



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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Otago Region Newsletter 4/2013 May 2013



Expect the unexpected in Dunedin! A brief unscheduled trip for Dave York on 3rd May to Tomahawk Lagoon turned out to be special. The usual complement of Pied Stilt, gulls, Black Swan, Mallards, NZ Shovelers, Paradise Duck and Little Shags and were present in abundance along with a few Variable Oystercatchers, Black Shag, Spur-winged Plover and White-faced Herons. But also perched on a dead log by the corner of the lagoon by the road were a White Heron and a Little Egret – side-by-side, so easy to compare sizes. So in one view, within metres of each other were

3 species of heron. Then 4 more White Heron came to the same corner of the lagoon. Two other OSNZ members braved the impending storm the next morning and also had a good look at all these birds and there was no mistaking the identity of the Little Egret. This Little Egret is the first to be seen in Otago since 19 May 1994, almost 20 years ago. Tomahawk Lagoon is also where other rarities have turned up: Franklins Gull, also found by Dave York and Common Sandpiper, found by an English birder. The Little Egret had disappeared by Monday 20th to be replaced by a Royal Spoonbill, also looking interestingly small at a distance beside the White Heron. Subsequently 6 White Herons have been seen.

The theory that the herons and egret might have recently arrived from Australia, surely NZ White Herons are loners, caused uncharacteristic enthusiasm about a report from Kaikourai Estuary of a spoonbill that looked as though it had a yellow bill. Dave York and Derek Onley pushed their luck but to no avail; not even one with a black bill was present there on Monday.

Mary Thompson and Derek Onley

One fine day at Shag River mouth

Mary Thompson and Sue Galloway canoed down the Shag River from the bridge over State Highway 1 to the mouth on that lovely Sunday afternoon of 12 May. There was hardly a cloud in the sky nor much wind and still some autumn colours on the willows. This alone would have made all the paddling worthwhile, but on turning the last bend in the river before it opened out into the estuary, a White Heron was feeding along the river edge and then a little further on another! We watched them for nearly an hour as they made their way to the coast then flew back upstream again. The estuary had a wonderful collection of other birds – 5 Royal Spoonbill (no bands), several White-faced Herons (which looked small beside the White Heron), 1 Caspian Tern, 50+ Black Swan, 50+ Mallard and about a dozen Grey Teal, 20+ Pied Stilt, 20+ Spur-winged plover, 6 Variable Oystercatcher. Along the river 5 Kingfisher, 3 Harriers, Grey Warbler, Swallows, 50+ Little Shag and 4 Black Shag and on the surrounding farmland – Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Redpoll, Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, Skylarks, Starling, and Blackbird.

Were the Shag River White Herons from those seen at Tomahawk on 4/5 May or additional ones? At least 1 white Heron was seen at Tomahawk Lagoon on 12 May.

Mary Thompson

Autumn Offshore workups

Autumn at the prion fence has been frustrating. At Easter there were huge flocks, thousands, of small gulls offshore attending ten or more fish work ups. People at sea reported that it was slender tuna schooling on krill. This persisted for more than a month and only now is diminishing. Few gannets have been seen flying by, unlike last year. Now in May a few mollymawks are flying by.

Theo Stephens invited me out for a day at sea on 2 May. The work ups were three kilometres east of Penguin Beach in a wiggly north-south line around dark water thick with Euphausiid krill. The slender tuna were rarely visible and did not break the surface but could make the surface very choppy. Sooty Shearwaters, Red-billed Gulls, Black-backed Gulls were the main components of the flocks, several hundred in each. Cape Pigeons and Fairy Prions were in groups of about twenty and there were some Buller's Shearwaters, greatest count six. White-fronted terns, 20, were on the edge with a couple of Black-fronted Terns, Southern Royal Albatross,

Buller's Mollymawks, Shy Mollymawks, a fur seal and Stewart Island Shag. Black-billed gulls were probably in the flock but none were positively identified.





Returning to Taiaroa Head we came upon fifty Cape Pigeons and four Giant Petrels in a little slick of oil. They were pecking at a yellow and white gooey mass floating on the surface.



I grabbed this slime and, with Cape Pigeons not letting go, turned it over and saw black hairs. Probably a fur seal skin, perhaps the victim of a sea-lion. The food chain at work.

Graeme Loh

Ornithological Snippets

Sandra and Jimmy Suttie saw a **Reef Heron** at Nugget Point on Good Friday. On the rocky beach furthest to the left (looking down from the lighthouse) on the last spit of the 'mainland'. The first one that they had ever seen in these parts and the first in Otago since one was seen at the same place by Richard Schofield, 4 or so years ago?

A **Kingfisher** stunned itself on the glass of one of the business buildings in Kaikorai Valley on 9th May.

After the large numbers of **Royal Spoonbills** reported this autumn in the usual places, Kelvin Lloyd saw one on a small farm pond while cycling down Double Hill Road, just uphill from Blueskin Bay.

Doc worker Tane Belsham picked up a juvenile **Red-billed Gull** at Tomahawk Lagoon Dunedin on 5 April 2013 with the following bands :- Right metal 226316 - Left Yellow tall "E16". Be nice to know where that was banded.

Falcons have returned to the Orokonui Sanctuary for winter and one in Waikouaiti has been eating less endangered but well loved domestic pigeons.

Notices and Business

Banded Tui and Bellbirds

Murray Efford has been busy again this summer and autumn and has banded another 100 tui and bellbird at his place in Helensburgh. It is crucial for the project that re-sightings are made and recorded. The tui and bellbirds will be starting to come to feeders soon so keep a good look out. Please send information of any banded birds to Murray Efford email murray.efford@otago.ac.nz; or leave phone message on 476 4668 or post to 60 Helensburgh Road, Dunedin 9010. Include location, date, time, left leg: colour over metal; right leg: top colour over bottom colour. Also take a digital photo if at all possible.

NZ Bird Conference, 1-3 June, Otago Museum

This event is fast-approaching and hopefully all our organising will come together. The number of registrants is currently 116 but we guess a few more last minute ones. Remember that there are day registrations for \$75 which includes lunch and morning and afternoon teas, so some of you may want to come just for the day. The programme will go up on the OSNZ website early next week.

Programme 2013

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

Wed. May 22	Indoor Meeting Steve Lawrence NZ Falcon nests of Dunedin forests
June 1-3 (Queens Birthday)	NZ Bird Conference and OSNZ AGM Otago Museum
Sunday June 9	Winter Wader Count. High Tide in Dunedin 16:23, height 2.0 m. Contact Peter Schweigman 4552790
Wed. June 26	Indoor Meeting Junichi Sugishita Royal parenting – foraging strategies and risks in Northern Royal Albatross.
Wed. July 24	Alan Baker Food of NZ Pigeons in Otago.
Wed. August 28	Moira Pryde Morepork Research
Wed. Sept. 25	Kate Hand Important Bird Areas, Otago
Wed. October 23	Bruce McKinlay Alaskan Birds.
Wed. Nov. 27	Nic Rawlence Ancient DNA research on Moa

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com
Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next Newsletter 19 June.