



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

## Wellington Region Newsletter

March 2009

### Monthly Meetings

**Wellington:** 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 March to October 2009

**2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

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

**20<sup>th</sup> 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.

**4<sup>th</sup> 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 Atlantic Ocean.

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

**29<sup>th</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> June.** OSNZ AGM and Conference at Orewa, near Auckland.

**6<sup>th</sup> 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.

**3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

**10<sup>th</sup> August (Monday) at Paraparaumu:** to be advised.

**7<sup>th</sup> 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.

**5<sup>th</sup> October:** *“Birds of feather flock together to count - the feeding behaviour of the NZ robin”*. Dr. Kevin Burns, School of Biological Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington. Kevin will talk about research into the cognitive ability of the NZ robin to count when feeding.

#### **Other activities:**

1. *“Farewell to the Birds, Manawatu River Estuary, Foxton”*. **Sunday 15th March, 1 pm**. High tide at Foxton on that day is at 1.38 pm. The event is being organised this year by Forest & Bird at Levin. Make your own way to Foxton, or arrange carpooling amongst yourselves, and bring your own lunch, coats, sunhats, binoculars/telescopes (and don’t forget your sunscreen!). It is suggested that you arrive about 11.30 am and make your way to the car park in Holben Parade (off Seabury Ave), adjacent to the Foxton Beach Camping Ground. OSNZ members in Manawatu and Wanganui are likely to attend.
2. *“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.
3. *“Wellington Harbour Bird Survey, 2008 – 2010”*. **First Sunday of each month** (excepting January and June, second Sunday), 1 pm to 3 pm. Interest in participating in the bird survey from new members or visitors is very welcome. Contact Ian Armitage for details.
4. *“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.
5. *“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’. Trips will be made on weekdays only and is a more sharply focused continuation of field work conducted between 2004 and 2007. Contact Ian Armitage for details.
6. *“Kapiti Island Bird Surveys”*. It is proposed that the Kapiti Island bird surveys commence in autumn 2009. Further details later. (This programme was postponed from 2008).
7. *“Onoke Spit Caspian tern and black-backed gull banding”* – late December or early January. A day trip in association with the Wairarapa Region of the society.

## **2009 OSNZ Conference and AGM at Orewa**

The OSNZ Annual General Meeting and Conference will be held in Orewa, near Auckland, over Queen’s Birthday week-end (Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May to Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2009). The venues are the Waves Motel, the Centrestage Theatre and the Orewa Rotary House. The Registration Form and supporting information was posted with the December 2008 issue of “Southern Bird,” or can be

downloaded from the OSNZ website. Please return your completed Registration Form and fees soon; a late fee of \$5 / person is charged for registrations received after 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009.

## Notable and recent bird sightings in the Wellington Region

There have been numerous interesting bird observations recently in and near Wellington.

During the spring, Ros Batchelor heard a **long-tailed cuckoo** on the Hemi Matangi Track on Kapiti Island and one was also heard in the Hutt River catchment on 14<sup>th</sup> October. In December, a **long-tailed cuckoo** was heard and seen on Mana Island by DOC staff. Also in the spring Peter Reece counted five **paradise shelducks** on various parks in Wellington's southern suburbs. Colin Miskelly reported that a **tui** was seen building a nest in a tree in Thorndon near the DOC Wellington Conservancy office, but sadly, a storm damaged the tree and the nest was found with rat droppings and broken eggshells in it. Hugh Robertson saw **tu**s mobbing a **bush falcon** in Wadestown one evening in the summer. Stuart Nicholson regularly hears **kaka** calling from near his home in Brooklyn and they are regularly seen in other western Wellington suburbs. Derek Batchelor saw two **kaka** at Otari-Wilton Bush. Ralph Powlesland found a road-killed **Californian quail** by the Happy Valley tip, near Ohiro Bay. Colin Miskelly reports many **Californian quail** in Karori Wildlife Sanctuary and increasing numbers of quail are seen regularly along the road between Eastbourne and Pencarrow. Jennifer Vinton saw three different banded **North Island robins** in East Harbour Regional Park. Janice Woon reports

a **dabchick** with three chicks on the Waimanu Lagoons, Waikanae and a **terek sandpiper** at Waikanae Beach. Janice and Jean Luke have monitored a pair of **variable oystercatchers** that have nested and raised chicks on Paraparaumu Beach – a very unusual event. **Red-crowned parakeets** continue to be seen and heard in the Porirua Scenic Reserve by Ian Armitage. At sea 10 **mottled petrels** were seen by Bruce McKinley (Otago member) in Wellington Harbour on 15<sup>th</sup> January and two **Procellaria** petrels were seen close inshore at Green Point in mid-December by Ian Armitage. Julia Brooke-White reports a flock of about 300 **white-fronted terns** in Lambton Harbour in January during the harbour survey – an unusually large number. A **shore plover** was seen at the Hutt River estuary by Shane Cotter on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

Other recent sightings reported by non-OSNZ observers are a **mute (white) swan** at the Waimanu Lagoons after first being seen on Raumati Beach and also resting on the sea. Two **Barbary doves** were reported at Island Bay in December; - are they cage escapes, or natural arrivals to Wellington? A **crimson rosella** was reported at the Otari-Wilton Bush in early January. Within the Wellington Region **Indian mynas** have again been seen most recently in late December at Martinborough.

## Recent talks in Wellington

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2008: Mr. Julian Fitter from the "Friends of Galapagos" in New Zealand made a fascinating presentation of aspects of the Galapagos Islands' stunning avian and other wildlife and outlined the islands' huge conservation problems. Eradication projects cover fire ants, goats, black rats, cats, pigeons and numerous plant infestations. Control programmes aim to eradicate quinine trees and control mosquitos, and tree frogs. Goats were eliminated from one island in the 1960's, and now dense vegetation flourishes. The introduced quinine tree spreads profusely and removes burrow space for the Galapagos petrel. Blackberry is being removed and guava bushes causes problems as the seeds are spread by cattle. Fire ants have been eradicated from two areas, and a third eradication is being attempted. Unsustainable development and unregulated fishing are major issues. Many thanks to Julian for your great presentation.

1st December 2008: Mr. Dave Hansford who was a press photographer for 18 years and now works as a freelance science writer and photographer, reviewed what wildlife photography was all about and showed some of his magnificent images. Dave's photographs included gannets at Cape Kidnappers taken by a remote camera, New Zealand dotterel on Stewart Island, Royal spoonbill at

the Manawatu estuary, red-crowned parakeets on the Kermadec Islands, pied stilt and white-faced heron at Pauatahanui Inlet, spotted shag and variable oystercatcher on Matiu/Somes Island, kingfisher, red-billed gull, albatrosses photographed from the deck of the frigate HMNZS Canterbury, flamingo and adielie penguins at Cape Bird in Antarctica. Thanks Dave your presentation. Plus, we indulged in and enjoyed our usual Christmas cheer before the meeting!

**2nd February 2009:** Dr. Hugh Robertson, Dept. of Conservation, compared the changes over a 30 year period in Wellington Harbour and along the south coast of the main bird species recorded in the Wellington Harbour Bird Surveys. Three surveys have now been carried out during the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's with the fourth survey currently underway. Seventy-three species have been recorded and over 500,000 birds counted. Giant petrels, royal and wandering albatrosses, cape pigeons, black-backed gulls, red-billed gulls and white-fronted terns have declined in numbers. Reef herons, which are present all year in small numbers, show a modest decline. Large increases in numbers have occurred with little black shags, little shags, spotted shags, variable oystercatchers and mallards. Some species have changed their distribution within the survey area, away from the inner harbour, such as white-fronted terns. Thanks Hugh for your interesting review and we all look forward to following progress as the survey continues.

## Wellington Harbour Bird Survey

The 4<sup>th</sup> Wellington Harbour survey commenced last December and will run until **December 2010**. The aim is 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.

Counts will be made on the first Sunday of each month, between 1 pm and 3 pm (excepting January and June – second Sunday). As in earlier surveys, it is important that all 17 sections be counted simultaneously to minimise multiple counting of birds.

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. Field forms, the harbour map and instructions are available from the RR.

A summary of counts for 20 prominent species, mainly seabirds, made between December and February are as follows:

Species	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.
GANNET, Australasian	4	8	8
GODWIT, Bar-tailed	1	1	0
GULL, Black-backed	901	689	1,180
GULL, Red-billed	387	639	1,222
HERON, Reef	1	0	2
HERON, White-faced	3	1	2
OYSTERCATCHER, Variable	90	0	180
OYSTERCATCHER, Pied	2	103	3
PENGUIN, Little blue	0	1	2
PLOVER, Spur-winged	42	4	2
SHAG, Black	15	18	8
SHAG, Little	26	40	47
SHAG, Little black	4	11	2
SHAG, Spotted	8	6	55
SHAG, Pied	6	4	8
SHEARWATER, Fluttering	0	1	0
SHELDUCK, Paradise	2	3	2
SWAN, Black	5	5	1
TERN, White-fronted	21	346	226
TERN, Caspian	2	2	1
<b>No. of birds counted</b>	<b>1,538</b>	<b>1,900</b>	<b>2,969</b>

## Beach Patrols

Beach patrols over the summer on Wellington, Horowhenua and Manawatu beaches have, as in late 2008, revealed surprisingly few birds. A few **fairy prions, black-backed gulls, fluttering shearwaters** and **diving petrels** and have been recorded on Kapiti Coast and Manawatu beaches recently. Of some concern is the number of **Australasian gannets** being found – and also reported from other parts of the New Zealand coastline. Remember that a new beach patrol recording form is now available and can be downloaded from the society's website but the printed cards can still be filled out until stocks are used up.

## Little Blue Penguins on Matiu/Somes Island

Working closely with Graeme Taylor and others in DOC, Reg. Cotter has coordinated and led the field work of a team of OSNZ members on Matiu/Somes Island for more than one year for a set of studies on the biology of the little blue penguin. In recent months 12 trips have been made to the island by 21 people (including 10 OSNZ members) staying over on 16 nights; 120 working days in total. Reg has provided the following notes on recent progress. The study will continue this year and will include a review of nest fidelity rates, nesting behaviour between Matiu, Mokopuna and Makaro Islands and how many chicks return to natal sites.

These figures may not be quite accurate but will show something of our efforts and time. Totals since this study commenced:

1. 635 blue penguins were found and we caught 83 banded birds, not including those we banded. Some of the birds were banded in Leigh Bull's study made in 1995/96.
2. 290 blue penguins were banded and we inserted transponders into 230. 32 penguins were duelled marked with bands and transponders.
3. We located 342 nest sites and built 163 nest boxes.
4. Blood samples were collected from 12 chicks for examination by a student at Otago University who is looking at the DNA of the different sub-species of the little blue penguin throughout New Zealand and at the Chatham Islands.

## Shore Plovers on Mana Island

Barry Dent and Sue Freitag have assisted DOC staff on Mana Island with monitoring of the shore plover translocation on the island. Barry writes the following notes to keep us up-to-date with progress:

In mid-February there were 34 shore plover on Mana Is, including a stable resident group from the first two years' releases and nearly all of the 15 juveniles released in late January 2009. A further 12 birds from Mt Bruce are expected to be released in early March. There was excellent news about breeding on Mana this year and from four nests there were five hatchlings, all of which have fledged and are currently resident on Mana Island. Although there have been several sightings from elsewhere on the island, the birds are most often present in a 500 m strip of coastline around the release site, including the landing area. Visitors coming ashore especially in October-January have been asked to be particularly aware of the likelihood of well-camouflaged nests in the first line of vegetation above the high tide mark. Stray kayaks or feet could do real damage and the nesting birds are prone to leave the nest when people come close by.

## A Field Trip to the Pencarrow Lakes

Seven members enjoyed a pleasant field trip to the Pencarrow lakes in lovely weather on Thursday 19 February. Despite playing tapes in attempts to call out birds in the wetlands we didn't record any crakes, bittern or fernbirds, but we all enjoyed a great day. Field work will continue during 2009 with a focus on gaining better information on bird species having a DOC "Conservation Threat" classification. The main observations are as follows:

Lake Kohangapiripiri - 16 species seen (dunes 4, lake 13). The most notable record is of a pair of dabchicks with three large chicks - clearly dabchicks are now breeding here. This is probably the southernmost population of dabchicks in the North Island. One NZ scaup was also seen loosely linked to a group of shoveler on the lake. More than 200 birds (all species) were counted, many more than the average observed on Lake Kohangapiripiri in the 2004/07 surveys, suggesting that we may have undercounted in the past; further field work will reveal whether this is the case.

Lake Kohangatera - 20 species seen (dunes 3, lake 7, wetland 4, scrubland/forest 9). The significant records here are six NZ scaup, 28 shoveler, over 90 paradise shelduck (mostly moulting; some were flightless) and eight black shags. At least two bellbirds were seen and heard in the forest at the north end of the lake.



The north end of Lake Kohangapiripiri where the breeding dabchicks were seen. Photo: Ian Armitage.

## New Zealand eBird

The **New Zealand eBird** the system is proving to be popular for recording bird observations throughout New Zealand and is a major advance in bird observation documentation and analysis technology. 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.

Your participation in the **New Zealand eBird** programme is encouraged; it will add an extra dimension to your bird-watching experience and will also help science and conservation. Registration as a new user is free and is quick and easy to do. The **New Zealand eBird** website address is <http://ebird.org/content/newzealand>

A summary of monthly counts for 2008 recorded on **New Zealand eBird** (as at 31 December 2008) and based on 336 checklists are shown below.

Wellington Region (86 spp)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number of species	20	27	18	65	53	65	51	46	50	49	56	53
Number of individual birds	200	249	139	186	291	1,775	1,355	701	471	1,051	2,071	925
Wellington City (48 spp)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number of species	10				21	39	11	5	3	11	2	19
Number of individual birds	47				124	1,103	58	7	8	44	4	94
Lower Hutt City (52 spp)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number of species			8		22		2	2	22	27	26	25
Number of individual birds			61		1		102	5	170	112	20	85
Upper Hutt City (45 spp)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number of species						24	1		22	22	25	18
Number of individual birds						1	1		11	16	15	9
Porirua City (50 spp)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number of species	13	14			12	28	36	21	12	17	12	36
Number of individual birds	153	67			82	201	657	240	28	103	62	491

Kapiti Coast District (66 spp)	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Number of species		13	13	40	26	16	22	36	34	26	37	12
Number of individual birds		182	78	184	84	135	220	391	246	776	1,959	246

## Greetings Cards for Sale

About 20 years ago the society published a set of illustrated greetings 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. 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 Wellington region has first-aid kits that can be borrowed for field trips. A telescope can be borrowed too. The region also owns various books including 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 the RR if you wish to borrow these.

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**Injured bird hotlines:** Ms. Karin Wiley, Native Bird Rescue Wellington Trust (04) 479-2936  
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