

TARA

Newsletter of Auckland Region OSNZ

May 2009



A view of Atiu Creek Regional Park on the Okahukura Peninsula, looking down Hargreaves Basin and west towards the Kaipara Harbour. (Photo:Chirs Thompson)

Easter bird counts at Atiu Creek

Auckland OSNZ's first group trip to Atiu Creek Regional Park at Easter aimed to survey the area and identify which bird species were present.

Atiu Creek Farm was gifted to the people of New Zealand by Pierre and Jackie Chatelant in October 2005 and the park was officially opened in 2008.

The 843 hectare property was entrusted to the Auckland Regional Council (ARC), so that future generations could enjoy unspoilt access to this part of the Kaipara Harbour forever.

Atiu Creek Farm is north-west of Auckland, about 20 kilometres west of Wellsford on the Okahukura Peninsula, beside an inlet of the Kaipara Harbour.

From Auckland, the park is 113km or a 90 minute drive. Overnight accommodation is available for volunteers, and a bach may be hired.

The park is still a working farm, mainly carrying sheep, and some dairy, with a resident ranger.

There is a wide range of habitats, including open water, intertidal mudflats, salt marsh, mangrove forests and wetlands, dams, scrubland, patches of native bush and open country.

The weather for Easter weekend was favourable - sunny or partially cloudy and light breezes, with temperatures reaching about 16 degrees.

High tides were around the middle of the day. There was a full moon on Friday.

Many of the expected species were not seen this time, for example banded rail, spotless crane, fernbird and bittern.

This does not mean they are not present – influencing factors include the time of year (autumn), tide times and weather.

Calling tapes were played but spring-time is more likely to produce a response. The most commonly seen species included Paradise shelduck, Yellowhammer, Goldfinches and Rosellas. A flock of 16 kereru was also seen.

In 1986, thirty-three Northland brown kiwi were released into the area. There are reports of kiwi being heard up until the mid 2000s, so there is a chance

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Rifleman transfer

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Ruru diet study

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Busy OSNZ Conference at Orewa

Later this month is the OSNZ Conference and AGM, starting at Centrestage Theatre in Orewa on Saturday 30th May.

There are more than 100 registrations for the conference weekend, and it would be great to see as many Auckland members as possible to welcome

TARA - Newsletter of the Auckland Region of OSNZ

Auckland Branch OSNZ meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm in the School of Natural Sciences, in the grounds of Unitec on Carrington Road in Point Chevalier. Enter via Gate 1 or 3 and follow signs to building 23. There is ample free parking. (Map available from Suzi). Admission by donation.

VISITORS AND FRIENDS ALWAYS WELCOME

Regional Representative

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Census and Surveys

All members are invited to take part in the OSNZ Auckland branch census and surveys that take place during the year. There are always experienced regulars on these trips and they welcome new members to get involved in identifying and recording the birds. For wader and shorebird counts, the group usually meets about two hours before high tide. Contact the organiser (whose name and phone number appears alongside the survey or census date) to find out what time and where to meet. (See Activities Programme).

visitors there on Saturday morning. There will be a very short time that morning to arrange tables, put up posters and hand out registration packs, before the Scientific Day starts, so your assistance would be much appreciated.

Seats are still available for the Saturday and Sunday evening dinners. If you have already registered and would now like to book the dinners, you can contact Mel Galbraith on 480-1958 or email him at melgar62@slingshot.co.nz Outside caterers are providing the Scientific Day lunch and morning/afternoon teas. The programme is as follows:

Friday 29th May, 3 - 6pm

Registrations at Waves Motel, cnr Hibiscus Coast Highway/Kohu St, Orewa. (Regional Reps and Council meetings take place here).

Saturday 30th May 7.30am

Centrestage doors open with registration from 8am. The Scientific Day runs from 9am to 5pm. From 5.30pm is Happy Hour and an informal dinner at Orewa Rotary House, Silverdale. The AGM starts after dinner at 8.30pm.

Sunday 31st May 9am

Field trips leave from Waves Motel to Tiritiri Matangi, Tawharanui, and other car-trips. We gather again at 6.30pm for the Conference Dinner at Orewa Rotary House. Our special after-dinner speaker is author Steve Braunias.

Monday 1st June From 9am, field trips leave from Waves Motel, or as required.

Principal Actors for the weekend are;

Registrations: Chris Thompson, Paul Asquith
Centre Stage Scientific Day: Sharon Kast, Anne Rimmer, Caroline Parker, Kevin Parker

Scientific Day - speakers: Kevin Parker

Scientific Day - posters: Sharon Kast

Sunday field trip - Tiri: Simon & Morag Fordham

Sunday field trip - Tawharanui: Sharon Kast

Car field trips, Sunday & Monday: Stuart Chambers and It'll be alright on the night! - Mel Galbraith
Supporting Cast:

Tiri Guides, front-of-house, airport collection, drivers.

Thanks to everyone for their efforts so far, and we look forward to a successful and enjoyable weekend. **Mel Galbraith, RR, Auckland.**

There is still time to register for the 2009 OSNZ AGM and Conference held at Orewa from Saturday 30th May to Monday 1st June. Come and listen to the Scientific Day presentations on the Saturday. See information above.

Rifleman transfer success for Tiri



Some of the Rifleman released on Tiri are already reported to be seen in pairs within small established territories. (Photo: Simon Fordham).

New Zealand's smallest bird now has a home on Tiritiri Matangi island, after an operation that took 12 days to complete.

A total of 31 riflemen were successfully caught on Hauturu / Little Barrier Island last week by a team of enthusiastic volunteers, with the birds being flown in batches across the Hauraki Gulf by helicopter.

This project has been a long time in the planning and is a joint initiative between the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi (SoTM) and the University of Auckland, with much assistance and encouragement from the Department of Conservation. SoTM spokesperson, Simon Fordham, is ecstatic at the result.

"This has exceeded our expectations, especially as it took five days to catch our first bird. A lot of effort, by many people, will now give visitors to Tiritiri Matangi Island the opportunity to see New Zealand's smallest bird in the Auckland region."

This is the twelfth species of native bird to be introduced to Tiritiri Matangi Island and is another step in the restoration of the island's ecology.

The survival of riflemen during a transfer is dependent on minimizing the time between capture and release. For this reason, they were transferred daily, by helicopter, for a mid-to-late afternoon release. Consequently, this was not a public release, but it is hoped to celebrate with a "Welcome to the Riflemen" event in the near future.

This is the third site to which riflemen have been translocated. The first transfer, in 2003, was from Codfish Island to Ulva Island, an Open Scientific Reserve in Paterson Inlet, Stewart Island. In 2008, a number of birds were transferred within Hawkes Bay, from Boundary Stream to Cape Kidnappers.

As there is a lack of suitable nesting cavities on Tiritiri Matangi, nesting boxes have been placed near the release site in anticipation for the next breeding season. These will be useful in monitoring the ongoing success of the species.

At only 8cm the Rifleman is described as New Zealand's smallest bird, although the Grey Warbler is

about the same weight, but with a longer tail. The male is a vivid green, hence the name Rifleman, whilst the slightly larger female is brown. They are predominantly insectivorous and can often be seen acting like tree-creepers, i.e. ascending the trunks of larger trees, searching for food along the way.

Once widespread, they are now described as locally common from the Waikato / Coromandel to the bottom of the South Island. They are common on Little Barrier Island and also present on Great Barrier Island. As recently as 20 years ago, a remnant population was discovered in a kauri forest at Warawara, north of the Hokianga Harbour. In recent years, they appear to have become extinct on Stewart Island although a healthy population does exist on nearby Codfish Island.

The common call is a sharp, repetitive squeak, at frequencies around the upper limit of human hearing. They are not particularly loud and usually beyond the audible range for anyone with even the slightest hearing impairment.

Riflemen are part of New Zealand's most ancient lineage of birds. The wrens were amongst the first birds to arrive in New Zealand and so the riflemen are particularly unique here.

Riflemen are not endangered but they are threatened due to the fragmentation of our forests. They are poor dispersers across water and open habitats so, once lost from a block of bush, they may well be unable to recolonise without human assistance. Also, due to very small body size, populations may crash after very cold winters etc and predators can restrict their ability to recover.

Riflemen nest in holes in trees, so their nests in the wild may be more prone to predation from the likes of rats and mice. They may not be as vulnerable to predation as some species as, unlike Saddleback for example, they spend very little time on the ground and their nesting holes are often too small for predators to enter. **Simon Fordham (SoTM) and Liz Maire (DOC).**



Auckland ecologist, Mel Galbraith checks for wetland birds at Atiu Creek Regional Park during the Easter trip. (Photo: Chris Thompson)

Easter bird counts at Atiu Creek

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that a few kiwi might persist in the park. None were heard on this trip.

Everyone had a very enjoyable weekend exploring the large park. The accommodation was pleasant, with a large lounge, kitchen, two twin rooms, a single room, and six bunks.

Overnighters were: Michael Taylor, Kathy Barrow, Geoff Arnold, Julie Arnold, Chris Thompson, Graham Saunders, John Collin, Roy Collin (age 11), Bryce Collin (age 8). Day visitors included Ken Bond, Gillian Eller, Mel Galbraith, Anne Rimmer, Brian and Ruth. Our thanks to Tim Lovegrove for organising the trip and the accommodation.

Further information on Atiu Creek Farm Park, volunteering, and booking the accommodation can be found in the ARC leaflet, or visit www.arc.govt.nz.

Species list from the Easter weekend at Atiu Creek Regional Park: Dabchick, Black Shag, Pied Shag, Little Shag, White-faced heron, Black swan, Paradise shelduck, Mallard, Grey duck, Grey teal, Scaup, Australasian harrier, Ring-necked pheasant, Feral turkey,

Banded rail? (footprint [GS]), Spotless crane? (possible [AR]), Pukeko, Pied oystercatcher, Pied stilt, Spur-winged plover, Black-backed gull, Caspian tern, White-fronted tern, Kereru (flock of 16 [GA]), Eastern rosella, Morepork, Kingfisher, Skylark, Welcome swallow, Pipit, Blackbird, Song thrush, Grey warbler, Fantail, Silvereye, Tui, Yellowhammer, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, House sparrow, Starling, Myna, Magpie.

Report by Chris Thompson.

Bird's Eye View

Bird photography exhibition and photographs for sale only on Saturday 30th May.

View at upstairs mezzanine, Centrestage Theatre, Orewa, during OSNZ Scientific Day

Young bird-watchers enjoy Easter trip

Trip Report from Roy Collin, (11 years).

On Good Friday Dad, Bryce and I went to Atiu Creek Regional Park with the OSNZ for two nights.

The first day we went looking around and found that there were a lot of bird species but not many of each species.

I think there were 43 species on the trip altogether. I only saw 37 of them, which were, Fantail, Magpie, House Sparrow, Paradise Shelduck, Harrier Hawk, Starling, Pukeko (not in great numbers), Pheasant, Tui, Turkey, Spur-Winged Plover, Skylark, Black Swan, Kingfisher, Mallard, Scaup, Welcome Swallow, Grey Duck, Dabchick, Grey Teal, Pied Shag, White-Faced Heron, White-Fronted Tern, Pied Oystercatcher, Pied Stilt, Black Shag, Little Shag, Caspian Tern, Black-backed Gull, Silver Eye, Eastern Rosella, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Spotless Crake, and NZ Wood pigeon.

There were a lot of habitats, shoreline, farmland, pine forest, native bush, wetland, and a reservoir.

Atiu Creek Regional Park is on the Kaipara Harbour and off State Highway 16. To get around I would take a bike because it is a large place.

Thank you to everyone who helped me at Atiu Creek Regional Park.

Trip Report from Bryce Collin, (9 years)

On Good Friday 11 people, including me, my brother and my father, went to Atiu Creek Regional Park with the OSNZ.

There was a lot of space which I enjoyed. I thought there was too much gorse.

There were extremely clear pathways, too many rabbits, lots of ponds and a reservoir.

There was a good variety of bird species and great sign posting. It was historical and educational.

There was also a variety of coastal, wetland and bush walks. I enjoyed walking, listening for Kiwi (we didn't hear any) and the friendly atmosphere.



Young Auckland OSNZ members, Roy and Bryce Collin, enjoyed the trip to Atiu Creek Regional Park at Easter. (Photo: John Collin).

New wetland reserve for Tupare

Tupare wetland on South Head has been a favourite destination for keen bird watchers for decades and now it has reserve protection.

The NZ Native Forests Restoration Trust recently purchased a property adjacent to the wetland that includes most of the lake and provides excellent viewing of the wetland and coastal birds that inhabit the area.

The opening of the new reserve, named the Marie Neverman Reserve, was held in March and attended by about 200 people - many of them involved with conservation and environmental protection in the Auckland region.

The reserve was formally opened by NZNFRT patron, Sir Paul Reeves with Trustees Bruce Davis, Geoff Davidson and Michael Taylor.

Many of the guests then took the opportunity to walk the reserve boundaries and view the wetland.

Birds seen on the day included a rare visitor, a Chestnut-breasted Shelduck spotted by Chris Bindon. (A pair of these Shelducks were later seen at the reserve for a few weeks). Other waterfowl included Grey Teal, Scaup, Dabchicks, Australasian Little Grebes, Little Shags, Black Swans, Australasian Shovelers, Mallards, and Grey Ducks.

There were also Fantails, Grey Warblers and Welcome Swallows seen around the wetland.

The Trust is now fund-raising to buy the block of land that lies between Tupare and the coastline - about 106ha.

This would provide a reserve from the wetland to the coast where the shellbanks provide excellent habitat for waders.



Above: Opening the Marie Neverman Wetland Reserve for the NZ Native Forest Restoration Trust was Sir Paul Reeves (left) with Trust chairman, Bruce Davis. Below: Trustee Geoff Davidson tells the gathering about botanical highlights in the new reserve including a species of native mistletoe. (Photos: Suzi Phillips).



Ruru diet study reveals taste for weta and beetles

Ruru or Morepork on Ponui Island feed mostly on weta and beetles, according to recent research by Massey University Masters student, Kirsty Denny.

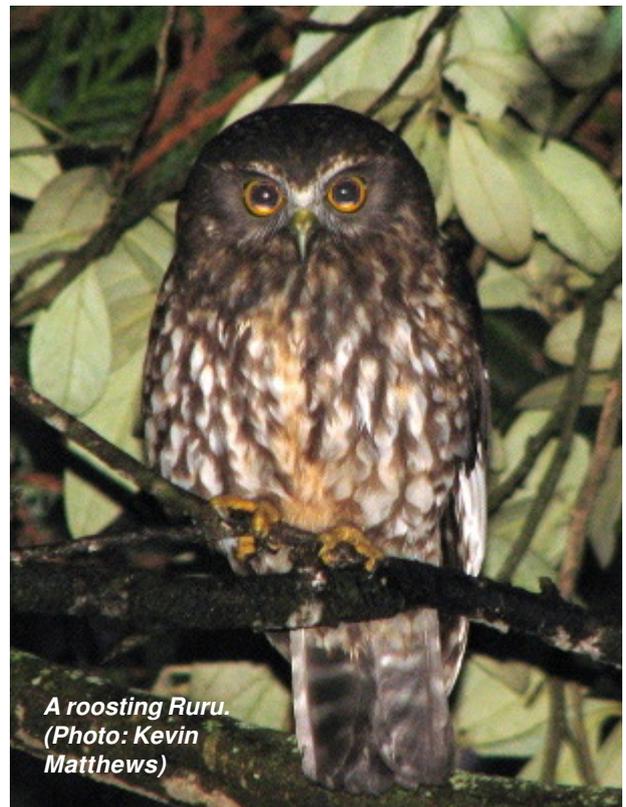
At a recent Auckland region monthly branch meeting, Kirsty presented her research from a study of Ruru at Ponui Island in the Hauraki Gulf. The main focus of her study was on Ruru diet related to the seasonal abundance of prey, and she also looked at roost site preferences and breeding success.

Kirsty described the Ruru as a generalist predator, feeding on a wide variety of invertebrate and vertebrate prey. Her study area was a 90ha bush patch on Ponui Island where there are no rabbits, possums, nor mustelid pests, but it does have rats, cats, and mice, and a very high density population of North Island Brown Kiwi - estimated at 500+.

Kirsty collected and analysed the Ruru's regurgitated pellets to get information on diet and had various ways to monitor prey abundance, from pitfall traps and interceptor traps for invertebrates, to live trapping of mice, and five minute bird counts. There was a separate mark/recapture study on rats on the island which gave her information on rat density during her study.

She found that weta were 45 percent and beetles (such as huhu, scarag, long-horn) were 33 per cent of the Ruru diet with smaller amounts of spiders (10 percent), cicadas (6 percent) and crickets (3 percent). Moths were present in 70 percent of the samples, (but difficult to quantify due to soft parts). There were even smaller amounts of earwigs, cockroaches, centipedes and millipedes in the Ruru pellets.

Vertebrates (such as rats, birds and mice) were only 2 percent of the prey items in the pellets, but a much larger proportion of the biomass at 39 percent and this



*A roosting Ruru.
(Photo: Kevin Matthews)*

included five birds, not identified, (but Silvereye and Grey Warbler were the most numerous small birds on the island).

Weta and beetle were taken all year, cicada and crickets in the summer months, and vertebrates peaked in April, August and November with most taken in April - again correlating with abundance after the summer breeding cycle.

Kirsty said it was possible that the Ruru's generalised diet provided a buffer against food shortages as they were less likely to suffer from starvation when they could respond to shortages by prey switching. It was also thought that the high rat density on Ponui (8.4/ha summer to 16.4/ha in May), would affect the breeding success for the Ruru. From her study of Ruru roosting sites, Kirsty concluded that good overhead cover was one of the selection factors for Ruru roost sites and they also favoured silver fern and tree coprosma as roost trees. **(Report by Suzi Phillips).**

Recent Auckland Bird Sightings

An opportunity to survey the property of Alan Gibbs beside the Kaipara Harbour by Judy Bendall and Chris Bindon recently, revealed a large number of waders in the foreshore lagoon there. These included 1500-2000 SIPO, 170 Pied Stilts, 23 White-faced Herons, and 6 Cattle Egrets as well as 14 Cape Barren Geese.

The annual Kaipara Dune Lakes Dabchick Census went ahead on April 25th and is being compiled by Judy Bendall. She says there were grebes at Lake Kereta and Tupare Wetland, but the count was down on a lot of the dune lakes this year.

The Hudsonian Godwit is reported to be still in the Mangere area and nine Black Fronted Dotterels were counted in the canal. An experienced overseas birder also reported seeing an Asiatic Black-tail Godwit. A count of the Spoonbills at the Ambury Park roost totalled 278 - on the shell island to the left of the hide.

Contributions welcomed for the next TARA - please email to suzi@dialogue.co.nz

Old TARA provide excellent record of Auckland's birding past

During her lengthy term as Auckland Regional Representative, (from 1969 to 1982), Sylvia Reed established a bulletin to record the ornithological activities of the region and its members.

The name "Tara" was chosen since the White-fronted Tern is an attractive species common around Auckland's coasts and beaches.

Our artist member Geoff Arnold made a sketch for the first cover and provided two later designs.

The editorial reigns of Doug Booth, Robin Child, Betty Searle, Geoff and Julie Arnold and Michael Turner and Tane Redwood covered the 73 quarterly issues from June 1976.

Production began in the bygone days of typed stencils and cyclostyled pages and ceased in June 1994 just as word-processing came on the scene, which should have simplified matters. During this period the format of Tara changed from A5 to A4 and back to A5 by photo-reduction. A typical size was 16 pages.

Staple items were reports of the region's monthly meeting and the results of beach patrols and other regular activities.

Surveys, field trips and longer expeditions were written up and members were encouraged to submit their observations or to record individual projects, as well as accounts of their travels further afield.

Tara attempted to stimulate ornithological studies by selecting a 'Bird of the Year' and gathering material about this species. Eastern Rosella and Black-backed Gull were two species chosen before this venture lapsed.



Geoff Arnold's cover designs for Tara (Photo: Michael Taylor).

Perhaps inspired by the example of Dick Sibson, some writers ventured into the realms of history and literature (even poetry) with ornithological connections.

Altogether Tara had 106 contributors during its 18 year existence. The bulletins provide an extraordinary record of Auckland Region's past activities.

Besides an archival collection, both the Hocken Library and Auckland Museum have full sets of Tara. While working as a Museum Volunteer, Michael Taylor has compiled contents' lists and an index which are available on request. **Michael Taylor.**

***Please send your Kaka sightings in the Auckland region to
kakawatchnz@gmail.com***

TARA - Auckland OSNZ

