



Birds New Zealand
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Birds New Zealand

Otago Region Newsletter 4/2019 April 2019



Out to Sea on the Sooty Chaser

Eight birders under Richard Schofield's leadership 16 April 2019, skipper Rachel McGregor

A few sooty shearwaters were seen but there were large work ups of hundreds of white-fronted terns and thousands of gulls, red and black-backed. Clouds of them were seen as we came out of the harbour a couple



of kilometres to the east. Schools of barracoota seemed to be the driving

fish school, but one humpback whale was also busy feeding in the 18m deep waters.



25 hovering red-billed gulls helped us keep a track of the whale's progress. We worked our way down the coast for a while into an area where hundreds of cape pigeons were dabbling the water surface for prey, but the workups behind us evaporated and we could see no more on the south and eastern horizon so returned.



We had some of the usual tubenoses, southern and northern Royal albatrosses, Buller's and white-capped mollymawks, one Campbell albatross, northern giant petrels, (including a young one released by the

Wildlife Hospital, it haughtily swam off with no expectation of further sardines. Four Hutton/fluttering shearwaters and the odd Buller's shearwater. Some white-chinned petrels were around for most of the day. Mixing with the other charadriiformes were some black-billed gulls and black-fronted terns. Waypoints were logged for the feeding Otago shags. Only one spoonbill sat on the Taiaroa taupata, but we did spot the reef heron on the ocean shoreline, stoic.

Coming back into the harbour there was a strong flood current breaking on the tip of The Mole with birds attending. Munida were concentrated in the current eddies making them fluoro pink and again many hundreds of gulls were attending them along with barracoota.



All was quiet on the home run into the harbour until a motley looking giant petrel was seen in the craft's path. "Southern giant petrel' Graeme declared on the basis of the smudgy pale beak tip. Good view of the white iris tho. Book consulted, "northern giant petrel has white iris". Hmm, maybe that beak is not that greenish. Conclusion: Sharon from Alex did not get to tick southern giant petrel. **Graeme Loh**



This year's Global Big Day is scheduled for Saturday 4 May. The aim is to see how many species can be seen throughout the world in one day. Last year more than 30,000 people around the world were out birding on Global Big Day and spotted 7025 species. NZ has many unique species so our sightings are an important addition to the total. The Otago Region has topped the number of species for Birds NZ regions for two years in a row now, with 76 in 2017 and 80 in 2018! It is not really a competition but it is fun nevertheless to see whether we can keep our record spot.

We will have teams visiting birding hotspots throughout Otago: Our main field trip for the day is to travel to Moeraki via Blueskin Bay, Trotters Gorge and/or Shag Point and finally checking out Katiki point (for more information and to join the field trip please contact Mary 4640787, maryt@actrix.co.nz). Other teams are birding on Otago Peninsula (to join this crowd contact Natalie Forsdick natalieforsdick@gmail.com); Richard Schofield and Lei Zhu and others are covering the Catlins area.

If you can't to join us for the day, individuals can also survey their favourite spots any time on 4 May. Possibly check out Aramoana, Tomahawk Lagoon, Orokonui. Please can members from Queenstown, Wanaka and Alex. go birding in their areas to increase our total species list (especially grebe, quail, pipit, kea).

We also need to listen out for Morepork and Little owl in the evening. And if you know where to see NZ Falcon, please check that out.

Remember, it is important to complete an area count, travelling count or stationary count; you need to spend at least 5 minutes birding, count all birds seen or heard, and, most importantly, submit complete data for 4 May to eBird by 8 May at latest to count towards the grand global, NZ, and regional totals.

No matter what you do—have fun, enjoy the birds you find, and record your sightings on eBird!

Use your individual eBird account or enter your group joint observations on our Otago Region eBird account;

Username otagobirds Password chalconotus

Mary Thompson

Ornithological Snippets

A couple of exciting species to start the report with this month: Annie Schofield saw at least 50 Canada Geese in a field near Arthurton, near Gore (just on the Otago side of the boundary) on 10th April, and earlier the same day estimated at least 1000 Feral Pigeons at Moneymore, near Milton. There have been two skua sightings in the last month – Derek Onley saw a Southern Skua flying over Quarantine Island in Otago Harbour on 9th April, and Mary Thompson reported an Arctic Skua from Katiki Beach on 5th.

There was an interesting report from Andrew Crossland from Christchurch, whose son & nephews found a White-flipped Penguin at Karitane on 23rd March. As it was underweight and vulnerable to dog attack, they took it to the rescue centre at Katiki Point. A White-faced Storm-Petrel was an unexpected sighting for Pete Naik from the Monarch within the harbour on 11th April. In another drive-by sighting, Annie Schofield also came across a White Heron between Kurow & Duntroon on 15th April. According to eBird this was in Canterbury, but I think Otago should claim this one. Other passengers in the car (but not the driver!) also saw the heron.

Finally this month a couple of psittacines: Peter Doyle heard a presumed Yellow-crowned Parakeet in Rongahere Road, on the edge of the Blue

Mountains, on 22nd March. This is the first report from the area in the eBird era, though it was present during the last Atlas period. And the benefits of cycling to one's destination were illustrated when the compiler saw 10 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos flying over the suburbs of Owaka on 7th April.

Interesting reports to cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Richard Schofield

Notices and Business

Hawksbury Lagoon



A couple of years ago the culvert gates that controlled the flow of water between the three main divisions of the lagoon were removed "by persons unknown". Stolen/vandalized. This increased the flow of both fresh and sea water through the lagoons. In the last year or so the outlet to the sea has been open, due most likely to the more frequent occurrence of easterly storms and, surely I can say it these days, sea level rise. This appears to have resulted in an increase in the numbers of inanga and yellow-eyed mullet but a decrease in Shovelers and an increase in Mallard/Grey Duck.

There may well be an opportunity to replace the culvert gates with weirs or designs that are more favourable to fish. This would also be an opportunity to manage the water levels to benefit birds, notably Shovelers which have

in the past reached as many as 1000 but also Pied Stilts which can be present in many hundreds during their post breeding dispersal.

So as to ensure we have the Shoveler/Mallard interaction correct, along with the stilts, and to monitor the changes, if and when the new gates are installed, I would like to survey the lagoon birds once a month. There are a few local residents who are keen to help out but I would really appreciate it if experienced BirdsNZ/OSNZ members (yes I know I'm showing my age by mentioning OSNZ- or maybe it's my suspicion of PR), those members who know their ducks at one hundred paces, could help out.

Please contact derekonley@yahoo.com if you can help. **Derek Onley**

And while we are in the vicinity.....



You can now bird watch from your bed. These I hasten to add are Emily Cooper's words, owner of the AIRBNB accommodation on the banks of that ornithological hotspot, Hawksbury Lagoon, home to such rarities as Marsh Sandpiper. Not mine. Honestly, young birders these days. Soft they are. Where's the commitment that sees you risking being shot by a farmer

while grabbing a couple of hours sleep in his tin barn after an 8 hour drive, a carrot from his field for breakfast then a pre-dawn hike out on to the mudflats in a freezing easterly?

But then again there is a precedent. Way back in the 1980s. Bill Oddie suggested in his expose of birding and twitching, that it was "normal" to have numerous "lists"; birds seen/ticked off in the world, country, county, suburb, garden, from your kitchen window and - in bed. He did also mention something about girlfriends but I think that is inappropriate for this newsletter and those who want to pursue that line further should acquire a copy of his scurrilous Little Black Bird Book.

If you still want to pursue the pleasures of birdwatching from bed, then check out thebirdhide.co.nz. There's a 15% rebate on the AIRBNB rates for BirdsNZ members.

Derek Onley

NZ Bird Atlas-related news and updates now on Facebook

The NZ Bird Atlas project is now on Facebook under New Zealand Bird Atlas and there will be information being uploaded at least one post per week, keeping followers informed on Atlas-related news and updates. It will also provide a forum for people to post comments and questions

So for those of you who are active on Facebook, please visit this page and "follow" it to receive these regular updates.

The project will be officially launched on 1st June at the NZ Bird Conference in Wellington.

Call for Funding Applications

A key objective of Birds New Zealand is to encourage, organise and promote the study of birds and their habitat use particularly within the New Zealand region. One funding option is still open for applications.

Birds New Zealand Research Fund - Applications will open 1 April and close 15 June

Details are available on our funding page

<https://www.osnz.org.nz/Funding-and-Awards>.

Please share this message among your networks and any contacts you may have in universities or other research arenas!

New Zealand Birds Conference 1 -3 June 2019

This is the 80th celebratory conference so should be a great one. This is the first where our own Bruce McKinlay will be chairing as President of Birds NZ. Our Birds NZ conference is the annual premier New Zealand conference for the communication of new research findings on New Zealand birds and for providing opportunities for discussion and networking for professional ornithologists, students and others who are interested in birds and their habitats.

There will be several keynote lectures of a diversity of topics, including Wellington birds, Auckland Islands, old bones and ancient DNA, genetics and taxonomy, physiology and reproduction, and seabirds. Field trips include Zealandia, Kapiti Coast, Te Papa Bird Collections and a pelagic cruise.

It will be held at the Brentwood Hotel, Kilbirnie, Wellington between 1 to 3 June 2019 (Queens Birthday Weekend).

Travel Option

Richard Schofield is thinking of driving up, birding on the way and from the ferry; he would like a couple of passengers; this might be a good travel option for students; so contact Richard if you are interested cluthaphotos@gmail.com

Online registration and full details are available on Birds NZ website.

Programme 2019

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

- Wed 24 April** Indoor Meeting. Kristina Smiley on “Hormonal regulation of avian bi-parental care; a study using zebra finches.”
- Sat 27 April** Tomahawk Lagoon Bird-watching, 10 to noon; our event for Wild Dunedin Festival; we plan to have telescopes to let the public see birds close-up and to help identify them, etc.
Contact Andrew if you can help; phone 454 5830
- Sat 4 May** Field Trip. Global Big Day for eBird. Teams will be heading to Otago hotspots; to join a team contact Mary maryt@actrix.co.nz or phone 464 0787.
Carpooling will be arranged.
- Wed 22 May** Indoor Meeting. Rachel Hufton on “Birdlife of the Makarora Catchment.”
- Wed 26 June** Indoor Meeting. Warren Jowett on “Confessions of two birding tour guides.”
- Sun 30 June** Winter Wader Count. High tide at 13.44 at 2m. (14 July back-up weather day) We need counters for harbours and estuaries around Dunedin area and Catlins. New counters most welcome. Please contact Maree Johnstone to be allocated to a team.
mareej@kinect.co.nz
- Wed 24 July** Indoor Meeting. Nick Beckwith slideshow on “Birds of my neighbourhood.”
- Wed 28 August** Indoor Meeting. Speakers from the International Penguin Conference.

- Sun 15 Sept** Bird-watching Walks. Dunedin Botanic Garden, 10 am to 11 am. We will be guiding groups of 10 or so, helping members of the public to spot and identify birds. Please let Mary know if would like to help maryt@actrix.co.nz or phone 464 0787
- Wed 25 Sept** Indoor Meeting. Bruce McKinlay on “Birds of the Dunedin Town Belt”, when he will up-date us on our project and findings so far.
- Wed 23 October** Indoor Meeting. Francesca Cunninghame on “The Galapagos Hawk”.
- Sun 24 November** Summer Wader Count; High tide 14.42, 2.2m
- Wed 27 November** to be announced

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

Articles, photos etc for next newsletter please by 16th May