



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

Wellington Region Newsletter

March 2008

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

CONGRATULATIONS: We express our congratulations to Dr. Chris Robertson on being awarded a QSM in the 2008 New Year's Honours for services to ornithology.

Monthly Meetings in Wellington

The venue for our monthly 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 4th floor. Access is available between 7:20 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. Our meetings are held on the first Monday of the month (January and June excepted), commencing at 7:45 p.m.

Meetings in the Kapiti District – a new feature of Wellington Region activity

The present Wellington-based monthly meeting arrangements are not really suitable for many members living on the Kapiti coast, from Pukerua Bay northwards. Most Kapiti District members are retired people who, understandably, find it difficult or awkward to travel to Wellington for evening meetings, especially in the winter. Presently, 22 members live north of Pukerua Bay, 16% of the Wellington Region membership and there are some others having close connections with the Kapiti District although living in Wellington.

In order to better serve the needs of Kapiti coast members an inaugural meeting of nine Kapiti coast members was held at the home of Dr. Viola & Phil Palmer at Paraparaumu on Monday afternoon, 25th February. We are very grateful to Viola and Phil for their generosity in opening their home for the inaugural meeting. There was considerable discussion on the form, content, timing and location of local meetings and field activities, the outcome being that up to four meetings each year should be arranged, preferably in the evening at Paraparaumu. Some field local trips will also be planned.

All were positive that meetings and field trips of Kapiti coast members should become a permanent feature of Wellington Region activities. These will be additional to the monthly evening meetings held in Wellington and will, of course, be open to all Wellington members. The next Kapiti meeting will be held at the Paraparaumu Public Library meeting room on Monday 12th May, 7.30 pm. (see the programme in the next section).

Programme from March to November 2008

March 3rd: Dr. Ralph Powlesland. Scientist, DOC, Wellington. *"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 made by four Wellington members in August 2007.

March 7th and 14th (Friday): A two-part *"early evening survey of the Pencarrow lakes and adjacent coastline"*. 5 pm to 9 pm. An opportunity to survey birds on the lakes and coastline in the late afternoon/early evening in late summer that will complement the 2004 – 2007 daytime surveys. It also provides a chance for other members to visit the locality. Car-pooling is required and transport is limited to two cars only on each evening. Further early evening visits next spring/early summer are also proposed.

March 8th: The Manawatu Estuary Trust is arranging another *"farewell to the birds"* at the Manawatu River Estuary, Foxton Beach. Meet at Holben Parade picnic area at 10 am, or earlier. High tide is at 10.30 am. Picnic lunch/BBQ, 12 noon to 1 pm. Further details are available from the RR.

March 26th: Additional meeting in March. Dr. Hugh Robertson, Co-ordinator (Research & Monitoring), of DOC's Kiwi Recovery Programme. A seminar arranged by the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary concerning *"the future of New Zealand's most iconic animal – the kiwi"*. Free for sanctuary members. Others are welcome to attend for a gold coin donation. Lecture theatre LT4, Victoria University Karori Campus, Campbell Street, Karori. 7.30 – 9 pm. Call (04) 920 9200 by 20 March to confirm if you wish to attend.

7th April: 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.

April: *"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 early 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 in March.

19th and 26th April: *"Beach Patrol, Otaki to Paekakariki"*. Led by Sharon Alderson & Ian Armitage. Tides are favourable. 19th high, 9.45 am; low, 3.50 pm. 26th high 1.15 pm, low 7 am & 7.20 pm. Details will be advised in early April.

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

12th May at Paraparaumu: Paraparaumu Public Library meeting room, 179 Rimu Road, Paraparaumu, 7.30 pm. Ample car parking is available. There are two possible speakers and one will be confirmed closer to the time.

June, 2008: No meetings. The OSNZ national conference and AGM will be held in Kaikoura between 30th May and 1st June (Queen's Birthday weekend).

7th July: 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.

4th 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 4th edition of the *Checklist of the Birds of New Zealand*.

1st 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.

6th 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 up-to-date knowledge concerning the issues and the ever present dangers to people and to birds of bird flu.

3rd November: Mr. Julian Fitter, Leader of the Friends of Galápagos Support Organization in New Zealand. "*Galapagos, the challenge for conservation*". Julian has travelled widely in Southern Oceans of the world and has a specific knowledge of the Galápagos Island group in the Pacific Ocean, west of Ecuador.

Other activities:

1. The popular "*mist-netting and passerine banding*" sessions at Wellington Zoo and Karori Cemetery this year have commenced recently. Sessions are usually held on Saturdays and if Saturday is too wet on the Sunday. 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 the RR for details.
3. The proposed "*dabchick survey of wetlands of Kapiti, Horowhenua and Manawatu Districts*" is postponed until Easter 2009 (10 to 13 April, 2009). Regrettably, it has proven to be too difficult to organize properly in the time available this year.

Notable and recent bird sightings

In mid-October Stuart Nicholson heard a **shining cuckoo** calling in Brooklyn.

During the spring seven pairs of **little shags** were counted by Enfys Graham nesting in Williams Park at Days Bay. Dr. Grace Suckling and others at Waikanae have been monitoring at least 20 **pieb** and **black shags** nesting at Waimanu Lagoons.

Dr. Chris Robertson saw a **black-browed albatross** in Evans Bay in December.

Juvenile **bar-tailed godwits** were reported from Petone beach by George Pope, six were seen at Waikanae by Jean Luke and others and three were seen at Pauatahanui in late October by Allan Munro together with three **red knots**.

Dr. Geoff Chambers saw three **royal spoonbills** at the Hutt estuary.

Dr. Chris Robertson reports a **morepork** in Wadestown and in mid-November Ian Armitage heard a **morepork** in eastern Tawa, the first heard there for about 20 years. Rod Orange regularly hears a **morepork** on the Tinakori Hill.

Kaka are reported at several localities. Stuart Nicholson continues to see and hear **kaka** in Brooklyn and Dr. Mary McEwen regularly sees **kaka** flying over Karori. Ros Batchelor reports **kaka** near Wilton's Bush and Reg Cotter has recent reports of **kaka** behind Eastbourne.

Ros Batchelor and others continue to see many **tui** in Khandallah and in other suburbs. Raewyn Empson reports a brown **tui** that was seen near the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. Nikki La Monica has seen several **black phase fantails** recently in Queen Elizabeth Park.

More than 70 **scaup** and several **dabchicks** and their young are reported in the Waimanu Lagoons at Waikanae in February by Dr. Grace Suckling.

In early December, 10 nests of **white-fronted terns** were found by Reg Cotter on Ward Island, the first seen there in Reg's memory.

Californian quail have been seen by Dr. Viola & Phil Palmer at Paraparaumu.

Dr. Colin Miskelly reports that a male **bellbird** has been present for several weeks on Mana Island, the first seen on the island, and Colin also reports that **bellbirds** are now present in Ohariu Valley and one has been seen at Makara.

In mid-December five **Arctic skuas** were spotted in the strait between Mana Island and Titahi Bay by Ian Armitage, Barry Dent and Grant Timlin. Flocks of **fluttering shearwaters** have been present near Mana Island for several weeks.

Ian Armitage has seen and heard **red-crowned parakeets** and **whiteheads** several times during the summer in a part of the Porirua Scenic Reserve. **Bellbirds** sometimes occur too.

Recent Wellington Region talks

Monday 5th November 2007: Dr. Kerry-Jayne Wilson of Lincoln University presented a fascinating "overview of the major seabird groups in New Zealand, a comparison of temperate Northern Hemisphere and New Zealand seabirds, and the foraging ecology and breeding biology of albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters". Three percent (about 300 species and subspecies) of the world's birds are seabirds and about one-third of the bird species native to New Zealand are seabirds. Kerry-Jayne also discussed the threats to and vulnerabilities of seabirds on land and at sea.

Monday 3rd December 2007: Ms. Delia Small of the Department of Conservation described the "status and management of orange-fronted kakariki in New Zealand". The species formerly occurred throughout the South Island, on Stewart Island, and on a few offshore islands but their present distribution is mainly within Arthur's Pass National Park. The small population is susceptible to predator irruptions associated with beech mast seeding. Nests are protected from rats using tin wraps on the trunks of nest trees and on neighbouring trees. Eggs and chicks have been transferred to Peacock Springs and to Te Anau, and some adults to Chalky Island and Maud Island, and soon to Breaksea Island. There is concern that the mainland population could become locally extinct, even with good predator control, caused in part through severe winter weather.



Sue Freitag, Julia White, Stuart Nicholson, Sally Truman, Anne Cotter, Enfys Graham and Richard Norman chatting over drinks and enjoying Christmas cake before the December 2007 meeting.

Monday 4th February 2008: Our "members' presentations evening" was well-attended. Geoff de Lisle summarized aspects of the biology of Fiordland's Breaksea, Hawea, Wairaki and Resolution Islands. Ms. Monica Awasthy explained the dire situation of the Aga on Rota and Guam Islands in the Mariana Islands, due partly to damage caused by the introduced brown tree snake. Dr. Mary and Andrew McEwen recounted January's "Nimrod Centennial Expedition", visiting Snares, Enderby, Macquarie, Campbell and Ulva Islands, and also the Ross Sea. Dr. Ralph Powlesland described bird conservation activities following a visit by several Wellington members last November to Tuhua / Mayor Island. Ros Batchelor summarized progress with the third and final transfer of fluttering shearwater chicks onto Mana Island. Amelia Geary described the first use of radar in New Zealand for bird flight monitoring (mainly migrating pied oystercatchers) for a proposed windfarm at Taharoa, near Kawhia. Dr. Colin Miskelly commented on aspects of the first shore plover release onto Mana Island. Ian Armitage summarised the results of recent five-minute bird counts in Porirua Scenic Reserve.

Beach Patrols

Jean Luke reports that very few dead seabirds have been found recently during beach patrols along the Te Horo, Peka Peka and Waikanae stretches of beach. In November last year, Barry Dent found a dead albatross at Green Point, near Titahi Bay.

Jean and Sharon Alderson (Beach Patrol coordinator) urge greater interest and involvement in beach patrolling. In order to encourage this several beach patrols will be scheduled this year, the first two in April.

Members are encouraged to let others know when a bird 'wreck' is found so that more effort can be put into recording birds over longer stretches of beaches. The RR is happy to coordinate this and let members know when wrecks occur. [For members who don't know a 'wreck' is an usually large number of birds on a beach often occurring during or following stormy weather].

Photos of recent arrivals

It is always nice to see and hear about recent arrivals that Wellington members have been associated with in one way or another, especially of rare and unusual bird species. Here are photos of three recent arrivals. Aren't they cute!



A *North Island* kiwi chick from Rimutaka Forest Park, hatched in Mid-December. Photo: Melody McLaughlin.



The first *shore plover* chick hatched on Mana Island. It has just fledged. February 2008. Photo: Ian Armitage.



A young *fluttering shearwater* chick being hand-raised on Mana Island. January 2008. Photo: Barry Dent

More news about the Mana Island fluttering shearwaters

Barry Dent wrote these notes describing recent progress with the translocation of fluttering shearwaters on to Mana Island. During January several Wellington OSNZ members have, once again, played a major part in the shearwater translocation programme that is being led by the Friends of Mana Island Trust and by DOC. Thanks Barry for this interesting summary.

Ninety-four fluttering shearwater chicks were successfully installed in their burrows on 5th January following their transfer by helicopter from Long Island in

the Marlborough Sounds. Peak feeding volumes have now been reached – 56 tins of sardines each day –

meaning long hours for the volunteers and the DOC contractor.

The birds have mostly settled in well. About 25 gates on the burrows have now been removed and several birds have emerged, at least two having to be recovered from nearby flax bushes, but the remainder returned to their burrows as hoped.

Many will know that there is a concurrent experiment running at the artificial colony site using a sound system to broadcast calls at night to attract seabirds to Mana. As early as last summer there was some evidence of seabirds visiting one or two of the artificial burrows and this January several feathers were recovered from burrows 1 and 100, two of the closest burrows to the speakers. Burrow 100 has had a scrape made and grass added by a visiting bird. Helen and others are confident that some of the feathers belong to fluttering shearwaters.

Recently some video monitoring equipment made by Stu Cockburn at DOC was brought over, and installed and operated by Vince Waanders, who is volunteering on the chick feeding programme. There is now very good video footage of a fluttering shearwater visiting burrow 100 and a fascinating story is unfolding of the behaviour of the visiting bird.

The video record shows an adult fluttering shearwater arriving above burrow 100 at 23:21 pm and it goes into the burrow at 23:22 pm. The bird is clearly unbanded on the right leg and very probably unbanded on the left (all the footage is being reviewed in slow motion to check this). It emerges at 00:57 am and collects grass, some of which is stuffed into the entrance pipe. At 01:01 am the bird goes back inside. It re-emerges at 02:14 am and collects more grass. At 02:20 am it

disappears out of frame. At 03:31 am a bird appears on the ground above the burrow and goes inside at 03:32 am. At 04:36 am it emerges, collects more grass and exits from the frame at 04:40 am.

Although it is possible that different birds have been seen in these observations I think it is more than likely it is the same bird because it entered and exited in the same way each time. It is suspected to be a young bird, "practising" for pairing up and nesting in a later year. There is little chance that it will breed this year.

Bird-attracting speaker systems are gaining acceptance as a worthwhile technique, with positive results from overseas and at least a couple of sites in New Zealand, not least of which is Mana Island where unbanded fairy prions have nested close to a sound system, again in conjunction with a translocation experiment. It may therefore not be possible to say that the sound system was the sole cause since translocated chicks were expected to be returning as adults at the same time and may have influenced others to arrive too.

The young translocated fluttering shearwaters are unlikely to return to Mana for several years so this result is either a random event, or is, in fact, caused by the sound system. Burrow 100 is close to one of the speakers and I think the evidence speaks for itself.

Similar sound systems now operating at several places including on Mana Island, Mātū/Somes Island, Chatham Islands, at Cape Kidnappers, in the Marlborough Sounds, and in the Kermadec Islands (three systems). Each costs about \$5,000 and, once operational, need little maintenance.

First robin chicks have fledged on Mātū/Somes Island

Contributed by Annette Harvey who has been monitoring the new North Island robin population on Mātū/Somes Island in association with DOC and the Friends of Mātū/Somes Is. Annette's edited notes are from '*Mātū Matters*' – the newsletter of the Friends of Mātū/Somes Is Trust.

November 2007. The North Island robins transferred to Mātū/Somes Island from Kapiti Island in April 2006 have settled in and bred well last year. Even though there was an excess of males and we ended up with only four breeding pairs, they produced fourteen fledglings and the total population was 27 by mid-February 2007.

An unexplained and unusually high mortality occurred during late summer and by mid-April 2007 only 10 robins were found. With the help of volunteers from the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary three pairs were transferred in spring 2007 in order to increase the founder population and to even up the sex ratio. All but one have been seen regularly bringing the adult population to 18.

This breeding season in spring 2007 got off to a good start with one of last year's pairs raising two chicks in their first clutch. After being fed by both parents for three weeks they have just left the nest and the family is often seen along the west Circuit Track. The fledglings squeak noisily as they beg for food, and the parents look rather harassed as they rush around finding food for their demanding youngsters!

A chick from last season has paired with one of the new females. She has just started sitting on eggs in their first nest and, all going well, these will hatch in 18 days. Most of the others have paired up too so we hope to find more nests soon. The new robin population has

spread over the whole island, many near the Circuit Track, so look out for them next time you visit!

February 2008. The adult robins have started moulting, signalling the end of the second breeding season. After a very successful 'top-up' transfer of 10 robins from Karori Wildlife Sanctuary last August this breeding season started with eight pairs and two 'extra' males.

Six pairs raised 12 fledglings bringing the total population to 28 by mid-February, a result that compares well with last season. Two pairs produced no chicks. However, the productivity of the new island population is low – much lower than at Karori Wildlife Sanctuary – probably due to habitat differences. However, the more relevant factor is how many birds will survive the winter and will breed next spring. They will continue to be monitored through the autumn with much interest.

Two adult males died, one from a head injury the other from unknown causes. One was helping his mate feed three chicks at the time, so the island staff (Matt and Jo) became busy surrogate parents and spent time looking for worms, weta and woodlice to help the female feed the chicks.

One healthy chick fledged successfully. The other male looked very ill so he was taken off the island to receive

expert care but sadly he died a few days later. This was a shame as he was the only surviving fledgling from 2006 to pair and breed. However, he did produce two fledglings himself and one of these has been seen recently laying claim to a territory near the fountain.

I always enjoy following the normal daily lives of the robins, but it is also intriguing to observe unusual behaviour. This year, the female from one pair built at least three nests but never laid eggs. The male from the other non-productive pair fed a blackbird fledgling with great dedication for several weeks. This behaviour has also been observed once in the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary but not over an extended period.

Last year I was fascinated to find a female robin sitting on three blue eggs, after unsuccessfully incubating two clutches of her own. She had somehow 'taken over' a blackbird's nest! To my great surprise the eggs hatched and with her mate's help she even managed to feed the three blackbird chicks. This is an amazing feat, considering that an adult blackbird weighs nearly three times as much as an adult robin and the chicks fledge in 14 days rather than 21, meaning that they grow more than four times as fast. The final outcome is unknown as just before they were due to fledge I went away for several weeks. Frustrating! But never a dull moment ...

Thank you Annette for sharing these notes with us.

A bird recording system for New Zealand

Here is an open letter from Dr. Paul Scofield that was posted on the 'Birding-NZ' list-server on 8th February 2008. Paul is a Councillor and is Chairman of the society's Scientific Committee. This edited letter is being circulated for your information because it covers a topical subject and it is expected that the bird recording system will soon become a new society activity that all members can use and contribute to.

Hi all,

OSNZ is well advanced in adapting the American e-Bird system for use in New Zealand but there are still a few things to sort out. To get an idea of what the NZ system will look like I welcome you all to have a look at the American site www.eBird.com

Brent Stephenson has supplied some lovely photos so the web interface is going to be splendid. This system is easy to use and has features that users of this list server [Birding-NZ] will enjoy like local, year and life lists. The largest part of the work in adapting this system is to adapt a system of filters to ensure that errors are not made in data entry.*

To this end we have created regional lists of birds likely, possible and impossible to be seen in each of the OSNZ regions. These lists will operate seamlessly the data entry screens to prevent rubbish data being entered. Any dubious records will be verified by regional authorities. To pinpoint sites for which you wish to enter data there will be a list of "hot-spots" or you can have your own sites list or accurately pinpoint a site using Google maps. All interesting records will be identified for possible publication in the New Zealand Bird Report.

With the launch of "e-Bird NZ" (hopefully at or before the OSNZ AGM in June) we will start to roll out a monitoring scheme that will be able to take advantage of this advanced system.

Paul

* Birding-NZ. see <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BIRDING-NZ/>

A reminder of the OSNZ Conference and AGM at Kaikoura

The society's Annual General Meeting and Conference is being held in Kaikoura over Queen's Birthday week-end, Friday 30th May to Monday 2nd June 2008, at the Lobster Inn Motel and at the Kaikoura Memorial Hall.

The Registration Form and supporting information was mailed to members with the December issue (No. 32) of "Southern Bird". Copies can also be downloaded from <http://www.osnz.org.nz/osnzagm.htm>, or can be sent to you by the RR.

Please return your completed Registration Form as soon as possible to the organizers in Christchurch, accompanied by the payment of fees. A "Late Registration" fee of \$5 per person is payable for registrations received after 30th April 2008.

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

- An audio copy of a Radio New Zealand interview with Dr. Chris Robertson that was first broadcast on the National Programme late last year is available on a CD from the RR for a cost of \$2. The radio interview followed Chris's graduation ceremony with an Honorary D.Sc degree from Victoria University of Wellington.
- Don't forget to periodically check the OSNZ website www.osnz.org.nz. It is often updated and several new items have been added to the site recently.

Photocopying of this Newsletter has kindly been provided by
Beca: Engineers, Planners and Managers