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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 9/2016 September 2016

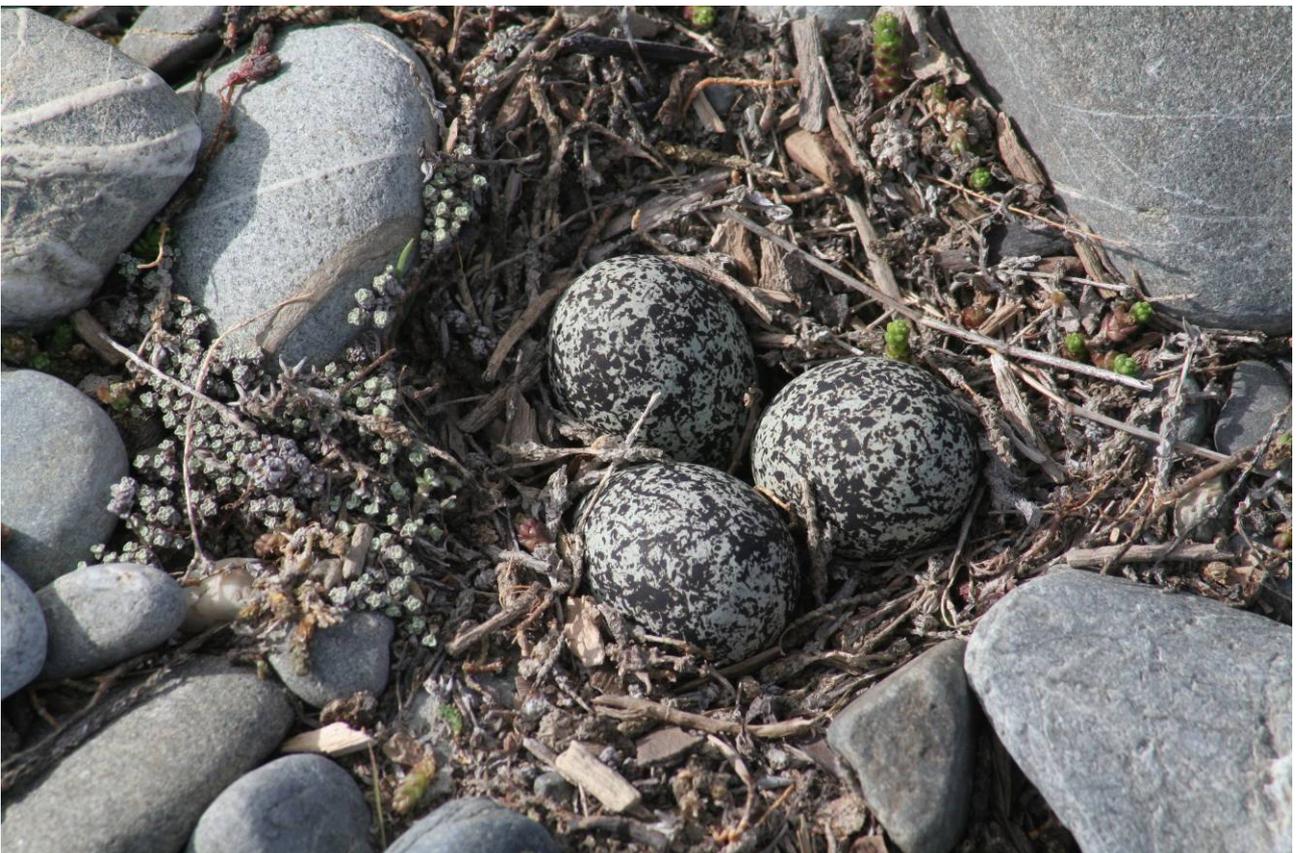
September birding. Graeme Loh



The Polaris sampled water on Tuesday 20th and Graeme saw 22 species of seabirds. Nothing in great numbers though. A total of about eight sooty shearwaters were seen heading south. The nearest were thirteen kilometres offshore. Two pairs of grey-faced petrels were around. Also seen; Northern and Southern Royals, Northern giant petrel, Buller's, shy, Salvin's and black-browed mollymawks, white-chinned and grey petrels, Cape pigeons, Cookilaria sp, fairy prion, broad-billed prion, storm petrel, black-backed gull, red-billed gull, white-fronted tern, a storm petrel sp., Otago shag, spotted shag. Two spoonbills were on the Taiaroa taupata when we returned along with several little shags on nests.



Sue Maturin and I spent a weekend on the Ahuriri finding that Banded Dotterels were on eggs, didymo everywhere, wrybill foraging under didymo in shallow pools.





Black-fronted terns were looking at a shingle island with a view to breeding above Longslip Ck . The most black-billed gulls were seen on the new reservoir on the now green Red Flat. Looks like they might even breed there, 300-400 birds. Practised band reading the legs of a pair of black-stilts that were hanging out in a miserable thicket of exotics. No SIPO were confirmed nesting. There has been much change in thirty years. Sue's films will turn up on youtube sometime.



Sparrows learnt last year that sugar water was food after several years of watching silvereyes and bellbirds here in St Clair. David MacFarlane also complains of this affliction at Upper Junction..

Graeme Loh

Kārearea/NZ falcon study information

Given the past interest and efforts of Dunedin Birds NZ members in understanding NZ falcons, Kārearea, I thought the local branch would appreciate information about a research project I have proposed and am raising funding for.

The endemic Kārearea is classed by DOC as Threatened; Nationally Vulnerable, the same threat classification as Hoiho / Yellow-eyed penguins and South Island Kaka, for example.

Kārearea are exposed to numerous conservation threats. They nest on the ground so are highly vulnerable to nest predation by introduced mammalian predators. Furthermore, people are known to shoot and purposefully destroy nests due to viewing Kārearea as pests (think depredation of pigeons and chooks) and Kārearea suffer electrocution in uninsulated power infrastructure. Kārearea may also be subject to non-target poisoning in 1080 operations. The limited evidence to date suggests non-target mortality does not occur at a high rate during 1080 ops, but importantly the quality of the evidence is generally not high.

Kārearea also exist in large part in an essentially industrial landscape (conifer plantations) so may be negatively impacted by forestry harvest-site preparation, and harvesting. Whilst there are clear guidelines for managing Kārearea in conifer plantations, these are based entirely on

Kārearea interactions with conifer plantation forestry in the Central North Island, where the habitat is very distinct to eastern Otago. Conversations I've had with people involved in Kārearea research in the North Island, and previously in the Dunedin area, have also identified behavioural differences that may have important implications for falcon nest survival in conifer plantations in the Dunedin area.

Despite the high threat classification of Kārearea, very little is known about the species in the South Island generally, particularly in South Island conifer plantation forests. In the greater Dunedin area we have good records that NZ falcons are present in conifer plantations, and the

surrounding conservation estates. But these observations do not provide insight into the vital parameters needed to inform management.

The key information needed for conservation management of Kārearea which does not exist for Kārearea in the Dunedin area (or anywhere in the South Island) is as follows:

1. Population size
2. Population trends
3. Breeding success
4. Survival of adults and juveniles
5. Mitigation options to increase nest and general survival, if required.

Due to the high threat classification status of the Kārearea / NZ falcon, the lack of detailed, locally specific and quantitative information to guide management, and the numerous threats to falcons, I put a proposal to various organisations earlier this year to fund a three-year study to establish 'baseline' information on these important features of falcon life-history.

The key objective of the proposed study is to better inform management of NZ falcon in the greater Dunedin area. At the end of a three year study we aim to have established:

- A population estimate of NZ falcons in the greater Dunedin area, centred on the conifer plantation estate. This will provide a baseline for comparing future estimates to, allowing insight into population trends.
- An estimate of breeding success (nest survival), identification of causes of breeding failure, and possible methods to reduce those causes.
- A study population from which adult and juvenile survival rates can eventually be estimated.
- Insight into if site preparation, timber harvest or pest control negatively impacts falcon breeding, and if so how to best mitigate any impact.
- Insight into other potential human caused mortality, such as electrocution in uninsulated power infrastructure or persecution (shooting or purposeful nest destruction).

Fieldwork for this project is proposed for the NZ falcon breeding season, starting this spring. Support for the project has been given by Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki, in Karitane, but we are still waiting to hear from Tē Rūnanga te Otākou. In addition DOC is also currently reviewing our research application.

Background information that helped justify this research has been gained from conversations with Steve Lawrence and his reports from the work he conducted in the Dunedin area 2010 - 2014. As many of you well know, Steve Lawrence collected some very good nest survival information in the greater Dunedin area. But as it was a project on the side of his professional life, too few nests were found and monitored to allow robust interpretation. This is because there is a well-recognised positive bias towards finding nests that 'survive' (fledge chicks), simply because those nests are there to be found for much longer than a nest that is depredated just days after eggs are laid. In other words, a searcher has 50+ days to find a successful nest, and just days to find one that was eaten by a pig or some such shortly after the eggs were laid. Because of this, many nests must be found to interpret nest survival, they must be found as early after laying as possible, and they must be checked regularly. Sandy Crichton, who made a beautiful film about Kārearea in the greater Dunedin area, has also provided information, as have Peter Schweigman, Richard Seaton, Noel Hyde and Chifuyu Hawkesby. Some of you may have heard Chifuyu speak about her Kārearea PhD research at this year's Birds NZ conference. Chifuyu will work this summer on this study once it is up and running as I will be away with seabird work again for part of this summer.

City Forests, Wenita Forest Products, Otago Regional Council and Dunedin City Council have committed funding. All of these groups readily agreed that further information would greatly improve the conservation management of this Vulnerable-listed species. The amount raised to date is not quite enough to cover the expenses of a four month research project each year for three years. The project has a small, pragmatic budget, and we hope to be successful raising the minimal amount still required. The project will continue this year regardless of securing further funding, it just may mean I would have to find a way to fund more of it personally.

Once fieldwork begins, we would be very happy to involve members of Birds NZ, for example with surveying, capture and banding. Closer to the time we will ask Mary to forward an email so anyone interested can get in touch if they want to come out and help either me, or Chifuyu.

If you have any queries, input or other please contact me, Graham Parker, at: g.parker@parkerconservation.co.nz. Alternatively I'll be at the October and November Birds NZ meetings so would be happy to discuss anything then. Ngā mihi.

Graham Parker

Wild birds in a cage...Is the Auckland Zoo out of touch with modern conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand?

The tīeke, or North Island saddleback, is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's greatest conservation success stories. They were reduced to just one island population of 500 birds in the 1960s. But an ambitious translocation programme, initiated by the New Zealand Wildlife Service, continued by the New Zealand Department of Conservation, and more recently by community based conservation groups, has increased the global population to at least 10 000 birds scattered across 18 islands and 5 protected mainland sites. North Island saddlebacks are now secure and extinction is very unlikely.

The critical aspect of this conservation success story is that it focussed on creating new free living populations in natural habitats. This work with wild populations has contributed to New Zealand's outstanding international reputation for innovative and effective conservation management. This is a far cry from the conservation ethic of the 1800s which involved shooting birds such as saddlebacks, stuffing them, and then displaying them in a glass case.

The Auckland Zoo has decided to celebrate North Island saddlebacks during conservation week 2016, but in quite a contrasting manner. They recently visited Tiritiri Matangi, one of the protected, free living populations, captured 10 wild birds and transferred them to the zoo where they will spend the rest of their lives in captivity in cages far smaller and simpler than the natural habitat they were born to.

So why is the Auckland Zoo capturing wild saddlebacks and confining them to cages for the rest of their lives? It is rare for modern zoos to capture wild animals and there is no need for a captive saddleback breeding programme. The zoo could never produce meaningful numbers of saddlebacks, there are considerable disease risks when transferring birds from zoos to the wild and captive bred birds often fare poorly after release.

That leaves "conservation advocacy". This argument, which the Auckland Zoo will likely use, states that by seeing saddlebacks in a cage people will both appreciate, and be more likely to support, conservation of saddlebacks and conservation more generally. The problem with this

argument is that it is notoriously difficult to get any proof that it actually works. And it also seems a very strange message to send during conservation week, especially to our children – Let's celebrate New Zealand conservation by putting birds in a cage purely so people can look at them? This is not modern conservation.

It might have been acceptable when the general public had little opportunity to actually see saddlebacks in the wild. But in the Auckland region alone there are five island populations, one of which is managed in partnership with the Auckland Zoo, which can be easily reached by public ferries or private boat. There is also a thriving mainland population at Tāwharanui Open Sanctuary that can be seen for free simply by driving to the park, the petrol required to get there from Auckland costing less than admission to the Auckland Zoo. And if you live in Wellington you might be lucky enough to have wild saddlebacks from Zealandia visit your back yard. As Predator Free New Zealand progresses this will be a privilege that all New Zealanders might one day enjoy.

The director of the Auckland Zoo recently stated in the Guardian that the old model of conservation was dead and that people had to manage species to secure their survival. In a sense he was right and this is exactly what is going on in Aotearoa New Zealand. Community groups right across the country have done the hard yards controlling introduced predators, restoring natural habitats and reintroducing saddlebacks and other species to create wild and free living populations – not by putting them in cages.

This is the saddleback story we should be celebrating. I have been personally involved in 12 saddleback translocations, working with a huge swathe of the Aotearoa New Zealand conservation community, from Northland Hapu to Taranaki dairy farmers. They know what saddlebacks need and they are providing it to establish wild and free populations in their communities.

So the Auckland Zoo's move to capture 10 wild birds for a life time of captivity seems out of step with modern conservation in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is not quite the stuffed birds in a glass case of the Victorian era but it is close and nowhere near the actual saddleback conservation being undertaken by community conservation groups. The New Zealand Department of Conservation have also had a longstanding policy of not

capturing wild animals simply for display, so it is odd that they granted the Auckland Zoo permission to do so.

Putting animals in a cage is the old way of doing conservation. Protecting and establishing free living wild populations is the new way. So is it right for the Auckland Zoo to celebrate such a tremendous conservation story in such a retrograde manner - especially for the 10 previously wild saddlebacks that will spend the rest of their lives in a cage?

Dr Kevin Parker, Massey University and Parker Conservation

Dr Parker is a conservation scientist whose work revolves around reintroducing birds to establish wild populations. He has worked with North Island saddlebacks for 12 years, including publications in leading international scientific journals and books. He realises that the issue of putting wild animals in captivity is essentially an ethical debate and what is wrong for one person is right for another. He also recognises that the Auckland Zoo has dedicated staff and a role to play in New Zealand conservation. However, he thinks the issue of capturing wild animals simply for display in zoos should at least be debated by the NZ public, especially during Conservation Week.

The article above and ensuing discussion can be found at:-

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL1609/S00027/is-the-auckland-zoo-out-of-touch-with-modern-conservation.htm>

Jamie Steer's take on introduced species and predator free NZ is also worth a listen - Kim Hill's Saturday morning programme:

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/saturday/audio/201816566/jamie-steer-introduced-species>

For a similar but even more provocative approach see Fred Pearce's book *The New Wild*. He maintains that "invasive species will be nature's salvation". For the antidote and those who find sheep an anathema, try *Feral* by George Monbiot.

If after that you just want to get back to birds, you could return to Kim Hill interviewing Dianne Brunton about her work on bellbird song:-

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/saturday/audio/201816564/dianne-brunton-bird-songs-and-dialects>.

Derek Onley

Ornithological snippets

There is a hint of spring about this month's summary, starting with a **Black Swan** family with 7 fairly well-grown young on ponds by the Puerua River south of Balclutha on 23rd August.



Although not in Otago, Mitchell & Dave Gunn, from Balclutha, were doing some pest control work at Mason's Bay on Stewart Island, and were accompanied for part of their stay by an immature **Buller's Molliebird** (I think, but am willing to be corrected – coverage of this plumage is a bit sparse in the literature, as birds of this age are supposed to be at sea, not living off handouts!)

A **Southern Giant Petrel** was reported from the Monarch cruise on 16th September by Mateo Winter, while 2 **White Herons** were at Tomahawk Lagoon on 14th (Bruce McKinlay).

A party of 12 **SI Pied Oystercatchers** flying up the Clutha River in Balclutha on 23rd August were presumably en route to their breeding grounds, but a **Caspian Tern** nearby on 23rd August was probably not planning on heading further inland.

Finally, Allan Walker from Milton reports larger than usual numbers of **Tui** this year at Bull Creek; has anybody else noticed changes in numbers? Any interesting reports for the next newsletter to richard@pconnect.co.nz
compiled by **Richard Schofield**

Notices and Business

Volunteer Field Research Assistant needed.

I am looking for volunteers between the end of September and start of February. I am a MSc student at Massey University and employee of DOC, Nelson. My research is based in Duncan Bay, Tennyson Inlet in the Marlborough Sounds. My research this summer is concerned with the nesting success of South Island Robins two years following the last 1080 treatment. I am looking for an enthusiastic birder or conservation minded person that has an 'above average level of fitness' and is able to camp in the outdoors with minimal home comforts. Experience navigating in the back-country is strongly preferred and some rope experience would also be handy! Ideally I am looking for volunteers that can commit to a full month, but if you have a couple of weeks or even a weekend free and keen for some practical field experience please contact me on marabell2014@gmail.com for further information. Food and accommodation provided.

Mara Nydegger Bell

and on Jill Hamel's Land at Mopanui

People who are doing "quiet work" on McKessar Road in the central part of the forest have seen the pair of robins in the first gully down from the stone ruins, where there have been most sightings. But we know very little about the extent of their territory. At least the male can be very noisy, so it shouldn't be difficult to trace them. We have had regular sightings in this gully between McKessar Road and the Middle Road for more than two years. I would love to set up a roster of people who would be willing to creep around in 6 hectares of bush, watching and listening for the robins for an hour or so at a time. **Jill Hamel** jhamel@xtra.co.nz

and keep an eye out for White Herons.

Its that time of the year again so I'm looking for ANY White Heron sightings (preferably with photos) but NOT in South Westland in a 30km radius from Okarito. I'm especially interested if people can differentiate between those without and those with incipient breeding plumage. A number of reports last year were of breeding adults but these were actually 2 year olds. A breeding adult will have a bright blue cowl around the beak and red eyes as well as extended feathers.

murycave@murycavephotography.co.nz

Offshore birding & wildlife excursion with Monarch Wildlife Cruises

On Sunday 16th October 2016 we plan on taking our smaller vessel the Vivienne J out past Cape Saunders to the deeper waters and offshore canyons to look for large seabirds and other wildlife that frequent these rich feeding grounds. The trips are aimed at photographers, birdwatchers and nature lovers – anyone who has ever wanted the chance to go offshore but lacks the access. Back update if the weather proves to be sour will be the 23rd October 2016.

The trip will depart from Careys Bay Wharf at 8:00am and return at 4:00pm. We have limited numbers to 12 people on a first come, first served basis. Cost is \$80 per person.

For more information or to secure your place please call (03) 477 4276.



photo Graeme Loh

Programme 2016

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

- Wed Sept 28th** Lei Zhu, on "a guide to the birds of China"; Janet Ledingham, "Birds of the Scottish Isles."
- Sat October 15th** Sinclair Wetlands Spring Survey.
- Wed October 26th** Murray Efford on "Urban tui, bellbirds and more."
- Sat November 12th** Seabird Watch Field Trip. Graeme Loh will lead us to the St Clair Cliffs to watch and listen for Shearwaters and Fairy Prions coming ashore. Meet at 8pm at Highgrove, St Clair, at start of the walkway. Warm clothes, sturdy shoes and walking sticks recommended. Contact gloh@earthlight.co.nz for more information.
- Wed November 23** Nic Rawlence and Martyn Kennedy. "Identification of the Otago Shag".
- Sun November 27th** Summer Wader Count. High tide 15.27 at 2m. Contact Peter Schweigman <peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz>

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for contributions to next newsletter: Oct 20.