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(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 6/2008 July 2008

Local News

Hawkesbury Lagoon Winter Count



Peter Schweigman and Derek Onley finally got out to Hawkesbury Lagoon on 1 July, a fine, frosty winter's day that saw about half of the ponds frozen over and ducks and swans huddled together in patches of clear water. The total number of birds was about half the count for April mainly due to declines in the numbers of Grey Teal,

Shoveller, Pied Stilt and Spur-winged Plover. Higher numbers of Paradise Shelduck and Black Swan were present but the highlight amongst the ducks were 3 Scaup, the first record since 3 on 26 Feb 1993. The lagoon is very shallow and not the best for diving ducks. A Black-fronted Dotterel was the first record but it's presence was nearly very short lived because, as it flew off, a NZ Falcon shot out of the nearby trees and chased it high across the ponds. We photographed what we assumed was the same bird some minutes later.

Date	28.1.08	13.4.08	1.7.08
Start Time	13:55	14:00	11:30
Water Level cm below top of gate	64	75	
Black Shag	0	0	1
Little Shag	2	0	1
White-faced Heron	1	0	0
Royal Spoonbill	1	0	0
Black Swan	82	14	52
Canada Goose	33	8	7
Graylag Goose	18	27	26
Canada/Greylag Hybrid	36	22	11
Paradise Shelduck	36	22	86
Mallard/Grey Duck	751	178	192
Grey Teal	855	341	39
NZ Shoveler	8	356	120
NZ Scaup	0	0	3
Harrier	0	0	1
NZ Falcon	0	0	1
Pied Oystercatcher	0	1	0
Variable Oystercatcher	0	2	2
Black-fronted Dotterel	0	0	1
Pied Stilt	322	76	9
Spur-winged Plover	51	40	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	0	0	0
Black-backed Gull	6	9	18
Red-billed Gull	38	0	13
Black-billed Gull	0	0	0
Caspian Tern	1	3	0
Kingfisher	0	0	0
Welcome Swallow	0	1	1
Total	2241	1100	584

Hawksbury Lagoon survey results January – July 2008.

South Island Pied Oystercatcher

In the last Newsletter it was mentioned that the number of these oystercatchers during the winter wader count in June this year came to 874. This number is well down from last year's total of 1225. One wonders if last breeding season was just a poor one or the year before was an exceptionally good one. But our figures dating back to 1984 suggest a decline in population. We have carried regular wader counts since 1984 and the average total for the first 10 years was 1271, whereas the average for the last 10

years is only 821, an average drop of 450 birds. It might pay to check these Otago Harbour figures with the national totals as soon as they are available.
Peter Schweigman

Native Pigeons

Does anyone else agree with me that native pigeons in Dunedin sit out on the power wires more often in a quiet drizzle than in fine weather? This would be a much safer way of getting a wash in an urban area than using creeks or puddles.

I think our pigeon population is increasing, and it could be mainly due to increasing food sources as trees mature in our gardens, but a habit like this would help too.



Jill Hamel.

Kereru holding underside of wings open to rain on powerline in Waitati, late summer.

Ornithological Snippets

Tim Cotter wrote: Today (10 July) at 12:08pm a **NZ Falcon** flew to the top of a large gum tree overlooking the Dunedin Botanic Garden bird aviary. The bird was dark brown all over. The bird arrived with fanfare, with **Eastern Rosellas** (x8) and **NZ Pigeons** (x6) flying in every direction away from the falcon. Also, **Tui** (about 10) and **Bellbirds** (about 6) flew directly towards the falcon, attempting to mob it. The falcon flew off at about 12:17pm, causing huge arguments between **Tui** and **Bellbirds** as the intruder was quickly forgotten and it was back to asserting one's territory. The Gardens gets regular **falcon** visits every winter, especially on calm days.

Alan Baker reports: "On 21 June I saw a **Falcon** at Ross Creek. **Tui** were particularly abundant in the Dunedin Town Belt on 12 July, particularly between Chamberlain St and the top of the Bullock track, where they were feeding on kowhai and fivefinger. Another good area was the north end of Wallace St., which also has early flowering kowhai."

Louise Foord reported from Maori Hill: In my garden in on June 23rd Flowers of *Banksia integrifolia* visited by a **Tui**. There are larger trees in the Botanic Gardens

next to the aviary that staff used to cut branches for the parrots when the seeds had formed.

Russell Cannings wrote: Three days ago (June 30th) I was out **Yellow-eyed Penguin** watching at Victory Beach on the Otago Peninsula when a dark jaeger (skua) flew past, close to shore and heading north. Unfortunately the bird was back lit so appeared mostly as a silhouette. Its shape, direct flight style and powerful, rapid wingbeats made it easy to separate from the nearby juvenile and immature black-backed gulls. I cannot be sure which species it was but judging from the jizz and hefty appearance my best guess would be **Pomarine Skua**.

It's getting pretty late for these pirates. I haven't seen an Arctic Skua around here since April. Is there a regular but minimal overwintering population or are records like these simply anomalies?

And on July 6 : The **Coot** raft on Lake Waihola is now a healthy 196 birds. That's the largest group of Coots I have seen so far on the South Island. The first Coots started showing up on the lake in April (originally just over 50 birds) and has tacked on a few more each time I check. I suspect these additions have been arriving from the Central Otago reed lakes.

At Waldronville Beach, many **Buller's and White-capped Mollymawks** were coming within 15 meters of the beach itself. This is not the first time I have seen this at Waldronville (opposite Green Island). For whatever reason, the birds tend to come a lot closer here than on other coastlines, regardless of the weather.

Flooded fields on the Taieri Plains have encouraged huge numbers of plovers, stilts, herons, ducks, blackbirds, skylarks, and geese, but I didn't see anything (species-wise) out of the ordinary.

A **Caspian Tern** at Kaikourai Lagoon was nice to see (not nearly as common down south).

A **White Heron** was present in the Botanic Gardens during the last month and Derek Onley saw one flying north along the cliffs towards Seacliff on 29 June.

World News.....

Peter Schweigman from Scotland – continued

A few weeks after the June Newsletter came out we realised that one of the most important highlights of our trip was not mentioned. Our visit to Scotland was mainly to catch up with Kim and Jenny, but we had asked if it was possible to see the Puffin, that species known to breed in countries like Scotland. Kim and Jenny investigated a possible breeding site in February, but had no luck. All four of us tried again in early May and this time they had arrived. We plodded along a barely discernible track through the peat bog and moorland till we reached the cliff edge. From the cliffs near Reay, not far from Thurso, we counted about 400 birds on a grassy stack off the coast. The birds were a bit far away but visibility from the cliff was good, in calm, sunny weather. A lot of activities, individual birds going in and out of burrows or having a lazy swim in the ocean. It was a mixed colony, since we saw about 25 **Razorbills** as well.

Other birds not mentioned before were the divers. According to the field guides the most common one is the **Red-throated**, which we didn't see, followed by the **Black-throated**, both breeding in Scotland. The one we saw on most of our field trips was the **Great Northern Diver** on most lochs and at sea, with only one in almost complete breeding plumage, but is it the one that doesn't breed in Scotland.



Peter and Susan Schweigman

Notices and Business

Sea trip

I have booked the Polaris II for August 16th (Saturday) for a full day birding trip off Taiaroa Head. We will get out possibly as far as 35nm and will be chumming along the way. It'll be an 8 hour day worth around \$150 (though this will depend on the turn out). So far I have had a good number of confirmations but am looking for a few more people.

Last time I got out on the Polaris I saw Light-mantled and Grey-headed Albatross, Soft-plumaged, White-headed, and Grey Petrel, as well as 3 species of storm petrel. Who knows what chumming will bring in!

Please contact me ASAP if you are interested in the trip as spots are filling up. All levels of skill are welcome!

Russell Canning russellcannings@shaw.ca

2008 Garden Bird Survey (12-20 July 2008).

This is not an official OSNZ project, but OSNZ supports it and you are encouraged to participate in the 2008 Garden Bird Survey. All you have to do is sit and relax (with a drink and something to eat if you like) and watch the birds in your garden for 1 hour sometime between 12 and 20 July, and record the largest number of each species of bird you see at one time. You can sit inside looking out the kitchen or living room window, or outside on a garden seat (but be aware that if you're outside you may frighten birds away). You don't have to be able to see your whole garden, only part of it.

Survey organiser, Eric Spurr, said 2064 people participated in last year's survey, and he hopes even more will participate this year. The results of last year's survey are available at <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/> and make fascinating reading. It is planned to repeat the survey annually. After a number of years the data gathered will provide valuable information on population trends of birds in our urban and rural environment.

For full instructions, a downloadable report form and background information see: <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/> or contact Eric Spurr, ph. (03) 321 9809, or email spurre@landcareresearch.co.nz

Mary Thompson

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

Glenorchy Trip 24-26 October

Accommodation is booked in a house at Routeburn Station for this long weekend. There are beds or bring sleeping bags to sleep on the floor or tents. Plenty of room for all.

The house is close to the beginning of the Routeburn and Greenstone tracks, the Rees and Dart Valleys. Anyone who wants to go off tramping could stay the night.

All the native forest birds are nearby, Robins, Kakariki, Mohua at Lake Sylvan. Falcons nest on the hillsides. Beautiful beech forests from river level upto the high peaks, river, lake and swamp habitats are within easy reach. There is plenty to see and all levels of activity. All welcome.

Contact Louise Foord 4675041.

New Zealand ebird

New Zealand eBird is sponsored by the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. This tool is designed to give bird-watchers the power to submit observations from New Zealand into a permanent archive, while building their lists and enjoying birds!

I recently had a look on eBird to try and get more information on the distribution of birds around proposed windfarm sites in Otago. Admittedly it has only just started but with the present levels of contributions it turned out to be useless. For someone who has to be reminded to send in their observations to our local recorder I suppose I was expecting too much and with a twinge of conscience I felt obliged to enter in several recent observations. I would like to encourage everyone else to do so as well – but remember also until the technology takes over completely, if it ever does, to send in your records to our local recorder **and this newsletter**.

The scheme does have a few entertaining quirks. It insists on telling you the number of birds in your world list – mine now stands at 57 as a result of a couple of visits to Warrington and Hawkesbury Lagoon – and it has an entertaining way of questioning the veracity of your observations – “27 Bar-tailed Godwits is a high count for your region” – something I suppose it will continue to do until it receives a decent number of observations? You do have to put up with the Australasian names for NZ birds – Purple Swamphen, Double-banded Plover, Pacific Black Duck and Swamp Harrier, and you do need broad band unless you enjoy spending hours in front of a computer. But it proved useful compiling this newsletter as I didn't have to spend hours trying

to find the notebook I used to write down those numbers at Hawkesbury Lagoon. Although it did take a while to remember my password...
Derek Onley

Help with spring wader migrations and windfarms

In view of the proposals for windfarms in Central Otago and the large numbers of native waders and gulls that migrate annually from the interior to the coast, members may find Ian Southey's work interesting.

"I'm back at Taharoa for most of the next 2 months watching for migrating waders again and there will also be another team out between Raglan and Port Waikato doing similar work. I'd be keen to hear any news of migrating birds from anybody who is out in suitable places over the next couple of months, in particular notes on departure from wintering sites and routes.

In terms of departures I'm keen for any casual observations but if people are spending a period of time it would be interesting to know the start and end times of the observation period as well as counts of flock numbers, flock size (if possible) and direction by compass or landmarks with notes on tide and weather as well as the usual place and date. I have been told that most departures from the Auckland area are more or less over the middle of the afternoon and this information would let me put some numbers on that. When SIPO are departing it sounds like you can expect them to be calling more than usual just beforehand and even more so when they take to the wing. I was told the call is a chattering sort of chattering version of their normal call, but not the same. Maybe that will make sense if you hear it. As the birds fly away the ascent is gradual and there may be a few stragglers trying to catch up to them. Call rates reduce quite a bit when they are under way but they don't stop so it is a reasonable way to pick them up, especially at night.

SIPO from Miranda appear to head about SSW as they leave which should have them going over the Waikato and the Atlas shows a few inland records from there and maybe overland they might continue as far as Wanganui or so. Bay of Plenty birds might cut across the base of East Cape and continue down the coast. It is likely that much of this would occur at night. The calls of migrating oystercatchers and stilts should be fairly obvious if they are there but records of Banded Dotterels or Wrybills would be pretty special. Again, I'd like to know the species, place, time and direction if birds are heard. It's been too bloody miserable to ask anyone to sit up but there is so little hard information that any observations will be significant at this point. The other way to pick up migrating birds is when they stop to rest so any reports of waders in unusual places, especially Wrybills would also be welcome.

I'd be grateful for any help and I'll keep you posted." iansouthey@yahoo.co.nz

Answer to Mystery Photo 1 An Albatross off Aramoana



The pale back and pink bill makes this one of either the Wandering or Royal Albatross groups. The bird has a pale patch in the centre of the wing and a trace of white along the inner forewing which rules out Northern Royal as they have a completely black upperwing. This upperwing pattern is however common to both Southern Royal and older Wandering Albatrosses from the sub-antarctic islands and the New Zealand area (though rare in Antipodes birds). The bird's body appears to be almost entirely white with no trace of dark on the head and as far as can be seen in the tail. A Wandering Albatross with an upperwing pattern as dark as this one would have dark patches on the crown, dark on the tail tip and smudgy, if faint, markings on breast and probably the back. So that leaves Southern Royal Albatross. Close up you would have been able to see the thin dark line along the cutting edge of the bill, which would have made identification much easier.

Have you any mystery photos you would like included here? Contact the editor.

Programme 2008/9

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 July | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Cavity nesting birds: New Zealand has some holes. | 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" | |
| Wednesday, 24 September | Indoor Meeting
Franny has recently returned from South America where she worked on a number of conservation oriented bird projects. She will talk about the Macaw project and promises to add some pretty pictures of the birds she saw at the end. | Speaker: Franny Cunninghame |
| Labour Weekend
24-26 October | Glenorchy Weekend Fieldtrip.
Contact Louise Foord, ☎ 467 5041 | |
| 21-22 February 2009 | The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebe in Otago. | |

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Final date for copy for next newsletter: 19 August