

The Wrybill

Newsletter of the Canterbury Region,
Ornithological Society of New Zealand

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To members on e-mail:

The latest Canterbury Region Newsletter is attached. It will also be sent by postal mail to members not having an e-mail address. If you would prefer a paper copy please ask. The newsletter will also be placed on the OSNZ website.

**What's on at OSNZ Canterbury:
July to December 2014**

Indoor Meetings

Evening Meetings take place at 7.30 pm on the last Monday of the month at Mahaanui Area DOC Office, 31 Nga Mahi Road, off Blenheim Road, Sockburn. Plenty of parking is available.

MONDAY 28th July: Paul Scofield, Canterbury Museum, with a presentation on the ancestry of the Kiwi and the Moa and a few other things.

MONDAY 25th August: Jamie Wood, Landcare Research, will talk about 'old poo' from sub-fossil birds like Moa. This is a fascinating topic so don't let the subject matter put you off!

MONDAY 29th September: Andrew Crossland, recently nominated for the Environment category of the Pride of New Zealand Awards, will speak on a subject to be confirmed.

MONDAY 3rd November (please note no meeting Labour Weekend): A student from University of Canterbury will talk about his research. Details to follow.

MONDAY 24th November: To be confirmed.

Field Meetings

SATURDAY 19th July: Ashburton Lakes winter waterbird count. Meet 9am Mt Somers or 7.30am Islington Tavern for car pooling. Contact Jan 03 322 7178.

SUNDAY 17th August: Joint field trip with Forest and Bird to Travis Wetland. Led by Nick Allen. Details to follow. PLEASE NOTE THIS TRIP WILL BE ON A SUNDAY.

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SUNDAY 21st September: Quail Island trip to commemorate Colin Burrows, who did a lot of work in aid of the revegetation of the island. We will take the 9.10am ferry from Lyttleton and return on the 3.30pm ferry. NOTE: ANOTHER SUNDAY TRIP. Contact Jan.

SATURDAY, 18th October: Downhill ramble at Panama Rock reserve above le Bons Bay, Banks Peninsula. Meet 9 a.m. Halswell Bowling Club carpark opposite Halswell Rd/Lillian St junction. Bring lunch. Contact Jan 03 322 7178

SATURDAY, 15th November. Annual Ashley River Survey. Meet 8.30 am at picnic area south side of bridge on road from Rangiora to Loburn. Footwear suitable for possible river crossings. More information later. Contact: Bev, Tel: 03-313 7009, birdiebev@xtra.co.nz

SATURDAY 29th November: Summer Wader Count of Lake Ellesmere and other areas, followed by a social get-together for lunch. Meet far end of Embankment Rd at 9am. Usual mud-sloppy footwear and clothing appropriate for weather.

RAMBLES – Dates and information:

WEDNESDAY 9th July – Botanic Gardens

TUESDAY 12th August – Halswell Quarry

WEDNESDAY 10th September – Avon/Heathcote Estuary

TUESDAY 14th October – The Groynes

WEDNESDAY 19th November – Travis Wetland

For all Rambles please contact Bev at birdiebev@xtra.co.nz or 03 313 7009 to confirm details on where to meet, weather etc.

Marj Davis

Marjorie Maud Davis was born on 14th September 1920 at Meander in Tasmania. She was one of 6 girls and when the family moved to New Zealand they initially lived at Rangiora, where Marj attended primary school. Later the family moved to Christchurch where she continued her education at Christchurch West High School, now Hagley High School. She trained as a pharmacist and after working at various pharmacies around the city she eventually bought a shop in Hills Road and set up her own pharmacy.

Marj Davis died on May 10th, 2011, leaving the society a generous legacy. She had been active in the society from the early 1960's until a few years before her death. The committee has deliberated about the best way in which to use the bequest left by Marj to the branch, stipulating that the money be spent to further the study of birds in the Canterbury region.

At the AGM on March 31st the committee's

thoughts on the matter were put to the meeting. An initial payment will be made for the cost of the new plates Derek Onley is providing for the next edition of Heather and Robertson's Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand. Marj's contribution will be acknowledged in the book. The committee proposed that the remainder of the money should be invested and the interest each year used to capture and encourage young people's interest in birds. The idea of an annual school competition, the prize being attendance at a course on birds, is being investigated. The committee were interested to hear of members' thoughts on this and any other ideas they may have.

Marj's interest in birds spanned nearly 50 years. From the early 1960's she conducted a study which focussed on the Red-capped Dotterel, and its interbreeding with Banded Dotterel, on the Ashley River and rivers of North Canterbury. Marj's Short Note in Notornis Vol 27 (4) 1980 p367-8 reports how she spent much of her spare time in the 1960's and

1970's walking upstream of the mouths of the rivers and tributaries of northern Canterbury, where she became aware of the general presence of the Red-capped Dotterel. It was not easy to find, was seldom found in the same place twice and it was difficult to establish their breeding success. As a pharmacist, Marj used her skills with an eye dropper on one occasion to come to the rescue of a baby Red-capped Dotterel with eyes full of sand.

Marj also started a study of Wrybills on the Rakaia. She wrote a report of a Canterbury three-day Field Study in 1963 which appears in *Notornis* (1964) 11: 61-64 and includes mention of a "60-mile trip to the area where Marj Davis had begun a study of the Wrybill. Again the weather was kind, and the visitors were able to see much of this unique bird, of its chicks in various stages, and of its fascinating parental behaviour." There are several active members who were teenagers at the time and who pay tribute to the field study weekends which took place in the 1960's and which they found stimulating.

Marj was an active member when Dick Jackson was Regional Organiser in the 1960's. They thought nothing of setting off at 4am on a field trip. A short note in *Notornis* (Vol 11 (1) 1964 p61-2) mentions wading waist deep in water at Harts Creek. And Geoff Harrow tells how Marj climbed up to the Hutton's Shearwater colony with him and Dick, high in the Seaward Kaikouras, no mean achievement.

Although a lot of her birding was done alone, Marj was a stalwart member of the society. She looked after the Branch Library for many years, attended every meeting and encouraged less experienced birders. In 1999 she made a valuable contribution to the Branch's hosting of the OSNZ Conference and AGM, using her computer to record registrations.

The cameras for sale in her Chemist's shop led her to try them out and Marj soon concentrated on bird photography. Her gear consisted of camera, scope and bins. Photography later became difficult due to her failing eyesight, but birds and their habitats still attracted her. She spent much of her spare time around the

estuaries and rivers of North Canterbury studying the birds she loved. Always inquisitive, she would ask "What will the bird do next, where will it go and why? Food? Sanctuary? Mating ritual?"

Marj kept a road-damaged Little Owl for years. His name was Wol and he loved to perch on open doors. Marj's house was an open home to all birders and the house rule was to check before you closed a door. She had many other interests, including the Japanese language and Geology, but birds came first and outlasted most, if not all, her other interests. More recently, orthopaedic surgery replaced bits of her spine, knees and hips, curtailing her activities. Even in severe pain, she never gave up.

The branch intends to make good use of Marj's generous legacy in her memory.

(Thanks to all who assisted with this report, which was compiled from Sheila Petch and Maida Barlow's obituary in *Southern Bird* in December 2011, items from *Notornis*, Sarah Jerard and personal memories. Ed.)

Droppings from the RR

A very good conference was held in Palmerston North over Queen's Birthday Weekend 2014. Among the memorable events were the mess of seabird wrecks all over the entrance to the venue as a workshop was held about how to identify messy remains. Some enviable ones, like Light-Mantled Sooty Albatross, came from North Auckland west coast beaches. We hardly ever get that sort of thing, being on the east coast.

I went to an eBird workshop and feel a little better about tackling the system. It is really very easy once you find the time to try it.

Some brilliant talks were given by a whole series of Vets, student and resident vets at Massey Veterinary School. The bird diseases covered many topics and were much appreciated. Who knew that Kiwi eggs, in their

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burrows for so long, are subject to all sorts of nasties like microbes, bacteria etc, that seem to lower the hatching rate substantially?

On the field trip to Foxton Beach, that famous location for cannon-netting every Godwit bold enough to land there, and where the most species of Tern have ever been seen in NZ, I discovered the place is the size of a double netball court! No wonder the location is so well birded. It is a tiny hotspot on a coast without much shelter.

The best event, however, was the awarding of the Sir Robert Falla Memorial Award for "valuable contributions to the study of birds in the NZ region and sustained service to the Ornithological Society" to our Nick Allen. It is something richly deserved by someone who beavers away quietly by himself but never stops.

Jan Walker



Photo: Hyeza Kim
Nick in action

Recent Sightings

January: 9th, Andrew, Crescent Island, Kaitorete Spit – 1 Common Greenshank, 2 Sanderlings, 45 Godwits, 51 Red Knots, 31 Turnstones, 10 Sharpies, 14 PecSands, 9 Curlew Sands, 13 Golden Plovers, 21 R-n Stints, 14 Wrybills, 30+ Bandies, 1 Gull-billed Tern. 10th Jan, Shining Cuckoo still singing in garden; Halswell Quarry - Cirl Buntings, Silvereyes and finches drinking at a horse trough and Warblers singing. 11th

Sheila, lower Selwyn Huts – 2 Little Terns. 12th, Jan and Sheila, Selwyn Huts – 3 Pec Sands, 120+ Spoonbills, 18 Godwits, lots of Bl Cormorants with juvs, 1 W-fr Tern, c500 Stilts, 10 Bandies. 16th Jan, Andrew and Phil, Crescent Island – lots of CaspTs with flying juvs., probably dispersed from breeding colony at Jarvis Rd. 19th Paul, Embankment Rd, 2 Hybrid B Stilts, at least 7 G-billed Terns, 3 or 4 Wrybills. 22nd, Paul reported a member of the public had found a Bullers Petrel in the surf at North Brighton Beach, FIRST LIVE RECORD in NZ. 22nd, Andrew reported at least 100 White-capped, Salvins and Northern Royal Abatrosses and other seabirds off eastern side of Banks Pen. close to shore – an UNUSUALLY HIGH NUMBER. 24th, Phil, Dyers Pass Road – 1 banded Tui caused great excitement. 25th, Peter, Charteris Bay, 20 Godwits; Jan, Waipara rivermouth – 200 W-fr Terns roosting on shingle bar. 26th, Jan et al, Taumutu, Little Tern and possible Common Tern; Hart's Creek – 1 W-Heron, 7 Mute Swans, 7 Cr-Grebes; Sheila et al, Lake Forsyth, poss G-billed Tern. 16th, Colin and Steve, Lower Selwyn Huts – 177 Wrybills, 30 Bandies, 220 Stilts, 1 G-billed Tern, 2 CaspTs, 3 Sharpies, 1 Pec Sands. 19th, GrahameNZ, Travis Wetland, Glossy Ibis back for the 17th year. Phil, Motukarara. - 1 KEA. Little Owls are being seen increasingly – nesting in Acorn Close, Beckenham and one seen standing in Northlands Mall carpark!

March: 14th, Bev, and 19th, Sandra and Eleanor, North side Saltwater Creek – 2 Whimbrels. 20th, Jan and Bev, Jarvis Road – 28 Golden Plovers, some in beautiful plumage.

April: 1st, Peter passed on reliable sighting on Waimakariri River, 3 kms downstream from Sheffield Gorge Bridge of 3 roosting ARCTIC TERNS. 6th, Stevex2, Bexley wetlands, 1 W-Heron, 1 Bittern, 2 Bl-Stilt hybrids, 20 Spoonbills, 12 CaspTs et al. 8th, Kevin, Lake Lyndon – 2 NZ Falcons. 11th, Hypno, Canterbury University – 1 NZ Falcon. 28th, Andrew, Bromley Oxidation Ponds, 1 imm WHITE WINGED BLACK TERN. Bev, Rushbrooks Rd/Drain Rd, Leeston - 8 Cattle Egret.

May: Early in month NZ Falcons reported by Phil in Victoria Park, Robbie in Botanic Gardens, at least two others reported in hills above

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Akaroa and one on Port Hills. 5th, Andrew, Sumner Beach – 1 Grey-headed Albatross floated ashore and was taken into care – VERY RARE event. Unfortunately this bird did not survive. 7th, Peter, Kaiapoi ponds, possible White-eyed duck. 17th, Sue, Robinsons Bay, Banks Pen – pair of rifleman reappeared in her garden after absence of two years. Colin and Steve, upstream from Selwyn Rivermouth – 42 CaspTs, 4 Bandies, 4 Mute Swans, 4 Stilts, 1 Spoonbill. 26th, Paul Sagar reported that a MOTTLED PETREL, which fledged and was banded by his daughter Rachael on Whenua Hou (Codfish Island), was found in a garage at Leeston and successfully sent on its way. 26th Steve, Greenpark area – NZ Falcon.

June: 1st, mpp26, Travis Wetland – Glossy Ibis back again. 4th, David, Travis, Glossy Ibis and one Bittern; Linwood, 1 W-Heron. 7th, Peter, Kaiapoi – Spotless Crake and W-Heron. 12th, Philip, Lake Forsyth – Little Egret. 17th, Ann, Pegasus township, W-Heron. 19th, Bev, Ashley Estuary – 1 imm. Cresed Grebe – NEVER RECORDED AT ESTUARY BEFORE. 20th, Bev, Rushbrooks Rd/Drain Rd, Leeston – 14 Cattle Egret. 25th, Ann (third hand via Greg of Te Kohaka o Tuhaitara Trust) – 1 Bittern in wetland north of Pegasus township, seen by DOC ranger doing predator control. 28th, Stevex2, Kaitorete Spit, 8 OVERWINTERING CURLEW SPS, 60 Bl-fr Terns in breeding plumage and large number of Bandies, also well into breeding plumage. 29th, Bev, Pegasus wetland, 4 W-Herons, 1 Spoonbill.

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Photo: Ann Sherlock
Strong wind ruffles a few feathers on the Ashley Estuary