



Forest & Bird

DUNEDIN BRANCH | Giving Nature a Voice



BRANCH NEWSLETTER

February 2019

Dunedin Branch Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held on Tuesday, March 19th at 5:30 pm

Benham Seminar Room, 2nd Floor, Room 215, Zoology Benham Building, Otago University, Great King St.

Following the AGM we have a talk given by Sally Carson and Rod Morris on the topic **'Strangers on the shore: what the intertidal zone teaches us'**.

Marine Biologist Sally Carson has joined forces with naturalist and Photographer Rod Morris, to talk about fascinating intertidal creatures featured in their new book.

Collins 'Field Guide to the New Zealand Seashore' is packed with information on endemic and introduced species, including anemones, sea stars, crabs, barnacles, paua, mussels, clams, oysters—this is New Zealand's most comprehensive and up to date guide to our unique and fascinating seashore.



Sally Carson knows our seashore very well as she has been teaching children for 20 years, and is Director of the NZ Marine Studies Centre on Otago Harbour at Portobello.

If you enjoy fossicking at the beach, this talk promises to give you a deeper appreciation of the extraordinary world of the intertidal zone.

Come along and hear them talk about everything from Ice cream cone worms, Sea hares and Ghost shrimps to barnacles, paua, and seaweed chips!

Sally will have copies of the Field Guide for sale to members.

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.

Nominations for the Branch Management Committee (Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee members) would be welcome and should be sent no later than March 12th to the secretary, Janet Ledingham, at dunedin.branch@forestandbird.org.nz (ph. 467 2960) or posted to Forest & Bird Dunedin Branch, PO Box 5793, Dunedin 9054.

The South Island Gathering, October 2018

By Paul Smale

While most of NZ endured a weekend of heavy rain, a group of sixty Forest and Birders from all over the country enjoyed settled weather in The Catlins, in the south-east of the South Island.



Our base for the weekend was the Tautuku Outdoor Education Center, nestled in the forests of Tautuku Bay (above). In places the forests of the Catlins stretch up continuously, from the coast through montane forest to the subalpine zone. These forests cover a series of roughly parallel ranges, with two main ranges—Beresford and MacLennan.



Travelling there, the bush was adorned with signs of summer, *Clematis paniculata* in prolific flower, a male plant shown left.

After Friday night registration, dinner, welcome, and social hour, the weekend's activities began with a talk by "Catlins bat Lady" Catriona Gower, after which most of the group headed out to a site in the Tahakopa Valley, where long-tailed bats (*Chalinolobus*) were heard on our bat detectors. Some of the group also watched a

magical display of different colors produced by lichens on silver beech trunks, fluorescing when illuminated by UV torch. Back at Tautuku Bay, moreporks (ruru) called into the night.

For early risers, Saturday morning began with a dawn chorus to die for. After breakfast we had a welcome by Dunedin Branch Chair Mark Hanger, and a thought-provoking keynote speech by Kevin Hague which included the topic of keeping Forest and Bird relevant, and much else ("Losing birds is still losing"). Then a series of talks and discussions focussed on the special features of the Catlins, and issues surrounding landscape scale protection, with regional experts like Franny Cunninghame and Brian Rance. Rose Clucas gave us insights into aquatic life in the local Fleming and Tautuku rivers. Stewart Bull from Murihiku provided iwi perspectives. Yolanda van Heezik addressed the urbanisation of New Zealand's population, and urban biodiversity ideas. Monica Peters spoke on the monitoring of conservation projects. Susan Walker (Landcare Research) brought us down to earth with the realities of endemic bird populations in monotonic decline, but the slight encouragement (for Southerners) of "less bird loss in cooler forests because of lower rat populations".



Afternoon field trips took attendees through local forests near our base at the Tautuku Education Center. I chose the trip along predator control lines through the Tautuku Bay Scenic Reserve, passing by Lake Wilkie, led by Gavin from Paptowai. Parakeets (kakariki) were heard chattering in the canopy (podocarp, southern rata, kamahi). Shining cuckoo (pipiwharau) were surprisingly absent, but have arrived there since The Gathering. They were late this year. The forest floor was lush with filmy ferns, hydrated after recent rain. The first few green-hood orchids (Pterostylis) were in flower (left).



Lake Wilkie, near the coast at Tautuku Bay



Tautuku River estuary, in evening light

After dinner on Saturday evening, renowned bird photographer Craig McKenzie showed us an outstanding selection of photographs. Some of Craig's photographs can now be seen on an interactive bird-recording display at a rest area beside Catlins Lake, just south of Owaka.

Saturday night, a group headed up the coast for a night walk at Papatowai. Titi (sooty shearwater) were un-obliging, but we saw their burrows beside a large rata tree, with feral cat traps nearby.

Sunday morning began with a Board session on Strategic Directions, with audience participation and debate, which included the issue of youth representation. Amongst the morning sessions which followed, the highlight for me was a wonderful talk by Thomas Mattern on hoiho (yellow-eyed penguin) research, outlining in particular the recent findings from GPS-tracking studies of these birds.



Catlins Lake



*Samolus repens in flower
at Long Point*

Midday Sunday, South Otago Branch Chair Roy Johnstone gave the wrap-up to a successful and enjoyable weekend, and we said our farewells to those needing to leave for home.

Sunday afternoon field trips followed. I chose the Long Point trip, led by Roy Johnstone and Jim Young from the South Otago Branch. We were treated to wildlife (including sea-lions), windswept coastal scenery, and shore vegetation in flower.



Scene from the Catlins coast at Long Point

A couple of choices of field trip were available on Monday to round out the weekend.

I chose that led by Fergus Sutherland from Papatowai. We headed up to silver beech forest on the Wisp Range. Here we heard and saw yellowheads (mohua).

This area is a DOC “Battle for Our Birds” predator control programme site. The effectiveness of 1080 was demonstrated to me by the huge bushes of highly possum-palatable *Peraxilla colensoi* (scarlet mistletoe), thriving up high in the silver beech host trees.



Down by the river, *Corybas* orchids, lycopods and umbrella ferns contributed to a pleasant and picturesque walk. Galls (*Cyttaria nigra*) were common on the silver beech trees.



As I headed back to Dunedin, the rain arrived...

Otago Projects

By Francesca Cunningham

2018 has been another busy year and I have enjoyed my time working on the projects with local branch members and volunteers, F&B national office staff and a range of contractors and project collaborators. I look forward to another summer of field work and future project advances to assist local conservation in Otago.

Bring Back the Seabirds

The tītī sooty shearwaters have completed their migration across the Pacific and are back in New Zealand to breed, egg laying taking place in late November – early December. While still one of the most common seabird species in the world, with an estimated 10 million birds in New Zealand during the breeding season, the species is still in decline. At sea the birds are at risk due to impacts from the fishing industry including by catch in our local waters and from changes in currents and food sources as a result of climate change.

A network of 51 double set traps was established around the remnant tītī colony in the Sandymount Reserve on the Otago Peninsula during winter 2017. We hoped that these would have provided sufficient protection to the breeding tītī and their eggs/chicks. Although a range of introduced predators were caught (stoat, weasel, ferret, rat, mouse), we were not successful at protecting the colony and remote camera and surveys with a certified conservation dog showed that no tītī chicks fledged from any of the monitored burrows.



Predation of chicks by ferret rat and potentially a hedgehog was recorded by camera. While this result from our first season with traps around the colony is disappointing, it highlights the importance of monitoring the species we are trying to protect to ensure that our predator control efforts are effective (rather than just tallying the number of predators caught). We will continue to work at the site until we are successful at protecting the tītī; the colony has



persisted for hundreds of years with predation pressure from introduced mammals and we are committed to making the site safe for the birds once again. This season we are conducting trials with different baits and will increase our monitoring of the birds and their nests/chicks.

The Predator fence at the St Clair Cliffs has provided a safe breeding site for tītī which were attracted inside the fenced area using playback of recorded calls. In early 2018 six chicks fledged from nest boxes inside the fence. This is a steady increase from the first tītī chick that fledged from inside the fence in 2016, bringing the total of chicks fledged over three years to 10.

At Lawyers Head, where there has been a red billed gull breeding colony for years, we hoped to obtain information as to how successful the birds were at rearing chicks and whether introduced predators were a problem. Unfortunately this year no red billed gulls nested at the site and monitoring cameras only documented roosting gulls. We will continue with the predator control at the site as it is likely that red billed gulls will return in future years.

Unfortunately we have had vandalism at the site with traps and tracking tunnels being thrown over the cliff. Thanks to support from the Dunedin City Council introduced predator control has been extended with rodent control now conducted along the coast.

Thank you to all of those who have volunteered for the Bring Back the Seabirds Project this year and to our regular volunteers without whom the project would not be possible: Martin Tolich, Jared Oliver, Jess Cripps, Graeme Loh, Francie Beggs. Thanks to the Otago Corrections Facility Carpentry Workshop for their careful making of trap boxes.

Tautuku Restoration

This year has seen an increase in both our knowledge of native species distribution within the project area and in introduced predator control. Securing funds through the DOC Community



Fund enabled us to employ Gavin White, a local Papatowai resident, as a part time trapping contractor. Gavin's work is supported by volunteers. Over 35km of new tracks have been established, enabling us to better access the project area in the Fleming and Tautuku Valleys as well as the coastal forest behind Tautuku Beach, including the Lenz Reserve and surrounding DOC managed land. Stoat traps have increased from 150 to 497 (this number keeps growing) and are regularly checked. Feral deer and pigs are causing significant damage to the forest within the Lenz

Reserve and wider project area and effective control of these species will be required.

Gavin observed geckos within the forest while conducting track clearing, these are most likely the Nationally Endangered Tautuku forest gecko and monitoring planned for this summer will hopefully confirm the species and add data to its distribution.

Native fish monitoring conducted during late 2017/ early 2018 revealed exciting results. Fresh water ecologist Rose Clucas led the work and it was confirmed that the reaches of the Fleming and Tautuku rivers above the natural waterfalls are free from introduced trout. Both of these rivers support populations of the Nationally Threatened *Galaxias gollomoides*, a non-migratory endemic fresh water fish. This discovery has greatly increased the known range of the species and could lead to down listing its conservation status. Additional records of long finned eel, red finned bully, pouches lamprey and giant kokopu have been obtained which help demonstrate the native fish diversity still present in the two rivers. Further surveys are planned for early 2019. Thanks to Aukaha, DOC Murihiku and Coastal Otago offices and the University of Otago for supporting this work.



Plans are underway to increase monitoring of key native species within the area to gain a better understanding of their presence and distribution (Tautuku forest gecko, kakariki spp. and long tailed bats) in addition to be able to effectively monitor their threats and plan their conservation.

Thank you to all of those who have volunteered for the Tautuku Restoration Project this year and to our regular volunteers without whom the project would not be possible: Roy Johnstone, Jim Young, Fergus Sutherland, Guy Blakely. Thanks to the Otago Corrections Facility Carpentry Workshop and the Gore Girl Guides for their careful making of trap boxes.

Dunedin School's Science Fair July 2018

Forest & Bird Dunedin Branch Prizes

Dannie Hawkins and Francesca Cunninghame

Once again Dunedin Branch contributed \$500 towards awards for this Fair.

Environment and/or conservation themed projects totalled 48, we were impressed to see such a number and the themes ranged from introduced predator control and impacts, native species protection, water protection, plastics reduction, climate change, ocean health, pollution, renewable energy. We had a hard time narrowing it down to a few winners and based our decision on projects that fitted within F&B's society vision. Additionally we hope that by awarding prizes we will help encourage environmentally minded young people to nurture their interest. We split the \$500 prize money between what we decided were the 19 most appropriate projects across all different age groups. Taking in to account that some projects were done by two people, each person involved in a F&B winning project was awarded \$20.

Our congratulations to all the winners.

Awarded Projects

What lies Beneath: Comparisons between soil profiles under native and no native trees and benefits gained from planting native trees. Peter Rowe Year 11.

Soil Quality in Dunedin Town Belt: Investigating the relationship between trees and soil, whether the Dunedin town belt has healthy soils and the role of native vegetation in maintaining healthy soils in urban peripheral areas. James Seo Year 11

Electro Trap: Awareness of the need for a reliable low cost effective self-resetting introduced predator trap to achieve the protection of NZ native species, they had designed a self-resetting introduced predator electronic trap. Cameron Elliot & Peter Crason Year 11

Lights Out: An investigation into the potential negative impacts from increased lighting on the Otago Harbour organisms, looked at plankton and related the work to the proposed DCC city harbour redevelopments. Josh Frund & Jude Moudy Year 11

Plankton in the Harbour: What would be the impacts if all the plankton in the Otago harbour died? Looked at the ecological importance of plankton and anthropogenic actions that threaten them and how to reduce these threats. Matthew Pyper Year 11

Soak it up: Investigated what sort of material could prove to be an effective natural and biodegradable product to be used for cleaning up oil spills. Elsie Burnside Year 8

Plastic the Final Straw?: Tested designs of different paper straws to look for one that would not get soggy. Trying to find solutions to reduce the amount of plastic waste. Nicola Allan Chalmers Year 8

Predators in Town: Investigated using tracking tunnels the occurrence of introduced predators within the town belt and the number of invertebrates. Concerned about the impact of introduced predators on native invertebrates. Oliver Bixley Year 11

Dam That Fish: OBHS has a school lodge up the MA Tukituki Valley. They had investigated the impact that building a dam for improved hydro power to the lodge would have on non-native galaxids and made a case for ensuring that galaxids are protected and do not suffer further declines. Michael Cross & Josh Brunt Year 10

Coal at School is it Cool?: An investigation into differences in air quality from pellet and coal heated schools. Studied by looking at the lichens at two different schools and expressed the need to stop using coal as a power source due to its environmental destruction. Ryan McCaughan & Theo Stebbings Year 9

What do cats kill?: The impact of cats on native species within Dunedin and its relevance to a NZ scale and predator free NZ that does not consider cats. Researched the impacts of urban pet cats on native bird and reptile life and highlighted the conservation problem presented by cats. Isaac McConachie Year 8

Backyard Banquet: How to attract native bird species to your garden. After having moved house a reduction in the number of native birds in the new property was noticed. Which plants should be planted to help increase native bird life in urban gardens? Several were planted as well as installing sugar water feeders and bird observations were made. Ted Menzies Level 7

A Plastic Ocean: Researched the negative environmental effect in the oceans from plastic bags and outlines actions that need to be taken by individuals to stop plastic getting into the oceans and killing a huge number of different species. Caleb Tulloch Year 8

Vitamin Green: Can green roof technology improve heating/cooling energy efficiency? Considered the new Dunedin Hospital with a green roof as a case study. Abi Gibson Year 7

Fantastic Plastic?: Compared the strength of paper and plastic bags in an attempt to find a less environmentally damaging product than plastic. Although plastic bags were the strongest the conclusion was that paper bags are still preferable due to the globally damaging nature of plastic rubbish. Jasmine Addison Year 8

What's in my Water?: Identified which chemicals we drink and what needs to be done to ensure that we maintain clean water sources for human consumption and environmental health. Ether Lau Year 11

Exceptional Pot Plants: An upcycling group which wanted to make biodegradable plant pots. Made successfully out of recycling egg cartons. Plant growth and break down of plant pots was recorded. Bethany Elder & Laura Allison Year 7

Incredible Bulk: Investigated the amount of rubbish that was avoided by purchasing products (Ecostore brand) in bulk. Highlighted the importance of first reducing packaging before reusing and recycling. Hector Howard Year 7

Contacts for the Branch Projects

As you will see from the Newsletter and Annual Report we have a number of projects underway with opportunities for Volunteers. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer please get in touch with the appropriate person:

- **Bring back the seabirds and Tautuku Restoration.**
Francesca Cunninghame, f.cunninghame@forestandbird.org.nz or 022 658 1349
- Helping out at the **Kereru Aviary** once a month.
Francie Beggs, fbeggs3@gmail.com or 453 6188
- **Moore's Bush - situated in the Leith Valley.**
- We would like 2 or 3 volunteers to keep the track open. This would involve clipping the foliage at the edges (hedge clippers or secateurs) once a month. It could be fun and would be done in your own time.
Francie Beggs fbeggs3@gmail.com or 453 6188
- **Wilding Tree Group**
Paul Smale, peacemail111@gmail.com or 027 384 5738

This Newsletter was compiled by Janet Ledingham and formatted by Alzira Alaniz