



THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 10/2010 Nov 2010
Summer Edition



photo Richard Schofield

Common Sandpiper at Tomahawk Lagoon

This rarity and the first sighting of this species in Otago has generated a lot of excitement since it was first reported on 26th September, by Robyn Pickering a visitor from Australia. Derek Onley tried unsuccessfully to see it twice in October, in southerly and northerly gales and Richard Schofield was the first to report re-sighting it on Saturday at lunchtime on 30 October. Hamish Spencer also saw it on the Sunday also on the grassy area by the outlet of the lagoon near the road. Derek finally saw it on the third attempt over lunchtime on 2 November and Craig McKenzie, Mary Thompson and Ian Southey were lucky enough to get good views in the sunshine on the same day when the Pied Stilts and Spur-winged Plovers were giving it a good telling off, so they saw it as a stranger too. This may have been the last sighting? Any

updates? The gathering of birders lined up with large lens cameras and telescopes all peering at a corner of the lagoon also piqued the interest of folks in neighbouring houses with many questions about what we were looking at.

Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*) breed across Europe and Asia to the Kamchatka Peninsula and Japan and migrate south to Africa, southern and South-east Asia, the Philippines, New Guinea, and Australia. It is a rare, usually solitary, visitor to New Zealand and has been recorded from estuaries, coastal lagoons and sewage ponds from Northland to Canterbury but nearly all records are from the North Island.

The American Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*) looks very similar and could, along with other American waders e.g. Hudsonian Godwit possibly turn up here. The first photos, see October newsletter, were not quite good enough to distinguish one from t'other but Richard Schofield's photo clearly shows Common Sandpiper's longer tail and markings along the edge of the tertials. The extensive markings on the back suggest the bird is a juvenile – always more likely to go astray. Other photos can be seen on Richard's website:

<http://richardschofield.co.nz/gallery/main.php/v/richard/wildlife/birds>

Mary Thompson & Derek Onley

Trip to Otago Museum.

On Wed 27th October a large group of us was treated to an exciting and interesting glimpse into the bird vaults of the Otago Museum. Cody Fraser, Collections Coordinator, Natural history, showed us around and explained how the collection is looked after. There are shelves and shelves of mounted bird specimens arranged by families, and also shelves and shelves of study skins and endless boxes of moa bones. Moa bones were used as swaps with museums around the world for exotic bird specimens in the early days. This is partly why Otago Museum has the best bird collection in Australasia. The job of looking after the collection and still adding to it is huge and it was very good to hear first hand from Cody some of what happens. Peter Schweigman is an Honorary Curator and has his own room, stocked with reference books, where he lays out a shelf of eggs and starts the painstaking process of measuring and identification and cross-checking and recording all the details and entering identifications into the database. We were only allowed to look at the shelves of boxes of mysterious eggs. A sense of history was evident all around us – one label read: Dusky Plover (now renamed NZ dotterel) donated by Hon. Capt. Fraser 1851; 100 year old kakapo, moa bones, the Kiwi Shoe polish kiwi. It was also great to have the chance to see some very elusive birds up close - bittern, long-tailed cuckoo and, perhaps more sadly, those now extinct - huia, South Island kokako, piopio. We also saw the albatross collection and the very historic kiwi collection. Thanks to the Otago Museum for making this tour possible.

Mary Thompson

Banded Tui and Bellbirds generate fascinating data.

At the September Indoor Meeting a large number of members were treated to a report by Murray Efford on the first findings from his study of individually colour-banded tui and bellbirds that he has captured by mistnets set up in his Helensburgh suburban garden. The first surprising fact was that he has captured 114 tui and over 90 bellbird in this one place over 2 seasons (2009, 2010) - a spectacular number of individual birds visiting one garden. So we now realize that the half dozen tui and bellbirds we see at our own sugar water feeders may be different ones each day. Those of us visited by tui have been looking out for banded birds and indeed several OSNZ members have been pleased to have seen some. The study has generated a lot of interest as reports of banded tui have come in from all over the city, some from Mosgiel, Brighton and Saddle Hill, but none from South Dunedin, Peninsula or Port Chalmers, so keep looking. Another really amazing fact is that a tui was sighted at Papatowai, 110 km away and three different birds were seen in Oamaru, 95 km away. And now data supporting our anecdotal observations that the number of male bellbirds seems to be much greater than female: of the birds banded by Murray, for bellbirds only 16% are female and for tui, 26% were female. It is not known how these ratios compare with 'wild' forest birds compared to garden inhabitants. Should we set up sugar feeders in native forest to find out?

Mary Thompson

NZ Falcon Study

Craig and Steve spent Saturday 6 November, trying to locate nest sites in Akatore forest at 2 places we had identified territories last year. At the first site near Airstrip Rd a faint kekking response to the playback was heard in a gulley nearby but we were unable to pinpoint the position, get further responses or sightings despite playing the playback in other spots nearby. At the next site in Narrowdale gulley where we had several good responses and sightings last year, a male flew up kekking in response to the playback, then flew off directly to Milton. In a large clear-felled area to the east we heard a faint kekking response in a gulley but again couldn't pinpoint it or see any falcon. It is possible the kekking responses are from incubating females so we should try again in those areas in a few weeks. There is also another area with a number of older falcon sightings we should check out.

If you would like to be notified of the next trip, please let **Steve Lawrence** know.
falco1@xtra.co.nz



Hawksbury Lagoon Spring Count

Better late than never.

Little Shag	..4
Black Swan	.83
Paradise Duck	116
Canada Goose	10
Domestic Goose	17
Hybrid Canada/Feral Goose	6
Mallard x Grey Duck	56
N.Z.Shoveler	83
Grey Teal	175
Pied Stilt	35
Black-backed Gull	22
Red-billed Gull	47
Welcome Swallow	183



In weather more typical of the Harbour Survey than a Sunday stroll at Hawksbury, 4 members counted the lagoon in a howling wet, southerly on 10 October. Apart from the large number of swallows feeding low over the water, looking as miserable and fluffed up as their watchers (where do they all come from?), there was little hope of seeing, let alone counting anything much smaller than a gull.

Black Swan, Black-backed Gull, Red-billed Gull and geese, of varied genetic make-up were nesting but the Pied Stilts appeared not to have started yet – or maybe they had been affected by the high water level. Details of all the counts are available on ebird.

Derek Onley

Ornithological Snippets

Sue and Mary were down at Manapouri last weekend and saw two large colonies; 1000+ of **Black-billed Gulls**; one on Oreti down from the bridge near Lumsden , the other on the Makaroa near The Key; lots of coming and going from nearby ploughed paddocks and many chicks still at downy stage.

Mike and Susan Molloy saw what “we believe to be a nesting pair of **NZ Falcons**” near Glenorchy on the west side of Lake Wakatipu on Sunday 14 November. There’s a couple of excellent photos at on the birdingnz website. An adult **falcon** flew up the South Branch of the Waikouaiti River past visitors to the Mt Watkin reserve open day on 14 Nov.

David Melville found 4 **Knot** and a **Wrybill** at Hooper’s Inlet 21 October during the godwit banding/band spotting trip. A few **Knot** regularly tag along with the **Bar-tailed Godwits** but Wrybills are very unusual around Dunedin.

A **White Heron** briefly at Waitati on 26 September was the first there for over a year,

The first **Shining Cuckoo** for the year was heard by Val Fay in the Orokonui on 27 September, several days earlier than last year.

White-fronted Terns and **Red-billed Gulls** are nesting again this year over the cave at Doctor's Point beach.

Neither **Pied** nor **Variable Oystercatcher** numbers at Warrington changed much from 14 September to 1 November, Pied numbered 115 to 153 and Variables 32 to 35.

Godwit News

A full report of the godwit goings on will appear when Peter Schweigman's computer is repaired. Meanwhile here's a few disjointed stories.

On 14 September there were 141 Bar-tailed Godwits at Warrington, about the number that had spent the winter in Blueskin Bay and a similar number, c120, on 24 September feeding on the bank in the centre of Otago harbour off Carey's Bay, again presumably the young birds that had overwintered. Just 2 days later however there were about 350 roosting on Rabbit Island in Blueskin Bay and by 5 October there were 630 at the high tide roost at Warrington, decreasing to 557 the following day and going back up again to 690 by November 1. Amongst the flocks were 6 birds banded at Warrington on 28 February 2006, 1 from Christchurch and a bird banded as a juvenile at Awarua Bay in Southland on 26 October 2004 which appears to have adopted Blueskin Bay for the summer.

David Melville, Rob Schuckard & Co visited Otago and Southland in late October and found 1 colour banded godwit at Aramoana, 5 at Hooper's Inlet, and 7 in a flock of 300 in the Catlins. So it's well worth having a look. But be prepared, the colour co-ordination is becoming even more complicated >>



We may well have been able to report more but the communications from the godwitters continue to be somewhat uninformative and baffling to this poor editor. For example on 21 October 2010 ORANGE x 1 F was at Aramoana and GREEN x 1 F at Hooper's. Anyone care to elucidate?

Derek Onley and Peter Schweigman

Notices and Business

National Caspian Tern Nesting Census

OSNZ Inc has decided to undertake a nation-wide Caspian tern census. This is described in the latest Southern Bird. This year is a pilot year with the main census being 2011-2013; which keeps all counts 20 years apart. The main focus will be identifying the location of colonies.

Caspian terns will be well underway nesting at present and you may already know where your regions colonies are. From the previous two censuses Caspian tern colonies appear to be somewhat mobile, so old colonies may be abandoned and new colonies started. This year you do not need to count the colony, primarily we are just after location. One important aspect this time round though is to get a good handle on the number of terns breeding as isolated pairs, so these need to be recorded.

So when you are out and about, probably further afield than Dunedin!, please look out for Caspian Terns and report your sightings to Mary, or our Regional Recorder, Alan Baker. We will collate all sightings and send to Mike Bell who is coordinating the survey.

Summer Activities for Otago OSNZ

The final Indoor Meeting for 2010 will feature Bruce McKinlay giving us an update comparing the results of the current Harbour Survey with previous counts. Bruce has been to an OSNZ Council Meeting so will report from that. In addition the Otago Conservator for DOC has asked Bruce to explain DOC's response to the proposed translocation of Robins to Orokonui.

No formal field trips are planned except for the monthly Harbour surveys and the summer count at Hawksbury Lagoon. The Falcon Study group will still be doing surveys, especially if active nests are found (contact Steve Lawrence). We should also make special efforts to look for colour-banded Bar-tailed Godwits and Royal Spoonbill. If you plan to go wader watching and would like to borrow the OSNZ telescope, just contact Mary (ph.464 0787). Another aim is to locate and record nesting sites of White-fronted Tern in Otago; plan to visit various coastal locations over the summer and we will see collectively what we can find.

OSNZ Wader Counts

At its meeting in 2009 OSNZ Council confirmed that regions should continue with the OSNZ Wader Counts on a national basis. The Wader Count for Otago will be included in the Harbour Survey on 21 November. Teams of counters in addition to the Harbour Survey are needed for Blueskin Bay, Karitane, Hooper's, Papanui and Catlins, so if you would like to join one of these please call Mary, 464 0787.

The purpose of the counts is to track changes in populations of endemic species and contribute to monitoring changes in the populations of northern hemisphere breeding waders in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (particularly Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot and Turnstone). As many wader populations plummet across the globe OSNZ has a major contribution to make through the provision of information, particularly as we are the country at the end of the Flyway, and where the populations can best be monitored. The data has many uses and will assume greater significance in the future as pressure on estuarine areas increases. We have excellent records for Otago.

Mary Thompson (Regional Representative)

Otago Peninsula Biodiversity Group: Bird Survey

OSNZ has helped this group design appropriate ways of surveying birds in the sections of the peninsula that are going to be targeting for possum control/hopefully eradication to protect the areas biodiversity values. Eight one km walks on Cape Saunders and from Portobello to Taiaroa Head have been mapped and volunteers are to count/ sight birds along these tracks every month. Derek Onley has volunteered his expertise. OSNZ members who live in the area are no doubt already helping with this survey but others may like to be involved; please contact Moira Parker, 478 0214.

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

Mystery Photo



Graeme Loh photographed this from his kayak at 171.5deg east on 28 September.

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.

Wed 24 November	Indoor Meeting Bruce McKinlay Otago Harbour Survey update
Sunday 19 December	Harbour Survey Contact Bruce McKinlay 454 4555
Sunday 16 January	Harbour Survey
Sunday 23 January	Hawksbury Lagoon Summer Survey, 9.30 am Contact Derek Onley 482 2831
Sunday 13 February	Harbour Survey

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Many thanks to all who contributed.
The next newsletter will be in late January
Final date for copy 18 January

Send in your holiday photos