



THE
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OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 5/2007 June 2007

Birds of San Diego

During May I visited my son and his family in San Diego, southern California. The highlight of my bird watching was a morning spent sitting on a bank about ten metres above a salt marsh. This was part of the very extensive estuary area of the San Diego River. With bird book and binoculars at the ready it was exciting to see a new, to me, bird fauna. As far as I could ascertain I saw 15 **Willetts**, 25 **Marbled Godwit**, 4 **Bufflehead Ducks** (they were very cute), 3 **Snowy Egret**, 1 **Great Blue Heron** and about 30 little birds I couldn't identify, but they looked like sandpipers.



There were three **Least Terns** swooping over and diving into the water adjacent to where I was sitting. They have a double clicking call, this I found unusual for a bird. The **Least Terns** nest on a sandy area just above the tide and I was happy to see the council erecting a protective barrier around the large nesting area to keep dogs and humans off the site. I also saw the occasional small group of Brown

Pelicans flying by. On the distant sandbars there were other species of birds but for these a telescope was required.

A surprising sight was a heron pulling the grasping claws off a large crab and swallowing them whole; this process took about five minutes. The crab repeatedly trying to run away. This was finally accomplished minus the two claws and with no hope for its future.

Other bird life I found disappointing in its scarcity. In the suburban area I only saw **Crows** and occasionally a flock of parrots, the latter calling as they swooped across the sky. I never saw them other than in silhouette, but I presume they are green.

My son and I stayed in a cabin in the Sequoia National Park at about 2130 m altitude but as there was still snow on the ground the birds were probably in the foothills. All we saw there were **Crows** and **Ravens** and a species of **Robin**.

I can't give you any scientific names because I left my bird book in America, ready hopefully, for my next visit to the family of Eagles and other birds.

Audrey Eagle

Very rare earlier sightings for Otago

In February 1991 the *Otago Bird Report 1985 – 1989*, compiled by A.G. Hocken and A.R. Baker was published. It dealt with sightings of all species recorded in available sources, Classified Summarized Notes in *Notornis* and local newsletters. At the moment I have an idea to create a Database of only the rare birds in Otago. To give you an idea, here follows an example of early sightings.

I'd like to start with this one, although the species is not rare. It's the location that is rare for the species. On 8 Jan 1942 a flock of 350 **Banded Dotterels** seen at Lake Waihola. In the Otago Newsletter of October 1966, Jill Hamel comments: "that startled me but they were recorded by R. Sibson."

A **Pomarine Skua** was seen by Bill Poppelwell on 20 Dec 1961 at Aramoana. His comments: "a dark phase, blunt twisted tail feathers." Refer CSN in *Notornis* Vol 19 supplement.



On 2 Feb 1963 there was a sighting of a **Red-capped Dotterel** at Lake Tuakitoto, seen by Ross McKenzie et al. In *Notornis* Vol 27 described as "...a small neat dotterel, grey above, clean white below, which showed a faint tinge on crown and nape and had sharply defined grey shoulder patches. Much smaller than nearby immature Banded Dotterels. We guessed it to be an immature female".

And a **Red-necked Stint** at Aramoana on 26 Oct 1966, seen by Bob Smith. The description in the Otago Newsletter 10, February 1967, by Jill Hamel reads: "...still with a trace of rufous down its nape. It was a minute thing smaller than a **Banded Dotterel**, about the size of a **House Sparrow**..."

On 16 Feb 1979 Pat Miller et al counted at least 60 **Spine-tailed Swifts** at Tautuku Lodge, Catlins. Initially they saw one, but "closer observation revealed the presence of six birds, and over the next 15 minutes this increased in steps through 9 and 12 to 13. Five minutes later, a large flock appeared over the bush to the west, bringing the total to at least 60". Refer Short Note in *Notornis* 27, p.44.



On 14 Nov 1976 there were five **Curlew Sandpipers** at Inchclutha, seen by Peter Schweigman. “Very restless, busily feeding one moment and the next moment were in the air flying from one end on the lagoon to the other end. This pattern was repeated a number of times.”

Peter Schweigman

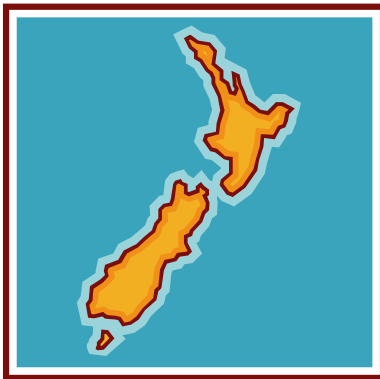
New Zealand Garden Bird Survey; Pilot Study, 14-22 July, 2007

Eric Spurr of Landcare Research, and also an OSNZ member, is coordinating pilot studies for a national Garden Bird Survey. This is the start of more comprehensive bird monitoring scheme initiated by Landcare that will include spring breeding birds, and water birds, as well as garden birds. He is keen to get OSNZ branches involved, although at this stage it is not known whether OSNZ Council will take this scheme up as a national project. Many Regional Representatives were very enthusiastic about it as it could provide much needed publicity and potentially involve members of the public or schools. The survey format is simple, easy to use and fun.

The objective is to monitor common garden bird population trends and distribution over the years with as wide a coverage of NZ as possible. The method is: record the highest number of each bird species seen, heard or flying over, at any one time during one hour from a fixed observation point looking over a section of your garden.

If you are keen to take part this season, then Mary has copies of the data record forms and full instructions or they can be downloaded from www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/. The results will be published on the Landcare website and the data will also be accessible to us.

Atlas of Bird Distribution in NZ, 1999-2004



What we have all worked hard for is to be launched at Government House on 13 August, 2007 at 6.15 p.m. Any OSNZ members who would like an invitation to attend this event should let Mary know before 20 June in order to register so that an Official Invitation can be sent to you.

Chris Robertson, who has been in charge of the project, reported to Council and the RRs and gave a presentation on the Scientific Day about the huge effort that has gone into the production of the Atlas. There were 440,000 hours of field work by 850 observers and teams, returning 31870 record sheets with over 1.5 million individual bird observations, then over 10,000 hours of data entry and map making. 96.4% of all the 10 k squares were covered. The final Atlas will have 530 pages, 2135 maps and weigh 2.5 kg! Each bird will have its distribution map in colour, seasonal maps and

the previous map, all on the same page, with some key references as well. Chris estimated that if the cost of volunteer time were factored in, the Atlas would have cost \$10m to produce. It will retail for \$98. It will be entered for the Montana Book Awards and Pride of Print Awards.

The Atlas will be distributed free to every paid up member of OSNZ, so if you have let your membership lapse, renew it now, or if you are thinking of joining, then now is the perfect time to join to gain maximum benefit. Application Forms can be downloaded from <http://osnz.org.nz/join.htm> and there will be copies at the next meeting, or contact Mary, 464 0787.

New Plymouth AGM and Conference, Queens Birthday weekend.

I attended this conference as RR. All the Regional Representatives met together on the Friday afternoon and also met with Council members and were briefed about OSNZ issues. They announced that the Atlas was to be published soon (see above). The RRs asked that posters be produced which branches could use for publicity and this was agreed to. Classified Summarised Notes is to be replaced with the NZ Bird Report which will be published annually; it will still contain observations, date and location and observers initials (so keep these coming in to Frank Austin, our Regional Recorder) and also contain reports from the Rare Bird committee, Beach Patrol scheme, etc. The Scientific Committee is exploring the options for a national long-term bird monitoring scheme, whether using transects, 5 minute bird counts or selected locations. The RRs were keen to proceed with the Garden/backyard Bird Survey as piloted by Landcare (see above).



The venue for the AGM was the New Plymouth Club (which has over 3000 members, so the facilities were excellent) situated on the foreshore with Len Lye ‘Wind Wand’ just up the street and seagulls, shags and even a **Gannet** flying by to welcome us – rare to see so close to shore. The first main events were field trips organised for the Saturday; the weather was not promising but we remained dry for the day and some sun broke through. Two bus loads of us headed off to just east of Eltham to Lake Rotokare, which has a predator-proof fence nearing completion enclosing the only natural lake in Taranaki and some lush regenerating bush with large specimens of pukatea, rewarewa and tawa and a rich ferny understorey compared with our beech forest. The aim is to transfer **Kiwi, Whiteheads, Saddlebacks, Stitchbirds**, etc. We had a 1.5 h walk round the perimeter of the lake, seeing **Tomtit, Grey Warbler, Tui**, heard the one **NI Robin, Pukeko**, 2 **Scaup, Mallards** and one **Shoveler**, and 3 **Little Shags**. By noon the clouds were lifting and we headed up Mt Taranaki from Stratford to the end of the road, with spectacular views over eastern Taranaki green, hedge-lined paddocks and behind us the ominous presence of the mountain with swirling clouds, massive scree slopes and occasional drenching showers - fortunately

we were in the bus for those. There are reports of **Kiwi** in the area and there is active predator control, but the birdlife on the mountain was sparse; **Tomtit**, **Pigeon**, **Bellbird**, **Tui** and others saw **Riflemen**. We were delivered back to base-camp by 5.00 pm.

The evening programme was the Conference Dinner and AGM. The President's report is essentially as written in *Southern Bird*. The news that disappointed some was that there is to be no name change for OSNZ. The appointment of an Executive Officer is hoped to help with publicity and raise the profile of OSNZ as the leading authority on birds in NZ.

The Scientific Day on Sunday, which started at 8.30 am and finished at 5.30 pm, was the highlight for me with many interesting talks. Topics included: the importance of native birds as pollinators and seed dispersers of native plants; the disappearance of **Bellbirds** from New Plymouth since 2000, although they are still present in Egmont National Park; movements of satellite-tagged **Kereru** in Invercargill between there and Gore and Stewart Island during the summer; the NI race of **Falcon** (bush falcon) nest in scapes on the ground in clear-felled pine forest; collections of bird, bone, skin and eggs in Australasian museums number more than 500,000 (Otago Museum has about 13,000 specimens); report of results from satellite transmitter-tagged **Godwits** by Phil Battley (non-stop flight of 10,000km in 6.5 days).

On Monday morning, clear view of Mt Taranaki with the first snow of the season; about a dozen of us ended the weekend with a pleasant stroll through Pukekura Park lead by David Medway, ex long-time President of OSNZ. The AGM was certainly a success and I learned a lot and met a lot of the people behind the names one reads in *Notornis*.



Mary Thompson

A Short Walk Along Powder Ridge 4 June 2007

Powder Ridge is one of the longest ridges in the DCC Water Reserve at the headwaters of the Silverstream. A track here seems to have been recently upgraded and is now well marked at the turn off from the main valley track.

After a steep climb of about 20 minutes onto the ridge itself the track carries on along the ridge climbing gradually. The forest is mature kanuka with a full range of pittosporum and coprosma shrubs. **Kereru** were heard flying past and landing in the canopy throughout the time we were there. **Bellbird** and **Tui** were common and could be seen gleaning on branches. **Tomtit** and **Fantail** were seen occasionally



especially on the lower part of the track. **Brown Creeper** were in large flocks foraging in the canopy with continual contact calls. When chirped at they reacted strongly and strident calls replaced the contact calls. Individuals came close and called in response to me.

Interestingly, compared to the main valley, we did not hear any exotic birds. The only bird we missed was **Robin** which I had previously seen at the flat terrace above the Powder Creek/Silverstream confluence.

Bruce McKinlay

AGM of Otago Region, OSNZ; 27 June

At the June meeting we will hold an AGM of our region and discuss possible projects we might like to undertake. Possible surveys might be: Taieri River, Akatore Forest, Green Belt, any other suggestions? Possible Field Trips: Inch Clutha, Purakanui, Waituna Lagoon, Botanical/Woodhaugh Gardens nesting birds; fairy prions at St Clair cliffs. If the idea of the Garden Bird Survey takes off, it would be good if we could have a small publicity team to promote it. Please bring your ideas to the meeting or let me know before hand if you are unable to be there.

Mary Thompson

Programme 2007

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, 27 June	Indoor Meeting & AGM Topic: Fernbirds	Speaker: Bruce McKinlay
Wednesday, 25 July	Indoor Meeting Topic: Orokoni Bird Counts	Speaker: Derek Onley
Wednesday, 22 August	Indoor Meeting Topic: Urban birds in Dunedin: species and possible impacts of domestic cats	Speaker: Yolanda van Heezik

Saturday, 1 September

Sinclair Wetlands Field Trip. 3.30 p.m. onwards. The aim is to stay into the evening to listen for bittern, but also including a survey of other birds in the area (fernbirds, grey teal, scaup, etc). Take a picnic tea, warm clothes, tape-recordings of bittern and fernbird calls.

Contact Mary Thompson, ☎ 464 0787

Wednesday, 26 September

Indoor Meeting Speaker: Jamie Newman
Topic: Tracking Titi for 64,000km and Other Recent Findings from the Titi Research Team

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