16
Diving Petrel		2	
Australasian Gannet	4	5	4
Variable Oystercatcher	1		
Spur-winged Plover	1		
Australian Magpie		1	
Total	97	171	86

The total for the three patrols is 354 birds on 20.5km, which is just over 17 birds/km. The main casualties were Buller's Shearwater (139 birds at nearly 7/km), and Fluttering Shearwater (124 birds at about 6/km).

Patrollers on 14th December were Hugh Clifford and Frank Bailey; on 16th were Hugh and Zoe Clifford, and Ray and Ann Buckmaster; on 17th were Hugh Clifford and Brian Challinor.

Hugh Clifford
18 December 2010