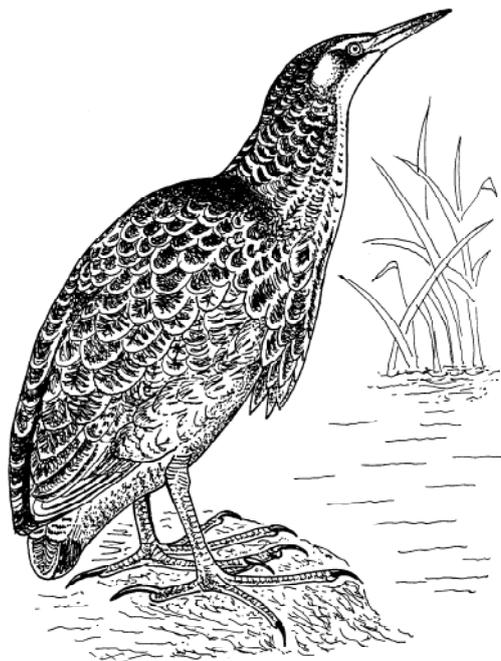


# MATUKU

## WAIKATO REGION NEWSLETTER

Ornithological Society of New Zealand

December 2012



### Regional Representative/Regional Recorder

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### Programme

*Wednesday meetings are held at the DOC offices on Northway Street, Te Rapa starting at 7.30pm.*  
Wednesday December 12th: Xmas BBQ at Buckmasters (this is the 2nd Wednesday). Start at 6pm.  
Wednesday February 20th: Evening meeting. TBA.

### Extreme birding

For most of us birding is a pleasurable leisure activity. Something we find satisfying and enjoy sharing with like-minded people. However, for others birding is a whole other thing. It can be an obsessive, individualistic and intensely competitive pursuit. Sometimes the rewards are purely personal but often there can be some meaningful consequences beyond an entry in The Guinness Book of Records.



Walter Rothschild

Stepping into the past we come across one of my favourite individuals. He had all of the above characteristics, more than a bit eccentric but capable of being incredibly single-minded and task-oriented. We were not contemporaneous; he died nearly a decade before my birth. He had lived a good bike ride away from my home and his was open to the public. It was a splendid trip to make when the relatives threatened to visit and show you all of their holiday snaps!

At his birth he could have been the wealthiest child in the UK. He was destined to become a banker and was for a while. The family had banked for centuries and formed a multi-national consortium. The power of compound interest became increasingly obvious as decade followed decade. So powerful that it was within their grasp to change the course of history. "I am sorry, Napoleon old chap. No go on the loan I am afraid".

Given his background he could easily have turned into another Hooray Henry. Perhaps he did in some areas of his life. Certainly he was blackmailed by a female member of the peerage for nearly forty years. He was, first and foremost, a naturalist from his very early years. He lived a privileged life in Tring Park and his indulgent parents permitted him to turn part of it into a zoo when he was still a teenager. Cassowaries were said to roam freely, people perhaps a little less so.



Cassowary illustration from Walter Rothschild's monograph

Eccentric in the extreme, he imported creatures from all over the world for his zoo. He attended university with a number of kiwis, the birds that is! Wishing to show the potential of previously undomesticated species led him to visit Buckingham Palace in a zebra-drawn trap. Consumption of the flesh of undomesticated animals was also fashionable amongst the mega-rich, a practice known as zoophagia. In fact one individual had a standing order with London Zoo for any deceased animal. If the elephant died it was his! Our character was known as Walter Rothschild and his zoophagia is probably not well documented, after all he did own his own zoo. He did comment that cassowary eggs present some difficulties if you like them boiled, great for baking however.

He had a more conventional side as a naturalist and researcher. He was only a few years old when Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859. For Walter it was a life-changing event. Much of his life was spent elucidating the naturally occurring variations in animal species that was so fundamental a part of Darwin's hypothesis. In 1892 Walter added a museum to the existing zoo at Tring Park. He was twenty-four, six years from giving up a banking career and one year beyond introducing his first new bird species to science. This was the Parea, the Chatham Island Pigeon. There are a further fifty-seven birds species that he subsequently described.

Evolution was not an accepted fact for the early part of Walter's life. If you were to visit the Natural History Museum in South Kensington, London, you would have found Darwin's bust at one end of the Great Hall. Eyeballing him from the other end was a bust of Adam. Evolution was very far from a done deal. We now know that there are around ten thousand bird species, but, in his collection, Walter had, at peak, some two hundred and eighty thousand study skins. There would have been many multiple copies to demonstrate sub-specific and other differences.

Such a large number of skins meant that Walter had people collecting for him all over the world. He may well have been the largest collector but there were other individuals with more of a stamp collecting approach and many national museums also accumulating specimens. One could imagine this having an impact on the populations of particularly rare species. Walter Lawry Buller supplied Walter with specimens, living and preserved, over a period of five years around the establishment of his museum. These included species now extinct. Today the extinctions are considered to be more likely due to rapid habitat destruction by pioneers and other related factors rather than any activities on the



Walter Lawry Buller

part of Buller. Now we do have a more informed, if not complete, view regarding the protection of native species although our approach to habitat preservation is not so forward looking.

Collecting by gun and trapping was very much the norm, both before and after Walter's time. The consequences do, perhaps, excuse the methodology. Those collections still remain although poor



Gouldian Finch

documentation and preservation of some specimens reduces their value to the scientific community. These collections also served another purpose. They, and hand-drawn sketches, were the basis for the illustrations of a number of epic books that brought avian biology and ecology to the attention of the wealthy classes. The production of these volumes required extreme dedication over a long period.

At the time that the Waitangi Treaty was being signed in New Zealand John Gould published the first volume of *Birds of Australia*. Six hundred and eighty-one species were described in total. Interestingly there are illustrations of New Zealand birds including the Huia and the Kakapo. Is this perhaps an early example of Australian geographic confusion?

In America Audubon's *Birds of America* was completed just a year earlier in 1839. Buller was much later on the scene. His *A History of the Birds of New Zealand* first appeared in 1873. All of these books have much in common. They have good descriptive text, some unbelievably good illustration and they are all still in print!

Audubon's name lives on in the Society that bears his name. Mark Obmascik, author of *The Big Year*, makes the point that, in 1900, it did its bit to change the way the world regards birds. The conventional male celebration of Xmas at that time was a competitive bird massacre. The Audubon Society introduced the alternative Xmas Bird Count. Given the circumstances it is no surprise that only 27 birders came "out of the closet" to participate! Small though it was, it was the prototype for birding "Big Days" Today 50,000 Americans take part in the Xmas Bird Count and valuable census data is obtained. Such Big Days have become moveable feasts as other dates are added to the birding calendar. A move from killing to counting had been consolidated. What had been the norm was itself now extreme. Audubon had, unwittingly, pointed the way to an alternative form of extreme birding.

Hammering home this change was the arrival of field guides. Unlike the earlier volumes these could be fitted into the pocket. They were cheap and a whole new and very large group of people had access to identification material.

Inevitably the Big Day gave way to the Big Year. This was more of a personal journey for individuals. The data collected had little scientific value and there was a potential for competition. How many species could you see in a year? Could you see more than anyone else? Could you afford it? Would your partner leave you? A

considerable number of books have been produced on the subject and, surprisingly, the motive behind a Big Year is not always totally competitive. In the case of Sean Dooley it was provoked by the tragic loss of both parents over a very short time. There was a small inheritance and Sean needed to do something meaningful with the



Audubon's Ivory-billed Woodpecker

money. *The Big Twitch* is his account of an attempt to see 700 different bird species within Australia in one year.

Phoebe Snetsinger was misdiagnosed and given a year to live. A Big Year seemed just the answer. As it happens she lived for 18 years and died, not from ill health but in a bus accident. She accumulated a Life List around 8500 birds. Read her story in *A Woman's Quest for the Most Amazing Birds* by Olivia Gentile.

The compulsion to become an extreme birder can be very powerful. One couple gave up their careers and sold all their property to finance a Big Year. Alan Davies and Ruth Mills recount this in *The Biggest Twitch: Around the World in 4,000 Birds*.

Charles Elder is perhaps my favourite. This is maybe because we have a common book in our past, *The Reader's Digest Book of British Birds*. It has illustrations that are unequalled in their beauty, product of that great NZ artist Raymond Ching. Tired of the mundane and humdrum Charles decided to see the top 40 UK Endangered Species on the Red List. The book has real value with insight into the ecology and conservation of many of these species. Charles also has an engaging sense of humour. Rare birds are on his list, but also some commoner species, house sparrows and yellow hammers that have had significant population declines as a result of post-1970 changes in agricultural methodology. The book is titled *While Flocks Last* and has more than anecdotal value.

This account started in Tring Park and perhaps it is suitable to end it there. Walter sold the majority of his study skins, including those from Buller, to The American Museum of Natural History. This was in 1932 and he realised \$US225,000. It is suggested to have been to raise money to pay off his blackmailer. His work does live on. When he died in 1937 he left his Museum to the Natural History Museum in London. It is now the major centre for ornithological research in the UK and currently houses 600,000 study skins, probably the biggest collection in the world. J.G. Keuleman's water colour illustrations for Buller's book are also stored there. These were included in the latest revision of this book, released in October of this year. Given Walter's lifetime contribution and his enduring legacy he would have to be my choice for extreme birder, any year any century!

The Museum itself remains a treasure house of data and artefacts and a great temptation to some. Walter would probably have been horrified and in turn amused by some recent events. In the past few years there have been two significant burglaries. In one some of the most attractive skins, including those of The Resplendent Quetzal and other Trogons were taken. Trying to sell the product on eBay proved not to be a good move. The Museum staff had the last laugh when the horn of a very large rhino was sawn off in another break-in and theft. The thieves got away with a huge and heavy horn of great potential value. Imagine their dismay when they found it to be made of fibreglass!

Ray Buckmaster

## **Rehabilitation theme for September**

If there is a theme for this month it is the willingness of both individuals and communities to become involved in environmental rehabilitation. Te Pahu residents and others were involved in tree planting along the Kaniwhaniwha Stream to mark Conservation Week. This was our field trip for the month.

Also, during Conservation Week, Laurie and Jan Hoverd were the surprised and delighted recipients of the Wingspan Raptor Award for 2012. This has been an annual award since 2006. It was fitting recognition as they have both been involved in the rehabilitation and return to the wild of damaged NZ Falcons for a number of years. It is great to see this dedication and commitment being acknowledged. Wingspan itself has a website that is worthy of a visit. [www.wingspan.co.nz](http://www.wingspan.co.nz)

Bill Smith, of The Avian Wildlife Rehabilitation Trust was our speaker and continued the theme. He is the "go to" man in the Waikato/King Country when it comes to bird rescue. Along with the Wingspan Trust and other groups he is part of the countrywide organisation known as Bird Rescue ([www.birdrescue.org.nz](http://www.birdrescue.org.nz)). Bill receives 3-400 birds a year for rehabilitation and none are turned away. His clients include tui, kereru, morepork, ducklings, pukeko, seabirds and even the odd parrot. A Sulphur Crested Cockatoo in a nice shade of gentian violet, from an earlier attempt at rehab., has to be an odd parrot! All admissions go through a

form of triage, a standardised visual and physical examination to determine the nature of the problem and the appropriate treatment. Broken bones require the expertise of a vet. But all other aspects fall within Bill's domain.

Bill sees public education as a significant part of his commitment, good intentions being much more effective when backed up with understanding. He made a particular point concerning the risk of *Aspergillus* infection. It is in the everyday environment of land birds but totally absent from the pelagic environment. All birds are susceptible when below par, but particularly so for seabirds. Placing an injured bird in a box made comfortable for travel with the addition of straw or hay is a mistake made with the best of intentions. Straw and hay harbour *Aspergillus* spores and *Aspergillus* infections along with dehydration are the major causes of death in birds needing rehabilitation. This is good information to have. The good news is that it will be more accessible in the future as Bill has just joined OSNZ!

Andrew, our RR, mentioned a number of important points. There are currently surveys into both Pied Shags and also Caspian Terns underway and help is needed. The Caspian Tern information can be found on [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz) and the Pied Shag requirements can be found on the Bird Alert site at [www.surfbirds.com/birdingmail/Group/BIRDING-NZ](http://www.surfbirds.com/birdingmail/Group/BIRDING-NZ)

Andrew also mentioned the continuing need to keep reporting, now and into the future, our Tui sightings. Low reports could suggest a lack of success on the part of the Halo Project rather than the fact that it has worked so well that Tuies are now commonplace! The Hamilton City Council, as a Conservation Week initiative, has established an updated page on its website. Now we can also report sightings of Kaka and Kereru alongside those of Tui at [www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/Forms/Enquiries/Tui-Sighting-XForm/](http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/Forms/Enquiries/Tui-Sighting-XForm/)

Finally Andrew mentioned the "New Zealand Birds Online" project. A PowerPoint presentation on this can be found at [osnz.org.nz/news/new-zealand-birds-online](http://osnz.org.nz/news/new-zealand-birds-online)

There is a request for photographs of NZ species to include in this venture. The emphasis is not primarily on quality as twenty photos emphasising different aspects of each species are planned. Colin Miskelly is overseeing the project and can be contacted on [nzbirdsonline@osnz.org.nz](mailto:nzbirdsonline@osnz.org.nz)

Ray Buckmaster

## **Mixed news on seabirds for October**

In a month devoted to our shorebirds the news has been mixed and, in some cases, disturbing. Keith Woodley, in his talk, gave us an update on the status of our shorebird species. He told us that only two of these are prospering, the others undergoing population decline or requiring conservation input to maintain their population size. The two fortunate species are the Southern Black-Backed Gull and the Spur-winged Plover. The remaining species are experiencing the impact of predation and human activity, both here and, in the case of our trans equatorial migrants, overseas as well.

It was the best attended meeting of our year so far and discussion continued long after Keith's presentation. Keith was also interviewed on the Nine to Noon Programme of National Radio on Tuesday, 30th October, still available on the Radio NZ website.

On the positive side it is great to see how contemporary our members have become, managing to harness the social media, namely Facebook, to their cause. Widespread lobbying being part and parcel of Forest And Bird's Bird Of The Year Competition. The winner was, of course, The New Zealand Falcon. A great result!

The field trip to Miranda Shorebird Centre and shellbank to "Welcome The Birds" was rain affected. A significant number from Waikato attended and it turned out to be a very big meeting. John Dowding talked on the Northern New Zealand Dotterel. The most recent census results are very encouraging, showing a population increase of around 15 percent in the eight years since the last census. Closer examination revealed that most of this population increase was found in two major areas, both of which have considerable sponsored volunteer involvement. Other areas are barely holding their own or showing decline; this includes our own west coast beaches. Adult birds have long life expectancy, the chance of mortality being around 7-8 percent per year. In areas lacking effective predator control the recruitment to

the population is just below that needed to replace this mortality. A one percent annual decline in national numbers could be anticipated if there was no conservation input. The message is that the NNZ Dotterel is yet another conservation-dependent species.

Concern was expressed that DoC was no longer able to be as significant a driving force behind conservation efforts due to funding cuts. Greater reliability now rests on sponsorship and volunteer efforts which creates a less certain future.

John Dowding also touched on the Rena grounding. A year later he is now back in The Bay Of Plenty evaluating the impact of that event and the conservation approach adopted then, on the current population of NNZ Dotterel. Preliminary findings are very encouraging.

The shorebird theme continues into the early part of November, with the Kawhia/Aotea Harbours census.

Ray Buckmaster

## OSNZ Waikato November 2012 Harbour Census summary: Aotea and Kawhia, 4 November; Raglan 5 November

Species	Aotea	Kawhia	Raglan	Total
Black Swan	6	255	4	265
Canada Goose	1	18	33	52
Paradise Shelduck			2	2
Mallard	1			1
Black Shag	1			1
Pied Shag	7		7	14
White-faced Heron		38	4	42
Royal Spoonbill		71	55	126
Swamp Harrier			1	1
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper		2		2
Godwit	1,230	1,830	623	3,683
Variable Oystercatcher	18	30	6	54
South Island Pied Oystercatcher	147	630	48	825
Pied Stilt		90	1	91
Northern New Zealand Dotterel	2		5	7
Banded Dotterel	7		2	9
Spur-winged Plover		6		6
Southern Black-backed Gull	8	110	67	185
Red-billed Gull	3	110	17	130
Caspian Tern	7	32	3	42
White-fronted Tern		4		4

**Nomenclature:** The species are listed in the order shown in the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand* Fourth Edition, 2010. The species names in the table are also in accordance with that publication, except that “Godwit” is used to cover all godwits seen. Three species of Godwit occur in NZ, at least 90 percent of which are Eastern Bar-tailed Godwits. Most of the birds we see will be of this species, however the level of scrutiny which we are able to use during harbour census is not usually sufficient to determine whether any individuals of the other two species are present.

An individual report for each harbour is available if required, providing more detail on the census in that harbour.

Hugh Clifford

## Recent Bird Sightings

**NZ Falcon:** 1 at Hamilton Gardens on 18 September, 2.14pm. “Just got an email from the Hamilton Gardens ops manager saying he saw a NZ falcon fly through the gardens yesterday. It ‘swooped past me and caught a goldfinch in mid air.’ (Neil Fitzgerald). 1 at Maungatautari on 19 September, chasing a harrier over the southern enclosure (Neil Fitzgerald).

**Shining Cuckoo:** 1 in trees in paddock by Wintec Avalon campus on September 18th (David Riddell).

**NZ Scaup:** 1 at Te Aroha Wetlands on 26 September (Grant Quist).

**Royal Spoonbill:** 1 at Te Aroha Wetlands on 26 September (Grant Quist).

**Tui:** groups of 2, 3, and 2 flying south (towards Maungatautari) from university area in evenings of 27 and 28 September (Graham Saunders). Tui however remain regular in Hamilton through spring and early summer, eg Seddon Park on 7 November, university on 8 November, Maeroa on 4 December (David Riddell).

**Rooks:** 2 flying in Fencourt Road, near Cambridge on 26 November (David Lawrie).

**Gannet:** 1 dead banded bird on beach patrol, Ruapuke Beach, on 24 November. It was banded as a chick on White Island on 1 February 1998 (David Lawrie, Zoe and Hugh Clifford).

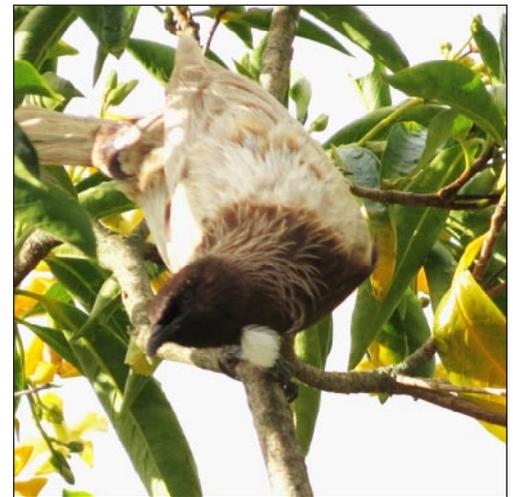
## Leucistic tui seen in Hamilton



Your average tui has to be the most patriotic of birds. Dressed in black it has not one but two silver ferns on its chest and a suitable degree of mongrel. Surely the All Black of the skies!

This week an alternative version appeared in our Dinsdale garden, feeding on a Queensland Frangipani. In various shades of brown and fawn it had a camouflaged look.

I am grateful to Hugh Clifford for the following extract which he located in Volume five of HANZAB.



“Aberrant plumages. Partially or wholly leucistic individuals have been reported at



several locations (Oliver). Other

aberrant plumages have been reported but all appear to involve a reduction in the amount of melanin in all or part of the plumage. Individuals have been reported with varying amounts of cream, fawn, and umber, brown or smoky brown plumage (Oliver)”.

Andrew Styche was kind enough to pass the images along to John Innes of Landcare. John Innes confirmed that Landcare had been aware of at least two such birds in the Whatawhata area for a number of years.

He provided the following URL where a much better image, taken by photographer Neil Fitzgerald, can be found at [www.neilfitzgeraldphoto.co.nz/gallery/thumbnails-114.html](http://www.neilfitzgeraldphoto.co.nz/gallery/thumbnails-114.html)

Ray Buckmaster

## Exciting flotsam

The beach patrol from the south head of Aotea Harbour to the north head of Kawhia Harbour is fairly long and often quite rewarding as it passes through a number of Northern New Zealand Dotterel territories. On 7 November it was particularly rewarding as one of us discovered a newly-arrived ‘message in a bottle’. This was a first for all members of the team.

In the best of all possible worlds the bottle would have had a screw top or an attached corkscrew. Neither applied so we had to delay our gratification even though we could see that intriguing spill of paper within the bottle!



What the bottle did come with was a large growth of goose-necked barnacle. The glue these creatures use is incredibly effective, making Superglue look like wallpaper paste. We could not detach the creatures, which was unfortunate as they were far from alive. In consequence we completed the patrol at a fast pace, surrounded by a miasma of decaying barnacle and with a large entourage of buzzy flies. The bottle was finally opened and quickly disposed of.

It was gratifying to see that it had travelled a fair distance in just over a year.

Matt Jensen Young, the



good captain who had thrown the bottle over board was thrilled to hear of our discovery. We look forward to hearing about recoveries of other messages he has seamailed!

**THIS MESSAGE WAS LAUNCHED BY  
STAFF CAPTAIN MATT JENSEN YOUNG  
FROM THE EXPEDITION CRUISE SHIP  
M.V. ORION, CURRENTLY ENROUTE  
TO: HOBART, TASMANIA  
FROM MACQUARIE ISLAND  
IN POSITION:  
LATITUDE 45° 00'SOUTH  
LONGITUDE 148° 30'EAST  
ON THE 6<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2011  
I AM INTERESTED IN OCEAN CURRENTS AND  
WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM THE PERSON WHO  
FINDS THIS MESSAGE. A SMALL REWARD IS  
OFFERED FOR THE RETURN OF THE ORIGINAL  
MESSAGE TO THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS:  
MATT JENSEN YOUNG  
"KINAKA" 281 RANGE ROAD  
EUMUNDI, 4562 QLD  
AUSTRALIA  
MATT@JENSENYOUNG.COM  
YOUNG\_MATTO@YAHOO.COM**

FAIR WINDS!

12 OF 12



The find has raised our expectations for the next beach patrol. Some N.N.Z. Dotterel chicks would be great. Failing that, perhaps a lump of ambergis.....?

Ann and Ray Buckmaster, Hugh Clifford