



# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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## *Otago Region Newsletter 2/2014 March 2014*

### **Results of 2014 National Grebe Survey**

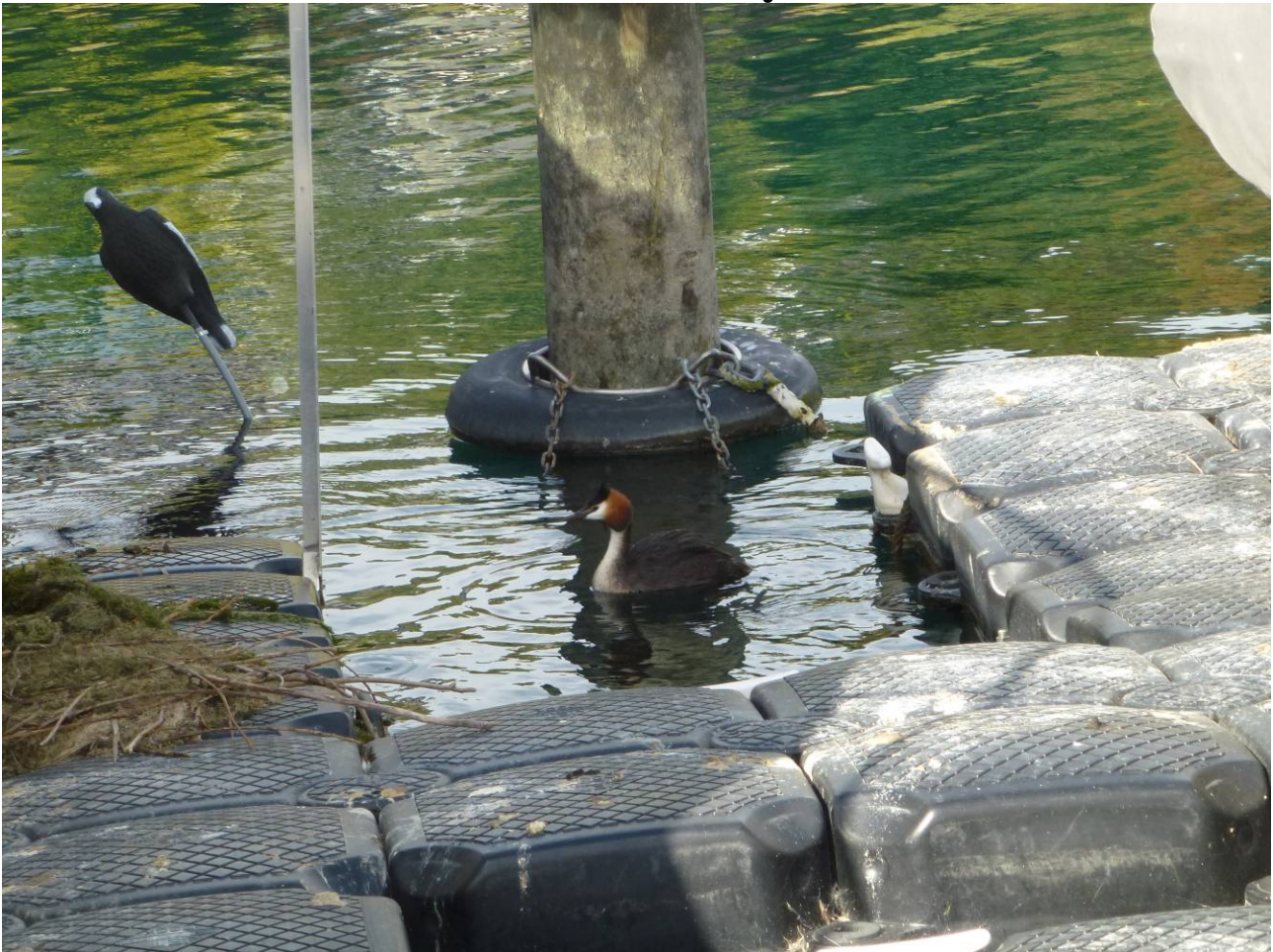


photo Phillip Munns

Thanks to all who helped organise observers and to those who counted 99 water bodies around the South Island. Thanks also to observers who travelled long distances by car and by boat, at your own expense, and to those who tramped into the hills to find grebes. It was a fantastic effort.

Most lakes were counted on the same day, a few were counted the day before and after the survey date. We await the results of one or two more lakes.

Currently the total is - 531 adult grebes counted, 23 adults were estimated on nests, and 147 juveniles were counted, bringing the total to **701**, compared to a total of 390 in the 2004 national count.

Most grebes were counted in the Otago group of lakes (224), Mackenzie (148) and Waitaki group (120). Grebes have returned to Marlborough (24). The decline on the West Coast (8) and Fiordland (10) continues. A count of only 9 grebes on Lake Heron, traditionally a stronghold, surprised. Another surprise is the number of grebes settling and nesting on lakes around coastal Canterbury (54).”

It is interesting to compare these results to the census done by Otago OSNZ of the Otago and Waitaki Lakes in 2009: It looks like numbers in Otago are holding up; interesting that Lake Hayes can support so many birds.

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Otago Lakes</b>	224	219
Hayes	120	81
Dunstan	43	90
<b>Waitaki Lakes</b>	120	85
Benmore	112	52
Aviemore	8	24

### **Rosalie Snoyink and Leslie Jensen**

The photo that heads this report is from Phillip Munns who says " a pair of Crested Grebes have nested throughout the summer on a pontoon at the Wanaka marina, successfully hatching at least two clutches. They are very tame and used to people and boats, but I wasn't quick enough to get a snap of her on the nest!"

## **Banded Godwits from Catlins seen at Aramoana**

On BirdingNZ online forum, Phil Battley made this post: “Peter Langlands has reported two apparent departures of godwits from Catlins Lake, South Otago, on 6 March. Last year we also had an unusually large drop in numbers of godwits at the Catlins site very early in the season, and it is possible that birds are moving between sites as well as departing on migration. So this is a plea for anyone out and about over the next week or two, particularly around Southland and Otago, to keep a special eye out for colour-banded godwits. The Catlins birds have a red flag and four colour-bands, and many also have geolocators. So they should stand out in the crowd if good views can be had. I would also appreciate receiving nil records, especially if you have a feel for how many birds you would have checked without seeing any colourbands.”

On Wednesday 12 March, Sue Odlin and Mary Thompson spent 4 hours out at Aramoana checking out the godwits. Our first task was to have lunch overlooking the salt marsh; most of the godwits were still out in the harbour feeding too! But two lone birds were closer in, very actively feeding in the channels in the marsh, quite separate from the others. A look through the telescope revealed a multicoloured banded bird-definitely with red flag and we could also see the geocator! This is the first time one of the Catlins birds has been seen elsewhere. Sue posted our sighting on BirdingNZ and got this reply from Phil “Fabulous sighting, Sue. Peter Langlands will come up from the Catlins to try to do a good search of the Dunedin godwit flocks.” Peter was here on Friday and checked about 1000 godwits and resighted the Catlin’s bird we had seen. We had been able to get quite close to the roosting godwit flock - about 350 - but only one other banded bird (a single orange flag) was seen. We also had nice views of banded dotterels (70+), black-fronted terns ( 67) and Caspian terns (12) and SIPO (200+).

**Mary Thompson.**



## Ornithological Snippets

On 22 February, Kelvin Lloyd saw another **Fernbird** on his farm up towards the Silverpeaks overlooking Blueskin Bay – in the same area of rushes/sedges/gorse that he has heard them previously. He says, "It isn't a large area of habitat so it would be hard to imagine that we have a breeding population of **Fernbirds**" and wonders if "non-breeding individuals hang out in places like this?"

On March 17, Richard Schofield emailed that, "Suzanne found a **Little Egret** on the Clutha River in Balclutha this morning, feeding on either shore just downstream of the lagoons near the town centre. Very flighty, but I got reasonable views before losing it in the mist. I'll try and get some photos later today." Unfortunately no trace of it was found in the afternoon and the following day.

Derek Onley found the **Grey-tailed/Siberian Tattler** was still at Blueskin Bay on 17 March, hanging out with the remnants of the summer **Bar-tailed Godwit** flock which was down from 545 on 26 February to 67.



Derek also found a pretty convincing **Grey Duck** at Hawksbury Lagoon on 27 February: grey bill and legs, green and black wing patch with no white border.

Ebird is throwing up some interesting local records. Rex Johnson reported a **Marsh Crake** at Rocky Point, Lake Dunstan on 15 March. The crake was at a maimai 50m south "spotting scope and eos550d - 270mm lens Submitted from BirdLog ANZ for Android v1.9.3". Translation please?

Also from ebird Sandra Bouma reported a **Reef Heron** from Harwood, Otago Harbour on 23 February.

## **Foreign News - Passing through South America -**

On my way to Antarctica recently I was fortunate to have a couple of days in Southern Argentina which I filled up with bird watching.

I arrived at Ushuaia, southern Argentina, after 17 hours flying and additional down time at Auckland and Santiago Airports and a night in Buenos Aires only having seen two feral pigeons from the hotel window in Buenos Aires. Ushuaia is a town surrounded by glaciated mountains covered in beech forest and ever expanding suburbs of the town. It's at 58 degrees south so in comparison is further south than Campbell Island. As a consequence it always seemed to be cool even in bright sunshine and by 10 am each day there was an even colder wind.

The town is quite large with about 57 000 people living in it. It seems that most of the activity in the town is about servicing cruise ships and related tourism, fishing and the naval base. There is a ski field above the town which is popular with visitors in the winter.

After arriving in mid morning I checked in at my motel on the edge of town and walked down to the waterfront. Top priorities were a local field guide, and see some of the local birds. The centre of town had a mixture of souvenir shops with postcards and the normal bric-a-brac; places to book tours and places to eat. By the time I had found the bookshop (only the one!) I'd already seen house sparrows!

Down at the water's edge there were the familiar shapes and colours of *Gaviota cocinera* (probably more familiar as black-backed gulls); which I rapidly had to learn to call kelp gulls, dolphin gulls and brown-hooded gulls. Also along the waterfront were crested duck, rock pigeons, South American terns and kelp geese. The terns were a real problem as the Arctic tern was recorded in the book as present and with the same description!

The next day I got a taxi from town to the edge of the Tierra del Feugo National Park. Near the entrance I spotted thorn-tailed rayadita, chimango caracara, and Austral thrushes all along the road side. Also present as much by noise as anything was a pair of southern lapwings; their call was more distinctively grating than spur-winged plover if that is possible.

After paying my entrance fee of 110 Pesos (\$NZ20) I was off down the road with beech forest on either side. I was soon off the dusty road and on a track into the forest and climbing a hill for views. The first sight was a beaver dam with a female speckled teal and 6 ducklings on it. At the top of the hill Chilean swallow swooped for insects, and rufous-collared sparrows and grey-flanked cinclodes were foraging for clamouring chicks. The view down the Beagle Channel was stunning and it was very warm out of the wind. The seashore and forest structure in the park looked very much like NZ with similar looking trees (beech) and along the beach familiar seaweeds and schist rocks.

That evening I got another walk in around the waterfront and came across large groups of red shoveler, speckled teal crested ducks, southern lapwings and brown hooded and kelp gulls.

The next day I booked myself a boat tour and by 10 am I was on the water with other visitors, and Pablo and Carlos. First stop was an island with blue eyed (or in this case King) shags, Chilean skua, flying steamer duck and more kelp gulls. This pattern was repeated at the other islands we visited until on Isla H we got ashore for an hour and saw flightless steamer duck, Chilean skua with chicks, kelp geese Chilean swallow, dark-bellied cinclodes, rufous collared sparrow, rock cormorants and Patagonian sierra-finch.

By that afternoon I was on the MV Hanseatic and ready to head south. But in two and a half days I got to see and identify 25 species of birds in a range of habitats. Some were old friends but I was pleased to have seen the Patagonian endemics such as the Patagonian sierra-finch, King shag, kelp goose, and the flightless and flying steamer ducks. Getting around

Ushuaia was easy on foot or taxis were readily available and enthusiastic to take you to your destination at light speed. People were friendly and Carlos the guide on the boat trip was ready to share and discuss bird identification. Obviously I could have spent many more days there but it was a nice little taster.

**Bruce Mckinlay**

## Notices and Business

### **Bioblitz, Dunedin Botanic Gardens, Saturday 12 July 2014**

It has been decided to hold a Bioblitz in the Botanic Gardens as an event during the International Science Festival in Dunedin this July. The goal is for participants to be involved in finding as many different species as possible of fungi, insects, birds, etc. between 10 am and 4 pm on Saturday 12 July. Part of the idea of Bioblitz is for children and the public to interact with specialist scientists. The Otago Branch of OSNZ has been approached to help with surveying the birds in the gardens and I have agreed that we will provide bird watching walks at various times through the day and we will probably have a table at "base camp" to highlight the study of birds.

Volunteers are needed. A team of OSNZ members is needed to search for all bird species in the gardens on the day, also a few people who would be available to guide bird watching groups, help at the display table, etc. It would be good to get a small group together to think about the best ways we can be part in this event. Please talk to **Mary Thompson** 464 0787.

### **Dead Shags and Penguins**

A paper giving the results of a dna and morphometric study of Stewart Island and Chatham Island Shags is available at:-

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0090769>

Results indicate that Otago and Foveaux Strait Stewart Island Shags comprise "two regional groups (Otago and Foveaux Strait) that show consistent differentiation in relative frequencies of pied versus dark-bronze morphotypes, the extent of facial carunculation, body size and breeding time."

However don't stop collecting those dead shags or penguins (all species, including feathers, bones and eggshell), especially from areas south of Dunedin (Taieri Island, Catlins). The samples will be used for genetic analysis in Martyn Kennedy, Hamish Spencer and Nic Rawlence shag and penguin research. We have a DoC holding permit and samples can be

collected for us without a permit; we just inform DoC (the system we have been using as approved by Bruce McKinlay).

If remains are good it would probably be a good idea to place in plastic bag, seal, label! and put in freezer. Contact Nic and he will arrange pick-up.

Dr Nic Rawlence Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Dept of Zoology, University of Otago

340 Great King Street, Dunedin, New Zealand

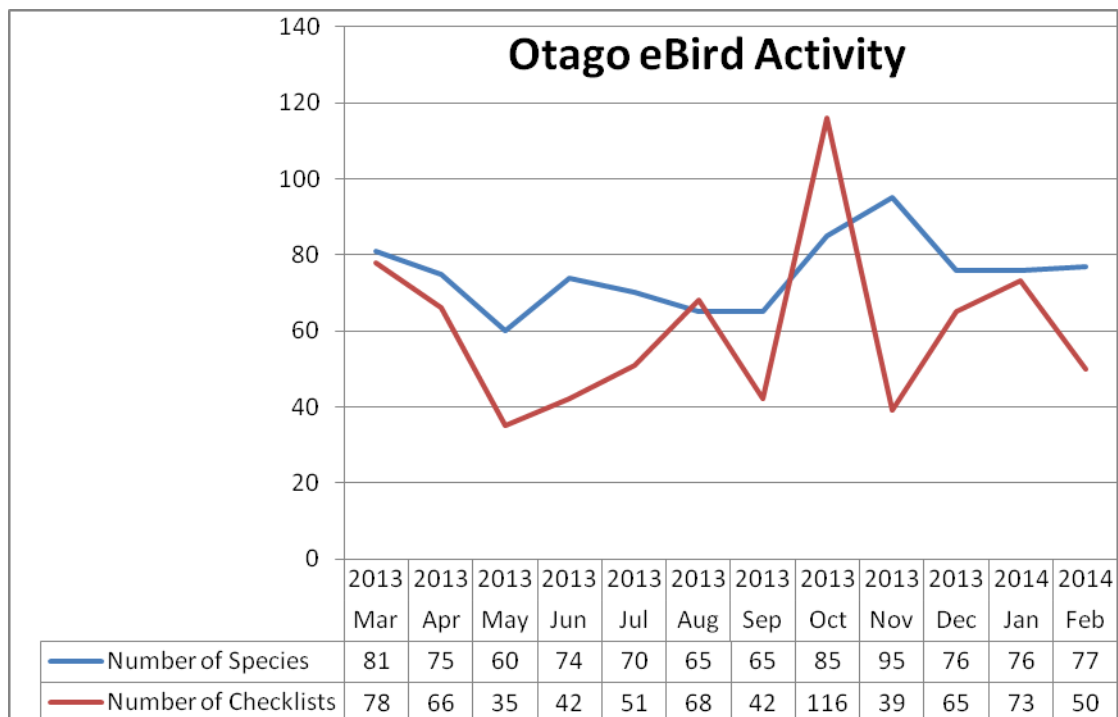
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## eBird Report

I hope your birding efforts were rewarded over the summer break. On checking eBird I see that the numbers of historical check lists have increased. Thanks you to all of you who are adding your recordings from you field notes. It certainly looks like we were very active in October 2013.

Please continue the good work and keep entering you field work. Also remember that it is critical when you are birding in groups that only one person enters the data in eBird. This is to ensure the integrity of the eBird data for Otago.



**Jim Wilson Regional Recorder**



## **OSNZ Annual Subscriptions**

A few members may have overlooked paying their annual subscriptions over the busy summer holiday period. Please check that you have paid as the 'grace' period will expire soon. You should receive a reminder email.

## **Indoor meetings and activities for 2014**

As you will see from the Programme we have an interesting range of speakers for our Indoor Meetings lined up for the first half of the year and several field trips. However, any suggestions of speakers or topics or offers to speak for the Indoor Meetings later in the year would be greatly appreciated. Also suggestions for field trips or offers to organise a birding weekend away would also be greatly appreciated.

Contact Mary Thompson 464 0787 [maryt@actrix.co.nz](mailto:maryt@actrix.co.nz)

## **New Zealand Bird Conference, 2014**

This year the annual conference and AGM will be held at Palmerston North. It is always a great opportunity to catch up with fellow birders, hear about the latest studies and get to do some birding in new places. The 'early bird' registration closes on March 31 so don't forget to register now to save.

## **Back Issues of Notornis and Southern Bird**

The stored journals are going to be disposed of so this is your last chance to receive free printed copies of any of these journals from Volume 1! Please contact [roger\\_sharp@xtra.co.nz](mailto:roger_sharp@xtra.co.nz) before the end of April if you would like to get any of these journals.



## Programme 2014

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

### Note change of time to 7.30 p.m.

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Wed. March 26    | Mary Thompson. Royal Spoonbills: what we have learned about our Otago birds                             |
| Sunday April 13  | Hawksbury Lagoon survey. 10.30 am.<br>Contact Derek Onley (482 2831)                                    |
| Wed April 23     | Lloyd Esler.<br>Birding experiences in Southland.   |
| Wed. May 28      | Graham Parker. Seabirds and trawl fisheries in the Southern Ocean.                                      |
| Sunday June 25   | Winter Wader Count High tide 11.50am.<br>To be allocated to a team contact Peter Schweigman (455 2790). |
| Wed. June 25     | Indoor Meeting Graeme Loh.<br>Birding off the Otago coast from the Polaris.                             |
| Saturday July 12 | Bioblitz, Dunedin Botanic Gardens, 10.00am to 4.00 pm. Contact Mary 464 0787 if you can help.           |
| Wed July 23      | Junichi Sugishita. Royal Parenting - foraging strategies and risks in N. Royal Albatross.               |

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next newsletter 17 April.