



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

Wellington Region Newsletter

December 2008

IN REMEMBRANCE: It is with much sadness that we record the passing earlier this year of Dr. Gordon Leary of Upper Hutt. Gordon was a keen member of our Society, attending our monthly meetings over recent years. Our thoughts are with his wife, Sheelagh.

Monthly Meetings

Wellington: We meet on the first Monday of the month (January and June excepted) at the Head Office of the Department of Conservation (DOC) ("Conservation House" – Te Whare Atawhai), 18-32 Manners Street, Wellington (located between 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 4th floor. Access is available between 7:20 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. Meetings commence at 7:45 p.m. If you are late please telephone (027) 230-8454 and someone will come to the door to let you in.

Paraparaumu: Four meetings are held annually (the dates are flexible) at the Paraparaumu Public Library Meeting Room, 179 Rimu Road, Paraparaumu, commencing at 7.30 pm. Ample car parking is available. Tea and coffee are served before the meeting. If you are late please telephone (027) 230-8454 and someone will come to the door to let you in.

Speakers Programme from February to August 2009

2nd February: Dr. Hugh Robertson, Scientist, DOC, Wellington. "*Some thoughts on the Wellington Harbour Bird Survey*". Hugh has been associated with earlier bird surveys of Wellington Harbour and at this talk he will review earlier findings and their implications for conservation management.

2nd March – Wellington Region AGM: Mr. David Melville. Consultant ornithologist, Nelson. "*A review of issues and dangers concerning bird flu (avian influenza)*". David is an OSNZ Councillor and has up-to-date knowledge concerning the issues and the ever present dangers to people and birds of bird flu.

6th April: "*Members evening*". An opportunity for members to make short presentations on summer – autumn bird watching, bird study and bird conservation activities.

20th April (Monday) at Paraparaumu: "*Some Observations on Birds and their Environment in China*". Ian Armitage, RR. An updated presentation first given in Wellington in early 2003.

It looks at some aspects of the life of birds in relation to the rapidly changing biophysical environments, especially forests and wetlands, in the People's Republic of China.

4th May: *"South Atlantic sojourns: birds of the Falklands, South Georgia, Tristan da Cunha, the Antarctic Peninsula and southern South America"*. Dr. Colin Miskelly, Conservation Scientist, DOC, Wellington Conservancy. Colin will present a fascinating account of birds of the southern ocean.

20th May (Wednesday) at Paraparaumu: *"Wildlife views in Oregon, USA"*. Mr. Peter Moore, OSNZ member, Paraparaumu. Peter will give an illustrated presentation on birds (from hummingbirds to owls) and other wildlife (bears, turtles and cowboys) encountered in Oregon, USA.

29th May to 1st June. OSNZ AGM and Conference at Orewa, near Auckland.

6th July: *"Some Observations on Birds and their Environment in China"*. Ian Armitage, RR. An updated presentation first given in early 2003. It looks at some aspects of the life of birds in relation to the rapidly changing biophysical environments, especially forests and wetlands, in the People's Republic of China.

3rd August: *"Fossil bonanza in Otago's Miocene opens a window on New Zealand's past birdlife"*. Dr. Alan Tennyson, Scientist, Te Papa Tongarewa – Museum of New Zealand. Alan will present an account of recent research on the rich fossil bird finds in central Otago.

10th August (Monday) at Paraparaumu: to be advised.

7th September: *"Some Results of Translocation Efforts of Fairy Prions on Mana Island"*. Dr. Colin Miskelly, Conservation scientist, DOC, Wellington Conservancy. Colin will present and discuss the results gained so far of translocation efforts of fairy prions on Mana Island.

Other activities:

1. *"OSNZ Picnic/BBQ & bird watching"*, Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Area, off SH 58 (Paremata/Hutt Valley highway). **Sunday 14th December 2008**, from 12.30 pm. Arrange your own picnic/BBQ. The 'Forest & Bird' BBQ will be operating on the lawn beside the pond. Bird watching before and/or after the picnic/BBQ.
2. *"Farewell to the Birds, Manawatu River estuary"*. The date is not yet set and will be advised in the New Year. However, put a ring around the first or second weekend in March, 2009.
3. *"Mist-netting and passerine banding"* sessions at Wellington Zoo and Karori Cemetery continue this year. These popular sessions for banding and moult studies of passerine birds captured by mist-netting enable members to gain useful first hand experience in handling small birds. Sessions are usually held on Saturdays but if Saturday is too wet on the Sunday. Is anyone on the Kapiti Coast interested in commencing this work? Contact Peter Reese for details.
4. *"Wellington Harbour Bird Survey, 2008 – 2010"*. First Sunday of each month (excepting January, second Sunday), 1 pm to 3 pm. 17 sections (67.5 km) are surveyed simultaneously. Interest in participating in the bird survey from new members or visitors is welcome. Contact Ian Armitage for details.
5. *"Monitoring of shore plover"* on Mana Is. and at adjacent mainland sites, including Green Point. Regular monitoring of the movement of birds will continue during the year. Contact Barry Dent or Ian Armitage for details.
6. *"Monitoring birds at the Pencarrow lakes"*. Field trips to monitor populations of wetland and forest birds on the lakes and in adjacent forest and scrublands, on sand dunes and on nearby beaches, with emphasis upon species having a 'threat classification conservation status'. This field work will be conducted on weekdays only and is a more sharply focused continuation of field work conducted between 2004 and 2007. Contact Ian Armitage for details.

Presidency of the OSNZ

Statement from Richard Holdaway:

"At the conclusion of the OSNZ Council meeting held in Christchurch on 18 October, and with considerable regret, I tendered my resignation as President of OSNZ. Council accepted my resignation and requested that I continue as an ex officio member of Council until the next AGM. My decision to resign was based on the level of commitments in my professional life that are much greater now than when I accepted the position of President in 2006. I am now responsible for three major research programmes. The probability of frequent overseas absences with respect to those programmes, and the arrival of the first grandchild earlier this year and the wish to enjoy more family life than has been possible recently, means I will not be able to contribute to OSNZ at the level I see as necessary from the President. I would have preferred to have completed the term; circumstances have ruled otherwise.

David Lawrie, as Vice-President, has become Acting President until the AGM. I am sure that he and Council will continue to move OSNZ forward. Thank you all for your assistance over the past couple of years."

[Richard Holdaway](#)

Statement from the Acting President:

"The Council in accepting Richard's resignation noted the circumstances and acknowledged the strain that the Society's functions had placed on him and his family. The Council also noted Richard's desire to concentrate on fulfilling his responsibilities as Editor of *Notornis*, in ensuring that the changeover to Jim Biskie is completed as soon as possible, and that the outstanding issues be posted within the next 3 months. The Council also accepted Richard's suggestion that once the Editorship handover is completed he take responsibility for developing the new "Projects and Activities Committee " to assist Council in achieving the outstanding goals of the strategic plan adopted three years ago.

If any member would like to be involved in organising these activities, which were considered a high priority in the recent member survey, please contact Ingrid Hutzler (Executive Officer) directly, or through your Regional Representative."

[David Lawrie, Acting President](#)

An Update on the Publication of *Notornis*

On 2nd December David Lawrie, Acting President and Dr. Jim Briskie, Editor of *Notornis* advised the following publication schedule of *Notornis*.

- The December 2007 and March 2008 issues will be posted with *Southern Bird* in December.
- Two issues (June 2008 & September 2008) will be ready for printing in mid-January 2009 and will be posted in late January/early February.
- A further two issues of *Notornis* will follow in March/April 2009, including the March 2009 issue, which will then bring publishing up to date.

Notable and recent bird sightings in the Wellington Region

There have been many interesting bird observations recently. **Royal spoonbills** were spotted several times during the winter and spring. Julia White came across a bird at Makara, Juzah Zammit-Ross saw four at Pauatahanui in October, including a banded bird (see photograph on page 8) and others were reported at Island Bay and at Eastbourne. **Dabchicks** continue to be seen

at several places, notably at Kaitoke, Otaki, on the Pencarrow lakes, Waikanae and at Paraparaumu. **Black-fronted dotterels** are often seen at the Otaki sewerage ponds. Colin Miskelly reports that a several **shore plovers** are still on Mana Island. Two banded **shore plovers** now appear to visit the Waikanae River estuary and are regularly seen by Kapiti Coast members. A male

shore plover, photographed on Mana Island, is shown below (photo: Phil. Palmer).



In late November a **shore plover** was also reported from the Hutt River estuary by Shane Cotter and another was seen at Plimmerton. On separate occasions Peter Reese and Owen Hughes saw finches, probably **goldfinch**, from a Cook Strait ferry (many kilometers from land) crossing from the South to North Islands. Mary McEwen reports a female **brown teal** at Waimanu Lagoon, and adds that the **pieb shags** at Waimanu Lagoon are nesting. Several **reef herons** have been seen recently, including at Queen's Wharf, Green Point and on Taputeranga Island. Ground nesting **moreporks** were seen recently near Upper Hutt, shown below (two fluffy little morepork chicks in the ground nest. photo - GW Council).



Julia White heard **kakas** at South Karori Road and up to six **kaka** are often seen in Brooklyn and at the Karori Cemetery. Andy Falshaw reports large numbers of **kereru** at Eastbourne. In November, a **kereru** was also seen on the edge of the Wellington CBD, almost within reach of tall city buildings! Janice Woon reports a **terek sandpiper** at the Waikanae River Estuary in November – a very unusual occurrence. Jean Luke and Janice Woon report a pair of nesting **variable oystercatchers** on Paraparaumu Beach at a

point close to where many people and dogs walk each day; let's hope that the chicks make it to adulthood! **Bush falcons** have made their presence felt in several places recently, including in Thorndon, Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and at Upper Hutt.

The most notable record of a **falcon** was at Thorndon, close to the DOC Wellington Conservancy office. Colin Miskelly writes thus:

"3:15 pm. Sitting at my desk with a freshly brewed coffee. The anticipation of that first sip was rudely shattered by one of my workmates urgently yelling my name from the other side of the floor. This is not normal public servant behaviour, nor DOC office decorum. But the excitement was justified. An adult male falcon was calmly plucking a song thrush fledgling on a pohutukawa branch 5 metres from the office window – to be more precise, 5 metres from the desk of our fauna conservation officer (Lynn Adams)". The falcon stayed about 45 minutes, having a post-prandial nap after consuming the thrush. It then flew out of sight behind a rose trellis, chasing a blackbird. (Colin and Lynn are OSNZ members - Ed).

An **Australian bittern** was photographed at a wetland just north of Waikanae in September at a site where bittern have not been seen for a long time (photo: GW Council).



In mid-November Ian Armitage heard and saw three **bar-tailed godwits** flying over Tawa, presumably migrating south. A few days earlier a **bar-tailed godwit** was seen flying through the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary,

also flying south. Both are unusual records. Reg Cotter comments that a **North Island robin** was spotted in the Orongorongo Valley, one of a batch of 40 **robins** that were released near Eastbourne. Dallas Bishop heard a shining cuckoo at her home in Upper

Hutt on 28th September. Perhaps the most disturbing recent bird record is of two **Indian mynas** seen by Frances Gazley in late November in Karori, the first record of **Indian mynas** in Wellington for a very long time.

Recent Wellington Region talks

7th July 2008: Dr. Colin Miskelly (DOC) reviewed the characteristics of various species of snipe that are known in New Zealand. Historically snipes have sometimes been confused with bar-tailed godwits. The Antipodes Island snipe temporarily ceases breeding in the middle of summer for 10 weeks, while breeding at the Auckland Islands is in full swing. The Auckland Island snipe, which survives on several islands of the group, is the most diverse species in terms of body size and genetics. The Snares Snipe occupies 100% of its original range on the 300 ha of the Snares Islands and the birds are at their natural population level. Most New Zealand snipe populations have limited genetic capacity to deal with environmental changes, such as climate change and new disease organisms. Thanks Colin for a great talk.

4th August 2008: Dr. Ricardo Palma (Te Papa Tongarewa - Museum of New Zealand) described the history of scientific naming of New Zealand birds. The first list of birds was published by G. R. Gray in 1843, based on Diffenbach's travels, containing 84 species. The number of species recorded and the geographical coverage increased over time; in 1909 Hamilton included introduced species in his 286 species. The OSNZ 1990 "Checklist" identified 379 species, including some extinct avian fauna. The new OSNZ "Checklist" (2009) will show 468 species and includes Norfolk Island again, Macquarie Island, all extinct birds and failed introductions. It also elevates several subspecies to full species. There are numerous changes of species' and generic names. Thanks Ricardo for a really interesting talk.

1st September 2008 (Wellington) and 19th November (Paraparaumu): Mr. Peter Moore (DOC) talked about his field-work concerning banding studies on Southern Royal albatrosses on Campbell Island. The 2004 to 2008 project aims to find and treat albatrosses with injuries resulting from leg bands, remove bands and not replace them, and apply new bands or insert transponders into some birds. Band injuries have been caused by open bands cutting through the skin and causing irritations, and embedded bands causing severe galls and bony growths. 2.5% of the birds found had major injuries, 9% had minor injuries, and 11% had bands open more than 3 mm leaving the potential to cause injuries. The population of Southern Royal Albatrosses on Campbell Island is no longer increasing. Thanks Peter for sharing your knowledge with us at two meetings.

6th October 2008: Ms. Clio Reid, a student at Victoria University of Wellington explained her studies that examine the relationship between behaviour and lead (Pb) exposure in kea. Kea are readily accessible for behaviour experiments and are "neophilic" birds, i.e. they are attracted to new things. The kea studied at Mt. Cook National Park had elevated lead levels in their blood, while the kea at Mt. Aspiring NP had negligible lead levels. Lead exposure seems to come from kea that can cleverly detach lead from the lead-headed nails used for building roofs. But no differences were found in the behaviour tests for birds with high and low lead levels. Thanks Clio for your enlightening talk.

Beach Patrols

Recent beach patrols over recent months on Wellington, Horowhenua and Manawatu beaches have revealed surprisingly few birds. Colin Miskelly identified a **Southern Buller's mollymawk**, picked up from Seatoun beach. Reg Cotter continued finding **fluttering shearwaters** and **diving petrels** in Wellington Harbour. Jean Luke reports several **fairy prions**, **fluttering shearwaters** and **diving petrels** on Kapiti Coast beaches. Please take opportunities to wander along our local beaches to look for wrecked birds. Even short walks may turn up interesting and significant finds.

Wellington Harbour Bird Survey

The 4th Wellington Harbour survey commences on 7th December and will run for 24 months from **December 2008** to **December 2010**. It will have similar objectives to earlier surveys, namely to describe the seasonal and geographic distribution of birdlife in Wellington Harbour and along the southern coastline and to investigate how modifications to the harbour have affected the numbers and distribution of birds. Surveys have been made by Wellington OSNZ members at three periods in the past, (i) 1998 - 2000, (ii) 1986 - 1988, and (iii) 1975 - 1977. An account of the 1986/88 and 1975/77 surveys may be read in Dr. Hugh Robertson's paper published in *Notornis* in 1992, Volume 39: pages 263-289. As shown on page 1 of this Newsletter Hugh will

talk about the earlier surveys at our February meeting.

As has been recognised in earlier surveys it is not practicable to make precise counts of each and every species but I hope that with full support from Wellington members we can, once again, collect a body of information that will enable a broad picture of the population and seasonal occurrence of birds in Wellington Harbour to be assembled. Results will be combined with information collected in the earlier surveys and will in due course be published in a new paper in *Notornis*.

For bird survey purposes Wellington Harbour has been divided into 17 sections, from Owhiro Bay in the west to Pencarrow Lighthouse in the east and Petone Beach in

the north, a distance of 67 kilometres. **Counts will be made on the first Sunday of each month, between 1 pm and 3 pm (excepting in January – second Sunday)**. Each section can be counted easily by one person or by a group of people and, as in earlier surveys, it is important that all sections be counted simultaneously.

Please contact the RR if you wish to participate in the harbour survey, even infrequently, and remember that separate surveys can be made at any time, in any section, not only on the first Sunday of each month (keep a couple of field forms in your car glove box). The more information that is collected the more useful will be the overall result.

New Zealand eBird

A new internet-based system for recording and documenting bird observations was launched at the annual conference of the society earlier this year. Known as **New Zealand eBird** the system is a major advance in bird observations documentation technology. It is a new tool designed to give bird-watchers the opportunity to submit observations into a permanent archive and to share your observations with others.

Data are compiled into your own monthly, yearly, regional and life bird lists *and* it contributes data that can be used by scientists to assess the status of New Zealand's birds. It enables all who visit the website to view maps of bird distribution and it updates users on rare

bird sightings and lists for over 100 "hotspots" around the country. Your participation in the **New Zealand eBird** programme is encouraged; it will add an extra dimension to your bird-watching experience and will help science and conservation. Registration as a new user is, of course, free and is quick and easy to do.

The **New Zealand eBird** website address is <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand>

Examples of summaries of monthly counts for 2008 recorded on **New Zealand eBird** (as at 2 December 2008) are shown below.

(a) **Wellington & Wairarapa Regions** (101 species reported):

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Number of species	20	27	18	65	53	65	51	46	50	49	52
Number of individual birds	200	249	139	186	291	1,775	1,355	701	471	1,051	2,061
Number of checklists	6	6	8	11	13	49	36	21	41	42	30

(b) **Wellington City** (50 species reported)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Number of species	10	--	--	--	21	39	11	5	3	11	2
Number of individual birds	47	--	--	--	124	1,103	58	7	8	44	4
Number of checklists	3	--	--	--	3	22	7	4	6	7	2

Greetings Cards for Sale

About 20 years ago the society published a set of illustrated greetings/best wishes cards for sale. Many still available; they make nice little gifts and are good for keeping in touch with friends. Each set of cards (10 in a pack, 10 cm x 13 cm) has a different native bird printed on the front - tui, pied fantail, Antipodes red-crowned parakeet and pied stilt. The artwork is from paintings by Mrs. Janet Marshall. Each pack of 10 cards includes envelopes and can be bought for \$3 per pack at local meetings (add \$1/pack if postal delivery is required). The fantail and pied stilt designs have the words 'Best Wishes' printed inside; the other designs are blank. Please contact the RR if you wish to order cards. Funds earned will be retained in the Wellington OSNZ accounts for local bird study project purposes.

First-Aid Kits, Telescope, and HANZAB books for Loan

The region owns first-aid kits if members want to borrow one for their field trips. A telescope can be borrowed by members for observing birds.

We own five volumes of the "Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds" (HANZAB) – Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks; Volume 2: Raptors to Lapwings; Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons; Volume 4: Parrots to Dollarbirds; Volume 7: Passerines (divided into 2 books). Contact Ian if you wish to borrow these.

Wellington Region Contacts

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Injured bird hotlines: Ms. Karin Wiley, Native Bird Rescue Wellington Trust (04) 479-2936
Department of Conservation 0800 HOTLINE 0800 362-468



Royal Spoonbills, Pauatahanui. The second bird from the left is banded (photo: Juzah Zammit-Ross)

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