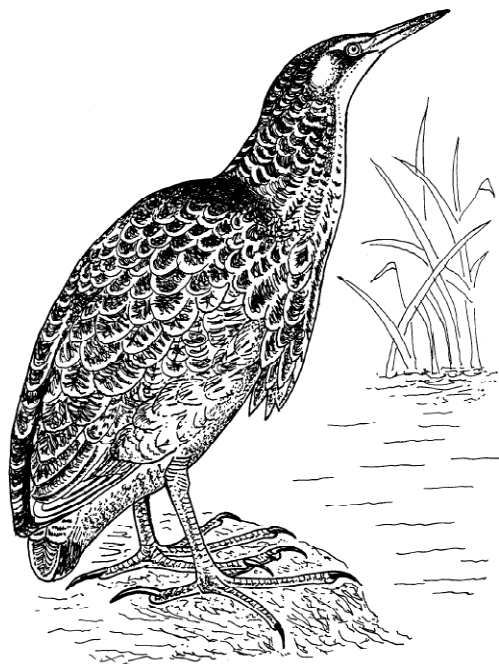


MATUKU

WAIKATO REGION NEWSLETTER

Ornithological Society of New Zealand

September 2012



Regional Representative/Regional Recorder

Andrew Styche

C/- Dept of Conservation

Private Bag 3072

Hamilton

Phone: 07 858 1013

Email: astyche@doc.govt.nz

Programme

Wednesday meetings are held at the DOC offices on Northway Street, Te Rapa starting at 7.30pm.

Wednesday September 19th: Evening meeting. Bill Smith: Caring for the birds after the Rena grounding.

Sunday September 9th: Kaniwhaniwha Planting Programme. Assemble at Kaniwhaniwha car park, 9am - 2pm Led by Te Pahu Landcare Group and supported by DOC staff. Come prepared for all weather conditions. Barbecue provided. All volunteers welcome. Contact Bruce Postill 07 850 8368.

Wednesday October 17th: Evening meeting. Keith Woodley: Book launch and talk on NZ waders.

Sunday October 21st: "Welcome the Godwits". Miranda Shorebird Centre 10am for the talk followed by bird watching.

Saturday 3rd/Sunday 4th November: Kawhia/Aotea Harbour Census.

Saturday 16th/Sunday 17th November: Field Trip to Onemana. Details to come.

Wednesday November 21st: Evening meeting. Kate Langdon-Arms: Learning in kea. Graham Saunders: OSNZ conference talk on Superhydrophobicity of Feathers.

Wednesday December 12th: Xmas BBQ at Buckmasters (this is the 2nd Wednesday). Start at 6pm.

Robins return to Pirongia

On Sunday 22 April in perfect weather, Pirongia Te Aroaro o Kahu Restoration Society released 29 Pītoitōi, or North Island Robins on Mt Pirongia which were sourced from Mangatutu, southeast of Otorohanga.

Waikato Regional Council funded the project with the Department of Conservation giving strong support and the permit to re-introduce 60 Pītoitōi over two years. More than 100 individuals were involved in the project in various roles over six months, ranging from outstanding project leadership by Selwyn June and technical expertise from Project Supervisor Paul Jansen, down to first-time conservation volunteers keen to be involved in this historic occasion. Pītoitōi were once present on Mt Pirongia, but died out in the early 1900s, probably due to introduced predators.

Society Chairperson Clare St Pierre summed up the tremendous contributions so generously offered in her thank-you speech with: “We couldn’t have asked for better.” About 80 people attended the event including representation from iwi groups around the maunga, and the birds were released near the beginning of the Mahaukura Track at the end of Grey Rd, Te Pahu. The Society is keen to hear from anyone who sees the birds so their locations can be monitored. Each robin has a metal band on one leg and two coloured bands on the other. Contact Clare St Pierre on (07) 871933 or clare@mtpirongia.org.nz giving the colours of the robin’s band, for instance red over green, and where they were seen. It would also be helpful if the ground was marked at the point where the robin was seen in the bush, for instance by clearing away a line of leaf litter. The Society intends to GPS these points. People with permits to take dogs into the Forest Park are asked to have them on a leash in the robin release area to protect the birds.



Clare St Pierre

A busy birding winter

For a number of members June started in Tauranga attending the OSNZ Annual Conference. Two of those members presented papers. The first up was Dai Morgan talking about the Hamilton Morepork Census, based on data collated by himself and Andrew Styche. Somewhat later Graham Saunders gave his paper on Superhydrophobicity of Feathers. They were both well presented and illustrated talks that provoked thoughtful questions and general approbation. The conference proved to be memorable with a great variety of topics, workshops and field opportunities available. The Bay of Plenty OSNZ is to be complimented for putting together such a well organised and enjoyable event.

A little closer to home was our winter Potluck Dinner, a convivial occasion with good food and company to the fore. A special dessert component was served up from the depths of Hugh Clifford’s freezer. It proved to be a Southern Fulmar, recovered on a patrol of Waikorea Beach. An incredible creature, new to most of us. Much appreciated as were other dessert components! There were some near perfect scores for most of the bird quizzes. The exception being the identification of bird calls – a B+ average with “room for improvement”. The Committee took the opportunity to make a small presentation to John and Stella Rowe. They recently stepped down from the committee after many long years of service. You would be hard put to describe all the contributions they make, and have made, to ornithology, both locally and further afield.

Saturday June 23rd was census day for the Kawhia and Aotea Harbours. We all left for our various appointed tasks fortified by some incredible ginger slice, compliments of Catherine. It was a trouble free census with light winds and flat seas. Unfortunately the good weather did not last and the Raglan Harbour census was delayed.

A number of our members were on field trips of their own in various locations, both at home and overseas, so there was no field trip for July. The Wednesday meeting however was a very good one! Chris Smuts-

Kennedy talked a little about Maungatautari and a lot about the Kakapo. It was a privilege to hear the thoughts of a man who was involved in its conservation way back in the 60's. He was a young man then but is still involved with this iconic species today. The story of the development of techniques, the hardships endured and the knowledge gained explains why NZ is at the cutting edge when it comes to species conservation.

There are now 125 Kakapo, more than their present environments can support. New homes are being sought and prepared for them and their progeny. One major possibility is Maungatautari and for the past two years Chris and his co-workers have been exploring this and the problems associated with it. It seems that pest proof fences are great at keeping things out but useless at keeping the Precious Kakapo inside! Luckily a solution has been found and Sirocco was instrumental in solving the problem!

There was a particular symmetry to August's events. The focus was on creatures of the night, the first being our featherless, but flighted, native bats. This was followed by a visit to Sirocco, our feathered, but definitely unflighted night parrot.

Jetlag prevented an eyewitness account of David Pattemore and his account of "Birds and Bats as Pollinators of New Zealand Plants". Those who did attend assure me that it was a meeting not to miss. David impressed as an excellent speaker with great material on a fascinating topic.

Sirocco was his unique self and we enjoyed our time with him. Many photos were taken. The light being low out of consideration for SIROCCO it was a bit of a photographic challenge, but, hopefully, someone managed a bit better than I did! The visit also gave most of us the first opportunity to see Maungatautari Project's new home base/visitor centre, a very pleasant surprise.



Ray Buckmaster

A New Species of Wren from Columbia: Evening talk by Carlos E. Lara Vasquez, 16 May 2012

We were lucky to have our Wednesday speaker. Carlos was an engaging young man who had travelled from Auckland to speak to us. This was after, of course, coming all the way from Colombia in the first place. Ours was the first public notification of the research that Carlos had carried out into a possible new wren species in the *Troglodytes rufalbus-nicefori* complex in Colombia.

Carlos explained that Colombia is a country rich in bird life and that it was not unusual for a new species to be described, several new species having been accepted within the last decade. The candidate this time was a population of wrens discovered by Carlos in an area of dry forest. This was in a region remote from similar species, separated by distance and terrain from the dry forests in which they were found. Examining the possibility that this population was, in fact, a true biological species was the basis of Carlos's investigation. When species share the same habitat it is possible to see if they are capable of exchanging genes to produce fertile offspring. This test is not possible for allopatric populations and other approaches are required.

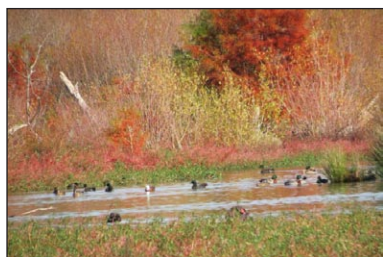
Carlos was able to show morphological differences in terms of size, colouration and plumage patterns between his population and *T. rufalbus* and *T. nicefori*. Differences in the amino acid sequence in a cytochrome molecule suggested that reproductive isolation between the populations could have been in existence for approaching two million years. Most dramatically the sonogram, particularly regarding frequency level, was significantly different.

As yet Carlos's "new species" has not been fully confirmed by the powers that be in Colombia. Carlos has yet to present his paper to a more authoritative assembly than the membership of the Waikato OSNZ. But this will shortly occur. We look forward to hearing more on this issue and wish Carlos well in his pursuit of a doctorate in NZ.

Ray Buckmaster

Visit to Howarth Memorial Wetland, Te Aroha, 19 May 2012

Saturday morning saw eight members of OSNZ meet at the car park. We were gratified to find Eileen, a member of the Bay of Plenty branch joining us. A pleasant time was spent in mostly clement weather, finishing up with lunch on a grassy prominence above the bird hide. All the usual bird suspects were seen and Stella has the full species list. There was an interesting mix of both native and introduced land and water birds present, among these a dabchick and a number of shoveller and grey teal. Bev located a variety of finches with the stand-out being a superbly colourful redpoll. It was a pleasant and social way to spend a Saturday morning.



Ray Buckmaster

Waikato OSNZ Beach Patrols: An apprentice's perception

Ray and Ann Buckmaster are the latest recruits to our local beach patrol scheme. They are serving an informal apprenticeship, 'under the wing' of Hugh Clifford, a long term beach patroller and coordinator. What follows is Ray's take on their experiences on patrol over the past two years.

Preamble: Beach patrolling is core business for the OSNZ: the national scheme started in 1951. There was a small hiatus in the 50s, but it has continued uninterrupted since 1961. Results are notified annually in *Notornis*. Many past and present Waikato members have had major involvement with the scheme. Their contributions comprise not only the collection of local data, but also the determination of protocols that are applied nationally. This was, and is, valuable work. There are five Waikato beaches that are regularly surveyed. Some of these have now been visited on a near-monthly basis for many decades. A massive database has been collected and it continues to grow from current activity.

Identification of the birds wrecked on our shores over such a time period has provided us with much information. Pelagic birds are seldom seen by the land-bound but we do now know what species are out there. The data also provides us with some guidance as to their fluctuations in abundance on a seasonal and longer term basis.



Shy Mollymawk

In a changing world baseline data like this can have great value. Since its inception the world has become aware of global warming and our southern oceans have become more intensively fished. More recently we have become concerned about the possible impact of the release of radioactive compounds into the waters off Japan on our NZ-based Sooty Shearwater populations.

For the OSNZ the integrity of this data is of greatest importance. It makes no effort to interpret its own data, so as to avoid any suggestion of bias. The data stands on its own merits. It is one of many sources of information consulted by researchers and Government departments. Its credibility and that of all the beach patrollers involved in its compilation remains intact: a remarkable achievement.

The above is not new information to long-standing members of the Waikato OSNZ. It might be, for some of our newer members. We hope that they will be the source of our next generation of beach patrollers!

West coast beaches are wild and rugged places. They lie across the prevailing westerly winds and can also bear the brunt of the south-westerly blasts that originate in the Southern Ocean. These winds, and the tides, can bring on shore the remains of birds that may have perished way out to sea.

Finding, identifying and recording these wrecked birds is part of the job of a beach patroller.

Walking these beaches is usually a pleasure but they can be desperately miserable places during a squall. Heart-breakingly beautiful however, when the skies clear.

Patrolling these beaches is best done as a planned activity, based on the time and height of the tide, and the length of time since the previous patrol. As these suitable times may not always coincide with weekends, people with conventional work commitments can find it difficult to take part frequently. However, this need not rule out some involvement.



Buller's Shearwater

For the retired such restraints do not exist. Metaphor provides a convenient way to describe the retired condition. By definition we have a fair few kilometres on the clock. Sometimes our body work isn't too flash but we do have plenty of gas left in the tank and a heap of life experience. The opportunity to gain new skills and make a contribution before being finally red-stickered is something we welcome. I was going to add that it ticks a lot of boxes but perhaps not. The remainder of this account will be metaphor-free!



Shearwater, but which species?

At its simplest a beach patrol involves a walk, often for several kilometres, along the high tide line. There is a need to keep an eye open for any birds that may have been cast up by the sea. Each bird found must be identified as to species and condition and checked to see if it is banded. The information is recorded and the bird placed well above the high tide line to prevent it being re-recorded on the next patrol. There is an element of multi-tasking involved because you will also be recording the species and numbers of live birds that you encounter.

Some species like the endangered Northern NZ Dotterel (below) live and nest on our beaches and there is always the possibility of seeing something unusual, living or dead!

Identification of wrecked birds is an issue. Most of the beach-cast species will be pelagic and come to land only to breed. This is usually in places remote from human habitation. There are 78 such species that breed in NZ. Consequently you would be very fortunate to see many of these magnificent birds as live specimens. So species must be identified from remains, some of which could be

very fragmentary. The issue can be further compounded when species differences are not very obvious.

For the novice patroller an informal apprenticeship with an experienced patroller over an extended period is of great value. A bad identification will devalue the database. It is much better to suspend judgement, bag the remains and pass the responsibility to someone with more experience.



There are times when you might question this approach. You may be many kilometres from both your mentor and the nearest pick up point. You stumble across a huge bird. It is mostly buried, falling to pieces and decomposing very nicely. The prospect of returning it to base has little appeal and you must make a good effort to identify it.



Wrecked (but still just alive) Antarctic Prion

It has only happened once so far and the problem was solved in a few minutes when the bill was discovered. Mystery over: it was a spoonbill. These days we carry a camera and measuring devices for use on large birds like unidentified albatross.

On taking up beach patrols you quickly become aware of how much you don't know. Two years on and we both know a little more. Unfortunately the amount we don't know has also increased! Only one thing is certain. No matter how many smelly birds you might have come across you still have a great appetite at the end of a patrol. Those sandwiches always taste great!



Ray Buckmaster

Hamilton Lake Census, Sunday 12th August 2012

Present: Barry Friend 10.00 am – 11.30 am

SPECIES	ADULTS	JUVENILES	TOTAL
COOT	111		111
MALLARD DUCKS	98		98
CANADA GEESE	6		6
DOMESTIC WHITE GEESE	13		13
WHITE FACED HERONS	1		1
PUKEKOS	112		112
(LARGE) BLACK SHAG (CARBOS)	8		8
LITTLE BLACK SHAGS	3		3
LITTLE SHAGS	1		1
PIED SHAGS	1		1
FERAL ROCK PIGEONS	150+		150+
Other: Blackbirds , Fantails, Grey Warbler (Heard) Mynas, Sparrows and Starlings. 2 Bantam chickens.			
CASPIAN TERNS	3		3
Dead: None.			

Previous Weather: Continuing cold nights with morning frosts with some fogs. Later weeks became very wet but warmer temperatures, even some sunny spells.

Today's Weather: Relentless heavy downpour that started early last night. No breeze, not too cold but extremely wet and grey. A very unpleasant morning, so please forgive the lack of notes! I thought I would get these figures down straight away as my writing pads have just about disintegrated!

The first sounds I heard while putting on my gumboots near the train car park were all the starlings and blackbirds – also a Grey warbler which was again heard near the yacht club.

My first observation was the lack of Mallard Ducks. I thought I would find more around the other side of the lake but whether they had gone away to breed or were just sheltering from the rain, I could not get my counter to read more than 98. This is about half as many as previous Augusts. It did make the counting of the Coot and Pukekos a lot easier with the Pukekos just winning by one with a count of 112.

There were other birds to count and it was nice to see a White-Faced Heron sheltering under the Shag roosting trees. The highlight of the count would have to be the three Caspian Terns. Firstly I saw a pair on the peninsula where the model yachts normally are. Then I saw another take off from the old golf course and perform several dives into the water trying to catch fish. Later all three were flying around.

All four species of Shag were also present in various places – most of the Carbos on the trees near the yacht club. The two bantams were just before the fenced wooded area, which had become a pool of water. They are the same two from August 2010!

Conditions: Very wet and muddy underfoot. Lake full to the brim – often overlapping the shore in places. Pools of water around the sides of the lake and on Innes Common. A few smelly areas – sulphur and musty smells. Two small single paddle canoes on water. Hockey being played opposite Innes Common with the white lights on.

NEXT CENSUS is on SUNDAY 9th September 2012. – Hope to see you there.

Barry

Recent Bird Sightings

Cattle Egret: over 100 at Church Rd, Rangiriri, 18 August. The farmer gave his permission to enter and view (Grant Quist).

Dabchick: 2 pairs mating and making nests in Te Aroha, 18 August (Grant Quist).

Kaka: 3 at Taitua Arboretum on 23 August, flying south from the car park. “Heard 3rd-hand they may have been here a few weeks at least. Not unusual for here at this time of year, but locals might want to try” (Neil Fitzgerald). Seen regularly through the winter at Pukemokemoke Reserve, Tauhei, including 6-8 on August 26 (via Neil Fitzgerald).

Pied Shag survey needs your help

I have been contracted by the Department of Conservation to undertake a review of pied shags and in the last Southern Bird I gave an overview of progress so far – a very interesting picture. However there are a number of gaps, and we need further information ... hence a plea for help!

September to December is the best time to count pied shag colonies, as it appears that this is when the peak number of nests are occupied. I would appreciate assistance from RR's by promoting this study to members and encouraging them to count any colonies they know about in the next few months. It would be great to fill in some gaps.

This study has highlighted that despite pied shags being found throughout much of coastal New Zealand there is little known about their population numbers and trends. This is an opportunity for member's observations to help in an important review of one of our little known native species. Information needed is count date, number of breeding pairs/nests, and location (detailed description or GPS reference).

All information used will be fully acknowledged in any publications resulting from this work and a summary will be published in Southern Bird. Please send information to: Pied Shag Review, PO Box 45, Spring Creek, Marlborough 7244, or email mike@wmil.co.nz

Mike Bell