



THE
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OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 4/2011 May 2011

Day trips to Macquarie Island



For two days in February I was privileged to land at Macquarie Island as part of a voyage on the “Spirit of Enderby” to Antarctica. On the first day the ship’s company landed at Sandy Bay which is about 5 km south of the north-eastern corner of the island on the east side. Even before we had had to deal with the moderate amount of surf at the landing the amount and diversity of birds was amazing. King penguins surrounded the ship and

seemed genuinely interested in what we were up to. On the landing beach non-breeding King Penguins were lying, singing, sleeping and walking sedately in pairs and small groups across the gravel. To the south Royal penguins were concentrated around the access point to their colony up the hill. Breeding king penguins with small chicks, mud and conscientious adults were to the north. Interspersed through all this were pairs and small groups of elephant seals, giant petrels, black backed gulls (or as the locals called them kelp gulls), brown skua, Antarctic terns and a lone gentoo penguin or two.

Sitting quietly on the beach was a cue for king penguins to come and inspect you. Ensuring that you had a small enough telephoto lens on your camera was essential or otherwise you only got a corner of the action. King Penguins would approach closely and hesitantly and, eventually reach over and nibble at your boots. At one time I was perched on a rock watching some king penguins approach when I felt a gentle peck on my left elbow. Unnoticed by me a penguin had come up behind and investigated my parka. After a peck or two they generally deem you uninteresting and promenade sedately on.

At the southern end of the beach is a boardwalk courtesy of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, which allows you to climb up the hill to look out over the royal penguin colony. In February royal penguins have mostly finished breeding and are starting to moult; but even so they walk more than 100 metres up a hill to a large gravel bowl which though not packed with penguins still had about 500 individuals present. The surrounds of this area look like they have been dusted in snow with the numbers of discarded feathers that are present.

As the day advanced the number of non-breeding king penguins increased. It seemed that these birds were dribbling in after coming home from the feeding grounds and rather than enter into the packed space which was the breeding colony had chosen to rest up on the main beach.



In addition to the penguins Macquarie Island has a large number of giant petrels present. Confusingly both the northern (*M. halli*) and southern (*M. giganteus*) species are present. With confusing colour schemes it was a grand opportunity to look closely at beak colour and really figure out what a darker reddish tip (*M. halli*) compared to a pale greenish tip (*M. giganteus*) looked like. Compared to the penguins giant petrels were much more nervous about being approached and would clumsily stagger away from you or take off when you got too close.

The next day we were anchored in Buckles Bay opposite the Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions (ANARE) base on Macquarie Island. From the stern of the ship there seemed to be an endless stream of king penguins passing by along with occasional light mantled sooty albatrosses and prions winging their way over head. After a lot of looking at the book (actually several) I deemed most of them to be antarctic prions because of the dark ear coverts and the distinctive blackish central streak under the tail.

After passing a rock stack filled with rockhopper penguins and landing we were again investigated by a king penguins. We were divided up into groups and given a guide for a tour around the base. Highlights here were

the presence in amongst buildings of elephant seals which seemed to find a place to haul out and sleep off the last meal in the most unlikely places and larger numbers of moulting gentoo penguins. Macquarie Island shags and giant petrels were also to be seen. Just to the south of the main base is a pair of penguin digesters, left over from the obscene days of boiling penguins for oil. The digesters (basically large pressure cookers) are rotting in amongst lush tussock: a reminder of an age when wildlife was seen as something to exploit not value. Also around the base are a large number of boxes which contain the poison necessary for the very expensive operation by the Australians to rid Macquarie of rabbits, ship rats and mice. The operation was held over from last year when continuous bad weather meant that helicopters could not fly to lay the bait in the allocated time.

Apart from around the base where the flying was successful and rabbit numbers have crashed, Macquarie Island is overrun with rabbits, vegetation has collapsed and large amounts of erosion are occurring. Not completing the eradication soon means that more of Macquarie will collapse to the effects of rabbit browse.

After reboarding the Spirit of Enderby we sailed down the coast to Lusitania Bay. Landings are not allowed here by Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife and the initial plan was to cruise offshore in the zodiacs but a northerly wind put paid to that. Instead we made one pass in the ship and through the mist could see an almost endless sprinkling of king penguins along the shore and up the hill behind the beach. Estimates currently range between $\frac{3}{4}$ and one million king penguins breeding at this site. It is, from a distance, an unbelievable site with each white dot being a penguin or in some cases a penguin with an egg or chick.

From here a course was set for Cape Adare and soon Macquarie was lost in the mist astern.

Bruce McKinlay

Ornithological Snippets

In late March, John Douglas from Alexandra was up above Gem Lake (Umbrella Range) and on the boundary fence at 1430m was this **NZ Falcon**.

He says there are not a large number of falcons resident down in the lower areas of Central Otago. Occasional ones can be seen there but there are more chances of seeing falcons in the mountains.

On 23 April, Hamish Spencer was surprised to see the **Tui** he had been feeding on his deck all day take to the air, fly high above the large gum tree in which they had been resting, and start squawking loudly. A moment later a larger bird flew into view, moving quickly up from Northeast Valley towards Signal Hill. It was a **NZ Falcon**, probably a female judging by its size, the first he has seen from his garden, although they do appear at the nearby Botanic Gardens on occasion.



He has just started feeding **Tui** and already up to 6 are present at any one time; the resident **Bellbird** hardly gets a look in and the **Silvereyes** are even further down the pecking order. Top of the ladder, though, has been a **Kereru**, which managed to perch delicately on the edge of the dish and plunge its whole head into the sugar-water.

Falcons were also reported by Connie Wright from near Cherry Farm where one was dining on domestic doves, and at Waitati, where a juvenile male caused consternation amongst the **Tui** feeding on the economy model sugar water feeder on 18 May. (see below)



Feeder Styles. Left: Hamish's top of the range sugar water feeder.
Right: Derek's Waitati economy model.

Connie Wright saw tens of thousands of **Red-billed Gulls** at Hooper's Inlet on weekend of May 9th (2 days after the easterly storm) and Mary Thompson saw thousands roosting on King's High rooftops the same day. After high winds during the same week there were over 1000 **Black-billed Gulls** in Blueskin Bay and similar large numbers at Karitane.

Mary found a dead juvenile **Black Shag** at MacAndrew Bay on the steps of the new seawall. It didn't look injured.

A single **Cattle Egret**, nowadays a rare bird in Otago, was reported from Karitane on 7 May and the **Little Owl** at Waitati was still around in mid May.

Otago Harbour Survey: April 2011

Here is the April summary. Another good day for a survey; although the weather was forecast to change it seems we got the survey done beforehand.

It seems the highlight was the lack of red billed gulls for some people, more on that below.

If the summary table is not correct for your section let me know.

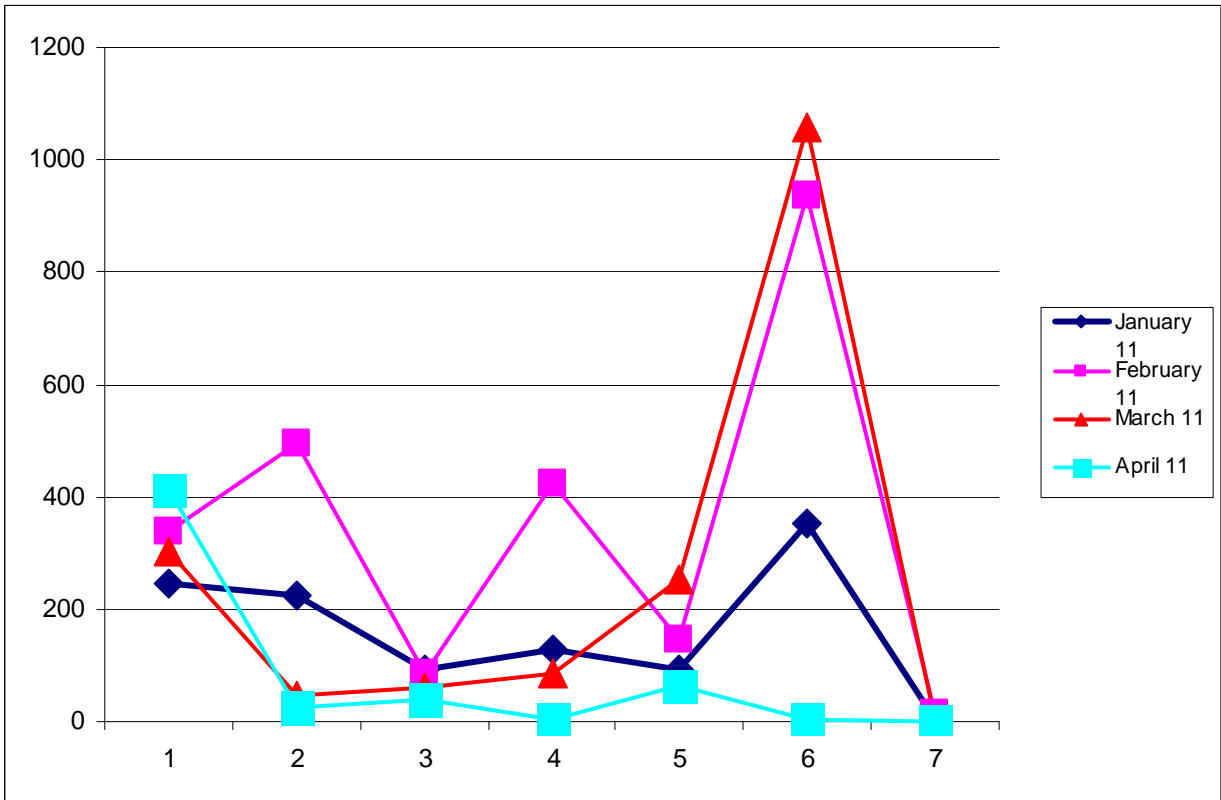
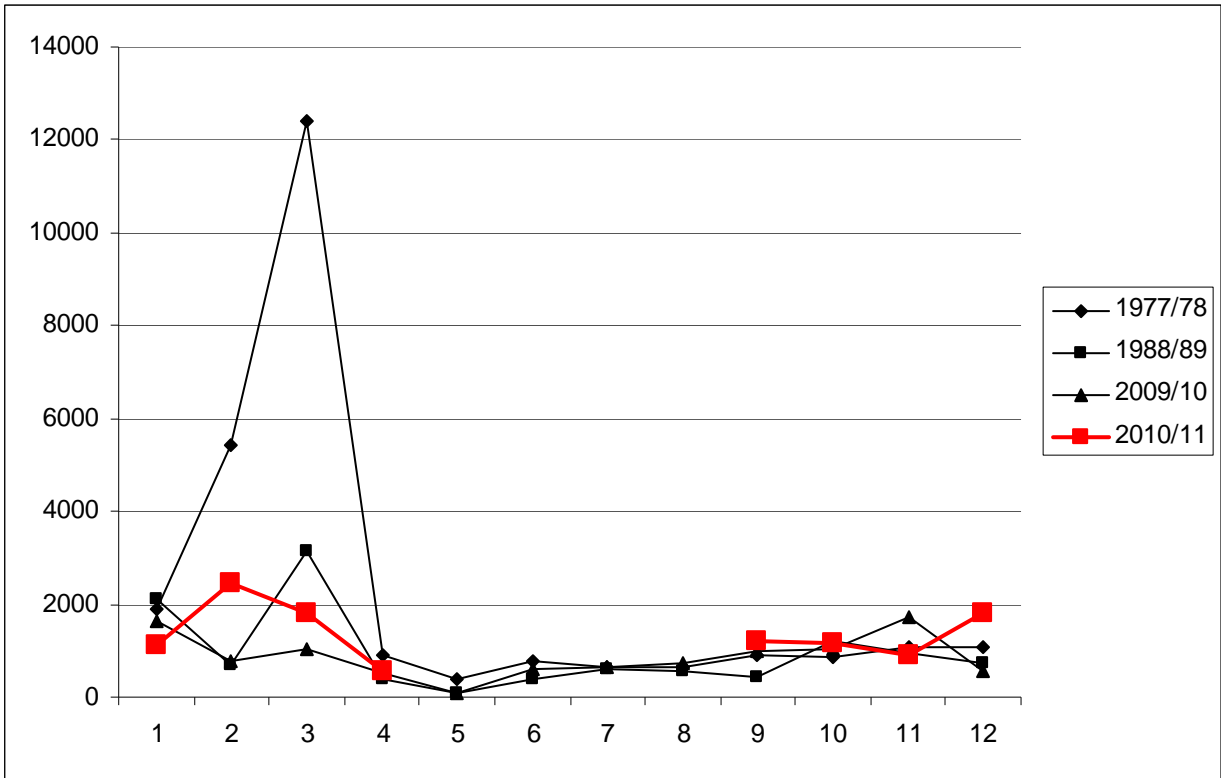
Sum of Count	Section							Grand Total
Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
black backed gull	183	3	150	13	539	4	71	963
black shag	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
black swan	0	0	6	2	0	198	0	206
canada goose	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	14
domestic duck	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5
fowl				2				2
gannet		1				3		4
godwit	0	0	0	0	0	0	72	72
grey teal	0	0	0	0	0	6	23	29
greylag goose	0	0	0	0	8	0	1	9
harrier				1		3		4
kingfisher							4	4
little penguin					1			1
little shag	13	159	70	79	136	53	9	519
mallard	0	96	199	123	90	124	0	632
mollymawk						2		2
paradise shelduck	0	0	2	13	0	0	47	62
piebald oystercatcher	75	0	26	0	478	0	172	751
pukeko						3		3
redbilled gull	413	26	38	4	64	2	0	547
royal spoonbill	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
shoveler	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
sparrow						11		11
spotted shag	11	6	3	1	2	0	0	23
spur winged plover	0	0	39	4	2	2	1	48
starling		4				1		5
stewart island shag	0	0	0	28	0	0	0	28
variable	7	0	0	9	28	39	0	83
oystercatcher						1		2
welcome swallow	1					1		2
white faced heron	1	0	3	5	0	26	0	35
white-fronted tern	0	1	3	1	0	2	0	7

Here are the monthly totals for April last year and this year. Banded dotterels, pied stilt and black billed gulls are absent. Black-backed gull and red billed gull numbers are up. As are little shags and mallards. All the key species are following the overall pattern.

Sum of Count	Year	
Species	2010	2011
banded dotterel	43	0
black backed gull	380	963
black fronted tern	375	0
black shag	16	3
black swan	225	206
black-billed gull	16	0
canada goose	0	14
caspian tern	14	0
gannet		4
godwit	129	72
grey teal	189	29
greylag goose	11	9
harrier	2	4
kingfisher		4
little penguin		1
little shag	462	519
mallard	453	632
mollymawk		2
paradise shelduck	19	62
pied oystercatcher	1103	751
pied stilt	33	0
pukeko		3
redbilled gull	513	547
royal spoonbill	3	1
shoveler	0	4
spotted shag	128	23
spur winged plover	8	48
stewart island shag	33	28
variable	87	83
oystercatcher		
white faced heron	19	35
white-fronted tern	248	7

A number of you asked “Where are the Red billed gulls?” Well yes they were down on what we have become used to over the last few months. If you look at the first graph below you can see that instead of about 2000 individuals in the harbour since December there were only 547 counted this month. However it’s not an effect across the harbour. Numbers for the

April count remain at about the same for Section 1 and possibly Section 5. Section 6 is where the difference is.



Bruce McKinlay

First Results from St Clair Prion Data Loggers



Graeme Taylor recently processed the data from the first of Graeme Loh's Fairy Prion data loggers. (See February 2011 newsletter) The results, preliminary at this stage, proved really interesting and somewhat unexpected.

The bird last visited the colony on 18 January and then headed out east past the Chathams, then SE of

there to an area about 1100 km SE of the Antipodes Island and in the zone of the polar front (about 60 degrees south) where it spent most of the next 3 months presumably doing wing and tail moult. Then it returned rapidly west after mid-April and back towards the colony. The activity log suggests it came ashore pretty much nightly from 21 April.

Graeme Loh

Notices and Business

Next Indoor Meeting

The speaker at the next meeting, 25th May is Edward Waite. The title of his talk is "The birds and the bees in the trees: the role of trees in supporting wider urban biodiversity." The following is a summary of the topic; it sounds fascinating. The rapid growth of towns and cities worldwide is a continuing trend, with dramatic implications for biodiversity at all scales. Sustaining urban biodiversity has been shown to have measurable benefits for nature conservation, and also for the maintenance of community health and wellbeing. Large, isolated trees are an unexamined part of the urban ecological landscape and offer a novel avenue of research, despite their status as keystone structures in other modified landscapes. Here I will discuss my PhD research which explores how birds use urban trees on both a local and a landscape scale.

Mary Thompson

Advance Notice: 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 (stint, turnstones, golden plover, godwits, etc) and also NZ Dotterel. Many Fernbirds are also in the area. It has been a while since our last trip down there so I have checked the tides and this weekend in November is suitable; the high tide is 4.30pm so we should head out about lunchtime. This means we could leave Saturday morning from Dunedin. The plan is to stay Saturday night at Beach Road Holiday Park, which has tourist flats and cabins that seem adequate. Members of Southland OSNZ may be available to guide us. I have also invited Dunedin Forest and Bird members to join us on the trip. Please let Mary (464 0787) know if you are likely to be interested in coming.

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).

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

Mystery Bird

Last month's mystery bird was a description :-

Mike McVie was fishing on 9 April on the Omarama stream upstream from the main road and township when: "we found a small bird 20cm tall thrush coloured plumage, red eyed relatively long slightly curved beak greenish tinge, very large wader type feet but not overly long legs . It was trapped in a fyke net on the streamside, we freed it and sat in the sun to dry and warm. I've seen wekas before but this was quite lightly built Do you have any idea's what it may have been?"

Both Mary and I agreed it was likely to have been a Marsh Crake.

This month, another of Graeme Loh's kayak photos:



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.
Please be on time: the door will be locked after 8 p.m.

Wednesday 25 May	Indoor Meeting	Edward Waite
	Biodiversity in Dunedin	
Sunday 12 June	Harbour Survey	start 11.46 am
Wednesday 22 June	Indoor Meeting	Georgina Pickerell
	Effect of predators on braided river bird habitats	
Sunday 3 July	Hawksbury Lagoon Survey start 10.30am.	
	Contact Derek Onley, 4822831	
Sunday 10 July	Harbour Survey	start 9.19am
Wednesday 27 July	Indoor Meeting	Eduardo Santos
	Dunnock behaviour in the Botanic Gardens	
Wednesday, 24 August	Indoor Meeting	Kat Manoo
	More about the Fairy Prions at St Clair	
12 and 13 November	Weekend Field Trip.	
	Awarua Bay and Waituna Lagoon.	
	Contact Mary Thompson, 464 0787	

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Many thanks to all who contributed.
Final date for copy for next newsletter 15 June