

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (INC.)

WANGANUI BRANCH



Birding Wanganui

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Mute Swan 1: Black Swan 0

On 10th December 2009, Paul Gibson witnessed a spectacular fight at Virginia Lake between a male Mute Swan and a presumed male Black Swan. The male appeared to be defending his female, sitting on a nest nearby. The fight, which took place in late evening, after sunset, started with the two birds swimming close together in circles for about 10 minutes, eyeing each other. Suddenly, this stand-off exploded into a fight, with each bird grasping the other's neck. Paul said "The fight was massive, reminding me of bull elephant seals fighting to death in the subantarctic". A second Black Swan got involved briefly, but to no effect. The Mute Swan eventually managed to get on top of the Black Swan and, grasping its neck, forced its head under water, holding it there for a long time. Towards the end, the birds drifted behind some vegetation. With the fading light, Paul was not able to see if the Black Swan was drowned or not. Because of the light, Paul only managed to get a couple of grainy photographs of the action, reproduced below with Paul's kind permission.



Although a fully mature Mute Swan is only about 25 per cent larger than a Black Swan, it is twice as heavy, so the outcome may have been inevitable. As they say in boxing "A good big 'un will always beat a good little 'un" (although there are occasional exceptions, this not being one of them).

Wanganui pelagic, round 2

On 13th October, we ran a second trip out of Wanganui to view pelagic seabirds in the South Tasman Bight. The trip had been planned for the previous week but poor weather forced a cancellation. That weather persisted up to the day of departure, when a small break in the sequence of low pressure systems allowed us to get out at 07:00, albeit in a choppy sea and under overcast skies with a 8 knot north-westerly wind. With a 1.5-2m south-west swell, occasionally enlivened by 3m hollows, conditions were not ideal for seabird watchers but good for seabirds. The day brightened up a bit around 11:00, when the wind backed to a 12-knot westerly, rising to 18 knots by the time we got back into port at 14:25. A total of 10 people came along: Phil Battley, Jesse Conklin, Peter Frost, Paul Gibson, Owen Mills, Yvan Richard, Sav Saville, Ian Smith, Craig Steed, and Ian Sutherland.

On leaving the port, we headed out in a south-westerly direction towards the 30m isobath, situated here around 40°S. and about 16 km offshore, where we began laying a chum line, mostly of fish scraps. We motored back and forth along the eventual 2.4 km line, attracting up to 25 White-capped Albatross, 20 Cape Petrel, and 60+ Fairy Prion, along with Northern Giant Petrel (2), Fluttering Shearwater (1), Sooty Shearwater (1). Turning westwards from the most easterly point at 40°00.167'S, 174°49.052'E, we motored slowly for the next hour through many thousands of Fairy Prion, attracting up to 25 White-capped Albatross, 2 Southern Royal Albatross, 1 Salvin's Albatross, up to 15 Cape Petrel, 2 Sooty Shearwater, 4-5 Flesh-footed Shearwater, and a couple of Black-backed Gull. One Hutton's Shearwater was also seen flying past.



White-capped Albatross (in flight) and Southern Royal Albatross (centre), together with Cape Petrel and Flesh-footed Shearwater feeding on fish scraps thrown overboard (photo: Peter Frost).

Just before 09:50 we turned and headed south-east for about 2 km, hoping to pick up more species, but the number of birds dropped off once we had used up all the chum. Up to 10 Cape Petrel continued to accompany the boat, along with 2-5 White-capped Albatross, and 2-3 Flesh-footed Shearwater. The surrounding sea was alive with Fairy Prion, many hundreds being noted, but mostly well dispersed. At about 10:00 we reached a point 15 km due south of Waiinu and 21 km SW of Wanganui, at which point we turned and set off WNW towards an undersea ridge, about 21 km away, near where many thousands of Fairy Prion had been seen foraging during the August pelagic cruise.

During this leg of the trip we were accompanied by up to 5 White-capped Albatross, 5-10 Cape Petrel and a couple of Flesh-footed Shearwater, but numbers declined as we moved further west, with only Cape Petrel (up to 3) and an occasional Flesh-footed Shearwater being recorded. One Buller's Albatross sp. was seen but it did not approach the boat closely. Small numbers of Fairy Prion were noted, together with a Northern Giant Petrel and three Black-backed Gull. Approaching the undersea rise, we came across small numbers of Fairy Prion (two small flocks contained about 25 and 40 birds respectively, along with scattered individual birds), as well as a single White-capped Albatross, up to 5 Cape Pigeon, 1 Flesh-footed Shearwater, 2 Fluttering Shearwater, at least 1 Common Diving Petrel. This is only a small fraction of the number of prions recorded just over two months ago, but then the birds were feeding over shoals of foraging kahawai. The fish would undoubtedly be running deep under the prevailing choppy sea conditions.

Just before 11:45 we reached our most north-westerly point (39°55.519'S, 174°31.898'E), turned south and headed off the bank, passing a small flock of Fairy Prion (12), 1 Common Diving Petrel, 1 Northern Giant Petrel, and a NZ Fur Seal on the way. At this time we were still accompanied by 1 White-capped Albatross and up to 7 Cape Petrel. We then swung south-east, where we encountered a large adult Risso's (Grey) Dolphin *Grampus griseus*. According to the skipper, a pod of four animals is often seen in this area.

Few other seabirds were on the way back to Wanganui: White-capped Albatross (2), Fairy Prion (about 180-200 overall), Cape Petrel (2), Common Diving Petrel (up to 12), Flesh-footed Shearwater (1), Hutton's Shearwater (13), Fluttering Shearwater (2), White-fronted Tern (3), and Black-backed Gull (2). One of the albatrosses accompanied the boat to within 5 km of Wanganui. We entered the harbour at 14:18, having covered just over 95 km in slightly more than 7 hours. In spite of the conditions, which resulted in a number of individual 'chumming' sessions, everyone appeared to enjoy the trip. A greater diversity of birds was seen than on the previous trip, but the number of Fairy Prion was much less. The following is a summary of species and numbers seen:

Southern Royal Albatross: 2-3 (seen at different times; max. 2 at any one time)

White-capped Albatross: 25 seen at one time, but 1-3 individuals following the boat throughout much of the trip.

Salvin's Albatross: 1

Buller's Albatross: 1 (not possible to determine if it was Northern or Southern Buller's as it did not approach the boat closely)

Northern Giant Petrel: seen on 7 occasions, but probably no more than 3 different birds. Maximum number at one time: 1

Cape Petrel: 25 seen at one time but total numbers undoubtedly higher than that as birds accompanied the boat throughout most of the trip. Total estimated to be 30-40.

Fairy Prion: "many thousands" at one locality. Smaller numbers (10s - 100s) scattered throughout the area surveyed.

Sooty Shearwater: 3, surprisingly few, as they should be passing through the area around now.

Flesh-footed Shearwater: maximum 4 at any one time, but individual birds seen sporadically throughout much of the southern sector that we covered. Perhaps 10 birds overall.

Hutton's Shearwater: maximum 10 at one locality; 1-2 birds seen sporadically elsewhere throughout the trip

Fluttering Shearwater: seen on 6 occasions, 4 of which were singletons. Surprisingly few.

Common Diving Petrel: recorded on 5 occasions, all except one being single birds. A small group of about 10 birds seen on the return to Wanganui.

White-fronted Tern: 5 (2 and 3 together at widely separate localities)

Black-backed Gull: maximum 4 at one time, otherwise 1-3 birds, including far from land.

Australasian Gannet: 1

Magpies as mavens?

The term 'maven' is used by market researchers to refer to experts or specialists who gather and pass on knowledge to others, thereby having a disproportionate influence on them relative to their normal social relationships (see Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point* for examples). In cooperative breeding species, in which young birds from one brood remain and assist their parents rear one or more subsequent broods, the 'helpers' presumably learn additional elements of brood-rearing and survival from their parents (as well as benefitting in other ways from living in a group, such as improved detection of predators). By passing on additional skills to their offspring during this period of extended association, the parents effectively function as mavens, even if only involuntarily. Pukeko, Australasian Coot, and Australian Magpies are known to breed cooperatively, at least to the extent that some immature birds remain with their parents and help rear fledglings of later broods.

For some years now, Lynne Douglas has been observing a number of pairs of Australian Magpies. A pair have nested regularly above the skate park at the Castlecliff Beach Domain for the past 9 years. (We don't know if they are the same birds, but from their behaviour, Lynne thinks that this is likely.) They feed on a wide range of insects (scarab beetles, Porina moths, caterpillars, etc.) and worms. In mid summer, when the surrounding area is parched brown, the magpies appear to live largely on scarabs. In hot weather, thousands of these beetles can be found stranded on the surface of the sand dunes and beach, many of them dead or moribund. Regurgitated pellets or casts coughed up by the magpies at this time of year consist mostly of beetle legs, wings, elytra, and other indigestible parts.

In 2008 this pair of birds lost their first chick when it was killed by a dog. They re-nested almost immediately and successfully fledged a chick. This bird remained in the parental territory throughout the following year. The female dominates it, usually acting aggressively if it gets too close, but recently Lynne observed the two birds apparently playing on nearby powerlines, with the immature bird swinging beneath the female like a parrot while she seemed to be playing with it (see photo below, left).



Left: Adult female Australian Magpie playing with one-year old immature. Right: One-year old immature feeding juvenile from a later brood (Photos: Lynne Douglas)

In October 2009, the adult birds nested again. The first nest failed in late October 2009, but by early November they had built a second nest, from which they successfully hatched two chicks. One of these got blown down in the wind and could not get back up to the nest, so Lynne rescued it and arranged for it to be hand-reared. The second chick eventually fledged, and was sufficiently mobile to get into low shrubbery where it could escape danger from people and dogs. The immature bird was later seen feeding this year's chick (see photo

above, right), even though the chick had already begun to forage for itself to some extent on the ground. Hughes et al., in a paper on social behaviour in Australian Magpie, published in the journal *Emu* in 1996 note: "Once the eggs hatched, other members of the group were occasionally observed feeding nestlings at the nest (Table 2). Other members of the group were commonly seen feeding the fledglings" (*Emu* **96**: page 67).

By helping rear the chicks of subsequent broods, immature magpies that are allowed to remain in their parental territory presumably contribute to the reproductive success of their parents. In turn, they probably benefit from the experience gained, as well as have the opportunity to learn other skills from their parents. What would be interesting for someone to study is the extent to which individual behaviours and skills are passed on from parent to offspring during this extended period of association; in brief, to test the idea that adult magpies function as mavens.

Lynne has been feeding this pair periodically with bits of mince meat thrown to them. She notes how skilfully the birds are at picking up the mince, even if already carrying other food items. Without putting these items down, the birds break up the mince, roll the pieces around on the ground, then gather them up before flying off to feed the fledgling. Lynne notes that the behaviour is gradually adopted by the young birds after they have watched the adults. One wonders what other skills the young birds acquire, especially during the period after fledging when they remain on their parental territory. Comparing the repertoire of skills of such birds with those of birds that leave their natal territory early, for whatever reason, or creating novel situations (such as learning to handle small balls of mince) for adult birds to solve, and then seeing if these skills are passed on to young birds that stay with their parents, and comparing their performance with those that leave early, might be an interesting long-term project for someone with patience and perseverance. Obviously, observations would have to be made on many individuals in both categories before we could be sure that any differences were not due to chance.

Tied up in knots

In mid November, Paul Gibson circulated a photograph of an unusual coloured Knot, and wondered if it might be a Great Knot. The bird had bright yellowish green legs and a prominent white supercilium (stripe above the eye), as well as dark lores (the patch between the eye and the bill).



Two views of a juvenile Red Knot showing pale yellow-green legs, photographed on the Whanganui R estuary, 14 November 2009 (photos Paul Gibson)

Ormond Torr and Phil Battley both identified this bird as a juvenile Red Knot, with Ormond noting that the markings on the breast and mantle (upper back) were not sufficiently dark or prominent for the bird to be a Great Knot . Phil added some interesting comments about birds in this plumage, which are worth repeating here: "This bird is a bit long-billed, but not enough for Great Knot, which would also have a less clear supercilium. And on Great Knot the new back feathers would be darker-centred than these plain grey ones. Juvenile Red Knot have yellowish legs initially that get darker with age, though banders I have talked to overseas are unsure just how good an ageing characteristic the legs [are] on their own. But the dark subterminal bands on the unmoulted scapulars and wing coverts confirm the age...The leg colour in [juvenile] Red Knots is not widely appreciated, so these shots are pretty educational to all... We don't see a whole lot of knots in this plumage, yet by autumn there are plenty of 1st-years around. Band records show that lots go to Australia first then come to NZ, and I think they filter in unnoticed through the summer...it's a good record for the plumage!"

Confused Curlew Sandpiper

Most birds that have brightly coloured breeding plumages will moult out of these at the end of the breeding season and then spend the non-breeding season in much duller non-breeding plumage. Only toward the end of the non-breeding season will they begin to replace this and once more adopt their breeding plumage. Most of the waders that arrive in New Zealand from their breeding grounds in eastern Siberia and western Alaska have already moulted, or retain only traces of their breeding plumage. Conversely, before they return to their breeding grounds at the end of the southern summer, many moult into their breeding plumage. So, what do we make of a bird that is in full breeding plumage at the height of the southern summer.

On 9 January 2010, Peter Frost was surprised to find a male Curlew Sandpiper in full breeding plumage on the Whanganui R estuary. When first seen, the bird was in the company of 4 Red Knot, all in non-breeding plumage. The bird was seen subsequently by a number of people, and it remained on the estuary until 13th January, after which it moved on somewhere else. (The Red Knots only stayed one day.) As you can see from the photographs below, this was a particularly handsome bird.



Adult male Curlew Sandpiper in full breeding plumage, 13th January 2010. The photo on the left shows the bird's brick red underparts, and on the right, its flight pattern (photos Lynne Douglas).

This bird caused some discussion among local wader experts. Sav Saville noted that "Breeding plumage at this time of year is uncommon, but not unheard of, in Arctic waders. It is normally attributed to birds which don't migrate and eventually adopt the southern

hemisphere timings for breeding plumage - but I don't think this bird really fits that hypothesis." Phil Battley commented "To me the colour looks like it's not fresh, and the scapulars seem worn without any nice tips that you would get on newly moulted feathers." Phil contacted Danny Rogers in Australia, an expert on moult in Arctic waders, asking for his impressions of the bird. Danny wrote: "I think it looks worn, and that it's a bird with a screwed up cycle. I've seen more Curlew Sandpipers in this kind of condition than any other species, which may be in part because an all-red wader is so conspicuous. They are still rare though, not something I see every summer...Whether they are out six months in their annual cycle is something I'm not sure about. I think I've most often encountered "reversed cycle" [breeding plumage] Curlew Sandpipers in Nov/Dec, and had the feeling that they've been really slow about undertaking pre-basis [post-breeding] moult of body feathers." In other words, this bird seems to have been slow in moulting out of its breeding plumage, rather than early in moulting into it.

Curlew Sandpiper are uncommon and transient visitors to the Whanganui R estuary, having been recorded just twice in the preceding 3 years, once in mid summer (16 December 2007, photographed by Peter Frost) and once in early autumn (21 March 2008, photographed by Ormond Torr).

Starling feeding Goldfinch chicks

If the Curlew Sandpiper was mixed up physiologically, a Starling that Paul Gibson photographed feeding Goldfinch chicks in their nest was both behaviourally and psychologically confused. Paul wrote that three chicks, still in their nest, were being fed by both their parents and a pair of starlings. A Putiki resident had noticed this unusual behaviour and called Dawne Morton who in turn phoned Paul, asking him to check this extraordinary observation. Paul sat at an upstairs window for a couple of hours watching the chicks being fed regularly, about once every 5 minutes by the starlings and about every 15 minutes by the Goldfinches. He wondered how the chicks could take so much food, as the starlings were bringing large beakfuls of food, including worms and moths. The nest was difficult to photograph, as the nest was inside a tree with lots of leaves in the way, but Paul got the following records.



Goldfinch chicks being fed by adult Goldfinch (left) and Starling (right). (Photos Paul Gibson)

The only rational explanation for this extraordinary behaviour is that the Starlings may have recently lost their own brood of chicks nearby, but were stimulated by the begging calls of the Goldfinch chicks to feed them. This behaviour lasted at least a couple of days if not longer, given the time interval between when it was first noted and when Paul was notified and managed to go out and photograph the birds.

Marked Godwits on the Whanganui R estuary

Over the past few years, large numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit have been caught and colour-banded by members of the New Zealand Wader Study Group as part of a study of the movements of godwits both internationally and nationally, and the degree of fidelity that birds show to specific areas in New Zealand during the southern summer.

On 31 October 2008, a number of Bar-tailed Godwits were caught and banded at Foxton Beach by researchers from Massey University. In addition to the standard uniquely numbered metal bands, the researchers placed white plastic flags engraved with unique combinations of 3 black letters on the birds' right tibia (i.e. above the birds 'knee', which is actually equivalent the heel). Among these were four males, marked AJB, AJC, AJD, and AMM. On 8 November 2008, at least 2 of 17 Bar-tailed Godwits that I counted on the Whanganui R estuary had white flags but the lettering could not be read. An opportunity to read the lettering finally arose on 19 December 2008, by which time there 4 birds with engraved flags: AJB; AJC; AJD; and AMM. These birds remained on the estuary throughout the 2008/09 summer. The last time the flags on all four birds were read was 22 February 2009, but white-flagged birds were seen through to at least 8 March, following which there were no further sightings as I was overseas.



Bar-tailed Godwits AJD photographed by Paul Gibson on 21 February 2009 (left), and AJC photographed by Lynne Douglas on 15 February 2010 (right). Both birds are moulting into their breeding plumage before migrating north to breeding grounds in the Arctic tundra.

Then on 4 and 5 November 2009, Lynne Douglas circulated some photographs of recently arrived Bar-tailed Godwits, showing both AJB and AJD had returned. Lynne photographed AJB again about a week later, then on 16 November I photographed AJB and AJC. This meant that three of the four marked birds recorded a year earlier had returned, a fact confirmed on 19 November when I saw AJB, AJC and AJD together among a flock of 39 Bar-tailed Godwit. (AMM has not been seen again, at least not on the Whanganui R estuary.) Earlier, between 28 September and 31 October 2009, Jesse Conklin had recorded all three birds at Foxton Beach, where they were originally banded. Interestingly enough, AJC had been seen in Australia in mid October, before arriving at Foxton on or before 31 October.

All three birds have remained on the Whanganui R estuary this summer, with the lettering on all three flags being seen clearly in late December 2009, a number of times in January and March 2010. In between, we have intermittent sightings of individual birds, as well as records of birds with white flags but without being able to read the lettering. I assume that these are the same marked birds. At present, all three are in the process of moulting into their breeding plumage, with AJD looking particularly handsome. The birds will likely leave in the next few weeks, and we wait to see if any or all of them return later in the year after another 29,000+ km round trip to their breeding grounds and back.

Peter Frost

Developments along the Whanganui River

Some of you will have noted that Horizons Regional Council and their contractors have started building the flood protection stopbanks adjacent to the Balgownie Avenue-Heads Road-Gilberd Street light industrial area. The plan was to begin construction along the Beach Rd-Karoro Rd section, and to finish it before 1 March, so as to minimise disturbance to the increasing numbers of birds that use the high tide roost at the end of Beach Road during autumn and winter. Construction ended on time, although landscaping and revegetating the area will take a bit longer. Construction has now moved on to the section between the end of Karoro Rd and the Wanganui Sailing Club on Gilberd St. I have been out a number of times at high tide, when roosting waders and waterbirds were squeezed close to the construction site, sometimes no more than 30 m away. As far as I've been able to tell, the birds have shown no discernable adverse response to all the activity taking place nearby. They are much more disturbed by people walking dogs along the beach at low tide, and occasionally by those who get their kicks out of riding scramblers, ATVs, or cars as fast as possible along the beach. Some have taken to riding along the top of the newly constructed stopbank, a development that could have adverse long-term consequences. We will see. In the meantime, I am in contact with Horizons' Project Manager for the scheme, as we attempt to resolve any wildlife-related issues as they emerge.



Flood protection stopbank under construction, Karoro Rd. Note the roosting gulls. Bar-tailed Godwits, Pied Stilts and a Pied Oystercatcher were roosting just beyond the grassy spit in the middle distance

A more disconcerting development is the application by Open Country Dairy Ltd to discharge up to 900,000 litres of 'condensate of whey' (COW) water direct to the Whanganui R from their newly opened factory adjacent to Affco-Imlay (Affco's Dairy Trust owns Open Country Dairy Ltd). The intended discharge point is immediately adjacent to the high-tide wader roost at the end of Beach Rd. The application argues that the relatively low concentrations of

nitrites, phosphate and dissolved solids will be diluted on entering the river, but it makes no mention of the fate of oils and grease in the effluent. An estimated 3.8 kg of oils and grease will be released daily when the factory is operating at its maximum. This application is for an addition to the existing factory, and it is unclear just what is happening to effluent from Open Country's existing operations. Nevertheless, it is a cause for concern that since the factory became fully operational earlier this year, a brown frothy scum has been noted being washed up along the beach up and downstream of Beach Rd. I am continuing to monitor the situation and will be contacting Horizons if there is any evidence of adverse environmental effects.

Peter Frost

General sightings

These selected sightings cover the period late September 2009 - early March 2010. They exclude those sightings reported elsewhere in this newsletter. Those who contributed observations are Keith Beautrais (KB); Ian Bell (IB); Ngaire Chamlet (NC); Paula Dennison (PD); Lynne Douglas (LD), Peter Frost (PF), Paul Gibson (PG), Bill Greenwood (BG); Andy Jones (AJ); Mike Lynch (ML); Ridgway Lythgoe (RL), Dawne Morton (DM), Colin and Robyn Ogle (CRO), Derek Onley (DO); Ian Smith (INS), Ian Sutherland (IS); Laurel Stowell (LS), Sav Saville (SS); and Ormond Torr (OT).

Fiordland Crested Penguin: 1 bird stranded on Kai Iwi Beach 16th Jan, where it was attacked by dogs. The bird was rescued and taken to the Wanganui Police Station, but it died. It isn't clear if the bird was an immature or a moulting adult (DM; *Wanganui Chronicle*, 19 Jan 2010). **Northern Giant Petrel:** 1, 400 m offshore Whanganui R mouth, 27th Dec (PF). **Giant Petrel sp.:** 1 immature found on Turakina Beach in a weakened state, 17th Dec; the bird was taken to Manawatu-Wanganui Bird Rescue but died the following day (DM). **Black Shag:** small colony of nesting birds in lakeside trees at Christies' Lake, Makirikiri Valley, 31st Oct (OT). **Little Black Shag:** about 25 pairs with nests, some containing large chicks, Virginia Lake, 24th Jan (PF). **Little Shag:** 5 nesting pairs and a number of already fledged young, Virginia Lake, 24th Jan (PF). **Spotted Shag:** 14 (half of them young birds), South Mole, 19th Jan (LD). **Royal Spoonbill:** influx of 28 birds during a spell of severe weather, Whanganui R estuary, 7th Oct, all but 6 of which had moved on when revisited 4 days later (PF). Spring and summer monthly averages (and maxima) on the Whanganui R estuary are: Oct, 4 (excluding the influx, max. 6, 1st); Nov, 3 (max 3 on 16th and 19th); Dec, 1.7 (max. 4, 13th); Jan, 3.9 (max. 14, 12th); Feb 5.5 (max. 9, 28th). **Cattle Egret:** between 14 and 16 birds recorded on 6 occasions on in paddocks 1.4 – 2.8 km along Whangaehu Beach Rd, 21st Sept – 16th Oct (PF, PG); 4 birds (3 in full breeding plumage) at the same locality on 12th Nov (PF). **Nankeen Night-heron:** 4 seen after dusk flying from the forest roost alongside Kuararapaoa Rd, 12th Oct (INS); 1, Jerusalem, 17th Feb (ML, NC). **South Island Pied Oystercatcher:** 1 heard flying south at night, Wanganui East, 21st Sept (PF); 7 apparently migrating west to east along the coast at the mouth of the Whanganui R, 26th Sept (PF). Recorded only sporadically on the Whanganui R estuary during spring (Sept – Nov: a total of 9 birds recorded on 5 of 17 occasions - PF). More common during the return migration in mid summer and early autumn (293 birds recorded on 27 of 35 occasions, including flocks of 5, 11, 14, 25, 41, and 85 recorded on 24th Jan by BG, LD, PF, and OT). **Variable Oystercatcher:** >1, Waitotara R estuary, 16th Sept (RL); 2, Whanganui R estuary, 10th Oct (LD); 1, Whanganui R estuary, 2nd Nov 2009 (PG); 1, Whanganui R estuary, 22nd Jan (LD). **Pied Stilt:** numbers on the Whanganui R estuary increased from an average of about 4 birds during the period Oct-late Dec, to 51 from late Dec – early March, with 94 recorded on 19th Feb, and 120 on 5th March. Daily fluctuations in numbers during summer suggest that many birds were transient, moving through to wintering grounds further north (PF, LD, PG). **Pied Stilt x Black Stilt hybrid:** 1, Koitiata lagoon, 5th Dec (PG, PF). **Banded**

Dotterel: 5, Whanganui R estuary (South bank), 7th Oct (PF); at least one pair nesting in short grass next to the Wanganui Airport runway, 9th Oct, with the airport manager and ground staff reporting 30-50 birds overall within the airport perimeter (PG); 7-8 birds on Whanganui R estuary, near South Beach Spit, 10th Oct (CRO, OT); 35 -40 birds, South Beach parking area, 3rd Jan (CRO); 2, Whanganui estuary (South bank), early Jan (PD); 27, Koitiata lagoon, 17th Jan (PF); 2, Whanganui R estuary, 24th Jan (OT, PF). **Black-fronted Dotterel:** 7, Whangaehu R estuary, 11th Oct; 4, Koitiata lagoon, 5th Dec (PF); 12, Koitiata lagoon, 17th Jan (PF). **Turnstone:** 1, Whanganui R estuary, 25th Sept (PF); 1 on rocks, South Mole, Whanganui R mouth, 1st Nov (OT); 1, Whanganui R estuary, 24th Dec (IS). **Wrybill:** small numbers (generally 1-4 birds) moving through during Jan, with a maximum of 11 on 6th Jan and 6 on 13th Jan; recorded on only 2/7 occasions in February, a total of 3 birds (PF, LD, OT, PG, SS). **Black-billed Gull:** 1, Whanganui R estuary, 1st Oct (photographed, LD); 1, Taupo Quay, 11th Jan (PF); 1, Koitiata lagoon, 17th Jan (PF); 1, Taupo Quay, 23rd Jan (PF); 1, Taupo Quay, 29th Jan (PF); 2, Whanganui R estuary, 15th Feb (PF); 3, Whanganui R estuary, 19th Feb (PF); 1, Whanganui R estuary, 4 March (PF). **Caspian Tern:** first birds of the year returned in early Jan, but numbers are low and fluctuate. Usually only 1-2 birds seen, Jan-Feb, but 4 recorded 29th Jan (PF, LD, PG, OT). **White-fronted Tern:** increasing numbers recorded on the Whanganui estuary and river mouth from early December onwards, with numbers peaking at about 520 on South Mole, 7th Feb, including many juveniles still being fed by adults (PF). **Black-fronted Tern:** 1, Whanganui R estuary, 31st Jan (PF); 1, immature, South Mole, 4th Feb (PF); 1 imm., South Beach, 8th Feb (OT); 1 imm., Whanganui R estuary, 7th March (PF). **New Zealand Falcon:** 1 pair with one fledged young, still being fed by parents, Bushy Park, 2nd Jan (PF, DO); 1, Bastia Hill, about 18th Feb (IB); 1, Castlecliff, 21st Feb (LD). **Kereru:** a report of an albino or leucistic Kereru in the Mangamahu R valley, early March 2010 (DM). **Sulphur-crested Cockatoo:** Seen and heard regularly near Westmere Lake, throughout (KB); 1 heard at Bushy Park, 2nd Jan (PF, DO). **Eastern Rosella:** a pair noted twice just outside the Wanganui city boundary on the true right bank of the Whanganui R, late Sept 2009 (LS); Seen and heard regularly near Westmere Lake, throughout (KB); 1, Papaiti Rd, 9th Nov (LS). **Cockatiel:** 1, Beach Rd, Wanganui, 27th Dec (PF); 1, Ikitara Rd, Wanganui, 2nd Feb (PF). This could be the same bird and is almost certainly an escapee. **Shining Cuckoo:** early records for 2009/10 were Kent Rd, Wanganui 28th Sept (AJ); Matarawa Stream, Wanganui East, 28th Sept (PF); RD 737, Papaiti Rd, 1st Oct (LS); Bastia Hill, 5th Oct (OT); Watt-Livingstone Rd, Westmere, 6th Oct (KB); Forres St, Wanganui, 8th Oct (CRO); Koitiata, 10th Oct (LS). One fledgling being by Grey Warbler, central Marton, early Jan (DM). **Fernbird:** 1 heard, Weraroa wetlands, near Ashley Park, Maxwell, 31st Oct (CRO).

Birding Wanganui AGM, 28 March 2010

Our annual general meeting will be held in conjunction with our usual monthly meeting at St Mary's Church complex on 28 March 2010, starting at 7:30 p.m. The meeting will be preceded by a short talk on *Birding in Indonesia* by Peter Frost.

OSNZ Conference AGM, Nelson, 4th to 7th June 2010

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand will be holding its Conference and Annual General Meeting in Nelson over the Queen's Birthday weekend, 4-7 June. The event will take place at the Conference Centre, Tahuna Beach Holiday Park, Tahunanui. Apart from the evening AGM, there will be a Scientific Day and days of field trips (Abel Tasman National Park – Scenic Cruise and Bird Talks; Nelson Lakes National Park – Mainland Island; and Falcons and Grapes – Marlborough. All details and registration form are available on the OSNZ's website: <http://osnz.org.nz/osnzagm.htm>.

About the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ)

"Fostering the Study, Knowledge and Enjoyment of Birds"

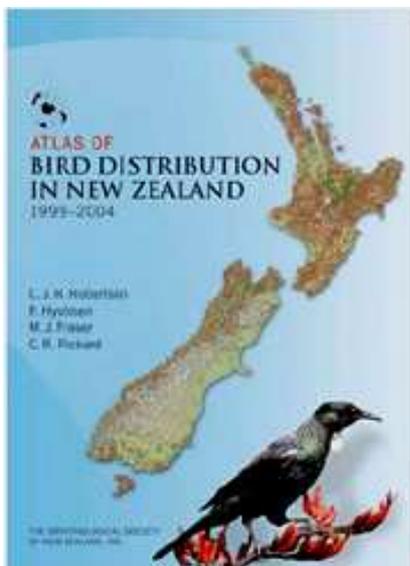
The OSNZ was founded in 1939, and became an incorporated society in 1953. It currently has just over 1200 paying members world-wide, ranging from professional ornithologists and government institutions in New Zealand and overseas, through experienced amateur observers and students at secondary and tertiary educational institutions, to newcomers wanting to increase their knowledge of birds. No special qualifications are required for admission and membership is open to anyone interested in birds. Details and application forms are available on the Society's website at <http://osnz.org.nz/join.htm> or from the Membership Secretary, Yvonne Mackenzie, PO Box 29-532 Fendalton, Christchurch 8540, New Zealand (email: yvonnemackenzie@hotmail.com).

Members are entitled to:

- Participate in all activities and meetings of the Society
- Receive all free publications (including the scientific journal **Notornis**, and the general interest magazine **Southern Bird**, both 4 times per year), and have access to the library and records of the Society
- Vote in elections to appoint Officers of the Society

Ordinary Member	NZ \$57.50
Full-time Student Member	NZ \$30
Family member *	NZ \$14.50
Institution/Group member	NZ \$115
Corporate Member	NZ \$290
Life Member (40 years and over)	NZ \$1,150

* A Family Member is someone living in a household with an Ordinary Member, Life Member, or a Fellow (appointed), and does not receive the Society's publications



Birding Wanganui is the local branch of the OSNZ, but is open to anyone living in and around Wanganui who is interested in birds and birding. Membership of the group is free. Members share information on a regular basis. Evening meetings (talks, slide shows) are held on the last Monday of each month at St Joseph's Hall, adjacent to St Mary's Catholic Church, 1 Campbell Street. Field trips are arranged periodically. For further details contact Peter Frost 06 343 1638 or 021 103 7730 (email: birds.wanganui@xtra.co.nz).

If you are not a member of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ), the parent body of our local branch, why not join? You can get further details from me or from the web at <http://www.osnz.org.nz/join.htm>. **As an incentive, the Society is still giving new members a free copy of the Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand 1999-2004** (worth \$98 if you bought it from the Society). This offer holds only while stocks last, so join now and get your copy. Of course, we hope that once you have joined and got your free copy of the Atlas you will stay on as a member and become involved in the various activities of the Society.