



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

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*Otago Region Newsletter 4/2010 May 2010*

**Bitterns in Otago**



At our April meeting we discovered that the Otago region was home to only 3% of the Australasian Bittern remaining in NZ. Peter Langlands reported to us on the database he was contracted to compile for DOC of all bittern sightings in NZ with the aim of identifying key wetland areas to protect. The bittern is nationally endangered with the population having declined dramatically. There are probably only a total of 2500 in Australia and NZ with between 750-1000 of them in NZ so this is an important population. Bitterns are actually rarer than kokako. The decline of bitterns has mirrored the drainage of large areas of the wetland habitat of shallow reed beds that they need for breeding. This very interesting talk by Peter has inspired some of us to make a special effort to listen for booming bitterns

next spring. The booming call of bittern have been reported recently in the Waihola wetland area near Dunedin. The areas to listen in include Waihola, Sinclair wetlands and Waipori Lake. The peak booming time is late October early November and the

best conditions are on a calm, moonlit night (or early morning) when booms can be heard as far as 2-3 km away.

So this trip will have to be a spontaneous one dictated by the conditions. If you would like to be on the “bittern alert” email and phone list, please give your name and contact details to

Mary Thompson 464 0787, mary.thompson@stonebow.otago.ac.nz

Those interested in keeping up with bittern sightings nationwide should look at <http://bittern-tracker.blogspot.com/>

Peter Schweigman has compiled a list of the sightings of bitterns in Otago since 1971. Has anyone got anything to add?

<b>Date</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Observer</b>
12-Feb-69	1 at Allanton, 1 mile downstream Taieri River	Peter Schweigman
04-Nov-69	1 at Boundary Creek, Berwick	Peter Schweigman
05-Nov-69	3 individuals Boundary Creek, Berwick	Peter Schweigman et al
11-Nov-69	one heard Lake Waipori	Peter Schweigman
15-Dec-70	one at Keyburn	J.T. Darby
01-Aug-71	one Riverside Rd, Taieri	Peter Schweigman et al
March 1971	one Puerua Estuary	Peter Schweigman
22-Mar-83	one near school Rd, Taieri Plains	Peter Schweigman
26-Aug-84	one at Bull Creek RD	Peter Schweigman et al
04-Oct-88	one at the Hoffmans Dam, Naseby	Jim Wilson
18-Mar-90	1 at Kaikorai during OSNZ survey	OSNZ party
25-Mar-90	one at Bushey Park	Dave & Janet York
18-Apr-90	1 at Kaikorai during OSNZ survey	OSNZ party
20-May-90	1 at Kaikorai during OSNZ survey	OSNZ party
09-Aug-90	1 Sstream, Riccarton Rd	Peter Schweigman
19-Aug-90	1 at Kaikorai during OSNZ survey	OSNZ party
29-Nov-90	one at Waihola, flying along SH 1	Peter Schweigman
mid Jan 90	one on mudflat at Waihola	Derek Onley
09-Jun-92	one at the Contour Channel, Berwick	George and Doreen Grant
21-Jul-92	one in Mill Creek, Riccarton Rd	Rex Coleman
06-Feb-94	1 at the Kaikorai estuary	Alun Baines
19-Sep-94	one at Taieri Ferry Rd, harrassed by Harrier	Peter Schweigman
16-Jun-96	one found dead Wyllies X-ing, Taieri	per Peter Schweigman
27-May-99	1 at Emerald Creek, Macraes Flat	Graeme Loh
19-Jul-02	one at the Tokomairiro River	Richard & Suzanne S
? Date ?	one seen briefly at the Catlins lake	Richard & Suzanne Sch.
12-Sep-08	1 heard booming at Waihola, early morning	Russell Canning
17-Feb-09	one juv on side of road near Chuck Landis's house,	Chuck Landis

**Mary Thompson & Peter Schweigman**

## Ross Creek Survey April Results

Section	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Black Shag				1			
Little Shag				3			
Mallard				35			
Coot				1			
Black-backed Gull				7			
NZ Pigeon	S	S	S	1	S	S	S
Rosella					S		
Rifleman	S	S		1			
Welcome Swallow				2			S
Dunnock		S	S	S	H	S	S
Blackbird	S	S	S	5	S	S	S
Song Thrush	S		S			S	
Brown Creeper	S				S		
Grey Warbler	S	S	S	2	S	4	S
Fantail	S	S	S	2	S	8	S
Tomtit	S		S		S		
Silvereye	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Bellbird	S	S	S	6	S	5	S
Tui	S	S	S	3	S	1	
Chaffinch	S					S	S
Goldfinch					S		
Redpoll					S		
House Sparrow	S			7			
Starling	S		H	S	S		
Species Total 24	14	9	11	17	14	10	9

S=seen H=heard B=breeding There is a map of the sections in the June newsletter.  
April is the last month of our survey.



**Alan Baker** 4675180 48 Pacific St., Dunedin 9010

## Extracts from New Zealand eBird for Otago so far in 2010

Here are the top ten counts for birds in Otago as reported in ebird so far for this year.

Black-billed Gull 700 Wright Rd 29/01/2010  
 Bar-tailed Godwit 495 Warrington Spit 26/02/2010  
 White-fronted Tern 350 Aramoana Mole 23/01/2010  
 South Island Pied Oystercatcher 343 Pounaweia 6/02/2010  
 Grey Teal 308 Hawksbury Lagoon, Waikouaiti 1/03/2010  
 Mallard 233 Rocky Point 29/01/2010  
 Mallard x Grey Duck hybrid 204 Hawksbury Lagoon, Waikouaiti 24/01/2010  
 Black Swan 202 Papanui Inlet 28/03/2010  
 Starling 200 68 kennels lane Hawea river 23/01/2010  
 Pied Stilt 169 Hawksbury Lagoon, Waikouaiti 1/03/2010

In March in Otago there were 55 species of birds recorded in 48 checklists. The top 10 most frequently recorded species were Black backed Gull, Red-billed Gull, House Sparrow, Starling, Little Shag, Silvereye, Redpoll, Paradise Shelduck, Chaffinch and Dunnock.

The most abundant species for March were Grey Teal, Red-billed Gull, Black Swan, Starling, Pied Stilt, Australasian Shoveler, House Sparrow, Black-backed Gull, Mallard and Mallard x Grey Duck hybrid.

These and other summaries are readily available from ebird. Otago's 48 checklists for a month is a bit low. For the same period Canterbury managed 86 species from 38 checklists.

If anyone wants a hand filing records in ebird then let me know and we can arrange to meet and work through any practical problems.



**Bruce McKinlay**

## Ornithological Snippets

Len Buchanan counted 135 **White-fronted Terns** at Brighton on 29th April.

Sue and Mary heard a **Morepork** calling near the start of the Pineapple Track at 10.00 pm on a very mild 29<sup>th</sup> April – just a bit far away to be counted in Ross Creek.

They also heard another calling on many nights over the last month from Sligo Terrace, Balmacewan, the first for about 20 years from that spot.

## Still a Lot of Educational Opportunities out there.



I must admit on particularly sluggish ornithological days on the beach I am occasionally inclined to try to turn one of these into something more interesting; a skua, a Brown Booby or if things are really slow, a juvenile Gannet – anything to get me higher up the list of ebirds top 100 birders.

Hopefully most OSNZ members will know what this is, (a juvenile Black-backed Gull) but hardly anyone else does. A friend of mine at Karitane used to call them Molly Hawks which on the first occasion had me rushing down to the wharf looking for albatrosses (This was way before ebird days so other stimuli must have been operating).

And Mary recently received this:

“Do you think this is a Skua, not sure if Brown, Arctic, or South Polar. We were on holidays in NZ this year and went to Hokitika Gorge 4th Feb. Just up river from the swing bridge, 11.22 am we watched this strange bird cruising around. I would like to know what it is, as I use it as a screen saver at work, and lots of people ask.”

So if things are a bit slow down at the beach or out on the Aramoana Mole or if you find yourself clearing up the section and having to spend the weekend at the tip (sorry Resource Recovery Centre and Transfer Station) take the opportunity to educate the wider public, advise on a good field guide (there's only one) or enroll them in the OSNZ.

**Derek Onley**

## Notices and Business

### **New Checklist pre-publication offer open**

The long awaited fourth edition of the New Zealand Checklist published by the OSNZ in association with Te Papa Press will be launched at the Society's AGM in June.

Pre-publication copies can be purchased by down loading the form and filling it in. The form is found here. <http://osnz.org.nz/publ.htm#other>

If you are intending to take advantage of the pre-publication offer and want to pick your brand new copy of the checklist at the Nelson AGM than please have your orders into Te Papa Press by 1 June.

**Bruce McKinlay**

### **Long Point**

We still have not made our Autumn trip down to the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust land at Long Point in the Catlins. The purpose is to survey all birds except Yellow-eyed Penguins. Anyone interested please contact Derek [derekonley@yahoo.com](mailto:derekonley@yahoo.com) or 03 4822831.

### **Black-fronted Terns – yet more legs to look at :-**

On 16 April, David Melville and co. caught some terns at Grassmere, Marlborough. “This was an experimental catch using mistnets and tape lures. We caught 3 Black-fronted Terns and 4 White-fronted Terns, 2 of which were recaptures of juveniles banded at Kaikoura by Lindsay Rowe on 26 November 2009.

The 3 Black-fronted Terns have been marked with alpha leg-flags (black characters on a white flag) on the tarsus. All birds were also marked with yellow dye on the breast which will turn to a more orange colour over time.

One of the White-fronted Terns has already been seen at the Wairau Bar (c. 26 km from the banding site) today., the 17<sup>th</sup>.”

A further 9 black-fronted tern were caught at the Wairau Lagoons on 17 April. These birds have been marked with white leg flags with three black characters, but do not have yellow dye on the breast.

Records please to David Melville [david.melville@ xtra.co.nz](mailto:david.melville@xtra.co.nz)

### **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)

## Programme 2010

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.

Sunday 23 May	Harbour Survey start time 9.45am
Wed 26 May	Indoor meeting. Hamish Spencer Birds of Costa Rica
Sunday 20 June	Harbour Survey start time 8.30am
Wed 23 June	Indoor meeting Sheena Townsend Bird studies on Ulva Island (note change of date)
Sunday 11 July	Harbour Survey start time 1.15pm
Sunday 18 July	Hawksbury Lagoon
Wed 28 July	Indoor Meeting Craig McKenzie Bird photography
Wed 25 August	Indoor Meeting Graeme Loh Catlins Ark and Mohua
Wed 22 September	Indoor Meeting Murray Efford Studying birds
Saturday 9 October	Hawksbury Lagoon

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next newsletter: 16 June