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(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 2/2008 March 2008

Local News

South Otago Pelagic

On many occasions over the last few years, I have been frustrated by distant glimpses of interesting-looking birds off Nugget Point. To remedy the situation, a boat was organised for 27th January to find out what was actually out there, but the seemingly perfect conditions suddenly disappeared as the sea fog rolled in just before the planned departure. However, on 29th January, Hugh Darwen, Russell Cannings and I made a second attempt, and took a short trip from Owaka, to a point about 8km offshore from Owaka Heads. Conditions were reasonable for being on a small boat, though a bit more wind may have been better for birds.



On the outward journey there were small numbers of **Sooty Shearwaters**, **2 Shy** and **1 Buller's Albatross**, and a probable **Fluttering Shearwater**. While the skipper did a bit of fishing, we were treated to about a dozen **Shy Albatross**, with a single **Southern Royal Albatross**, close to the boat. Also 4 single **Buller's Shearwaters** were seen, along with another **2 Fluttering Shearwaters**, **3 White-faced Storm Petrels** and **1 Cook's Petrel**. More expected were **3 or 4 Cape Petrels**, a **Yellow-eyed Penguin** and a lone **Gannet**.

While the overall number of birds was low, and there were no real surprises, there was a good variety of birds for a short trip (2 hours), and I personally have not seen Buller's Shearwaters, White-faced Storm Petrel or Cooks Petrel around the Otago coast. Richard Schofield

February Wader Count

The Wader count, planned for 16 February 2008, was cancelled at the last minute, due to inclement weather, to put it mildly. Very strong southerly wind and rain made it impossible to even see the birds, let alone count them.

However Derek Onley and Valerie Fay ventured out the following day in slightly less adverse conditions, unaware that everyone else was sitting at home in front of the first fires of autumn. Luckily Rob Schuckard counted the whole of Otago (& Southland) and a summary of Rob's results are shown in the table below.

	Karitane	Warrington	Aramoana	Hoopers Inlet	Papanui Inlet	Catlins Lake	Papatowai	
	12.2.04	22.2.04	23.2.04	8.2.04	8.2.04	21.2.04	21.2.04	Total
Pied Oystercatcher	141	1375	115	186	287	250	49	2403
Variable Oystercatcher	2	28	2	1		19	1	53
Pied Stilt	6	43		141	62	44	2	298
Banded Dotterel	106	62	40			67		275
Spur-winged Plover		4	5	15	42	53	4	123
Bar-tailed Godwit	180	702	390	725	0	367	9	2373

Derek and Valerie's counts for Karitane & Warrington were generally similar but slightly lower than Rob's. To some extent the conditions and Rob's larger outlay on optical equipment are to blame but the variation in numbers of Godwits at Warrington, from 350 to as many as 800, have been a feature of the counts this year. The same colour banded individuals have been seen at both Aramoana and Warrington this year and after high tide in February, several hundred birds were seen heading south-east out to sea past the end of Warrington Spit just before dusk. We already know they move between Hoopers and Papanui Inlets but it appears they move around even more than we expected.

Derek Onley & Peter Schweigman

Ornithological Snippets

On 7/3/08, while walking the pipeline track at Deep Creek, Lesley Gowans saw 2 juvenile **Falcons**. They appeared to be squabbling and she was attracted by the sounds. On a return visit on 12/3/08, they were still present, even posing on a rock, for a far off photograph.

Alan Baker reports : On 29/2 I saw a **Crested Grebe** on the Lower Waitaki irrigation ponding area at Black Point (between Duntroon and Georgetown). Birds at the Ohau River mouth, Lake Benmore, on 27/2 included 2 **Royal Spoonbills** and 1 **Black Stilt**.

Later the same day I saw 3 **Black Stilts** on farmland beside the state highway north of Omarama.

I used the perfect weather of Waitangi Day to walk to Swampy Summit via Ross Creek and the Pineapple Track. Birds seen included a young **Shining Cuckoo** being fed by a **Grey Warbler** beside the Ross Creek reservoir, **Pipits** at the Summit, and a clear, very close view of a **Fernbird** along the Swampy Ridge Track.

In Waitati a **Shining Cuckoo** was still being fed by a **Grey Warbler** on 8 March and the last cuckoo (so far) was seen on 17 March – in a kowhai – customary at this time of year so it seems.

World News

Mary Thompson reports from England

Some Waders and Wildfowl of the Liverpool Area

The first fine weekend in February after 4 weeks of dismal drizzly weather turned out to also be a special one bird-wise. Chris, from Royal Society for Protection of Birds, came and got me at 8.30 am and we drove about 20 miles north of Liverpool up the coast towards Southport (many pheasants in stubble fields that we passed by) and turned off at the beach at Ainsdale, which is the headquarters of the Sefton Natural Coast Rangers (Chris's day job is as a Ranger). Stopped at a freshwater lagoon behind the sand-dunes and saw black-headed gulls, tufted ducks, pochards, mallards, mute swans, coots and moorhens and shovellers. In the grass of the dunes a female stonechat came out to a top twig and flitted about for insects (didn't see the male). About 16 people turned up for the Sand Safari in the landrovers. We headed out onto the wide, flat sandy beach with sand dunes all along the beach, and the sea perfectly calm in contrast to the storms the week before that wrecked a ferry. We did some riding through the dunes but the real highlight for me was the wader-watching we did from the 'landrover hide'. The tide was now coming near high and hundreds of waders were feeding at the edge of the surf and flying by in huge flocks. Had good close views and clear in the sun, of sanderlings, dunlin, grey plover, redshanks, thousands of oystercatchers (one colour banded), hundreds of knots flying by, as well as a variety of gulls. Heading back before being caught by tide we saw 4 ringed plovers (one banded, probably a chick from the few that bred here) and a small flock of common scoters (marine ducks) flying quite close in shore. On the salt marsh behind the beach were lapwings. Then to top all this off we went to Marshside (RSPB reserve just north of Southport). From the hide we had absolutely marvellous close views of teal, pochard, pintails, a little grebe, 3 little egrets, many wigeons, hundreds of lapwings (one colour banded) and in the larger pond there were several hundred golden plover, blacktailed godwits, a few curlew and a few dunlin. This is a fantastic place and on this day with no wind and in sunshine it was extra special.

Mary Thompson

.... and a warning to Mary up there in Merseyside

Birdwatcher is saved from mud

Crosby A 75-year-old birdwatcher was rescued by an RNLi hovercraft after he became stuck waist-deep in mud for 45 minutes. The man became trapped after walking out on an outlet pipe and stepping on to the sand. The Times Nov.7 07



Mary Anne Miller reports from Mexico

A recent five week stay in Mexico provided the opportunity for some exotic birdwatching. I was based in Cuernavaca, a city of half a million souls just south of Mexico City, which is situated on mountain slopes with oak/juniper forests on its northern fringes, scrubby hill country and fertile plains to the south and tropical vegetation in sheltered ravines or *barrancas*, which dissect the city. It was an ideal location to observe resident and visiting bird-life, and as it turned out our breakfast patio provided the perfect hide. I had been forewarned of the variety, brilliancy and numbers by my non-birdwatching partner but nothing prepared me for the sheer exuberance of it all and I quickly set myself the task of recording at least one new species a day. As it turned out the average was two per day.

Nothing could beat the splendour of hummingbirds. They started up quite early in the mornings, and this was winter in Mexico, darting among the red hibiscus to get their first fix. They were captivating, if somewhat pugnacious, and one morning I witnessed a duel over territory between a Green Violet-ear and a Violet-crowned Hummingbird – tiny opponents sparring barely 300mm in front of me. Other locals to impress were the Orioles - Hooded, Streak-backed and Altamira varieties, making noisy daily visits to the pointsettias.

However, the noisiest of all were the flycatchers, especially the Boat-billed and Great Kiskadees. Nine species of flycatcher came to the garden but the flashiest, the Vermilion Flycatcher, was spotted on the road to nearby Tepoztlán and the aerobic Tufted Flycatcher



in oak on the upper slopes of a neighbouring *barranca*. Heard more than seen, the Golden-cheeked Woodpecker's favourite haunts were the huge palms that dotted the garden, a well maintained ½ acre on the edge of a small *barranca*. Winters are dry, there was no rain during my stay, so watered gardens provide food and shelter in a seasonally arid environment.

Other residents in the garden or *barrancas* were Rufous-backed Robin, Groove-billed Ani, Painted Redstart, White-naped Brush-finch, Common Woodnymph, Magnificent Hummingbird, Curve-billed Thrasher, Tropical Gnatcatcher, Inca Dove, Melodious Blackbird, Golden-crowned Warbler, Bronzed Cowbird, Great-tailed Grackle, Pileated Flycatcher, Bewick's Wren, Golden Vireo, Slate-headed Tody-flycatcher, Striped Sparrow and Gray-crowned Yellowthroat. If I could take my eyes out of the garden and look on high Turkey Vultures and various hawks could be seen at most times cruising Barranca Amanalco and once a Crested Caracara was seen heading south.

Clouds of swifts and swallows streamed to and from mountain caves and cliffs night and morning, and parakeets went by so fast I had no chance of further identification. While out walking early one evening nightjars were spotted swooping about above a busy thoroughfare. Outside Las Grutas Cacahuamilpa (a spectacular 70km cave system in the neighbouring state of Guerrero) we were entertained by the roadrunner-like, but arboreal, West Mexican Chachalaca as they bustled and bossed about in Jacaranda trees.

Having been in Canada and USA for seven weeks in their early autumn I was frustrated at being unable to get close to the elusive LBJs (Little Brown Jobs in New Zealand— although, of course, most in North America weren't brown) but that was rectified in Mexico because winter migrants came as accommodatingly close as the residents. In the LBJ category were the warblers and I was able to pick out; Macgillivray's, Virginia's, Black and White, Nashville, Tennessee, Wilson's, Yellow and Grace's Warblers, also Pine Siskin, Bell's and Warbling Vireo and the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. In a slightly bigger category were Eastern Phoebe, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Gray Flycatcher and Thick-billed Kingbird. No Tanagers were seen, possibly wintering nearer the coast or further south, nor Trogons. However, being able to combine spotting 63 species of colourful bird life with exploring many Indian and Spanish Colonial heritage sites left me well satisfied.

Mary Anne Miller



Coastal Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus litoralis*)

With 123 grebes in Central Otago in summer 2004 and 229 in Central Canterbury, (Jensen & Snoyink, Notornis Vol 52, March 2005) it is strange that we have only the odd one in winter on the Otago coast, whereas on Lakes Forsyth and Ellesmere on the Canterbury coast, there are over 180.

In Otago the first reported coastal sighting came from Anderson Bay Inlet, where Wynston Cooper, then the RR for Southland, saw 1 on 8 July 1985. It was still present the next day.

The next sighting was 6 years later on 13 September 1991 when Malcolm Foord spotted a juvenile at Tomahawk Lagoon. Another 4 years elapsed until Dave and Janet York reported one juvenile in the Catlins River on 11 June 1995.

Since then sightings have been a little more regular. The next sightings came from Andersons Lagoon, north of Palmerston. An adult was first seen on 6 April 1996 by Pete McClennan from Southland. Dave and Janet York saw what was probably the same bird on 17 August and 28 September and an OSNZ party saw it on 26 October. This spring sighting made us check for a second bird in the hope of adding a new breeding species for coastal Otago. It was not to be, but an adult returned to the lagoon following year and was present there on 24 June 1997.

Kim and Jenny Morrison saw one in Otago Harbour on 17 May 1998. Three years later, on 25 May 2001, Dave York found a juvenile on the estuary at Karitane and he Dave and George Chance confirmed it was still there on 28 and 30 May. See the description by George in the Otago Newsletter No. 6/2001.

The most recent sighting was last year, 2007, when Dave York saw one juvenile at the Kaikorai Estuary on 20 and 21 June. Photographic evidence was provided by Paul Davey on 23 June.

Unlike Canterbury, Crested Grebe appears to be a rare bird on the Otago coast.
Peter Schweigman

Long Point Reserve

The Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust has purchased a new reserve in the Catlins, near Long Point, south-east of Owaka. The Trust have asked if the OSNZ would be interested in conducting a survey of the area along the lines of that carried out by the OSNZ for the Okia Reserve on the Otago Peninsula in 1991/1992. Further information will be available at the indoor meeting on 26 March.

Peter Schweigman

Best Bird Book of the Year.

Members will probably be aware of the journal *British Birds* (*BB*), which recently celebrated its centenary, and covers all aspects of Western Palearctic birds. In association with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), all books reviewed in BTO publications and in *BB* each year are considered for the award of *BB/BTO* Best Bird Book of the Year. To those familiar with Derek's artwork (presumably all of us!), it will come as no surprise that the *Field Guide to the Albatrosses, Petrels and Shearwaters of the World*, by Derek Onley and Paul Scofield, was ranked fifth in what was apparently a close vote. It was rated higher than any other eligible field guide and regional handbook, so congratulations to Derek and Paul.



Richard Schofield

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

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.

Programme 2008

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, 26 March | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Inbreeding in the South Island Robin | Speaker: Rebecca Laws |
| Sunday, 13 April | Autumn Survey of Hawkesbury Lagoon
Contact Jim Wilson, ☎ 476 3235 | |
| Wednesday, 23 April | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Private Penguins: Isolation? | Speaker: Ryan Clark
Selection for Visual |
| Wednesday, 28 May | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Genetics and Conservation of Yellow-eyed Penguins | Speaker: Sanne Boessenkool |
| Saturday, 31 May | Winter Wader Count. High tide at Aramoana 11.39.
Back up day, Saturday 14 June. High tide is 12.12.
Contact Ken Gager, ☎ 487 6670 | |
| Wednesday, 25 June | Indoor Meeting
Topic: Return of Campbell Island Teal | Speaker: Bruce McKinlay |
| Saturday 28 June | Winter Survey of Hawkesbury Lagoon | |
| Wednesday, 23 July | Indoor Meeting
Topic: TBA | Speaker: Bryan Rhodes |
| Weekend, 24-26 October | Glenorchy Weekend Fieldtrip.
Contact Louise Foord, ☎ 467 5041 | |

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Final date for copy for next newsletter : 14 April