

Kārearea

Protecting a southern land

March 2020

Image: Craig McKenzie



South Otago Forest & Bird celebrates Seaweek 2020

Richard Schofield Photography



Connecting With Our Seas

Ko au te moana, ko te moana ko au – I am the sea, the sea is me

Thanks for the memories
Jeanette Fitzsimons 1945-2020



The news of Jeanette Fitzsimons' unexpected death

on 5th of March this year came as a devastating shock, not just to Green Party members, but to all New Zealanders who are concerned with environmental and social justice. We honour her memory because she had the courage, the determination and the moral fortitude to take on challenges ranging from standing for Parliament to co-skippering the tiny Greenpeace boat that faced down an Anadarko drill ship. At the same time, she was a dedicated farmer; an accomplished violinist; and one of the most principled and caring politicians ever to take a seat in the Beehive.

A tribute paid by former Green MP, Sue Bradford, said it all: "Jeanette had the heart of a militant ecologist, the mind of an academic, the determination of a politician and the compassion of a partner, mother, mentor and friend. Respect, and may earth's green flag fly with you always."

In January 2014, The Listener asked prominent New Zealanders to share stories about the awa (rivers) they loved. This was Jeanette's contribution:

Sliding through silky water at dusk, the moon reflecting, the trout leaping and the morepork starting to call. Washing off the grime and stress of the city. Bliss at the cool plunge on a hot afternoon after shearing or haymaking.

The kotare diving from its nest in the cliffs; the cockabullies playing in the shallows. The joy of a five-year-old swimming the whole 30 m across for the first time. Christmas shrieks and laughter as the grandchildren paddle the inflatable and tip each other out.

Awe at the flood that lifts the river five metres in a night, with standing waves as it turns the bends, carrying logs and anything else it finds in its path. A river not to be argued with at such times.

The Kauaeranga River is all this and more, the centre of our life at the farm: social meeting place, fun, solace, calm and sometimes a place just to sit and dream. It drains 20,000 ha of mainly bush, so is still clean enough to swim in. We could probably drink it safely, though we generally don't. Our animals and most of our neighbours' have been fenced out for more than 20 years, and the banks are now shaded by the totara, kahikatea, kowhai, miro and much more we've planted to replace the gorse, willow and blackberry.

There are swimming holes the length of the river, used by trampers, tourists and locals throughout the summer. Further upstream, it supplies Thames with its water. The denuded hills are gradually revegetating, holding the run-off back for longer and cleaning it.

Without the Kauaeranga, life in our valley would be immeasurably poorer. ■



Young Greens' Summer Camp 2015

Jeanette and her husband Harry Parke regularly hosted these events on their Coromandel farm, Pakaraka. Apparently the Young Greens were sometimes a tad shocked by Jeanette's enthusiasm for skinny dipping in the Kauaeranga River.

Helping our native birds



Famous plump penguin

The Otago Peninsula little blue penguin shown here weighed in at 1.52 kg, compared to an average chick weight of 1.2 kg. It's nice to know that there's *some* good news on the penguin front. Many little blue colonies are in decline due to predation by introduced predators including cats, dogs and ferrets. The penguins are also at risk of entanglement in set nets while out at sea.

Wellington, Banks Peninsula and Oamaru populations, however, have responded well to predator control and provision of nest boxes.

www.stuff.co.nz/travel/back-your-backyard/120385817/fat-penguin-chick-brings-good-news-for-dunedins-tourism-sector



Taxi service for Hutton's Shearwaters

A Kaikoura taxi driver Toni Painting leads a volunteer army that has been scouring the streets of Kaikoura in the middle of the night in search of Hutton's shearwater chicks that crash-land onto the road – mistaking the shiny bitumen for the sea.

Painting was the first to spot the seabird chicks dazed and confused around town on foggy nights five years ago. Now she patrols each evening in fledgling season, collecting the wayward birds and delivering them to a nearby rehabilitation centre.

Hutton's shearwater is the only seabird in the world that nests and raises its young in the mountains, at heights around 1200m. Since the 1960s their breeding colonies have reduced from eight to two, classifying them for "endangered" status by the Department of Conservation.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/20/taxi-endangered-new-zealand-seabirds-get-a-lift-to-safety-after-crash-landing-in-fog>



Jake Osborne

Happy Hatch Day Hondy!

With love from the Wildlife Hospital – Dunedin

By the end of February 2019, thanks to intensive intervention by the Department of Conservation's Kākāpō Recovery Programme, the population of 147 kākāpō had produced more than 80 chicks – a record number, given the seriously inbred species' struggles with infertility.

To help ensure the chicks' survival, Auckland Zoo vets took turns working busy stints alongside conservation workers on the remote sanctuary islands where the birds live. By April, everyone was exhausted, but finally starting to relax. Then aspergillosis hit.

You probably don't want to read anything about infectious diseases at the moment, let alone about a lung disease, but there's an engrossing account of the campaign to control the aspergillosis outbreak at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/14/worlds-fattest-parrot-comeback-from-extinction-aoe>.

Many birds needed months of daily care, but the outbreak was contained. Chicks became juveniles, and while a few died from other causes, most survived and are now counted in the population number: 211, up from 123 just seven years ago.

Hondy (Ihi-2-B-19) is named after DOC ranger Paul Hondelink, who died in a helicopter crash in 2018. Paul was an expert in the area of pest control, developing new methods to help reduce the impact introduced species have on New Zealand's natives.

Hondy was reared by foster mum Sue and has now settled into a steep coastal area of Whenua Hou. He disappeared for almost four months, going for a big walk and then hiding in the coastal areas where it's very hard to get a telemetry signal, especially when you don't know what part of the island the bird might be on!



Cautious applause for environmental outcomes

OMV comes up dry

In January, international oil giant OMV started drilling its \$80m exploratory well off the Otago coast, 146 km southeast of Balclutha. The project met with active opposition from Oil Free Otago and Extinction Rebellion who planned to send a protest vessel to the drilling site.

A few weeks after operations started, OMV managed to carry out the hi-tech equivalent of shooting themselves in the foot when the drill ship, the *COSL Prospector*, cut its own drill pipe after a blowout preventer was mistakenly activated. Not an incident that exactly inspired confidence in the company's safety protocols.

On 21 February, OMV announced that there didn't appear to be commercial quantities of gas or oil present, and the well would be plugged and abandoned.

Reactions were predictably mixed.

Progas Otago spokesman and Dunedin City councillor Andrew Whiley: "All the evidence has shown there is a major find out there – it's just a matter of when they drill in the right hole, at the right time."

Dunedin Mayor Aaron Hawkins: "We can't burn the fossil fuel that we know of, let alone go searching for more. Oil drilling does not have a future in Otago or New Zealand."

Environmentalists such as Mayor Hawkins would be well aware that in December 2019 OMV had been given consent to drill up to 10 exploration and appraisal wells and discharge into the ocean. So the fact that number one has come up empty is good news but no guarantee that the situation won't change in the future.

<https://www.odt.co.nz/business/omv-comes-out-great-south-basin-empty-handed>



Water Conservation Order (WCO) for Te Waikoropupū Springs

After nearly two years deliberation, the Environmental Protection Authority has released the Special Tribunal's positive recommendations for the WCO for Te Waikoropupū Springs. However, co-applicants for the WCO, the Ngāti Tama ki Te Waipounamu Trust and long-time resident Andrew Yuill, planned to keep the champagne on ice until they had gone through all the details of the report with a "fine tooth comb".

The tribunal has recommended that the application for the WCO be granted over both the confined and unconfined Arthur Marble Aquifer, and over Te Waikoropupū Springs. This includes the main spring, Dancing Sands Spring and Fish Creek Springs.

It also recommends protection apply to the headwaters of the Takaka River and to its surface water tributaries, including the Waingarō River.

The draft order included controls on water takes and discharges to protect aquifer pressure and water quality. The issues of significance and concern included water quality, pollution, and *E coli* and nitrate levels.

Yuill described the report as a "major and very welcome step" in a long journey. "It is a powerful weaving of mātauranga Māori, Pākehā science, and profound environmental values which cross cultures. We would recommend anyone to read it and reflect on what their own values are."

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/environment/119939692/applicants-for-springs-protection-to-examine-report-with-finetooth-comb>

Batty about bats

Catriona Gower reports on part of the 19th Australasian Bat Society Conference

New Zealand/Aotearoa may only have two species of bats compared to the 90+ of Australia, but ours are endemic, very rare and just a bit unusual even by bat standards. The promise of a field trip involving night trapping bats in the Eglinton Valley, after more than 50 presentations on every aspect of bat ecology at the Australasian Bat Society biennial conference, had 110 delegates booked and hooked! They were mostly from Australia though NZ, New Caledonia, France and USA were also represented.

We were honoured to have Stewart Bull provide us with the opening welcome. Stewart is probably one of the few people living with a tale about experiences with the now-extinct Greater Short-tailed bat .



Alex Napier, Sarah Stephens and Clark Napier

This truly international gathering was especially exciting for these three young students from Tahakopa School who presented their research on the local presence of Long-tailed Bats (*Chalinolobus tuberculatus*) as part of the Catlins Bats on the Map Project. After this they gave the delegates a quiz testing their knowledge of NZ bats which caused quite a stir! They were presented with a special Student Award to encourage them to continue their scientific work.

The Eglinton Valley looked idyllic on a calm, cloudless day for the field trip to round off the conference. Before the actual night trapping, Bex Jackson and Wazza Simpson (DOC Te Anau) gave demonstrations of tree climbing, setting up of tag ID scanners and cameras, and installation of mini-harp traps over the roost entrance. This is carried out frequently every summer, on all the roosts (once found) of both species of bats in Eglinton. They appear to be tolerant of the level of catching and always return to roosts (and traps).

People catching Short-tailed Bats 'STB' (*Mystacina tuberculata*) had been told to expect a river crossing up to waist deep and a one hour tramp through the bush. In the event they stayed dry and had a very steep crawl up a slope but were rewarded with around 60 bats in the mini-harp trap. These were measured, weighed, sexed and if not already tagged had a PIT tag (like those used for registering dogs and cats) inserted under the

skin between the shoulder blades. The automatic scanner wires set up at the roost entrance record every pass of every PIT tagged bat. Everyone was euphoric; converted STB fans that would have happily waded the river!

The Long-tailed Bat 'LTB' group set up a few harp traps and a mist net, each set up with a bat lure, in the hope of catching both bat species a couple of km down the road from Knobs Flat. One trap was outside a known STB male singing roost – a small hole in a relatively small tree that one male bat at a time would use to sing from, in hope of attracting some female attention. This type of courtship & mating is known as a lek system and the roost hole is a lek. The singing is audible to humans! It also has ultrasounds but mostly it is high pitched squeaks we get to hear. Elsewhere, sitting in the dark we waited for a LTB to check out the calls from the lure in front of the mist net. Nothing appeared. We listened patiently as the kaka serenaded us with a huge repertoire of calls and mosquitoes found plenty of fresh blood.

Suddenly, the tree nearest to us whistled and squeaked and some leaves rustled: we'd set up the mist net on a previously unknown lek! Over the next hour we were entertained by three STB males who sang their hearts out whilst each had their turn in the roost hole. It was all clear as day through the IR camera Ian Davidson-Watts had set up to see bats entering the net. He has since turned the lek footage into a short video, which you can check out on the Catlins Bat Project fb page.

As well as singing, the bats will fly out and back to the roost hole periodically. The third bat finally flew into the net and we all got to admire him and the three bat flies he was carrying. For more on these adorable rare bats and their equally rare ectoparasites, it is worth listening to the DoC Conservation Diaries: <https://blog.doc.govt.nz/?s=bat>.

The ever elusive LTBs probably showed up after we had hastily packed down all the traps and rushed back to the buses so we could be carried back to Te Anau. Maybe this coming summer we'll get to catch some LTBs in the Catlins instead.

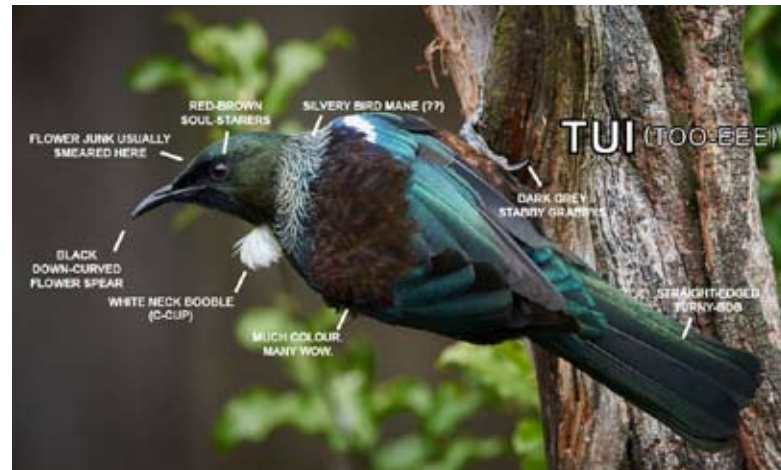
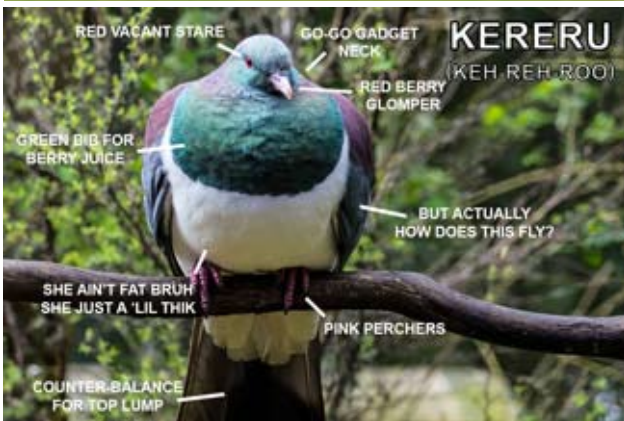
Catriona Gower catlinsbats@gmail.com



Photographing a Short-tailed bat



Practice your NZ Bird ID



Bryony Griffiths

And for a slightly more formal approach, you can practice your ID skills with the help of South Otago Forest & Bird's:

Catlins Birds – A pocket guide

This title can be sent to you by letter post, at a cost of \$10 + \$2 pp. You can then pay Forest & Bird by D/C.

Contact janejimyoung@slingshot.co.nz for more information.

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Yellow-eyed Penguin Trust

www.yellow-eyedpenguin.org.nz

New Zealand Sea Lion Trust www.sealiontrust.org.nz

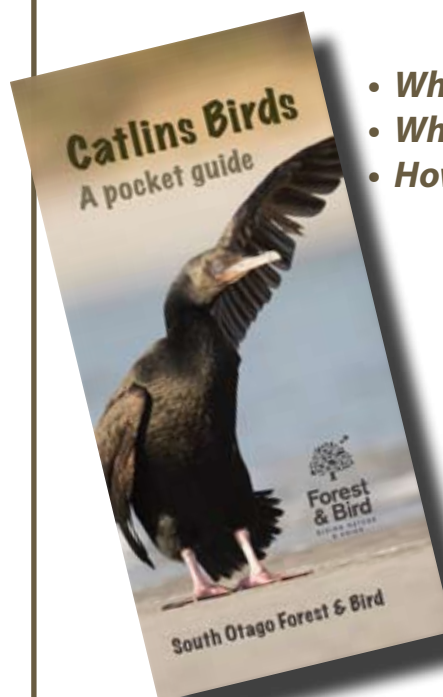
Kārearea: protecting a southern land

Contributions welcome. Copy for May due on 30 April.
Editor Jane Young: janejimyoung@slingshot.co.nz

Kārearea contains southern-focused environmental news and views from both groups and individuals.

It is edited by Jane Young but is not the official newsletter of any specific group.

Catlins Birds - A pocket guide



- What to see
- Where to see
- How to ID



Forest & Bird
TE REO O TE TAIAO
Giving Nature a Voice