



ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND (Inc)
Wellington Region Newsletter
November-December 2006

www.osnz.org.nz

Monthly Meetings

The monthly meetings are held on the first Monday of the month at 7:45 p.m. The venue for 2007 is yet to be arranged because of a shift being made by the Department of Conservation Research, Development and Improvement Division in December 2006. Our final meeting in the Holloway Room of the Research, Development and Improvement Division of DOC in Victoria Street, Wellington will be on Monday 4th December 2006. We will advise of a new meeting venue later in December, or in January.

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 November 2006

December 4th: Ms. Lynn Adams, "Translocation of Short-tailed Bats to Kapiti Island".

January 2007: No meeting.

February 5th: Members evening. Let's share experiences of bird watching over the summer.

Please let Ian Armitage know in advance if you wish to make a presentation so that the evening can be planned. "Powerpoint" presentations, slides and photographs will be welcomed.

March 5th: Dr. Richard Holdaway, President of the OSNZ, will speak about the society and some of his experiences in ornithology.

April 2nd: Local Branch AGM; Dr. Mary McEwen. "Charles Fleming's Cape Expedition Diary; Auckland Island 1942-43: Albatrosses, mollymawks and other distractions".

May 7th: Ian Armitage. "Some further observations on birds in China and elsewhere in Asia."

June 2007: No local meeting. The AGM and conference of the society will be held in New Plymouth at Queen's Birthday weekend in early June. Details are published in "Southern Bird".

We express an apology to Freya Sadgrove, whose name was mis-spelt in one of the newsletters earlier this year. Freya was one of the two students who jointly won our branch's ornithological prize for their project in the Schools' Science Fair in 2005.

Banding of Caspian Terns and Black-backed Gulls, Onoke Spit – December 16th

In conjunction with members of the Wairarapa Region we will again help with banding of chicks of Caspian terns and black-backed gulls this year, on 16th December, commencing at 10 am. Weather permitting we will meet at the south end of the Western Lake Road, where the Onoke Spit begins. Drive across the Rimutaka Hill on SH 2, turn right at Featherston and follow the

Western Lake Road southwards. Take the left hand branch of the road (near the end) and follow it around the hill to the road end. Bring lunch, warm clothes and windbreakers!

Manawatu Estuary Wader Excursion

There is no excursion this spring to the Manawatu River Estuary to observe the range of wading birds that gather there but we will meet to observe birds in the late summer or early autumn, 2007. Details will be provided in January, including directions on how to reach the estuary at Foxton Beach.

Notable Recent Bird Sightings and Activities in the Wellington Region

There are a large number of interesting observations made in recent months, including two unusual and rare species. Geoff de Lisle reports that a **sooty shearwater** was found recently in Upper Hutt and another was found in Lower Hutt last May. Over the winter Tina Troup saw a **reef heron** at Makara, and one was seen by Rod Orange along Oriental Bay in early June. Reg Cotter also saw a **reef heron** on Ward Island on 21st July and Reg adds that they are continuing to breed on Matiu / Somes Island, which they have been doing for a long time. A **morepork** was encountered on Matiu / Somes Island by Stuart Nicholson's son. Some **mollymawks** were seen near the island one stormy day. Several members have seen bush falcons in recent months. On the 4th June Owen Hughes saw a **falcon** fly into a group of feral pigeons in Upper Hutt. A **falcon** was spotted chasing a **kereru** within the Ngaio Gorge by Colin Miskelly and Rosemary Heather saw a **falcon** in the Waikanae area. In July Matthew Lark saw a **falcon** at Harcourt Park in Upper Hutt. Steve Lawrence observed a pair of **falcons** along the River Road in Upper Hutt and earlier in the year, Nick Peetz came across a **falcon** in Seatoun. Do these observations mean that falcons are more common than previously, or are we all keeping our eyes open? On 7th June Colin Miskelly came across a **bittern** on Mana Island and he also counted up to 14 **pieb shags** roosting on Mana Island. In early August about 120 **little black shags** were seen flying over the Mana marina by Colin. Reg Cotter reports that 5 **New Zealand scaup** were still on the Pencarrow lakes during the winter. Stephen Sharp counted 7 **kereru** in the vicinity of the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, and several were also seen at Otari by Peter Dunstan. Colin Miskelly came across a **kaka** in the Porirua Scenic Reserve, as well as a **bellbird**. Andy Falshaw reported a **kaka** at Waikanae and Stuart Nicholson continues to see **kaka** in Brooklyn at dawn and dusk, presumably birds that are ranging out of the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary. Ian Armitage saw a juvenile **bar-tailed godwit** at the Pauatahanui Wildlife Management Reserve in early October, feeding and roosting with pied stilts, Canada geese and spur-winged plovers (see the photo).



On Mt. Kaukau Frances Gazley encountered a male **tomtit** singing, a new occurrence for this species in the western part of Wellington. Geoff de Lisle saw a male **tomtit** in Blue Mountains Road in Upper Hutt. **Paradise shelducks** were seen in Linden West Park in Tawa and along to Onepoto Park by Owen Hughes. Ian added that **paradise shelducks** often nest in the Porirua Scenic Reserve high up in the trees. Several flocks of **redpolls** were seen flying across Macalister Park in Adelaide Road, Newtown by Annette Harvey and Peter Reese. Colin

Miskelly encountered a **shining cuckoo** at the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary on the 5th August. Peter Reese (and others) saw a **black-faced cuckoo-shrike** on Kapiti Island in early November. Allan Munro and Janice Woon saw a **little egret** at Pauatahanui Harbour in early November and it was also seen by Don Laing who has provided the accompanying photograph.



Colin Miskelly reports that of the 240 **fairy prion** chicks that were transferred to Mana Island over recent years, 3 young birds have returned to Mana Island, and 5 have returned to Stephen's Island, as of early September this year.

Beach Patrol News

During July, from 9 ½ kilometres of beach patrolled between Paekakariki and Te Horo Stream, Jean Luke, Dave Bush, and Alan Tennyson picked up 18 birds: 1 salvin's prion, 2 Antarctic prions, 1 thin-billed prion, 6 fairy prions, 2 fluttering shearwaters, 5 common diving petrels, 1 black-backed gull. Mike and Miriel Imber retrieved 1 fluttering shearwater, and 1 common diving petrel from 3 kilometres patrolled at Waiterere, and got no birds over 3 kilometres at Himitangi beach. From Petone beach, Reg Cotter found 1 little blue penguin, 1 buller's mollymawk, 4 cape pigeons, 1 thin-billed prion, 4 fairy prions, 1 giant petrel, 2 gannets, 1 white-faced heron, 1 sooty shearwater, 1 fluttering shearwater, 2 gannets, 1 domestic goose and a feral pigeon. During August, Jean Luke found 1 fairy prion on the Kapiti coast. During September, Mike Imber found 1 prion wing at Waiterere Beach.

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

Our mist-netting and passerine banding sessions will continue next year at Wellington Zoo. Anyone who would like to practice their mist-netting and banding skills are welcome to come along. We had a very interesting day in September when we caught and banded quite a few greenfinches, but didn't catch any silvereyes at all. The sessions are usually held on Saturdays. Further details are obtainable from Peter Reese.

Fluttering Shearwater Chicks Transfer

Fluttering shearwater chicks are being transferred to Mana Island over the summer-time; any members who would like to help feeding these delightful little birds after they have been transferred are invited to contact Colin Miskelly or Barry Dent for details. Although the volunteer roster is all but full the organizers are keen to have the services of some reliable people who can be available at short notice to help if an emergency occurs. Barry can be contacted by e-mail on barry.dent@bdg.co.nz or by phone (04) 04 476 6536.

Newsletter by Email

If you would like to get your newsletter by email, and also be on an email list for projects and trips that come up at short notice, and to receive other birding items, please give your email address to Ian Armitage. About 80% of Wellington members are now on the e-mail address list.

First-Aid Kits, Telescope, and HANZAB for Loan

Our branch has some 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 at home for safe-keeping and can be borrowed at any time for observing the 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.

Summary of Organized Field-Trips and Activities for OSNZ Members

East Harbour Regional Park Bird Survey: monthly surveys of Pencarrow lakes area.
Wellington Zoo and Karori Cemetery: mist-netting and passerine banding, various Saturdays.
Manawatu Estuary Wader Viewing: a day-trip, during March 2007.
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: rotated annually to various regions throughout New Zealand over Queen's Birthday week-end. The 2007 conference and AGM is being hosted by Taranaki Region.

Events over recent months

3rd July 2006: Susan Cunningham described the foraging ecology and prey detection of a population of North Island Brown Kiwi, inhabiting regenerating forest and farmland. Thirty-eight kiwis were fitted with transmitters. The distribution and properties of the probe-holes made when probing into the soil to find invertebrates, were investigated. Probe-hole depths range from less than 1 cm to about 15 cm, with many shallow probes and a few deep ones. Many probe-holes were found in soft soil conditions, and none were found in hard soil; many probe-holes were present in wet soil, and none in dry soil. Like wading birds, Kiwis have sensory pits in the tip of their bill, and forage by picking up vibrations in the substrate. Thanks to Susan Cunningham for a very interesting talk.

7th August 2006: Colin Miskelly related the lives of some of New Zealand's early naturalists, and their expeditions to Big South Cape Island off Stewart Island. Big South Cape Island was the last stronghold of the (now extinct) Stewart Island Snipe. Herbert Guthrie-Smith was on Big South Cape Island in 1923, and he predicted a rat irruption occurring on that island, which did eventuate. Some of the field notebooks that members of the expeditions wrote, are known to exist and have been archived, as well as photographs that were taken. Several snipe nests were photographed. However, pages of Edgar Stead's diaries were recently found in the Canterbury Museum, and Sir Robert Falla's 1966 diary was also found this year in the Alexander Turnbull Library. Thanks to Colin Miskelly for an enthralling narrative.

4th September 2006: Ralph Powlesland went through preliminary findings of a study of the status and ecology of Kereru and Tui in rural and urban landscapes. The two study sites were around Invercargill and New Plymouth. The most common food consumed by Tui in Taranaki was nectar from Banksia, Kowhai, Puriri, Prunus spp., Camellia, New Zealand flax, and Rewarewa; in Southland the most common food consumed was "nectar" from "sugar-water feeders", Fuchsia, Heart-leaved silver gum, and Kowhai. Tui also eat fruit. Kereru eat foliage, flowers, and fruit; the main foods taken in Southland include Elm foliage, Miro fruit, and from Kowhai; food plants used in Taranaki include Kowhai, and Puriri. Movements of radio-tagged birds were tracked, including to Stewart Island. Thanks, Ralph, for sharing your study on these popular birds.

2nd October 2006: Richard Seaton explained the ecological requirements of the New Zealand Falcon in pine forests. There are three forms of the falcon: an eastern, southern and bush falcon. The male weighs about 230 gms, and the female about 500 gms. The research was on

the eastern form in Kaingaroa Forest where Richard found that falcons nest on the ground. The sizes of the home-ranges were 9 kilometres square for adult males, and 6 kilometres square for adult females. Different aged pine stands were used differently. The falcons cough up pellets after eating, so the birds consumed by falcons were compared to their availability in the environment by doing line transects through the forest to count the other birds. Very large numbers of finches were present. Thanks to Richard Seaton for a thoroughly interesting talk.

6th November 2006: Sandy Bartle spoke on his findings to date on a personal at-home research project that he says helps him to restore his sanity after curating birds at Te Papa! He has been collecting what he can find about the Messenger Pigeon or Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia*. As Ralph Powlesland has told us before the data is poor – too boring Sandy says! It seems that pigeons may be the first domesticated bird with records going back to 12,000 BC in Syria and Anatolia. One of Sandy's sources has been recipe books! Pigeons were first collected for guano production in towers near Isfahan, Persia/Iran. It was some time before they were brought back to Europe, not even the Crusaders seem to have done this. The use of their ability for message carrying took some centuries to be exploited but 1481 seems to be the earliest record. It was also not immediately obvious how the homing skill was developed – birds had to be released away from their home – although it seems obvious to us now! Stories of their use in the Siege of Paris and in the two World Wars have been widely reported. Sandy would really like to know how carrier pigeons came to New Zealand – none of the usual sources seem to record this. Can you help? Write to myself or directly to Sandy Bartle, c/- Te Papa, Wellington.

Next Newsletter

The next newsletter is due out in March or April 2007. If anyone has any items to be included, please contact Sally or Ian.

Contact Phone Numbers / Email Addresses

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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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