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(INCORPORATED)

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The Alaskan Bar-tailed Godwits in Otago



The average population of these **Bar-tailed Godwits** in coastal Otago during the summer is about 2000, spread out over Karitane, Blueskin Bay, Aramoana, Papanui and Hoopers Inlet and the Catlins. This is an easy number to check for bands and flags. I should say easier, since we had our difficulties. But spare a thought for the effort

required to carry out the same exercise at Farewell Spit or the Manukau Harbour, an average of 13,500 and 15,550 birds respectively.

These last two years we have been seriously involved in this godwit programme, which gave us an opportunity to check their behaviour as far as movements were concerned. It is all very well to assume that the Blueskin Bay ones at high tide move to Warrington Beach, or the Papanui area will have a good number roosting at Victory Beach. Most of the time the handful seen there at low tide disappear to Hoopers Inlet come high tide. And at Hoopers Inlet with its unpredictable high tides they can move from one end to the other. One needs plenty of observers.

Aramoana is a bit more predictable, bird movement wise, although the birds can still do a dirty trick, especially at a low high tide, staying at the far end, invisible to the birders at the other end of the mud flats. Lately they have behaved and paraded nicely at the sandy edge of the harbour and moved slowly in front of the observers to roost on the *Sarcocornia*, most of the time.

One of the aims of this study is to determine the extent to which individual godwits (and knots) use a network of estuaries while in New Zealand. Here in Otago we have some idea. Most of the godwits, banded at Warrington, returned to the same area a year later. And the odd one changes location to Aramoana and Hoopers Inlet. At least we have now proof that there is some movement in between these areas. What it

doesn't tell us why these birds turn up again more or less in the same place they were banded. The numbers of orange flagged birds, caught in Victoria, Australia, seem to wander more, since we have seen one or two during most of the 27 checks we made at all locations.

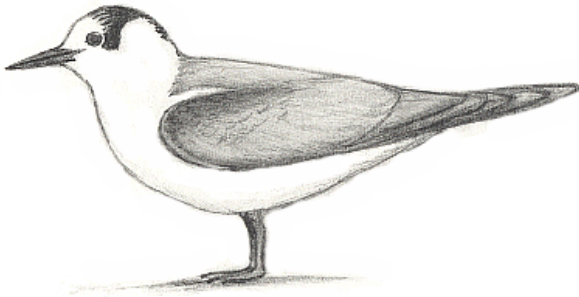
We have done our bit. It's now up to the experts to come up with a final analysis of what has been achieved. No doubt we will be informed.

Peter Schweigman

Ornithological Snippets

Alan Baker saw a **Crested Grebe** on a nest in raupo at Sailors Cutting on 26 February 2007. On 5 April 2007 a pair was present, along with one young bird. Another pair, this time with two young birds, was seen on the Wairepo Arm of Lake Ruataniwha on 3 April 2007.

Peter Schweigman writes the last of the Otago godwit reports: They are on the move! The summer count gave over 2000 birds, but that has been reduced to about 600 and is still going down. The highest number at Karitane this year was 229 on 16 February 2007, which fell to a pathetic 2, hiding amongst 1200 **Red-billed Gulls** at the spit on 30 March 2007. The combine effort of the godwit gurus and us minions came up with at least 30 banded godwits, most of them banded at Warrington Beach, with a few banded at Awarua Bay and Australia. Let's hope most of them make it to Alaska, breed and return safe and well with their offspring in September.



Richard Schofield reports from Inchclutha of a roosting flock of 30 **Royal Spoonbills**, including 1 banded individual, at Matau Mouth, on 28 March 2007. There was also a possible **White-winged Black Tern**, though strong winds prevented good views. Further up the island, a group of 8 **Cattle Egrets**, most showing just

traces of orange on head and breast. And on the Koau Branch, were 49 **Black-fronted Terns**.

Louise Foord reports 12 **Australian Coots** at Sullivans Dam on 22 January 2007. On 25 February 2007 there were not as many visible, only 10, but 5 were fully grown juveniles! On 29 March 2007, at the DCC Wetland Enhancement pond, Peter Schweigman spotted a pair of **Australian Coots** with a juvenile and a pair of **NZ Scaup**, also with a fully grown juvenile. He wonders if one is allowed to assume that this is a breeding record for



these areas. Alan Baker saw a pair of **Coots** with 2 young on a pond at Macraes on 8 April 2007.

On 27 February 2007, Richard Schofield had an unexpected sighting of a **NZ Falcon** on the shoreline at Taiaroa Head. It was plucking a white prey item (hopefully not a **Spoonbill**) under the nose of a fur seal. He saw another **Falcon** on 2 March 2007 on SH1 at Milburn.

Richard also checked out Hooper's Inlet on 27 February 2007. He saw no **Chestnut-breasted Shelducks** on the lagoon, but a male and 2 females close by the road on the opposite side of the inlet, just near the start of the Nyhon Track. They were with half a dozen **Paradise Shelduck**; 1 male and female flew off (towards the lagoon), while the other female moved to the other side of the road. Peter Schweigman reports the latest information about these birds, from 23 March 2007 at Little Hoopers, is 3 females and one male. The group came together at Hoopers Inlet 20 minutes later. These birds clearly wander a bit: it pays to check the two areas and not concentrate only on Little Hoopers, if time permits.

Alan Baker had a good view of 6 **Black Stilts** at the edge of a lake beside Birchwood Road in the Ahuriri Valley on 1 March 2007.

Jim Wilson has learnt that a **Kaka** took up residence in the Abbotsford area during the month of March of this year. While he did not see the bird, he did see a very good photograph (not that to the right, though).



Programme 2007

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street at 8 p.m. Please be on time: the door will be locked after 8 p.m.

Wednesday, 25 April (Anzac Day)	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: Ian McLean
	Topic: Predation & Artificial Nests in Dunedin	
Wednesday, 23 May	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: Graeme Loh
	Topic: A Visit to Svalbard	
Wednesday, 27 June	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: Bruce McKinlay
	Topic: Fernbirds	
Wednesday, 25 July	Indoor Meeting	Speaker: Derek Onley
	Topic: Orokonui Bird Counts	

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