



THE
ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 9/2008 October 2008

All at Sea

We finally got a Dunedin pelagic trip off the ground under brilliant sun on Sunday morning 12 October. Just under 30 of us left Weller's Rock in the Monarch at 10:30am for a cruise out to about 4 nautical miles. Though some species were not as numerous as I had hoped, a great time was had by all and a good variety of species were noted. Here is a brief summary:

Southern Royal Albatross: 2

White-capped Albatross: 20+

Salvin's Albatross: 1

(Southern) Buller's Albatross: 15+

Black-browed Albatross: 1

Northern Giant Petrel: 2

Sooty Shearwater: 1000+ (huge southward push right now. On Friday they were passing Nugget Point at a rate of 400/minute over several hours... do the math)

Common Diving Petrel: 1

Fairy Prion: 400+

Blue Penguin: 1

Taiaroa Head is quite amazing right now with all the Stewart Island and Spotted Shags carrying nesting material back and forth overhead. Red-billed and Black-backed Gull, Royal Spoonbills, Little Shags, and yes starlings are all getting their nests going. As of yet the Northern Royals have not yet set up territory for the new season.

A big thank you to the Monarch staff for taking us all out. Getting the community enthusiastic about these sorts of things is the key to continuing our education of seabirds and their environment. Also a thanks to the out-of-towners who came down for the trip. And a special thank you to Graeme Loh for his hard work in helping to organise the trip and tending to the chum from his kayak!!! Has anyone a photo of that?
Russell Cannings

Russell also got out to sea on two other trips on October 3rd:-

“I got out on the Polaris II for a quick trip off Taiaroa Head to collect specimens for the aquarium. The skipper had said over the phone that they were heading out to the 80m mark. I thought he meant 80m offshore but I was pleased to realise (once we got out there) that we were heading for the 80m depth mark (roughly 8nm offshore). In terms of the birdlife there were no surprises although it was great to see the Sooty Shearwaters and Salvin's Albatross back in good numbers. Here is the list of tubenose species seen:

Southern Royal Albatross: 3

Northern Royal Albatross: 2 (near colony)

White-capped Albatross: 24

Salvin's Albatross: 18

Buller's Albatross: 10

Northern Giant Petrel: 5 (all adults)

White-chinned Petrel: 1

Cape Pigeon: 45+

Fairy Prion: 600+

Sooty Shearwater: 300+

and a possible Short-tailed Shearwater sitting on the water”

and 13 October :-

“Today a visiting birder-friend (Jukka Jantunen) and I squeezed onto a small trawler for 12 hours (6am-6pm) out to a limit of 12.2nm (off the Otago Peninsula). Weather was mostly sunny though there were patches of heavy fog between 10-12nm. Wind was light in the morning but picked up a bit from the north in the afternoon.

Around 7:30am the crew starting chucking fish off the back of the boat which attracted a big mob of Buller's and White-capped Albatross, as well as many Sooty Shearwaters among other things. Then all of a sudden around 5nm, a large shearwater cruised into our wake and both Jukka and I saw it at the same time. I just pointed and stammered, "Look at that!" but Jukka had his northern hemisphere wits about him and shouted, "Great Shearwater!! !" Luckily the bird followed us for a good 1.5nm so Jukka was able to get some good photos.

I recall that Chris Gaskin & Co. had one off the Chathams (1st NZ record) so then this must be the 2nd NZ record and 1st for the mainland.

Great Shearwaters breed in the south Atlantic and migrate north at this time of year. They are vagrants to the eastern Indian Ocean.

Anyways, after that shearwater things went downhill... well it was a great day but how can you keep up that pace?

Here are some rough numbers on the seabirds seen out there today: the rarer ones in capitals

Southern Royal Albatross: 20+ (good variety of ages)

Northern Royal Albatross: 6+ (including two banded birds)

White-capped Albatross: 200+

Salvin's Albatross: 40+

CAMPBELL ISLAND ALBATROSS: 1 adult

(Southern) Buller's Albatross: 40+

Northern Giant Petrel: 10+

Southern Giant Petrel: 2

White-chinned Petrel: 7+

Fairy Prion: 30+

Prion sp.: 3

Sooty Shearwater: 6000+

HUTTON'S SHEARWATER: 3 (all solos heading southward)

GREAT SHEARWATER: 1

"Yellow on head penguin" sp.: 1

Stewart Island Shag: 4 (foraging as far out as 12nm)

Black-backed Gull: 15+

White-fronted Tern: 11"



Photos by

Jukka Jantunen

Down to Earth Spring survey of Hawksbury Lagoon

In very windy conditions Peter Schweigman, Mary Thompson, Lesley Gowans and Derek Onley counted all 580 birds at the lagoon. Numbers of the commoner species were much the same as in winter but there were no falcons, dotterels or scaup and the excitement was provided by the rescue of Derek's windblown hat before it sank into the murky depths of the muddy lagoon. Unfortunately no photo is available. Black Swan, geese of various hues, Mallard and more unusually Grey Teal were confirmed breeding and Red-billed Gulls and Pied Stilts looked set to breed soon.

Date	1 July 2008	28 Sept 2008
Start time	11.30	1.00
Water Level cm below top gate		55
Black Shag	1	0
Little Shag	1	4
White-faced Heron	0	0
Royal Spoonbill	0	1
Black Swan	52	64
Canada Goose	7	12
Greylag Goose	26	c14
Canada/Greylag Hybrid	11	c25
Paradise Shelduck	86	96
Mallard/Grey Duck	192	181
Grey Teal	39	25
NZ Shoveler	120	143
NZ Scaup	3	0
Harrier	1	0
NZ Falcon	1	0
Pied Oystercatcher	0	0
Variable Oystercatcher	2	2
Black-fronted Dotterel	1	0
Pied Stilt	9	9
Spur-winged Plover	0	6
Bar-tailed Godwit	0	0
Black-backed Gull	18	6
Red-billed Gull	13	24
Black-billed Gull	0	0
Caspian Tern	0	0
Kingfisher	0	1
Welcome Swallow	1	6
Total	584	580

Anyone seen a Chukar lately?

Further to Russell Cannings' comments last month Mary received this from Andrea Stevens ".....today while sorting out irrigation on a vineyard on the Cromwell-Wanaka Rd we spotted what looked to be a lone Red-legged partridge, which took fright and flew up into the low branches of the nearby trees. We are pretty certain it was one of these, but I see that the Chukar look rather similar. How common are either of these in the Cromwell region. We always thought that the Chukar were higher up in the hills?"

Ornithological Snippets

Bar-tailed Godwits arrived back in Blueskin Bay on 20 Sept but no decent count was possible until 21st when Derek Onley counted 140 at high tide. There were 180 on 26 September, at least 250 by 4 October and 778, including 24 juveniles on 16th. The first **Shining Cuckoos** were heard on 20 September in Waitati and Purakanui, a bit earlier than usual, and there were several near Port Chalmers on 24th.

Bob Cunninghame heard his first on Signal Hill on 4th October about mid-afternoon. He says "this is the usual pattern - a few calls then gaps of three or four days during October, presumably as they pass through the property. Maybe our warblers have not yet built nests! From late October on into December they are heard on most days." The **Moreporks** Bob heard last year at his place and again this past winter were the first for about 20 years but he has heard nothing since August.



A male Cirl Bunting in typical Otago pose.

photo Jukka Jantunen

On Oct 9 at Aramoana Jukka Jantunen spotted a male **Cirl Bunting** on the side of the road with a group of **Yellowhammers** and possibly two other Cirl Buntings (a male and a female).



Jukka, Richard Schofield and Russell Cannings found an immature **Pied Shag** sitting on some pilings near the bridge at Kaikourai Lagoon on October 12. Richard has seen several other Pied Shags in the Catlins suggesting that this species may occur regularly in coastal Otago in very small numbers.

“I don't see why this species can't expand its range given that they're at Washdyke Lagoon and all through Stewart Island and southern Southland. Also at the lagoon were 12 **Royal Spoonbills** in stunning breeding plumage. Their wispy headdresses and yellow bellies looked spectacular at sunset.”

Notices and Business

Comments from your RR

It's good to be back in NZ where I can recognise most of the birds I see and there are not too many 'little brown jobs' or numerous waders that are very difficult to distinguish from each other except for the curlews. There was also a kereru nesting in the tree outside my office to greet my return.

Thank You to Our Regional Recorder

A huge 'thank you' to Frank Austin, who has been our Regional Recorder for many years. Frank has decided to retire from this position after 5 years in the job. It was Frank who has carefully collated the reports we make of unusual sightings of birds in our area and then sent the annual report for the Classified Summarised Notes which have appeared in Notornis. It is really nice to see ones observations in print with ones initials beside it in an official publication. These observations are now going to appear in a new publication called Bird Report and more detail and comment will be included so I think it will be worth reporting more of your observations than previously. There is also eBird to record your observations. A new Regional Recorder will be appointed soon.

Membership of OSNZ

I am pleased to welcome several new members to the Otago Branch: Florence Gaud, Amanda Rogers, Gail Quayle and Graham Parker. We hope to meet you at the monthly Indoor Meetings and would love you to get involved in some of the regular surveys and special projects.

The Otago Branch has grown to 70 OSNZ members and about 100 are on our mailing list. About 30 people attend the Indoor Meetings, which feature a speaker and give a chance to exchange reports of birds, answer queries on unidentified nests, feathers, etc. and meet with others who enjoy birds.

For those of you who haven't been on a survey the Summer Wader Count is a good one to try. You don't have to be an expert and you will be joined up with people who have been to the survey areas before and telescopes are provided so it is a chance to get to see godwits and hopefully other waders up close. These surveys happen twice a year. Contact Ken Gager 487 6670. Another good trip is the seasonal survey of Hawksbury Lagoon so watch out for the summer count early next year. For other events see the Programme or contact your RR Mary Thompson, 464 0787.

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)

Mary Thompson

The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebes in Central Otago, February 2009

The sight of a pair of Great Crested Grebes is quite thrilling and most of us have been fortunate enough to have seen these beautiful and interesting birds on a still high country lake, so we don't tend to think of them as rare. But did you know that Great Crested Grebes are classified as 'vulnerable' by IUCN and 'nationally critical' in NZ; the last NZ census in 2004 came up with a total of only 340-350. The exciting thing is that the reports of counts on various lakes suggest there has been a big increase in numbers in Central Otago recently. The planned Census is to get the most accurate total we can.

There is certainly a lot of keen interest in this major up-coming project and 18 people have already signed up to be involved, which is great. There is still time for others to

join in, but we need to have the names as soon as possible so that the final organisation can be done.

Planning is progressing very well for this project. We have booked a lodge in Cromwell at The Chalets, which has twin and single rooms and a communal kitchen/lounge area, so this will be an ideal base for us (there are also camping sites). So far the plan is for the Dunedin contingent to travel up on the Friday evening and stay at Cromwell. The main survey day will be Saturday, 21 February. A good number of our Central Otago members are playing a crucial role in the survey and hopefully we can all get together on the Saturday night – probably in Cromwell as there is also a restaurant at The Chalets. It would be really good to have this time to socialise and discuss everything we have seen and done on our Saturday expeditions and to add up the tally of Great Crested Grebes. There will be some spot prizes for such things as birds in new locations, greatest number, least number, etc.

We are planning on using a variety of survey methods so there should be something to suit everyone. Some of the larger lakes will be surveyed by boat – Wakatipu (and Mt Nicholas Lagoon), Hayes (the main grebe location), Wanaka and Hawea (Forest and Bird folk are helping here), and the head of Lake Dunstan is going to be tackled by kayak, especially at the Bendigo end, but the shoreline can be surveyed from the road if necessary. The Glendhu Bay area may need to be done by car and foot. The south arm of Wakatipu to Kingston is a little tricky but many spots could be surveyed by car at viewing points and beaches. The Frankton Arm Walkway is a good option for walkers to survey the Arm and Moke and Johnston can be accessed by car. Butchers Dam and others in the Alexandra area also need to be surveyed and perhaps on the way home on Sunday, Benmore and Aviemore and Onslow and Mahinerangi. There are still a few smaller lakes that probably can only be got at by tramping in that are still posing a problem (any fit young things out there?).

Mary Thompson

Long Point, Catlins.

We have been asked by the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust to survey the birds of their new reserve in the Catlins, near Long Point, south-east of Owaka. See the April newsletter for an account of the preliminary visit. The survey will involve walking around the reserve counting landbirds, checking the cliffs for nesting seabirds – visually from land unless some more intrepid members would like to take to the water. – and maybe staying out after dark to listen for shearwaters and the like. Everything in fact except Yellow-eyed Penguins. Ideally it would be interesting to get out to Cosgrove Island as well. We have 4 volunteers so far and we intend to go down for one day, on Saturday 8 Nov. If you are interested please contact Derek Onley 4822831 or Peter Schweigman 4552790 as soon as possible.

Glenorchy Trip 24-26 October

Accommodation is booked in a house at Routeburn Station for this long weekend. There are beds or bring sleeping bags to sleep on the floor or tents. Plenty of room for all.

The house is close to the beginning of the Routeburn and Greenstone tracks, the Rees and Dart Valleys. Anyone who wants to go off tramping could stay the night.

All the native forest birds are nearby, Robins, Kakariki, Mohua at Lake Sylvan. Falcons nest on the hillsides. Beautiful beech forests from river level upto the high peaks, river, lake and swamp habitats are within easy reach. There is plenty to see and all levels of activity. All welcome.

Contact Louise Foord 4675041.

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



Royal Spoonbill in evening light at Kaikourai Lagoon

photo Jukka Jantunen

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.

Wednesday, 22 October	Indoor Meeting Paraguay	Speaker: Derek Onley
Labour Weekend 24-26 October	Glenorchy Weekend Fieldtrip. Contact Louise Foord 467 5041	
8 November	Survey of Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust's new reserve at Long Point in the Catlins Contact Derek Onley or Peter Schweigman 455 2790	
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 Liver Birds and other birds of Liverpool	Speaker: Mary Thompson
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,
Final date for copy for next newsletter: 18 November