



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

Wellington Region Newsletter

July 2006

www.osnz.org.nz

It is with much sadness that we learned of the death of Dr Peter Bull of Lower Hutt in April. Peter Bull was a Fellow and long-standing member of the society and his work over many years was well-known within the OSNZ and beyond. An obituary for Peter appeared in 'The Dominion Post' on Thursday 11th May 2006. All members in the Wellington Region of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand extend our sympathies to Peter's family, friends, and colleagues.

Monthly Meetings

The monthly meetings are held on the first Monday of the month at the Research, Development and Improvement Division of the Department of Conservation, at 7:45 p.m. Entrance is via the glass door immediately to the left of the Wellington Public Library main doors on Victoria Street; one of the DOC staff will take you up in the lift to the conference room on the 4th floor. Access is available between 7:30 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. If you arrive late, phone 471 3286 for someone to come down and let you in.

Offers, suggestions, speakers, and ideas for the meetings would be gladly received. What topics would you like to hear about? – Please discuss any suggestions with Ian Armitage.

Welcome to New Members

We warmly welcome several new members to the Wellington Region and we hope that you will find your membership of the OSNZ to be both interesting and enjoyable. We hope too that you will join in with some of our field activities and come to our monthly meetings.

Meetings from July 2006

3 July: Ms. Susan Cunningham. "How Kiwis hunt: Is smelling underground the best way?"

7 August: Dr. Colin Miskelly. "The ghost of Sir John Hanham: unravelling the mysteries of the extinct Stewart Island snipe".

7 September: To be advised.

2 October: Mr. Richard Seaton. "Falcons in pine forests, is this a big deal?"

6 November: Mr. Sandy Bartle. "Human Uses of Messenger Pigeons".

National Godwit and Knot Band Spotting Weekends

Two band-spotting weekends have been scheduled to check for Godwits and Knots wearing bands, throughout the country. The dates are 15th and 16th July for checking of over-wintering immature birds, and 7th and 8th October to check recent arrivals following migration back to our shores. So please make an effort to go looking for banded Knots and Godwits, if you can. Reports should be made on the reporting forms circulated to many Wellington members on e-mail recently. Forms can also be downloaded and printed from the OSNZ website.

Notable Bird Sightings and Activities in the Wellington Region

Over the summer and autumn, Gordon Leary was watching **starling**, **kingfisher**, and **rosella** competing for the same nesting hole; a clutch of starling eggs was laid with the nestlings fledging, and then the kingfisher nested and the brood fledged. Ralph Powlesland reports that **piebald shags** are nesting at Massey Memorial, on the northern end of the Miramar peninsula. A **chukor** was seen in Kingston by Stuart Nicholson, and a chukor was also seen in Kilbirnie by Peter Reese. Five **kakariki (red-crowned parakeet)** bathing in a pond were encountered by Don Stracy on Matiu / Somes Island. Chris Robertson saw 2 **reef herons** at Shelley Bay, and in early March Enfys Graham saw one at Mahina Bay; a **reef heron** was also seen by Bill Lock from along Centennial Highway (near Paekakariki) and Ian and Gwyneth Armitage saw a **reef heron** in early June at Paremata. In early March, during one of Wellington's gales, Anne Cotter was watching a group of **black swans** flying and they were actually traveling backwards! Colin Miskelly came across a feral population of **peach-faced love-birds** in Khandallah. In April a pair of **paradise shelducks** were back again at Vogelmorn Park in Morningside – an annual event which Bill Lock has been recording for the past several years. **Falcons** have been seen at Seatoun and at Upper Hutt, the latter feasting on two chickens one falcon had



taken – the photograph explains it all, and surprisingly the bird didn't take flight after being photographed! Enfys Graham and Gwyneth and Ian Armitage counted five **banded dotterels**, many **redpolls**, and two **piebald stilts** during their bird monitoring of the Pencarrow lakes and coastline. Owen Hughes observed **goldfinches** eating pohutukawa seeds in Parliament grounds. Owen also heard his first **song thrush** singing for the season during the last week of April in Porirua; Ian Armitage heard a **song thrush** singing in Tawa in May. On 1st May a **rifleman** was encountered by Reg Cotter on the track behind Lowry Bay. On 7 June a **bittern** was flushed twice on the plateau of Mana Island by Graeme Taylor, Grant Timlin and Colin Miskelly. Three **cattle egret** were reported at Upper Hutt, in paddocks just north of Maoribank, on 30 May. A few days earlier, also at Upper Hutt, a single **white heron (kotuku)** was seen at the water reservoirs at Te Marua. Barry Dent again reports seeing five **kakariki (red-crowned parakeet)**

at the Rangituhi Cres entrance to Porirua Scenic Reserve on 30 May. On 11 June a **black-fronted tern** was reported at Island Bay.

Beach Patrols

In January Jean Luke retrieved 18 birds from her beach patrolling between Te Horo and Waikanae, including **sooty**, **short-tailed**, and **fluttering shearwaters**. After the gale in early March, Anne and Reg Cotter picked up nearly 20 beach-wrecked **sooty shearwaters** and a **variable oystercatcher** from Petone foreshore. In May an unusually large number of juvenile **sooty shearwaters** appeared on beaches in Wellington Harbour, including at Seatoun. In early June a freshly dead immature **grey-headed mollymawk** was found at Island Bay.

Mist-Netting and Banding of Passerines at Wellington Zoo and at Karori Cemetery

Our mist-netting and passerine banding sessions are continuing through the year at Wellington Zoo. Any members who would like to improve their mist-netting, bird handling and banding skills are welcome to come along for an enjoyable day of banding activities, and it's a good way of getting to know other members too. The sessions are usually held on Saturdays. Further details are obtainable from Peter Reese.

Fluttering Shearwater Chick Translocations on Mana Island

Fluttering shearwater chicks are again being transferred to Mana Island next summer (January). Any members who would like to help feed the chicks after they have been transferred should contact Colin Miskelly for details. The routine is to stay on Mana Island for a week at a time and it is likely that two or more 'shifts' of members will again be needed, as in last summer.

Newsletter by Email

If you would like to receive your newsletter by email, and also be on an email list for projects, trips and new information that often comes up at short notice, and to receive news of other birding items, please give your email address to Ian Armitage. Presently 79% of Wellington members receive newsletters and other information by e-mail.

First-Aid Kits, Telescope, and HANZAB for Loan

Our region has first-aid kits if any members want to take one out on any of their OSNZ trips. The telescope belonging to our branch is stored by Ian Armitage for safe-keeping; it is available to be borrowed by any member at any time for observing the birds and their activities and habitats. We also own the four 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, and recently we bought Volume 7 (two books) - Passerines. These books can be borrowed for a while by any member. Contact Ian if you wish to make use of any of these items.

Summary of Organized Field-Trips and Activities for OSNZ Members

East Harbour Regional Park Bird Survey: monthly surveys of Pencarrow lakes area.

Mist-netting and Passerine Banding: various Saturdays during the year, at Wellington Zoo and Karori Cemetery.

Manawatu Estuary Wader Viewing: a day-trip, during March and November

Fluttering Shearwater Chick Transfers: feeding chicks on Mana Island during January

Mana Island Robin Census and Banding, Sooty Shearwater Banding: yearly, in March, over a week-end

Kapiti Island Coastal Bird Survey: yearly, in November, a day-trip

Ocean birds in Cook Strait: we hope to arrange a full day trip in the early summer to provide an opportunity for members to view, recognise and learn about ocean birds at close range.

National Twitchathon: any 24 hour period of your own choosing in January.

Caspian tern and Black-backed gull banding, Lake Onoke, Wairarapa: If weather permits we may again arrange a day visit to Lake Onoke at the invitation of the Wairarapa Region to help with banding of fledgling chicks, usually on the weekend before Christmas.

Bird banding in Marlborough: At the invitation of the Marlborough Region we may arrange a weekend visit to Blenheim and Ward during the summer to help with banding and to watch birds in a new environment for many Wellington members. Further details will be provided later. Members who are interested are invited to let Ian know by September.

National AGM and Conference: held annually over Queen's Birthday week-end. 2007 – Taranaki. 2008 – Kaikoura. 2009 – north of Auckland (possibly Orewa).

Recent Events

Monday 6th March 2006: Our Wellington Region Annual General Meeting was held prior to the evening's talks. Ian Armitage was re-elected as our Regional Representative, and Stephen Sharp was re-elected as our Treasurer. Ian Armitage presented his annual report for the region, listing the monthly and periodic field-trips and projects that members participated in. The Wellington Region presently has 136 members. Stephen Sharp presented his financial statement for the 2005 year.

Monday 6th March 2006: For our members projects' evening, John Geale talked about Peru and its birdlife. Andy Falshaw and David Cornick showed slides of their respective trips to Mana Island, to feed Fluttering Shearwater chicks following translocation. Andy also described his Antarctic visit, where he encountered the Magellan Penguin, Gentoo Penguin, Crested Duck, Steamer Duck, Turkey Vulture at the Falklands, King Penguin, Chinstrap Penguin, Rockhopper Penguin, Wandering Albatross, Giant Petrel, Sheathbill, Long-tailed Meadowlark, and South Georgia Pipit on South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula. Geoff de Lisle covered the ecological course at Miranda that he attended, at which some cannon-netting was done. Ian Armitage showed some results of the bird survey of the Pencarrow lakes and coastline that some Wellington members are undertaking. Thanks everyone.

Monday 3rd April 2006: Paul Jansen from the Department of Conservation related the history and current situation of the Kakapo. In 2004 a disease outbreak among some of the Kakapo was caused by a common bacterium, *Erysipelas*. In 2005 60% of Kakapo eggs laid were infertile; male infertility is regarded as the most likely cause of this, possibly due to inbreeding. Suspected infertile males are removed from the breeding population. Semen samples have been collected and analysed; even the "best" males have relatively poor quality sperm. Females need to mate at least twice to produce a fertile clutch. Sperm from genetically distinct males will be used for breeding. Freezing and thawing sperm has been tried, and it remains fertile. Thanks to Paul Jansen for his presentation about the plight of the endearing Kakapo.

Monday 1st May 2006: Reg Cotter reviewed the many bird surveys and excursions he has been involved with as an OSNZ member over several decades. Slides of Matiu / Somes Island taken in 1975 showed very bare grassy slopes, which are now fully covered with bush. Similarly, on Mana Island the previously bare grass areas are now in shrubs. Reg assisted with conservation of Hutton's Shearwaters in their colony near Kaikoura, and of the Taiko in the Chathams. We saw slides of the Antipodes Island Parakeet, Rockhopper and Erect-crested Penguin on Antipodes Island; Royal Spoonbill on the Wairau River bar; White-faced Storm Petrel; Glossy Ibis on a flooded paddock where "Queensgate" is now situated in Lower Hutt; Fairy Prions being banded at night on Stephen's Island. Many thanks Reg for your long-term perspective of ornithological activities in New Zealand.

Queen's Birthday Weekend, 1st to 5th June 2006: The Wellington Region was pleased to arrange and host the national conference and Annual General Meeting of the society in early June 2006. Attendance was 135 people, mostly OSNZ members, and the conference was notable for having two scientific days at which 22 scientific presentations were made on a wide range of topics covering land bird studies, bird conservation and ocean bird studies. A milestone in the history of the society was the launching of 'Notornis' on the internet, a development that is expected to widen knowledge about the OSNZ and about New Zealand birds. The internet address is: www.notornis.org.nz Several field trips were held to the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, to Pauatahanui and the Kapiti Coast, Matiu/Somes Island and to the undisplayed bird and fossil collections at Te Papa. Unfortunately visits to Mana and Kapiti Islands were cancelled because of bad weather on Sunday and Monday.

Next Newsletter

The next newsletter is due out in November. If anyone has any items to be included, please contact Sally or Ian.

Contact Phone Numbers / Email Addresses

Regional Representative	Ian Armitage 232 7470 ian.armitage@xtra.co.nz
Regional Recorder	Stuart Nicholson 934 5940 nicholson@paradise.net.nz
<i>Southern Bird</i> Regional Roundup	Ian Armitage 232 7470
East Harbour Regional Park bird survey	Reg Cotter 568 6960 reganne@clear.net.nz
Fluttering Shearwater chick transfers	Colin Miskelly 479 1662 cmiskelly@doc.govt.nz
Rock Pigeon nesting project	Ralph Powlesland 386 3323 rpowlesland@doc.govt.nz
Beach patrols	Jean Luke 04 904 1704 jeanluke@paradise.net.nz
Mana Island robins and sooty shearwaters	Geoff de Lisle 527 0929 (evenings) geoffrey.delisle@agresearch.co.nz
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