



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)

Wellington Region Newsletter

March 2010

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

We send *Stuart & Jane Nicholson* our very best wishes for your long-term shift to the UK. On behalf of Wellington members I wish to thank Stuart very much for the very considerable efforts you have made over many years as Regional Representative for Wellington, as Regional Recorder and as a member of Council. We'll continue to send you this Newsletter and do keep an eye on those British birds as you travel about the woodlands and wetlands in Britain.

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 April to October 2010

12th April (note date change; no meeting on 7th 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.

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.

4th to 7th June: National Conference and AGM in Nelson. No Wellington meeting in June.

21st June – Paraparaumu: *“Critical critters: how urban gardeners can contribute to regional recovery of birds”*. Ms. Lynn Adams, Biodiversity Conservation Manager, Poneke Office, DOC. Lynn will describe a project aimed at encouraging suburban gardeners to establish suitable plants to support native birds, lizards and invertebrates in our gardens.

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 closer to the time.

4th October: *“Critical critters: how urban gardeners can contribute to regional recovery of birds”*. Ms. Lynn Adams, Biodiversity Conservation Manager, Poneke Office, DOC. Lynn will describe a project aimed at encouraging suburban gardeners to establish suitable plants to support native birds, lizards and invertebrates in our gardens.

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. *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.
4. *“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 17th and 18th April. Later surveys are proposed in July and October. More volunteers are welcome but remember the work is physically demanding.
5. *“Rimutaka Forest Park 5-minute Bird Counts.”* A long-term programme of 5-minute bird counts continues 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.

Annual General Meeting & Conference, Nelson, 4 – 7 June

The society Conference and Annual General Meeting will be held in Nelson at Queen's Birthday Week-end, 4th to 7th June 2010, at the Conference Centre of the Tahuna Beach Holiday Park at Tahunanui. This is handy to Nelson Airport (1 km) and is 5 km from Nelson CBD. The Tahuna Beach Holiday Park still offers a special **10% discount** to OSNZ members and remember, if you register **before 31 March** a late registration fee of \$25 can be avoided!

Notable and Recent Bird Sightings in Wellington Region

During the spring and summer, **falcons** continued to be observed in the Wellington region, including at Ngaio and at Otari. Two **falcons** (known to be breeding) were seen at Karori Wildlife Sanctuary by Annette Harvey. Mary McEwen saw several hundred **yellowhammers** at Ben Burn Park in Karori. Colin Miskelly reports that **whiteheads** and **bellbirds** were being seen regularly in Belmont Regional Park. **Whiteheads** and **bellbirds**, including juveniles, were also seen in March by Ian Armitage in Porirua Scenic Reserve. One **bellbird** was seen in Nottingham St in Karori. At least 750 **white-fronted terns** were recorded in Wellington harbour during the February Wellington Harbour Bird Survey; large numbers were also seen in the harbour November and in March. Four **reef herons** were recorded in the harbour bird survey in March by Sheelagh Leary, Hugh Robertson and Stuart Nicholson – four birds may be a record seen on one day in the harbour. Reg Cotter reports that **reef herons** have been nesting on Matiu/Somes Island for several years now. Owen Hughes came across a dead **blue penguin** on the Hutt motorway at Kaiwharawhara. Colin Miskelly counted about 40 **kereru** in a flock near the summit of the Rimutaka

Incline. Julia Brooke-White saw a **kereru** perching on a clothes-line in Wadestown where the species is now quite common. Enfys Graham reports that there are now many **Eastern rosellas** in the Kapiti coast area and Rod Orange comments that **Eastern rosellas** are regularly seen in and near the Wellington Botanical Gardens. Over the summer, Peter Reese was watching **tui** nesting in the forest forming a part of Te Papa – Museum of New Zealand and reports that, for the first time three **tui** fledged here and the parents then re-nested. **Tuis** were often seen near industrial areas and beside the Hutt Motorway during harbour bird survey in the summer. A banded male **shore plover**, four **wrybill** and a single **bar-tailed godwit** were seen at the Pauatahanui Wildlife Reserve in January by Ian Armitage. Jean Luke reports a **shore plover** at the Waikanae River estuary. Colin Miskelly spotted a **fairy prion** near Mana Island. Colin also reports seeing 17 **black swans** from an inter-island ferry in Cook Strait flying in a line near the sea surface and heading for the Wairarapa. He also saw a **harrier** in mid-Cook Strait flying from the South Island to the North Island.

Recent Wellington Region talks

2nd November 2009: Dr. Susan Waugh-Filippi explained how ecological risk assessment was carried out with regard to seabird mortality in New Zealand and Pacific fisheries. Five percent of the total New Zealand ocean fishery is monitored each year. Susan explained that New Zealand has 85 breeding seabird species and distribution maps of seabird ranges are compiled and are combined as composite maps of a large number of bird species. Then maps are generated showing the abundance of various seabird species in relation to the fishing effort, and the species' susceptibility to damage or loss in relation to fishing effort. The number of birds observed killed for each fishing event is graphed against the density of the birds to assess their vulnerability. The productivity of each species (or the number of offspring produced as recruitments to the population) is also analysed. Many species of concern have only recently begun being observed for fisheries-related mortality.

7th December 2009: We had a good attendance for our Christmas meeting and an enjoyable time was had by all. Later Dr. Geoff Chambers described recent and ongoing molecular studies of the genetic relationships of the various Cyanoramphus parakeets (or kakariki) and pointed out that these birds dispersed widely to islands across the South Pacific Ocean, including to New Zealand. Geoff explained that hybridization occurs among several different types of parakeets living in the same geographical areas. In contrast, other types of parakeets show distinct assortative mating (that is, the individuals mate with their own type of parakeet).

1st February: Three interesting presentations were made at our members' projects evening.

1. Amelia Geary told us about the week-long field course she attended in January this year at the Miranda Shore Bird Centre in the Firth of Thames. The course considered the whole ecosystem and specific topics included wader identification, entomology, botany, sedimentation, sea-water and fresh-water invertebrates, mist-netting and banding passerines, canon netting and banding, bird measurement, assessing moult and autopsy.
2. Reg Cotter and Ros Batcheler described a long history of blue penguin studies on Matiu/Somes Island, and their current field work involving banding adults and chicks, the use of transponders, and nest site studies. The work is intended to provide a better understanding of the distribution and breeding biology of blue penguins on the island.

- Peter Reese summarized his analyses of road-killed birds from roads around Mt. Albert in southern Wellington from 2002 to 2010. The most common road-kills are house-sparrows and blackbirds.

Beach Patrols

Once again, few beach wrecked birds have been found on local beaches over the summer. In the late spring, Jean Luke found two **Antarctic fulmars** on the Kapiti Coast – one on a road, the other on Pekapeka beach. Other species found included **gannets, blue penguins, black-backed gulls, diving petrels** and **fairy prions**.

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

Notable observations of coastal and ocean birds made during the Wellington Harbour bird survey since December are summarized in the table below. The photographs show white-fronted terns and red-billed gulls seen during recent harbour bird survey counts.



I thank those who have recently offered to help; this is very much appreciated.



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

SPECIES RECORDED	January	February	March
DOTTEREL, Banded	4	0	0
GULL, Black-backed	907	1,305	533
GULL, Red-billed	553	1,124	165
HERON, Reef	3	0	4
OYSTERCATCHER, Variable	94	145	131
OYSTERCATCHER, Pied	1	3	2
PENGUIN, Blue	2	0	0
SHAG, Black	8	20	48
SHAG, Little	19	38	57
SHAG, Spotted	14	70	41
SHAG, Pied	6	8	8
SHEARWATER, Fluttering	15	0	15
SWAN, Black	80	55	45
TERN, White-fronted	99	764	213
TERN, Caspian	1	4	2
No. Species Recorded	30	31	29

Bits and Pieces of News

- Colour-banded Wrybill.** 12 adult (breeding) wrybill were colour-banded on the upper Rangitata River in Oct 2009. These birds should be in the North Island now. If anyone

sees any colour-banded wrybill could you please send colour band combinations, date and place to Peter Langlands, DOC. < planglands@doc.govt.nz > Note: sightings of all colour-banded birds should also go to banding office in Wellington.

2. **Garden Bird Survey, 2010.** The National Garden Bird Survey will be held this year between 26th June and 4th July. Details will be provided by Landcare Research and are also on their website, <http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/research/biocons/gardenbird/>
3. **Electrocution Study of Birds.** Ms. Sara Cross is studying the dangers of electrocution to New Zealand birds. As some may know falcons are prone to electrocution in vineyards. Although the evidence seems to be compelling the sample sizes are small and because the falcon population in the vineyards is manipulated, it is hard to relate falcon electrocution to potential impacts on this or other species. Sara is studying how often birds (of any species) get electrocuted, on what type of power structures they tend to be electrocuted (transformers, normal poles, switches, etc), what species get electrocuted, and in what habitat types electrocution is more common. Sara is eager to collect reports from anyone has found an electrocuted bird or has actually seen a bird get electrocuted. Contact: < saramaekross@gmail.com >
4. **OSNZ Book Auction.** The society is running an auction for the sale of books on a wide range of titles concerning ornithology. The funds raised will be invested in the General Fund for projects and schemes run by the society. Bidding closes at midnight on Friday 14th May. Refer to the society website for a list of books on offer, the most recent bids that have been posted and the auction rules. The RR also has details of the auction. Bids can be made to Ms. Biz Bell, contact: < wmil@clear.net.nz > A minimum bid of \$5 would get you most items at present! Great opportunity for bargain books!

First Aid Kits, Telescope and HANZAB for Loan to Members

We have first-aid kits if any members want to borrow one for their field trips. An OSNZ telescope is stored by the RR for safe-keeping and is available to be borrowed for observing the birds and their activities and habitats. We own five volumes of the "Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds" (HANZAB) – Vol. 1: Ratites to Ducks; Vol. 2: Raptors to Lapwings; Vol. 3: Snipe to Pigeons; Vol. 4: Parrots to Dollarbirds; Vol. 7: Passerines (-divided into 2 books); these books can be borrowed for a while by members. Contact the RR if you wish to borrow these items.

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