

DUNEDIN BRANCH PO Box 5793, Moray Place, Dunedin 9058

BRANCH NEWSLETTER MAY 2016

Notice of the Annual General Meeting

The 2015 Dunedin Branch AGM will be held on Tuesday 17th May from 5:30 pm at:

Benham Seminar Room Second floor room 215 Zoology Benham Building University of Otago

Nibbles and drinks will be available, with a gold-coin-minimum donation requested from attendees. Please be on time as we have to hold the door open.

Following the AGM, Forest and Bird Chief Executive Officer, Hone McGregor, will speak on -

'Tangata whenua, the Key player in Conservation in the 21st century'

Nominations for the Branch Management Committee:- Chairpersons, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee members would be welcomed and should be sent to the secretary Janet Ledingham at jledingham@xtra.co.nz (ph. 03 467 2960) or posted to Forest and Bird Dunedin Branch, PO Box 5793, Moray Place, Dunedin 9058 no later than May 13th.

2016 Events Programme (June-December)

The Branch programme of indoor meetings and field trips for the next 6 months comes out with this newsletter.

The Programme sub-committee always tries hard to arrange talks and field trips in conjunction with relevant conservation issues. We hope you will join us to attend some of these.

Any queries re the programme please contact Janet Ledingham, jledingham@xtra.co.nz, 467 2960.

Field trips in the last 6 months



The AAPES crew who helped us greatly

Of the Field Trips since May all have been enjoyed, particularly the great day up on the Maungatua with Sir Alan Mark. The Aramoana day was less well attended but thanks to six keen students from the student AAPES group (see photo above)we made good progress on weeding the track to the boardwalk. It was great to have them along.

The new programme through to the end of the year has topical talks and field trips and we urge you to support them.

We have talks on everything from 'Native bees of NZ' and the 'Botanical gems of Stewart Island' through to ones on the newly described Otago shag species, Skua research in Antarctica (rescheduled from May), and both a talk and a field trip on NZ sea lions and on the outcomes of the SE Marine Protection Forum.

News from the South-East Marine Protection Forum - from Sue Maturin

The Forum set up to identify and recommend marine areas for protection from Timaru to Waipapa Point in the Catlins, has released a series of maps that show areas under discussion by the Forum. https://south-eastmarine.org.nz/oursea/maps-under-discussion/.

The areas shown have been identified as possible options for further consideration for marine protection. Forest and Bird's Regional Conservation Manager represents the Environment Sector on the Forum. She says that the maps are very preliminary as the Forum will be considering these and possibly other areas over the next few months before they release a formal report for consultation sometime in October."

In the meantime Sue suggests that you visit the Forum's website as she is keen to hear what you think or know about the areas under discussion, and especially if there are some areas that are not included in the Maps.

The forum's task is to protect marine biodiversity by establishing a comprehensive network of MPA's that is representative of the south-east Otago area. MPA's include marine reserves and other forms of protection such

as customary fisheries management, marine mammal sanctuaries, Fisheries Act tools, or special legislation. See

http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservat ion/marine-and-coastal/marine-protectedareas/mpa-policy-and-implementationplan.pdf. The Policy and implementation plan expect that at least one sample of each habitat or ecosystem type will be protected in a marine reserve. Otago has a very rich marine diversity which includes bryozoan reefs, kelp beds, canyons, inshore reefs, deep water reefs,



islands, headlands, beaches, estuaries, sea grass, shallow and deep sandy and muddy bottoms, as well as habitats for sea lions, seals, penguins, whales, dolphins and sea birds. You can find out where all these habitats and ecosystems are by looking at the Forums interactive map and data base, and see if you can design some marine reserves to represent all these and other habitats.

http://www.seasketch.org/#projecthomepage/5331eff529d8f11a2ed3dd04/about

We know that once it was possible to collect paua and crayfish without donning a wetsuit, giant grouper could be caught or seen close inshore. Now these fish are only found way out in the deep water. Otago does not have any marine reserves, or a net work of protected areas and this is an opportunity to make sure that future generations may be able to experience the richness of the seas that our grandparents and ancestors enjoyed.

The Forum faces a tough job as it's members which include iwi, commercial fishers, recreational fishers, scientists, tourism and environmental interests are required to seek to establish a consensus on the proposed protected areas. You can help by giving Sue ideas and information, or letting her know what you think about marine reserves and what sorts of other protected areas you might support and then taking part in the consultation in November. Email Sue with Marine protection in the subject line s.maturin@forestandbird.org.nz or phone 03 477 9677

Forest and Bird Climate Disruption Road Show

New Zealand's leading science body the Royal Society has warned in a new report that up to 70 New Zealand native species could go extinct by the end of the century because of climate change.

In the second half on this year Forest and Bird will be organising a roadshow on climate disruption and you will hear more about it in coming months.

Before the road show we are keen to learn about what you are doing to reduce your emissions so that we can share success stories from the region.

Email Sue with climate in the subject line s.maturin@forestandbird.org.nz

Summer with a Sealion Pup

Janet Ledingham reports on encounters with a sealion pup

In late December 2015, DOC ranger Jim Fyfe and Bradley Curnow of the Aramoana Conservation Trust observed a pregnant sealion, Patti, while picking up an injured penguin at Big Beach. Jim thought Patti was very close to giving birth. On 27 January, I also saw her, and then early on the morning of the 29th— in a sheltered spot beside rocks and above high-tide level at the far end of the beach — I came upon Patti and a pup. The placenta was still lying on the beach, so Pup must have arrived overnight.



Patti and Pup – newborn.

I called in to see Bradley with the good news, and he drew up a roster of members and friends to keep an eye on the pair. For some days, at low tide periods, volunteers watched the pair to make sure they weren't harassed in any way.

On the first day, I had the initial watch and all was peaceful, then Adrian Hall who followed me had the unpleasant experience of seeing a large male pounding up the beach and making straight for Patti. She did not welcome his advances, and there was an intense struggle for some time. Fortunately, Pup got out of the way and things calmed down. In subsequent days, the male was with them on the odd occasion but mostly sleeping rather than harassing Patti.



The large male, Patti and Pup, day 3 after birth.

Pup thrived. Checking on the pair added an extra bonus to my daily walks.

Patti, as far as we know, first left Pup to go fishing about 9 days after the birth. On 14 January, when Pup was 16 days old, I found the baby sealion alone and alerted Jim, who wanted to tag her. The deed was done that afternoon. Pup was found to be a female, tagged as 9031.

For the pair, 22 January was a big day. As I went to go past Keyhole rock, the sealions emerged from the water, having swum along from where they were located previously and come up on the beach. With rest stops for Pup, they headed along towards the Mole and spent a few days on the beach, in the scrub and also up on the road. Late in the day, road cones had to be borrowed to protect Pup who was on the road at one point while Patti was away.

On 27 January, Pup and Patti were seen by the Spit cribs. They settled into the beach and tree and shrub cover by the Pilot houses. Pup sometimes played by the rocks or stayed up by the trees while Patti was away. Another young female, Nuki, seemed to act as an aunt.





Left: Stopping to read the 'watch out for the sealions' notice on the way to the Mole end of the beach . Right: Pup at 9 days, Patti away fishing.

On 10 March, I saw Pup and Patti emerge from the Pilot House gateway. I thought it was to be another swimming lesson. Then later in the day Jim and Steve Broni and other Sealion Trust members saw them coming up Papanui inlet, a big swim for a just over 10-weeks-old sealion pup.

I first saw them at Papanui down on the mudflats sleeping, two days after the big swim. They have settled happily into their new patch where they both have lots of sealion company and I visit them at least weekly. Pup 9031-also known as "Janet"! - is now, as Jim predicted, moulting and turning into a silver spirit. Long may she live and breed.





Left: Pup, middle, and pup 9040 with a young male along the Okia boundary fence just near Pup's favourite play pool.

Right: Pup – aka "Janet" – is moulting and turning into a silver spirit.

About 5 of this year's pups now seem to be at Papanui, and 4 others at Hoopers Inlet. Sadly one of this years pups was killed by a shark, and another by causes unknown, but it has still been a good season. The most sealions I have seen at one time at Papanui has been 31, an underestimate I think as there were bound to have been some hiding in the dunes and scrub. I have seen some huge handsome males, females large and small, half-grown bully-boys and in all, four pups.

I have not been impressed by certain human behaviour. While many people respect the sealions, others let dogs run free, and it was after a particularly busy beach weekend that Patti left with Pup for Papanui. Problems with dogs have also occurred this year at other Dunedin beaches where there have been pups. Sealions are endangered and need our help. Any sealion harassment should be photographed if possible and reported to DOC immediately.

Motu Maha/ Maungahua - The Auckland Islands

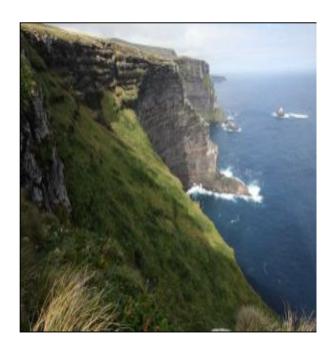
Branch Committee member and research biologist Kalinka Rexer-Huber reports on her day job as a seabird biologist on the Auckland Islands

Most of my work is seabird conservation research on subantarctic islands. Albatrosses and petrels often get caught as by-catch in commercial fisheries, and are affected by introduced mammals like rats and cats when on land. The New Zealand Subantarctic Islands are hotspots of seabird life, so as researchers we ask questions like: How many birds are there, Where do they go, How are they doing? We are funded by the Department of Conservation, which manages the subantarctic islands, the fishing industry, and universities like the University of Otago. They use our research to inform management decisions. Our work last summer was also supported by the J S Watson Trust, which is administered by Forest and Bird.

Although they're part of New Zealand, the Auckland Islands lie about 465 kilometres south of Bluff. They're quite hard to get to: we have to charter a boat and sail for several days through the Roaring 40s and Furious 50s. They

are one of the world's special, unique places. Nowhere else can you see a falcon chasing a light-mantled sooty albatross high above roaring sea cliffs. Most of the animals are only found there. The Gibson's wandering albatross, for example, only breeds in the Auckland islands. The very shy Auckland Island rail is only found on two islands in the Auckland Island group, and nowhere else in the world.





Left: Gibson's wandering albatross. Right: Cliff ledge on Adams Island

In 1998 the Auckland Islands were designated a World Heritage Site because of their extraordinary natural riches. The island we work on, Adams Island, is among the most pristine places on the planet – it has never had pest plants or animals, so everything we see belongs there.

We mostly work on the 'tops', the windswept slopes and cliffs on the southern side of the island. The cliffs are quite inspiring – in places they drop 400–500m into the Southern Ocean. If we're working with the albatrosses, we spend the day on a windy plateau high above the sea, walking from nest to nest and checking the birds and eggs. Or we might be working with petrels, so we scramble down to the cliff–ledges where they breed. There's only a few ledges that are safe to access, but even there we need to work especially carefully since the cliff drops a long way below.

It will rain at some point during the day – it rains every day, sometimes for a short squall, sometimes as hail, sometimes as dense wet fog that sticks around. The wind drives waterfalls upwards, creating upfalls that never reach the sea. These are very wet islands.





Left: Graham Parker finding a route down to a cliff shelf. Right: Upfalls

Our work contributes in a small way to maintaining what is unique and special about these islands. This summer, for example, we did the first 'census' of white-chinned petrels on Adams Island. These birds dig a long burrow in the ground and nest at the end, so we spent a lot of time lying flat on the ground with an arm deep in a muddy burrow. In digging their burrows, seabirds introduce the riches of the sea to the islands, which helps maintain the lush vegetation.

We found that white-chinned petrels only breed on the cliffs ledges on the south of the island. To find burrows, we crawl around under and wade through the dark green spiky megaherb *Anisotome latifolia*. From this, we estimate how many breeding white-chinned petrels there are on the island. Importantly, white-chinned petrels are caught in huge numbers as by-catch in commercial fisheries, so a population estimate helps answer questions like what the impact of fisheries bycatch is on the species, and what we can do about it.





Left: White-chinned petrel burrows. Right: White-chinned petrel with Kalinka at its burrow

- If you're interested in reading more about the Auckland Islands:
 <u>http://www.doc.govt.nz/parks-and-recreation/places-to-go/southland/places/subantarctic-islands/auckland-islands/</u>
- (All photographs Graham Parker / Kalinka Rexer-Huber. For more images of the work we do, please see: http://www.parkerconservation.co.nz/index.php/gallery-and-news/
- See also the Forest and Bird Best Fish Guide: http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/best-fish-guide-13-14

Yellow-Eyed Penguins in Crisis – New Initiatives offering Hope

Dave McFarlane, Field Manager for the Yellow-Eyed Penguin Charitable Trust and Branch Committee Member, writes on new initiatives offering hope in the struggle to save this endangered endemic species.

Season summary -

The knock on effect of the last 6 seasons of indifferent breeding success for yellow-eyed penguins (*Megadyptes antipodes*) is once again evident, with many fewer nests and therefore chicks fledging along the mainland coast of Otago / Southland and on Stewart Island.

There were 203 active nest sites recorded at mainland sites, around half of the 400 usually found On Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust reserves a similar pattern was apparent, with fledging numbers at Long Point - Irahuka and Cosgrove Creek at 22 chicks and 12 chicks respectively, well down from the 80 and 18 chicks that fledged annually as recently as the 2012/13 season.

At the Southland F&B Te Rere Reserve, nest numbers were up in 2015/16 from 7 to 12, still only half of the longer term average. 18 chicks fledged at an average weight of 5.06kg. In an ironic twist, the condition of the fledging

chicks was generally excellent, with average fledging weights of over 5kg and the heaviest chick ever recorded at the Trust's Otapahi Reserve on Otago Peninsula being measured at 6.85kg.

Yellow-eyed penguin survival at this northern limit of their range remains on a knife edge and has been the driving impetus for the Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust in developing some significant conservation initiatives. In an important departure from previous practice the Trust is now very conscious that it is no longer simply managing a population of yellow-eyed penguins but that the welfare of individual animals must be safe guarded.

Trust Science and Veterinary Roles

In the first of two significant developments the Trust has appointed a conservation scientist to advise and lead research with emphasis around marine issues affecting yellow-eyed penguin productivity. For too long the mysteries of the marine ecology of yellow-eyed penguins has been exactly that, a mystery. In an almost unprecedented move for a New Zealand conservation NGO the appointment of Dr Trudi Webster brings science alongside our conservation management.

In another development, spurred on by the number of yellow-eyed penguins suffering from barracouta bites in the January – February 2015 breeding season, the Trust ran a highly successful fund raising campaign to employ a specialist wildlife vet over the busy and challenging fledging / adult moult period.

Dr Lisa Argilla, previously employed by the Massey University Veterinary School and Wellington Zoo, was contracted for 6 weeks and operated on 18 yellow-eyed penguins (13 adults and five chicks), travelling hundreds of kilometres to retrieve injured penguins from up and down the coast. Of concern was the realisation that the majority of injured yellow-eyed penguins were female.

Dr Argilla's contribution was outstanding, operating and stitching badly bitten penguins and relieving the suffering of some, where euthanasia was the only option. Sue Murray (Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust General Manager) commented that: "Without Lisa and her passionate commitment to the welfare of these endangered penguins many more would have died, further compounding an already difficult situation".

Indeed the success of Dr Argilla's work has highlighted the need for a much more organised and systematic approach to providing wildlife veterinary services in the southern South Island of New Zealand. A meeting was recently held in Dunedin to explore the case for establishing a wildlife hospital.

<u>The Riddle of the Burgan Skink – S.O.S.</u>

Most of us haven't heard of *Oligosoma burganae*. According to Wellington-based herpetologist Geoff Patterson, *O. burganae* was originally assumed to be the common skink, until later identified as an independent species wholly confined to a small area on the Rock and Pillars/Lammermoor. The species was named from a specimen found near Burgan Stream.

The Burgan skink has a glossy appearance, a yellow/grey ventral colour, and dorsal coloration varying from moderate olive to dark olive-brown (occasionally black), with irregular flecks. Unlike many of its cousins in the *Oligosoma* genus, it has only three supraocular scales (ie enlarged scales above the eye), and its head is noticeably blunter and deeper than other closely related species.

The predominant vegetation in Burgan skink habitat is short and tall tussock grassland, and the species' preferred microhabitat is herbs and shrubs rather than rocks and grasses. Burgan skinks eat a range of invertebrates, particularly spiders, as well as berries from several shrub species such as snowberry (*Gaultheria depressa*). They are territorial, defending their sites from other skinks, but this microhabitat preference allows them to coexist with other species.

Burgan skinks hibernate in the winter, reproducing in mid-late summer. The maximum litter size is about six. Abdominal fat has been noted to increase during summer, presumably to aid them during hibernation. Tails

likewise have been observed as relatively emaciated in spring, but become plumper over summer as the skinks increase their fat reserves.



Oligosoma burganae

Over the past 3 decades this skink seems to have suffered a drastic drop in numbers at the original site in the Rock and Pillars and is currently classed at being 'Nationally Critical'. The latest very recent survey funded by DOC found none at the original site but a few animals in three other areas. There are maybe other species either worse off or in a similar situation. The knowledge base of Otago skinks and geckos is so limited that we just do not know whether this species decline is typical of most Otago skinks or simply what has occurred on the Rock and Pillar Range/Lammermoor area. Much much more work is required throughout the province to ascertain the status of so much of our unique wildlife.

More research is desperately needed to identify the species' current population status and trends, establish its known range, and identify potential threats.

Email the Honourable Maggie Barrie, Minister for Conservation, at Maggie.Barry@parliament.govt.nz to ask why the Government insists on reducing funding to the Department of Conservation so that they are unable to carry out vital research to inform recovery strategies for this and other endangered skink species and to urge her to advocate for more funding for this vital research.

Newsletter prepared by Richard Reeve and Janet Ledingham