



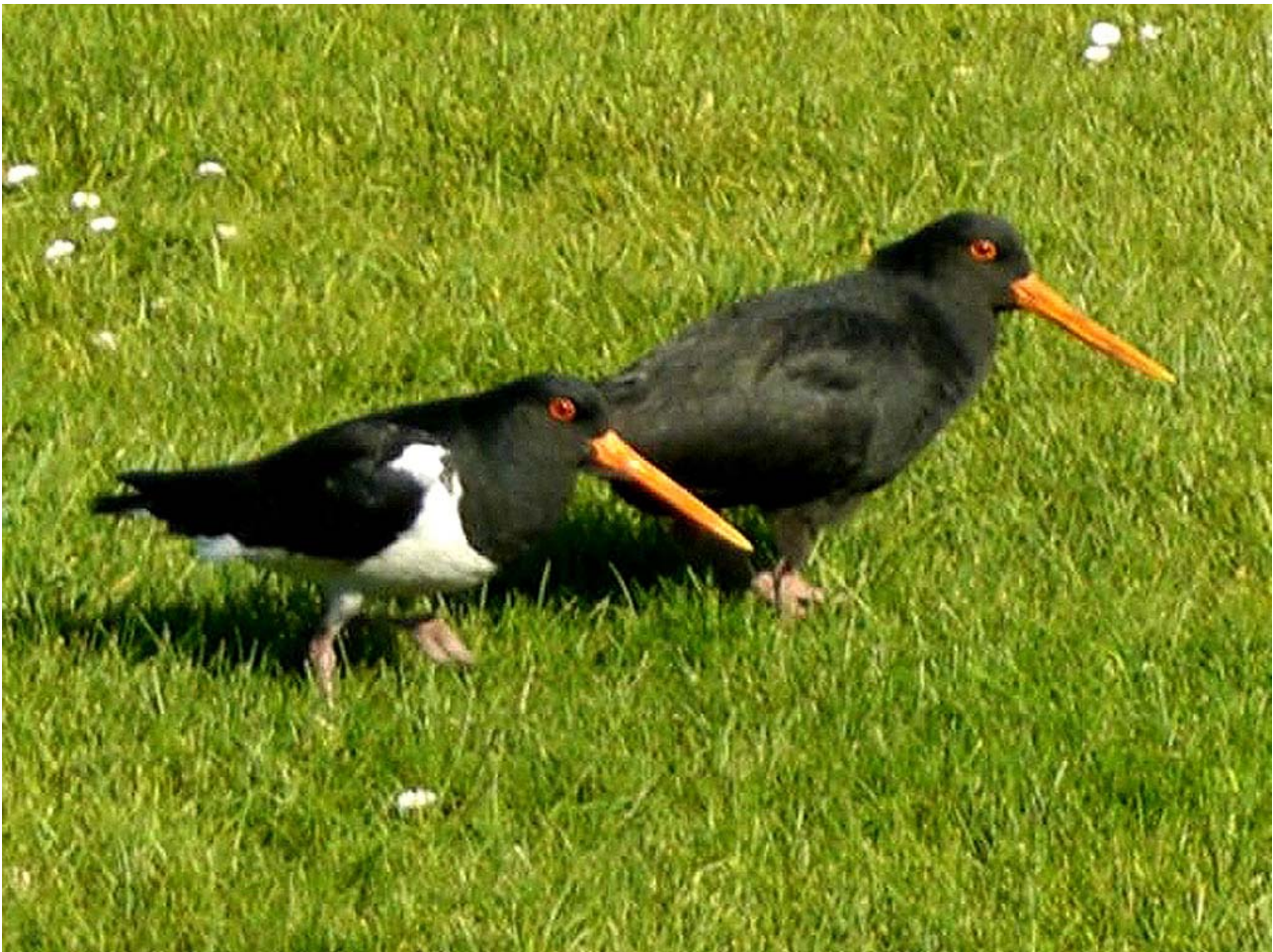
THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 10/2008 November 2008

Hybrid Oystercatchers at Oamaru



David McKenzie reports “On our golf course in Oamaru we have a pair who have a 2 egg nest very close to a tee. They have been an item for some months and have now done the deed in a spot about a kilometre from the coast. The pied does most of the brooding and would seem to be the female but that may not be correct.” He asks if it is rare for pied and variable oystercatchers to mate and breed?

Hybridization has been reported from Canterbury and Peter Schweigman followed up those reports. The first sighting was back in 1976, when Sheila Petch saw them, but didn't take specific notice, assuming that they were two variables, one a pure black, the other a pied morph. She realised later on that the pied bird was a pure Pied Oystercatcher. In the early 1990s two mixed pairs produced chicks that were banded. According to Nick Allen, the latest count was 16 mixed pairs of many degrees of hybridization. The answer to the question, is it rare, is yes, but not as rare as 15 years ago and without doubt it is getting worse!

Long Point, Catlins.

On November 8, Lesley Gowans, Lala Frazer, Peter Scweigman and Derek Onley went down to the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust's newest reserve at Long Point in the Catlins. We were there to survey everything except for penguins.



It wasn't perhaps the most exciting of tasks for the reserve consists mainly of heavily grazed sheep paddock with a thin fringe of windswept vegetation. We saw no native passerines other than Welcome Swallows, barely admissible as they have only been in the country for 50 or so years. There were Skylarks in the paddocks, a few Yellowhammers, Redpolls and Chaffinches and Starlings nesting in small numbers in the cliffs. Dunnocks were almost everywhere the vegetation was higher than sheep cropped grass, even singing on the bare rocks, metres above the waves. A couple of

pairs of Variable Oystercatchers and a flock of 16 Pied Oystercatchers fed in the paddocks but a group of 43 Australasian Magpies provided the highest count. White-fronted terns fed at sea along with a few gulls, Spotted Shags and a couple each of White-capped and Black-browed (?Campbell –we couldn't see the eye colour) Mollymawks. A small colony of about 40 Red-billed Gulls and several Black-backed Gulls nested on the high cliffs to the north of the point, but although terns and a few shags were seen landing on the cliff ledges we saw no evidence of nesting. We did not however get to the Cosgrove Island section, which might be expected to yield a few more native bush species, seabirds on the cliffs or island and burrowing shearwaters.

We hope to organise a trip there soon. Anyone interested contact Peter Schweigman or Derek Onley

P.S. The penguin nesting survey had been carried out the previous week in sub-antarctic weather and came up with 58 nests in total; 43 at Long Point and 14 at Cosgrove. The surveyors didn't walk the coastal section between Cosgrove and Purakanui Bay (given the snow and sleet weather one can understand why) where they would normally expect another 1-2 nests.

Taiaroa Head/Pukekura update

Toroa Northern Royal Albatross

Currently there are 30 eggs with four more pairs present that may produce an egg and that could lead to, or exceed the highest number of eggs laid at Pukekura (32 laid in 2002). Although we are at the very early stages of incubation there are four eggs currently in the incubator. Three eggs came from poorly constructed nests and it was likely the egg would break/roll out if left in the nest (as has now occurred with all three dummy eggs placed in each nest).



A dummy egg rolled out of a flattened nest

The fourth egg is from an inexperienced pair and egg success from first time breeders is increased if their egg is removed and replaced by a dummy egg until they are well settled. 20 eggs have been candled with just two infertile, one of which was laid by a new pair and one laid by our oldest bird yellow-green (yellow green turns 49 years

old next January). Age is not considered a problem for fertility, as grandma (Taiaroa Head's oldest) was over 60 and still produced chicks. Yellow-green and her mate will be used as foster parents for one of the eggs from a failed nest site.

Over 90 birds have been seen this season and we expect about 20 more birds to visit over the coming months (current total estimate for Taiaroa Head population is about 140 birds).



A well formed nest with native ice plant in the foreground- a species that is increasing in abundance with the removal of rabbits and it is good to see native vegetation spreading in the nature reserve which is dominated by introduced grasses.

Stewart Island Shags (approx 300 nests) are well into chick rearing, chicks will depart in January.

Red-billed Gulls/tarapunga are hatching chicks and with almost 2000 nests there is definitely some very lush looking vegetation nearby, including Cook's scurvy grass (an endangered species). Egg laying coincided with abundance of marine larval species seen within the harbour and near the Headland.

Blue Penguins/Korora (approx. 300 nests) are also hatching chicks at present. Almost 1/3rd of all nests are within the Pilots Beach area. The volunteer programme at Pilots Beach (joint programme between DOC/Dunedin City Council with help from the Otago Peninsula Trust) is currently running to help reduce impacts of viewing and educate people who visit to see the wildlife spectacle at night.

Sooty Shearwater/titi Approximately 1300 burrows are active and they should be incubating at present.

Spoonbills/Kotuku ngutu-papa first nested here in 2002, now with over 30 birds present on the headland, representing the only place on the Otago Peninsula these birds nest.

Spotted Shag Hatching has started for this species, however there has been a notable decrease of nests just in the last few weeks with about 80% of the nests abandoned, (similar poor breeding success as has occurred with this species in previous seasons).

Lyndon Perriman

Otago Bar-tailed Godwits.

It appears that the godwits are changing sites from time to time. This Spring 249 were counted at Aramoana on 10 October. On 22 October the number at Hoopers Inlet was estimated at 756. Back at Aramoana on 23 October there were none, despite a thorough search. But by 11 Nov Aramoana had 510 and three days later 722 were counted at Hoopers. Last year we had a similar situation in November with none at Aramoana and 1247 at Hoopers. To get a decent count it looks like we need two parties of observers, one at Aramoana and one at Hoopers like we have during the summer wader counts.

This Spring counts at the high tide roost at Warrington have also varied from over 700 down to about 450.

Peter Schweigman

Back to Earth at Hawksbury Lagoon

In the report of the winter count at the lagoon on 1 July, we said that the Black-fronted Dotterel was the first record for the area. Jim Wilson has since checked back and reports that 2 were present in 1990 on 8 July, interestingly, a very similar date. He also unearthed the sighting of 3 Chestnut-breasted Shelduck on 23 July 1991.

Ornithological Snippets

On 19 October Mary Thompson & Sue Galloway found a very large **Black-billed Gull** colony (estimate 1000) on the Makaroa River near The Key; also a small colony of **Black-fronted Terns** nearby. This site is easy to get to and visible from the road. They also reported a **Royal Spoonbill** feeding in the overflow channel along SH1 at the Henley/Berwick crossing at 8.00pm on 10 Nov about high tide.

Lesley Gowans and Peter Schweigman saw 3 adult **Wrybills** at Aramoana on 23 October and also there on 11 November another nest of a pair of **Variable Oystercatchers** at the same silly spot as last year. Most likely it will be washed out soon. "When will these sods learn?"

A **Falcon** was seen at the Orokonui, on and off throughout the latter part of winter and early spring. Prey items included **Bellbird**, **Song Thrush** and **Rosella**. It was last seen pursuing a **Rosella** over the cowshed near the old hospital grounds on 4 October. One was also heard on 17 Oct over a larch plantation and an area of recently logged pine at Mountain Road Silverpeaks. Another, carrying blackbird sized prey, flew over Mt Allan forest near the Taieri Gorge railway viaduct on 18 November. Maybe it was coming from the local golf course where over the years birds have been seen hunting thrushes.

Notices and Business

Comments from your RR Some members may be yet to hear this news:

Statement from Richard Holdaway:

"At the conclusion of the OSNZ Council meeting held in Christchurch on 18 October, and with considerable regret, I tendered my resignation as President of OSNZ. Council accepted my resignation and requested that I continue as an ex officio member of Council until the next AGM. My decision to resign was based on the level of commitments in my professional life that are much greater now than when I accepted the position of President in 2006. I am now responsible for three major research programmes. The probability of frequent overseas absences with respect to those programmes, and the arrival of the first grandchild earlier this year and the wish to enjoy more family life than has been possible recently, means I will not be able to contribute to OSNZ at the level I see as necessary from the President. I would have preferred to have completed the term; circumstances have ruled otherwise. David Lawrie, as Vice President, has become Acting President until the AGM. I am sure that he and Council will continue to move OSNZ forward. Thank you all for your assistance over the past couple of years."

Richard Holdaway

Statement from the Acting President:

“The Council in accepting Richard's resignation noted the circumstances and acknowledged the strain that the Society's functions had placed on him and his family. The Council also noted Richard's desire to concentrate on fulfilling his responsibilities as Editor of Notornis, in ensuring that the changeover to Jim Biskie is completed as soon as possible, and that the outstanding issues be posted within the next 3 months. The Council also accepted Richard's suggestion that once the Editorship handover is completed he take responsibility for developing the new "Projects and Activities Committee " to assist Council in achieving the outstanding goals of the strategic plan adopted 3 years ago. If any member would like to be involved in organising these activities, which were considered a high priority in the recent member survey, please contact Ingrid directly or through your Regional Representative.”

David Lawrie, Acting President

Subscription Renewal

I see that the Subscription Renewal Notice for OSNZ has arrived. It is easy to overlook this so I thought I would remind folks. There are also a few who have overlooked their 2008 sub. For those who are not yet members of OSNZ, this might be a good time to consider joining OSNZ as a full member as the offer of a complimentary copy of The Atlas of Bird Distribution in NZ (\$99) has been extended for 2008. A new member joining between now and Christmas will automatically be a member until Dec 2009 and receive all publications including a free Atlas – what a deal! There will be forms at the meeting or download from the website <http://osnz.org.nz>

(Full member \$57.50 and Student \$30)

Summer Wader Count

More volunteers for this count would be greatly appreciated. It is a great event to become familiar with the good areas for wader-spotting and there is always the chance of seeing some of the godwits that were banded for the study of movements of waders within NZ. This project has been going for over 20 years and the data we have collected is very important for monitoring the changes occurring in the Otago Harbour. Please contact Ken Gager 487 6670 to get allocated to a team for the survey.

Mary Thompson

New Birdy material at Dunedin Public Libraries

Albatross : Their World, Their Ways; Tui de Roy, Mark Jones & Julian Fitter.

Albatrosses; Terence Lindsey & Rod Morris.

Anoraks to Zitting Cisticola : a whole lot of stuff about birdwatching; Sean Dooley.

Bird Songs from around the World; Les Beletsky.

The Birder's Companion; Stephen Moss.

Bird's-eye View : through the eyes of New Zealand Birds; Maria Gill.

The Birds of Waikouaiti Estuary, Karitane : A Report; Derek Onley.

Brolga Country : Travels in Wild Australia; Mitch Reardon.

Guide to Waders, DVD; Paul Doherty.

Exotic Birds from A to Z; Angelika Lang.

The Field Guide to the Birds of Australia, 8th edition; Graham Pizzey & Frank Knight.

Field Guide to the Waders of Europe, Asia & North America; Stephen Message & Don Taylor.

Of a Feather : A Brief History of American Birding; Scott Weidensaul.

Pigeons : The fascinating saga of the World's most revered and reviled bird; Andrew D. Blechman.

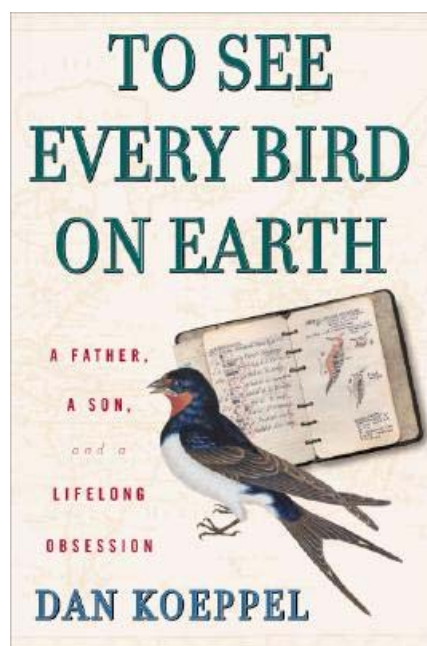
Primaevial Paradise : The Story of Ulva Island, DVD.

The Shorebird Guide; Michael O'Brien, Richard Crossley & Kevin Karlson.

Silence of the Songbirds; Bridget Stutchbury.

Smithsonian Q&A : The Ultimate Question & Answer Book. Penguins. Lloyd Spencer Davis.

To See Every Bird on Earth : A Father, a Son & a Lifelong Obsession; Dan Koeppel.



“Dan Koeppel tells the life obsession of his father, an extreme birder, one of the few persons in the world to have seen over 7000 species. Only from a lifetime commitment can you see such a high number of species; special vacations and travel arrangements, effort, money, strategy, and knowledge all play a large part of this lifelong compulsion. A quick read that opens the birding world to everyone. The history of birding, rules and technicalities of creating a lifelong big list, and even the taxonomy of birds are examined. A closer look at the deterioration of the American family, this one torn apart, not from drugs or alcohol but from the natural world is also revealed in this gem of a book.” Todd, Williamsburg Regional Library

Alan Baker

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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| 22nd Nov 2008 | Summer Wader Count. High tide is 12.43 at Dunedin and approximately 11.43 at Aromoana. Height 2.0m.
Contact Ken Gager 487 6670 |
| 26 November 2008 | Indoor Meeting Speaker: Mary Thompson
Liver Birds and other birds of Liverpool |
| 31 January 2009 | Summer Survey of Hawksbury Lagoon. Start 9.30 am.
Contact Derek Onley 482 2831 |
| 21-22 February 2009 | The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebe in Otago.
Contact Peter Schweigman 455 2790 |

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Many thanks to all who contributed,

The editor and contributors are allowed a summer holiday so the next newsletter will not be until January.

Final date for copy for that newsletter: 18 January