

The Wrybill

**Newsletter of the Canterbury Region,
Ornithological Society of New Zealand**

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June 2012

To members on email:

This newsletter is sent by post to members without an email address. If you are getting it by email but would prefer a paper copy, please ask Jan (contact details above). The newsletter will also be loaded on the OSNZ website www.osnz.org.nz

**What's on at OSNZ Canterbury:
June - December 2012**

Indoor Meetings

Evening Meetings take place at 7.30pm on the last Monday of the month at the Mahaanui Area DOC Office, 31 Nga Mahi Drive, off Blenheim Road, Sockburn. Plenty of parking is available.

MONDAY June 25: Mike Bell on The Chathams and the bird programmes going on there – a talk long postponed from the snow of last winter.

MONDAY July 30th: Scott Mowat's film on Kakapo with introduction by Ron Nilsson and possible update by Ron on Kokako in the Waitutu area of Southland.

MONDAY August 27th: Nick Ledgard, chair of BR-aid with a presentation on the formation, aims and progress of the BR-aid group.[Braided River Aid]

MONDAY Sept 24th: Colin Miskelly, Curator Terrestrial Vertebrates, Te Papa Museum – In the Footsepts of Edgar Stead. Canterbury-based Edgar Stead (1881-1949) was a pioneer NZ naturalist with the time and means to pursue his interests to the remotest corners of the country. In this talk, Colin will use a mixture of Stead's diaries and photographs and his own observations and images to describe changes in ecology over 80+ years for seven islands between Taranga (Hen Island) in the north and Taukihepa (Big South Cape Island) in the south. The talk will also cover some of Stead's lasting contributions to our knowledge of New Zealand birds.

MONDAY Oct 29th: Pot luck salads and BBQ at DoC office followed by Members night

MONDAY Nov 26th: Nick Allen with a presentation about his trip to the Sub-Antarctic Islands, Snares, Auckland and Campbell Islands.

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Field Meetings

More details will follow. Contact Jan at 322 7187

*TUESDAY 19th June – a leisurely two-hour walk around the Botanic Gardens with Bev Alexander. All welcome but primarily for beginners to get to know some of our local birds. Meet by the Information Centre (over footbridge from Armagh Street carpark) at 9.30 a.m. Phone Bev 03-313-7009, cellphone 027 318 4713 if in doubt about weather or other matters.

SATURDAY 21st July – Ashburton Lakes Census. Early start. Phone Jan for details.

SUNDAY 12th August – National Spoonbill Survey.

SATURDAY 8th September – Banks Peninsula Reserves survey.

LABOUR WEEKEND 19th - 22nd October – Possible weekend trip to South Canterbury and North Otago.

SUNDAY 18th November - City Council Wetland Reserve at Kaitorete Spit with Andrew Crossland and Phil Crutchley, City Council Rangers.

SAURDAY 24th or SUNDAY 25th November (Backup day if weather poor on Saturday) – Ashley River Census.

SATURDAY 1st December – Summer wader count and BBQ.

*Tuesday Walks

In the future Bev would like to accompany people on walks to different local venues on a two-monthly basis. Future visits will be to Travis Wetlands, Riccarton Bush and the Heathcote/Avon Estuary. These areas are home to a wide variety of birds. For further information please phone Bev 03 313 7009, cellphone 027 3184713.

NICK ALLEN **A Birder's Story**

Watching the birds in the back garden aged about five is my first memory of being interested in feathered creatures. I needed a chair to see out of the window and my guide as to what I was seeing was the animal section of my dad's AA Book of the Road – really a road atlas but with sections on wildlife and domestic

animal breeds. I never did see a Highland cattle beast in the garden, and probably the same could be said of some of the bird species I claimed. The house was on the edge of a huge private housing estate on the southern edge of the Sheffield conurbation (but actually just in Derbyshire) and the gardens were not really developed, lacking much cover for birds, but nonetheless a few species were present to keep me interested.

Nobody else in the family was really wildlife-minded, with my parents having more a passing interest in what they saw, and we didn't go out much into the countryside. My dad must have sensed my enduring enthusiasm for birds because after a few years he bought me the Observer's Guide to Birds – a pocket-sized book with artistic illustrations inside that were just passable to identify most bird species, even though many were printed black-and-white. I remember the Red Kite illustration making me

positively salivate with the prospect of seeing one, but it would probably be about 15 years before that happened.

Living on the edge of the countryside us local kids would play in the nearby fields quite a bit, no doubt to the mild annoyance of the farmer, though I never remember doing any damage. It was the seventies. Birds such as Skylarks were still within a five-minute walk of home, and the long grass of seemingly abandoned paddocks were alive with butterflies. These days Skylarks are mostly gone from that area of farmland and the abandoned paddocks are given to grazing hobbyist horses.

My interests in birds and nature stayed with me through my school years on and off, with side interests in trains (my dad's greatest love apart from Manchester United), stamps and coins. In my early teens I started watching a patch of scrub about 15-minutes walk from home, getting to know the difference in song between the difficult Blackcap/Garden Warbler pair, and learning how to patiently watch and wait for skulking species such as Lesser Whitethroat. One day a Merlin flashed through and other species such as Sedge Warbler stayed a few days on migration. On my last visit two years ago most of the cover had recently been torn out, no doubt for grazing – a shame as the land is fairly steep and won't support more than rough grazing for a few animals. At the end of my school years a biology field camp on the island of Great Cumbrae in Strathclyde was exciting for the Black Guillemots and roadside nesting Ringed Plovers. And I easily won a local biology class field quiz. I kind of regret not studying ecology at university, but at the time Margaret Thatcher was in power, there was a deep recession, and I studied something with better prospects of obtaining employment – Pharmacy.

The University of Aston in the centre of Birmingham was about as far away from the coast as you could get, and wasn't exactly the place most birders would go for avian excitement. However, just 10 minutes down the canal towpath were delights such as Black Redstart and Grey Wagtail, Chiffchaffs would pass through in spring, singing in the lollypop trees at the base of the high-rise halls of residence, and, at dusk in winter, huge

murmurations of starlings performing close-order pre-roost aerobatics were attacked by Sparrowhawks. I found a couple of nearby places to go birding, both about an hour away by Midland Red bus. I went to Kingsbury Water Park/Coton Ponds regularly in my three years in Birmingham, and Chasewater a bit less often (and only in winter). Kingsbury Water Park is a mosaic of abandoned gravel pits and scrub, Coton a settling/purifying complex of shallow lakes for the badly polluted River Tame, and Chasewater a huge, rather bleak reservoir. I extended my knowledge of species and their identification, especially by jizz, in these places due to the large number of species they attracted: Coton had Short-eared Owls and lots of waterfowl in winter – it stayed ice-free due to the river flowing through; Kingsbury had more waterfowl, passage waders, breeding Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers and heaps of scrub/woodland birds; Chasewater had a great gull roost at dusk where Iceland and Glaucous Gulls could be seen regularly – and I twitched the first Lesser Scaup for the UK there.

I bought my first pair of good binoculars and first scope whilst at University – a pair of Swift Audubon 8.5's and an Opticron Piccolo 20-60x60. By chance another birder was in the same year of the Pharmacy degree I was taking. Rob lived in Hull, and one week of a vacation in early autumn I spent at Spurn Point bird observatory, after being shown round by Rob. It was an interesting time spent watching a stream of birds passing overhead at The Narrows after dawn, and scanning through wader flocks on the Humber.

After obtaining my degree I had a year of training at Gainsborough, on the River Trent in Lincolnshire. Local birding was a bit ordinary, but on my day off I would often catch an early morning train to Skegness, then walk for an hour or so to Gibraltar Point – a migration watchpoint on the northern edge of The Wash. It was great to watch wheeling flocks of Knots and other waders going to roost, and a wide range of species could be seen in the sea buckthorn bushes in spring and autumn, including Wryneck and warblers. The beach had Snow Buntings and the odd Shore Lark in winter.

The next six or seven years I lived at home with

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my dad whilst working up to 50 hours a week, mostly as a locum. On Sundays I often went on coach/minibus trips with the Derbyshire Ornithological Society and Sheffield Bird Study Group, visiting exotic destinations such as North Norfolk, mid-Wales, Anglesey and The Cairngorms, being mentored by older and more experienced birdwatchers. I finally saw Red Kite, and plenty of other rare species such as Ruff and Montagu's Harrier, plus vagrants such as Pechora Pipit and Black-and-White Warbler. One long-lasting memory was of being in a small hide in the Great Forest of Caledon before dawn listening to bubbling Curlews and it finally getting light enough to illuminate a lek of Capercaillies, with their wheezing and cork-out-of-a-bottle-pop display. Being able to drive



Photo: Nick Allen
Capercaillie, Caledon Forest, Scotland

meant I could get regularly out on my own to other great sites, with North Norfolk being a favourite. More money led to an upgrade of optics to the Swarovski binoculars (then cheaper than their competitors), and Leica scope I still have, the amount of birding I was doing warranting the expense. In the mid 1990's I started doing field work for local bird club censuses (e.g. the Sheffield Magpie survey – in the former heart of the steel mills in Attercliffe/Brightside) and the Derbyshire breeding bird atlas.

I undertook a few overseas trips in these years, firstly a 'last family holiday' to Kenya, also Texas and Arizona, Nepal, and New Zealand (in 1994 and 1996). I had had the thought of leaving the UK for New Zealand since my teenage years, so the two trips were a type of reconnaissance, seeing what the country was like and where I might/might not live.

In May 1997 I emigrated to New Zealand,

quickly finding, via the library, Sheila Petch, by co-incidence another former Sheffielder, and the Ornithological Society. With an increase in my amount of leisure time and with the help of Sheila and other members I did quite a bit of birding, visited lots of different places, and saw some unusual birds. I found that, in comparison to the UK, it is easier to find unusual birds yourself here, though the variety is a lot less with no nearby continental land mass. I started doing regular counts of the birds at the Ashley Estuary (I lived at Waikuku Beach from August 1997 to March 2008), Lake Ellesmere and elsewhere. When the atlas came along I did a bit of work for that too, especially the 'boring' squares of the Canterbury Plains.

Ron Nilsson suggested I become RR in 1999, and I accepted, not quite knowing what to expect, but it was quite an enjoyable job, if challenging at times, only becoming more difficult towards the end when I had less free time, and I was grateful when Jan agreed to take on the role and do it better justice. I was able to make the acquaintance of lots of other birdwatchers through the country, a pleasurable experience. Tony Crocker suggested that I take over as Southern Bird editor in 2003, a job I have done since that time.

At some stage, around 2002-3, I started work on putting together a site guide for Canterbury, something that had originally been planned by Sheila Petch and Tony Crocker, and something that was long overdue for the largest province in New Zealand. My current busy-ness is delaying its final production, but it's nearly there. I've also travelled to the far corners of New Zealand working on a site map project for the whole of New Zealand – a range of maps suggesting places to go and basic information such as how to get there and what might be there when you do.

Everything birdwise is taking a bit more time these days as in September 2006 I met my wife, Hyeza, and in 2008 Olivia came along, but family life, I've found, is equally as rewarding as watching and studying birds. Perhaps Olivia will eventually come to enjoy birds – she pointed out and correctly identified a picture of a Saddleback last week...

Nick Allen

Effect of earthquakes on the penguin colonies in Harris Bay

The penguin colonies in Harris Bay have been closely monitored over the last 18 months to see how the Christchurch earthquakes have affected them. Overall, the effect on the penguin population appears to have been minimal with both the 2010 and 2011 breeding seasons being largely unaffected. Contrary to some media reports, no penguins are known to have been killed or injured in these colonies as a direct result of the earthquakes.

The first and largest earthquake on 4th September 2010 occurred just prior to the main laying period when at least 50% of the adult birds would have been ashore. Fortunately for the penguins it caused little damage in the Harris Bay area. The colonies were showered with fine debris from the bluffs and there were a few small rock falls. All the nest boxes in the Bay were checked straight after the earthquake and cleared of debris, and the penguins laid and incubated as if nothing had happened. The next big earthquakes occurred on 26th December 2010 when only a few chicks remained in the colonies, and on 22nd February 2011 when only the late moulters were ashore. These had much the same effect in the Harris Bay area as the one in September with the addition of a few more small rock falls.

The two large earthquakes on 13th June 2011 brought down rock falls from most of the coastal bluffs in the area including numerous localized falls in Harris Bay. As a result 23 of the 130 nest boxes in the Bay were buried under slabs of basalt and volcanic debris that had fallen from the bluffs. Fortunately there were no penguins ashore at the time, and their next breeding season was still three months away. All but 7 of the boxes were cleared before the start of the 2011 season and the rest are being replaced now.

In general the penguins appear to have been unfazed by the prolonged period of seismic activity. Those pairs that lost their established nest site under debris typically shifted to nearby nest boxes then back to their original one when it was cleared. A few pairs managed to access their usual nest boxes through piles of rocks,

and one pair nested in the smashed remains of their box anyway.

The predator trapping program on Godley Head has been maintained as well as the periodic restrictions on access would permit. It was not possible to check the traps in Harris Bay for much of 2011 because of the risk of further rock falls; this trap line is now re-established and being checked regularly. The Christchurch City Council ranger staff, who run the program, were however able to access the trap line adjacent to the Evans Pass to Godley Head road throughout. The reduced trapping effort resulted in fewer predators being caught in the area during 2011 than in previous years. Despite this, no penguins are known to have been preyed on in Harris Bay over this period.

Chris Challies

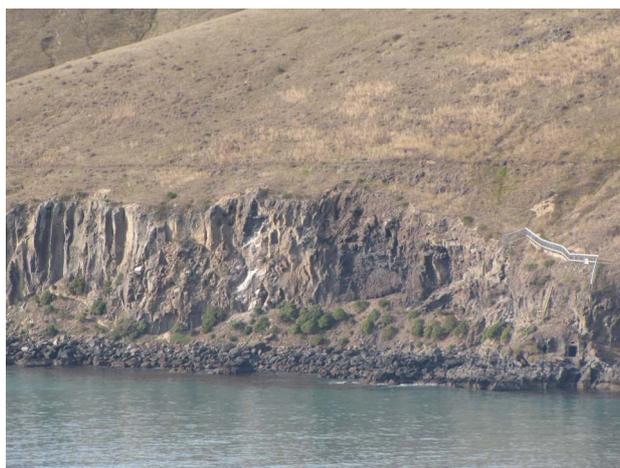


Photo: Chris Challies
Recent photo of part of main penguin colony, Harris Bay, largely unaffected by earthquakes, cf. heaps of rubble now common below more exposed bluffs nearby. Predator fence and ladder, right of photo, not damaged.

Recent Sightings

December: 21st, Banks Peninsula (between Motukarara and Ahuriri Road) – possible Rook, a sighting followed up by Andrew Crossland who had heard of a different corvid on a roof of a home in Mt Pleasant. 22nd, Peter Langlands, Upper Rangitata – a pair of White-winged Black Terns in full breeding plumage. Colin Hill and Steve Wratten, Yarrs to Clarks - 25 Wrybills, 15 Red-necked Stints, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 63 Banded Dotterels, 32 Red Knots, 6 Bar-tailed Godwits, ~ 300 Pied Stilts. 24th,

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Andrew Crossland, Beacon St Wetlands – Black-fronted Dotterel pair and recently fledged juvenile – a new resident species for Christchurch. Bev Alexander and Sheila Petch, Blenheim Sewage Works – 2 Glossy Ibis. 26th, Colin and Steve, Embankment-Yarrs – 2 Stint sp., 117 Wrybills, 3 Red-necked Stints, 3 Pacific Golden Plovers, 1 Grey Plover (unusual at Lake), 682 Pied Stilts, 1 Royal Spoonbill, 6 Bandies. Andrew, CCC Reserve, Kaitorete Spit – 200+ Godwits, 9 Pectoral Sandpipers in a group, a few Sharpies. 29th, Richard Hurt, Embankment Road – 30 Wrybills, 2 Gull-billed Terns, one in breeding plumage. 31st, Bev, Sheila and Jan, boat expedition to a maimai on Lake Ellesmere confirmed Royal Spoonbill breeding – found 4 eggs in one nest. Mouth of Selwyn, Selwyn Huts – 3 Little Terns.

January: 2nd, Steve and Colin, Yarr's Reserve - 2 gull-billed Terns, 40 Wrybills, 350 Stilts, 10 Red-necked Stints, 5 Bandies, 1 moulting Juvenile Sharpie. 5th, Andrew took Bev, Sheila and Jan to CCC Reserve, Kaitorete Spit, an "incredible ephemeral wetland" - 6 Pectoral Sandpipers, 14+ Sharpies, 95 Godwits, 22 Red Knots, 37 Wrybills, 7 SIPO, 6 Spoonbills and numerous Bandies, Stilts, Grey Teal etc. 6th, Colin and Steve, Greenpark – 3 Godwits, 63 Bandies; Clarks – 102 Stilts; Embankment – 41 Wrybills, 34 Bandies, 4 Red-necked Stints, 364 Stilts; Yarrs – 30 Bandies, 50 Stilts, 69 Wrybills, 8 Red-necked Stints, 7 Spoonbills, 2 Gull-billed Terns (ad), 1 Godwit. 10th, Chris Gaskin's trip to Arthur's Pass included Orange-fronted and Yellow-crowned Parakeets, Great-spotted Kiwi, Long-tailed Cuckoo and Kea in Hawden; Weka at Arthur's Pass (apparently now quite common there); Blue Duck and Long-tailed Cuckoo in Waimakariri. 15th, Grahame, Avon Estuary – >3000 SIPO, c45VOC, 850 Godwits, 5 Caspian Terns, 4 Spur-winged Plovers. 18th, Andrew, Ashley Estuary – 1 Eastern Curlew, 85 Godwits, 3 Turnstones, 4 Knots, 2 Pectoral Sandpipers. 19th, Peter Langlands, Rakaia Rivermouth – 10 Turnstones, 1 Curlew Sandpiper among large numbers of terns and gulls. 17th, Sheila, Bev and Jan, Yarrs – many Banded Dotterels, 170 Wrybills, 29 Red-necked Stints, 43 Godwits. Selwyn Huts – a number of Caspian Terns. 23th, Andrew, Southshore Spit – Great Crested Tern 400m offshore feeding amongst terns, 1 Arctic Skua, Hutton's Shearwaters, Spotted Shags and gulls. 24th, Sheila and Bev, Ashley

Estuary – 1 Black Stilt, 4 Knots, 3 Turnstones, 1 Siberian Tattler, 1200 White-fronted Terns and 1,000+ Spotted Shags. 24th, Andrew, Waipara Rivermouth – 7 Black-fronted Dotterels in groups 3, 2, 2. 26th, Andrew - Crested Grebes nesting successfully at Clearwater Golf Resort and Lake Roto Kohatu, both near Christchurch Airport, and at least one adult at shingle ponds north of Kaiapoi. At least 7 pairs of Yellow-eyed Penguins nesting at various bays on Banks Peninsular, most with large chicks, and lots of Hutton's Shearwater inshore, seen just beyond the surf at Waipara Rivermouth, South Brighton and Kaitorete Spit. At last site 11+ Arctic Skua were also seen. Kaitorete Lagoon - 1 Black Stilt [sub-adult] and 1 "H" node hybrid Stilt amongst several hundred Pied Stilts. Sumner Bay – 1 dark phase Arctic Skua. 26th, Peter Langlands, Waimakariri Rivermouth ~ 10 Arctic Skuas, 500 White-fronted Terns, 200 Hutton's Shearwaters in breakers just north of rivermouth. 26th, Colin, Yarrs – 4 Curlew Sandpipers. 28th, Colin and Steve, Yarrs – Embankment – 5 Wrybills, 92 Bandies, 2 Red-necked Stints, 7 Knots, 768 Stilts, 45 Godwits, 15 Spoonbills, 3 Cape Barren Geese, 3 Pied Oystercatchers. 29th, Grahame, Southshore – 8+Arctic Skuas, 1 Gull-billed Tern, a first sighting for Christchurch. 29th, Andrew, Waimakariri Rivermouth – 11 Arctic Skuas, 1 Pomarine Skua. This month was the start of the Botulism outbreak among the wildfowl and waterbirds at the Sewage Treatment Settling Ponds. By the time the outbreak subsided a few months later, over 6000 dead birds had been found.

February: 11th, Jan, Lake Ellesmere – 3 Gull-billed Terns doing aerobatics, 2 with definite black caps, 2 Sharpies, 1 Wrybill (banded, seen for past month). 14th, Jan, Ashley Estuary – 1 Asiatic Whimbrel, 1 Far Eastern Curlew. Grahame, Staveley St, Avonhead – 1 Shining Cuckoo. Peter Langlands, Hurunui Rivermouth - some Black-fronted Dotterels seen recently, 17th, Alex, Waharoa Saddle (975m), Arthur's Pass – Kea, Kaka, SI Robin, Tomtit, Fernbird, Falcon on subalpine tussock – 2 adults and 3 playful juveniles talon-grappling and swooping each other. 20th, Colin and Steve, Yarrs – Greenpark – 32 Wrybills, 106 juvenile Bandies, 23 Spoonbills, 20 Red-necked Stints, 1 sub-adult White-winged Black Tern, c.400 Stilts, 2 adult Gull-billed Terns, 1 Pied and 2 Variable

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Oystercatchers, 80 Paradise Shelducks, 5 Spur-winged Plovers. 29th, Grahame, Saltwater Creek Estuary – 1 Eastern Curlew, 2 Lesser Knots, 1 Arctic Skua, 1 White Heron, 19 Spoonbills (18 juvenile), 64 Godwits, 100's Bandies. Colin and Steve, Yarrs - Embankment – 46 Wrybills, 42 Bandies, 3 Spoonbills, 2 Red-necked Stints, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Godwits, 170 Stilts, 2 Gull-billed Terns (winter plumage) 180 Black-billed Gulls, 2 Mute Swans.

March: 6th, Jan, Sheila and Bev, Embankment-Yarrs – 69 Wrybills, 5 Spoonbills, 4 Curlew Sandpipers (2 breeding plumage) 29 Godwits (some obese and in beautiful breeding plumage), 2 Gull-billed Terns with black caps, 150+ Black-billed gulls, 2 Mute Swans, 4 SIPO, 5 White-faced Herons. 11th, Jan, Pleasant Point Yacht Club – 90 Spoonbills roosting (indicating birds may be starting to migrate northward). 12th, Colin and Steve, Embankment-Clarks – 20 Godwits, 49 Bandies, 43 Wrybills, 14 Stilts, 1 Hybrid Stilt, 2 Mute Swans. Andrew, Avon Heathcote – 95 Spoonbills (peak for flocks in this area April/May), 815 Godwits. 12th, Bev, Kaiapoi Ponds – 1 Crested Grebe (new site for this species) and 1 (possibly 2) Marsh Crakes. 15th,



Photo: Jill Hanna
Marsh Crake, Kaiapoi Ponds. Note long middle toe on branch.

Andrew – Motukarara Flats, 1 Gull-billed Tern (breeding plumage). Spoonbill colony nearly deserted (25 of 300 original birds left). About 50 nests seen at this site, 1st time a major colony has been found at Lake Ellesmere. 16th, Bev and Sheila, Selwyn Huts – 5 Little Terns. 19th, Jan, Lake Ellesmere – Spoonbill chicks from eggs reported on maimai in December did not survive. Willows at back of Garibaldi Island near Timberyards may have >100 Pied, Little and Black Cormorant nests. Colin and Steve,



Photo: Andrew Crossland
Spoonbill colony between Ataahua and Halswell Rivermouth. Lake Ellesmere's first major colony.

Embankment – 530 Black-billed Gulls, 80 White-faced Herons, 4 Curlew Sandpipers (1 in breeding plumage), 7 Godwits, 16 Bandies, 3 Spoonbills, 33 Stilts, 35 Wrybills. Clarks – 16 Bandies, 5 Spur-winged Plovers, 1090 +/- 5% Stilts, 25 Wrybills. 24th, Niall, Waimakariri Rivermouth – 760 Black-fronted Terns, including 60 juveniles. 26th, Colin and Steve, Embankment to Yarrs – 39 Wrybills, 49 Bandies, 8 Stilts, 6 Mute Swans, 10 Godwits, 4 in summer plumage. Clarks – 33 Wrybills, 12 Bandies, 15 Stilts. John Goodrich, Northwood, Chch – 2 White-faced Herons on bonnet of car displaying, tapping bonnet with beaks. John Knight, Avon river near Wainoni Bridge, 1 White Heron. 26th, Jill Hanna, Selwyn River, 4 Little Terns seen fishing. 27th, Grahame, Bexley Wetlands, 1 Glossy Ibis. 28th, Andrew, Travis Wetland, 1 Glossy Ibis (19th consecutive year this bird has been seen, and probably the same one seen on 27th at Bexley), 1 Black-fronted Dotterel; Kate Sheppard Lake – 17 Little Black Cormorants. He has confirmed these are breeding in the settling ponds; Lower Avon River – 1 White Heron. 28th, Bev, Cooper's Lagoon, 3 Arctic Skua, 2 juvenile Gannets; Davidson's Road near Embankment Road, 1 Cattle Egret.

April: 3rd Bev and Sheila, Kaiapoi ponds – male HARDHEAD or White-eyed Duck – another rare Aussie vagrant. A Rare Bird Report has been submitted. Grahame, Travis Wetland, 1 White Heron, 1 Brown Teal and Avon Heathcote Estuary – ~140 Spoonbills, 150 Godwits. Andrew, Spencerville Beach – juvenile Yellow-eyed Penguin seen emerging from surf, which Andrew pointed back in the right direction (banded Otago bird). Niall, tip of Kaitorete Spit

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Photo: Peter Langlands
Hardhead spotted by Bev and Sheila, Kaiapoi Ponds, 3rd April.

- 1 Buller's Shearwater, 1 Giant Petrel, 200 Gannets, 30+ Hutton's, 2 Pomarine Skua, 2 Arctic Skua, c.150 Bandies, 1 Spoonbill. 5th, Andrew, Lake Forsyth - 7 Gull-billed terns (after Niall had reported seeing one at end of March and 3 in early April. Niall's initial sighting was first record of G-bT at Lake Forsyth). 6th, Peter Langlands and 8th Phil, Kaiapoi ponds - Hardhead. 8th, Steve and Colin, Embankment - Yarrs 6 White Herons, 6 Bar-tailed Godwits, 105 White-faced Herons, 1 Cattle Egret, 7 Pied Oystercatchers, 7 Mute Swans, 10 Bandies, 1 Gull-billed Tern, 192 Stilts, 2 Caspian Terns, 26 Spur-winged Plovers, 44 Spoonbills. 15th, Sheila, Lake Forsyth - 4 Gull-billed Terns, one in breeding plumage, 21 Crested Grebes including 2 very young. Lake Ellesmere pull-in - 14 Crested Grebes, 48+ Spoonbills, one begging from parents. Steve and Colin, Greenpark Huts - 1 Sharpie, 19 Red-necked Stints (all in summer plumage); Greenpark - Yarrs 214 Stilts, 8 Mute Swans, 75 Bandies, 17 Wrybills, 26 Spoonbills. 17th, Jan - Song Thrush singing in garden at dawn, loudly since 2nd April. 18th, Udo Benecke, Greenpark Huts - 17 Red-necked Stints in varying plumage, 2 Sharpies (summer plumage), 6 Knots, 1 Curlew Sandpiper. 19th, Jan and Sheila, Greenpark - 8 Knots, 20 Red-necked Stints, over half in breeding plumage, 8 Wrybills, many Bandies. Kaituna Lagoon - c60 Spoonbills, where first view of Lake is obtained on way to Akaroa and where first confirmed nesting at Lake occurred this year. Peter Langlands, Lake Ellesmere - White-winged Black Tern, full breeding plumage. 24th, Steve and Colin, Greenpark - 2 Wrybills, 87 Bandies, 35 Stilts, 1 Gull-billed Tern adult; Jarvis - 16 Bandies; Embankment - 137 Stilts, 22 Bandies, 7 Mute Swans; Yarrs - 1 White Heron. Sheila and Bev, Lower Selwyn Huts - 6 Little Terns, 1 Bittern flying overhead. Cooper's Lagoon - 4

Arctic Skuas (2 light, 2 dark phase) hassling White-fronted Terns. 30th, Colin and Steve, Greenpark - 122 Bandies, 19 Stilts, 12 Spoonbills, 1 Wrybill; Jarvis - 3 Red-necked Stints (winter plumage), 6 Wrybills, 10 Bandies, 10 Mute Swans, 1 Gull-billed Tern (ad), 1 Caspian Tern, 5 White-winged Terns, (winter plumage) (1 only seen before at this site).



Photo: Nick Allen
Although not appreciated by all campers, Nick and his family enjoyed the close proximity of this young and very noisy falcon at Hanmer Springs, Easter.

May: 3rd, Bev, Sheila, Jan, Yarrs - 16 Mute Swans, 1 Crested Grebe, 3 non-breeding White-winged Black Terns "bathing, loafing on tiny vegetation patches in the water and flitting like butterflies down to the water surface feeding." 6th, Peter Langlands, Lower Avon - 18 Little Black Shags, 15 Black Shags. 16th, Andrew, Lower Styx River between Brooklands and Spencerville - 3 Bitterns flying together at dusk. 23rd, Jan and Bev, Lake Forsyth - at least 111 Crested Grebes already and 1 Gull-billed Tern; Birdlings Flat - 2 Gull-billed Terns. 28th Peter Howden, Stour River east of Lake Emily - 1 Bittern. Tina Troup, Pigeon Bay - Kereru flocks of 27+ during past week. Also, Brown Creepers seem to be on increase.

Garden Bird Survey

A reminder that this year's survey will take place during the week 30th June to 8th July. The public are asked to spend 1 hour during that period looking for birds in their own garden, a public park or school ground. For each species detected, you record the largest number of birds seen or heard at any one time.

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A Survey Form, which includes excellent images of the birds you are most likely to see is available in the last issue of Southern Bird, the May issue of Forest and Bird, the June edition of NZ Gardener and will also be published in The Press nearer the time. There is also an on-line Survey Form found at: www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/

Akaroa Field Trip

Eleven members took part in a weekend visit to Akaroa where we stayed in extreme comfort in the reasonably priced holiday home of Bev Alexander's brother (see advert below). In glorious autumn weather we explored the town, which resounds to the call of Bellbirds, and witnessed the success of the reintroduction of Tui to the area. In one particular street in the town we visited two homes where Tui regularly feed in trees and at feeders and saw at least 10 different birds. Only one was banded, indicating the others were the offspring of those released in Hinewai a few years ago.

Birds seen on an afternoon visit to the lower region of Hinewai Reserve and a walk down to Otanerito Bay included Bellbird, Brown Creeper, Tomtit, Fantail, Warbler and Silvereye. Four Tui were found in a small grove of walnut and gum trees and a lone Giant Petrel was seen sheltering in the bay.



Photo: Elizabeth Burt
Fantail - perfectly captured "mid-flick"

Sunday's 4-hour pelagic trip was a day to remember. Once outside the harbour the big birds appeared in graceful majesty. ~ 20 Southern Royal Albatross, 1 Wandering, 30-40 White-Capped, and ~6 Bullers Albatross plus 3 Northern Giant Petrels, together with 10-12 Cape Petrels, 1 Bullers, 150-200 Sooty and 20-

30 Huttons/Fluttering Shearwaters and 6+ Little Penguins. Large flocks of Spotted Shags and White-fronted Terns sped purposefully up and down the harbour and a delightful "David Attenborough" moment occurred when a pod of Hector's Dolphins corralled a school of fish, above which sat a raft of opportunistic Sooty Shearwaters.



Photos: Elizabeth Burt
Buller's Albatross (Left) and Southern Royal Albatross, off Akaroa Heads.

Our tour was with Tony Muir of Coast up Close (www.coastupclose.co.nz) who specialises in small group tours and charters. Albatrosses and other pelagic species can be seen surprisingly close to land near the heads of Akaroa Harbour and views of Hector's Dolphin and the white-flipped form of Little Pengu are commonplace.

Ann Sherlock and Nick Allen

HOUSE TO RENT AKAROA

Comfortably sleeps 13.
Well equipped kitchen with large fridge, cooker, microwave.
3 Bathrooms.
Garden area and Deck with BBQ.
Safe for children.
Easy walking distance from shops, harbour and local walks.

Further details:
Contact Alan Phone: 03 324 2782

Droppings from the Regional Rep

At the Conference, which is going to be called the 'NZ Bird Conference' in future, we RRs were given our usernames to access the new members' database. I can now see that Canterbury has 113 paid-up members and 29 who haven't paid their sub for 2012. If you get an email from me with a renewal form and subscription prices in it, you are one of those. Clearly our membership has dropped a bit since last year so please have a think about renewing yours.

The weekend in Tauranga was very busy with talks, workshops and fieldtrips. Plus the usual formal and informal dinners, an AGM and lots of catching up with other members. Only 6 Canterbury members went, 3 of them giving talks or receiving awards. Three of us were ordinary participants.

Our most illustrious attendant received the highest OSNZ award, a fellowship. Paul Sagar has been a member since 1966 and packed so much work into the last 46 years, despite still looking like a spring chicken, that he might have been given this twice over. He had no idea that he had been inveigled along and his reaction was 'Oh*&*^*' when his name was read out.

Three hours of talks were on the Rena disaster and were most informative. Others were on seabirds, waders, moreporks, Ebird, shags and windfarms. Some of this should be appearing on the OSNZ website soon. I went on the mist-netting workshop in a kiwifruit orchard, but other workshops were on wader identification, organizing a wader count, and putting data into Ebird.

I let a sparrow escape yet again!

Jan Walker

Photo: GrahameNZ
Royal Spoonbills, Avon-Heathcote Estuary, March 2012

Members Matters

The Canterbury Branch of the Society was sorry to hear of the death of two of its members and wishes to express its condolences to relatives of Chris Pryor and Lawrence S. Rickard.

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Sheet1

ASHBURTON LAKES MID-WINTER BIRD COUNT

Date 16 July	Heron	Emily	E Maori	W Maori	Trinity	Denny	Emma	Roundabout	Spider/Donn	Nursery	Camp	Clearwater	Lambies	Barossa paddocks	Totals
%Ice	1%	98%	10%	100%	40%	49%	70%	80%	No count	100%	0%	20%	100%		
Crested grebe	12										1	2			15
Black shag	4						5								9
Little shag	21					1	59				15	10			106
White-faced heron	1														1
Bittern															0
White heron											1				1
Black swan	177	4	8		6	14	52	31			5	7			304
Canada goose	125		260		1	2	311	2				156			857
Paradise shelduck	98	2			20	9	5	4							138
Mallard	382	5	29			13	95	11							535
Grey duck	5						65	3							73
NZ shoveler	25						9	20							54
Duck spp												2			2
NZ scaup	1357		23			2	335				113	560			2390
Grey teal	68														68
Pukeko			8												8
Coot	289														289
Pied oystercatcher															0
Pied stilt															0
Hybrid/black stilt															0
Spur-winger plover															0
Banded dotterel															0
Black-fronted tern	3														3
White-fronted tern															0
Black-billed gull															0
Back-backed gull	18						18								36
NZ Falcon	2														2
Harrier	2		1								1				4
Kingfisher															0
Swallow											2				2
NZ pipit															0
Totals	2589	11	329	0	27	41	954	71	0	0	138	737	0	0	4897

Ashley River Bird Survey, 27 November 2011

Species	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Average	Median
Black Shag	18	3		8	7	2	2	10	9	6	2	5	7	6
Little Shag	3	6		4	7	6	2	4	0	17	6	13	6	6
SI Pied Oystercatcher	25	22		22	37	22	5	26	27	32	20	35	25	25
Variable Oystercatcher					2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pied Stilt	229	82		138	140	137	68	164	131	196	233	194	156	140
Black Stilt				2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
Banded Dotterel	199	130		169	213	245	84	237	198	233	260	250	202	213
Wrybill	17	7		16	9	7	5	9	8	13	18	15	11	9
Spur-winged Plover	18	nc		13	27	149	37	116	11	39	15	89	51	32
Black-backed Gull	26	nc		10	27	3	5	12	10	19	19	2	13	11
Black-billed Gull	314	3		0	10	1	213	13	16	2	41	425	94	13
Black-fronted Tern	74	44		102	28	26	180	89	81	124	192	190	103	89
White-fronted tern	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	77	8	0
Caspian Tern	0	0		4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

nc = not counted (2002 not counted because of high river level)

Counts for all species except black shag and black-backed gull were above average. Of particular note were a large well-established colony of c. 400 black-billed gulls, two small established colonies of white-fronted terns (in association with the black-billed gulls), and four small developing colonies of black-fronted terns. This is the first time we are aware of white-fronted terns breeding so far up river. Last year, for the first time, we counted eight white-fronted terns flying up the river but not settling. The banded pair of wrybill at the Railway site (male B/W B/W and female W/O G/O) was not seen so the total number of wrybill on the river is at least 17 (assuming no double-counting).

In addition to the above, we counted 9 Canada goose, 65 mallard duck, 30 paradise shelduck (plus 3 chicks), 2 grey teal, and 26 white-faced heron.

The weather was sunny and mild with a very light north-easterly wind. The river level was about 0.65 m and flow about 10 cumecs at Ashley Gorge (a tad too high and fast for comfortable crossing lower down). The survey was originally planned for 19 November but the river then definitely was too high and fast (13 cumecs), and so the survey was postponed until 26 November but again the river was too high and fast (11 cumecs).

The survey was undertaken by 16 volunteers from the Ornithological Society, Forest & Bird, Environment Canterbury, and Ashley/Rakahuri Rivercare Group (Bev Alexander, Udo Benecke, Rob Evans, Michael Hamblett, Keith Harrison, Nick Ledgard, Dianne Parker, Andrew Macbeth, Chris Martin, Kevin Rigalsford, Toni Rigalsford, Eric Spurr, Zuni Steer, Geoff Swailes, Kath Varcoe, Jan Walker).

Compiled by Eric Spurr, 27 November 2011

CANTERBURY WADER COUNT FEB 2012																								
Species	Ashley/Swater Crk Est	Brooklands Lagoon	Avon-Heathcote Estuary	Lyttelton Harbour	Akaroa Harbour	Lake Forsyth	Tip of Kaiorete Spit	Crescent Island	Hidden Bay	CCC Reserve	Aggie Price's	Kaituna Lagoon	Araahua	Alaahua - Moulukara Flats	Halswell RM	Halswell RM-Greenpark Hills	Greenpark Hills - Jarvis Rd	Jarvis Embankment	Embankment Rd	L/I Pools	Harts Creek	Coopers Lagoon	Washdyke Lagoon	Ki-Wairono
Counters/NC	JW/BA	AC	AC	AC	AC	AC	PC	PC	AC/KT/PC	AC/KT/PC	AC/KT	AC/KT	AC/KT	AC/KT	AC/KT	JW/NA	BA/JW/NA	BA/JW	Gba/CH/BA/SP/Gbe	JW/BA	JW/BA	JW/BA	JW/BA	
Notes																								16&17 Feb
Date counted	14-Feb	21-Feb	20-Feb	22-Feb	27-Feb	15-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	12-Feb	11-Feb	11-Feb	11-Feb	11-Feb	11-Feb	10-Feb	10-Feb	17-Feb	16-Feb
Aus Crested Grebe						46						4				1						5		
Mute Swan													3									11	42	
White Heron		1										1	1						1					
Royal Spoonbill			67							1	2													10
Pied Oystercatcher	145	271	4562	559	234								12	292	20	1	7		2	59			5	51
Variable Oystercatcher	11	12	66	7	22	4																	3	
Hybrid Oystercatcher	16	5																						
Pied Stilt	29	28	258	125	26	389	151	154	18	11	369	220	225	178	64	91	169	171	342	96		60	499	
Black Stilt	1																							
Hybrid Stilt	1																		1					4
Banded Dotterel	31	6	34			28	183	10	5	226	3			77			309	61	93			12	328	
Wrybill							29							2			1	4	10	111				
Spur-winged Plover			66	8	26	42	21	8		26		2									4		70	124
Turnstone	1																							
Lesser Knot	4																							
Curlew Sandpiper							1																	
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper							2												2					
Pectoral Sandpiper							2																	
Red-necked Stint																				15				
Eastern Curlew	1																							
Whimbrel	1																							
Bar-tailed Godwit	110	113	1982	322	1		1					91											5	
Gull-billed Tern			1														1	2						
Caspian Tern	7	8	62	3	3		4	54			2	1		1				2				1	1	3
Site totals	358	444	7098	1024	312	509	394	226	24	265	374	319	241	550	84	94	492	245	566	155	20	43	156	1019
Wader site totals	351	435	6968	1021	309	463	390	172	23	263	372	313	225	257	64	92	482	243	563	96	4	0	155	1006
# wader species at site	12	6	6	5	5	4	8	3	2	3	2	3	1	3	1	2	3	4	3	1	1	0	6	5
Counters																								
Nick Allen = NA																								
Colin Hill = CH																								
Andrew Crossland = AC																								
Jan Walker = JW																								
Bev Alexander = BA																								
Sheila Petch = SP																								
Grahame Bell = Gbe																								
Grant Bawden = Gba																								
John Allan = JA																								
Dianne Parker DP																								
Rob Evans = RE																								
Udo Benicke = UB																								
Maria Stoker-Farrell = MS																								
Kieren Tibble = KT																								
Phil Crutchley = PC																								