



Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 6/2015 June 2015

75th Anniversary Conference

Travelling to Blenheim earlier in the month for the Society annual bash and Science Conference started early in the last week of May when I collected up Sarah, Graeme, Jill Mary and Stef and headed off in the DOC minibus. We made steady progress north counting harriers on the way but not stopping for any serious birdwatching. We arrived in time for a curry with an assorted group of RR's Council Members and friends.

For me, and Stef, the next day started early with a full day Council meeting. We steadily worked our way through a large and complex agenda with a break in the middle of the day to catch up with the RR's who's annual meeting started about lunchtime. The Council covered off the series of reports from Society Officers and Scheme Convenors and an annual report from Ingrid Hutzler the Society's EO. We had an interesting session with Heather Rogers, the Society's Librarian. I think the most interesting thing I heard during this day was from Heather who said that the Society's collection of ornithological journals occupied some 85 linear metres of shelf space in the Auckland Museum. It is, according to Heather, probably the most significant collection of ornithological literature in the Country. Heather talked to Council about the changing face of Journals from overseas and how some were moving to an exclusively electronic format. The impacts on exchanges and access were discussed by Council. Council also looked at the impacts on the Society operation of the resignation of Julia White and Nick Allen from their respective roles. We are appreciative of the contribution made by Nick

and Julia and have advertised for replacements so production of Birds NZ and management of membership queries can be seamless. Sharon Alderson also joined Council and was able to report on the successful teen camp held in April. Although the weather was atrocious and seriously impacted on activities Sharon was able to show that such camps are able to be held in the modern day; that they are popular and will contribute to inspiring young people to engage with Ornithology. Although there was much, much more on the agenda the other highlight for me was a meeting with the Society's Scientific Committee about progress on a national monitoring scheme as a new national project.

Saturday was the opening of the 2015 NZ Bird Conference. It was the Society's 75th year and so there were a lot of invited papers looking at where we had come from and some of our big achievements as a Society. The day ended with the Society's AGM where we had a spirited discussion about the minutiae of a new strategy for providing leadership in the Society over the next few years. The final version is on the Society's website here: <http://www.osnz.org.nz/Strategy-for-Birds-NZ> The AGM then turned to dealing with the launch of the new Edition of the Field Guide and honouring Hugh Robertson and Derek Onley for their commitment to producing the Countries premier field guide to the birds of New Zealand.

Have a look here for the photos: <http://www.osnz.org.nz/Awards>

Another great meal organised by the Conference Team concluded the day. Sunday started with workshops. I disappeared into a computer lab with a group of people and got people set up and going on eBird. Thanks are due to Nikki McArthur and Mark Ayre for their support and help. Science presentations continued with a wide range of reports from David Melville on advocacy to me on shorebirds; and everything in between. Sunday night marked the formal end of the Science with another great meal and then everybody was up early and dispersed on their various field trips. I went to Kaikoura and watched seabirds. So after a pretty intensive weekend what do I make of it all? Being on Council gives me a privileged over view of the Society. I never cease to be amazed at the breadth of activities reported by RR's that they are up to across the Country. Also I never cease to be amazed at the energy and endeavour that RR's and other scheme convenor's put into their work on behalf of the Society. The format of the Conference is becoming pretty stable; lots of science,

workshops and an extremely social time. I do think there is more scope for Society members who are amateurs to stand up and speak on their projects. It was quite clear from the conference that the long term data sets that really describe changes in the pattern of birds in New Zealand are being created and held by the Society membership; not the paid professionals. For the last three years the Conferences have had about 140-150 registrations. Next year we are in the Hawkes Bay so it will be good to see how Bernie Kelly and his crew manage.

It was a full on weekend with meetings, catching up with individuals to move things along, lots of science, meeting new people, making sure I did not set off the Security alarm at the Polytech (where we had the eBird workshop), and eventually getting to see some new birds out at sea, but I do enjoy myself and have a lot of fun. Though I'm going to fly to Napier; see you there.

Bruce McKinlay

The Long March of the Bird People



Queens Birthday we went to Blenheim for the 75th OSNZ AGM. (Birds NZ? Clunky grammar) Led by Bruce McKinlay, Jill Hamel, Sara Larcombe, Stephanie Grosser, Mary Thompson, Francie Beggs and Sue Odlin. Some of us had a Friday to look around, so the Awatere River Mouth and the Grassmere foreshore were visited. Very quiet and the sea was murky and sloppy, not recovered yet from the end of May windstorm. But the beach patrol only found a dried spotted shag for the bird measuring workshop.

Things were seen. I usually snort at the excitement about waifs and strays like circl buntings, but it was truly interesting to see mixed finch flocks around the salt works with lots of circl buntings. Also interesting the hundreds and hundreds of red billed gulls feeding on the salt ponds, I estimated about 2,000. Jill wondered if they are feeding on brine shrimps. Also seen; banded dotterels, pied shags (a refresher, how many are in our harbour now?) and two white-winged black terns followed by four black-fronted terns. Jill paid homage to mounds of sand, the Marfells Beach archaeo site.



Then a real holiday on Monday with the field trip out on Queen Charlotte Sound, two boat loads. On ours we were guided by Bill Cash, The islands where predators have been eradicated, although a falcon was perched on top of Motuara, tieke and robins below , Blumine which is stocked with Catlins mohua (no none seen heard). The stories of evil hedgehogs now being on Arapawa and pig release and quick response eradication on Pickersgill Is. Great to see a wilding pine gang active on the landscape, and much regeneration since the bad old days of subsidised clearances. The dolphins were distracting. The learning, spotted shags were already coloured up and sitting on nests, as were the king shags, so correctly described as winter breeding! Groups of hundreds of fluttering shearwaters inside the sound and it was great to follow up the excellent presentation by Rob Schuckard on king shags and habitat allocation to developers with seeing a fish farm and mapping the feeding sites of king

shags up the sound. This was one of several presentations which showed the role of members gathering data that assists in defending the environment from careless development. Thanks to the organisers!

Graeme Loh



AGM Workshop: "Measurements of Birds"

An array of birds, from the large Wandering Albatross to the small Sparrow were taken from the deep freeze for the demonstration led by expert Biz Bell. Many of the specimens were from fishing by-catch and the resulting measurements are available for world-wide research. We practised measuring legs, wings, length of tail, and several measurements of the beak (depth, width, length). The official Bird Banders Manual is available from DOC. Measuring, with the appropriate equipment, is a matter of much practice to master!

Other things noted in the albatross were:

- * the presence of a brood patch which enabled the observer to decide if a chick had been left to die
- * a close look at the base of the wing feathers for indications of moulting
- * to sex the bird a dissection was needed to look for testes, which are like small kidney beans.

Lesley Gowans and Francie Beggs

The Scientific Presentations at this conference celebrating 75 years of the Society, reflected the theme of “the birds and the people”, and covered a wide range of topics, species and regions with a focus on the Society’s history, future plans and events. Abstracts will be available on the website www.osnz.co.nz so I’ll look at some specific presentations, which reflect this range.

Colin Miskelly spoke of the early ornithologists, both professional and amateur who set up the association to focus on the study of birds. He then described how OSNZ had developed into Birds NZ including the impact of digital technologies on studying birds. Colin was followed by Biz Bell who looked at field trips (images included several of our field trips and projects featuring Bruce, Mary, Lesley et al.) and the influence of OSNZ field training camps on a generation of younger members, a theme that was taken up by Sharon Alderson. During April 2015, a field camp was organised for teenagers on Mana Island to teach basic birding and bird study skills. The successful camp was seen as a pilot for future events elsewhere in New Zealand. In the next session, national and regional projects were covered including wader studies, the Beach Patrol Scheme and the red-billed gull study.

In the final cluster of speakers addressing matters pertaining to OSNZ, Bruce McKinlay spoke about the future of Birds NZ and introduced the Strategy developed by the Council to encourage and promote the study and enjoyment of birds, including scientific projects and the dissemination of information. This conference saw a smaller number of research papers, and as usual they reflected the diverse interests of members. **Sue Odlin**

I have not attended an OSNZ conference for many years, but being provided with a lift by Bruce McKinley and it being our 75th anniversary, I was tempted. It was slightly uncanny to watch Biz Bell running the conference with all the vigour, style and cheerful efficiency with which her father Brian ran our field trips , 40 years ago looking for black stilts on the Ahuriri. At my age, I thought that sleep might overcome me during some of the 31 papers presented, but except for two who shall be unidentified, I had no trouble staying wide awake. The papers summarising projects, local and national, showed how hard and how effectively members are working, particularly on seabirds. Graeme

Taylor's paper made clear the big improvements in bird translocations, even down to the simple things such as electric blenders instead of hand-turned mincers for preparing pureed fish feed.

I attended the workshop on OSNZ projects, and must have dismayed the host, Ralph Powlesland, when I accidentally sparked off a vigorous discussion on health and safety during projects. Ralph did manage to convey the gist of running projects but using fewer examples.

The field trip to the falcon breeding facility on the Brancott vineyards was a revelation for someone like myself who had seen only wild falcons. The star of the show, a female called Fern, was quite remarkably contented but very alert. Her handler, Dian, clearly had an excellent bond with her, but the character of Fern still came through. She is used for advocacy rather than the mundane business of scaring small birds over vineyards, and is taken to visit schools and institutions throughout Marlborough to educate about the value of these lovely birds. We were also allowed to see the elaborate breeding sheds, where disabled birds that cannot be released are mated up to produce young that can be released in the local hills. Ordinary transformer boxes, of which there are several thousand among the Wairau Valley vineyards, are a problem for the young birds. The boxes are warm, the falcons roost on them and then spread their wings for take off and get between live points. Up to 11 have been found electrocuted. Insulating the points is costly but clearly needed.

Jill Hamel.

Ornithological Snippets.



Maree Johnstone sent this photo of a male sparrow which feeds in a friend's Tainui garden most mornings and has been visiting for some months now. "It's amazing that it is able to feed with such a grossly extended bill; hard to believe but I'm told that it pecks 'normally' and only sometimes feeds sideways. Presumably some damage has occurred early in its life which

has caused the overgrowth. Can't imagine that it offers any competitive advantage!".

Tom Waterhouse went to Totara (the ponds along Fortification Rd inland from Kakanui) on June 6 to see the 3 **Black Stilts** that are still in the area and found 2 **Black-fronted Dotterel** as well. Jason Wilder found 55 **Banded Dotterel** at Aramoana on June 11 along with 63 **Bar-tailed Godwits** including a bird in breeding plumage. 51 godwits were overwintering in Blueskin Bay on 16 June.

Jason Wilder reported a **Southern Giant Petrel** in heavy wind off Cape Saunders on 12 June, riding on a carcass (seal or penguin?) which it was eating from and defending against a **Northern Giant Petrel** and he also posted this on BirdingNZ on 11 June:-

Interesting shearwater off Taiaroa Head

I took a drive out to Aramoana this morning where a walk to the end of the Mole produced good numbers of seabirds, including quite a few close in **Buller's, White-capped and Northern Royal Albatrosses**. A small shearwater-type bird flew in from offshore, and landed just off the rocks at the very tip of Taiaroa Head. The bird caught my attention as it flew in because of its small size (obviously smaller than a **Cape Pigeon** that had just flown by), short and round-ish wings, and uniformly quite dark upperparts. In flight it showed clean white underneath including chin, throat, and undertail. The undersides of the wing were mainly clean white, with a dark trailing band and thin dark leading band. In bright light I can't rule out faint duskiness to the armpit, but if present it must have been quite reduced and/or faint in comparison to the obviously dark trailing edge of the wing. The bird was too distant to make out the fine details of face pattern, but the face was dark to just below the eye and there was a hint of a partial collar.

The bird spent ~15 minutes feeding just off the tip of Taiaroa Head, staying within ~20 meters of the rocks the entire time. It's feeding behaviour was unlike anything I've seen before and included repeated bouts of near-hovering with wings raised as the bird pattered just above the surface. At other times it would sit and then dive after prey. Dives were long enough that I sometimes worried I'd lost track of the bird (so maybe 10 seconds...). The overall feeding behaviour was like some odd combination of penguin/diving-petrel/storm-petrel. In fact, at one point a Little Penguin surfaced nearby and it was a bit surprising how large the penguin was in comparison.

Based on the looks I had I'm guessing this bird was perhaps a shearwater of the **Fluttering or Subantarctic Little** persuasion. I don't think either of these is expected in June off Otago, and my experience with these species is limited (zero, in fact, for Little; and I've only seen Fluttering on a handful of occasions), so I'm not too sure what to think. Does anyone have any thoughts from the details I've provided? The bird was too distant for photos (700 meters from the tip of the Mole to Taiaroa Head), but the looks I had were good and prolonged through a Zeiss telescope and the details here are based on my notes from the field.



photo Graham Parker

Seven White-capped Mollymawks and a Wandering Albatross were washed up on beaches from Shag River to Kaka Point from February to May this year. Autopsies revealed that four of the White-capped Mollymawks had broken wing bones indicating that they were killed by becoming tangled in trawl fisheries gear.

A farm contract worker reported a Kea just inland from Waikouaiti after the heavy rain early in June.. He'd seen many in the Alps and managed to call it down into the gum trees behind his house.

Alison Cunningham found Mary's contact via the Ornithological Society website and emailed to say "I'm fairly certain I saw a Fork-tailed Swift about 9am this morning (12 June) at the caves (north) end of Long Beach, flying amongst the usual groups of Welcome Swallows. My bird guide says it's a rare straggler and offers only one other possible candidate, the Spine Tailed Swift, which is also a rare vagrant. The bird I saw was definitely a swift, all black on its back with a very clear and defined white rump stripe with an obvious black tail. There was no white cheek. It was clearly larger than the swallows and stiff winged, less flitting and more wheeling in its flight than the swallows. It was a prolonged and very clear sighting, but no photo, alas."



By first light the following morning, the beach was of course filled with avid twitchers, though by the time Derek Onley arrived after a leisurely breakfast they'd all departed. As had the swift.

Presumably the twitchers, failing to find the swift, then shot off for a belated try at the possible **Black Kite** reported to the Wingspan National Bird of Prey Centre by a resident of Arawa Street, Tainui. The man said that he believes he saw a black kite on Tuesday 9th of June soaring low over He mentioned the bird had a triangular tail shape and that it reminded him of the red kites that he was familiar with in the UK. Andrew Thomas of Wingspan reckoned it was "possibly a unusual moult/tail damage on a harrier, but worth mentioning I thought. I think this is a pretty good chance that it was a black kite. Worth keeping an eye out for it if you live down there or are passing through."

Tomahawk Times



Kingfishers gain from beach storms

Kingfishers seized feeding opportunities brought to Tomahawk Beach by winter weather and flooding.

As usual in winter, a kingfisher sometimes perched on power lines near the outlet bridge and flew along the creek. It was a larger bird than those seen more recently. A smaller kingfisher was seen in cliffs above the beach in stormy weather and snow showers on May 25. It was very active, flying and perching half way up along the cliff.

Next evening the kingfisher was there again, in bushes along the stream edge above the beach. It caught small items off the stream surface, probably insects. The prey could not be seen by human eyes, but the bird launched off tree perches 15 to 20 metres away and went straight at whatever tiny thing it had seen on the water. Then a second kingfisher appeared in the same tree, a metre away from the first bird, the same small size and bright blue and green plumage. This bird flew along the edge of trees, once swooping down and grabbing something small off the sand by the stream.

Heavy rain and flooding on June 3 left Tomahawk Beach strewn with wrecked vegetation and tangled piles of kelp. The same two kingfishers were busy continually flying along the surging outlet creek and cliffs above the beach. Each bird flew down from cliffs and grabbed something tiny from bare sand just ahead of the incoming sea. They also took minute

prey from edges of kelp piles. All their feeding was on the wing without stopping, flying close to the sand and storm debris. Then they perched briefly on rock outcrops in the cliffs, watching the beach before flying out again. They were usually several metres apart, and a few times perched a metre from each other. On June 11 they continued the same behaviour, the debris and kelp piles being a real food opportunity.

Checking the beach again in sleet showers on June 15 of course meant anticipating seeing two kingfishers. The beach was still covered in debris, the swells caused small boulders to roll around in incoming seas, dislodging small animals, and the dunes are heavily carved away. I saw one kingfisher in a tree at the edge of the cliff, and then four kingfishers in the same tree, perched close together and watching the beach, but not flying. They were all small sized kingfishers, bright blue and green plumage, yellow chests, less white feathers. Two welcome swallows flew low over kelp piles just above the incoming sea, and there were two swallows later over the raupo at the lagoon. **Andrew Austin**



photo Graeme Loh

Another Conference Field Trip. Ecosystem for Red-billed Gulls.

Notices and Business

Winter Wader Count

Just a friendly reminder that the winter wader count will be on Sunday, 28 June 2015. High tide for Dunedin will be at 1251 hrs; for Blueskin Bay about 1130; for Port Chalmers about 1230 and the Catlins will have a high tide at 1020. The height will be 1.9m.

Let's hope the weather will good, not too windy and no rain.

I might be repeating myself but the waders have priority to be counted and if time permits, it would be nice to count other bird species. Just to be able to get this survey on ebird.

Peter Schweigman

Otago Branch, Birds NZ AGM, July 22 , 2015

The AGM will be held following Hamish's talk on shags.

Please think about what activities you would be keen to participate in and bring your ideas along to discuss.

Current projects: Sinclair Wetland seasonal survey; Beyond Orokonui habitat survey.

National Projects: wader count, Red-billed gull nest count

We are hoping to have a field trip to the Catlins area, maybe in conjunction with cannon netting godwits.

As usual spring is very busy bird-wise. **Mary Thompson.**

Beach Wrecked Birds

I've been asked by a student in Australia to collect fresh seabirds for her thesis project which is a study of the extent of ingestion of manmade objects as a cause of death or ailment. If any of you are in a position to freeze fresh seabirds we would be grateful. At some stage we can arrange for them to be freighted to Invercargill where I have freezer space. She will be visiting sometime to dissect them. There is a grant to cover the cost. Any help much appreciated.

Lloyd Esler 03 2130404 esler@southnet.co.nz

The Birds New Zealand Beach Patrol Scheme

Volunteers needed for the Beach Patrol Scheme for recording information about seabirds found dead on New Zealand coastlines.

The Birds New Zealand Beach Patrol Scheme commenced in 1951 (although some records date from 1943) and for more than 60 years has

aimed to systematically document the identity, location and numbers of seabirds found dead on New Zealand beaches. It has provided information leading to an improved understanding of the seasonal movements, migration and causes of seabird deaths. The development of a new internet-based data management system has commenced to ensure that the database and data analysis is kept up-to-date.

We are looking for volunteers to help enter data from more than 25,000 scanned cards into a new online database. This can be done anywhere as long as you have a computer and access to the internet. You do not have to have any earlier beach patrol experience, although that would of course be helpful, just some time and an interest in contributing to this long-running citizen science project.

If you would like to help with data entry, please contact Ian Armitage, Project Coordinator (ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz), or ask local Regional Representative for further information.

Ian Armitage, Project Coordinator

South-East Marine Protection Forum

Roopu Manaaki Ki Te Toka

The New Zealand government is committed to creating a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) to protect a representative sample of New Zealand's coastal environments and habitats. The coastline between Timaru and Waipapa Point is currently being considered for marine protection by the South-east Marine Protection Forum. At the moment there are no MPAs on this section of coast that meets the protection standard set in government policy and this is a significant gap in New Zealand's network. The Forum was established by the Ministers of Conservation and Primary Industries and it is the Forum's job to recommend to the government what sites are deserving of marine protection and what type of marine protection are needed. There are 14 members on the forum, representing the interests of tāngata whenua, commercial and recreational fishers, local communities, and environmental, scientific and tourism groups. The Forum will first consult widely with local communities and interest groups and also consider any available scientific information. There are no predetermined sites for marine protection. Then, on the basis of that first stage of information gathering, the Forum will decide on draft Marine Protected Areas, and will

notify these recommendations for formal submissions. On the basis of all the information gathered through this process, the Forum will then make a

final set of recommendations to the government, on what sites should be protected and what type of protection each site needs.

The marine protection tools will need to meet a protection standard that achieves biodiversity protection. These may include marine reserves, Fisheries Act, or Resource Management Act tools, customary fisheries management tools, special legislation, wildlife refuges, sanctuaries and management reserves, provided they meet the protection standards set out in the MPA policy. To meet the protection standard a management tool must enable the maintenance or recovery of the site's biological diversity to a healthy functioning state.

The Forum's outcomes will be reliant on the input it receives, so it's important to get involved in the process now. There are several ways to be involved and have a say:

Visit the forum website or facebook page:

south-eastmarine.org.nz

[facebook.com/southeastmarine](https://www.facebook.com/southeastmarine)

Follow this link to fill in a questionnaire:

<http://www.seasketch.org/#projecthomepage/5331eff529d8f11a2ed3dd04/survey/5474fd3056fe77161bc623d6>

Call the Freephone: 0800 OURSAY (0800 687729)

Email: ruwhite@doc.govt.nz

Programme 2015

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

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| Wed June 24 | Double Bill: Wray Grimaldi "Disease in Adelie Penguins-a feather loss condition".
Jason Wilder "Birding experiences of a visitor from USA to Dunedin." |
| Sunday June 28 | Winter Wader Count, HT 12.15pm 1.9m
We are keen for more people to be involved, contact peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz . |
| Saturday July 11. | Survey of Sinclair Wetlands. Car-pooling from Dunedin at 9 am. This is our winter survey of the waterfowl, bush birds and fernbirds.
Backup - Sunday July 12. Contact Mary Thompson 464 0787, maryt@actrix.co.nz |
| Wed July 22 | Hamish Spencer Classification of the World's Cormorants and Shags
followed by AGM to discuss future projects and allocation of tasks. |
| Wed Aug 26 | Kelvin Lloyd
Update on the Beyond Orokonui project. |
| Wed Sept 23 | Catriona MacLeod and Priscilla Wehi
"Birds as measures of biodiversity." |
| Wed Oct. 28 | to be arranged |
| Wed Nov. 25 | Philippa Agnew "Foraging behaviour of Little Blue Penguins at Oamaru." |

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: July 16.