

TARA

Newsletter of Auckland Region OSNZ

September 2007

E7 tracked on incredible journey

The incredible journey of Bar-tailed Godwit, E7, is setting new records this month. After six months she is on target for a world trip of about 29,000 km !

This will be the first, satellite tracked record of a godwit flying from New Zealand to the breeding grounds in Alaska, and then back across the Pacific to New Zealand. This female godwit left the Firth of Thames on March 17 and flew non-stop to Yalu Jiang on the coast of China's Yellow Sea. This was a journey of 10,219 kilometres, flown in just seven and a half days. E7 stopped there for 38 days to refuel on the extensive mudflats on this huge tidal bay. On May 1st, she left Yalu Jiang for Alaska and flew another 6460 kilometres in just five days, before touch down on the Alaska Peninsula. After a few days, she headed north again and flew to the breeding grounds at Manokinak on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta - a total journey of 17,460 km ! E7 appears to have nested, as she was there for 63 days before flying south 155km on July 18, to Cape Avinoff on the Delta, where she fed for a fortnight.

At the September meeting of Auckland OSNZ, wader expert Adrian Riegen reported on her progress. At that stage she was just north of Fiji and flying at an estimated speed of 60-65 km/hr depending on the headwinds. "Her implanted battery-powered satellite transmitter was not really expected to last so long, says wader expert," Adrian Riegen. Being able to track her progress back to New Zealand is an exciting bonus. E7 left Alaska at the end of August and flew non-stop back to New Zealand, heading due south towards Hawaii and then south-east towards Fiji, covering the first 8500 km in about six days.

On September 7, she was due to arrive back in New Zealand, possibly flying direct to the Firth of Thames, a total non-stop journey of about 11,400 km ! Her flight records will prove beyond doubt the amazing endurance flights of these migratory shorebirds, thousands of which make this round-trip every year between New Zealand harbours and their Alaskan or Siberian breeding territories.

For more detailed information about New Zealand's satellite tracked Godwits, see the Miranda Naturalists' Trust May and August 2007 issues, (65 and 66), and visit Phil Battley's shorebird research website, www.nzshorebirds.com

Albatrosses, Mollymawks and other distractions !



Come and listen to author, Mary McEwen talk about her father Charles Fleming's exploits that were recorded in his Cape Expedition Diary 1942-43.

Tuesday 2nd October at 7.30pm
in the Unitec Natural Sciences Building 23

Charles Fleming (1916 - 1987) was one of New Zealand's pre-eminent 20th century scientists (a geologist, palaeontologist and ornithologist, biogeographer, entomologist, and science historian). In 1942, aged twenty-four, he spent a year on Auckland Island as a coast watcher with the secret wartime Cape Expedition.

Future bright for Motu Kaikoura

Restoration plans for Kaikoura Island are underway with rodent and cat eradication planned for next year. At a recent meeting of Auckland OSNZ, ecologist Mel Galbraith, talked about the progress on the 564 ha island, next to Great Barrier Island in the Hauraki Gulf.

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 **Environmental Sciences Building** 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 and 'TARA' Editor:

Suzi Phillips, Ph 09-479-5395 or email suzi@dialogue.co.nz

Regional Recorders :

Landbirds, Waterfowl & Rails;

Mel Galbraith, Ph 480-1958 (a/hours) or email melgar@ihug.co.nz

62 Holyoake Place, Birkenhead.

Waders, Herons, Spoonbill & Egrets;

Adrian Riegen, Ph 814-9741 or

Email riegen@xtra.co.nz

231 Forest Hill Rd, R.D.1, Henderson.

Seabirds, Gulls, Terns & Shags;

John Simmons, Ph 828-8642 or

email johnsimmons@clear.net.nz

4 Bamford Place, Avondale.

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).

The island was purchased by the government in 2004 for \$10.5 million, in a deal that was funded by community, local body, government and charitable societies.

It was gazetted as a scenic reserve and is managed by the Motu Kaikoura Trust who aim to restore it to a natural environment that is available to the community for use and enjoyment and especially for youth outdoor education.

The vegetation on the island has suffered from historical clearances and many years of grazing by goats, pigs and fallow deer, he says.

From the air, the impression is of reasonable canopy cover with vegetation to the water's edge and areas of pines. Under the canopy, there has been very little re-vegetation happening with scrubby cover and low bio-diversity, says Mel. Around the coast, some large native trees have survived including pohutakawa, mahoe and a copse of kauri trees.

Goats and pigs have now been eradicated and deer are also being culled with a view to eradication. Succession on the island was suppressed by these pests and this allowed kanuka to dominate everywhere except the most inaccessible places.

As a result, bird life on the island is very limited for a 500+ ha vegetated island, he says. A four-day bird survey was carried out this year, and three bird transects were cut and trialled. Some of the birds seen there include Banded Rail, Kereru, Kingfisher, and Kaka. Black and Cooks Petrels fly over the island and potential colonists could include petrels, Bellbirds, Tomtits, and Brown Quail from Great Barrier. Bird counts will be done on a regular basis and the Trust is discussing possible translocations for the future. Restoration and regeneration on the island will take time and it's seen as a 100-year project, says Mel Galbraith.

Suzi Phillips

Subsidy for bird surveys

Any Auckland OSNZ member organising a survey can now apply to the Regional Rep for a subsidy for food, or accommodation, or petrol, etc for that survey.

It was agreed at the September meeting of Auckland OSNZ that all survey organisers could submit a request for subsidy to the Regional Rep, and each request will be taken to the next meeting for a decision. Each request will be considered on its merits.

The committee meeting making the decision will be all those members present at Tuesday evening meetings, and the business will be conducted after the main speaker.

Rare visitors out west this winter



A large Wandering Albatross was washed up on Whatipu Beach in August. This albatross was banded and enquiries to date suggest it probably originated from a South Atlantic seabird island such as South Georgia. (Photo Erin Patterson).

Two albatross species and a Southern Giant Petrel were victims of storms on Auckland's west coast this winter.

A rare visit from a Light Mantled Sooty Albatross ended well when it was rehabilitated and later released, a Giant Petrel died on Muriwai beach and was taken to the Auckland Museum, and a dead, probable Wandering Albatross, was found washed up on Whatipu Beach.

In mid-June the Light-mantled Sooty Albatross was found crash-landed in bush near Helensville. It was taken to Bird Rescue on the North Shore and cared for by Sylvia Durrant who runs the SPCA Bird Wing in Rothesay Bay.

She nursed the albatross for 10 days, and says it was hungry and fed well. It appeared to have no injuries. It was released by a Department of Conservation ranger at the Muriwai gannet platform in late June.

This was a good result for a bird not often seen on our coasts. Bird Rescue do a wonderful job rehabilitating these birds.

Light-mantled Sooty Albatross breed on New Zealand's Sub-antarctic islands and range widely in our sub-antarctic waters, occasionally reaching coastal waters. Even more rarely, they range into northern waters and are sometimes seen flying near the coast in high winds or storms.

In early August, a Giant Petrel was found on the beach at Muriwai by Erica Kuschel. The bird was found spread-winged and struggling on the sand, but died soon after. The bird was understood to be a juvenile Southern Giant Petrel, although final identification is yet to be confirmed from the band which may be from an overseas location. It is being followed up the NZ Banding Office.

There are two species of Giant Petrels found around New Zealand, (Southern and Northern). The Northern species breeds in our Sub-antarctic islands and is more often seen in northern coastal waters in winter. The Southern Giant Petrel breeds on circum-polar Antarctic islands and is less often seen in New Zealand coastal waters.

The probable Wandering Albatross was found on the surf line on an isolated stretch of west coast beach north of Whatipu on August 11, by a group including Darryl Jeffries, Dan Kirwin, Alison Anderson, Erin Patterson and Suzi Phillips.

The albatross was being scavenged by gulls (stomach), but was otherwise in apparent good condition with no obvious injury. It was later recovered and taken to the Auckland Museum.

The band indicated that it was banded by a British research group, possibly in the Falklands or South Georgia Islands. The precise details of when and where it was banded are being provided by the British Trust for Ornithology.

Anyone finding a dead or injured seabird on the coast should report it to OSNZ, the Department of Conservation, or the Auckland Regional Council. If the bird appears sick or injured, it can be wrapped in a towel and taken, (preferably in a covered cardboard box), to SPCA Bird Rescue centres in Henderson or Rothesay Bay. If the bird is dead, it may be of interest for identification and recording, and a possible addition to the bird specimen collection at the Auckland Museum. It should be placed in a plastic bag and frozen. For live birds, Bird Rescue is 09-478-8819. For dead birds, contact the Auckland Museum direct or Auckland OSNZ on 021-271-2527 or via email to aucklandosnz@gmail.com

More seabird photos page 5

Canopy survey aids Hihi monitoring

Auckland ecologist and teacher, John Staniland spent last year on a Royal Society Teachers Fellowship studying forest complexity at the Cascades in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park.

John, an enthusiastic amateur botanist and ornithologist, has spent 36 years teaching Latin, Classical Studies and English at Kelston Boys High School.

Early in his Fellowship year an outbreak of a new strain of salmonella in the Tiritiri Matangi Island population of Hihi (Stitchbird) forced him to change his focus.

The disease outbreak, postponed for one year, the scheduled translocation of 60 birds from the island to the Ark in the Park project in the Cascades.

The flexibility of the Teacher Fellowship scheme allowed John to switch from monitoring the survival and breeding of Hihi in what was to have been their new home, to a survey of its forest.

His first task was to establish the optimum size of quadrant in which to carry out future invertebrate herbivore sampling studies, since it was known that invertebrates make up over 30 per cent of Hihi diet.

A random sampling of 96 quadrants of three different sizes based around pest control bait stations in the 1100 hectare Ark, provided the answer, as well as an insight into the identity of the 30 most widely occurring plant species in the under-storey.

John's next task was to make a detailed study of forest complex-

ity in the Ark, following the protocol of a recent thesis which analysed the vertical habitat structure from 100

points within an 80 metre radius of each Hihi nesting site on Little Barrier Island and Kapiti Island. The thesis had shown that the sites with the greater complexity also had the greater fledging success in the Hihi nests studied on the two islands.

The aim of John's study was to enable a comparison in forest complexity to be made between the Ark site and those two islands.

He also provided an assessment of the overall quality of the habitat, considering not only potential nectar and fruit food sources, but also the potential abundance of invertebrate food, and of protection afforded by the habitat.

Instead of being centred on Hihi nesting trees, his was based around Hihi feeding stations and other points to give a representative coverage of the inner Ark site.

John's year did include some literally hands-on contact with Hihi during a stay on Little Barrier Island, helping to mist net and band birds and take part in a DoC census of their numbers. He also made several trips to Tiritiri Matangi Island to observe Hihi feeding and to help in the census there.

John says he relished the chance to work in the Regional Park, and heartily recommends the Royal Society's fellowship scheme which allows teachers to follow oppor-

unities and extend their knowledge beyond their teaching areas.



John Staniland conducts canopy research at Ark in the Park in the Waitakere Ranges.

New Executive Officer for OSNZ

Our new Executive Officer, Ingrid Hutzler, started work on behalf of the OSNZ this week. Over the next few months, Ingrid will be developing new databases and systems to keep track of the Society's increasingly complex activities and working out new ways of enhancing communications within the Society and between OSNZ and the rest of the world. Ingrid will be taking over the Membership database and will be the first contact for the Society; Committee members and RRs and Convenors will get to know her very soon because she will be contacting you and starting to build up the essential connections that will allow OSNZ to develop and prosper. I know that all OSNZ members will join with me in welcoming Ingrid to the fold, and in wishing her well in creating and developing this important new role in the Society. Richard Holdaway, President OSNZ.



Southern Giant Petrel found at Maori Bay near Muriwai Beach in early August.



This Light Mantled Sooty Albatross was found in bush near Helensville, rehabilitated at SPCA Birdwing and released at the Muriwai Gannet platform in late June. (Photos: Suzi Phillips).



Tahuna Torea and Waiatarua Wetland were visited by a group of OSNZ members in April. Below clockwise; A White-faced Heron poised on a bridge waits patiently for prey; a male Australasian Shoveler at the wetland ; pied stilts on sarcocornia; and Richard Baker , Chris Bindon and Chris Thompson at Tahuna Torea.(Photos: Suzi Phillips).



Great response to garden bird survey

There was an overwhelming public response to the July 2007 garden bird survey. To date, more than 1800 survey forms have been returned, and more are coming in daily, says organiser Eric Spurr.

Lots of people said how much they enjoyed doing the survey, and provided extra comments about the birds normally present in their gardens but not present during the one hour of the survey. A common comment was, "I didn't see as many birds as I normally do." Poor weather was partly to blame for this.

Some people returned up to nine survey forms, while others included photographs of their gardens and bird feeders, and even recipes of food to give to the birds. All ages participated, from 5 year olds (with their parents or grandparents) up to a 98 year old. A preliminary analysis of about 20 percent of the forms that have been returned shows blackbirds occurred in 90 percent of gardens, house sparrows in 83 percent, Silvereyes in 81 percent, Starlings in 54 percent, and other species in less than 50 percent of gardens

When considering all gardens (whether or not species were present), House sparrows and Silvereyes were recorded in the greatest number at any one time (average 7.7 per garden during the one hour of observation) The next most abundant birds were Blackbirds and Starlings (2.4 per garden).

When considering only gardens where the species was present, Rock pigeons occurred in greatest numbers at any one time (average 13.3 per garden), followed by Silvereyes (9.5 per garden) and House Spar-

rows (9.2 per garden) . The maximum number of Silvereyes seen at once was 70, House Sparrows 52, and Rock pigeons 50. The high numbers of Silvereyes and House Sparrows is at least partly a result of people feeding birds. About 60 per cent of participants fed birds with food scraps, bread, seeds, nuts, fat, fruit, and/or sugar-water. Most of the surveys analysed to date (92 percent) were done in home gardens, 4 percent in school grounds, and 3 percent in public parks. Some schools did the survey as a class exercise. These figures could change as more surveys are analysed. Some people expressed concern that the length of observation period, time of day, size of observation area, vegetation characteristics of different gardens, and weather could all affect the number of birds counted. This is true, but not important because the aim of the survey is to monitor whether garden bird populations change

over the years. (A secondary aim is to increase public interest in birds and the natural environment.) The length of observation period will be the same in subsequent years, and it is assumed that there will be a similar range of times of day, sizes of observation area, garden vegetation characteristics, and weather conditions each year. It is interesting that the results are similar to last year's very small, trial, garden bird survey. This is the first comprehensive survey of birds in New Zealand gardens. A final report will be available on this website when all the data has been received and analysed. It is planned to repeat the survey next year.



Silvereye on mandarin (Photo: Suzi Phillips)

Birds of Prey Conservation Award 2007

A new national annual award was announced by the Wingspan Birds of Prey Trust in Rotorua this month. 'The Raptor Conservation Award' is to recognise outstanding conservation efforts and contributions by individuals or groups, for New Zealand birds of prey, says Trust chairman, Dr Noel Hyde.

The award trophy is a solid bronze Falcon bust made by New Zealand artist Mike Norris, accompanying a certificate and grant of \$2000.

This year's inaugural winner of the Wingspan Raptor Conservation Award 2007 was presented to Richard Seaton, to recognise outstanding contributions to the conservation and research of New Zealand falcons. Noel Hyde said "Richard's award recognised his four years of PhD research on New Zealand falcons within the pine plantations of Kaingaroa Forest. Richard's work has given us a much greater understanding of falcons living in these areas. It has implications nationally, and shows the importance of managed forests for the long term conservation of the threatened NZ falcon".

Richard Seaton said he was "thrilled to receive this award for his work in Kaingaroa Forest illustrating how New Zealand falcon are thriving within commercial plantation forests.

It is a particular pleasure to receive this award from Wingspan Birds of Prey Trust whom were instrumental in me deciding to undertake this work in the first place, and whose passion for Karearea is an inspiration."

Sightings from around Auckland region

Count at Waiwera at high tide at midday today. (19/7/2007) The birds I counted today were mainly between the SH1 road bridge and the estuary mouth. Only a very few (red billed gulls) were counted along Waiwera beach itself down to the camping grounds.

Pied Oystercatcher x 58, VOC x26, Red-billed Gull x36, Southern BB Gull x12, NZ Dotterel x2 (bands sent to JD), Mallard x2, Pied Shag x1, Little Black Shag x2, Tui x14, Fantail x6, Indian Myna x10, Black-bird x1, House Sparrow x6, Silvereye x1, Goldfinch x1. Later in the afternoon I went to Straka's Pond. Australian Shoveller 50+, NZ Scaup x12+, Grey Teal x8+, Grey Duck x20+, Mallard 20+, Black Swan 2 + 4 cygnets, Paradise Shelduck x4, NZ Dabchick 6+, Pied Stilt x2, Welcome Swallow 12+, Pukeko 6+, Pied Shag 1. **David Preston**

18/7/2007 Puhoi conservationist, **Arthur Dunn**, reported a Pukeko swimming submerged in his house dam recently. He asked if other birders have seen similar behaviour from Pukeko. The Pukeko stood at full leg's depth in the water and then submerged itself completely under the water, then stood and preened. It repeated the routine a few times, completely submerging its head and body in the water. He has also observed Tui on the lawn, eating fallen citrus fruit.

The garden list from the 2 acre house garden on Ahuroa Road, (seen by him and his wife Val), totals 28 species and includes; Mallards, Pukeko, Pheasant, Spur-winged Plover, White-faced Heron, Tui, Kereru, Fantail, Pipit, Welcome Swallow, Tomtit, Harrier Hawk, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Kingfisher, House Sparrow, Hedge Sparrow, Californian Quail, Yellowhammer, Chaffinch, Grey Warbler, Morepork, Silvereye, Little Shag (Pied and Black phase), Rosella, Myna, Shining Cuckoo, and Starling.

Two Royal Spoonbills were seen on several occasions feeding in the Weiti River near Stillwater in late August and early September. **Martin Sanders.**

17/8/2007 I know **Spurwing Plovers** choose some pretty exciting places to nest, but the most dangerous I've seen is the bird currently sitting on a nest two or three metres from nine lanes of motorway at the Western Springs on ramp to Auckland. There were 47 Spoonbill at Weymouth [Manukau] closely observable beside Roys Rd at high tide yesterday. **Phil Hammond Potts Lane Wetland, Beachlands 19/8/2007.**

1x Brown Teal, 2x Grey Duck, 3x Grey Teal, 9x Shoveller, 11x Canada Goose, 5x NZ Dabchick, 9x NZ Dotterel, 2x Wrybill, 7x Banded Dotterel, 7x VOC, 2x Scaup.

On the Kawakawa side of the hill, (South Auckland territory), their counts also included a Reef Heron at Kawakawa Bay, and nearby, 460 Spotted Shags and 3 Weka. **Mike and Sharen Graham**



This Mallard fashion statement was photographed by Martin Sanders on a pond in Dairy Flat.

Have you seen a Grey Warbler nest?

Do you have a Grey Warbler nest in your backyard? If so, please contact me. I am a PhD student working on the breeding biology of the Grey Warbler and Shining Cuckoo.

I am seeking Grey Warbler nests that have been parasitised by Shining Cuckoos at sites within the Auckland Region. Shining Cuckoos lay eggs in the Grey Warbler nests from October to December, so I am primarily interested in nests found during this time.

If you have a Grey Warbler nest with a Shining Cuckoo egg, or are unable to see inside the nest, please contact me. My contact details are:

Michael Anderson, Ecology and Conservation Group, Massey University.

Email: m.g.anderson@massey.ac.nz

Ph: 09 414 0800 extn 41197 or 021 0677453

For more information see our research group's website: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~dhbrunto/>



Grey Warbler nest

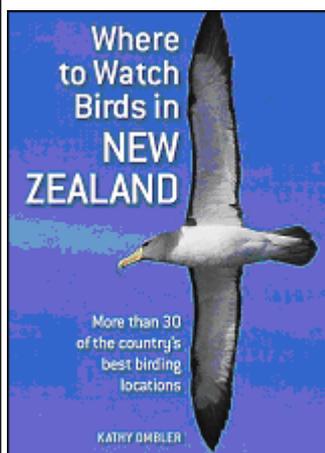
Entries now open for the 2007 Auckland OSNZ Student Prize - deadline September 30

Auckland OSNZ Activities Programme

- Sept 4** Tuesday 7.30pm, "From Nelson Lakes to Tawharanui" with Matt Maitland, new ARC manager at Tawharanui Regional Park.
- Sept 8 Muriwai Beach Patrol with John Simmons, Ph 828-8642.
- Sept 29/30 Motutapu Island Bird Surveys, contact Emma Stanyard, Ph 02102372597
- Oct. 2** Tuesday 7.30pm, "Charles Fleming's Cape Expedition Diary; Auckland Islands 1942-43: Albatrosses, mollymawks and other distractions" with special guest speaker, author Mary McEwen from Wellington.
- Oct 6 Muriwai Beach Patrol, 9.15am with John Simmons, contact as above.
- Oct 14 **Shakespear Park Bird Survey**, meet 7am. Details from Michael Taylor, Phone 5249234.
- Nov. 6** Tuesday 7.30pm, "Wildlife Enforcement Group" speaker TBC.
- Nov 3 Muriwai Beach Patrol, 9.15am with John Simmons, Ph 828-8642.
- Nov 24 **Kaipara Harbour Wader Census**, contact Adrian Riegen, 814-9741
- Nov 24/25 Tiritiri Matangi Island Census, contact Sharen Graham on 817-5537.
- November Wader Census at Manukau/Waitemata Harbours, dates TBC.
- Dec 1 Muriwai Beach Patrol 9.15am with John Simmons, Ph 828-8642.
- Dec 2-5 Australasian Ornithological Conference, Perth, Western Australia.
- Dec 4** Tuesday 7.30pm, **Christmas Gathering** with quiz and cake.
- Summer Picnic at Ayrilies Lakes.** We have special permission to walk round the lakes at this well-known private garden. Meet at the picnic tables by the lake at the end of Potts Road, Whitford at 6pm. Or come earlier and explore the beach for waders. HT 20.15. Contact Chris Thompson, ph 478 9781.
- Jan 22 2008**

For updated information on contacts, speakers and venue locations, email Suzi Phillips at suzi@dialogue.co.nz or phone 0212712527.

Discount offer for new bird book



'Where to Watch Birds in New Zealand' will be published by New Holland Press in September 2007. Wellington writer Kathy Ombler introduces more than 30 of the country's best birding sites with a full description of each location as well as a list of the birds to watch out for and where best to see them.

At the end of each chapter the book provides accommodation information for visitors, as well as a selection of bird and nature tour operators.

We have been offered the opportunity to purchase copies at the discounted rate of \$22.75 for bulk orders to sell to our members. If you would like to take advantage of this offer, please contact Suzi Phillips and she will add you to the bulk order. The normal Retail Price will be \$34.99.

Contributions Wanted for the next TARA - please send in your bird sightings, snippets, articles and photographs for use in TARA to; Suzi Phillips, Auckland OSNZ, Private Bag 1, Helensville 0840, or email to suzi@dialogue.co.nz