



THE  
**ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY**  
OF NEW ZEALAND  
(INCORPORATED)

PO Box 12397  
WELLINGTON

**Alan Baker**  
**Regional Recorder**  
48 Pacific Street  
Dunedin 9010.

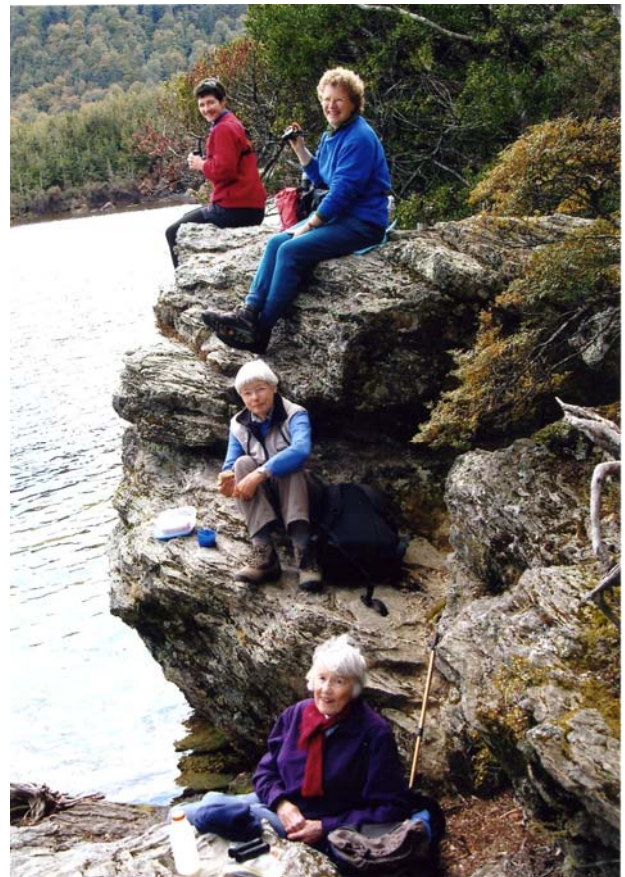
☎ 03 467 5180

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

## *Otago Region Newsletter 1/2009 January 2009*

### **OSNZ Weekend Trip to Glenorchy; Labour Weekend 24-27 October**

Seven of us had a great weekend, with great birds, great weather, great accommodation and great food and company, and of course a big thank you goes to Louise for all her great organising. The accommodation was in a farmhouse motel on Routeburn Station in the Dart Valley in a paddock surrounded by sheep, who came up on the deck to look in and check us out, horses, chooks and friendly puppies that accompanied us on our first walk to the Dart River. The weather was ideal for bird-watching, calm, mild and often sunny (only one squall came through on the Saturday after we had returned from our excursion to Lake Sylvan, then quickly cleared so we were out again to enjoy an evening walk to the river. We ticked off a total of 48 species plus quail and Great Crested Grebes on the trip through. Here are some of the highlights. A Little Owl was heard calling night and morning; a new species since the Atlas.



The Saturday morning walk to Lake Sylvan through beech forest (both red and mountain) was very special as we were accompanied for 2 hours with the song of SI Robins from both sides of the track every 100 metres or so, and almost continual song and calls of Mohua from the tops. Patient observation was rewarded with excellent views. Two of the robins were banded (these have been reported to DoC); we noted

that this area is covered intensively with rat and stoat trap lines and with the number of birds we heard and saw they seem to be paying off. Our other big excitement started when Sue glimpsed a large bird flying through the bush and Neil spotted it perched on a dead branch-binoculars up and it was identified as a NZ Falcon. It flew higher from there to another tree and then quickly to a large flat branch where we had an excellent view of it for several minutes as it dissected its prey – which it must have obtained from a nest in the tree – then off it flew through the trees carrying its prey in its talons and calling loudly; so it must have been off to a nest. The next day we saw another NZ Falcon flying overhead on the road to Paradise near Diamond Lake, also with prey and calling.



Four different trips down to the Dart River gave us good views of most of the riverbed without the hard slog of boulder hopping and river crossings. On the first sunny calm evening Lesley, Mary and Honor headed down to the river across the Station paddocks and surveyed the shingle banks, seeing many Black-fronted Terns flying upstream with small fish in their bills. (Over the three days we tried to locate the colony but from our various vantage points we didn't manage to. We walked to Chinaman's Bluff on Sunday but there was no sign of terns this far up the river.) Distraction displays and head-on attacks by a SIPO pair alerted us to something of interest and so we sat quietly at a distance to watch and they soon settled down, sitting still on raised ground and watching too. After about 15 minutes we saw some movement and it was a chick running between cover and we found a second chick

under the same log; they were about half the size of the adult and their plumage was slate grey above and already white underneath. The next day on the way to start of Dart Track we also saw another SIPO chick and parents near the roadside. On the Saturday after the hail storm had gone through, intrepid birders, Sue, Mary, Audrey, Lesley and Honor headed back to the river, this time following the Routeburn down to the Dart. The highlight of this excursion was seeing several Banded Dotterel in full breeding plumage which looked very splendid in the evening light. Mary commented that one of the bird's legs was very orange and that she hadn't realised that they were this colour. On looking carefully with telescope we discovered that in fact the bird had a bright orange flag on its left leg. (a Double Banded Dotterel?) (Leslie followed up this sighting with DoC at Queenstown and discovered that it was banded in Victoria, Australia. Another orange flagged dotterel had been seen on the lower Shotover on 4/11/06). Leslie, Mary and Sue spotted a small Black-billed Gull colony from the Paradise Road and set off to explore while the others headed up the Rees Valley. The colony was on a shingle bank across a main braid but we could see it quite well with the telescope. We counted 46 sitting birds. While watching these Mary saw another small bird fly by that wasn't a dotterel so guessed it was a Wrybill - which indeed it was. We watched it feeding along the river edge for a long time and another one joined it. Mary also observed a surprising behaviour - one appeared to chase a small chick away (was it making its own chick hide or did it object to a dotterel chick?).

Most of us made the trip home on the Monday as long as possible, stopping at Glenorchy (banded Black-billed Gull seen) and at Butchers Dam to watch the pair of Great Crested Grebes. It was a gloriously warm, calm, sunny day and a great end to an excellent birding weekend. Mary Thompson

## Summer Wader Count 22 November 2008

### OTAGO SUMMER WADER COUNT 22/11/2008

	Aramoana	Papanui Inlet	Hoopers Inlet	Harbour West	Harbour East	LPG Depot	Total
Pied Oystercatcher	61	41	37	87	2		228
Variable Oystercatcher	41	20	7		11		79
Bar-tailed Godwit	338		733				1071
Banded Dotterel							0
Pied Stilt	8	4	13				25
Royal Spoonbill		1					1
White-faced Heron		33	3	1			19

Compared with the summer count last year, the distribution of waders has changed somewhat. For example Aramoana had hardly any waders last year. There were no Pied Oystercatchers last November but 61 this year. However this did not affect the

overall totals which were not greatly different: 218 in 2007, 228 this year. There was an increase in Variable Oystercatchers, with 55 last year, 79 this year, but Pied Stilt numbers dropped from 63 to 25.

Rumours that the White-faced Heron population was very low in coastal Otago were contradicted at Papanui. A total of 33 is a good number, all feeding on their own, well away from each other.

Ken Gager and Peter Schweigman



## Godwit Banding

David Melville and Rob Schuckard turned up at Warrington to cannon net godwits on 14-16 December and again on 11-13 January. The first attempt netted 9 Bar-tailed Godwits from a flock of about 500 but the following day all but a dozen or so skittish juveniles had decided that Rabbit Island and Evansdale were quieter roost sites. However the 200 or so somewhat more phlegmatic Oystercatchers returned to the usual spot at the end of the spit. The juvenile godwits eventually out-manoeuved a damp, salt encrusted David (the wind was from the NE) and Rob resorted to firing on 20 Oystercatchers.

On the January trip the wind was yet again from the sea and the tides were well over 2 metres. Everything looked fine at the end of the spit on the previous afternoon, although all but one of the godwits were at Evansdale. You can always move the

godwits but the tide is not to be told where to go and even Dutch seawall expertise, coupled with English sand castle experience couldn't control the Southern Ocean and the nets had to be quickly taken up as the waves washed towards the dunes.



## **Golfing Gull** a new species for Otago?

During my annual nest and egg count of the Black-backed Gull colony at Hooper's Inlet in November 2008, this picture was taken and shows a rather unusual content in one nest. One wonders how this golf ball turned up there. The closest golf course is at Otakou, some 7 km away. I had a witness to prove that it wasn't me who put it there. It would be a bit far fetched to suggest that somebody changed one egg for his collection for a golf ball. There are far easier locations to legally get an egg from an unprotected bird. Why would a Black-backed Gull carry this ball all the way to it's nest?

Peter Schweigman



## **Keep a look out for Kaka**

Six juvenile captive bred kaka were released into the Orokonui Ecosanctuary near Dunedin on November 1, 2008. An adult pair remain in the aviary and supplementary food is provided in 2 locations to encourage the juveniles to stay around. The 3 females and 3 males, 2 from the Dunedin Botanic Gardens and 4 from Invercargill, are all fitted with radio tracking devices. They are tracked at least every second day and attempts are made to sight each bird on a regular basis.

For the first month the birds mostly stayed within a couple of hundred metres of the aviary. Their flying skills improved and they were seen drinking from fuchsia flowers, ripping open dead logs for invertebrates and generally exploring their environment. The outside of their former cage was a favourite place to explore.

The second month, December, saw the birds begin to spread out a bit and the Ecosanctuary started getting calls of sightings from further afield: Waitati, Purakanui, Carey's Bay, Mt Cargill Rd and an unconfirmed sighting near Dunedin.

Currently the Dunedin siblings can often be found in the upper stream area of the Ecosanctuary and are rarely found with the others. One of the Invercargill males is often found around the main track and an Invercargill female feeds with all of the others and does not favour any particular area. But two of the birds have remained undetected (ie no signal) for periods of up to 11 days. Subsequently it was found that one of the birds (a female) was often in the Mihiwaka area. The other bird, a male, continues to elude us although he does turn up now and then.

It would be good to know where the "disappearing" male goes. Please look out for our stray kaka and phone the Orokonui Ecosanctuary office (482 1755) to report any sightings of kaka. They are all wearing metal leg bands and if you manage to get very close you might be able to read the number (the last digits are the distinguishing ones).

Sue Hensley

### **...and White-winged Black Terns?**

Alice Wilkins has been monitoring Black-fronted Tern on the Dart River for the past few months -“On the 23rd of December I was at Paradise where there is a colony of about 70 terns and I noticed a bird with a very black under belly. It looked like a tern but a bit chubbier. On returning to the office I checked in The Field Guide to the birds of New Zealand (Heather and Robertson 1996) and found it was possibly a White-winged Black Tern”.

“The tern was directly above my head and it got my attention because of the sound it made, something I didn't recognise. It hovered for about 30 seconds then headed downstream towards the colony. I haven't been out there since and that was the only sighting.”

White-winged Black Terns normally migrate to the Southern hemisphere from breeding grounds in Asia but in the 1970's a pair was found breeding in a colony of Black-fronted Terns. (Pierce, R.J. 1974. *Notornis* 21:129-134). Maybe they are still there?

### **Ornithological Snippets**

Doreen Grant reports a **Kingfisher** in the main street of Outram, the first there for many years and a **Blackbird** captured in a garage that bore a white band with the number 56. Any suggestions?

A **White Heron** was on the Merton Tidal Arm in the paddock just south of the flood gates by Highway 1 south of Cherry Farm on 8 December.

Alan Baker went to Omarama last November travelling along the north side of Lake Aviemore. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, opposite the Otematata R. mouth he counted 12 **Great Crested Grebes** with more further up the lake. He also reported grebes on Benmore, Ruataniwha and its Wairepo Arm and Middleton. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, there was an excellent collection of riverbed birds in an irrigated paddock beside the Omarama-Twizel Highway: **Pied Oystercatchers, Black-billed Gulls, Black-fronted Terns** and stilts including 2 pure black ones. On the 20<sup>th</sup> he went up the Birchwood Road in the Ahuriri Valley where there were 2 **Black Stilts** in the roadside lake in the Ben Avon Scenic Reserve. Near the Birchwood Station Homestead he saw **Spur-wing Plovers** pursuing a **New Zealand Falcon** which was carrying prey. It flew high into the air and was joined by another where it appeared the food was passed over and they flew off in different directions. Alan also saw another **Falcon** in Omarama on the same day.

## Notices and Business

### New Regional Recorder

I am very pleased to announce that Alan Baker has agreed to be our new Regional Recorder. A new publication is planned by OSNZ called the New Zealand Bird Report that will contain records of observations in a similar format to Classified Summarised Notes but also aims to include comments as to whether the observation was noteworthy because of the number of birds, or the location, or the date. It sounds like this will be more user-friendly than CSN.

Please remember to let Alan have 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](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)--

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

The date for this major project is fast approaching. Peter Schweigman has done a fantastic job so preparations for the survey are well in hand. There are a few areas where boats or transport need to be finalised, but they will be sorted out. The various tasks include observing on board boats at the various lakes, using kayaks or canoes in conjunction with the boats and a number of small lakes will be covered by car/foot. Accommodation has been booked in Cromwell and numbers need to be confirmed. Now is the time for those who have not registered their intentions to be part of the team, to confirm their interest. Phone Peter.Schweigman 03 4552790

Mary Thompson

### 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](mailto:mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz)

### Ross Creek

For some years Brian Heenan has been encouraging the DCC to look after the Ross Creek Reserve better and as part of his approach he would like to know more about the birds of the area. He has already tracked down Richard Gray, who carried out research there on nesting Rifleman in the 1960s (Notornis 16:5-22(1969)), but would like more recent information. If anyone is interested in participating in (and organising) a survey, (which could even include looking at Richard Gray's Rifleman nesting sites which are well documented in his postgrad thesis) please contact Derek Onley.



## 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.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 31 January 2009     | Summer Survey of Hawksbury Lagoon. Start 9.30 am.<br>Contact Derek Onley 482 2831                 |
| 21-22 February 2009 | The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebe<br>in Otago.<br>Contact Peter Schweigman 455 2790 |
| 25 February 2009    | Indoor meeting          Speaker Lisa Hegg<br>Vanishing Relics: Conservation of the Mohua          |

Newsletter editor: Derek Onley, c/o Blueskin Store, Waitati, 9060  
[derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com)

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