



OSNZ news

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for the members of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand (Inc.)
Please note that sightings recorded in this Newsletter are subject
to confirmation.

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Note Deadline for the September issue will be
20th August.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE & AGM 1990

The Society's Annual Conference & AGM was held at Marsden Collegiate, Wellington, during the weekend of 11-13 May. Friday evening got us off to a relaxed start, with early arrivals gathering in the vicinity of the bar to renew acquaintances and catch up on happenings and sightings of the past 12 months.

The theme of the short talks on Saturday Afternoon was member's projects. Jenny Hawkins told us about the banding study of Black-backed Gulls on the Nelson Boulder bank. Despite Jenny's assurances about the beauty of the gulls I think a lot of members remained unconvinced, particularly after learning how the nesting materials used by the gulls varied with the rubbish being generated by the citizens of the nearby urban area. Paul Sagar then spoke about the study he and Donald Geddes are undertaking on the breeding of oystercatchers on farmland in mid Canterbury. While they have obtained some interesting results these weren't obtained easily because they soon found that oystercatchers are intelligent; some field trips were very frustrating because the birds outwitted the observers!

Michael & David Bell then gave an excellent account of their backyard bird banding study. After experimenting with a cardboard box trap they graduated to a mist net and during the past 3 years have banded about 2200 birds - Greenfinches and Silvereyes being the most common species. Their slides showed their well set up banding hut and detailed note taking; an example of just what can be achieved without leaving home.

The Avon-Heathcote Estuary is close to home for Andrew Crossland, who is about half way through a 10-year project of regular counts. The numbers and variety of birds recorded at the estuary show just how important it is for waterbirds and how

their numbers vary with time of year and between years. The possibility that there is a regular migration of Welcome Swallows in the New Zealand region was discussed by Derek Onley. Using his counts of swallows and their nests on the West Coast, references to swallows in CSN, and reports of swallows at sea Derek certainly provided us with something which warrants further investigation.

Interesting comparisons of bird numbers in Otago and Wellington Harbours during surveys conducted 11 years apart were presented by Peter Schweigman and Hugh Robertson. Peter reviewed the results of Otago Harbour counts conducted in 1977 & 1988, showing how there had been significant decreases between count periods in the numbers of Black-backed Gulls, Black-billed Gulls, and Red-billed Gulls; while numbers of Little Shags and Mallards had increased. Hugh reviewed the results of Wellington Harbour surveys conducted in 1975/77 and 1986/87. Between these count periods there were significant increases in the numbers of Little Shags, Little Black Shags, and Spotted Shags; the numbers of Mallards and Variable Oystercatchers also increased. There had been a slight decrease in the numbers of Black-backed Gulls and while the numbers of Giant Petrels had also decreased the distribution of this species showed a remarkable change with the birds favouring a particular effluent outfall.

A novel way of obtaining recoveries of banded birds was explained by Peter Reese. His study at the University of Canterbury involves banding nestlings, with Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, and Redpolls the commonest accessible species. Most of his recoveries came from birds which were killed by flying into glass-walled walkways on the campus. Local cats had also

discovered this source of a free lunch and Peter had to institute prompt and regular checks below the walkways; otherwise all he found were a few feathers.

Finally, Kerry Oates described a study of territories and breeding success of Blue Ducks on a section of the Maunganui-A-Te-Ao River.

All these talks illustrated what a valuable and interesting contribution to NZ ornithology can be made by individual and small groups of OSNZ members.

The afternoon session finished with Lou Gurr presenting an entertaining account of his reminiscences of personalities and events associated with the early days of the Society. Alan Wright then gave an illustrated account of the new Black Stilt enclosure and observation hide at Twizel.

We were treated to a fine meal that evening and after the AGM the bar ensured that discussions went on into the small hours.

We reconvened on Sunday morning to hear Sandy Bartle present a stimulating review of the transequatorial migrations of gadfly petrels in the Pacific. Facts and figures flowed freely as Sandy demonstrated the fragile situation of some populations and highlighted gaps in our knowledge.

The rest of the morning was spent in workshops where Brian Bell showed us banding procedures, Ralph Powlesland explained beach patrolling and provided tips on identification of beach-washed seabirds, Ben Bell explained moult, Rob Guest explained the procedures for reporting rare birds, and Hugh Robertson promoted the Nest Record Scheme. These workshops were very informative and just

Dotterels; however, after a lot of hard work (and waiting) 126 adults were caught and 78 chicks were also colour-banded. Compared with Banded Dotterels, colour bands on stilts have proved much easier to see, and with the regional colour coding system it is easy to work out where the birds have come from.

Eight long-distance movements (500+ km) have been reported already, but much checking of flocks still has to be done this winter.

The plan is to continue colour-banding in spring 1990 and to see if the few pairs that were colour-banded remain together in the same place, and to see if juveniles return to their natal colony at one year of age.

3. Register of OSNZ projects

No progress has been made with this, but it will be taken up with RRs again.

4. Advice on projects

On behalf of the Nelson & Marlborough regions, I successfully applied for a group permit to colour band Royal Spoonbills at Vernon Lagoons, Marlborough, for the next 2 seasons. The regions had unsuccessfully sought a banding permit last year. In my application I had to include considerable details about band sizes, age at banding, and handling of birds that I had obtained from Dr Kim Lowe (Director of the Australian Bird & Bat Banding Scheme).

I also provided some statistical advice to Dr Peter Bull about his analysis of Nest Record cards for finch nests.

5. New studies

Reports from around the country over the past year suggest that the numbers of Royal Spoonbills have increased markedly, with record numbers being recorded at many localities. Whether this increase is due to an invasion from Australia, or due to a good breeding season at the Otago, Marlborough, and Okarito colonies is not clear.

Following a very successful census of Royal Spoonbills in the Otago region, Peter Schweigman has suggested that OSNZ undertakes nationwide counts to determine the population and breeding productivity of Royal Spoonbills. RRs decided to conduct a winter count in conjunction with the national wader census and a summer count on 6 February, Waitangi Day. Peter Schweigman will coordinate these counts.

OSNZ undertook a national count of Royal Spoonbills 10 years ago and although the results were not published, they will make an interesting comparison with the current series of counts.

6. Contact with overseas organisations

A recent visit to NW Australia allowed me to have discussions with Dr Phil Moors (Director, RAOU) about the New Zealand content of species accounts in the

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. I re-issued my invitation to make available data from the OSNZ Nest Record Scheme. The presence of 4 New Zealanders on the recent RAOU NW Australia Wader Expedition should serve to further increase trans-Tasman cooperation in wader studies.

7. Applications for funds from the Projects Assistance Reserve

Grants approved in 1989 were:
\$ 350 - Kerry Oates, Blue Duck study (plus \$1000 loan).
\$ 200 - Chris Jowett, bird predator study (MSc).
\$1000 - Nest Record Scheme.
\$ 200 - Ron Moorhouse, Kaka study (PhD). \$2500 - Pied Stilt Study Group.
\$ 200 - Colleen Cassidy, Fiordland Crested Penguin study (MSc).
\$ 200 - Andrew Cummins, NZ Dotterel study (MSc).
\$2500 - David Butler et al., Nelson bird book (loan).
\$ 200 - David Crockett, Black-backed Gull study.
\$ 200 - Richard Maloney, Robin study (MSc).
\$ 200 - Sarah Stokes, Scaup study (MSc).
\$ 250 - Barrie Heather, Black-fronted Dotterel study. One request for funds was received by Council at its May meeting.
\$ 700 - Gabor Lovei, for passerine study in the Manawatu. Council decided to buy \$500 worth of equipment to loan to the study, and to grant \$200 for travel and other costs.

HUGH ROBERTSON
Field Investigation Officer

Annual Report of the Rare Birds Committee 1989-90

There have been some changes in the composition of the Committee this year, prompted by the election of Brian Bell to President. The Committee was augmented by Ray Pierce and Paddy Latham - both extremely experienced and capable field observers. Ray also brings specialist knowledge of the waders, whilst Paddy has valuable experience with the rarer terns.

Fourteen records were received in the past 12 months. Of these, 11 have been accepted by the Committee (see below).

Two records were not formally circulated as they were sightings of escaped waterfowl and partly albino Blackbird. Two records were regrettably not able to be accepted by the Committee. The first was a sighting of an American Golden Plover. Whilst the report was detailed, and most members of the Committee instinctively felt the identification by the observers was correct, the reliable feature for separation of this species from Pacific Golden Plover was not noted. American authorities who were consulted advised against acceptance without this vital information. As this would have been a first

sighting for NZ, the Committee exercised caution and the report has been recorded as a probable sighting. The other record was of a vagrant goshawk in the Horowhenua. The various sightings were sufficient to indicate the bird was in fact a goshawk, but were not satisfactory to determine the species. Unfortunately the presence of the bird was not widely known at the time.

A series of sightings of "Commic" Terns is still circulating the Committee.

The following records were accepted by the Committee in the year to 31 March 1990.

Soft-plumaged Petrel - 2 sightings at sea east of North Cape (33° 12'S 177° 22'E, 34° 41'S 176° 50'E) on 13/11/89 (A. Tennyson & G. Taylor).

Christmas Island Shearwater - 1 ashore on Curtis Island, Kermadecs, on 10/11/89 (A. Tennyson & G. Taylor).

Brown Booby - an adult at Whitianga Bay, East Cape, on 29/7/89 (M. Draper & W. King).

Reef Heron (white phase) - 1 at the Avon-Heathcote Estuary on 7 & 8/6/87. With re-evaluation of an earlier record, this is now assumed to be the first NZ sighting (A. Crossland).

Yellow-billed Spoonbill - 1 at Te Whiti on 12/12/80. The second record for NZ (T. Dennison & C. Scadden).

Northern Shoveler - a pair at Pauri Lake, Wanganui, 19-23/8/89 (P. Battley & I. Saville).

Oriental Dotterel - 1 at Lake Ellesmere between 9/2/89 and 14/3/89 (K. Harrison).

Common Tern - 1 on 28/11/87, 2 on 28/11/87 at Bowentown Shellbanks, Bay of Plenty (B. Chudleigh).

Brown Noddy - about 25 pairs breeding on Curtis Island, Kermadecs, in October-November 1989. The first record for NZ (A. Tennyson & G. Taylor).

Barn Owl - 1 on South Kaipara Head in February 1986 (S. Nicholls).

Satin Flycatcher - a male, dead on the beach at Motueka Sandspit, 26/12/88 (A. Crossland).

ROB GUEST
Secretary Rare Birds Committee

Report of the Banding Liaison Officer

During the past year I commented to the Banding Officer (Department of Conservation) on nine application for new banding permits or extensions to existing ones. I understand all these applications were eventually approved, either in full or in part. The Scheme seems to be running well and the only complaint I received concerned the Banding Office policy of not providing bands for birds being released after rehabilitation from injury. The main