



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)
Wellington Region Newsletter

March-April 2007

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

Monthly Meetings

The venue for our monthly meetings has recently changed and we now meet in the new Head Office of the Department of Conservation ("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 door for a DOC staff member & OSNZ member to admit and escort you to the meeting room on the 4th floor. Access is available between 7:30 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. Our meetings are still held on the first Monday of the month (January and June excepted), commencing at 7:45 p.m.

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.

Meetings' Programme from April to July 2007

April 2nd: Wellington Region AGM, followed to be followed by a talk by Dr Mary McEwen - "*Charles Fleming's Cape Expedition Diary*": *Auckland Islands 1942-43: Albatrosses, mollymawks and other distractions*".

May 7th: Dr. Darryl Jones, Victoria University of Wellington. "*Bird feeding in backyards: Do birds become dependant? The case of the Australian magpie*".

June: No Wellington meeting. The society AGM and conference are being held in New Plymouth.

July 2nd: Dr. Graeme Taylor, DOC, Wellington. "*Conservation of New Zealand's endangered petrel species and population trends from a 17-year monitoring project of three petrel species at Bethells Beach, Auckland*".

A reminder about the OSNZ Conference and AGM in 2007

This year's OSNZ Annual General Meeting and Conference week-end is being held at the New Plymouth Club in New Plymouth over Queen's Birthday week-end (Friday 1st June to Monday 4th June 2007). The Registration Form and supporting information was posted to members with the December 2006 issues of "Notornis" and "Southern Bird" and can also be downloaded from the society's website. Please mail your completed Registration Form soon, and bear in mind that a "Late Registration" fee of \$10 per person is payable for registrations received after 30th April 2007.

Notable Recent Bird Sightings and Activities in the Wellington Region

Last spring, Colin Miskelly retrieved a **northern giant petrel** from the bottom of the Ngaio Gorge, which was later released on Mātīu / Somes Island. Reg Cotter observed a **bar-tailed godwit** on Petone beach over a 10 day period. In late October a **royal spoonbill** was seen at the Hutt River estuary by Shane Cotter. A **reef heron** nest was spotted by Reg Cotter on Mātīu / Somes Island, which contained 2 eggs; at least one chick has hatched. Reg has also seen many **variable oystercatcher** chicks on the island, clear evidence that many pairs are breeding there. A pair of breeding **variable oystercatchers** were also seen near Pencarrow lighthouse during the monthly Pencarrow lakes survey (see photos below).



Grace Suckling saw a **red knot** at the Waikanae estuary, not a common occurrence for this species. Peter Reese saw a **long-tailed cuckoo** in a pohutukawa tree in a Te Papa carpark and he also saw a **shining cuckoo** being followed by two **grey warblers** at the Wellington Zoo. Other members have also seen **shining cuckoos**, one by Graeme Taylor in Ngaio and another by Jennifer Vinton in Belmont. In her garden at Kapiti, Jean Luke was surprised to see a **tui** strike a **silveryeye**. Julia White saw a **crimson rosella** in Karori. Several reports of **kaka** in various places in Wellington have been received by Raewyn Empson, including from the zoo.

On 20th December, Colin Miskelly came across two **bitterns** in the Boggy Pond area of Lake Wairarapa. Over the summer, Reef Herons were seen at Lyall Bay by Ralph Powlesland, Owhiro Bay by Andy Falshaw, Balena Bay by Peter Reese, and at Makara Beach. Bill Lock saw a **bush falcon** in Morningson. Gwyneth and Ian Armitage observed a **bush falcon** harassing a group of **rock pigeons** in central Wellington and saw it attack and catch one pigeon, then landing roughly on the roof of an office building. Annette Harvey reports that the **robins** which have been transferred to Mātīu / Somes Island, have produced second clutches of eggs, and some were laying third clutches; Annette also discovered a **robin** incubating the eggs laid by a **blackbird**. About six **dabchicks** have been seen in the Hutt River catchment area. Is this evidence that dabchicks are becoming more numerous in the Wellington Region? Ralph Powlesland and Colin Miskelly report a new nesting colony of **pied shags** on Mana Island; the shags were building nests during the late summer and early autumn. Several members have seen and reported a **little egret** at the Waikanae River estuary.

Beach Patrols

During last October, Ann and Reg. Cotter's finds from their regular patrols along Petone beach included a **wandering albatross**, two **sooty shearwaters**, a **spotted shag** and a **domestic (feral) goose**. From the Kapiti coast, Jean Luke's recent finds have included two **fairy prions**, and a **hutton's shearwater**. In November Jean found three **albatrosses**, a **cape pigeon (petrel)**, a **hutton's shearwater** and a **buller's shearwater**. In the early summer she also found about 20 birds, mostly prions and shearwaters.

The OSNZ Role in the Otari-Wilton Bioblitz on 23 and 24 March 2007

Several Wellington Region members contributed to the design, planning, organization, field observations and public speaking at the Otari-Wilton "Bioblitz" on held on 23 and 24 March.

The “Bioblitz” was a large undertaking led by Victoria University that aimed to identify as many species of biota as possible during a 24-hour period. We led the section about birds and 25 bird species, including bellbirds, were identified, 20 species on Friday and a further 5 on Saturday. No rarities were seen but we were rather hoping to locate kakariki, falcon and whiteheads in Otari during the Bioblitz. We also cooperated with other specialists to try to locate bats but none were found, despite the use of electronic bat detection equipment. Members worked in shifts through the daylight hours and into Friday evening to carry out the field work and to report our findings into the central Otari-Wilton species data registry.

Contract with DOC to Survey Bird Populations at River Mouths

The Wellington Region of the society has recently entered into a contract with the Department of Conservation to survey the occurrence and populations of birds in the vicinity of 10 river mouths, extending from the Orongorongo River in the south-east to the Ohau River in the north. Four of the 10 rivers are in the Manawatu Region and with its agreement we are surveying those rivers. The first surveys were carried out during the summer months and will be repeated in the winter. The work was required to be carried out within two hours of high and low tides at each river and stream. It was desirable that a only few members carry out the work over a short time period in order that consistency in the recording methodology could be achieved for the 20 visits that were made, 10 at high tide and 10 at low tide.

Some impressions from the summer surveys are (a) red-billed gulls seem to be relatively scarce, (b) banded dotterels were seen at most Pauatahanui-Kapiti-Horowhenua river mouths, (c) a little egret was seen at Waikanae, and (d) several bar-tailed godwits and a few wrybill were seen at and near several Kapiti and Horowhenua rivers. If any members wish to contribute to the winter survey field work please let Ian Armitage know.

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

Lead by Peter Reese the mist-netting and passerine banding sessions have commenced again this year at Wellington Zoo. This is a great opportunity to gain experience in handling small birds so you are welcome to join in and learn how to handle small birds, extract them from mist-nets and band them. You will also be contributing to the long-term study of bird aging and bird distribution in Wellington. The sessions are usually held on Saturdays. Further details are obtainable from Peter Reese.

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.

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

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

Activities associated with Karori Wildlife Sanctuary: contact the Sanctuary.

National AGM and Conference: Held in various regions of New Zealand, over Queen’s Birthday week-end. It includes field-trips. This year the AGM is in New Plymouth.

Notes on Recent Events

Monday 4th December 2006: Lynn Adams from the Department of Conservation described recent attempts to translocated short-tailed bats to Kapiti Island. The bats exist as remnant populations widely scattered through New Zealand, including a small population in the Waiohine Gorge in the Wairarapa. The bat-roost was found by catching some bats and attaching signalling transmitters, the following the birds to their “home”. Several juvenile bats were translocated indirectly to Kapiti Island, by transferring pregnant bats to Mt Bruce to give birth, and then transferring the pups to Kapiti Island, just when they were learning to fly. After the

bats had been released and were living in the wild on the island for some time, the bats developed contagious ear lesions, meaning that they are unable to echo-locate effectively. The bats were treated with antibiotics, and the problem is serious and is of, course, being investigated. Thank you Lynn for a very interesting presentation.

Monday 5th February 2007: For our members' projects evening, Monica Awasthy discussed her study of kereru in the Wellington area. Contact Monica if you have any sightings of banded and jessed (a PVC ribbon hanging off the bird's leg) kereru. Chris Robertson updated us on the development of the N.Z. Bird Distribution Atlas. Owen Hughes told us of his historical research about the magpie lark. David Cornick showed a colourful set of slides of this summer's translocation of 91 fluttering shearwaters to Mana Island from Long Island in the Marlborough Sounds (see photos below). Gordon Leary related his travels to the Galapagos Islands in October and to Stewart Island in December. Ian Armitage recounted some aspects of his voyage in January to the Auckland Islands and to Campbell Island. Ralph Powlesland described Tuhua/Mayor Island and proposed a Wellington Region visit to the island in the spring. Thanks to everyone who contributed.



Monday 5th March: Professor Richard Holdaway, President of our Society and team leader of research in conservation biology at Canterbury University presented a fascinating talk about studies on moa and other extinct birds. He presented examples of the ecology of some extinct New Zealand birds (such as the South Island giant moa), and birds that longer occupy their former range, and their relevance to conservation and restoration of flora and fauna. The importance of nutrient cycling from the marine environment onto the terrestrial environment through breeding was emphasized. Seabirds, such as petrels, bring in to the land over a long period of time large amounts phosphorus compounds, which supports the growth of vegetation and subsequently benefits other animals, such as forest birds. The loss of enormous numbers of seabirds in recent centuries results in the loss of phosphates that are beneficial to the terrestrial environment. The damage to various moa bones caused by the claws of Haast's eagle was also shown. We extend our thanks to Richard for sharing some aspects of his fascinating studies with us.

Banding of Caspian Terns and Black-backed Gulls at Onoke Spit, Wairarapa

Several Wellington and Wairarapa members met in December and again in January to attempt to band Caspian tern and black-backed gull chicks on the Onoke Spit, southern Wairarapa. We were surprised to see that the adult birds are sitting on eggs and no chicks were present at all. It may be that this is the second, or even the third, attempt at breeding this year. The colony is located on relatively stable ground on the north facing side of the spit, in contrast to earlier colonies being on more exposed and less stable ground on the top of the spit. 26 nests/scrapes and 46 eggs, mostly in pairs, were counted. To our surprise and disappointment there were almost no chicks of either species present in January. What has happened to them and where have they gone? The colony of Caspian terns that we saw in December has disappeared and we only caught a brief glimpse of one flying. The absence of breeding birds is cause for concern. The unusual weather in the spring may be factor that has lead to the demise of both species, but perhaps predators, people and cars being driven over the dunes have also

caused them to abandon breeding this summer. Hopefully it will be better next summer. A pleasant find in December was to see a black-backed gull chick hatching from an egg.

Newsletter by E-mail

If you would like to get your newsletter by e-mail, and also be on an e-mail address list for news, projects and trips that come up at short notice, and to receive other birding items, please give your email address to Ian Armitage. 80 percent of Wellington members now receive notices about OSNZ and bird study topics by e-mail. Remember too that newsletters of other regions of the country can be downloaded from the OSNZ website, www.osnz.org.nz

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

Our region has some first-aid kits if members want to take borrow one for use on their OSNZ trips. Our telescope is stored by Ian Armitage for safe-keeping; it is available to be borrowed by any member at any time for observing birds and their activities and habitats. Our branch also owns four volumes of the "Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds" – Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks; Volume 2: Raptors to Lapwings; Volume 3: Snipe to Pigeons; Volume 7: Passerines (-divided into 2 books); these books can be borrowed for a while by any member. Contact Ian if you wish to make use of any of these items.

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
Fluttering Shearwater chick transfers	Colin Miskelly 479 1662
Rock Pigeon nesting project	Ralph Powlesland 386 3323
Beach patrols	Jean Luke 04 904 1704 jeanluke@paradise.net.nz
Mana Island robins and sooty shearwaters	Geoff de Lisle 527 0929 (evenings)
Mist-netting and passerine banding	Peter Reese 387 7387 ruth.peterr@actrix.co.nz
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Photocopying has kindly been provided by Beca: Engineers, Planners and Managers.