

# THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

## Wellington Region Newsletter

### OSNZ—Birds New Zealand

October 2014

<http://osnz.org.nz/> and <http://notornis.osnz.org.nz/>

#### Greetings

Spring is an exciting time of the ornithological year. Many of the birds are nest building in preparation for a new breeding season and the first shining cuckoo has already been recorded. Dallas and I recently visited the Murawai gannet colony where there was much nest building in progress as well as considerable mating behavioural activities.

The Wellington / Wairarapa shag survey has finally been launched. There are some significant challenges in carrying out such including the inaccessibility of some shag colonies and the characteristic of some shag species having a very extended breeding season. A number of members have already offered help in carrying out this survey. If you are interested please let me know. Included in this newsletter is a guide to the identification of the shags encountered in our region. My thanks to NZBirdsOnline photographers for allowing inclusion of the pictures in the newsletter.

Since the last newsletter two long-standing, Wellington OSNZ members have passed away. Bill Watters (21 May 1926 - 16 July 2014) was the Chief Petrologist at New Zealand Geological Survey and emeritus at GNS. He wrote a number of articles for Notornis and Southern Bird. Bill Lock (75) passed away on the 18th of September. He worked for the Ministry of Agriculture as a chemist and his studies included an investigation of heavy metals of sea birds.

Geoff de Lisle

Wellington Regional Representative, OSNZ



## Upcoming Monthly Meetings

### WHERE and WHEN

Meetings are held at Te Papa's collections building, 169 Tory Street. Go up the steps and across the carpark.

First Monday of the month, 7.30pm.

### Monday 6th of October.

**Little Penguins – a multi-year study on Matiu Somes Island. Ros Batcheler & Mike Rumble.** Matiu Somes Island contains a large population of little penguins which over the last few years have been extensively studied. These

studies have been greatly aided by the use of a large network of artificial nest boxes. Ros and Mike will present a summary of their findings. Please note, this talk differs from that previously advertised.

**Monday 3rd of November.** Heidi Kikillus, Victoria University, will describe her work on cats as potential predators of birds.

### Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December

Christmas Special – Christmas cake and drinks will be served.

There will be a screening of the DVD, the Ghost Bird. The **ivory-billed woodpecker** (*Campephilus*

*principalis*) is one of the largest [woodpeckers](#) in the world, at roughly 51cm in length and 76cm in wingspan. It was native to the virgin forests of the southeastern United States (along with a separate subspecies native to Cuba). Due to habitat destruction, and to a lesser extent hunting, its numbers have dwindled to the point where it is uncertain whether any remain, though there have been reports that it has been seen again. However, in 2004 a single bird was observed in Arkansas and the discovery was in 2005 reported in *Science*, the most prestigious research journal in the USA. The DVD reports on the re-discovery of this bird and the subsequent investigations.



There will not be a meeting in January 2015.

### **Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2015**

#### **Members' Evening**

There will be short talks on recent birding activities carried out by members. If you would like to present, please contact Geoff de Lisle

## **Report of Monthly Meetings**

**July Meeting – New Zealand Storm Petrel.** The first part of this talk was given by Alan Tennyson from Te Papa. Up to 2003 the New Zealand storm petrel was known from three museum specimens collected off the east coast of New Zealand. Two of the specimens were collected off East Cape, probably in February 1827 and the remaining specimen came from off Banks Peninsula (19<sup>th</sup> Century). A review of historical records indicates 5 possible records between 1886 and 1991. On 25<sup>th</sup> January 2003 two British birders, Bob Flood and Bryan Thomas identified New Zealand storm petrels at sea off north-east New Zealand. Subsequently there have been hundreds of sightings. Graeme Taylor (DOC) described the recent investigations of New Zealand storm petrels and the investigations that led to the discovery of their breeding site on Little Barrier Island. This was achieved by catching birds at sea and the use of small radio transmitters. Birds were also caught on Little Barrier Island. Of the 39 birds caught on Little Barrier, all were unbanded. This raises the fascinating question as to the current size of the New Zealand storm petrel population. While more data is required to get a precise estimate of the population, the indications are that there could well be more than 1000 birds. Given the numerous, recent sightings of New Zealand storm petrels it is tempting to speculate that this is evidence of a recovering population following the removal of cats (1990) and rats (2004) from Little Barrier Island.

**August Meeting - New insights into seabirds relationships using DNA - Lara Shepherd (Te Papa).** The recent revolution in DNA sequencing has opened up new and exciting opportunities for studying the taxonomy of birds. Lara has been using DNA sequencing to investigate the taxonomy of prions, taking advantage of the recent wreck of a huge number of sea birds. An estimated quarter of a million prions (*Procellariidae: Pachyptila* spp) died during a severe storm that affected much of New Zealand during July 2011. Starved prions of all 6 species were recovered dead, although 80% were broad-billed prions (*P. vittata*). Densities of dead birds on some beaches on the west coast of the North Island exceeded 1000 birds per km. Lara's genetic studies have revealed the complexities of the taxonomy of prion species and some of the limitations of relying on morphological features for identifying the individual members of this group of birds. An example of how DNA studies can complement morphological features is the recent discovery of a new species of prion on Gough Island, in the South Atlantic ocean. Until recently it had been assumed that all the prions on Gough Island were broad-billed prions [[http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/african\\_birdlife/AB02\(4\)10-11.pdf](http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/african_birdlife/AB02(4)10-11.pdf)]. Another example of the use of DNA sequencing is the identification of bird remains such as those retrieved from bird strikes. Lara identified a long-tailed skua from remains following a bird strike with an aeroplane over Coromandel Peninsula in 2012 [<http://blog.tepapa.govt.nz/2013/09/23/making-sense-of-snarage/>]

**September Meeting – Project Kākā - James Griffiths, Department of Conservation.** Combating the effects of introduced predators is vital for the wellbeing of many New Zealand birds. The use of 1080 continues to be controversial but has been proved to be useful in the control of predators. Project Kaka was established by DOC, in conjunction with Wellington Regional Council and Landcare Research, to determine the ecological outcome of 3 yearly applications of 1080 in 22,000 hectares between Otaki and Holdsworth, as well as an additional 10,000 hectare water catchment area to the south. The project includes control areas and extensive monitoring of not only birds but also “predators”, insects, plants and fruiting levels. Monitoring of birds has used 5 minute bird counts and revealed significant increases in bellbird, tui, kakariki, rifleman and whitehead. An important finding of the project has been that immigration was an important component of the recovery of rat numbers following 1080 application. The importance of this project cannot be overstressed as it will provide information to maximise the efficiency of predator control operations. Furthermore, it has the potential to identify any adverse effect of 1080 operations so that mitigation steps can be developed.

### **Project Kākā progress reports**

[Progress report to 2013 \(PDF, 1,005K\) \(opens in new window\)](#)

This report summarises the results of Project Kākā pest animal and bird monitoring programmes between 2009 and 2013.

[Project background and progress report 2010–2011 report \(PDF, 5330K\) \(opens in new window\)](#)

The report outlines the rationale for Project Kākā, and summarises the results of activities over the first two years – 2010 and 2011.

## **Field Activities**

1. *Mist netting and passerine banding* – Peter Reese reports, 13<sup>th</sup> September.

We had a reasonable banding day at the Zoo on Saturday. The weather was much better than was forecast and we had a good turnout of people with a number of enthusiastic younger folk.

After a rather slow start bird numbers increased and we ended up with 50, 41 new and 9 recaptures. There were 11 species caught so we had a bit of variety, however many species were represented by only single birds. Surprisingly there were no Silvereyes caught.

Species caught were – (recaps in brackets)

Blackbird – 1 (0)

Song Thrush – 0 (1)

Dunnock – 2 (2) one of the recaps was banded in June 2010 and is at 1526 days now the oldest Dunnock we have recaptured at any site.

Chaffinch – 1 (0)

Goldfinch – 1 (0)

Greenfinch – 26 (5)

House Sparrow – 5 (1)

Starling – 1 (0)

Fantail – 1 (0)

Tui – 2 (0)

Magpie – 1 (0) our first at the Zoo since 2004.

On Monday work starts on the “Meet the Locals” the next exciting project at the Zoo. This will affect several of our net sites and especially the Banding Station that we have used over the last few years. With this in mind our sessions in the future will follow a different format, not sure at this stage what this will be. If we have another session this year it will likely be over the weekend 18-19 October. I will send details nearer the time.

A bit more info and some photos can be found on our blog - <http://wgttnzbanders.blogspot.co.nz/>

2. *Zealandia / Karori Sanctuary five minute bird counts*

These counts are being carried out every 3 months. This is a great opportunity to learn the five minute bird-counting technique. Please contact Colin Miskelly for details.

[Hakawai@xtra.co.nz](mailto:Hakawai@xtra.co.nz)

### 3. Trip to Mana Island

As reported in a previous email, I am organising a trip to Mana Island for 30 people on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> of October. There is still a few spaces available. Contact Geoff de Lisle.

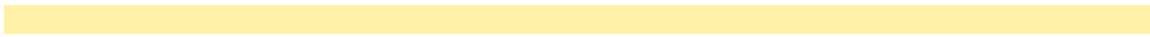
### 4. Shag Survey

As reported in a previous email and in my opening, the shag survey is underway. A number people have contacted me expressing a wish to participate in the survey. For anybody else who is interested in participating in this survey please contact Geoff de Lisle.

## The Flamingos of Lake Bogoria – Jenny Dey

Exhibition of photography, at FINC café in Wakefield St, Wellington

Lake Bogoria in Kenya has been a National Reserve since 1973 and is located at the northern region of the Kenyan Rift. The main reason people visit Lake Bogoria is to see the thermal hot springs and the birdlife including the truly amazing massive flocks of lesser flamingos plus the greater flamingo that feed on the blue-green algae. [www.jennydeyphotography.com](http://www.jennydeyphotography.com)



### Operation Duck Pond

“Volunteers around the country have begun counting waterfowl on their local ponds, as part of a new citizen science project dubbed Operation Duck Pond.

Fish and Game NZ has launched the project that aims to determine what pond habitat features provide the best breeding for mallard ducks and other species of waterfowl.

The organisation is appealing for New Zealanders around the country to join the project, pointing out it will not only help highly valued introduced species, but also native birds too.

*“With about 90% of New Zealand’s wetland lost over the past 150 years, there is a need to look at the role ponds play in the conservation of water birds”,* project coordinator Nathan Burkepile says.

All volunteers will be given a set of simple instructions on how to go about the monitoring, a manual telling them how to run the survey. The volunteers will start by filling out a pond characteristics datasheet, and will then be asked to count waterfowl four times over a four month period, beginning in September.

<http://www.fishandgame.org.nz/operation-duck-watch-nationwide-%E2%80%98citizen-science%E2%80%99-project-0>

## Kaitoke Regional Park Kereru Counts - Campground, Pakuratahi Forks

**Nikki McArthur, GREATER WELLINGTON REGIONAL COUNCIL**

Every year in mid-September large numbers of kereru descend on the Pakuratahi campground at Kaitoke Regional Park (near Upper Hutt) to feed on budding willow foliage.

The Kaitoke RP kereru counts have now been completed for another year. I counted a mean of 99 kereru over the five counts this year (min 87; max 106), compared to a mean of 135 kereru counted the previous year (min 80; max 178). Surprisingly, this difference was not quite statistically significant (two-tailed t-test;  $P=0.099$ ;  $t=2.14$ ), but this was probably due to our small sample size interacting with the highly variable counts in 2013 to reduce our statistical power.



Over the longer term, the mean number of kereru counted per year continue to be significantly higher over the past 5-6 years compared to the first 5 years of counts, suggesting kereru are either much more numerous than they were in the early 2000's, or have simply found the campground much more to their liking in recent years:

This year I made a point of keeping a record of all of the other bird species I encountered during the kereru counts, recording a total of 31 additional species (15 native and 16 introduced). This a fairly high number of bird species to encounter in any one location in the Wellington region, but is probably thanks to the diversity of habitats (farmland, river, native bush and amenity plantings) found in close proximity to the campground. This high diversity, coupled with the fact that the layout of the campground allows visitors the chance to get good views of many species makes the Pakuratahi campground one of the "hidden gems" for bird-watching in the Wellington region.

Non-kereru highlights of this year's surveys included a pair of kingfishers recorded during each count in the vicinity of Steve's chicken coop, a pair of white-faced herons spotted roosting in beech trees on [Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

the far side of the Pakuratahi River during most counts, and a single cock pheasant heard calling near the walk-in camping area on several occasions. The only threatened native bird species recorded was a pair of pied stilts (At Risk – Declining) seen flying overhead during the final count (today), though NZ falcon (Nationally Vulnerable) have also been recorded in the campground in the past. Full checklists of all the birds recorded during these kereru surveys (along with a couple of nice kereru photos) can be found by clicking on the following hyperlinks:



Photo – Nikki McArthur

<http://ebird.org/ebird/newzealand/view/checklist?subID=S19804121>  
<http://ebird.org/ebird/newzealand/view/checklist?subID=S19843483>  
<http://ebird.org/ebird/newzealand/view/checklist?subID=S19794331>  
<http://ebird.org/ebird/newzealand/view/checklist?subID=S19815299>  
<http://ebird.org/ebird/newzealand/view/checklist?subID=S19852748>

## Bird Snippets – Wellington

### **Parakeets on Whakanui Track, Rimutaka Forest Park, Peter Hodge, Sat Jul 12**

I was clearing a trap line on the Whakanui Track (Rimutakas) this morning. About halfway down the ridge to the Orongorongo River I came across a Yellow-crowned Parakeet, a Red-crowned Parakeet and another unidentified parakeet in a stand of tall rimu trees. There were Tui, Riflemen, Kereru, Tomtits, and Grey Warblers in this place too.

About an hour later, coming back up the ridge, I saw a Yellow-crowned Parakeet again, maybe the same bird, maybe another one, accompanied by another parakeet, with several Whiteheads in the canopy. BirdingNZ.net

### **Petone Beach, Hutt Estuary, Julia White 26<sup>th</sup> July**



Blackbacked gull with starfish – Geoff de Lisle

Today I organised a trip to spot seabirds in the Petone area, we met at 11am Petone Foreshore, Wharf end.

We then drove along the inland road towards Hutt Motorway, we saw a few blackbacked gulls, one chewing on a starfish and a few oyster catchers, red billed gulls, the wind was extremely strong, and unbearable. We decided to drive to Hikoikoi Reserve and walked along the wooden walkway passing numerous variable oyster catches (~30), Blackbacked gulls and Black and Little Shags, and then to the Waione Street and under the bridge and along the track to Halford Place to Jackson Street passing the golf course carpark and following the stream for some distance.

We saw a pair of Canada geese, a pair of Pukeko, 1 Spoonbill, 2 Kingfishers, 2 Swallows, 2 White Fronted herons, mallard ducks; more birds that I had expected to see.

Participants, Geoff de Lisle, Dallas Bishop, Nina Wortman, Katie Cornish.

### **Blue-headed bellbird, Zealandia, Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop, Wed 30<sup>th</sup> July**

Observed on the kaka sugar water feeder. The blue head is due to feeding on tree fuschia. Subsequently we saw another blue-headed bellbird on our sugar water at home at Blue Mountains Road, Upper Hutt



### **Northern giant petrel (& banded dotterels), Pencarrow Head, Nikki McArthur Wed Aug 06**

Had very close views of a northern giant petrel flying low and slow over the beach adjacent to the lighthouse at Pencarrow Head this afternoon. I've only seen them a handful of times at this location, but never as close to shore as this bird was.

I was down there with a couple of colleagues and two kaumatua from our local iwi who were placing a Rahui (temporary access restriction) on two stretches of beach along which banded dotterels nest each year. The dotterels have just arrived back from wherever they go for the winter (Lake Wairarapa, or perhaps the northern harbours?) and this afternoon they were busy chasing each other around the beach, setting up territories etc.

Last year we set up some intensive hedgehog & cat trapping at this site, added signage and applied the Rahui and managed to achieve a nine-fold increase

in dotterel nesting success in comparison to the previous couple of years, so we're hoping for a similarly promising result again this year.

**Falcon Skyline walkway Wilton, ledzep, Sun Aug 10**

As I was rambling over the hills just off the Skyline walkway above Wilton sub-station (Wellington) I was surprised by a Falcon flying close to me about 1 metre above the ground, which is open farmland with gorse bushes. GPS 174.748518 -41.254081. Flying silently, no call. Not many other birds in the area (finches, Skylarks). Excellent view of though only for a few brief moments as it disappeared up and over the hill behind me. This is not that far from Karori sanctuary (as the Falcon flies) where we hope they nest again. BirdingNZ.net

**Black Stilt at Waikanae Estuary, Lena » Sat Aug 23**

Was at Waikanae Estuary this afternoon around 3.30pm and to my great surprise sited a black stilt. Did not have my birding lens so photos not that great. BirdingNZ.net

Note: The bird was unbanded and did not have any white patches, suggesting it was not a hybrid stilt.

**Reef Heron Plimmerton Fire Station, ledzep » Sun Aug 24**

Good views of a Reef Heron, very active with the highish-tide. They are around this coastline but don't often see them. BirdingNZ.net  
Photo, Duncan Watson



**NI robins, East Harbour Regional Park, Wellington, Nikki McArthur » Sun Aug 31**

Went for a walk in East Harbour Regional Park near Wellington today, following up a robin sighting reported by Keith Levy earlier in the week. Sure enough, Keith and I located a pair of robins in Gollan's Valley, several hundred metres upstream from the Butterfly Creek picnic area. Both birds were unbanded, so must be locally-bred birds & confirms a small breeding population persists at this site following translocations carried out in 2011 and 2012. BirdingNZ.net

**Magpie in Eastbourne, SomesBirder » Fri Sep 05**

This morning I was very surprised to briefly see a Magpie on my own front lawn. Though obviously not an uncommon species in New Zealand overall, they are definitely beyond uncommon around the south-eastern bays of the Wellington harbour; not even appearing on the local playing fields. It was my first sighting for the area, but to my misfortune, I had no time to photograph it. BirdingNZ.net

**Finch spp. in beech forest, Jim\_j » Sun Sep 07,**

While walking the track to Blue Range Hut (Northern Tararuas - not far from Mt Bruce) came across a huge flock of finch - they "exploded" from the forest floor and sub canopy as we got close - quite spectacular - would have been hundreds of birds. Not sure what species (s?) I'm not good enough at recognising their little tweets!! - I'm assuming redpoll - but I guess could have been goldfinch based on Nikki's sighting?

Was at about 700m asl a good hour or so from the carpark (pity it wasn't a couple of hundred years ago and hundreds of parakeet instead....)

Very good numbers of tomtit and whitehead all the way from the carpark to the hut with chaffinch the next most common.

A 1080 drop in June (from the signs) looks to have paid off - plenty of fruit lying on the ground as well.

Didn't pick up any rifleman but I've found I need to be very close before I can hear them now - and was wet & slippery so head down most of the time No parakeet or kaka heard (despite being close to Mt Bruce) - a single falcon heard on the way back to the carpark.

A couple of flocks of rosella along the road in the drive in - maybe 15 birds seen in all. BirdingNZ.net

**Subantarctic (brown) skua, Wainuiomata River mouth, Annette Harvey, Sun Sep 07, pm**

I encountered a brown skua at the Wainuiomata River mouth (Baring Head, Wellington) earlier today. The bird was first spotted sitting on the beach & was very confiding allowing good close views. At one point the bird raised its wings in typical skua style, showing its white wing "flashes". I later spotted the skua in the river itself feasting on a half-submerged sheep carcass. BirdingNZ.net

**Black fantail, Queens Drive, Lyall Bay, Deb Clark, Wed Sep 10**

Seen in a tree by my back door.

**Inner city biodiversity, Nikki McArthur » Wed Sep 18, BirdingNZ.net**



Further to my previous post, a bit of a feeding frenzy developed very close to waterfront in Te Papa just after midday, with several hundred fluttering shearwaters, a dozen or so w-f terns, BBG, RBG, a little shag and a blue penguin feeding on a large school of fish.

The shearwaters made quite a spectacle, and drew a number of onlookers from among the lunchtime crowds. Had great fun eavesdropping on some of the resulting conversations as people tried to figure out what the shearwaters actually were.

One couple had narrowed their suspect list down to either penguins or "baby seagulls", but the penguin proponent lost their argument when her companion pointed out that the birds were quite obviously flying. Just when they were on the verge of settling on their "baby seagull" option I felt obliged to step in and suggest that they google "fluttering shearwater" on their smartphones. They did, and ended up browsing through the fluttering shearwater page on NZ birds online, with the species in question mere metres away, and all within sight of Te Papa - a great example of the website in action! Photo Nikki McArthur

**Inner city biodiversity, ledzep » Sat Aug 02, 2014**

Fluttering Shearwaters well out from Petone towards Ngauranga Gorge (mid-afternoon Sat). Large flock of about 62 Pied Stilt on Petone foreshore by water ski club (unusual). BirdingNZ.net

**Inner city biodiversity, Colin Miskelly » Tue Sep 02, 2014**

An immature falcon flew low over me as I walked home through the grounds of Massey University, Wellington (near the top of Taranaki St). BirdingNZ.net

**Bellbird, Makara mountain bike park, ashercook » Fri Sep 12, 2014**

Saw a single male bellbird just near the main Makara mountain bike carpark this morning. I've logged the sighting on ebird. BirdingNZ.net

**More Bellbirds Ashercook » Thu Sep 18, Heard a bellbird today on the Mornington Golf Course. BirdingNZ.net**

**Inner city biodiversity, ledzep » Tue Sep 16, 2014**

With the strong northerly the Fluttering Shearwaters are out in Wellington harbour again. Flock of 100+ at times easily visible from Queens Wharf, some coming close at times. BirdingNZ.net

**Shining cuckoo arrivals, Nikki McArthur, Mon Sep 01, 2014**

I've just seen an intriguing early report of two shining cuckoos seen in Trentham Memorial Park in Upper Hutt on 29th August & reported via eBird. I'll ask for a bit more detail as this is very early for



Wellington, but the observation was annotated with the following note:  
"flying overhead, identified through metallic shiny green back and striped belly"

...which sounds fairly unambiguous to me!  
BirdingNZ.net

**Early shining cuckoos?** [Paul Scofield](#) Mon Sep 01, 2014, BirdingNZ.net

First eBird record this year was on Aug 26 from Oromahoe near Pahia.

First last year was 22 Aug in Porirua!

**Cuckoo arrival dates, Peter Hodge** » Sun Sep 21, 2014

I heard a Shining Cuckoo coming down the Whakanui track, south of Wainuiomata (Wellington), this afternoon. BirdingNZ.net

## Calls to cull wandering geese – Friday 19<sup>th</sup> September, Dominion Post

*"Large flocks of Canada geese fouling lakes and walkways in a Paraparaumu reserve and subdivision have prompted calls for them to be culled.*

*Waterstone subdivision resident Lyn Boswell is fed up with flocks of about 120 birds flying in at all times of the day and night, making a din with their honking, and fouling the lakes, grass areas, paths and walkways. ....She feared that, in three to five years' time, they would take over the whole area, especially as the Kapiti Expressway would create about 10 hectares of new wetlands."*

*Council leisure and open space asset manager Lex Bartlett said it was aware of the geese problem, especially in the Waterstone area, and had been talking to Greater Wellington Regional Council and other agencies about possible solutions."*

## Grey Warblers – Sarah Jamieson

I have noticed an increase in the cat hunting in my area. If any of you come across a **freshly** killed Grey Warbler would you be able to contact me ASAP (027-726-9141)? I am particularly interested in warblers from the South Island.

## Dusky Woodswallow on Stewart Island– new sighting for New Zealand?

[Satoshi Kakishima](#)

Nice to meet you. I'm Satoshi Kakishima from Japan. I and Miss Tomoe Morimoto saw and took photos of Dusky Woodswallow on Stewart Island. In that time, we didn't know this species was first record in New Zealand. We got excited when we realized that. Here we report detail location and time.

Location: on Golden Bay Road along Traill Park.

Time: AM 8:30, 27th Sep 2014.

We went to same place at PM 4:00, 27th and AM 8:00, 28th, but we couldn't see it again. We will submit a rare bird report later. (BirdingNZ.net)

Note: Before adding another bird to the New Zealand list there needs to be positive confirmation by the Records Appraisal Committee of a rare bird report. Two photographs of "the" bird are attached to the entry in BirdingNZ.net <http://www.birdingnz.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=9&t=3883>

## National Red-billed Gull Survey, 2014-2016

In 1965, Lou Gurr and Fred Kinsky's published a review of the known colonies of red-billed gull (Gurr, L. and Kinsky F. 1965. The distribution of breeding colonies and status of the red-billed gull in New Zealand and its outlying islands. *Notornis* 12: 223-240). The review covered all sites that had been reported between 1889 and 1965, many of them either in the OSNZ's Consolidated Short Notes published in *Notornis* or through personal communications. In the end they conservatively estimated about 40,000 breeding pairs at 166 different localities, including some small colonies in New Zealand's sub-Antarctic islands.



What is the current status of this species? Jim Mills, our leading authority on red-billed gulls, has reported that the numbers of birds breeding in our largest colonies, at Kaikoura and on the Three Kings and Mokohinau islands, have declined markedly over the last 20 years (Mills, J.A. 2013. Red-billed gull. In Miskelly, C.M. (ed.) *New Zealand Birds Online*. [www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz](http://www.nzbirdsonline.org.nz)). The decline at Kaikoura at least has been attributed to a reduction in marine productivity and therefore to food availability. Conversely, Lyndon Perriman and Chris Lalas (Perriman, L. and Lalas, C. 2012. Recent increase in population size of red-billed gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae scopulinus*) at Otago, southern New Zealand. *Notornis* 59: 138–147) have reported an increase of 6–10% over the same period along the Otago coastline, especially where there have been concerted efforts to control predation and disturbance.

What therefore is the current status of the red-billed gull in New Zealand? Have numbers declined overall, or has there been a redistribution of the population (and perhaps a change in the size of colonies from a few large ones to many smaller ones), or both? Birds New Zealand will be conducting a national survey of red-billed gull colonies over at least the next two years, and you are encouraged to take part, if you can. The information from this survey will allow the Department of Conservation to evaluate more precisely the species' conservation status. At present, the red-billed gull is classified as Nationally Vulnerable, based on a predicted decline of 50–70% over three generations despite an apparently large population of 20 000–100 000 mature individuals (Robertson, H.A. *et al.* 2013. *Conservation status of New Zealand birds, 2012*. New Zealand Threat Classification Series 4, Department of Conservation, Wellington. <http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/nztcs4entire.pdf>).

The survey will be in two parts. The first is a scoping survey, to be carried out during the coming breeding season, between October 2014 and January 2015. The aim is to locate all current red-billed gull breeding colonies, irrespective of their size (some can be as small as 2–3 pairs). At this stage, we do not need to know precisely how many breeding pairs there are, just a general indication along the lines of “less than 10 pairs”, “10–100 pairs”, “100–1000 pairs”, or “more than 1000 pairs”. Estimating the size of these colonies will be the focus of the second part of the study, currently scheduled for the 2015–16 breeding season. Given that many colonies are likely to be on offshore islands, stacks, or sea-facing cliffs, surveying them will require careful planning and special resources, including probably photographic surveys from aircraft and boats. We also do not want to disturb the breeding birds, and so will need to organise the surveys well to avoid or minimize this.

As a starting point, we need to check all those localities where Gurr and Kinsky reported red-billed gulls breeding. The Wellington Region sites identified in the Gurr & Kinsky study included 10 different sites on Kapiti Island and its associated islands, one on Mana Island and one at Cape Terawhiti.

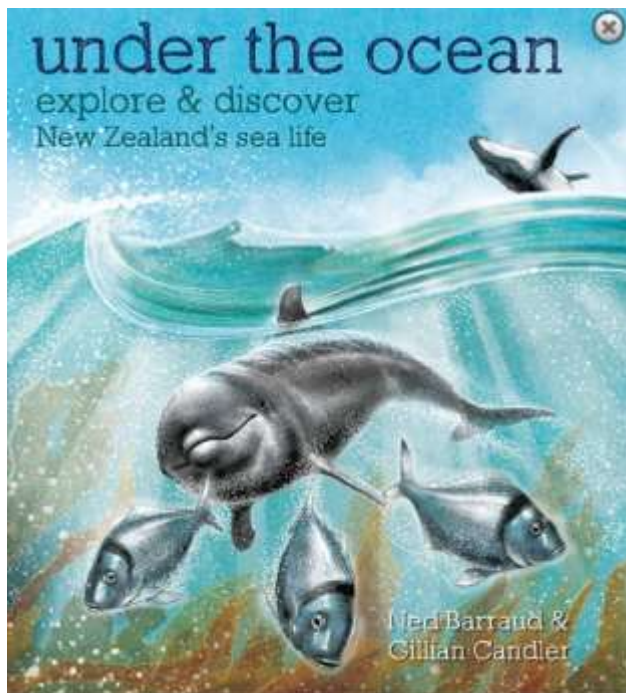
At the same time, we would like people to look for and document any additional sites, either through their own observations or from information gleaned from offshore fishermen, divers, tour-boat operators and others. The minimum information required for each site is its geographic position (latitude/longitude or NZTM2000 coordinates, ideally accompanied by a map or Google earth image showing the location of the colony), together with some indication of the size of the colony, along the lines suggested above. In the first instance, that information should be sent to our regional recorder (Nikki McArthur, [nikki.mcarthur@gw.govt.nz](mailto:nikki.mcarthur@gw.govt.nz)). If you can include photographs of the site or any other information that you consider will be useful in planning the second stage of the survey please do so (for example, the names and contact details of people who know the sites, or who control access to it; people, such as boat-owners or skippers, who might be prepared to assist logistically in surveying the sites).

Finally, Claudia Mischler (Wildlife Management International Ltd) is carrying out a parallel survey of black-billed gulls. She is particularly keen to have information on the locations and sizes of any black-billed gull colonies in the North Island. If you come across any such colonies, please pass the information on to Claudia (email: [claudia@wmil.co.nz](mailto:claudia@wmil.co.nz)), and copy it to the relevant Birds New Zealand regional recorder.

*Peter Frost, Convenor, Birds New Zealand Projects and Activities Committee, 87 Ikitara Road, Wanganui 4500 (email: [birds.wanganui@osnz.org.nz](mailto:birds.wanganui@osnz.org.nz))*

*Graeme Taylor, Department of Conservation, PO Box 10420, Wellington 6143, New Zealand (email: [gtaylor@doc.govt.nz](mailto:gtaylor@doc.govt.nz))*

## Local OSNZ member publishes book



Local OSNZ member, Gillian Chandler and Ned Barraud have just published *Under the Ocean* which introduces young children to the creatures that live in the seas around New Zealand. The book describes different habitats: underwater reefs, the sea floor, the open ocean and the deep ocean. Animals featured in the fact pages include octopus and squid, sharks and rays, whales, dolphins, sea birds, penguins and many others.

*Under the Ocean* is the third volume in the Explore and Discover series, following Gillian Candler and Ned Barraud's best-selling *At the Beach*, which was a finalist in the non-fiction section of the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards, and the popular title *In the Garden*.



This is the old substation is owned by Wellington Electricity, in Northland Tunnel Road, just round the corner from Zealandia. The artist is Sean Duffell, aka Ghstie and the mural was painted in 2013. Unfortunately Sean has recently moved up to Auckland, but has done a number of murals around our fair city. He is an incredibly talented mural artist and you can see more of his work here: <http://ghstie.com/>

#### **Wellington Region Contacts**

Regional Representative: Geoff de Lisle (04) 527 0929 or [osnzwelly@gmail.com](mailto:osnzwelly@gmail.com)

Regional Recorder: Nikki McArthur [nikki.mcarthur@gw.govt.nz](mailto:nikki.mcarthur@gw.govt.nz)

Birds New Zealand Regional Roundup: Geoff de Lisle & Dallas Bishop (04) 527 0929

[osnzwelly@gmail.com](mailto:osnzwelly@gmail.com)

Shag Survey - Geoff de Lisle

Mist netting and passerine banding - Peter Reese (04) 387 7387 or [Ruth.peter@actrix.co.nz](mailto:Ruth.peter@actrix.co.nz)

Zealandia 5 minute counts - Colin Miskelly [Hakawai@xtra.co.nz](mailto:Hakawai@xtra.co.nz)

## Identification of shags – Wellington & Wairarapa

The following extracts and pictures have been taken from NZ Birds On line.  
(<http://nzbirdsonline.org.nz>).

### Black shag

Length: 80-88 cm

Weight: 2.0 – 2.4 kg

Similar species: Little black shag, Little shag, Pied shag

A large all black shag of coastal and inland waters with white feathering on the cheeks and throat, yellow facial skin, black feet and grey-green eyes. Adults in breeding plumage have red-orange facial skin, white thigh patches, a small black-head crest, and white filoplumes on the neck.



Image © Ormond Torr

### Little black shag

Length: 61 cm

Weight: 800 g

Similar species: Little shag, Black shag

A medium sized shag of coastal and inland with all-black plumage, dark facial skin, a thin black bill and black feet. The distinctive iris is much brighter green eye than either shag species.



Image © Heather Whear

Does not breed in the Wellington region.

### Little shag

Length: 56 cm

Weight: 400 – 880 g

Similar species: Little black shag, Pied shag, Black shag

A small shag with a short yellow bill, black feet, a relatively long tail and multiple plumage variations. Most adults are either black with white cheeks and throat or black with completely white underpants, or intermediate. All three morphs develop a head crest during the breeding season.



Image © Tony Whitehead

All black, immature, little shag

Image © Glenda Rees



### Pied shag

Length: 65 – 85 cm

Weight: 1.3 – 2.1 kg

Similar species: Little shag, New Zealand king shag, Stewart Island shag, Black shag

A large, relatively slim black and white shag with white face, black feet, blue eye rings and yellow facial skin. Black back, nape and upperwings contrast with white throat, breast and belly.



Image © Peter Reese

### Spotted shag

Length: 64 – 74 cm

Weight: 700 – 1200 g

A slim, medium-sized, grey-blue marine shag of the mainland with a long, slender bill and yellow-orange feet. Adult breeding birds have black spots on the back and upperwings, and two curved broad, white stripes that run from each eye down each side of the neck



Image © Ormond Torr

### King shag

Length: 76 cm

Weight: 2.5 kg

Similar species: Pied shag

A large, thick necked, black and white marine shag with large pink feet, blue eye rings and yellow caruncles on each side of the bill. The upperwings are black with a white patch or stripe near the leading edge and sometimes a white patch on the black upper back.



Image © Duncan Watson