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(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 3/2008 April 2008

Hawksbury Lagoon



On 13 April, a beautiful autumn afternoon, Jim Wilson, Audrey Eagle, Gail Quayle, Peter Schweigman and Derek Onley strolled around Hawksbury Lagoon and counted a total of 1100 birds, 80% of which were the three common duck species, **Mallard**, **Grey Teal** and **Shoveler**. There was nothing unusual except for the bird to the left, which perhaps should be the mystery photo for the

month, if there were not so obvious a clue in the list below of the results of the first three counts of the lagoon.

The main changes from the January count were an increase in **Shoveler** numbers and a decrease in **Pied Stilts** from a very high 322 to 76, suggesting maybe, that the post-breeding dispersal has finished.

Things can change very quickly. On 10 April, a cool, dull morning three days before the count, there were 2-300 **Welcome Swallows** feeding low over the water and long grass on the causeway. We saw only one on the 13th.

Date	11.11.07	28.1.08	13.4.08
Start Time	13:50	13:55	14:00
Water Level cm below top of gate		64	75
Black Shag	1	0	0
Little Shag	0	2	0
White-faced Heron	1	1	0
Royal Spoonbill	0	1	0
Black Swan	47	82	14
Canada Goose	4	33	8
Graylag Goose	17	18	27
Canada/Greylag Hybrid	9	36	22
Paradise Shelduck	117	36	22
Mallard/Grey Duck	155	751	178
Grey Teal	61	855	341
NZ Shoveler	75	8	356
Harrier	0	0	0
Pied Oystercatcher	0	0	1
Variable Oystercatcher	2	0	2
Pied Stilt	38	322	76
Spur-winged Plover	27	51	40
Bar-tailed Godwit	0	0	0
Black-backed Gull	5	6	9
Red-billed Gull	10	38	0
Black-billed Gull	0	0	0
Caspian Tern	0	1	3
Kingfisher	0	0	0
Welcome Swallow	6	0	1
Total	575	2241	1100

Hawksbury Lagoon survey results November 2007 – April 2008.

Derek Onley & Jim Wilson

Ornithological Snippets

Alan Baker reports a **Falcon** at Hampden on 16 March, “posed beautifully high in a macrocarpa by the Presbyterian Church”. Derek Onley saw a more prosaic immature plodding across Waitati on the evening of 3 April.

Latest date for **Shining Cuckoo** this year stands at 23 March in Hampden feeding yet again on caterpillars in Kowhai reported by Alan Baker. Alan also saw a **Rifleman** on Queens Drive near Cosy Dell Road on 9 March. **Riflemen** are present in the Ross Creek reservoir area but are rarely seen in the town belt.

There still appears to be a lot going on at sea this year.

In addition to the usual **Northern Royal Albatross**, **White-capped** and **Buller's Mollymawks** off Aramoana on 29 March there was a **Southern Royal**, **Salvin's Mollymawk** and **Northern Giant Petrel**.

There have been large numbers of **White-fronted Terns** and **Black-billed Gulls** at Karitane and Warrington in March and April. On 16 April there were 910 terns on Karitane Spit and many hundreds more feeding of the headland along with several thousand **Sooty Shearwaters**, **Spotted Shags** and gulls. The flocks of adult **Gannets** seemed to have left – only one was seen by the wharf – but oddly enough about 10 juveniles were feeding amongst the **Sooty Shearwaters**. Alan Anderson, a local fisherman, told me “there are still a lot of those skuas around”. Tacked onto one end of the **White-fronted Tern** roost was a single juvenile **Black-fronted Tern**.

On 5 April Graeme Loh, Sue Maturin and Marina Hanger kayaked from Katigi Beach to Moeraki and back -

“The feature of the day was the constant feeding activity in the Bay enclosed by Katigi Point. Hundreds of **Sooty Shearwaters** and **Spotted Shags** were massing in feeding aggregations to exploit sprat, (some were dropped for our examination). **White-fronted Terns**, 20-30 at a time, were also active along with **Red-billed Gulls** and a few black backed. A **Stercorarius skua** was busy robbing the terns. We had some very good views from the kayaks. No big fish appeared to be in the melees. A few juvenile and adult **Gannets** were in the mix, but only one **Blue Penguin** was seen.

In between feeding times the shags, terns and gulls were roosting on Katigi Point and the Islet. The islet looks to be a favoured roosting site. Hundreds of terns and **Red-billed Gulls** were present with 1000 plus **Spotted Shags**.

Not much was happening on the open coast, though the occasional **Buller's Mollymawk** passed by. No **spoonbills** were on Maukiekie Island - gone for the season? **Stewart Island Shags** are present roosting here with another fifty on Tawhiroko Point, the headland east of the Kaik.

Driving on return down the Katigi Straight, after harvesting roadside apples, we had to stop at Te Rapuka Creek (where the Euphorbia is), to watch the evening sun on massed shags, terns and shearwaters in the low surf. The shags stayed behind the breakers but the **Titi** went right onto the wet sand of the beach in pursuit of sprat.”

At Papanui Inlet Spit Graeme reported the biggest roost of birds he had ever seen in Otago:-

- 312 Black-fronted Terns
- 600 approx White-fronted Terns
- 35 Variable Oystercatchers
- 39 Pied Oystercatchers (though some were probably pied Variables)
- About 5,000 Red-billed Gulls
- Approx 50 Black-backed Gulls - and 15 sea lions

Bob Cunninghame writes from his property on Signal Hill - “A **Morepork** was heard three times during last winter (May, July and August) May and July below us towards the SPCA and Logan Park; August across NEV in Chingford Park area. We have heard one several times over the last ten days - well and truly on our property and sometimes within a 100 metres or so of the house. It usually calls at dusk. This is the first time we have had one around since the first couple of years (1985/86) that we lived here.

Sparrows - we have up to 100 feeding round the house early in the morning - we do throw out a few handfuls of wheat! Their numbers have increased dramatically over the last year or so.

Rosellas - A pair probably nest on the property and at the moment three are seen regularly.

New Zealand Pigeons. Only two or three around at the moment, but they gather in significant numbers to feed on our broom fields along the road frontage in October and November. We have had up to 50 pigeons at times and 20 to 30 are not uncommon at this period. Unfortunately the broom is dying off, but we have a couple of patches we are leaving for them, although away from the public view! We should encourage a few more broom fields round Dunedin!” (Plant tree lucerne and native fuschia ed.)

World News - Mary Thompson reports from England

Twitching in North Wales

On a blustery cold Sunday in March a group of about a dozen Liverpool RSPB members and I spent a good few hours spotting waders, wildfowl and divers off the coast of North Wales. Then after all that to finish off the day, we went on my first real twitch! At about 4.30 pm we headed off up the Conwy valley towards Betws-y-coed, turned off at Llanrwst up into the hills through pine forestry then out on the tops – on the edge of Snowdonia - now weather closing in a bit and quite wild looking. Then when we seemed to be in the middle of nowhere we came across about a dozen cars and coming and going along a farm track were birders in camouflage gear and carrying huge scopes. This was a twitching site, which they had found out about on the web. We trekked up the track round behind a stone farmhouse and up on the hillside was a hoopoe feeding actively on the ground. A very spectacular, exotic looking bird, bigger than a blackbird, with rusty pink body



and black and white stripes on wings and a black-striped crest and a beak that curves down; normally seen in Spain and other Mediterranean countries (and Asia and Africa) so what it is doing in North Wales in the winter is puzzling-I think it has been seen for quite some time. So this was a really good twitch.

Mary Thompson

The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebe in Otago

Your RR is very pleased to hear of the decision made at the March Indoor Meeting to carry out a survey of the Great Crested Grebes in Central Otago in memory of George Chance. These birds were one of George's special subjects and he had suggested that their numbers in Otago should be surveyed again. The date for the survey is around the 21-22nd February 2009. This will be a challenging task to do with our limited numbers, but I am sure we can do it. From random current reports in Ornithological snippets it looks like the numbers of grebes in Central over this summer have increased greatly so it will also be a very exciting project to be involved in.

Peter Schweigman has agreed to take on the huge job of organizing the survey and working out the logistics of how we can get to all parts of the bigger lakes such as Wakatipu, Dunstan, Wanaka and Hawea, where boats and kayaks will probably need to be used, and into the more remote mountain lakes like Moke, Kilpatrick, etc. His contacts with DoC, Fish and Game and others will be very useful here. We have funds in our project account that can go towards covering the costs of boats, etc.

So please try to plan to be part of this project and indicate your intentions to Peter (email peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz). Your RR is coming back so she doesn't miss out!

Mary Thompson

Long Point Reserve

On 3 April Dave McFarlane and Leith Thompson from the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust guided Peter Schweigman, Derek Onley and Audrey Eagle around the Trust's new reserve in the Catlins, near Long Point, south-east of Owaka. We went to look at what would be involved in conducting a survey of the area along the lines of that carried out by the OSNZ for the Okia Reserve on the Otago Peninsula in 1991/1992. The reserve is mainly close cropped sheep paddock on the top of some spectacular cliffs with a thin fringe of low native bush and flax where the **Yellow-eyed Penguins** nest.



A few **Sooty Shearwater** nest on the edges of the paddocks and **Spotted Shags** apparently do so on Cosgrove Island and the mainland cliffs but other native species were understandably few and far between.

In the open paddocks we recorded **Spur-winged Plover**, **Mallard**, **Paradise Shelduck**, **Variable Oystercatcher**, **Black-backed Gull**, **Skylark**, **Redpoll**, **Greenfinch**, **Goldfinch** and **Welcome Swallow**. The most interesting were several **Pipits** along the cliff tops and a total of a dozen or so **Harriers**. There were **Dunnocks** and a couple of **Silvereye** in the coastal scrub and gullies and **House Sparrows** and a single **Blackbird** near the farmhouse.

At sea there were the usual thousands of **Sooty Shearwaters** but few other birds, especially compared with the Dunedin area at the moment. We saw a few **Gannets**, **White-capped**, **Buller's** and **Black-browed Mollymawks** but only 8 **Spotted Shags** and 2 **White-fronted Terns**. **Red-billed Gulls** and a single **Pied Stilt** hung around the seals on the rock ledge opposite Cosgrove Island.

The Trust would keep an eye on the Yellow-eyed Penguins so the OSNZ would only have to survey the rest. We thought that a survey would be needed in the breeding season – mid November – and again perhaps in March or April. We could easily walk around the area in the daytime but ideally would need to kayak out to Cosgrove

Island and camp out at night to listen for calls of petrels and shearwaters. Any other ideas please to Peter Schweigman or Derek Onley.

Copies of Notornis

Jennifer Bannister asks if anybody would like copies of Notornis dating from 1995 to 2007, including 'Wader Studies' and 'Kakapo'.

Contact Hamish Spencer: h.spencer@otago.ac.nz for details.

Trial of Email Newsletter

Many of you will have received a pdf copy of this Newsletter by email as well as mail. It is quite a big job to photocopy, collate, address and post the newsletters so if you are happy to receive the newsletter **only by email**, or if you would like to but didn't, please send your email address with your request to mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

Kea Conservation Trust - Help Needed

Tamsin Orr-Walker, Project Coordinator for the Kea Conservation Trust is asking for volunteers to help in their population studies.

They have recently secured funding to carry out two population studies of kea in 2008-2009. The winter portion of this survey begins this July and will run each Saturday and Sunday afternoon throughout the month. In order to ensure that this survey is a success, they are calling for volunteers to undertake simple recording of kea. The volunteers can state where and when they wish to undertake their observations.

Volunteers will be required to:

1. Record maximum numbers of kea sighted during each recording period;
2. Record other information listed on the recording forms (site, general conditions, whether birds are banded, age as related to presence/absence of yellow around face and general behaviour e.g. flying, eating, interacting with humans and/or other kea etc).

The important aspect will be to have as many people as possible involved over as large a range of the species as possible.

If you are keen to be involved or wish for more information, their contact details are: email n.notabilis@xtra.co.nz or web-site www.keaconservation.com or phone Tamsin on 09 8173002 or 0274249594.

Otago Harbour Winter Wader Count

This is just a reminder that the winter wader count will be carried out on Saturday, 31 May 2008, with a high tide at Aramoana at 1139 hrs.

It's the winter count, so we don't expect myriads of arctic waders. Come to that, even during the summer there aren't that many, except for a fair number of Bar-tailed Godwits. But we might find the oystercatchers and Banded Dotterels this time, having left their inland breeding ground, spending the winter near the coast. But those that have been involved in wader counts are always hoping for the odd rarity to turn up.

Please give Ken Gager a call on 487 6670 to see if you can help with this count.



Long Point. Peter, Leith, Dave and Audrey looking South to Papatowai.

Programme 2008

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.

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| Wednesday, 23 April | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Private Penguins: Isolation? | Speaker: Ryan Clark
Selection for Visual |
| Wednesday, 28 May | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Genetics and Conservation of Yellow-eyed Penguins | Speaker: Sanne Boessenkool |
| Saturday, 31 May | Winter Wader Count. High tide at Aramoana 11.39.
Back up day, Saturday 14 June. High tide is 12.12.
Contact Ken Gager, ☎ 487 6670 | |
| Wednesday, 25 June | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Return of Campbell Island Teal | Speaker: Bruce McKinlay |
| Saturday 28 June | Winter Survey of Hawksbury Lagoon | |
| Wednesday, 23 July | Indoor Meeting
Topic: TBA | Speaker: Bryan Rhodes |
| Wednesday, 27 August | Indoor Meeting
This meeting will feature the NZ premiere of Sandy Crichton's film "Karearea: The Pine Falcon" starring George Chance. Hamish Spencer says "I have had a sneak preview and it is a wonderful film, a moving tribute to George" | |
| Labour Weekend, 24-26 October | Glenorchy Weekend Fieldtrip.
Contact Louise Foord, ☎ 467 5041 | |

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Final date for copy for next newsletter : 19 May

