



**THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)**

## **Wellington Region Newsletter**

**December 2007 – supplementary issue**

[www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz) and [www.notornis.org.nz](http://www.notornis.org.nz)

**CONGRATULATIONS !** I'm sure that all Wellington members will join with me in extending our hearty congratulations to Dr. Chris Robertson D.Sc for the award of honorary degree of Doctor of Science by Victoria University of Wellington. Chris has made a major contribution during his career to studies on several species of ocean birds and most recently was the leader of the society's *Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand* project.

### **A Letter from the President**

8 December 2007

Dear OSNZ Member

#### **President's column**

It has been a busy year, and one in which OSNZ has made significant progress. As usual, some of that has been behind the scenes, and there are some exciting new developments in the pipe-line, including *New Zealand Bird Report* and an on-line bird-recording system. Some old favorites such as annual Field Study Courses will return, too in due course. Membership participation is the key to the continued development and expansion of such schemes. There are many ways in which members can contribute to the growth and wellbeing of OSNZ, from your vital membership subscription to putting your name forward for election to Council. There are several vacancies this coming year and hopefully, for the health of OSNZ, the positions will be keenly contested.

The big "event" of the year has been the launch of the *Atlas*, covered in detail in the September *Southern bird*. It is a magnificent tribute to the power of voluntary commitment to a well-organized project and the book sets the standard for first-class, scientifically robust, documentation of the natural world and the changes humans are making to it. Even better, it is beautifully presented, using state-of-the-art computer-mapping software: the Society has much to be proud of! Christopher Robertson's Fellowship of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand, conferred at the *Atlas* launch at Government House, recognized not only his efforts, which "made" the *Atlas* and made it what it is, but also his contributions over many years to the Society and to ornithology in New Zealand and globally, including his part in the previous atlases, IOC 1990, and gannet and albatross research.

Another significant step along the way of implementing the Strategic Plan was taken this year, with the appointment of Ingrid Hutzler as Executive Officer. This is the first

time OSNZ has committed its funds to a position of support for the membership and the Society's activities. Ingrid has introduced herself to the membership via email, but I hope you will all soon have a chance to meet her at AGMs and meetings and events throughout the country. She is developing the nerve centre for OSNZ activities and her efforts will allow Council, the Society Committees, and, especially, the membership to concentrate on studying and enjoying birds and moving the Society forward.

One way of applying OSNZ's knowledge and expertise to identifying issues and framing responses is the series *State of New Zealand birds*, which is distributed not only to our membership but also to Ministers, MPs, regional councils, universities, CRIs, DoC, and other organizations. The special issue on seabirds was a most timely statement of the plight of many species and avenues for expanding our knowledge: the next will deal with the implications of the *Atlas* and its potential for framing future research.

Of course, no worthwhile activity is entirely without its problems. For example, Council has been dealing with the knotty one of how far OSNZ can and should go, in light of our Constitution and our limited financial and logistic means, in providing information underpinning responses to increasing number of threats to bird habitats and individual species. Just providing personnel for long-running series of wader counts, for example, places great strain on regions involved. Working groups have been, and are being, established, to find and implement solutions to these problems.

Not least of the problems this year, and one which reaches right to the heart of OSNZ'S existence and purpose (set out as a major aim of the Society in our Constitution) has been the delays in processing and publishing *Notornis*. The journal is essential as the premier outlet for research on birds in New Zealand and the South Pacific. Its arrival is awaited eagerly (even it is not always read!)

and for the past several years it, and *Southern bird*, have **been** OSNZ to many members. I apologise unreservedly to members and authors for the delays in production and correspondence that have plagued the journal over the past year, and which can all be laid at the Editor's door. The problem has been in large part a result of my unexpected success in gaining significant research funding **after** accepting the Presidency on top of the Editorship. Partly, too, it has resulted from developments in producing the journal. These have saved enough money to pay for the publication of *New Zealand Bird Report*, which is now under development, so that part of the process, at least, has a silver lining. The main reason lay, however, outside the ambit of the Society's activities, in the manner of an opportunity given once in a lifetime and which I was unable to resist. What that was may become apparent before too long and I hope its value to ornithology in the end will be seen to merit the costs.

*Notornis* is an international scientific journal, but it has also to serve our mostly amateur supporting membership. The Editor can – and should – expect to spend time helping first-time, amateur authors see their worthwhile observations and research reach the pages of *Notornis*. It is not always easy, but it is perhaps, along with serving actively on Council, one of the most satisfying ways of contributing to your Society. It is therefore even more painful to admit that I have not been able to fulfil my responsibilities in the position. A new Editor will be progressively taking the reins from the New Year; their appointment just requires Council's final approval. I will ensure that the "missing" issues are brought forth as soon as possible so that the Editorial desk is clear for a smooth transition. In the meantime, I thank members and authors alike for their patience and understanding during what has been a rather difficult time.

Have a very Happy Christmas

Richard

## **OBITUARY:**

It is with great sadness that we have learned of the sudden death of **Dr. Gordon Leary** on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2007. I know that all Wellington members will join me in passing our condolences and thoughts to Sheelagh and her family, relatives and friends at this sad time. Gordon was a member of the Ornithological Society for many years and was always an enthusiastic and cheerful contributor to Wellington Region meetings and field trips.

## **A letter from the OSNZ Executive Officer**

*8 December 2008.*

**Dear OSNZ Member!**

### **Volunteer to make history?**

An international team will be conducting a state-of-the art excavation at the iconic fossil site of Pyramid Valley, near Waikari, North Canterbury, from 15 January to 15 February 2008. The site is available for excavation only once in a generation, and the team will be developing new techniques and using new technologies aimed at gaining as much information as possible about the deposit and the lives and times of the moa, eagles, and other animals preserved there.

Volunteers will be able to contribute to the programme by dissecting their own small blocks of history. Training will be provided: the job is "boring" and exciting at the same time! Unfortunately, funding levels this year will mean that it will be a pay-your-own-bills

contribution, but you will be part of a major undertaking and be able to rub shoulders with experts from all over the world and partake of the amazing North Canterbury weather, landscape, and hospitality.

We are also planning an impromptu bird survey of the Hawarden Basin and Annandale plateau as a first stage in reviving the national field courses. Great birds and amazing scenery: we will be investigating places to establish constant effort sites to monitor changes in the local avifauna.

So, if you have made no plans for the holidays, or be passing through, please let us know at [piopio@paradise.net.nz](mailto:piopio@paradise.net.nz).

Ingrid Hutzler  
Executive Officer  
Ornithological Society of New Zealand, Inc.  
PO Box 834  
NELSON 7040

## **Meetings**

The venue for our meetings is the Head Office of the Department of Conservation (DOC) ("Conservation House" – Te Whare Atawhai), 18-32 Manners Street, Wellington. Conservation House is located on the south side of Manners Street, between the western end of Manners Mall and Willis Street. Please wait outside the glass entrance doors for a DOC staff member / OSNZ member to admit you through the entrance security system and to the meeting room on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. Access is available between 7:20 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. Meetings are held on the first Monday of the month (January and June excepted), commencing at 7:45 p.m.

I have been aware for some time that the present Wellington-based meeting arrangements are not really suitable for members living on the Kapiti coast (northwards of Pukerua Bay). Most Kapiti members are retired people who, understandably, find it difficult or awkward to travel to Wellington for evening meetings, especially in the winter. The cost of running a car nowadays and parking issues in Wellington doesn't make it any easier. At present, 22 members live north of Pukerua Bay, 16% of the Wellington Region membership. There is interest from some Kapiti members in having one or two meetings each year in Waikanae or Paraparaumu. They will, of course, be open to all members. We will make a start on this in February 2008 – details will follow later.

## Programme from February 2008 to October 2008

**February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008:** A members evening. Please let me know if you wish to make a 15 minute contribution. One offer has been received so far (*A visit to Breaksea Island, Fiordland – Geoff deLisle*).

**February, 2008:** An additional meeting to be held on the Kapiti Coast (Waikanae or Paraparaumu). Details to be advised shortly.

**March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008:** Ms. Jennifer Vinton, M.Sc Honours Student, Victoria University of Wellington. "*Urban Flyers – a study of bird movement in suburban Wellington*". Jennifer will describe her studies on the movement of birds within parts of Wellington City and what her results might mean to the wider community.

**March 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008 (Easter).** "*Dabchick Survey of Ponds and Wetlands, Kapiti, Horowhenua, Manawatu and Wanganui Districts*". Led by Ian Armitage, RR. Expressions of interest in participating in the dabchick survey are welcome. Details will be advised by Ian in early 2008. In general, the survey will involve members, or small groups of members, being assigned responsibility for surveying ponds and wetlands from Paraparaumu/Waikanae northwards to Wanganui. The Survey will be arranged in conjunction with Manawatu and Wanganui Members of the society. Some funding from the society will be provided to defray petrol and other operational costs.

**7<sup>th</sup> April, 2008:** Dr. Ralph Powlesland. Scientist, DOC, Head Office. "*It's not all about Birds! - a descriptive story about birds and wildlife in Sabah, Malaysia*". An entertaining account of a journey through parts of Sabah, Malaysia made by four Wellington members in August 2007.

**April, 2008:** "*Kapiti Island Bird Survey*". Led by Dr. Colin Miskelly, DOC. A long-term survey of forest birds on parts of Kapiti Island will commence in April and will involve regular participation by members for three years. Overnight stays on the island will be necessary. Society members have been undertaking forest bird counts on Kapiti Island since the 1970s and we are, once again, invited by DOC to participate in this new survey. Details, including dates, will be advised by Colin in early 2008.

**5<sup>th</sup> May, 2008:** Ms. Raewyn Empson. Conservation Scientist, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. "*Recent Progress in bird studies and conservation in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary*". Raewyn will review recent progress with species translocations and breeding of birds at the sanctuary.

**June, 2008:** No local meeting. The OSNZ conference and AGM will be held in Kaikoura in early June (Queen's Birthday weekend). Details will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Southern Bird*.

**7<sup>th</sup> July, 2008:** Dr. Colin Miskelly. DOC, Conservation Analyst, Wellington Conservancy. "*Conservation genetics of New Zealand snipe*". Colin will bring us up to date with genetic studies on New Zealand snipe.

**4<sup>th</sup> August:** Dr. Ricardo Palma. Scientist/entomologist, Te Papa Tongarewa – Museum of New Zealand. "*History of the naming of N.Z. birds*." Dr. Palma is a member of the OSNZ Checklist Committee that is preparing the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*.

**1<sup>st</sup> September:** Dr. Peter Moore. Scientist, DOC. Head Office. "*Southern royal albatross on Campbell Island - what have we learned from four years searching for bands?*" Peter has worked on Campbell Island for several summer seasons and has a first hand knowledge of royal albatross migration and biology.

**6<sup>th</sup> October:** Mr. David Melville. Consultant ornithologist, Nelson. "*A review of issues and dangers concerning bird flu (avian influenza)*". David is an OSNZ Councillor and has first hand knowledge concerning the issues and the ever present dangers of bird flu.

**Injured Bird Hotline:**

0800 DOC HOTLINE

0800 362-468

## Manawatu River Estuary Field Trip – 8 December

A hardy group of nine members met at the Manawatu River Estuary on 8 December in blustery though fine weather and watched 131 bar-tailed godwits and 104 red knots and recorded their band and flag combinations when the birds were grouped together on the “spit” at high tide. As we found during our September visit godwits and knots have the irritating habit of standing on one leg when resting so it is not so easy to see complete band combinations. Nonetheless, with many eyes watching we managed to record five complete band combinations on godwits and one band combination on a knot. Other species seen during the day included seven banded dotterel (including several recent fledglings), one pied oystercatcher, 11 black shags and at least 20 white-fronted terns. Late, we all enjoyed a pleasant picnic in warm sunshine before returning home.

A short stop at the Otaki waste water treatment plant revealed at least four dabchick, many grey teal and shoveler, and several pied stilts and black swans.



*Left: Janice Woon, Entys Graham and Allan Munro looking at bar-tailed godwits and red knots. Right: A group of resting knots and godwits at the waters edge. Manawatu River Estuary, 8/12/07; photos by Ian Armitage.*

## An Article from *Matiu Really Matters* – the newsletter of the “Friends of Matiu/Somes Island”

The following article has been reprinted with kind permission of the Editor of ‘Matiu Really Matters’ - the newsletter of the Friends of Matiu/Somes Island, November 2007, and of the author.

### ***Fluttering Shearwater Project***

The completion of the shearwater burrow installations and a numbering system in place to navigate to each burrow has allowed the sound system to be hooked up, hopefully to attract the birds. An initial problem with the sound system was repaired and it is now playing fluttering shearwater calls during the night.

To monitor any activity or potential use of the burrows a small fence of twigs will be placed in front of each burrow entrance. Any disturbance of the fence can be followed up by peaking inside the burrow to see what’s inside. To date kakariki and possibly tuatara have been seen to be using the burrows.

Because the burrows are under wind-shorn coastal scrub, ‘take off’ ramps had to be constructed to give any potential new shearwater residents a chance to get above the scrub to catch the wind for take off.

We now wait in hope that all the hard work by staff and numerous volunteers will pay off. Hopefully it is just a matter of time.

Brent Tandy, Ranger Biodiversity, Ponake Area Office, DOC.

## Wellington Region Contacts

### Regional Representative

Ian Armitage 232 7470

ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz

### Regional Recorder

Stuart Nicholson 934 5940

nicholson@paradise.net.nz

### Southern Bird Regional Roundup

Andy Falshaw 562 8428

arfalshaw@xtra.co.nz

### Beach Patrol Coordinator

Sharon Alderson 298-3707

salderson@doc.govt.nz