



# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND



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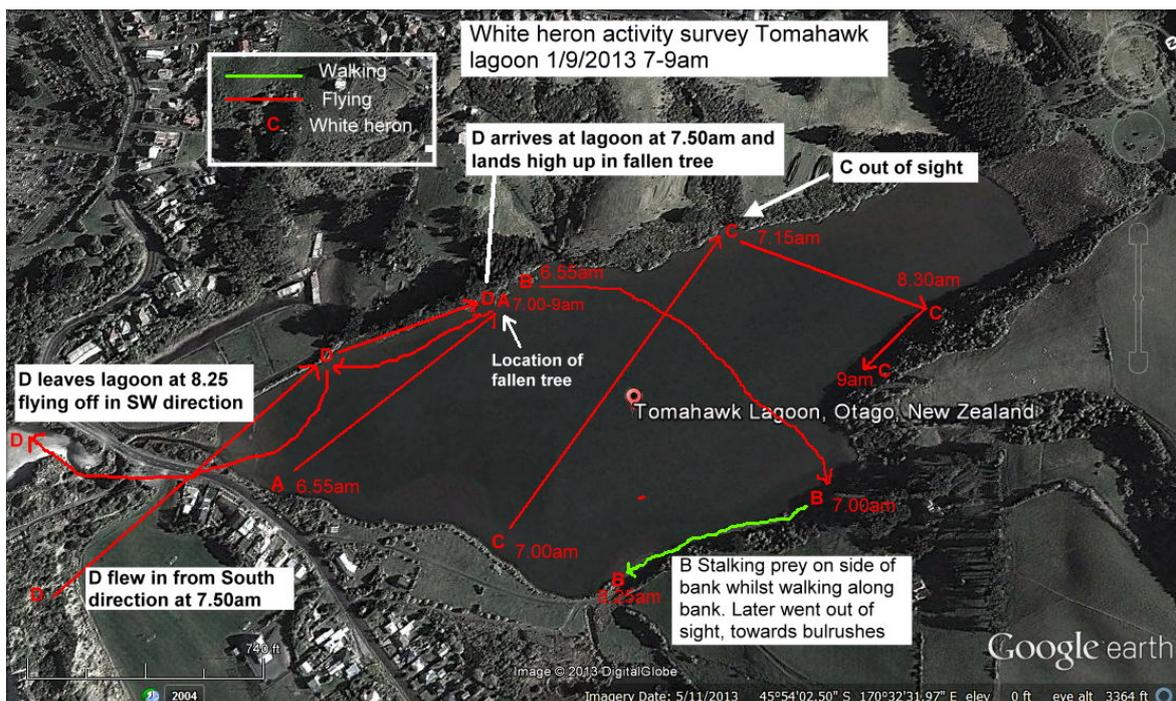
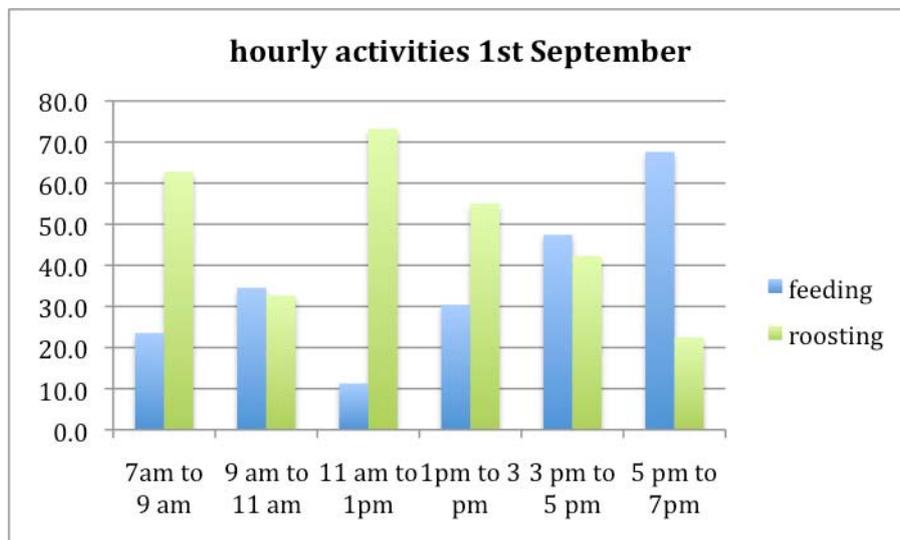
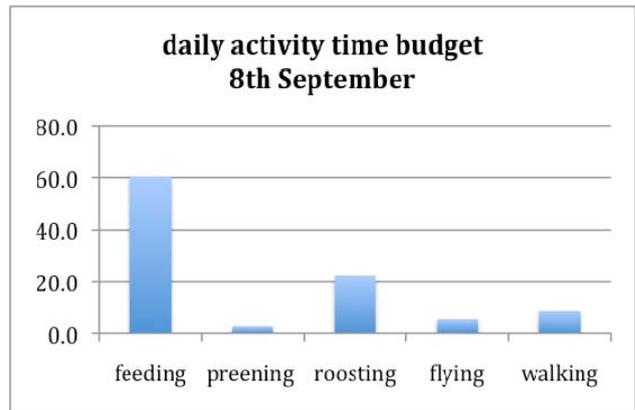
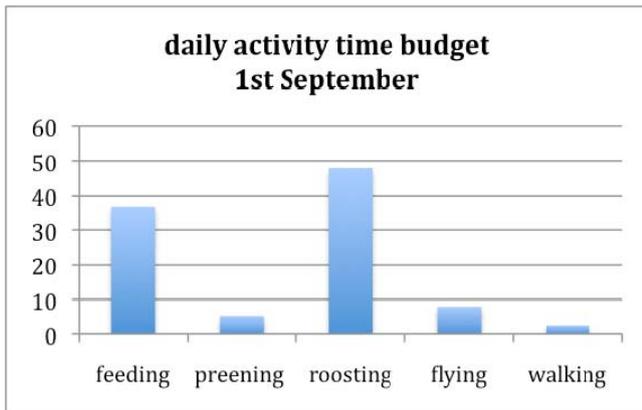
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*Otago Region Newsletter 8/2013 September 2013*

## **White heron Activity Time Budget Study**

At the last Indoor Meeting it was proposed that we carry out an activity time budget survey of our white herons at Tomahawk lagoon, and despite the short notice there was an enthusiastic response and so we proceeded. Eighteen OSNZ members helped with this by watching in 2 hour stints from 7 am to 7 pm on two Sundays – 1<sup>st</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> September. The weather was absolutely fantastic for day one, with observers lounging on picnic chairs in the warm sun. Every 5 minutes observers recorded the number of white herons undertaking feeding, preening, roosting, flying or other and every 15 minutes marking the location of herons on maps of the area. In all 675 observations were made, so there was not much time for relaxing! Up to 5 herons were seen at any one time but mostly only 3 or 4. We discovered that the herons were using the reeds at the far end and also between the two lagoons for feeding so unfortunately were often out of sight. The herons were observed feeding much more on the second Sunday than on the first but the pattern throughout the day was similar; increased in afternoon and greatest at 5 to 7 pm, and least at midday. We also learned that the lagoons are stocked with trout so there is plenty of nice food for them. They were only observed preening in the morning. Philip tracked down a Tomahawk bird that had flown off in the morning a few km further along Tomahawk Road in a stream, so it appears that they have got to know their surroundings well by now and moving further afield. No one has seen any nesting activity yet – here's hoping. The regular daily watches will continue (see the report by Taeko and Betty below for an example of what there is to see). Also below is one of Philip Pointon's maps of movements.

The graphs show the results of a preliminary analysis of the data.



## A day in the life of 6 White Herons

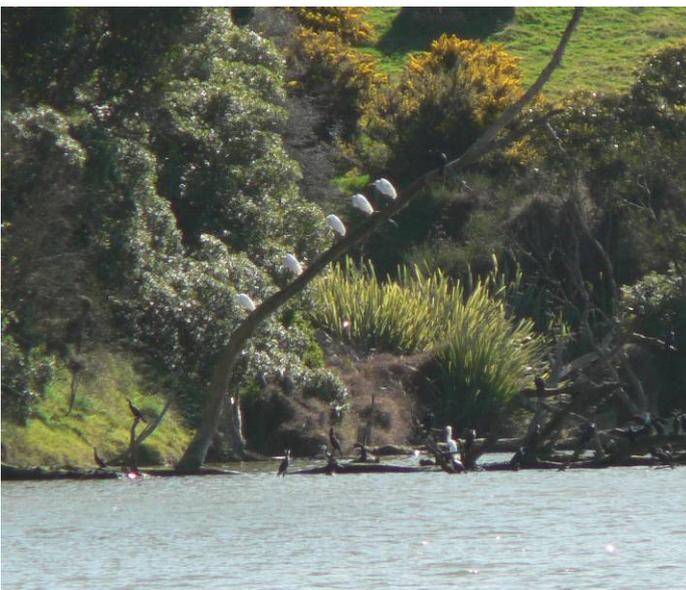
29 August 2013 Tomahawk Lagoon Betty Duncan & Taeko Abe

Sunny but cloudy later, stiff breeze from south, muddy water rippling.  
Car temp. 9 C. 11.15 am – 14.10 pm really, really cold outside of car.

11.15 – 11.35: **Lagoon 1. Three white herons** preening while sitting in tree a little to the left of the big dead tree. Most of the time only two visible but on one occasion one bird moved to the left and I could definitely see three.



11.40 – 11.50: Domain Hall No herons but water very high in reeds and swan poo everywhere on grass behind and beside hall.



11.56: **Lagoon 1** Arrived back to see **6 herons** flying around large dead tree and. Five settled on the upright branch. They were hunched up with their backs to the sun. A sixth was on the dead log above water. Also, at least 30 shags on lower branches.



Note: Black swan to left of lower heron in centre of the photo. It continually patrolled the area behind the horizontal log swimming in circles.

12.01 – 12.10: The birds moved about on the tree several times. When they wanted to move to the higher branches on the right side of the dead tree the herons flew right as if heading for Lagoon 2 and then circled back to land in the branches.

The photo shows the herons in the same positions as a week earlier. These seem to be favourite spots. They often sit with their wings in the inverted V shape as the centre lower one does in photo.

Note: black swan to right of the two lower birds in centre.

12.10: The black swan attacked the **heron at right and it flew off** to the right across Lagoon 1 in the direction of Lagoon 2. (It went out of sight before we could determine where it landed. It would have been great to have been able to phone an observer at Lagoon 2 to see where it and the subsequent four birds landed.)

12.12: Herons moved around on dead tree – two to the rear fallen truck over the water.

12.17: One heron walked down the right hand branch towards the water and pecked at a shag until it moved out of the way. Could definitely see they have yellow beaks.

12.23: **Second heron flies** to right towards Lagoon 2.

12.24: **Third heron flies** to right towards Lagoon 2.

12.26: **Fourth heron flies** to right towards Lagoon 2.

12.31: **Fifth heron flies** to right towards Lagoon 2.

12.42: **Sixth** heron was still sitting on lower branch so we decided to see if we could locate the other five herons at Lagoon 2.

## 12.46 – 14.10: **Lagoon 2**

No sign of any herons after continually scanning with binoculars.

12.48 : We thought we saw a harrier hawk circle over Lagoon 2 and then it flew off to the right above/into the pine plantation.

12.54: **Four herons** flew above reeds to the right of the Domain Hall and settled into the reeds. Then three rose up again and another flew in from higher up to join them. We wondered if this was the last heron we saw at Lagoon 1. It was as if the others were showing it where they were. This whole episode lasted about 20 seconds.

13.11: Two herons moved to the left to be in the reeds nearer the Domain Hall.

They sort of half jumped or bounded or flew to move through the reeds.

During this time we sometimes saw the head of one heron above the reeds to the right.

13.14: Four or five popped up and down again among the reeds.

13. 18 – 13.19: Again saw heads move up and down among reeds.



13.46: **2 herons** flew up to the grass on the hill on opposite side of Lagoon 2.

These two landed together in the position of the one on the left in the photo.

13.50: The one on the right walked very

quickly to the right and disappeared behind the scrub and later reappeared further to the right.

13.52: They appeared to be looking for food among the grass. The one to the left stayed still to begin with but later caught up with the right hand one.

13.55: Both moved closer together and further to the right. Then one flew off the hill and appeared to have gone back to Lagoon 1.

13.57. The second heron flew off the hill to the rushes. The others also flew up and all appeared to be going back to Lagoon 1 and clearly flew over the flowering pussy willow trees beyond the reeds.

## Ornithological Snippets



Continuing the **White Heron** theme, Derek Onley found a bird at Waikouaiti Racecourse on 2 September. Paul Pope saw 2 at Hooper's Inlet on 3rd and Neville Peat saw a single bird near Hooper's Inlet hall on 8<sup>th</sup>. Up north at Wainono lagoon, Zuni Steer reported one 6th September. Maybe they are all returning to the West Coast?

Dave Yeoman found an immature **Mute Swan**, (what's going on with big white birds?) at Stony Creek Estuary on the 1 September and it was still there the following weekend. The nearest **Mute Swans** are in Christchurch. The last one reported around Otago appears to be a bird in Blueskin Bay in July 2005.



A few **White-fronted Terns** had returned to the old piles on the Mole by 9 September and a juvenile **Pied Shag** was fishing alongside. In the northerly out at sea there was little else except for several hundred **Red-billed Gulls** feeding in the tide rip and the usual patrolling couple of **Buller's Mollymawk** and immature **Northern Giant Petrels**.



## Notices and Business

### Creating urban bird lists for New Zealand Birds Online

OSNZ Council seeks the assistance of members nationwide to prepare bird lists for all New Zealand cities and towns, for loading on the New Zealand Birds Online website. Preparation of the lists is a desktop exercise.

The main reason for doing this is that these lists will be a helpful entry point for beginner bird watchers as they try to learn the common birds of their neighbourhood. At the moment, NZ Birds Online is mainly focused at experienced bird watchers. These lists will assist beginners to take a knowledgeable interest in the birds around them, and we hope that this will lead to greater interest in OSNZ/Birds New Zealand and our activities.

The urban lists will also assist overseas birders learning the birds of their port of entry before venturing further afield.”

The lists for the Otago regional towns are underway with Zuni, Richard and John working on checklists for Oamaru, Balclutha and Alex., respectively. So can we have a couple of people to get together to work on the checklist for Dunedin City.

**Colin Miskelly**

Contact Mary for detailed information and Excel spreadsheet.



## **YEPT 25th Anniversary Conference 17–18 October**

### **Pre-conference workshops on 16 October.**

Registration is open for the conference and spaces are filling fast. We recommend that you register soon to be sure of participating at the event.

You can register on-line at

[www.yellow-eyedpenguin.org.nz/conservationinc/register-online](http://www.yellow-eyedpenguin.org.nz/conservationinc/register-online).

Remember, let us know as soon as you can if you'd like to display a poster or require space to exhibit your cause and work.

### **Conference programme**

An outline of the conference programme is now available. You can see what's in store at

[www.yellow-eyedpenguin.org.nz/conservationinc/programme-outline](http://www.yellow-eyedpenguin.org.nz/conservationinc/programme-outline).

We will post the finalized programme itself closer to the time, once we are sure that we have allowed for the inevitable change.

### **Abstracts**

Speakers are now submitting their abstracts. We will include all of them in the conference booklet. But we will also post them on-line as we receive them. Look now for those we have on the website.

### **The conference venue**

Want to see where the conference will be held? We are privileged to be using Dunedin's newest conference facilities in the centre of town and only just completed. Take a peek at [www.dunedinvenues.co.nz](http://www.dunedinvenues.co.nz)

### **Got time to hang about before the conference?**

DOC's irrepressible Graeme Loh, whom many of you will know, has offered to lead a tour to his inspiring fairy prion conservation project on Dunedin's coastline. The cliff-top predator fence is an engineering feat in itself. But if you are up for it, Graeme will abseil you down the cliffs to see the prions themselves and the work his team has done to augment their cliff-ledge breeding opportunities. Either way, you won't forget what you see. Graeme's tour is scheduled for the Wednesday afternoon preceding the conference. So, if you are not attending one of the pre-conference workshops on 16 October, and would like to see community-anchored conservation at its very ambitious best, contact Graeme directly at [gloh@earthlight.co.nz](mailto:gloh@earthlight.co.nz).

## 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. Sept. 25	Kate Hand	Important Bird Areas, Otago
Sunday Oct. 13	Hawksbury Lagoon Survey	Meet Stewart St. 10.30am. Contact Derek Onley 482 2831
Wed. October 23	Bruce McKinlay	Alaskan Birds.
Sun. Nov.17	Summer Wader Count	High tide Dunedin 16.29hrs Height 2.1m. Contact Peter Schweigman
Wed. Nov. 27	Nic Rawlence	Ancient DNA research on Moa

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next Newsletter 17 October.