

Birds New Zealand

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PO Box 834, Nelson. osnz.org.nz
Southland Regional Representative: Neil Robertson
PO Box 65, Te Anau, Southland 9640 0211526275
Southland Regional Recorder: Phil Rhodes
44 Dunns Road, RD9 Invercargill 9879 0272314953

Southland Region Newsletter – November 2015



Photo: Glenda Rees

The Southern New Zealand Dotterel breeds only on Stewart Island. Sadly, despite conservation measures taken since the 1990s, the population seems to be declining. It is one of the rarest of New Zealand's endemic breeding shorebirds.

Following a brief consultation with *OSNZ Birds New Zealand* members at the April 2015 Southland Field Club meeting and a number of discussions between active members, it has been decided to use some of the funds from the Dorothy Alloo bequest to pay for research on Southern New Zealand Dotterel. The Southland Branch has agreed to fund a project, managed by DOC, to band adult and juvenile birds during the 2015-16 breeding season.

Hopefully this will help us to understand more about the population dynamics of the species and perhaps inform more effective conservation strategies. Part of the agreement allows for local *OSNZ Birds New Zealand* members to be actively involved in the fieldwork as volunteers. **If you are interested in volunteering and wish to hear about planned dates for fieldwork please contact Neil (neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz).**

Dorothy Alloo (nee Grantham)



Earlier this year the Southland branch learned of the passing of a former member and benefactor of the society, Dorothy Alloo. A phone call from her nephew, Glen Clarkson, informed us that Dorothy had remembered the society in her will and bequeathed a considerable sum of money to Southland OSNZ to be used for a conservation project.

Dorothy was born in Edendale and attended North School and Southland Girls' High School in Invercargill. She later studied at Otago University where she graduated with a Home Science degree. During WW2 Dorothy worked as a land girl and a nurse aide. After the war she was employed as a dietician at Kew Hospital, Invercargill. Dorothy joined the staff at Southland Girls' High School in 1949, becoming Head of Biology and, later, Deputy Principal, retiring in 1989.

Following her retirement she married Lawrence Alloo.

Dorothy had a great passion for the outdoors and especially Fiordland, and was one of the pioneers of outdoor education in Southland, starting with a field trip to Deep Cove, Doubtful Sound in 1958, which was featured as a double page spread in the *Auckland Weekly*. During her years teaching biology she brought many groups of students into Fiordland and these visits became part of the biology curriculum at Southland Girls' High School. She was actively involved with the establishment of Borland Lodge and the Southland Youth Adventure Trust. Dorothy became an Honorary Ranger for Fiordland National Park prior to the establishment of DOC in 1987. Dorothy passed away on 26 February 2014.

(The above article will appear in the next issue of *Birds New Zealand*)

Dorothy Alloo bequest – funding of future projects

The first consultation with *OSNZ Birds New Zealand* members regarding potential projects took place at the April 2015 Southland Field Club meeting. A number of ideas were proposed and discussed at the meeting, and informal discussions between individual active members continued following the meeting. The decision to fund the Southern New Zealand Dotterel project was taken relatively quickly, partly due to the perceived urgency and the need to put things in place before the start of the breeding season. The proposal had also been subject to a rigorous assessment within the Department of Conservation.

A significant sum of money still remains, and this is currently invested and earning interest with the Southland Building Society. It is clear that the Southland branch of *OSNZ Birds New Zealand* still needs to consult further with members and collect many more ideas on how this bequest should best be used. Also it is important that a formal process is established, through a sub-committee of members, to ensure that potential projects are rigorously assessed and that appropriate funding decisions are reached. **If you are interested in being involved, please contact Neil (neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz).**

Southland Bird Week 2015

Organised by the Southland Natural History Field Club, Southland Bird Week will be held from Saturday 7th November to Sunday 15th November. Events will be held daily at weekends and most evenings during the week. Activities include: Bird Watching at Daffodil Bay, Big Twitch day, Bird Badge day and a big range of educational opportunities at the *Nature Education Centre* in Otatara.

Details of the full programme are available from Lloyd Esler (esler@southnet.co.nz)

Wader Census Week-end



Identifying the various different species of waders and shorebirds that inhabit New Zealand's estuaries and wetlands can often seem quite daunting. However, for most people, once they get started, it is never as difficult as they first thought.

A great way to learn more about this fascinating group of birds, and how to identify them, is to join Southland *Birds New Zealand* members on our regular Wader Census days.

There are normally three official census days each year, and the counts are done at a number of great shorebird sites along the Southland coast.

As well as the wonderful sight of huge flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits and South Island Pied Oystercatchers, there is always the chance that much rarer birds will be discovered.

Over the last few years, wader count days have turned up special birds such as Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek Sandpiper and Greater Sand Plover.

The next wader census will be held on the weekend of 20-21 November 2015.

If you want to come along, to this or future wader counts, please contact Phil Rhodes (p.rhodes@xtra.co.nz) for details.

Birds New Zealand Conference 2017 – in Southland?

Over the last four or five years, at OSNZ Conferences, I have been asked by various members, "When are we going to have another conference hosted by Southland?" It is now 20 years since the last Southland-hosted event in 1995. The pressure to host another one is increasing every year. I suggested that, as I would be expected to take on most of the responsibility for organising the event, then I would prefer to host it close to home, i.e. Te Anau, where there are good facilities for hosting such an event. There was a good degree of support for this suggestion. There have also been offers of help and support from Otago members, who hosted a very successful conference in 2013.

Before I take this any further, I would like to canvass members' views. If you have any thoughts, then please let Neil Robertson know (neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz). I will need to let Council know our response fairly soon, probably by Christmas 2015 at the latest.

Red-billed Gull Survey



This important national project is now entering its second season. During the first year 2014-15 we were asked to review the historical Red-billed Colony sites identified in a paper by Gurr & Kinsky in the 1960s.

Southland contributed data on some but not all of the sites, as well as providing data for some new sites which were not included in the earlier study.

Southland has some very remote and inaccessible sites, many on off-shore islands. I have been in touch with Peter Frost, the project organiser, to see what funding might be available to assist with the completion of this work.

The 2015-16 season focus moves towards identifying all of the current Red-billed colonies and estimating the number of breeding pairs / nests. I have had discussions with Mary Thompson in Dunedin, who has a friendly pilot with a plane able to survey the Otago coast. It is possible that we may be able to arrange to photograph the south-east coastline of Southland during the same exercise. We can then follow up with a ground-based survey of any locations where gulls are sighted.

I have arrangements in place with two boat owners to collect data when they are working on the Fiordland coast.

We do still need a plan for the Stewart Island area; and also the rest of the south coast. Any suggestions are very welcome. Please contact Phil on 0272314953 or Neil on 0211526275.

Birds NZ Youth Camp

Following the successful Teen Field Camp held on Mana Island earlier this year, the Waikato region will be organizing next year's event. **Birds NZ Youth Camp 2016** will run from 22 - 26 April 2016, at the **Pukorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre** on the Firth of Thames. This is a fantastic opportunity for young people to get a hands-on experience with birds and develop skills in bird ecology!

This is a catered residential youth camp, sponsored by *Birds New Zealand* and supported locally by Birds Waikato. There will be a cost to participants but the course will be subsidised from a number of sources. We hope that local Birds New Zealand branches will financially assist any of their young members to attend. However you do not need to be a member to go on this course. We anticipate about a dozen students on the course. The camp is for students Year10 and above. For details go to

http://osnz.org.nz/sites/osnz.org.nz/files/BIRDS_NEW_ZEALAND_YOUTH_CAMP_2016_FLYER.pdf

If you are aware of any young people who may be interested in attending, please draw their attention to the flyer for the Miranda event.

At the 2015 Birds New Zealand Conference in Blenheim I was asked about the possibility of hosting a similar event in Southland in 2017 or 2018. We would not necessarily be expected to provide all of the expertise locally. **If you have any ideas on what might be feasible, regarding potential venue(s) and activities please let Neil know. (neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz)**

eBird – Personal Experiences

My first encounters with eBird date back almost seven years to November 2008. It was just after I started my current job working as a Nature Guide in Doubtful Sound, and I thought it would be a good way of keeping a record of birds seen during my trips, to produce a useful data set of bird sightings along an under-watched section of the Fiordland coast.

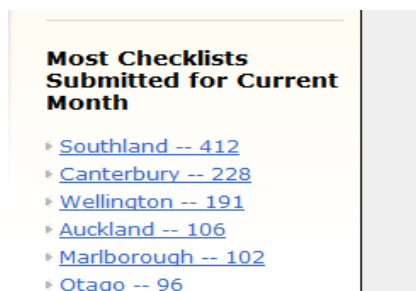
A combination of factors, in particular, a hopelessly slow and expensive internet connection, and a not-very-user-friendly interface, very quickly led me to lose my initial enthusiasm. And so while the record keeping continued in notebooks and on a stand-alone database, input to eBird became very sporadic.

Over the years, the data built up but the input to eBird all but ceased, despite attendance at eBird workshops and the encouragement of Bruce McKinlay. Then, during a recent trip to visit my daughter in Massachusetts, I decided to use eBird to check out possible sites to do a bit of bird-watching during my stay. Having met a local birder I visited some interesting birding venues. I then thought I ought to use eBird to add my data. I was AMAZED at how simple and fast eBird now was, compared to how I remembered it.

On my return home I decided to make a conscious effort to input some of the data that had been accumulating over the years.

I started with the 2015 records and was again surprised at how easy and how speedy the process was. During a phone call to Phil Rhodes, I mentioned what I had been up to. He had already noticed, on the eBird NZ Home Page, that Southland was top of the league, the region with the most checklists added in the current month.

When I last looked Southland had over 400 checklists, nearly double the next most prolific region, Canterbury.



Why am I sharing this with you?

Well, the main reason is to encourage Southland birders, many of who already have a few checklists on eBird, and who, like me, may have found the process slow and time-consuming, to have another go.

Let's see if we can keep Southland top of the eBird league!!

Neil Robertson

Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand 4th Edition



Launched at the OSNZ Conference in 2010, this may well be the final checklist to be published in book form. It is now out of print. All remaining stocks of the book have been distributed to *Birds New Zealand* regional reps. Not too many pretty pictures of birds, well none actually, but an incredibly useful and interesting reference work. This Checklist, like its predecessors, provides a compact guide to the classification and distribution of the birds of the New Zealand region. The Checklist is the official register of all birds accepted as part of the New Zealand avifauna, and is updated every 10-20 years.

Originally sold at \$90, the book is now available for sale at the bargain price of **\$20** excl. P&P. If you wish to purchase a copy please contact Neil Robertson (neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz). To reduce postage costs, I will make copies of the book available at future Field Club meetings in Invercargill.

Future Field Trips and Events

November 7th	Afternoon at Daffodil Bay 'Birdwatching for All' 1-4pm. Telescopes to look at the estuary birds, walk some of Petrie's Track and check out the bush birds.
November 8th	The Big Twitch Day. How many sorts of wild birds can you find in Invercargill or Southland in a day? Beat 50! Join an experienced birder or make up your own team. Please register. Lloyd Esler 2130404 esler@southnet.co.nz
November 9th	Birds at the Invercargill Lagoon. Meet 6.30pm at the estuary access at the end of Kew Road for a walk around the lagoon
November 15th	KCC Southland Community Nursery Bird Week Activities 2-4pm – contact Chris Rance 032131161 evenings
November 20th-21st	Wader Census weekend – contact Phil 0272314953
Nov 19 th , 26 th & Dec 3rd	Full day Stewart Island Pelagic (book via Wrybill Birding Tours website)
December 5th	Te Rere Yellow-eyed Penguin Reserve, Penguin Count – contact Chris Rance 032131161 evenings
Nov – Dec	Pomona and Rona Island Bird Counts. Dates to be finalised, contact Neil if you are interested in helping. neil.robertson@osnz.org.nz
December 13th	Forest and Bird, Pleasure Bay, Invercargill Estuary. Meet at Estuary car park off Bond Street at 10.30am

Southland Bird Race Totals – October 2015

During 2015, a few members have been holding an informal 'bird race' to find who can see the most species of birds in Southland in a calendar year. Below are the current standings.

If you wish to be included in the list it is not too late. All you need to do is faithfully (and honestly!!) record all of the species (taxa*) that you see, with date and location of the first sighting. Please email your list(s) to birds.southland@osnz.org.nz.

There are two separate lists; (1) birds seen in Southland (Mainland Southland, Fiordland and Stewart Island), (2) birds seen throughout New Zealand.

Entering your records on to eBird is strongly encouraged, and we may consider having a 'prize' or award for the person recording the highest number of species in Southland on eBird in the calendar year.

Name	Southland Total	New Zealand Total
Lloyd Esler	88	97
Shawn Herron	91	106
Pete McClelland	82	118
Phil Rhodes	74	79
Neil Robertson	96	145

*we still need to decide which taxonomy will be used, and whether the count will include identifiable subspecies.

New (ish) Members

Birds New Zealand Southland Branch would like to extend a warm welcome to the following new (fairly new) or transferring members: Brian Strong, Riverton; Phillip Owen, Invercargill; Lianne Kooiman, Invercargill, Robert Schadewinkel, Riverton; Jeanette Jenkins, Mataura and Kerri-Anne Edge, Te Anau.

We hope you will find the activities and events outlined in this newsletter of interest and will be able to get involved. The Southland Branch currently meets jointly with the Southland Natural History Field Club, at 7.30pm on the 2nd Thursday of the every month in Invercargill. (Venue: The Hearing Association, Leet Street). It would be great if you could join us.

Recent Sightings August 15th to October 20th

Glenda Rees reported an **Australasian Bittern** on a deer farm at Gore on August 15th. Glenda managed to get a few shots of the bird as it wandered around in a bare paddock, not the usual habitat for these birds. On August 16th I had a **Bellbird** feeding on fruit bread that was thrown out in the garden; it looked as though it was just concentrating on the raisins in the bread. I also had a pair of **Yellowhammer** come in for a look.

Lloyd reported 5 **Cattle Egret** near Gorge Road on August 21st and 21 were reported from Paul Jacques at Papatotara Rd in Tuatapere. There were 3 **Wrybill** at the head of Awarua Bay on August 30th reported by Glenda Rees; one of these had a metal band attached to its leg.

Furhana Ahmad reported a pair of **Royal Spoonbill** from Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island on August 31st; I imagine there will be a colony about to be established on the island if they have not already. Also on this date the **White Heron** was back in Pleasure Bay Lagoon and a day later another was reported from a chicken run in Lumsden.

There was much excitement in Otatara on September 2nd when a **Kaka** dropped in for a visit to Marama Avenue North and Awarua Road, locals managed a few snap shots and it was reported in the Southland Times. Lloyd Esler was also advised there were two in the Tuatapere domain on September 16th.

The resident Otatara **Red-crowned Parakeet** seemed to have survived the Southland winter and was seen by Lloyd at the Otatara Scenic reserve on September 9th and I saw it again on September 19th and heard again on the 20th and October 1st. A **Large Sand Dotterel** was seen and photographed by Glenda Rees at Awarua Bay on September 12th and I saw 2 of this species on September 26th in the same location.

A **Falcon** was spotted in Slopedown Forest on September 13th during a Field Club outing and another was photographed on power lines at Curio Bay by Lloyd Esler on September 19th.

Joe Sherriff heard a **Shining Cuckoo** on September 23rd; if anyone has heard an earlier call, let Phil know.

Lloyd and other field club members saw a pair of **Black-fronted Dotterels** at Yellow Bluff on the Aparima River on September 26th and we heard that the **Marsh Sandpiper** was back at Pleasure Bay Lagoon on September 28th.

The resident **Eastern Curlew** was at Haldane Estuary as usual but this time around by the cribs opposite the sand dunes. And finally Neil Robertson reports a **Grey-backed Storm Petrel** which was roosting in a boat tender in Doubtful Sound on October 12th.

PS Not a Southland sighting but Sharon Roberts who lives between Clyde and Alexandra had a pair of **Cirl Bunting** visit her property along with a flock of Redpolls. Sharon thinks it has been many years since they were reported from here. I would think Central Otago has some excellent habitat for this species so if you are heading that way on holiday keep a lookout.

Happy Birding!

Phil Rhodes – Southland Region Recorder – Birds New Zealand