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In Memory of George Chance.

Bird watchers around New Zealand will see with regret that George Chance died in January this year at the age of 92. His photographs of the **Royal Albatrosses** at Taiaroa Head, **Falcons** of the Otago hills and **Crested Grebes** at Lake Hayes will live long after him. Particularly memorable were the giant prints that he created with special equipment in the Otago Museum darkroom. And I mean giant – 3 metres of glowering **Falcon** on the wall of the Museum foyer had real impact.

George's bird photography deserves a better record than I can put together. Using my old notebooks, I see that, after I became Otago's Regional Rep in 1964, George was a major supporter of various schemes. The three that I remember best were working in the wetlands of Lake Tuakitoto, trying to find **Brown Teal** at Freshwater River and Mason Bay in Stewart Island, and building a bird watching hide at Waikouaiti Lagoon.

As members of OSNZ, we were not meant to involve ourselves in conservation issues, just provide independent advice. Magnus Sinclair had been studying **Fernbirds** in the wetlands which extended north from the open water of Lake Tuakitoto when the Otago Catchment Board announced its intention to drain much of the wetlands and increase the open water area. He asked for our help. George put in some very wet hours getting photographs of **Fernbirds** at the nest, as well as some duck nests, to help the cause. (We didn't win. The drains were dug, but years later John Gillies, the Catchment Board engineer of the day, admitted that nature foiled him. The bed of the Clutha River silted up by over a foot and prevented the drains from working effectively. The lake and wetlands are now a reserve.)

As part of his interest in rare species, George was keen to get photographs of **Brown Teal** on Stewart Island. In good military fashion, George had a carload of us away from Dunedin by 4 a.m. and all assembled at the Bluff ferry by 8 a.m. With help from Jim Watt's family, we were transported by fishing boat up a turbulent Paterson Inlet and by the Watt's dinghy up Freshwater Creek to the rather simple tramping hut at Freshwater Landing. George and Magnus spent some days hunting for **Fernbird** nests using tape recordings of calls. We walked through to Mason Bay on some very boggy tracks to explore creeks and ponds for **Brown Teal**, without any luck. This was in January 1968 when George would have been 52, had been through a great deal of soldiering in both Africa and Italy and broken a leg skiing at Coronet Peak. My memory is that he was usually well ahead of everyone else on the longer treks. The irony of the trip was that the only **Brown Teal** we saw were seven birds lurking in a creek at Half Moon Bay a hour or so before we were due to catch the ferry back home.

When, in 1968, George saw and photographed an **Australian Little Grebe** on a dam near Arrowtown, a first for New Zealand, I can remember how pleased we all were. (I do not know why the new bird atlas says this sighting was at Lake Wanaka.) There were some indignant conversations in Otago, when the gurus on the Rare Birds Committee expressed some doubts. George dealt with these by publishing not only a photograph of the **Little Grebe**, showing its bright spot between eye and bill, but also photographs of adult and juvenile **NZ Dabchicks** to show the clear differences. George's photographs of **Bitterns** may have been taken about the same time, but Mathieson Beaumont remembers one from the Green Island estuary.



George's work was done systematically, by spending as much time as possible observing each species until he understood the bird well enough to place a hide at a nest. Geoff Moon thinks that there have been only three or four other bird photographers in New Zealand besides himself and George who have used hides regularly. He tended to concentrate therefore on one or two species at any one time. It would be as valuable to know not only which species George photographed but also when. Talking to George's family, I found that it was George who recorded the breeding of **Spoonbills** in the early 1960s in the Okarito **White Heron** colony, and compiled a series of photographs of both species at their nests. Mathieson Beaumont considers that his fine series of **Royal Albatross** was taken during the 1960s. According to his nephew, Dougal Stevenson, some of his last efforts in a hide were at Aramoana where he got images of **White-fronted Tern** chicks emerging from the eggs in the nests alongside the mole. Only weeks before

George died, Dougal took him into Central Otago to look at the site of the proposed wind farms. George's birding career must have spanned at least 50 years.

Though George's bird photography is best known for albatross, falcon and grebe, he worked on many other species. I invite others to send me notes of field work that they did with George, which I will hand on to his family to file with the collection of his photographs. I hope that a compilation of the species and dates of photographs can also be put together as a memoir for publication. His colleague, Mathieson Beaumont, made scans of some of George's photographs and is willing to provide some for illustrations.

Chance, G.R. 1969. A new bird for New Zealand - Australian little grebe at Arrowtown. *Notornis* 16: 3-4.

Jill Hamel

News from Our RR in Liverpool, England

I have contacted the RSPB and the Leader of the local group has taken me out a couple of times around the birding sites of Liverpool – Chris's day job is as a Ranger for Sefton Coast Natural Reserve, so he is a great person to have met. I have been to Childwall Woods a couple of time; it is a small natural woods, with old oaks, beeches, chestnuts and many silver birches only a few miles from the centre of Liverpool. The birds are high up in the bare branches and so difficult to watch, but once the spring starts I imagine it will be almost impossible to spot them. On the first trip I saw **Blue Tit**, **Great Tit**, **Long-tailed Tit** (family group in tops of beeches), **Coal Tit** (dashes about), and had good views of **Tree Creeper**, which crawls up the trunks.



This last weekend was the first fine, sunny day after about three weeks of rain and gloom. I caught a bus to Childwall Woods by 9.30 a.m. to meet the RSPB group visit to the woods led by Chris Tynan. About a dozen or more people turned up. There was still not much green undergrowth and bulbs only showing leaves. There was a surprising lack of birds flitting around, but we soon came across a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and had a great view of him

in the sunlight, with red at the back of his head and red under the tail – very impressive. As the morning progressed we had wonderful views of several woodpeckers at the same time, disputing territories and also drumming. The old trees had many woodpecker holes in them so I should come back again to see if I can find a nest. Chris thought there were ~12 pairs in the woods. I also saw several **Nuthatch** (which move down the trunk looking for insects), **Tree Creepers**, **Blue Tit**, **Great**

Tit, Robin, Blackbird (only 2 or 3) and, surprisingly, a **Buzzard** soaring overhead, and a **Kestrel** perched on a distant tree. There were Grey Squirrels, which raid nests, so they are a major pest really, even though very cute.

Mary Thompson

Godwit spotting at Hoopers Inlet, 24 November 2007



Here is a picture of our smiling RR, Mary Thompson. And this picture was taken even before we did any serious, successful, spotting!

The exercise went well. Mary had everything and everybody in the right place. Observers were stationed on Dom Island (my name for the island with the colony of **Dominican Gulls**), others were stationed on the shore and the best part was left for Sue Galloway with her kayak, who very gently shifted the godwits close enough to the shore to be checked for bands and flags. We counted a staggering 1247 godwits, but only two were banded: one orange flag, banded in Victoria, Australia and one multi colour-banded in Feb 2006 at Warrington Beach.



Unfortunately the previous weekend, wader census day, had only 265 godwits at Hoopers and none at Aramoana. A week earlier Hoopers had 812 close to Hooper Inlet Road, but it is assumed it was not the total population that was counted. Karitane had 185 and Blueskin Bay 730 with a total of 21 banded birds.

For the record, the total number of godwits this summer is matching previous summer totals. Because of this it was agreed with the national wader coordinator, Adrian Riegen, to change the total of Hoopers Inlet number of godwits from 265 to the later figure of 1247 (refer the Summer Wader count results in this newsletter).

Peter Schweigman

A Big Day Out in Dunedin

On the last day of January 2007, Ian Jamieson, Ian McLean and Hamish Spencer spotted 55 different species of birds on a trip around Dunedin. This year Ian McLean could not participate, but on 28 January 2008, Ian Jamieson, Graham Parker and Hamish Spencer decided to try to better last year's record (Hamish had seen 54 in previous years), following much the same route.

Starting at 7.20 a.m., a fast trip to the Botanic Gardens quickly netted the first 18 species (5 more than last year). As before, one highlight was **Tui**, which we did not

see the rest of the day. We ticked **Rosella** here, too; last year we waited until our next spot, Mt Cargill. Our target species on Cargill was **Fernbird**, which we missed last year, but this year we scored, with two individuals, in fact. But again we missed **NZ Pipit**. We headed back down the mountain just after 8 a.m. with 22 species (+3).



We planned to make a quick circuit of the Ross Creek Reservoir, but our visit coincided with a groundsman using a leaf-blower. (Why a bush reserve needs its leaves blown, I am not really sure!). But it was to our advantage: we detoured back to the car, away from the noise and spotted a small group of **Rifleman**, another species we missed last year. And to ice our cake, Graham recognized the begging call of a **Shining Cuckoo** chick, which we tracked down and saw being fed by a pair of much-smaller **Grey Warbler**. We also added **Tomtit**, as we did last year. By 9 a.m. we had 26 species (+2).

We then stopped in one of the few remaining Douglas Fir stands on Three-Mile Hill and added **Robin** and **Brown Creeper**. By this time we had all the bush species we could reasonably have expected, so we did not take last year's side-trip to Whare Flat (where we had hoped to see **Rifleman**). By 10 a.m., we were at 28 species, just one more than last year, but we had gained precious time.

We next drove to the Sinclair Wetlands, adding a number of open-country birds and waterfowl, including our only **NZ Scaup** of the day. A further bonus was a **Little Owl**, tracked down with the help of the incessant alarm calls of a furious **Blackbird**. By the time we had navigated to the south end of Lake Waihola, it was 11 a.m., 38 species (+7). The eastern side of the lake gave us, as last year, **Black-billed Gull**, **Royal Spoonbill** and **Black Shag**, and we almost substituted last year's **Feral Goose** (a miss this year) with a **Cape Barren Goose**, but some enquiries of the farmer showed it was not a wild bird.



We lunched over the hill, at Taieri Mouth, where we added our first shorebirds and two seabirds, **Australasian Gannet** (another new tick for the year) and **Sooty Shearwater**, which were wheeling just offshore. We skipped the Taieri Gorge Walkway from last year, as it was not likely to give anything new for a significant time commitment (**Falcon** is possible, but not at all common), and we headed north back up the coast at 1 p.m., two hours ahead, with 51 species (+4).

Kaikorai Estuary then came up trumps with a lone **Black Stilt** and we headed via St Clair through town to Aramoana. We added our only **Caspian Tern** at

Ravensbourne, which brought us to 55, and a **Stewart Island Shag** roosting on a beacon in the harbour broke our record.



Nevertheless, Aramoana was not too speciose: just one Asiatic migrant (**Bar-tailed Godwit**) and just 3 individuals of that. Nor did we see last year's **Little Blue Penguin** swimming off the Mole. A **Kingfisher** on a branch over the road was our last bird of the day, giving us a round 60 (+5) at 4.45 p.m., and we headed for the Carey's Bay Hotel for a celebratory beer.

So, yet again a new high for us in Dunedin, but there were assuredly other species possible. If we spent more time and included the Otago Peninsula, we could have ensured both **Little Blue** and **Yellow-eyed Penguins**, and probably added further seabird species. Other possible species are **Cattle Egret**, **Falcon**, **California Quail**, and **NZ Pipit**. Nevertheless, some of our species are not at all certainties: **Black Stilt**, **Little Owl** and **Shining Cuckoo** being the outstanding examples. But with luck and effort, maybe we could make 63. Maybe next year!

What we saw (in order of sighting; additions bolded):

- | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Kereru | 22. Fernbird | 43. White-fronted Tern |
| 2. Starling | 23. Back-backed Gull | 44. Pied Oystercatcher |
| 3. Chaffinch | 24. Tomtit | 45. White-faced Heron |
| 4. House Sparrow | 25. Rifleman | 46. Pied Stilt |
| 5. Redpoll | 26. Shining Cuckoo | 47. Variable |
| 6. Grey Warbler | 27. Brown Creeper | Oystercatcher |
| 7. Blackbird | 28. Robin | 48. Grey Teal |
| 8. Dunnock | 29. Song Thrush | 49. Black-fronted Tern |
| 9. Mallard | 30. Australasian Harrier | 50. Australasian |
| 10. Little Shag | 31. Paradise Shelduck | Gannet |
| 11. Bellbird | 32. Welcome Swallow | 51. Sooty Shearwater |
| 12. Spur-winged Plover | 33. Black Swan | 52. Black Stilt |
| 13. Fantail | 34. NZ Scaup | 53. Spotted Shag |
| 14. Eastern Rosella | 35. Little Owl | 54. Rock Dove |
| 15. Goldfinch | 36. Canada Goose | 55. Caspian Tern |
| 16. Silvereye | 37. Skylark | 56. Stewart Island Shag |
| 17. Red-billed Gull | 38. Pukeko | 57. Northern Royal |
| 18. Tui | 39. Black-billed Gull | Albatross |
| 19. Yellowhammer | 40. Royal Spoonbill | 58. Banded Dotterel |
| 20. Greenfinch | 41. Black Shag | 59. Bar-tailed Godwit |
| 21. Australian Magpie | 42. NZ Shoveler | 60. Kingfisher |

Hamish Spencer

Summer Wader Count Otago Harbour, 18 November 2007

This summer the waders were not very cooperative. Aramoana had only 10 waders. And by the time Hoopers Inlet was surveyed, the godwits had moved away out of

sight. Only 265 were still in view. But since the total number of godwits matched the summer average, we have changed, with the approval of the national wader coordinator, the Hoopers inlet number of godwits to 1247, the number counted five days later.

The results:

OTAGO SUMMER WADER COUNT
18/11/2007

| | Aramoana | Papanui Inlet | Hoopers Inlet | Harbour West | Harbour East | LPG Depot | Totals |
|---------------------------------|----------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|--------|
| South Island Pied Oystercatcher | | 9 | 58 | 98 | 3 | | 218 |
| Variable Oystercatcher | 7 | 37 | 4 | | 7 | | 55 |
| Bar-tailed Godwit | | | 1247 | | 8 | | 1255 |
| Banded Dotterel | | | | | | | 0 |
| Pied Stilt | 3 | | 60 | | | | 63 |
| Royal Spoonbill | | | | | | | 0 |
| White-faced Heron | 11 | 6 | 2 | | | | 19 |
| Paradise Shelduck | 7 | 35 | 17 | | | 2 | 61 |

This time we checked the numbers of Paradise Ducks again. Numbers are well down from the June census.

Ken Gager and Peter Schweigman

Bird Books & DVDs Added to the Dunedin Public Libraries' Collection in 2007

All things reconsidered by Roger Tory Peterson

The atlas of bird migration

The big twitch: One man, one continent [Australia] a race against time by Sean Dooley

Bird: The definitive visual guide

Birds in Southland by Lloyd Esler

The birds of Pukeiti by David G Medway

Charles Fleming's Cape Expedition Diary: Auckland Islands, 1942-43

Don Merton: The man who saved the Black Robin by Alison Balance

The field companion to Roberts' birds of southern Africa by Gordon Lindsay Maclean

Field guide to New Zealand seabirds by Brian Parkinson

Field guide to the albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters of the world by Derek Onley and Paul Scofield

How to watch a bird by Steve Braunias

Kiwi: The people's bird by Neville Peat

Life on the wing: Remarkable birds and their extraordinary lifestyles by Brutus Ostling

Migrations and movements of birds of New Zealand and surrounding seas by Murray Williams et al.

Native birds of New Zealand [DVD]

Naturalised birds of the world by Christopher Lever

New Zealand birds: A diverse selection by Paul Gibson

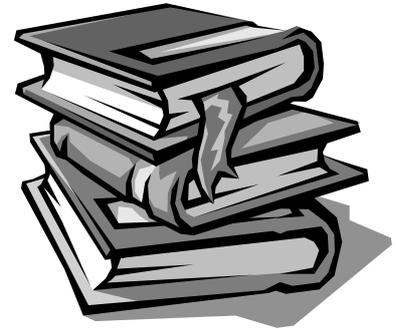
New Zealand birds: An identification guide by Stuart Chambers

Southern African bird sounds [CDs] by Guy Gibbon

Where to watch birds in New Zealand by Kathy Ombler

Whio: Saving New Zealand's Blue Duck by David Young

Alan Baker



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mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

Proposed Weekend Fieldtrip to Glenorchy, Postponed

This trip has been postponed until 24-26 October. The plan is to stay at Glenorchy and explore the surrounding areas; it may be possible to organise a trip up the Rees or Dart. At this stage we need to have a good idea of how many are likely to come so that suitable accommodation can be arranged well ahead. Please let Louise Foord (☎ 467 5041) know as soon as possible if you are at all interested.

Ornithological Snippets

A lone **Royal Spoonbill** was seen by Alan Baker at the Ohau River mouth, Lake Benmore, on 20 & 22 November 2007.



Peter Schweigman reports that an **Asiatic Whimbrel** was spotted at Aramoana on 23 Nov 2007. It was feeding on its own well away from the very few **Godwits**, 27 in all. Initially it looked big. A single bird, without the possibility to compare with other birds, can be difficult to identify by its size alone. But fortunately two **Godwits** turned up not far away and

the correct identification was made. It was not a **Curlew**, but the **Asiatic Whimbrel**, the one with the off-white rump. The next day, during the Hoopers Inlet godwit spotting, another **Asiatic Whimbrel** turned up, away from the **Godwits**, again with the off-white rump. I would like to suggest that these two sightings are of the same bird, knowing how scarce these rarities are here in Otago.

Also at Aramoana on 23 November 2007, Peter came across a nest of a **Variable Oystercatcher** with two eggs on the *Sarcocornia*, at the edge of the harbour. He is not sure if the clutch survived. At extreme high tides this area is always totally submerged. All the same, it's nice habitat for these oystercatchers, but it is the first breeding record for Aramoana, as far as he knows. Alan Baker reports ~55 **Pied Oystercatchers**, beside a lake in the Nenthorn Valley on 29 December 2007, most roosting on 2 large rocks.

Richard Schofield reports a **Black-billed Gull** colony at Pounaweia, noticed during the November wader count. Approximately 260 birds were present on a rocky islet just offshore from Pounaweia, on 18 November 2007, in various states of nesting. Some birds appeared to be sitting, others involved in courtship and mating, while others were ferrying nesting material (freshly mown grass) from the foreshore. Gulls have been present here before, but he has never been aware of them nesting. He wonders if maybe they've been washed out from the Clutha or elsewhere.



Derek Onley has had a busy time recently, reporting the following species. **Californian Quail** were heard calling at Orokonui on 17 November 2007 and on Mountain road in Silverpeaks in previous month. A lone **NZ Falcon** was chasing an **Eastern Rosella** at Waitati on 8 November 2007 and one was being "chased" by a **Tui** on 17 November 2007. There was

lots of activity at sea off Warrington and Karitane from late December 2007 to early February 2008. Apart from the thousands of **Spotted Shags** accompanied by **Red-billed** and **Black-backed Gulls** and **Sooty Shearwaters** there were also unusually large numbers of **Gannets** with 70-75 off Warrington in December 2007 and ~80 off Karitane 6 February 2008. There are usually only 2-3 at this time of the year. Off Karitane on Alan Anderson's catamaran on 24 January 2008 we saw the regular **Northern Royal Albatross**, **White-capped Mollymawk**, **Cape Pigeon** and **Sooty Shearwater** plus fair numbers of **Hutton's Shearwater** and a single **Buller's Shearwater** quite close inshore for that species. At the end of the Waikouaiti River estuary there were about 1000 **White-fronted Terns** including juveniles still being fed. All this activity seems to have attracted skuas. Up to 10 **Arctic Skuas** were regular seen during the period and a **Southern Skua** landed on the end of Warrington Spit on 17 December 2007.





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