



THE
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OF NEW ZEALAND
(INCORPORATED)

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Otago Region Newsletter 8/2008 September 2008

Green Island Prions

I visited Green Island overnight 2 September 2008 with the purpose of searching the Green island prions for birds that had been banded at the Prion Cliff below St Clair golf course.

I had established that there is a peak of surface activity at the Prion Cliff on previous nights. I checked the legs of 73 prions on the south side of the island, mostly in the area identified by Chris Lalas as being the most heavily occupied part in 1984. All prions seen were fairy prions.

One prion was found with band D 183730 on the left leg; a bird I had banded. I have checked my records and it is a chick that was banded 25 January 2004 but its history is not straight forward. My notes say " that it was found in an Andy Bay car yard" in commercial/industrial Dunedin. I released it the same day after banding it and measuring its wing at 175mm and weight 112 grams. I probably fed it a little tinned sardine. It had down on the back of its neck, indicating that it had recently fledged. I released it during the daytime into box C1 in the "Prion Cave" 200metres east of the main "Prion Cliff". So I cannot say for sure what the provenance of this bird is. As it has now been found on Green Island, it may have come from there. These three places lie in a straight line from east to west and the distances between them are: Andersons Bay Road - 4 km to Prion Cave - 7 km to Green Island This is the first resighting of this bird.

This is the first examination of prions on Green Island since I began banding prions at the Prion Cliff. I plan to make a series of 6 visits in the coming year to look for banded prions.

Graeme Loh

Avian Pox

There have been several reports over winter, especially from people feeding birds of Silvereyes with wart like growths on their feet and around the face. An outbreak was also noted last year particularly in the Portobello area.

These growths are visible symptoms of avian pox virus. In a sample of over 1000 Silvereyes caught in the Dunedin area in the 1990s the infection rate reached 5% over one winter. Two birds were known to have recovered but we do not really know the fate of the rest because our re-trap rate was so low. Dunnocks are also regularly infected and the rate has reached as high as 20% in birds trapped in the coastal lupin and gorse on Farewell Spit. Kereru get a pox virus but it does not appear to be the same one that affects Silvereyes. Bellbirds and Tui have not been seen with wart like growths. Do they get pox as well?

The disease can be transmitted among flocks of birds at feeders so good hygiene practices are advisable but it is arguable whether to stop feeding.

There is little you can do about infected birds but it is worth recording its occurrence. Please drop a note to me if you see or hear of it.

Brett Gartrell director, New Zealand Wildlife Health Centre at Massey has a PhD student looking at the varieties of pox virus that are present in NZ and would be keen to get the bodies of any birds that die with pox-like lesions.

So if you find any fresh dead bodies please refrigerate (not freeze) and contact DOC promptly so DOC can send them on to Massey.

Graeme Loh

Anyone seen a Chukar lately?

As you know Tekapo has been the traditional Chukar-stop for many years. Everywhere else in the country their numbers have plummeted due to rabbit poison drops. I talked with a hunter near Cromwell a few months ago who lamented that they have virtually disappeared from Central Otago. Well it looks like Mt. John has now met the same fate. I talked to locals about it and spent two days hiking around the hills and it seems that the population has probably dropped to around 10% over the last year. Chukar is of course introduced but I wonder what effect this poison has on other native ground feeders (insects, reptiles, even robins). And there are still millions of rabbits up there!

Russell Cannings

Ornithological Snippets

Graeme Loh found a very early Sooty Shearwater on the ground on Green Island on 2 Sept. (and 4 were seen off the Monarch around the 13th). Graeme circumnavigated the Island on Sunday 14 September and saw 4 Royal Spoonbills – also apparently early.

Russell Cannings saw 60+ **Buller's Albatross** and 1 **Cape Pigeon** off Cape Saunders on 6 Sept. and “Just south of Macandrew Bay I spotted a **Brown Skua** flying parallel to the road! Unfortunately I was hitching with a stranger so didn't want to yell.”

Bob Cunninghame reports: “We have heard a **Morepork** on several occasions during the winter here on Signal hill.

Early June - 2 nights, 1st down Opoho Stream gully towards the end of Blacks Road; two nights later further down towards the Alhambra playing fields.

Late July two successive nights on our property within 200m of the house

August 23rd within 50m of the house.

Flocks of 50+ **Silvereyes**, at least 6 **Bellbirds** and 3 **Tui** at our feeders during the winter. Less numerous close to the house now that trees are flowering at lower altitudes.”

Chuck Landis's son Ripp saw a **Kotuku** feeding in a small wetland along Park Rd, Warrington on 21 Aug.

Neil Fitzgerald asks if a pair of **Crested Grebes** at Lake Alexandrina building a nest in a very public place late August - 3 Sept are early?

Tim saw a **NZ Falcon** in the Dunedin Botanic Gardens on 4 Sept at 10:15pm. It circled frequently around the top of the large Peacock aviary, perching in between flights on top of a large gum tree overlooking the bird aviary. Murray Efford had “a nice view of a **falcon** being mobbed by three **Tui**” in Ferntree Gully at 7.15am on 13 Sept.

Russell Cannings went to the Sinclair Wetlands and Lake Waihola on 12 Sept (beginning at 5:30am). “The highlight from the marshes was hearing a distant booming **Australasian Bittern**, as well as a single **Marsh Crake**, and many **Fernbird**. (There is a video of a **Marsh Crake** taken in the wetlands in the visitors centre) The caretaker said that he flushed a **Bittern** yesterday, right off the path! There was



also 1 **Coot** there. That's the first one I've seen at Sinclair though apparently they breed there. All the ducks (especially **Mallard** and **Scaup**) are in full breeding mode it seems; I saw some **Mallard** ducklings on the Brighton Road. The other notable sightings at Sinclair were 1 pure male **Grey Duck** (hanging out with a female Shoveler) and 2 **Pied Oystercatcher** sleeping on a duck box in the middle of the marsh. Despite a little bit of rain I racked up 40 species at the marshes alone! The two interesting observations at Waihola (other than the lack of **Coots**) were a group of 7 **Scaup** (never seen them on the lake though it seems logical), and a female **Australasian Shoveler** with a completely white head!”



There were 7 **Coots** on Sullivans Dam on 7 Sept., 10 on the 10th and 18 on Lake Hayes early in the month. But the 200 or so, that were on Lake Waihola over winter, appeared to have left by 12 Sept.

Notices and Business

Sea trip

Russell Cannings has booked a short pelagic trip with the Monarch on the morning of October 12th. It'll be just over 2 hours and will cost \$60.

“The skipper knows his birds and the area quite well and has advised that we keep our range within 4nm since the fish-life and currents seem to keep most seabirds within those bounds. Apparently there would be no use in heading out further unless you went to the edge of the Southland current which is at 40nm.

I am hoping that we'll still find a couple gems amongst the usual birds (Black-bellied Storm Petrel and Mottled Petrel?) since October is a transitional period and the few Dunedin pelagic trips that have gone ahead have all been in mid-to-late summer.

Let me know if you're interested and of course please pass this message along. I think the nature of this trip will suit all tolerances of the sea and wind!”

russellcannings@shaw.ca

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

This census has been set for the weekend of 21 and 22 February 2009. February was suggested back in November last year by George, in a discussion with Dawn Palmer, since February is the best time to get a post breeding count. It was his experience that the highest numbers were counted then, later than that they seemed to move out of breeding areas.

This census is a follow up from the one carried out in January 2004 to see what differences were come across. The total for Central Otago in 2004 was 97 adults and 27 juveniles. Anecdotal reports indicate that there was a dramatic increase this last breeding season. Lake Hayes in 2004 had a maximum of 57 adults and 18 juveniles. On 17 March 2008 Dawn Palmer counted at Lake Hayes 104 adults and 40 juveniles. Lake Dunstan had in 2004 11 adults and 16 juveniles. The number in November 2007 was 35.

Numbers at Lakes Wanaka and Hawea was high, but that was in winter 2007. In January 2004 Wanaka had 4, including 2 juveniles and Wanaka had none. Next year we will be able to find out if there are breeding populations on these lakes.

The census involves checking all lakes. The large ones will be tackled by motorized boats, but we may need additional kayaks, and the smaller ones by car/foot.

For logistic purposes, organizing transport, accommodation, the latter two most likely subsidized, we would like to have names of participants interested in this exciting project as soon as possible.

Peter Schweigman, on behalf of 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

Mystery Photo 2

It was a Black-billed Gull of course - everyone knew that because it wouldn't be a mystery otherwise - but the bird has red legs and a partly red bill suggesting it could be a juvenile. But juveniles have brownish scruffy markings on wing coverts and dark eyes and the mystery bird has a pale eye and pale grey coverts so presumably is an adult.

The mystery bird (top right) was photographed in Picton on 12 June with a bunch of other Black-billed Gulls which varied in bill and leg colour and from bi-coloured bill and red legs through to standard adult black bill and dark reddish black legs.



It looks like adult Black-billed Gulls do not always have dark bills and dark legs, especially outside the breeding season.



By early Spring life is much easier. Adults have dark bills and legs and white tips to the primaries. Immatures have pinkish legs, wholly dark or pink bases to bills and the primaries look entirely dark because the white tips have worn away.

Photo: Timaru, late August.

Derek Onley

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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| Sunday, 28 September | Spring survey of Hawksbury Lagoon. 1 pm.
Contact Derek Onley 4822831 |
| Wednesday, 24 September | Indoor Meeting Speaker: Franny Cunninghame
Franny has recently returned from South America where she worked on a number of conservation oriented bird projects. She will talk about the Macaw project and promises to add some pretty pictures of the birds she saw at the end. |
| Wednesday, 22 October | Indoor Meeting Speaker: Derek Onley
Paraguay |
| 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 4552790 |
| 22nd Nov 2008 | Summer Wader Count. High tide is 12.43 at Dunedin and approximately 11.43 at Aromoana. Height 2.0m. |
| 21-22 February 2009 | The George Chance Census of Great Crested Grebe in Otago. |

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Thanks to all who contributed, especially Graham Loh and Russell Cannings

Final date for copy for next newsletter: 15 October