



THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

PO Box 12397
WELLINGTON

Alan Baker
Regional Recorder
48 Pacific Street
Dunedin 9010.

☎ 03 467 5180

Mary Thompson
Regional Representative
197 Balmacewen Road
Balmacewen
Dunedin
☎ (03) 464 0787

Otago Region Newsletter 2/2009 February 2009

Laughing Kookaburra ...Yeah Right

Peter Schweigman can tell you Kookaburra-Kingfisher stories from the 70s, the 80s and the 90s but finally a rumor of a Laughing Kookaburra turned out to be true. Dave York saw the bird and at Waihola on 4 February. This is the first **confirmed** record for Otago. *(The photo is probably a different bird in a Sydney suburb)*



Hawksbury Lagoon Summer Survey

On the 1st February, yet another windy day, Peter & Susan Schweigman and Derek Onley braved squally showers and well over 1200 ducks to count Hawksbury Lagoon. Both the weather and the selection of birds suggested that summer was over. Only the Black Swans still had small young, Dark, newly fledged Black-backed Gulls stood around on the remnants of an old causeway while the nesting Red-billed Gulls had finished long ago to be replaced by a flock of roosting Black-billed Gulls newly arrived from their inland nesting sites. Over 300 Pied Stilts fed in the shallow water of the pool at the "Racecourse End", presumably on their way to winter areas on the coast. Both Shoveler and Mallard numbers had increased since September but the big change was in numbers of Grey Teal; up from 25 to 771.



Date	28 Sept 2008	1 Feb 2009
Start time	1.00pm	10.00am
Water Level cm below top gate	55	
Little Shag	4	1
White-faced Heron	0	1
Royal Spoonbill	1	0
Black Swan	64	42
Canada Goose	12	25
Greylag Goose	c14	23
Canada/Greylag Hybrid	c25	22
Paradise Shelduck	96	34
Mallard/Grey Duck	181	257
Grey Teal	25	771
NZ Shoveler	143	195
Harrier	0	2
Variable Oystercatcher	2	0
Pied Stilt	9	337
Hybrid Pied/Black Stilt	0	1
Spur-winged Plover	6	11
Black-backed Gull	6	25
Red-billed Gull	24	7
Black-billed Gull	0	90
Kingfisher	1	0
Welcome Swallow	6	10
Total	580	1854



Hawksbury Lagoon Counts; September 2008 & February 2009.
Derek Onley

Time to Count the Harbour Again?

In the July newsletter Peter Schweigman pointed out that the harbour Pied Oystercatcher census figures, dating back to 1984, indicate a decline in population. “The average total for the first 10 years was 1271, whereas the average for the last 10 years is only 821, a drop of 450 birds”. Since then, with statistical assistance from Murray Efford, I looked at the figures in a bit more detail. They showed statistically significant declines in the harbour for Pied Oystercatcher in both winter and summer (-4.7% and -8.9% each year) and Bar-tailed Godwit in summer (-7.2% each year). However the figures for the Peninsula inlets, Hooper’s and Papanui, have changed very little and you have to wonder what else might be going on in the harbour.

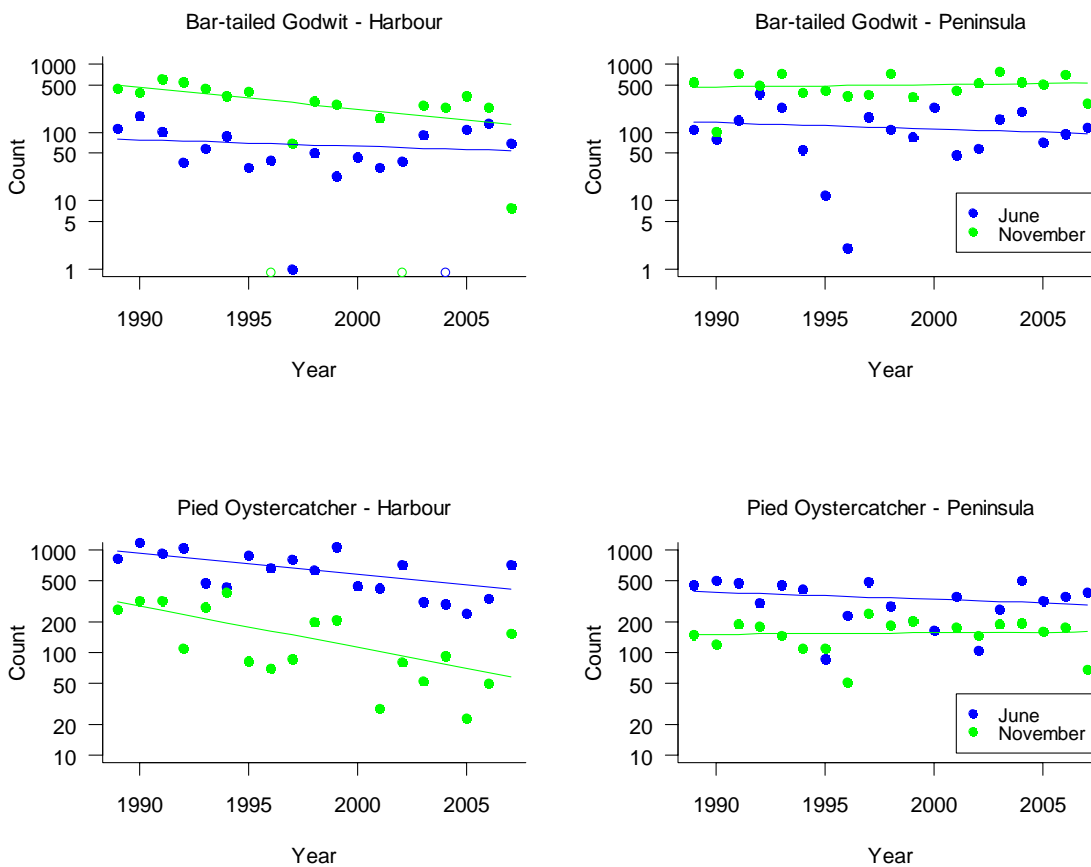


Fig. 1. Trend in wader counts by OSNZ at Otago Harbour and Otago Peninsula 1989–2007 (2000 omitted). Note log scale on y-axis. Open symbols indicate zero counts for Godwits.

The Society last surveyed the Harbour in 1977-8 & 1988-9, counting the whole coastline each month for a year. Over the last twenty years there have been big changes in Port construction, dredging regimes and recreational use. There is also a proposal to commercially harvest cockles on the two extensive sandbanks that emerge at low tide either side of Quarantine Island, both of which are feeding habitat for oystercatchers and godwits.

Maybe it is time to count the Harbour again? Derek Onley

Dart/Caples Operation Ark Update

Mohua

As a result of our very successful aerial rat control in the Dart in 2006-07, the Mohua population in that area is now very strong. This allowed us to translocate 70 Mohua from the Dart Valley to Secretary Island last October.

It is hoped that the Secretary Island population will be genetically diverse enough to allow us to then use birds from there to re-establish Mohua on mainland sites in the future. In the Caples Valley and in sites we didn't treat for rats in 2006, Mohua continue to struggle.

Whio

We now have stoat control in place along 105 kilometres of river. In 2007, a pair were seen in the Fraser Valley (upper Caples), and in July 2008 three more were seen at the Kaye Creek junction, indicating that we may have a breeding pair. However, a survey this January found no sign of them. In the Rockburn, though, we have known of a pair since 2005 and finally, last December, they were photographed with four ducklings. Then in January a further two ducklings were observed. The last confirmed Whio breeding in the Wakatipu area was in 1983 in the Routeburn so this is great news.



Barry Lawrence DoC, Wakatipu

Robins doing OK with help

DoC Staff were excited to sight the first **Robin** for probably 30 years in the East Matukituki Valley near Junction Flat. It is believed that this bird is an offspring of the robins released in the West branch near Aspiring Hut (over 20 km away) in April 2008.

and without....

Graeme Loh had two pleasant surprises these summer holidays. “Robins are still widespread and present in many islands of kanuka habitat along the Clarence River and in the Kaikoura district. We rafted the river. And when I returned to the Waitaha, south of Ross, my possum block of 1976, I found it full of robins. There were none in 1976, the nearest being in Ianthe forest. I did record a stray juvenile at Moonbeam Torrent Hut, well up the valley in 1990. Now the farming fringes and the montane forest have robins.”

Ornithological Snippets

A **Bittern** was found on the side of the road near Chuck Landis’s house at Warrington on 17 February. It was a juvenile and appeared to be physically undamaged, if a bit thin, but seemed intent on self destruction by pretending to be a wavering clump of rushes in the middle of the otherwise vegetatively barren Coast Road. It was moved over the fence to the pond in Chuck’s garden.



The local **Black Stilt**, the banded one, is still around. Peter Schweigman saw it twice on the beach approximately 4 km south of Brighton, on 26/1/09 and 3/2/09. It has been seen by Len Buchanan a few times during the breeding season, but was not breeding this year.

Sue and Mary were up the Ahuriri River at Waitangi weekend; and camped near Canyon Creek and saw the usual **Paradise Ducks, Harriers, Black-fronted Terns, Spur-winged Plovers and Tomtits**. A **Kea** was seen and heard along with many **Riflemen** and one fledgling perched on Mary’s bike right out in the open valley in broad daylight-very adventurous! They also saw the pair of **Black Stilts** at Ben Avon Wetlands as reported by Alan in last newsletter and another hybrid (all black but for a little white on head and under tail) paired with a Pied with one chick. Also there were a family of **Black Swan**, many **Grey Teal, Paradise Duck** and some **Scaup**.

Daniel Jack spotted a **Kereru** nest with one egg in the Carey’s Creek walk on 25 January. It was on the “Honeycomb” section of the track 30m above the junction of the 'Rongomai' track, in the top of a small leaved Coprosma, 1.7 m above the ground between the track and the stream.

Dave York saw an adult **Pied Shag** at the Kaikorai Estuary on 10 February

Derek Onley reports a dark phase **Arctic Skua** at Warrington on 8 February along with 1021 **Pied Oystercatchers** (more than in the winter harbour count last year) and the usual 490 **Bar-tailed Godwits**. A **Falcon** was seen at Woodside Glen on 23 January. Bruce McKinlay saw one there last year. Do they nest nearby?

Graeme Loh reports successful **Variable Oystercatcher** breeding in the Catlins with a fledged clutch of three and another of two on Surat Bay and Kings Rocks

Graeme, Sue and Fergus Sutherland and kayaked around Tautuku Peninsula on 7 February and had a good bird time. “We found floating along estuarine channels of the Fleming River among the *Leptocarpus* was a great way to see **Fernbirds**, a clay cliff with multiple kingfisher burrows was also in the estuary. The highlight at sea was a dark arctic migrant **Skua** kleptoparasitising **White-fronted Terns**. Perhaps **Pomarine**, perhaps **Arctic**. I must return to the Francis Pillars in spring to listen for Fairy Prions.”

Graeme has been seeing **Gannets** in ones and twos very regularly on the coast with a flight of eight off Tautuku peninsula and six at Blackhead.

Fergus reports **Spoonbills** nested on Rainbow Islet again this year

On 17 February a **Royal Penguin** turned up at St Kilda to moult. It has been put in a quiet place for the duration.

Notices and Business

AGM at Indoor Meeting 25 March

I think it is about time that we reviewed our activities and made some plans for the future – what should be our next project, what other activities would members like? Get you thinking caps on. Suggestions for speakers and/or offers would be gratefully received.

Mary Thompson

Great Southern TV

This company is filming several 30 minute programmes called Birdland which will feature all sorts of aspects of birds and birders. It is to be screened later in the year on TV1. They are to be in Dunedin 25th and 26th February. The producer/planner has contacted me and it is highly likely that the crew will be at the February meeting to film our meeting and talk to some of us, so it would be great if we could come out in force for this first meeting of the year. They are also filming at the Museum and Albatross colony and maybe Graeme’s prions.

The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebes in Central Otago, 21 and 22 February, 2009

This is in full swing on the weekend of 21 and 22 of February; all the planning is coming together under Peter's fantastic efforts (with about 20 participants) and all we need now is the right weather. Canterbury and Southland have also caught the spirit of it all and are surveying their areas too. If all goes well we will be able to make a preliminary report at the Indoor Meeting on 25th February.

Mary Thompson

New Regional Recorder

Just a reminder to send Alan, our new Regional Recorder a copy of your observations - mail to Alan Baker, 48 Pacific Street, Dunedin 9010.

We like to have them recorded in our monthly newsletter, so please also send the information to Derek Onley, Newsletter Editor - email derekonley@yahoo.com--

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

Three birdy podcast links

Alison Ballance's

Mana Is Seabird re-introductions

Part 1

http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/aft/aft-20090203-1547-Environment_Story-048.mp3

Part 2

http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/aft/aft-20090204-1547-Environment_Story-048.mp3

and Kakapo and Rimu

http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/aft/aft-20090209-1545-Science_Story_-_Kakapo-048.mp3

Graeme Loh

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.

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| 21-22 February 2009 | The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebe in Otago.
Contact Peter Schweigman 455 2790 |
| 25 February 2009 | Indoor meeting Speaker Lisa Hegg
Vanishing Relics: Conservation of the Mohua |
| 25th March 2009 | Indoor Meeting Bruce McKinlay
will introduce and guide us through eBird, with some hands-on live action.
This will be followed by the AGM. |
| Sunday 19 April 2009 | Hawksbury Lagoon Autumn Survey. Start 1.00pm
Contact Derek Onley 482 2831 |
| Saturday 27 June | Hawksbury Lagoon Winter Survey. |

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, c/o Blueskin Store, Waitati, 9060
derekonley@yahoo.com

Many thanks to all who contributed,
Final date for copy for next newsletter: 17 March