

# OSNZ news

Edited by PAUL SAGAR, 38A Yardley Street, Christchurch 4,  
for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)  
Please note that sightings recorded in this Newsletter are subject  
to confirmation.

No. 70 March, 1994

Note Deadline for the June issue will be 10th  
May.

## Small Shearwater Problems

On 6 January 1993, while undertaking a monthly survey of seabirds in the Hauraki Gulf, I noticed an unusual shearwater among c.10 Fluttering Shearwaters off Kawau Island. The most striking feature of this obvious shearwater was the extension of the white flanks onto the rump – separated by a dark stripe down the middle. The bird was also darker and more white underneath than neighbouring Fluttering Shearwaters. On 27 July 1993, I again saw 2 similar shearwaters between Great Barrier Island and Kawau Island; these birds were alone. One of these birds, seen from the side initially, appeared to have a white band across the rump, but this was seen to be divided when viewed dorsally.

Of the small “black and white” shearwaters seven show white flanks – Townsend’s, Newell’s, Fluttering, Hutton’s, Audubon’s, Little, and Manx. Of these, only Townsend’s and Newell’s show the extension of the white flanks to the sides of the rump. Plates 31 and 32 of Harrison (1983. *Seabirds: an identification guide*) show these species. However, there is some doubt about the accuracy of these plates as he has placed the dark thigh patches incorrectly, they should be closer to the tail not the wings. His Fluttering and Hutton’s drawings (108 & 109) show the white flanks extending broadly to the sides of the rump, though not to the same extent as Newell’s and Townsend’s (110 & 112). No flank extension is shown in Manx (107), Audubon’s (114), or Little (113) Shearwaters.

Photographs in Harrison’s *Seabirds of the world: a photographic guide* (1987) show little flank extension for Manx, none for Fluttering and Audubon’s, while that of Hutton’s shows some of the variability in flank extension in that species. Jehl’s

paper on Townsend’s and Newell’s Shearwaters (1982. *Le Gerfaut* 72: 121-135) shows the extension of flanks to sides of the rump consistent in that species and listed as an important identification factor. I have seen and examined hundreds, if not thousands, of Fluttering Shearwaters and never seen the flank extension I saw in the Hauraki Gulf birds; nor in the Hutton’s and Little Shearwaters I have found on beach patrols.

Yet the occurrence of Townsend’s Shearwater appears highly unlikely. This tropical species nests on Hawaii, and Revilla Gigedo Island off Mexico; with the Newell’s subspecies wintering in equatorial waters south to near the Galapagos and possibly recorded off California and Alaska, while the Townsend’s subspecies is more sedentary and occurs mostly around 10-25°N.

So how could they turn up in New Zealand waters? Cook’s Petrel, Gould’s Petrel, Mottled Petrel, Black Petrel, Fleash-footed Shearwater, Sooty Shearwater, Short-tailed Shearwater, and Buller’s Shearwater are all species which occur in New Zealand yet are found within the ranges of Townsend’s and Newell’s Shearwaters during the period April to October. It is possible that a juvenile or non-breeding Townsend’s or Newell’s Shearwater became associated with any of the above species and migrated with them to New Zealand waters, as has been suggested for stray Manx Shearwaters associated with its relative the Fluttering Shearwater.

The possibility of some kind of partial albinism in Fluttering Shearwaters, extending the white flanks onto the sides of the rump, cannot be discounted.

I would be very interested to hear from

anyone who has made similar sightings, my contact address is 30 Parawai Crescent, Ponsonby, Auckland.

CHRIS JOWETT

(Descriptions of these unusual shearwaters were submitted to the Rare Birds Committee, which did not accept the suggested identification as Townsend’s Shearwaters – Ed.)

### Editorial

This is my last issue as editor of *OSNZ news*, so I thought that I would indulge in the luxury of an editorial.

I started editing with issue no. 8 (September 1978) and in the intervening years have seen the newsletter grow and develop. Although the format and style have changed in this time the content of the newsletter still fulfills the prime function of informally reporting the activities of the Society and its members.

I have enjoyed my time as editor. It has brought me into contact with many members and others interested in birds, and proved an ideal way of keeping up with OSNZ activities.

The success of the newsletter is due to the efforts of many people, particularly those who have contributed articles and encouraged others to contribute. Without a regular supply of material an editor cannot function, so members should take pride in the success of what, after all, is your newsletter.

There are almost too many people to thank individually for assisting me over the years, but RRs, scheme conveners, and Council members should take a lot of credit for ensuring that the flow of material across my desk has increased as each deadline

approached. Finally, I do want to thank my family (Joy, Matthew, Rachael and David) for allowing me the time to indulge in editing the newsletter. I completed editing issue no. 10 on my wedding day in 1979 and this issue exactly 15 years later!

PAUL SAGAR

## New Editor

All material for the June issue of *OSNZ news* should be sent to the new editor –

Tony Crocker,  
117 Paparoa Street,  
Christchurch 5  
(Phone 352-4530) by 10 May.

## From the President's Desk

1994 has come and it will be a quarter gone by the time this reaches you all. I trust that among your New Year resolutions was one to do something more with the study of birds. The moulting season is all but finished and the migrant waders will be on their way north soon. However, there is still much to be done.

The winter often sees wrecks of seabirds on some beaches and a stroll along the tideline in the autumn or winter can often be rewarded by finding some rare and interesting petrels and albatrosses. Even if nothing turns up you will find it an enjoyable outing with either family or friend, a great time to talk about old times and to plan for the future.

Another aspect to give attention to during the winter months - unless you migrate to warmer climates like the birds - is those notes and articles you should be preparing for *Notornis* or *OSNZ news*. We all enjoy reading about what has been seen and what others have been doing, but we don't always consider that others may like to read about what we are doing. Most, if not all of us, have some observations which should be recorded for posterity. There are many gaps in our knowledge of most species and you can almost certainly provide some of the answers. Part of our objective to study birds is to record these observations.

What lies in the future? Certainly the AGM, the programme for which is circulated with this *Notornis*. This year there is a new innovation, a Scientific Day. Don't be put off by the title, but it is a special day for us to hear about the studies being carried out by members in both the academic world and also by enthusiastic amateurs. I am assured there are many interesting papers to be presented. Of

course there are other interesting features of the annual conference weekend, plus the usual mix of field excursions and social functions.

Regular attendees at AGM weekends continue to express the pleasure obtained from the formal and informal gatherings. Most try to make it an annual event on their calendar - a time to meet old friends and to revamp their enthusiasm for birds and bird study. Also, spare a thought for those who have gone to the trouble of preparing a memorable weekend for us, in this case Jenny Hawkins and her Nelson team. Your best answer is to decide this is a weekend you cannot miss.

See you at the AGM

BRIAN D. BELL  
*President*

## Donations

A big thank you to the following people for their donations to the Society during the first quarter of 1994, and also to everyone who paid their subscriptions promptly.

### *New Zealand*

Prudence Baker, David Baker, Judith Beirne, Dr & Mrs Bycroft, Gerry Clark, A.R. Carey, Mrs Janet Drake, J.F. Davidson, John Davenport, G.L. Dow, W.A. Cook, Elizabeth Bell, Miss Sheila Coombs, G.W. de Lisle, Patricia Evans, B.P. NZ Ltd, Anthea Goodwin, Peter Grant, A.G. Hutson, Graham I. Hunt, Mark & Marina Hanger, Kay Haslett, Jim G. Hamilton, Colin Hill, Barry Friend, B.M. Fitzgerald, Jackson/Eddington, E.J. Kirk, Gordon Lassey, Dr P. Munns, Mrs G. Norman, Marie Neverman, Rod Orange, Kerry Oates, Adrian Paterson, Emma Pratt, Ralph & Mary Powlesland, L.S. Rickard, John & Stella Rowe, Hugh & Lea Robertson, Paul & Joy Sagar, W.N. Salmons, Kim Sterelny, Betty Seddon, M.M. Simpson, Lorna Simpkin, Ian Southey, Kevin J. Taylor, Allan Tennyson, K.V. Todd, K.B. Walshe, Roy Weston, Barbara Walter, Malcolm Waller.

### *Overseas*

Stephen Jarvis - England.  
Dr Phillip Moors, Neil Cheshire, John Peter - Australia.

HAZEL HARTY  
*Membership Secretary*

## Falla Memorial Award & A.T. Edgar Junior Award - 1994

Nominations are called for the above awards and should be with the Secretary, P.O. Box 12397, Wellington, by 30 June 1994. Nominations should be on the standard forms, which are available from RRs and the Secretary.

All nominations will be considered by the Awards Committee and its

recommendations will be forwarded to Council for consideration at its spring meeting.

A full summary of OSNZ award procedures was published in *OSNZ news* 58 (March 1991).

RAEWYN EMPSON  
*Hon. Secretary*

## J.S. Watson Conservation Trust

This Trust is administered by the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society. Applications are invited from individuals or conservation groups for financial assistance for conservation projects over the 1994-1995 year.

The criteria for assistance are:

- \* the conservation of plants and animals and natural features of New Zealand;
- \* the advancement of knowledge in these matters by way of research, literary contribution, essay or articles, or other effort;
- \* general education of the public to give them an understanding and love of the earth in which we live.

A total of \$10,000 is available. It may be awarded to one or more applicants, or held over for a subsequent year.

For further details and application forms, write to the General Manager, RFBPS, P.O. Box 631, Wellington. Applications close on 31 July 1994.

## Wanted - reports of colour-banded Pied Oystercatchers

During late December and into January, Pied Oystercatchers move from their inland breeding areas to spend autumn and early winter in coastal areas. Two current studies of Pied Oystercatchers have resulted in birds being colour banded and reports of these birds are important to determine the dispersal patterns of the species.

Donald Geddes and Paul Sagar are into the 7th year of their longterm study of oystercatchers which nest on farmland in Mid Canterbury. They reported previously (*OSNZ news* 57 December 1990) about preliminary results of sightings away from the study area. Well, following our appeal for more sightings in 1993 we had an amazing response with reports of 23 of the 79 adults known to be alive. Once again the birds were found throughout the country - from Aramoana in the south to Whangarei Harbour in the north.

1994 has started well, with details of 8 adults already sent in. However, we still need more sightings if we are to determine whether the same birds return to the same areas year after year, and whether both birds of a pair remain together after leaving the breeding area. So we look forward to receiving even more sightings in 1994.

All banded birds in this study have an orange band in the combination.

The second study is being conducted on birds which nest on the Ahuriri River, MacKenzie Basin. This is part of a long-term study of the habitats used by waterbirds, and is coordinated by Richard Maloney, Department of Conservation, Twizel.

About 20 birds a year are banded in this project and all have a black band in the combination.

Please report all sightings of colour-banded Pied Oystercatchers to the Banding Office, Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 10420, Wellington.

PAUL SAGAR

### Titi Alert!

A long-term Sooty Shearwater study has commenced at the Department of Zoology, University of Otago. This year the work is being carried out by Phil Lyver and associated assistants, in order to fulfill thesis requirements for an M.Sc. The overall study is under the guidance of Dr Henrik Moller.

The overall objectives of the study include finding ways to restore mainland colonies of Sooty Shearwaters. Most of these remaining colonies are small, and in danger of being snuffed out altogether by predators (cats and ferrets). There are indications that intermittent food failure at sea presents another threat. Eighty-five fledgling Sooty Shearwaters were recovered from just three beaches on the Otago coast in May 1993. They were comparatively small and thin. In 1993, several muttonbirders reported poorly grown young. Accordingly, we are very keen to determine whether beach-wrecked birds are in general smaller and in poorer condition, and whether the numbers found in the Beach Patrol surveys can index marine food failure events. If so, the splendid efforts of the Beach Patrol searchers over the past 40 or so years can give us an enormous amount of retrospective information about the frequency and timing of food failures!

Another objective of this study is to carry out morphometric analyses of Sooty Shearwaters to determine their age and sex. We are hoping to compare sizes of chicks that are about to fledge from mainland and island colonies and those found washed up on beaches around New Zealand in May. We now wish to measure a lot more adult and fledgling Sooty Shearwaters that we know the sex of. By checking the gonads of dead birds found during beach patrols we can gain a positive identification of the sex of each bird. Body measurements of live adults and chicks can then be used to determine the sex of birds that we have banded. This will allow us to determine whether early life fatalities are sex-related.

For this research to be really successful we need your help! Our aim is to obtain as many fresh carcasses of beach-wrecked Sooty Shearwaters as possible, between now and the end of May 1994. We would be grateful if OSNZ beach patrollers pick up freshly dead Sooty Shearwaters. Late April to mid May will be the time when the greatest concentrations of fledglings are beach-wrecked, so we would be especially pleased to receive your offerings from those months.

It would be appreciated if the birds could be placed in a plastic bag and frozen. Please enclose a note (written in pencil) with the location and date found, and your name, phone number and address. Whenever convenient (immediately if you need to clear your freezer, or best of all, after your June 1994 beach patrol if you wish to send them all in one go) please despatch them to us by overnight courier service to arrive between Monday and Friday morning (we don't want them thawing on the doorstep or at the courier's depot). Please address the offering to "Titi Alert", c/o Mrs Val Allen, Zoology Department, University of Otago, Great King Street, Dunedin. Val's phone number is (03) 479-7974. If there are any hassles we can also be contacted by fax (03) 479-7984. Any freight costs will be paid by us, if you wish.

After the birds have been measured and autopsied, we will be more than willing to make any findings available to your local OSNZ group.

Any birds sent will be greatly appreciated. However, remember and take mercy please. We want only freshly dead specimens.

We look forward to hearing from you.

PHIL LYVER & HENRIK MOLLER

### More ornithological research at NZ universities

Since publication of the list of current ornithological research at NZ universities in the last issue of *OSNZ news* I have been advised of the following additional projects.

#### Massey University

##### MSc

Suzanne Bassett: Emu farm management.  
Mark Forman: Stress responses in wild and captive Mallards and Grey Ducks.

Guy Hessel: Possum influence on Wood Pigeon numbers.

##### Staff

Alison Campbell: Ecology and behaviour of Black Swans.

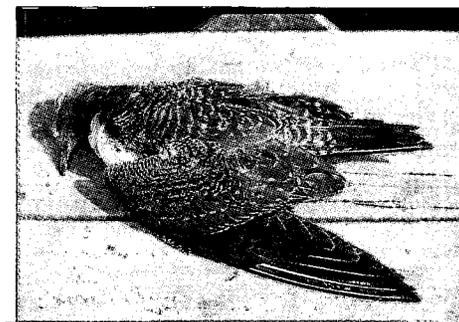
John Cockrem: Reproductive physiology of New Zealand birds; stress and reproduction in birds; non-invasive measurement of reproductive hormones in endangered species, including Kakapo and Takahe.

Ian Henderson: Population modelling of Blue Ducks.

PHIL BATTLETT

### Mystery Bird # 14

Mystery bird # 14 is obviously dead, and so gives no clues from posture etc as to which group of birds it belongs. Could it be a raptor, or bird of prey? Its bill rules this out, as it has no hook at the tip. Perhaps a cuckoo? No cuckoos match this bird, Long-tailed Cuckoo having a barred tail, streaked breast and a differently patterned head.



The bill shape seems reminiscent of a gull. Black-backed Gulls start life as largely dark birds and take several years to reach their black and white adult plumage, but at no time show such barred upperparts and a dark head with white underparts. The other group of birds which does have a similar bill shape to gulls is the skuas. Of the two main subgroups of skuas, the *Catharacta* skuas are instantly ruled out by the white underparts and barred upperparts, leaving our bird as a *Stercorarius* skua, one of Pomarine, Arctic or Long-tailed, all of which are on the NZ list.

When identifying skuas the essential first step is to age the bird. The fresh plumage shows the bird has recently moulted, and the pale fringes to all of the mantle, scapulars, tertials, wing coverts and uppertail coverts, combined with the pale bill shows that this bird is a juvenile in its first year. This plumage is typically lost at the end of the bird's first southward migration, the subsequent first-summer plumage lacks the fringed upperparts.

Correct identification of skuas relies on a composite of features, their plumage is variable and there are no foolproof single features. So what do we have to go on?

Our bird is a pale morph, which occurs frequently in Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, but is rather rare in the less variable Pomarine Skua which is typically a rather dark bird as a juvenile.

The bill is not at a good angle to see well, but lacks the pronounced hook found in Pomarines. The tip is darker than the rest of the bill, but the extent of this is hard to judge. It appears restricted to the outer third or so of the bill, which is more typical

of Arctic Skuas; Long-tailed Skuas often having 40-60% of the bill dark. The bill is also appears rather small.

Pomarine Skua usually has a brown head and lacks the white chin found on our mystery bird. Arctic Skuas often have a paler head, including around the base of the upper mandible and chin. Long-tailed Skuas also generally show this pattern. However, dark streaking on the head is more distinct on Arctic, especially on the hindneck and chin, while these streaks are rather shorter on Long-tailed. Our bird shows extensive pale around the base of the bill, but fine streaking only, and a rather clear chin.

Juveniles of all three species show pale fringing on the upperparts, typically narrower on Pomarine and broadest on Long-tailed. The barred upper tail coverts of juvenile Long-tailed and Pomarine Skuas are normally quite conspicuous, generally less contrasting on Arctic.

On the outwing, pale shafts on the outer three to eight primaries characterise Pomarine and Arctic Skuas, Long-tailed showing generally only one or two pale shafts. However, some Long-taileds have shown four pale shafts. Our bird shows two prominent pale shafts, three less prominent pale shafts.

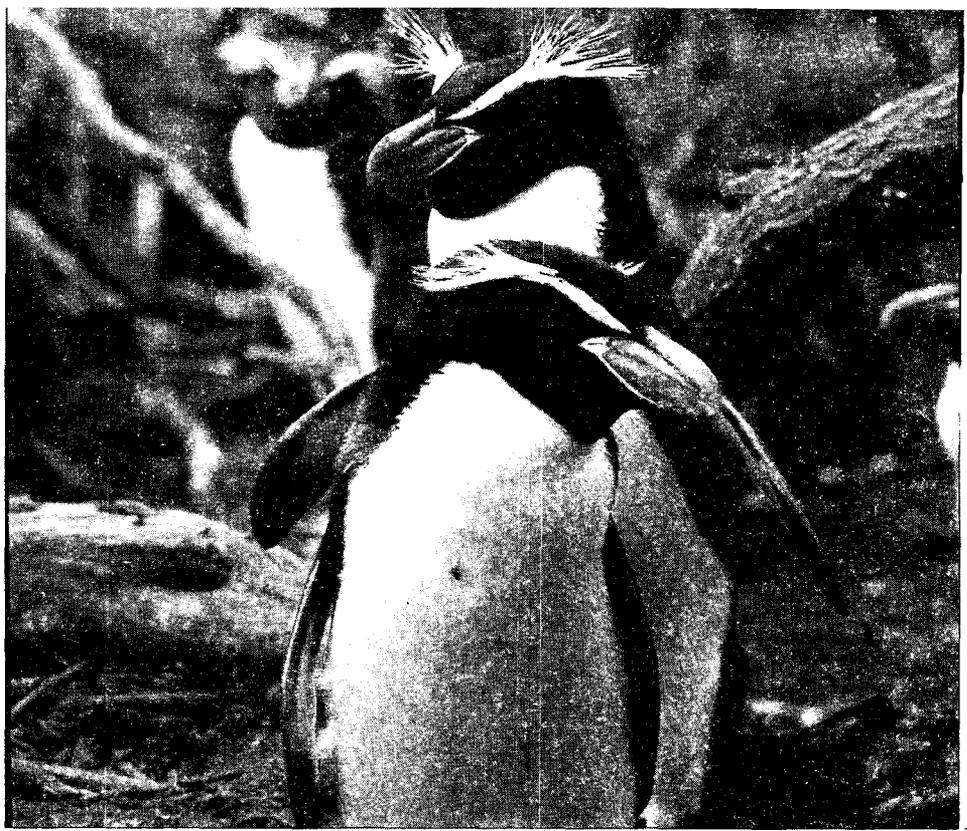
So, on balance of these features, where do we stand? The bill seems small enough for Long-tailed, but pale enough for Arctic. The head pattern is compatible with Arctic and Long-tailed, perhaps tending to the latter. Pomarine is ruled out on bill size and shape and head colour. The pale barring on the uppertail suggests Long-tailed, while the number of pale primary shafts suggests Arctic. Hardly conclusive!

Are there any further features? One would be the shape of the slightly longer central pair of tail feathers (rounded in Long-tailed, more pointed in Arctic), but these are unfortunately cropped in the photo. However, the upperwing still holds two important clues.

First, there is the obvious contrast between the very dark outwing and the medium tone innerwing. Second, the primaries have only a very fine pale edging. Both of these features are strongly characteristic of juvenile Long-tailed Skuas.

Thus, what we are looking at is a rather pale-billed, pale-faced juvenile Long-tailed Skua with rather more than its quota of pale primary shafts. Nobody said it would be easy!

Long-tailed Skuas are rarely reported from NZ waters, with few sight records. In the summer of 1982-1983, however, a wreck of 16 occurred south of Wellington. They breed in high Arctic regions across both North America and Eurasia, migrating south for the northern winter, and are probably rather more pelagic than Pomarine and Arctic Skuas. I found and



### Mystery Bird # 15

Identify this bird. Answer Next issue

photographed this individual in the Netherlands in August 1991, so it was only a few months old when it died.

PHIL BATTLE

### Mystery Bird Quiz

The final round is now complete. It was a tight competition, but the last difficult species proved too elusive for those trying to catch Daryl Eason. At the time of preparing this for publication, Daryl's final guesses have not reached me but his nine correct in the first three rounds proved sufficient. Congratulations Daryl on a winning a free 12-months' membership of OSNZ.

Now to the identification of the last three species.

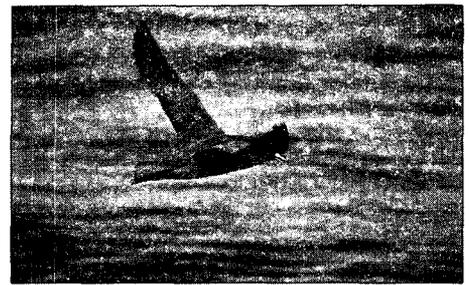
J. Antarctic Fulmar. Photographed off the Kaikoura coast.

K. Black-browed Mollymawk. Also photographed off Kaikoura.

L. NZ Pipit. Photographed at the Bromley Sewage Ponds in winter.

The first round of the 1994 competition now begins. The rules are printed in the March 1993 *OSNZ news*. There is just one difference. Canterbury region members may enter as I have not shown mystery bird slides at any of our 1993 meetings and pictures will be selected which they have not seen. Once again the prize is a free 12-month membership of OSNZ.

Please send entries to: Don Hadden, 288 Yaldhurst Road, Christchurch 8004.  
DON HADDEN



A



B



C



## The 1994 Waitangi Day Royal Spoonbill count

Rather than wait until all results have come in (this is written only 6 days after the census, so it is hardly fair to expect all the results to be reported yet), I feel it is worthwhile to bring you a progress report before the Nelson AGM in May. It hopefully warms the readers to the task at hand – another winter census in June 1994 to determine the breeding success of Royal Spoonbills in New Zealand.

The Editor of *OSNZ news* must be a happy man to know that his publication is read from time to time (I am – Ed.). My Royal Spoonbill report in the December 1993 issue had a nice response and I am able to come up with an almost national total of 474 adults and juveniles (one region still has to submit their numbers).

With this figure in mind and a good breeding season in the South Island I predicted a total of over 500 Royal Spoonbills for the 6 February 1994 count. And to date the census figures tend to confirm this prediction. Marlborough and Otago of course topped the list with a combined figure of over 200 birds. The South Island total, with one region still to send in its count, reached 409; the North Island gave an interim total of 81.

Chicks are not included in these totals, and there are still quite a number of late and new clutches. It means that if all goes well the winter numbers of Royal Spoonbills will be well over 500.

I recommend that OSNZ conducts another winter census, in June 1994.

PETER SCHWEIGMAN

## NZ Pigeon behaviour amuses

During early February on Waiheke Island, I observed a group of NZ Pigeons during a cloudburst toward evening. All 10 birds, except one, congregated near the trunk of the tall tree they had settled in.

The lone bird started to walk toward the outer branches at the top of the tree, and stopped by a stout fork. It crouched, wrapped its right wing and half of its tail feathers around the upper fork, and proceeded to lift the left wing towards the sky. The wing kept stretching until the whole underside of the wing was facing up, to catch the pouring rain. This seemed unwieldy to say the least, yet it was a full

2 minutes before the bird changed position. This change in position was to mirror all the previous actions, but facing the other way.

All the other birds appeared to take no notice of this behaviour and seemed to be trying to get shelter. Perhaps the lone bird was a seasoned local, and the others were just tourists!

PAUL CUMING

## A Zebra Finch, but where from?

On 5 February 1994, I picked up a fresh road-killed Zebra Finch in Birkenhead, Auckland. The red bill, finely barred throat and white-spotted chestnut flanks showed that it was an adult male. This Australian species is quite commonly kept as a cage or aviary bird and the most likely explanation for the origin of the bird I found is that it had escaped from captivity nearby.

Another interesting possibility did occur to me, however. During the recent widespread bush fires in New South Wales, huge numbers of scrub and forest birds must have attempted to escape incineration by flying high above the fires or, in the case of those near the coast, possibly out to sea. The up-draughts created by the fires probably carried others higher than usual. Some of these birds (particularly the smaller species) could easily have been caught in the prevailing westerly winds and carried across the Tasman Sea to New Zealand. Given that the species I found is a common aviary bird, I still think a local escapee is the more likely explanation. It might be interesting, however, to look back through the records to see whether any correlation can be detected between previous large-scale bush fires in south-eastern Australia and records of Australian vagrants in New Zealand.

JOHN DOWDING

## Review

*Koe Malau. Life and future of the Malau*, by Dieter, R.R., Lata, H.S., & Usback, A. 1993. Brehm Fund for International Bird Conservation. Bonn, Germany. 20 pp. ISBN 982 314 001 4.

Found only on the island of Niuafo'ou, in the Kingdom of Tonga, the Malau (*Megapodius pritchardii*) is one of the rarest birds in the world. It is a small, forest-dwelling flighted bird similar in appearance to a Weka and Banded Rail.

This book, written in Tongan and English, has been compiled primarily for the purpose of educating Tongans about their natural heritage, using the Malau as a case study. It is complemented by several colour photographs and a number of line drawings and maps showing the Malau habitat, distribution, behaviour, and threats to its persistence.

The most striking feature of the Malau is its unusual breeding behaviour. The female lays her large eggs (up to 10) singly in volcanic ducts, then covers them with volcanic sand. The soil temperature incubates the eggs and the fully feathered and independent young tunnel through to emerge 40-55 days later. At emergence the young are vulnerable to "long legged ants" which blind the chicks before reaching the surface and then slowly eat them. Other threats include habitat damage, Barn Owls, cats and humans.

This book encourages protection of the Malau and its habitat and serves as a colourful, informative, easy to read, nonspecialist introduction to conservation in Tonga. For the specialist, it is lacking in depth and detail and does not list pertinent references. It will, however, serve as a useful resource for high schools and others with an interest in Pacific conservation.

GARY BRAMLEY

## Regional Roundup

### Northland

The speaker for our August meeting was Robert Webb of the Whangarei Native Bird Recovery, who talked about voluntary work with injured and sick birds and the recent acquisition of a building at Maunu as a base. Paul Thomson, the OSNZ Science Fair prize winner, also had his Kereru entry on display.

Our October meeting was addressed by Dr Murray Williams, currently working for DoC at Russell, who gave an interesting talk about southern teal. On 17 October, Ina May organised a trip on the *Felicitaire* to the Hen and Chicken Islands. Because beautiful, calm, sunny conditions prevailed low numbers of birds were seen, but 16 species were observed including land-based birds on the islands. It was a fantastic experience to pass very close to Sail Rock and other landmarks usually seen from afar.

During November about 20 members attended a seabird workshop, held by Pat Miller, using frozen beach-wrecked specimens found during our monthly beach patrols.

Members also took part in the annual national wader survey of Whangarei and Kaipara Harbours on 6 November. This time, Gavin Grant found dolphins trapped in the mangrove mud at Takatiwai and spent the rest of the day helping to rescue 3 dolphins (5 had already died), so this section of the Kaipara Harbour was not surveyed this time.

Gavin Grant and his team banded 100 Black-backed Gull chicks at Waipu during late December and early January.

On 18 December we had our annual barbecue at Meryl Robinson's home at Whangaumu Bay and some people stayed

overnight for a champagne breakfast next morning.

During our Anniversary Weekend 9 members stayed in shearers' quarters at Paua and had an interesting time birdwatching in the Paua area of Parengarenga Harbour. They also walked for 2 hours across sand dunes to the West Coast, finding a pair of Variable Oystercatchers with 2 chicks about a kilometre from the sea. The real excitement was visiting a dam where there were dozens of Paradise Shelducks, Black Swans, Mallards, Pied Shags, and Little Shags, and a few Pied Stilts. However, most significant were 16 Royal Spoonbills with 3 nests. One nest contained 3 well-grown chicks, another had a bird sitting tight, and the third nest appeared empty. One bird was banded yellow over green on the right leg.

Recent sightings of interest include 35 Asiatic Whimbrels and 33 Golden Plovers at Mangawhati Point/Skull Creek; a Gannet roost 2 km inland at Mahuta, which may become a future breeding colony; and a Darter seen at Kao in late December.

A Silvereye banded at Wren Greechan's Kiripaka property on 22 August 1993 moved the 12 km to Whangarei where it was killed by a cat on 26 October 1993.

Pat, Karen and Ayla Miller are now in Stratford for three months.

(Lorna Simpkin)

### South Auckland

Our news goes back to mid September when David Lawrie organised a trip to White Island. In weather which normally would have caused a cancellation we had magnificent seabird watching. Highlights were seeing 5 species of mollymawks, and seemingly endless streams of Grey-faced Petrels moving towards Whale Island at dusk.

The Kokako survey in the Hunuas, organised by Brenda Green and carried out by Shaarina Boyd, was plagued by bad weather, but several birds were heard from "new" areas. During a special look at Kidd's, on Manuakau Harbour, in the last week of October we were pleased to find 2 pairs of NZ Dotterels each with 2 chicks, while 2 Marsh Sandpipers were also a delight. Later, 2 further pairs of NZ Dotterels were seen with chicks, making this by far the greatest breeding activity here for many years. One flying juvenile was still here recently. The 70 Black-billed Gulls which have been coming and going between Kidd's and Mataitai finally took courage and laid in 8 nests during early January, but sadly these were unsuccessful.

Our visit to the Caspian Tern colony at the Waikato Rivermouth lacked the usual excitement because we had transport provided by Keith Ryburn and his

runabout. As magic a place as ever, the count of 36 Caspian Tern chicks was a little down on last year. There were also 10 NZ Dotterels at the rivermouth. In early November we completed our 6-monthly count of birds in the Botanic Gardens and it was pleasing to be called on to check our records recently against those of the resident staff. This was our 4th spring count.

As usual we had excellent speakers for our evening meetings. In September, Shaarina Boyd spoke about the local threatened species programmes and in October Adrian Riegen showed us videos of wader work in NW Australia. November saw all of us at Dick and Bryony Veitch's home to watch the video Islands.

Our end of year barbecue with Pam and Des Agnew was voted an outstanding success. Over the holidays we have kept up our beach patrols, checked for banded birds, and hosted some overseas visitors.

(Anthea Goodwin)

### Waikato

When Kawhia Harbour was visited in November for our regular census we noted a colour-banded Royal Spoonbill, the first colour-banded bird for Kawhia. It had been banded as a chick at Wairau Lagoons in 1989. We were delighted to find 3 pairs of NZ Dotterels nesting at Te Motu Sandbank, one pair with 3 chicks which were still present and almost fledged when a further visit was made in late December. The outcome of the 2 other nests is not known. Caspian Terns nested on Te Motu Island this summer, with 34 adults and 17 chicks in various stages of development being counted in late December; 7 nests still contained eggs. No colour-banded birds were seen.

On the Ope Ope Rocks we found 2 Black/hybrid Stilts with colour bands. These turned out to be juveniles which had been banded at Glentanner Swamp a year previously. Dave Murray reports that he expects them to look like node G or H birds by winter 1994. Unfortunately, neither these birds nor their parents were seen in the South island in spring 1993, as Dave would have expected. We will keep a watch on Kawhia for them.

End of year social events took on a festive air when members gathered for a sumptuous pot-luck Christmas dinner. Paul Cuming devised a bird-photo identification quiz which was a source of puzzlement for some and gratification for others! Folkert Nieuwland duly shared his prize of a box of chocolates with the rest of us. The evening was rounded off by Ian Reid showing his video films of birds on our beaches. Ian has devised a clever way of photographing birds through a video camera coupled to binoculars, resulting in excellent magnification of plumage detail and behaviour.

Several members saw in the New Year

at Miranda after an enjoyable shared barbecue dinner with members of the Miranda Naturalists Trust, and some spent New Years Day amongst the flocks of waders on the shellbanks and mudflats. What more could one ask?

(Bev. Woolley)

### Hawkes Bay

In October we visited Balls Clearing and Little Bush. At Balls Clearing Whiteheads were plentiful and NZ Pigeons, Tuis, Fantails, Grey Warblers, and introduced passerines were also seen. At Little Bush we saw the same species, plus Shining Cuckoo.

In December we had a twitchathon, followed by a meeting and then a barbecue. The winning team saw 53 species in 5 hours - species recorded included Glossy Ibis, Bittern, Spotless Crake, and Cattle Egret. We had a visit to Outfall Channel at Ahuriri to see a Lesser Yellowlegs and all had a good look at it. Looking back through the records it is interesting to note that Lesser Yellowlegs have been seen in Hawkes Bay four times, each 10 summers apart; the first in 1963.

We visited Mohi Bush in January where we saw Rifleman, NZ Pigeons, Grey Warblers, Fantails, and Tuis, as well as a good look at a Shining Cuckoo. A Tui with colour bands was recorded - it had been banded at Mohi Bush by Hugh Robertson in 1988.

(Christine McRae)

### Taranaki

On 4 December several members from the region visited the Manawatu Estuary where a large number of waders (for us) was seen. These included several hundred Bar-tailed Godwits and Lesser Knots; 15 Golden Plovers; 4 Turnstones; 1 Wrybill; 1 Grey-tailed Tattler; 1 American Whimbrel; 2 Banded Dotterels; and 3 probable Pectoral Sandpipers. There were several Pied Oystercatchers, 1 Variable Oystercatcher, several Spur-winged Plovers, and a large number of Pied Stilts also present.

More unusual sightings around New Plymouth included a report of 7 Royal Spoonbills (obviously passing through) on one of the inshore Sugarloaves at New Plymouth in late October. There were about 40 petrel burrows (probably Grey-faced Petrels, but not yet confirmed) on the same island. Quite large numbers of Red-billed Gulls and White-fronted Terns nest on the inshore Sugarloaves each year.

In late October a pair of House Sparrows ejected Fantail chicks from their nest and then built their own nest around that of the Fantail. Chaffinch and Goldfinch have been observed separately to wrap spiders' webs around their bills, presumably for use as nesting material. A Blackbird was observed eating rose flower

buds. A number of Blackbirds with various amounts of white in their plumage, including a completely white bird, have been reported in several places around New Plymouth.

(Erika Woodger)

### **Wanganui**

At our November meeting we were given a talk by Ian Sutherland, one of our local members, about the birds of South America. This was illustrated with slides and all were treated to a very well presented talk and an enjoyable evening.

We started 1994 with a talk given by David Merrie, a visiting ornithologist, who told us about Scottish birds and a conservation project he is involved with in providing artificial nests for loons. This talk was given in conjunction with the DoC Summer Nature Programme and the 36 attendees were treated to a very enjoyable evening.

(Tom Teasdale)

### **Manawatu**

We had a most successful barbecue and pot-luck dinner on 10 December. The icing on the cake was a slide show by Roger Wasley. Besides his "old" slides he had a new batch of Moreporks, Cattle Egrets, Rooks and NZ Dotterels.

The Broad-billed Sandpiper has not returned to the Manawatu Estuary this season, but we have had 3 Pectoral Sandpipers and a whimbrel. The Pectorals have been seen several times, standing upright and confronting each other, they seem to ignore the 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers that have also been resident at the estuary since the end of October. The whimbrel has been identified as an Asiatic and an American, so perhaps there are 2 birds!

On 13 November 1993 there were about 500 Bar-tailed Godwits at the Manawatu Estuary. The numbers of Lesser Knots seem to have built up more slowly than in the previous 2 years, but by the end of January there were almost 400 birds. Also present were 20+ Wrybills, 40+ Pied Oystercatchers, 1 Variable Oystercatcher, 1 Siberian Tattler, 70 Banded Dotterels, 100+ Pied Stilts, 4 Turnstones, and 20+ Golden Plovers. Early in the season 3 Curlew Sandpipers and a Red-necked Stint were seen. Jim Moore and Walter Chelley also observed a Far Eastern Curlew during January. On 30 January, 8 Cattle Egrets were seen on the outskirts of Foxton Beach by Jim Moore - 4 were all white and had pale yellow bills, and 4 were in full breeding plumage including pink-red bills.

The most spectacular display at the Manawatu Estuary on 30 January was provided by about 1000 White-fronted Terns feeding in one of the channels as the tide came in. Walter and Olive Chelley had seen 600+ White-fronted Terns with 6 Black-fronted Terns near the rivermouth

the previous day. During the Christmas period Jim Moore reported massive shoals of pilchards, trapped by larger fish, between the Surf Club and North Head for 2-3 days. These were systematically eaten by the larger fish, numerous gulls, White-fronted Terns, Gannets, and several skuas. The surface of the sea boiled when the larger fish moved in to feed. The only other observation of note at the estuary was a NZ Dotterel on 31 October 1993, seen by Jim Moore.

An unusual heron, living on the Livestock Improvement Centre farm at Awahuri, was brought to the attention of local members on 26 January. Roger Slack and Roger Wasley met Brian Reid, one of the staff at the Centre, the following day and they duly found the bird. It appears to be a Pacific Heron and fits all the criteria except for rather too much white in the wings. Roger Wasley has managed to take some photographs, but it was difficult to get close with lots of potentially fierce and very inquisitive bulls in the paddocks. The staff at the Centre had seen the same bird 6 months previous and it had returned on 25 January. It appears to feed in water troughs, and stalks insects in the long grass.

Pied Stilts and Banded Dotterels have had a difficult year nesting on the Manawatu River. For the first time, stilts nested on a particular high gravel bank, downstream of the bridge in Palmerston North. Previously, this gravel had been occupied by nesting Black-fronted Dotterels. On 29 October 2 Pied Stilt nests were found, each containing 4 eggs. On 17 November a recently laid in Black-fronted Dotterel nest was found about 5 m from one of the stilt nests. However, on 20 November a flood destroyed all the nests. The gravel was again exposed by 26 November and by 1 December the 2 pairs of stilts had re-nested, each pair laying 3 eggs. Unfortunately, these were submerged again on 6 December.

Other bird sightings from the region during the holiday period include a Falcon, seen by Ian Andrew between the track bridge and Rangiwahia Hut on 15 January. This track is one of the main access points into the western Ruahines and seems to be a good place to look for Falcons. Pam & Roger Slack, on a trip to Whirinaki, heard Kokako on the track from the Plateau-Central Whirinaki Hut, near the Caves area. Finally, on a DoC summer programme trip to Boyd Hut in the Kaimanawas, Banded Dotterels and Falcon were heard near the airstrip.

Hope to see everyone at the AGM.

(Pam Slack)

### **Wellington**

November brought the long-awaited trip to Little Barrier Island. The weather was fine, the sea reasonably calm, and the landing dry. Ten of us had met up in Leigh

the previous evening, some visiting Miranda en route. Ralph Powlesland showed us the tracks and helped with identification of birds and plants. Our two and a half days gave enough time to explore all the areas where we were allowed access - the top of the island is restricted to people working on DoC projects. The abundance of Stitchbirds and Saddlebacks as well as Tuis, Bellbirds, Kakas, and parakeets was thrilling. There were lots of Long-tailed Cuckoos, and we saw Brown Teal and native bats.

In December we had another twitchathon which was enjoyed by those of us who took part, but with only 2 teams it was hardly a competition. The final of 2 years of counts on Kapiti Island was completed in January.

Our November meeting featured Black Shags. Ralph Powlesland began studying the nesting shags at Pencarrow Lakes in 1989/90. Because they are shy of people and nest in inaccessible places there has been a lack of detailed study of them. Colour bands have been fitted to some of the young birds over the past few seasons. In December, members' knowledge of ornithological matters was tested in an extravaganza devised by Owen Hughes and Allan Munro. There were calls and feathers to identify, general ornithological questions to answer, and some cryptic quotes from Mr Explorer Douglas to recognise. The evening and Christmas cake went down pleasantly.

(Ros Batcheler)

### **Wairarapa**

We really have been doing things, but it seems we haven't had them reported!

The region has been fortunate with the variety of interesting talks presented at evening meetings. We have had talks about places from the Chathams to the Galapagos Islands, and we have heard about South Pacific Kingfishers, Chatham Island Pigeon and Shore Plover. Also at our meetings we are having short talks of 10-15 minutes on some aspect of ornithology, given by our members. The object of this is to spread members' interests and studies, thereby helping each other to learn more about our hobby. Topics covered so far include plumage, colour, bills and feet.

Our summer wader count could well have taken place in mid-winter, the weather was so wet. What birds we saw could hardly be counted for the rain and fogged glasses and binoculars. A great proportion of the bird population must have been able to find somewhere out of the rain, and out of sight of the counters; the day's total was only slightly more than a third of the usual figure. However, to make up for this a group of members joined with the Nelson team for the count on Farewell Spit. This was a wonderful day, perfect weather, the many different species and the numbers to be seen amazed us. The

2 Knots seen during our Wairarapa count paled with the 11 000 odd counted on Farewell Spit that day. Our thanks go to Jenny and the Nelson team for their hospitality and for organising such a wonderful day.

Our efforts to participate in the Pied Stilt banding programme were frustrated by the very dry spring and later by the high flood levels in the rivers. The floods also wiped out at least 2 nesting attempts by Black-fronted Dotterels.

Cattle Egrets were seen in good numbers this season, with 30 in one group and 41 in another. Some of the latter group were still present during our twitchathon on 5 December. The twitchathon was a great success, even with only 3 teams participating. 59 species were recorded for the day, with one of the more unusual sightings being a Long-tailed Cuckoo. The official count at the barbecue afterwards saw the most diligent team being declared the winners. The barbecue was a great way to wind up such a fun day. We thoroughly recommend twitchathons as a great way of getting people involved.

(Colin Scadden)

#### Nelson

After a rather wet December summer is now beginning. The end of January trip to Farewell Spit was made in excellent weather. A full count was made with the help of Phil Battley, who is completing a study of the intertidal zone of the Spit, and Andrew Crossland. Highlights of this count were 33 whimbrels and 7 Far Eastern Curlews. The Gannets had fewer chicks than last year and were later leaving the colony.

In December, Henk Heinekamp and others banded Black-backed Gull chicks on the Boulder Bank, where Red-billed Gull and White-fronted Tern colonies had been very successful this season. The number of Black-backed Gull chicks was fewer than previous seasons, no doubt owing to better rubbish disposal in the region.

Willie Cook and Henk also banded 35 Caspian Tern chicks at the Bell's Island colony, which is increasing year by year.

Recently we have noted (and sent to the Banding Office) several colour-banded Pied Oystercatchers, a red-flagged Knot, a red-flagged Bar-tailed Godwit, and 2 colour-banded Pied Stilts. Of the latter, one was a local bird which has been about since 1990 and the other bird we think came from the Waikato.

See you all at the AGM where, thanks to Stewart Lauder (West Coast), we hope to have a certain delicacy on the menu.

(Jenny Hawkins)

#### Canterbury

Our evening meetings continue to attract a steady stream of members. Andrew Grant of DoC attended our October 1993 meeting

and gave us a most interesting talk about his work on South East Island. In November, Amanda Freeman discussed her studies of the Westland Petrel.

Andrew Crossland led our November field trip, a survey of the lower 20 kms of the Ashley River. Four pairs of Wrybills and a Common Sandpiper were among the birds counted. Sadly, Andrew will be leaving us in March for an extended overseas trip; he will be sorely missed as he is a tireless worker for our Society. The November wader count at Lake Ellesmere was combined with our Christmas break-up and all helpers, plus some family members, met at Colin Hill's farm after their work for a barbecue lunch. The weather was kind and a good time was had by all.

The lower Waipara River had 6 pairs of Black-fronted Dotterels this year. One nest was found and two small chicks seen subsequently.

Not a lot of exciting birds were seen over the summer holidays, the most notable were 2 Mongolian Dotterels, a banded Black Stilt, a Japanese Snipe, 2 Pomarine Skuas, a Spine-tailed Swift, 4 White-winged Black Terns, and 250 Wrybills.

An English visitor stayed with us for a few days in January; David Rosair is writing the text for a new book A photographic guide to the waders of the world. We look forward to seeing his book next year.

Nesting Pied Stilts were hard to find this season and only chicks were colour banded.

(Sheila Petch)

#### Southland

Only eight members took part in our summer wader census, so we did not have a very good coverage of Southland's extensive estuaries and harbours.

There are at least 13 Royal Spoonbill nests on Omaui Island, and a possible population of nearly 50 birds.

Weekly beach patrols on Oreti Beach have produced little variety in the past few months. A few Sooty Shearwaters, Short-tailed Shearwaters, Diving Petrels, and Fairy Prions providing the bulk of the finds.

Visiting ornithologists continue to be delighted with the waders at Awarua Bay, the seabirds of Foveaux Strait, and the variety of species available on Stewart Island. We are happy to provide advice to anyone intending to visit the island and are always glad to see visiting ornithologists.

Maida Barlow and Gary Morgan have continued their Caspian Tern work. There were 47 nests on the shellbank in the Invercargill Estuary this season and about 56 chicks were raised.

An immature Rook was spotted recently at Mason Bay, Stewart Island. Also at Mason Bay was a pair of Variable Oystercatchers, and one of these was pied. Usually these birds are exclusively black at this latitude.

(Lloyd Esler)

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