



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)
Wellington Region Newsletter

December 2009

www.osnz.org.nz and www.notornis.org.nz

Monthly Meetings in Wellington City

We meet on the first Monday of each 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.

Periodic Meetings in Kapiti Coast District

Meetings are held periodically 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.

Programme from February to September 2010

- 1st February:** *"Member's Evening."* An opportunity for members' presentations on their summer bird watching, bird study and bird conservation activities. Please let the RR know during January if you wish to make a presentation.
- 1st March: Wellington Region AGM** – followed by a talk on *"Some Observations on Wildlife, including Birds and their Environments, in the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador"*. Ian & Gwyneth Armitage visited the Galapagos Islands National Park in October 2009 and will summarize some observations on the fascinating range of plant and animal species that occur in one of the world's most unusual natural environments.
- 5th April:** *"Sharing a Burrow: the Interactions between Fairy Prions and Tuatara"*. Ms. Ilse Corkery, Ph.D student, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University will summarise some aspects of her studies on the ecology of fairy prions and tuatara on Stephen's Island.
- 12th April – Paraparaumu:** Speaker to be advised.
- 3rd May:** *"Customary harvest and long term viability of muttonbirds in the Marlborough Sounds, New Zealand: implications for retaining traditional cultural heritage"*. Ms. Amelia Geary, Ph.D student, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University will

summarise some aspects of her conservation management studies on sooty shearwaters in Marlborough.

5th to 7th June: National Conference and AGM in Nelson. Details are expected to be circulated in a *Southern Bird* in early 2010. No Wellington meeting in June.

21st June – Paraparaumu. Speaker to be advised.

5th July: *“Progress in the Establishment of Brown Kiwi in the Rimutaka Forest Park”*. Ms. Melody McLaughlin, Kiwi Project Coordinator, Rimutaka Forest Park Charitable Trust will outline recent achievements leading towards the establishment of a small brown kiwi population in the Rimutaka Forest Park.

2nd August, Wellington; 9th August, Paraparaumu: *“Genetic Variation and Malaria Infections of naturally occurring Mainland Re-colonisation of Bellbirds”*. Ms. Shauna Baillie, Ph.D student, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University will discuss some aspects of her genetic studies on bellbirds.

7th September: *“Progress in Genetic Studies on Albatrosses”*. Dr. Geoff Chambers, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington. Further details of this talk will be provided in the next newsletter.

Offers to lead or assist with field trips and suggestions and ideas for meetings would be appreciated. What topics would you like to hear about? – Please let Ian Armitage know.

Field activities:

1. *“Mist-netting and passerine banding”* at Wellington Zoo and elsewhere in Wellington. Sessions are usually held on Saturdays or on Sunday if the weather is too wet on Saturday. Please contact Peter Reese for details.
2. *“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 for details.
3. *“Monitoring of birds at the Pencarrow lakes”*. Periodic weekday field trips to monitor populations of wetland and forest birds on the Pencarrow lakes and in adjacent forest and scrublands will resume in the spring, with emphasis upon species having a ‘threat classification conservation status’. Please contact the RR or Sheelagh Leary for details.
4. *“Wellington Harbour Bird Survey, 2008 – 2010”*. First Sunday of each month (excepting January and June, second Sunday), 1 pm to 3 pm. Interest from new members in participating in the bird survey would be very welcome. Contact Ian Armitage for details.
5. *“Kapiti Island Bird Survey”*. Led by Dr. Colin Miskelly, DOC. A long-term survey of forest birds on parts of Kapiti Island will continue in the summer. Overnight stays on the island will be necessary. Society members have been undertaking forest bird counts on Kapiti Island since the 1970s. The next survey is planned for 16th and 17th January. Later surveys are proposed in April, July and October. More volunteers are welcome but remember the work is physically demanding.
6. *“Rimutaka Forest Park 5-minute Bird Counts.”* A long-term programme of 5-minute bird counts continue in January in the forests in the Catchpool-Five Mile Track zone of the Rimutaka Forest Park, in conjunction with the Rimutaka Forest Park Trust. The field work requires a medium level of fitness and will take most of a day to complete. Volunteers are welcome. Contact Ian Armitage for details.

Notable and Recent bird Sightings

The most notable recent observation was made by Sheelagh Leary in early November during the harbour bird survey when she saw three, possibly four, **king shags** in the Seaview Marina, Lower Hutt. The most

characteristic feature of **king shags** are the pink feet and legs and this clearly marks them apart from all other shags that regularly occur on Wellington Harbour. Also seen during recent harbour surveys

were **banded dotterel** (three at Eastbourne by Nina Wortman and one at the south end of Wellington Airport by Peter Reese) and **Canada geese** were recorded near Petone (by Reg. Cotter). Twenty-six **banded dotterel** were counted by Allan Munro in the Pauatahanui Harbour. Much to everyone's surprise at least 18 **bar-tailed godwits** were seen for several days along Petone Beach and at the Hutt River mouth (by Sue Freitag, Reg. & Shane Cotter and Delia Small) and this number exceeds earlier records of members of godwits in Wellington Harbour. Raewyn Empson reports that **falcons** have been dive-bombing people in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary rather earlier in the spring than in the past. **Falcons** continue to be spotted around the Wellington region - above Mount Victoria (by Ralph Powlesland), Melrose (by Peter Reese) and at Eastbourne (by Owen Spearpoint & Shane Cotter). One or two **red-crowned parakeets** continue to be regularly seen or heard in the Porirua Scenic Reserve (by Ian Armitage), in Eastbourne (by Sue Freitag) and in the Hutt Valley (by Owen Spearpoint). **Whiteheads** were also seen in November in the Porirua Scenic Reserve for the first time in two years and Owen Spearpoint reports **whiteheads** recently in the Belmont Regional Park. Matthew Booth has been tracking juvenile **bellbirds** along the South Karori Road that fly from the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. Much to Matthew's surprise he also saw a pair of **saddleback** recently that "jumped the sanctuary fence" and were foraging in shrubs beside the South Karori Road. **Bellbirds** have also been seen recently in the Porirua Scenic Reserve and in suburban gardens in Porirua by Ian Armitage.

Other observers report **bellbirds** at Newlands. **Pipits** have been reported from several localities. Stuart Nicholson saw a **pipit** near the Happy Valley rubbish tip and they have now been recorded several times in the harbour survey by Nikki McArthur between Pencarrow Lighthouse and Eastbourne. **Pipits** are also reported from the Catchpool Valley, Rimutaka Forest Park. Colour-banded **tui** have been seen by several members in Roseneath and Newtown so keep an eye open for these. A **tui** was recently seen at Seatoun by Rod Orange. Several members reported **Shining cuckoos** in September and October in various parts of the Wellington Region and **long-tailed cuckoos** were heard in October and November in the Rimutaka Forest Park. Rod Orange reports a **morepork** near the top of the Cable Car in Kelburn. **Royal spoonbills** have been reported at Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve (up to 17 birds) and at Waikanae by several members. Three **Australian Coots** have been seen by several observers since August in the Whitby Lagoon, Porirua. Barry Dent and Sue Freitag report a **Pacific golden plover** on Mana Island in late October, roosting with some of the unpaired **shore plover** and Colin Miskelly reports a **black-fronted dotterel** on Kapiti Island. A **reef heron** was seen recently on Matiu/Somes Island by Reg Cotter. **Variable oystercatchers** are once again nesting at the Waikanae River estuary and they are also nesting on Matiu/Somes Island. There are now 35 free-ranging **brown kiwis** in the Rimutaka Forest Park, including two chicks that have hatched naturally, the first to do in a Wellington forest for more than 100 years.

Recent Wellington Region talks

3rd August: Dr. Alan Tennyson, Te Papa Tongarewa – Museum of New Zealand. Alan described his studies into the diverse fossil fauna retrieved from an ancient lake-bed in Central Otago. The fossils date from 19 to 16 million years ago. There was once a fascinating and rich fauna present including at least 31 bird taxa. Birds species include a diving petrel, a heron, at least eight species of ducks and geese, a kite, an eagle, a hawk, possibly an adzebill, two rail species, two wader species (resembling a dotterel and a stint), a gull, a pigeon, three parrot species, an owlet-nightjar, a swiftlet, a long-billed wren, a crow-like bird, and a flamingo-like bird, as well as eggshells. Other animals identified are at least four bat taxa, a tiny "waddling mouse-like mammal", three frog species, tuatara, lizards, crocodylians and land snails.

7th September: Dr. Colin Miskelly, Department of Conservation, Wellington-Hawke's Bay Conservancy, summarized the processes involved and results gained through restoring slow-breeding burrowing seabird colonies to islands and other suitable sites. 239 common diving petrel chicks were transferred to Mana Island, of which 118 fledged (49%). Twenty of these birds returned to Mana Island along with 83 unbanded birds. Seventy chicks have subsequently been reared by these parents. In the Chatham Islands, 200 Chatham Island petrel chicks were translocated to Pitt Island; 198 chicks fledged and began returning to the new colony as adults from 2005. From 2006 to 2009 all chicks of the taiko were translocated to the Sweetwater Conservation Covenant and 35 chicks were fledged.

5th October: Dr. Kevin Burns, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington described a fascinating series of experiments undertaken to investigate feeding behaviour and counting ability of New Zealand robins. Robins eat some of their prey when it is caught and the remainder is stored in suitable places in trees. Males acquired three times more meal-worms provided by the researchers than did females, irrespective of the time of year. Males have a 20% larger body size than females. Solitary birds stored (or cached) more prey than was eaten at the time, compared to paired birds, and males cached more prey than did females. An experimental cache site was set up in a tree branch that included a small hidden compartment; the robins could see how many meal-worms were put into the cache, and how many were available there, because some were hidden. Thanks Kevin for providing a fascinating insight into an unusual aspect of the feeding behaviour of birds.

Beach Patrols

Not many dead seabirds have been found over the spring and winter on Wellington beaches. Jean Luke found two **fairy prions** and two pairs of wings on the Kapiti coast and Mary McEwen also picked up four **fairy prions** and a **broad-billed prion** on the Kapiti coast. Alan Tennyson found a **fulmar prion** in mid-July. Ian Armitage found a **fluttering shearwater** near Green Point and a **gannet** beside the Hutt Road motorway during a harbour bird survey. In early September, a **Caspian tern** was found on Mana Island by Barry Dent.

Members are encouraged to let members know when an unusually large number of birds are found on a beach (a bird 'wreck') so that more effort can be put into recording birds over longer stretches of beaches. The RR is happy to coordinate and let others know when wrecks occur.

Wellington Harbour Bird Survey

Observations from July in the Wellington Harbour bird survey are summarized in the following table. We are now half way through this series of counts. Offers from

other members to assist in the survey during 2010 would be welcome as the work is falling onto the shoulders of a small number of people.

SPECIES RECORDED	July	August	September	October	November
BLACKBIRD, European	48	8	14	27	11
CHAFFINCH	17	16	11	10	5
DOTTEREL, Banded			1		3
DUNNOCK	3		1		9
GANNET, Australasian	10	9	20	17	1
GODWIT, Bar-tailed					18
GOLDFINCH	10		2	59	3
GOOSE, Canada				2	1
GOOSE, Feral			8	4	7
GREENFINCH	12	12	14	4	7
GULL, Black-backed	617	1,019	872	899	601
GULL, Red-billed	705	972	607	634	453
HERON, Reef	2		1	3	1
HERON, White-faced			1		
KINGFISHER, Sacred	1		3	3	
MALLARD x Grey Duck	115	115	91	99	88
OYSTERCATCHER, Variable	80	108	87	184	104
OYSTERCATCHER, Pied	30		4	1	1
PETREL, Giant	1				
PIGEON, Feral / White Dove	34	28	70	58	54
PIPIT	2	2	6		2
PLOVER, Spur-winged	4			3	1
QUAIL, Californian	1			11	
SHAG, Black	28	22	25	41	21

SPECIES RECORDED	July	August	September	October	November
SHAG, King(?)					3
SHAG, Little	147	120	49	33	36
SHAG, Little black	110	135	76	45	10
SHAG, Spotted	5	1	10	12	4
SHAG, Pied	22	8	8	29	8
SHEARWATER, Fluttering	6	24	1,224	159	
SHELDUCK, Paradise	2			2	1
SILVEREYE	39	25	5	9	15
SPARROW, House	100	17	46	117	107
STARLING, European	222	122	131	170	123
SWALLOW, Welcome	1		2	6	6
SWAN, Black	4	1	13	12	12
TERN, White-fronted		13	122	2	155
TERN, Caspian	1	2	2	2	
THRUSH, Song	1		2	2	1
TUI	1		6		4
WARBLER, Grey			1		1
YELLOWHAMMER	1		46	2	2
No. Species Recorded	34	25	35	33	37

New Zealand eBird <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand>

Reports of bird observations in the Wellington Region onto the New Zealand eBird system continue to be made by a small number of members. This new web-based and simple recording system not only provides a permanent record of your own field observations but also contributes your records to a large database that can be studied by others. The more information that is contributed the more useful the database becomes. Go the website (shown above), log on (register first if necessary) and you are in! Then follow the easy-to-use navigation menu to submit observations, or to view and explore data.

To provide encouragement to infrequent users the following note was included on the *NZ eBird* website in September. For members who haven't used the eBird system yet, give it a go!

"Occasionally we hear about birders who tried eBird once, but then did not return because they felt they were not qualified to contribute, or that eBird caters only to "expert" birders. This is not the case at all! At eBird we believe that all bird observations have value. You need not be a globetrotting expert—some of the most valuable checklists are repeated observations from people who have never looked for birds outside their own backyard! You need not know every bird

that flashes through your binoculars either, the eBird data quality process guards against many potential identification errors. Furthermore, the exchange of information between experts and beginners during this process is a valuable learning tool. We want eBird to be used by birders of all skill levels: our only request is that you try to use eBird to its fullest capacity, report the birds you see and hear to the best of your ability, and err on the conservative side if you are unsure about your identification".

The following tables summarise data reported on *NZ eBird* for the Wellington Region, (a) monthly bird observations between 1st January and 30th November this year, and (b) a list of 88 taxa (including one hybrid) reported by observers. A much wider range of reports and graphical charts can be generated on-line.

2009	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
No. of species counted	52	49	40	63	56	60	66	51	48	49	36
No. of individuals counted	1,280	615	185	1,073	1,692	2,210	2,393	594	816	894	157
No. of checklists reported	17	37	25	30	32	28	49	15	28	15	7

North Island Brown Kiwi	Pacific Reef-Heron	Shining Bronze-Cuckoo
Little Spotted Kiwi	Royal Spoonbill	Long-tailed Koel (Cuckoo)
Graylag Goose	Swamp Harrier	Morepork
Canada Goose	New Zealand Falcon	Sacred Kingfisher
Black Swan	Weka	Stitchbird
Paradise Shelduck	Purple Swamphen (Pukeko)	New Zealand Bellbird
Muscovy Duck	Takahe	Tui
Mallard	Eurasian Coot	Rook
Mallard x Pacific Black Duck	Masked Lapwing (Spur-winged plover)	Saddleback
Pacific Black Duck (Grey duck)	Double-banded Plover (Banded dotterel)	Australasian Magpie
Australian Shoveler	Black-fronted Dotterel	New Zealand Fantail
Gray Teal	South Island Oystercatcher	Tomtit
Chestnut Teal	Variable Oystercatcher	New Zealand Robin
Brown Teal	Pied Stilt	Whitehead
New Zealand Scaup	Black-billed Gull	Rifleman
Ring-necked Pheasant	Red-billed Gull	Sky Lark
California Quail	Kelp Gull (Black-backed gull)	Welcome Swallow
New Zealand Grebe (dabchick)	Caspian Tern	Gray Gerygone (warbler)
Little Penguin (blue penguin)	Black-fronted Tern	Eurasian Blackbird
Shy Albatross	White-fronted Tern	Song Thrush
Black-browed Albatross	Pomarine/Parasitic Jaeger	Silver-eye
Fluttering Shearwater	Rock Pigeon	European Starling
Australasian Gannet	New Zealand Pigeon	Dunnock
Little Black Cormorant	New Zealand Kaka	Australasian Pipit
Great Cormorant (Black shag)	Red-fronted Parakeet	Yellowhammer
Pied Cormorant	Yellow-fronted Parakeet	Common Chaffinch
Spotted Shag	Crimson Rosella	European Greenfinch
Little Pied Cormorant (Little shag)	Eastern Rosella	Common Redpoll
White-faced Heron	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	European Goldfinch
		House Sparrow

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