



By Mike Britton, Chair, Wellington Branch

A victory for nature

As I am sure most of you have heard, the Minister of Conservation has announced the addition of the 64,400 ha Mokihinui Valley to the Kahurangi National Park. This fabulous area has gone from being threatened, to being accorded the highest level of protection — one that can only be revoked by Parliament.

Forest & Bird was one of the key players in stopping Meridian from damming and flooding this pristine and natural ecosystem. At the time it was a big challenge, with a pro-development National government and a Department of Conservation that was standing back from its statutory role of advocating for nature and conservation land in Resource Management Act hearings. But in this case the then Director General of DoC, Al Morrison, came out fighting as did the membership of Forest & Bird and our allies.

Things like success in stopping the dam is why lots of people belong to Forest & Bird and give their voice to nature, to make a difference. Many individual members wrote submissions and attended meetings. And when asked, they put their hands in their pockets to help fund the campaign and the potential legal costs. When we have a win like this it is a time for every member to feel proud and engage in a little back patting.



Female rifleman

Have you been attending the Wild Wednesday talks organised by Marc Slade on behalf of the branch? The most recent one was 'A Plastic Ocean' run in conjunction with Forest & Bird Youth. Scary stuff, and I am sure others like me completely re-evaluated how we are managing our plastic consumption and use. There are sea birds dying from stomachs stuffed with plastic objects like cigarette lighters. Horror! See the next series of talks mentioned in this newsletter.



Male rifleman

And more good news. Recently, titipounamu/rifleman were returned to Wellington with 60 birds recently released in Zealandia. The spark that gets the wider community to support us stopping dams and addressing climate change, is experiencing nature in places like Zealandia, and it is a big part of making people care.

As David Attenborough famously said, "No one will protect what they don't care about, and no one will care about what they haven't experienced."

Local news

Plants had a great start early in the year with a wet spring, and when summer turned up the heat, many species produced fruits and seeds in abundance. This was good for birds and plant propagation but also for pests so we may see a rise in rodents trapped under the Predator Free Wellington project.

Late in the summer a long period without rain dried up many shallow wetlands. Some of the pools and ponds at Pauatahanui wildlife reserve were cracked dry mud by mid-February. The pools by Thorpe hide were low, and hopefully the banded rails that recently appeared there have stuck it out through the



Dry pool bed at Pauatahanui harsher conditions. Spotless crake have also been sighted at the reserve and a number of unbanded fern birds have been reported indicating successful breeding from the birds translocated there from Taranaki.

Half a dozen black fronted terns called at Wellington in March. Black fronted terns breed on South Island river beds and in autumn they head north. Wellington must be a convenient stop after crossing the strait before they carry on to their wintering grounds.

They are smaller than the much more common white fronted tern, greyer and show a white rump in flight. They too have a forked tail, but it does not have the streamers of the white front and is much shorter. The adults are easy to distinguish from their bigger cousins by their orange beaks, legs and feet.



Taupata with masses of berries



Adult black fronted tern in non-breeding plumage

Health and Safety — is it all a big waste of our time?

The background

There's a lot of emphasis on Health and Safety (H&S) these days. It seems that as a nation we have become so risk averse that we will no longer let children play in a tree house — or let Forest & Bird members start a working bee without a long lecture about the risks they could encounter. Understandably, this can be irritating to members who have worked safely in the bush for many years without what they perceive as “nanny state” hectoring about every trip hazard — or the need to wear sunscreen or a hi vis vest.



While this increasing nervousness about risk has been around generally for quite a few years, the major concern for Forest & Bird these days is the *Health and Safety at Work Act 2015* (the Act)¹. Under this Act, any organisation that has even a single employee is classified as a “person conducting a business or undertaking” (PCBU), whether that business is for profit or not.

Forest & Bird, with over 50 staff in its National Office, is a PCBU. The Act makes clear that, with respect to H&S issues, Forest & Bird's **volunteers are treated in the same way as its employees**.

¹ www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2015/0070/55.0/DLM5976660.html

The Act also specifically prohibits anyone from insuring against their liabilities under the Act, and furthermore there are some eye-watering penalties for behaviour that breaches the Act's provisions, even more so if that behaviour could be deemed "reckless".

The changes

Consequently, to protect itself, its staff and volunteers, Forest & Bird has introduced some new H&S processes. Each branch has nominated a H&S representative; one of that person's aims will be to ensure that their branch, and therefore Forest & Bird as a whole, is compliant with the Act.



H&S is planned to suit the hazard

A major concern is that, if a H&S "incident" occurs, we may not be able to prove that we took all "reasonably practicable" steps to prevent the incident occurring. As far as the Act is concerned, if it isn't recorded, it didn't happen. Appropriate records may be electronic or on paper, but they must exist — it may be no defence simply to say "... but I warned them of the risks".

This makes for a tricky balance between what's practical and what's required by the Act. The National H&S Officer, working with the branch H&S reps, has developed, and will continue to develop, H&S procedures that (ideally) will have as little impact on volunteers as possible, while still ensuring that Forest & Bird is compliant with the Act.

So there are (or will be) H&S management plans for every branch project, site risk assessments, and various forms and templates — but almost all of this will be unseen by most volunteers.

What volunteers *will* see, at the start of every working bee for example, is a form asking you to record details for an emergency contact person — and you may also be asked to initial a form that states that you have received a H&S briefing.

The information collected will only be used for compliance with the Act — it will not be used for any other purpose.

These processes are already largely in place on Wellington Branch projects — and volunteers are becoming used to this minor amount of bureaucracy.



To summarise

H&S is important — but we need to keep it in perspective. Our H&S record is very good. We already do it mostly by the book but must be sure we can prove it — in the unlikely event of an incident.

Whatever our feelings about H&S and the Act, it has legal force. We are all individually responsible for staying safe and for ensuring that Forest & Bird doesn't breach the provisions of the Act.

eBird with thanks to Geoff de Lisle of Birds NZ

eBird is an online birding tool that can be used for many purposes. Essentially it is a database that anyone can use to look up or record locations of birds seen anywhere in the world. Full-on birding enthusiasts record every species and the number of individual birds of each type that they saw on each birdwatching trip, or even on the walk to work. Others record the species seen but not the number, and some people do check-sheets for particular trips, or if they see a rare species or an interesting bird in an unusual place.

This enables others to see trends over time (it has historic records entered retrospectively from old notebooks going back decades) and birding hotspots. Those keen to see particular species can look up recent sightings in their area, which can be a great time saver.

Data entry is easy and can be made using a mobile phone app or by computer. You can enter a GPS reference, an address, a place name such as a reserve, or find the location on a map and describe it. eBird prompts you with checklists of birds normally seen in the region you visited, and it can also offer additional lists of rarities. You can insert photos including large files for high quality.

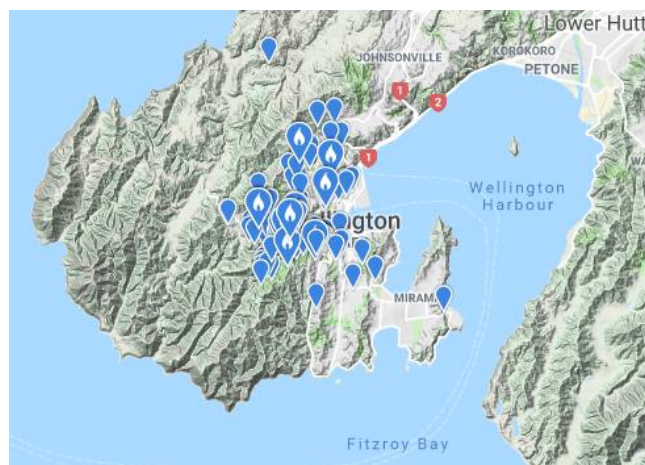
It is a fantastic resource for sharing records of birds encountered and for people keen to locate species they've never seen before. Anyone can look at other people's sightings, and if you register you can enter your own records as well. Some inaccurate identifications have been corrected by others more familiar with the area or species, which increases the value of the resource. [This link](#) leads to the New Zealand home page.

When searching for information you can filter by location, species and time period and see what species have been observed, where, when and by whom. By clicking on individual pins on the map you can see who made the report, the exact location and any other information or photos the submitter provided. If going to unfamiliar areas it is a great tool to find good places to see birds or to locate special hotspots to see particular species. It is also a photo resource and you can look at other people's photos and also audio tracks with birdsong and calls recorded by people submitting records.

These maps from eBird show kākā sightings in 2004 and 2017, showing the growth of the population in Zealandia and their spread beyond the sanctuary. Kākā were transferred to Zealandia between 2002 and 2007.



Kākā sightings in 2004



Kākā sightings in 2017

All up, eBird is a brilliant resource and the more people who use it the more useful it will become.

[The Birds NZ website](#) includes the following information about eBird:

A real-time, online checklist program, eBird has revolutionised the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird provides rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution.

eBird's goal is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. It is amassing one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence.

There are over 111,000 checklists of New Zealand birds including records of 348 species.

EVENTS

FOREST & BIRD WELLINGTON'S WILD WEDNESDAYS

Wednesday 10 April 2019

Kevin Hague — Restoring Nature

Forest & Bird CEO, Kevin Hague, will talk about Forest & Bird's new campaign — Restoring Nature. He will describe what needs to happen for conservation to succeed — including moving from only protecting existing habitats to restoration at a landscape scale. How can we turn the tide from slowly losing our native taonga to creating a sustainable future where people and nature flourish?

Venue: Forest & Bird National Office, 205 Victoria Street, Wellington

Please register your interest via [Eventbrite](#)

Price: Free/Koha

When: Doors open 5.45pm, talk starts 6.00pm – 8.00

Wednesday 8 May 2019

Farming for the Future — Dr Mike Joy & Alison Dewes

Dr Mike Joy, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Governance and Policy Studies, Victoria University Wellington and Alison Dewes, Head of Environment at Pamu/Landcorp Farming Ltd will discuss the future of farming, looking at how we need to change our current food system to adapt to and mitigate climate change, restore freshwater and biodiversity and remain competitive in a changing global food market. This will be followed by a chaired discussion exploring the issues raised.

Venue: RHLT1 Rutherford House, Victoria University of Wellington.

Tickets will be available via Eventbrite shortly.

Price: Koha

When: Doors open 5.45pm, talk starts 6.00pm – 8.00

Wednesday 12 June 2019

Conservation in cities: why it is hard and why we do it — Danielle Shanahan

Conservation in cities is hard. The impacts of urbanisation on native ecosystems are extremely high and hard to overcome, and the remaining patches of habitat are often highly disturbed, weedy and small. So why do we do conservation in these landscapes? What does it mean for biodiversity, and for people? Are there special opportunities that we have in cities?

Join Danielle Shanahan, Director of Zealandia's Centre for People and Nature, as she explores these questions, drawing on examples from across the Oceania region.

Participants will have the opportunity to add their views during a facilitated discussion on what biodiversity means for Wellingtonians.

This free seminar is brought to you by Zealandia and Forest & Bird Wellington.

Venue: Visitors' Centre, Zealandia

Please register your interest via [Eventbrite](#). (Limited spaces)

Price: Free/Koha

When: Doors open 5.45pm, talk starts 6.00pm – 8.00

Wellybird – a personal view

The Tākāpu or Australasian gannet is relatively common around Wellington, but mainly outside its breeding season in the height of summer. Attempts to encourage gannets to nest on Mana island using concrete



At Cape Kidnappers

models resulted for several years in a sole male falling for one of the decoys, with limited success in the breeding department.



More recently there have been encouraging signs with other birds showing interest in nesting. Otherwise the next nearest colonies are at Cape Kidnappers and Farewell Spit, and when feeding their chicks, the parents seldom venture as far as Wellington.

Out of the breeding season however they can be seen over the sea, harbour and Hutt River estuary.



Larger than gulls, and with adults whiter when seen at distance, they are sometimes initially mistaken for the smaller albatross species. But on closer inspection their wings are a different shape, have black tips and trailing edges and the head and beak is quite different from the tubenose clan, of which albatrosses are members.

They soar over water on the lookout for prey and dive spectacularly from height,

folding back their wings just before plunging into the water. They share this habit with gannets in other parts of the world, and the closely



Green toe stripes - fancy footwork

related boobies that generally inhabit warmer waters, but which pay occasional visits to New Zealand. Around Wellington they are often in pairs, and tend to patrol a patch of sea for quite a while, often close to the shoreline. The two photos of gannets in flight were taken at Island Bay in July.



At close quarters

E-newsletter

Do you have any ideas for subject matter or things you'd be interested in hearing about in this newsletter? Please let us know by email to wellington.branch@forestandbird.org.nz. Any photos submitted must include photographer's credit and permission to be used.

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