Forest & Bird
GIVING NATURE A VOICE

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South Canterbury Branch Newsletter 2017/02

Evening meetings are held at St John's Hall, Wai-iti Road, Timaru, on the third Thursday of the month, and start at 7.30 pm, unless noted otherwise.

A donation, ideally $5 or more, to cover hall hire and expenses would be appreciated.

A warm welcome is extended to many new members - thank you for joining Forest and Bird. The Committee would really like to know about the things that interest you, e.g. Committee work, suggestions for speakers, writing submissions, help with supper, penguin monitoring, general volunteering in our local conservation areas.....So please make yourself known at evening meetings, or make contact via this email address or by phone (numbers at the bottom of this newsletter).

Programme June - August 2017

Thursday 15 June, Evening meeting, 7.30 pm

Tekapo to Queenstown - Section hiking the Te Araroa.

Forest and Bird member Tony Doy recently spent 4 weeks walking some of the country's longest track, Te Araroa. Come and enjoy his photographs of this very scenic part of the trail, and hear about his experiences.

Thursday 20 July, Evening meeting, 7.30 pm

Reclaiming South Georgia - the defeat of furry invaders on a sub-Antarctic island.

Denis Browne will talk about his experience of being involved with eradicating rats and mice on South Georgia in the southern Atlantic Ocean.

Having arrived with whaling ships, these rodents were eating their way through literally millions of vulnerable seabirds and their chicks. An international team of rat eradicators, brightly coloured helicopters and tonnes of rodenticide bait, a small British charity, the South Georgia Heritage Trust, set about fixing the problem.

Endangered South Georgian Pipit

Eradication team at work

Photos: Roland Gockel

Thursday 17 August, Evening meeting, 7.30 pm

A collection of New Zealand birds.

Since retiring from farming, Alistair Beeby has had time to indulge his passion for photographing wildlife. Alistair and his wife Heather will share some of their experiences in capturing his award-winning photographs of many of our local birds.

Black stilt/Kaki

Royal spoonbill

Photos: Alistair Beeby

Advance notice:

Thursday 23 November, Evening meeting, 7.00 pm

Between a rock and a cold place - the story of glaciation in the Rangitata Valley

Jamie Shulmeister will describe how ice advanced and retreated through the Rangitata Valley numerous times during the last ice age with a focus on the Butler and Brabazon Downs and the Lake Clearwater area, which was part of the Rangitata Glacier. His well-illustrated talk will explain the landforms and sediments left behind and what the glaciers tell us about climate change in New Zealand.

Jamie is a Professor of Geography (Geomorphology) at the University of Queensland, Australia. Previously based at the University of Canterbury, he has worked on the glacial history of various parts of South Island for nearly 20 years and has active projects in the Waimakariri and Clutha

Valleys. This talk is a summary of more than 10 years' work in the Rangitata and Ashburton Lakes area.

Towards Mt Potts from the Rangitata Photo: Jamie Shulmeister

NB: This meeting is on the 4th Thursday of November, not the 3rd.
Also, the meeting will start at 7 pm as this is our end-of-year meeting. Please bring some food, savoury or dessert, to share with coffee/tea before Jamie's presentation.

Regular Events

Kakahu Bush care days

Kakahu Bush calls on the first Saturday of the month, except January. The dates for the rest of the year are: 3 June, 1 July, 5 August, 2 September, 7 October, 4 November, 2 December.

Meet at the historic limestone kiln on Hall Road at 9:30 am. **Bring food and fluid to keep you going, and prickle proof clothing for protection.** Any questions, John Talbot 03 614 7896 by 8:30 am in the morning. For car-pooling from Timaru, ring Fraser Ross 03 684 3382

News

A tribute to ‘Bella’

In 2008 I started surveying a gully with native bush and shrublands for lizards. It turned out that this gully had the best remaining jewelled gecko population in South Canterbury. Over the years, I have been back many times and monitored the population. Back then there was very little known about jewelled geckos in our region, so this population provided the opportunity to study this rare and attractive gecko more closely and learn more about the species. This was helped by the fact that each gecko has an individual pattern on its back, so animals with a clearly distinguishable pattern can be identified at the time of the observation or later on photos.

One of the results is that our monitoring has shown there are many changes and movements in a particular habitat, but there is also a stable group of females who ‘occupy a territory’, that is they are seen regularly in the same spot. From the year 2009 when monitoring started , there were at least seven females seen regularly over a number of years. One of them is in the photo at the top of this newsletter.

Another one is named ‘Bella’, because she has her home in section B of the area and she was beautiful. The first time Bella was recorded and photographed was on 14 March 2009 as the ‘poster girl’ for the lizard exhibition at the Timaru Museum. Since then up until last summer Bella has been observed on 81 days, on many days more than once. While she has been seen on various shrubs, mainly coprosma and matagouri, she always stayed in a particular spot within a radius of about 10 metres.

She has been the most reliable of all jewelled geckos I have seen, but she has never been seen from May to mid-August, a clear indication that jewelled geckos in our region hibernate. On the August date, it also became apparent that she had given birth, establishing that South Canterbury geckos give birth in early spring.

While the other original females have disappeared over the years, mostly around 2013/14, Bella was always back on one shrub or another. However, this autumn she did not show up at all. The last observation of her was on 30 Dec 2016. What happened? We do not know. Most likely she fell prey to one of the many predators when she moved onto the ground from one shrub to another. Or she might just have died of old age.

Her age is not known, but she must have been at least ten years old as she was already a full-

grown adult when she was first observed in 2009. During those years, she must have given birth to at least 16 baby geckos. Hopefully some of them will help to carry on her legacy. Or she might be still alive and just decided in her ripe age to move to a new spot somewhere in the wider area.

Hermann Frank

Beautiful Bella on 18 March 2011 Photo: Hermann Frank

Pekapeka Protection Project

Trapping in a local riverbed is continuing, and recently the first mustelid was caught – a ferret. This is exciting as mustelids tend to be very wary and difficult to catch. The trapping team has been trialling salmon feed pellets donated by the Mt Cook Alpine Salmon Company at Twizel. The pellets were recommended by a 'follower' on the Pekapeka Protection Project Facebook page. The pellets have an extremely strong, not particularly pleasant scent and the trappers suspect (although are not able to conclusively prove) that the pellets may have attracted the ferret.

Self-setting A24 traps were purchased some for rats and stoats, and a couple have been placed in the field recently. A camera to monitor traps and roosting sites has been placed with the A24 traps to investigate the behaviour of the pests in the vicinity of the traps. It is hoped that the video footage may provide some useful insight.

Traps ready to go, and Jenna Hughes-Games helping out with trap checking - ferret!

Battle for our Birds monitoring results

Monitoring shows that at-risk native species are protected by predator control programmes. Researchers have tracked species such as kākā, mohua, rock wren, kea, robin, rifleman and bats to determine their survival and breeding success.

Bats, unlike other species, cannot be moved to pest-free sites. Hence, without predator control, they are likely to become extinct. For the past 15 years pests have been controlled in the Eglington Valley in Fiordland, with a mix of traps and poison bait stations, and as result the monitored long-tailed bat colony has increased four-fold. The colony was tracked after 1080 treatment. No adverse effects on the bats were found, and the colony continues to increase in size.

For more information on other species check out the link: http://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/battle-for-our-birds/battle-for-our-birds-monitoring-results/

Conways Bush

A good number of 'Weedbusters' removed 1,557 weed seedlings from within the Reserve on a beautiful Saturday in April. Predominantly sycamore, some ash, and in smaller numbers: male

fern, holly, cotoneaster, hawthorn, violet, forget me not were removed. A new plant pest, privet, was found and removed. This plant has the potential to increase and spread.
Over the summer months the bush boundary fences have been maintained. Further work may be needed to make them totally stock proof from cattle in particular, which graze on the adjoining property from time to time. Advice and effective fence upgrading and help with implementation would be welcome.
Please contact the field officer or the secretary if you are able to assist.

Sycamore control along the Waihi River

Steve Dakin, a member residing adjacent to Conways Bush at Woodbury has instigated a control programme to get rid of sycamore trees, to reduce the source of seeding trees. ECan has kindly provided some funding for a contractor to target the largest trees in the Waihi, in the vicinity of Clarke and Rae Roads. Timaru District Council has also chipped in to eradicate weed pests on an Esplanade Reserve in the area.
A track along the south bank of the Waihi is being re-opened by volunteers in order to gain access to the target trees. A working bee will be held every Tuesday from 10 am to noon. All volunteers are welcome, take loppers along. Additional working bees may be held. For further information please contact Steve Dakin, phone 03 693 2931

Vegetation clearance in the hill country

Significant natural areas on local hill country have recently been converted from native vegetation to exotic pasture. This has been done by aerial spraying with herbicides then top dressing and sowing. Such conversions enable increased stocking rates on steeper hill slopes. Research shows that native vegetation cover helps to stabilise soils and reduce and control water run-off and flows. Therefore, the impacts of such conversions are of great concern for the following reasons:

- loss of native vegetation and biodiversity values
- potential loss of soil
- increased water runoff

- increased sediment loading into wetlands, streams and lakes
- potential reduction in water quality

Water users lower down in the catchments are often adversely affected, as is the little remaining biodiversity in the lower reaches.

Riverbed habitats threatened

Globally, braided rivers are rare. New Zealand is a braided river hot-spot, and 59% of braided rivers are in Canterbury. The Canterbury Plains were formed by sediment and gravel carried from the Southern Alps by braided rivers.

In recent years, significant areas of local riverbeds have become choked with exotic weeds such as broom and lupins, causing an almost total loss of breeding habitat for several species of native birds. The nationally vulnerable banded dotterel and wrybill, and the nationally critical (once common) black billed gull are dependent on the braided rivers. The black billed gulls used to nest in their hundreds, if not thousands, on the bed of the Opihi River, near Arowhenua. The lack of high flows and floods means that tall weeds invade the shingle islands, which makes it impossible for these bird species to nest and breed in these areas.

A recently-published report *Management and research priorities for New Zealand's braided rivers* by Colin F. J. O'Donnell, Mark Sanders, Chris Woolmore and Richard F. Maloney (http://braid.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ODonnell-et-al.-2016-Management-and-research-priorities-for-conserving-biodiversity-on-New-Zealands-braided-rivers.pdf) discusses the threats to braided river ecosystems. An excerpt from the paper: Whilst there is a need to improve understanding of how weeds affect flora and fauna in braided riverbeds, this should not impede weed management; it is clear that weeds are detrimental, and well-established principles and methods of weed control can be employed to control weeds at many sites. However, sustaining resources to apply such techniques cost-effectively at a landscape scale and over decades remains a challenge and needs further research.

Healthy catchments

Concerns over vegetation clearance and riverbed habitat loss has been raised by the branch in writing to the Orari, Temuka, Opihi and Pareora (OTOP) Zone Committee of ECan. The zone committee is in the process of developing their *Healthy Catchments Strategy,* and workshops have been held for public feedback and input. The branch has asked that these important matters be given a high level of consideration. In their reply, the Zone Committee stated that they will be developing potential solutions over the next few months.

Conservation status of New Zealand birds, 2016

The second complete review of the conservation status of all 487 taxa of New Zealand birds has been completed using the same ranking criteria as the first complete audit in 2012. Of 77 threatened taxa classified in 2012, the status of 22 (29%) has improved, mainly due to successful conservation management, while five (6%) were moved to a more threatened status. Eight taxa, including three not assessed in 2012, were added to the threatened categories. Overall, 71 taxa were classified as being threatened with extinction, six fewer than in 2012. Whilst the overall conservation threat status is the bottom-line for each taxon, the qualifiers provide important information about each assessment. As a member of the review panel, I was particularly interested in the number of taxa where their threat status was conservation dependent (CD in the tables) or data poor (DP). Conservation dependence indicates that current and future management is essential to maintain the populations (such as the Nationally Critical kaki, the Nationally Endangered black-fronted tern, the Nationally Vulnerable kaka and blue duck). The data poor qualifier indicates that whilst the conservation threat status has been decided on the best available knowledge, there are gaps in the information. Therefore, it may be surprising that the data poor qualifier is applied to the Nationally Critical Salvin's albatross and black-billed gull, the Nationally Endangered black-fronted tern, the Nationally Vulnerable wrybill and banded dotterel, and a number of other familiar species in the At Risk Declining category. The data poor qualifier clearly indicates the need for further research for many species. This important document can be downloaded from http://www.doc.govt.nz/Documents/science-and-technical/nztcs19entire.pdf.

Paul Sagar

The Branch has a very active Kiwi Conservation Club for kiwi kids who love nature. Check out the KCC website www.kcc.org.nz, or contact Win or Justine, our enthusiastic Kiwi Conservation Officers, to find out more about the KCC group's recent and upcoming activities (phone numbers below).

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