



THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 8/2009 August 2009

Ross Creek Survey July Results

Mary Thompson, Les Buchanan, Alan Baker and Bruce McKinlay contributed section bird lists. Some lists included numbers (transect counts). The table below gives the highest numbers reported for each section. Where no numbers were given: S = seen; H = heard only; B = indication of breeding.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Black Shag				S			
Little Shag				1			
White-faced Heron							
Paradise Duck				S			
Mallard				S			
Harrier					1		
Black-backed Gull				1	S		
NZ Pigeon					1		
Rifleman				2	1		
Dunnock	1	S	2	S	1	1	S
Blackbird	4	S	S	6	2	3	S
Song Thrush	S	S	S	S	H	S	
Brown Creeper		S				H	
Grey Warbler	3	S	S	2	1	3	S
Fantail	2	3	S	3	3	1	S
Silvereye	2	S	1	S	14	13	
Bellbird	3	1	1	5	5	4	S
Tui	S	S	s	S		2	
Chaffinch	S	S		1	2		
House Sparrow				S	S	2	S
Starling			S		S		
Magpie					1		
Species Total 21	9	9	9	16	15	10	6

Mary's count of Mallards on 26th was: small lake 12, large lake 53.

Spur-winged Plover, Welcome Swallow, Tomtit, Goldfinch, and less surprisingly, Californian Quail were recorded in June but not July.

Please send all August results to me by September 7.

Alan Baker 4675180 48 Pacific St., Dunedin 9010

Hawksbury Lagoon

Peter, Susan, Mary, Derek, Lesley, Ian & Helen took a leisurely, post lunch stroll around the Lagoon on the afternoon of 25 July.

	1 Feb 2009	19 Apr 2009	25 July 2009
Start time	10.00am	1.00pm	2.00pm
Black Shag	0	0	2
Little Shag	1	0	0
White-faced Heron	1	1	1
Royal Spoonbill	0	0	0
Black Swan	42	44	16
Canada Goose	25	1	12
Greylag Goose	23	43	22
Canada/Greylag Hybrid	22	0	0
Paradise Shelduck	34	51	34
Mallard/Grey Duck	257	238	299
Grey Duck	0	1	0
Grey Teal	771	203	60
NZ Shoveler	195	253	205
Harrier	2	0	0
Pied Oystercatcher	0	0	1
Variable Oystercatcher	0	0	0
Pied Stilt	337	21	13
Hybrid Pied/Black Stilt	1	0	0
Spur-winged Plover	11	13	3
Black-backed Gull	25	7	12
Red-billed Gull	7	0	10
Black-billed Gull	90	0	0
Caspian Tern	0	1	0
Kingfisher	0	0	0
Welcome Swallow	10	25+	0
Total	1854	902	690

Numbers

were similar to the April count except that Grey Teal numbers decreased from 200 to 60, Shoveler numbers were down by 20% from 250 to 200 and Black Swans from 44 to

16. For the second count in a row there were no hybrid Canada/Feral Geese but it is possible they have moved to Karitane where several were present for the first time on 9 August.

Derek Onley

Colour-banded Bellbirds and Tui

Bellbirds and tui colour banded by Murray Efford in the autumn have been seen regularly around Wakari and adjoining suburbs (Halfway Bush and Glen Ross). A few tui have made it further afield, at least as far as Opoho and Abbotsford. Murray reports that almost all the bellbirds coming to his feeder just now are colour-banded males, but there seems to have been a turnover in the tui so most are unbanded. Bellbirds are now appearing with fuchsia pollen caps. Please email sightings to murray.efford@clear.net.nz or phone Murray at 476 4668. When recording bands it helps to know what to expect: the left leg has a colour over a metal (silver) band and the right leg two colours (although one bellbird seems to have removed two of its colour bands). The colours are blue, white, yellow, orange, red and various shades of green (one rather dark and not easy to pick).

Ornithological Snippets

In early winter Steve Logan from Earnsclough near Alexandra reported roughly 30 hawks (**Harriers**) at various altitudes, moving as a group to the east. "I have never seen more than 2 hawks flying together before. There were weather fronts coming through and we were getting snow on and off. They were travelling with the wind and heading east-northeast."

Following on from winter - yet more **NZ Falcons**.. Valerie Fay saw one on 5th August at the end of Pigeon flat road swoop down from a standing pine in a felled area calling once. It was well along in a felled area and on the Northern side of Mount Cargill. Fiona and Rob Nyhoff saw one finishing off a Kereru at their place just above the Orokonui Sanctuary.

Elton Smith reports well over 200 **Kereru** at his place on the northern end of Mountain Road in the Silverpeaks. His land is full of tree lucerne amongst many other trees planted to attract birds. This appears to be by far the largest flock of **Kereru** seen for many years.

Barbara Markby saw 4 **Rooks** flying near Sutton on 30 July. She commented that she seldom sees Rooks now.

Richard Schofield saw a Variable **Oystercatcher** flying over Balclutha town centre on 7th August, his first sighting away from coast, and 9 **Cattle Egrets** at Inchclutha, on 16th August. Mary reports that the two **Cattle Egrets** were still at Henley on 15th August.

Sue Galloway heard a **Morepork** calling from Steve Amies Track on 5th August at 6.30 pm.

Keep a look out for **Cirl Buntings**: Kelvin Lloyd convincingly described several feeding on barley fed out to cattle up Manse Road overlooking Blueskin Bay in mid August.

Bird populations on New Zealand sheep/beef farms and kiwifruit orchards Implications for conservation on production lands is the subject of the next evening meeting on August 26.

Two graduate students will present the results of their studies; it would be great if a goodly number of people could be at the meeting to support them as well as hear about some of our more common birds.

Only eighteen percent of New Zealand private lands below 500m are part of the public conservation estate, with much of the remainder utilized in agriculture. The warm, fertile conditions that make lowlands ideal for production similarly enable them to support high levels of biodiversity. Accordingly, efforts to conserve biodiversity should place emphasis on agricultural landscapes. The Agriculture Research Group on Sustainability (ARGOS) has implemented research on bird populations on agricultural land.

The research by PhD student Sarah Meadows used birds as indicators of wider agro ecosystem diversity on South Island sheep/beef farms and addressed the following questions: 1) How does bird diversity change with changes in structure, composition and connectivity of unmodified patches of the agricultural land matrix. 2) How do different bird species utilize different components of the agricultural matrix?

Similarly, research by MSc student Guinevere Coleman is addressing the question of the impact of management systems (primarily 'Hayward' (Organic), 'Hayward' (Green), and 'Hort16A' (Gold)) on bird populations, with a focus on whether fantails could be used as a flagship species for sustainable kiwifruit production. Orchardists within the ARGOS project were interviewed to gauge their attitudes towards birds on their orchard and to the potential for an environmental label for export kiwifruit.

The intent of both projects is to provide a base of knowledge to aid in the development and implementation of biodiversity-friendly and sustainable farming practices on New Zealand's production lands.

Notices and Business

Aurora Otago Science Fair

There were only two posters on bird study this year; one on food preferences of waxeyes and one on fledging success of Mallard ducks. This is a continuation of the project by Rhian Gaffney of the population of ducks in the back yards of a street in North East Valley. By careful observation he has managed to identify individual ducks by their markings and drake partners (which he think stay with same mate each year). This year's project was to see if early broods had more success of fledging. Peter Schweigman and Mary Thompson judged the posters and a book prize will be awarded from OSNZ, Otago Branch.

Absconders from the Orokonui Ecosanctuary

Bryce Masuda is interested in any sightings of Saddleback outside the sanctuary.

Please note the change of email address to bryce.masuda@otago.ac.nz.

You are much more likely however to see a wandering Kaka. One bird from Invercargill, known only as 60 after its radio channel (-2 if you have a radio tracker, band no L34281 if you get close enough) has not been seen or heard of for months. All birds have aerials sticking out of their backs and metal bands, except for the chick which has no fashion accessories. Any sightings please to Sue Hensley 03 4822687 or sue.hensley@gmail.com.

Harbour Survey

Sundays with suitable high tides are as follows:-

2009 Sept 13 1028; Oct 18 1638; Nov 15 1529;
Dec 13 1419.

2010 Jan 10 1307; Feb 7 1146; Mar 14 1600; Apr 11
1348; May 23 1147; June 20 1029; July 11 1517;
Aug 22 1417.



Below is a map of the harbour marked off in sections. Each section was counted separately but one team can easily cover more than one section in the 2 hours before high tide over which the survey is carried out.

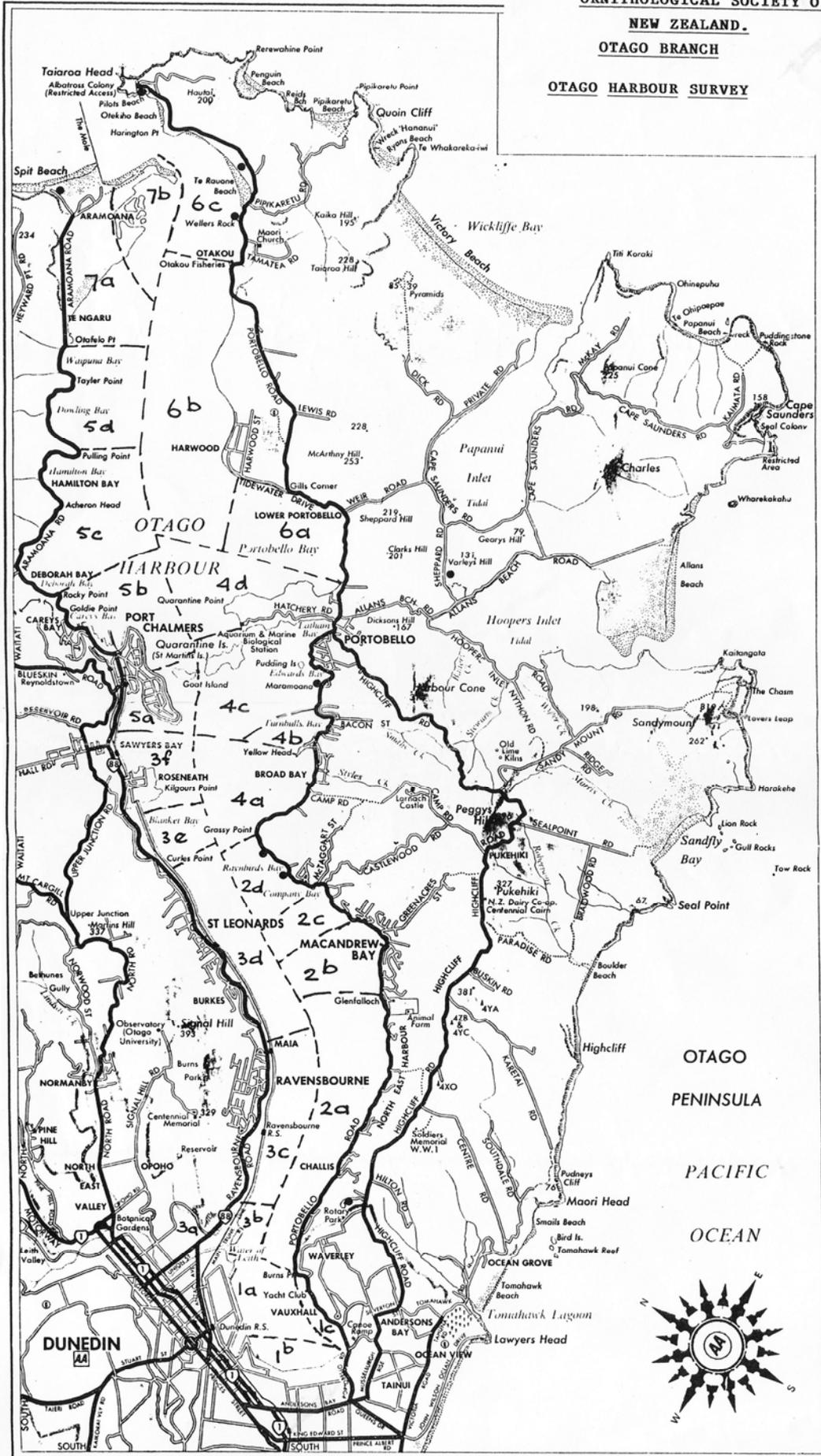
Please can all those who have expressed an interest and any who haven't please contact Derek Onley derekonley@yahoo.com or 03 4822831 and indicate which sections they would prefer to cover.



Information on previous counts is also available from Derek.

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF
NEW ZEALAND.
OTAGO BRANCH

OTAGO HARBOUR SURVEY



Falcon Study Group Ford Falcon Car Club and NZ Falcons



Bruce McKinley talking to the Ford Falconers

Hopefully you will have seen the excellent article and photo in the sports pages of the ODT about the funds we received from the Henry Ford Car Rally on 2nd August towards our NZ falcon study. Bruce gave a very good short talk to the assembled crowd about what we aimed to do and the reporter seemed to enjoy the falcon link and plans a follow-up article. Steve Lawrence has got the gear that is needed and he and Peter are following up getting access to the various forests so there should be some action soon.

If there are any other members interested in this study I would be pleased to hear from you, so that you can be kept informed.

Contact: Steve Lawrence.

E-mail: falco1@xtra.co.nz Ph 03 486 2569

Records wanted for the 2008 N.Z. Bird Report

Many thanks to the two people who have sent me their 2008 records for the Bird Report. I would really like to hear from more of you. I have been through the newsletters, but I am sure that people must have more records which are suitable for

the report. In addition, the information in the newsletters is not always easy to convert to the report format. For example, some observations lack dates and, in other cases the observer is not named. This is not a criticism of the newsletter, which has a different purpose from the report, but I hope it explains why I would appreciate an annual list of records from as many of you as possible.

Please could I have all 2008 records by the end of August, so that I can start organizing them. My address is at the top of the newsletter. Thanking you in anticipation. **Alan Baker, Regional Recorder.**

Which records to Send?

Records suitable for the report include not only the rare and unusual but series of counts at a site, maximum and minimum counts, indications of changes in status throughout the season or compared with previous years, arrival and departure dates for migrants, counts at breeding colonies, new or abandoned nesting sites etc.

For some species whether to send in the record will be relatively obvious: for example all records of falcons will be welcome. For commoner species some indication of context or the reason for sending in the record will be helpful. For example, 13 Canada Geese in Blueskin Bay may need to be qualified by "only seen irregularly in the bay" whereas 13 at Karitane might require a comment along the lines of "usual number over the last few years".

Generally speaking however, the yet to be published 2007 bird report suffers from a lack of records; a dire lack in some regions. If in doubt it is better to send in more information and let the recorder and compiler sort it out.

Derek Onley

Nest Record Scheme for Blackbirds and Thrushes

The AGM supported a concerted push for the nest record scheme and some written notes for "Nest Record 2010" will be published in the new Southern Bird so that members can be active as soon as the first eggs are laid. The aim will be to get nest records for blackbirds and thrushes with a focus on first laying dates for the two species throughout the country. I'm sure there are other aspects that could be learnt from a good sample of hi-quality nest records: - relative incidence of predation, preferred tree or shrub species, differences in nest height, differences in nesting success, differences in clutch size. The other aim of course is to encourage members in those aspects of ornithology that involve finding nests, observing what is happening and recording this well. Recording should be on the standard nest record form (available from the website); nest visits should take care not to be disruptive - perhaps using a mirror on a stick to check contents; frequent visits are more valuable - allowing determination of first laying date, clutch size and fledging success with more confidence. In the first instance, please send completed records to your RR.

Peter Gaze (OSNZ Council member)

Email Newsletters are in glorious colour!

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 do not, please send your email address with your request to:

mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

Mystery Photos

The bird below, photographed off Fiordland recently, was tentatively identified as an Amsterdam Albatross. Was it?



Photo Keith Lerner

In the past, the large Southern hemisphere albatrosses were divided into two species, Royal and Wandering Albatrosses. They could be confidently told apart, if you ever saw them close enough, by the thin black line along the cutting edge of the bill, a feature present on Royal but absent on Wandering. However by far the most obvious difference between them was that the Royal Albatross fledged looking like the adult, if a little scruffy, and the Wandering chicks left the nest a dark chocolate brown but for the white face and underwing. Wandering chicks then became lighter over the next ten years or more until they resembled adults. So, thirty or more years ago, the

bird in the picture would have been called an immature Wandering Albatross and that would have been the end of it.

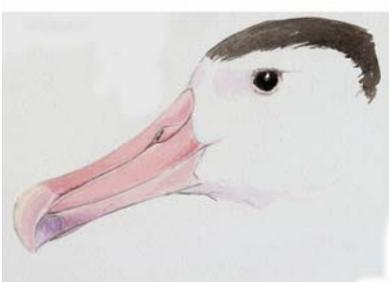
But then it was realised that, on some islands, birds were breeding in dark, immature-like plumages and rarely if ever became really white like the better known and well studied birds on South Georgia. This was especially true of the birds in the New Zealand region (Antipodes, Auckland & Campbell Islands) and to a lesser extent on Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic. Somewhat controversial DNA analysis followed and the Wandering Albatross was divided into several species, those from Gough, known as Tristan Albatross (*Diomedea dabbenena*), those from New Zealand, N.Z. Albatross (*D. antipodensis*) and the rest, Snowy Albatross (*D. exulans*). If you are really keen on the efficacy of DNA analysis or increasing your tally of ticks you can further divide the New Zealand birds into those from the Auckland Islands, Gibson's Albatross (*D. gibsoni*) and Antipodean Albatross. (*D. antipodensis*). As a result the mystery bird could be called an immature Snowy or an adult or immature Tristan, New Zealand, Gibson's or Antipodean Albatross.....

Or an Amsterdam Island Albatross (*D. amsterdamensis*). In 1977 half a dozen pairs of dark brownish albatrosses were found nesting amongst cattle on the top of Amsterdam Island in the southern Indian Ocean. They looked much the same as the dark breeding birds from Tristan and the New Zealand area but, just to make things even more complicated, had thin dark lines on the cutting edge of their bills like Royal Albatrosses. And darkish tips to their bills like the mystery bird.

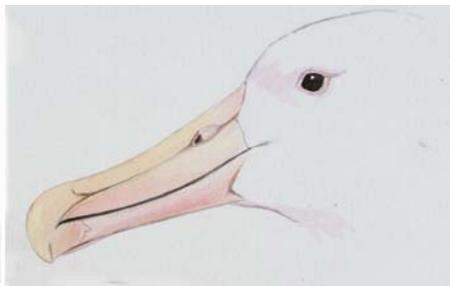
So the bird could be an Amsterdam Island Albatross, but to confirm it you would have to get a lot closer and see the thin dark line on the bill, for the brownish plumage and dark bill tip alone are not enough to identify it as such. Birds in similar plumage from the other three (or four) species can also sport dark tips to their bills.

And to be honest the chances of it being an Amsterdam bird are very slim, for there are only about 130 Amsterdam Island Albatross left compared with 25,000 New Zealand and 10,000 or so Tristan Albatross.

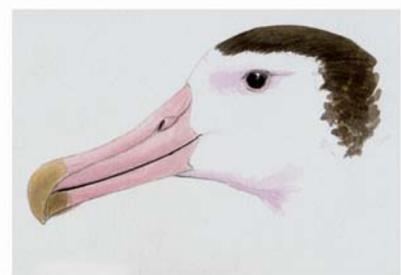
As the photo was taken off Fiordland it is most likely the mystery bird is a New Zealand Wandering Albatross – but you can't be sure.



Immature NZ Wandering



Royal



Amsterdam Albatross

Programme 2009

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 26 August Indoor Meeting Sarah Meadows and Guinevere Coleman
“Bird populations on farms and orchards.”
- Sunday 13 Sept Harbour Survey High Tide 1028, Start time 8.30!
- Wednesday 23 Sept. Indoor Meeting John Barkla “Birds and plants of the
Kermadec Islands”
- Sunday 18 Oct Harbour Survey High Tide 1638, Start time 2 30 pm
- Wednesday 28 October Indoor Meeting Dave Bell “ Results of the national survey
of NZ Falcon”
- Sunday 1 November Ross Creek Survey. Meet at 1.00 pm end of Cannington
Road. Contact Alan Baker, phone 467 5180
- Wednesday 25 Nov. Indoor Meeting TBA
- Sunday 11 October Spring survey of Hawksbury Lagoon
- Saturday 28 November Summer Wader Count. High tide at Dunedin 13.22.

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Many thanks to all who contributed,
Final date for copy for next newsletter: 16 September