



Birds New Zealand

Birds of the Parangarahu (Pencarrow) Lakes



There are not many settlements like Eastbourne in New Zealand where you can live with beautiful native bush flowing to the sea, but many do not know that the Pencarrow Lakes are among the most ecologically important fresh water lakes in New Zealand. This is in part due to the bird life they support. MIRO's banded dotterel monitoring project at the Lakes has been fortunate to have Geoff de Lisle, Wellington Regional Representative of Birds New Zealand (Ornithology Society of New Zealand), accompanying our weekly trips to help with the monitor and banding efforts. This month, we asked Geoff to talk about the bird life that this area supports.

There are four different bird habitats at the Pencarrow Lakes, namely the ocean, beach, wetlands and remnant bush at the head of Lake Kohangatera. Each of these habitats supports different bird species and over 50 bird species have been recorded in this area.

The beaches at the Lakes Block look directly out onto Cook Strait which has a wide range of sea birds, many of which do not come into Wellington Harbour. For example, giant petrel and albatrosses/mollymawks have been seen recently from the beach at Lake Kohangapiripiri.

The beach area is important habitat for nesting birds and this season banded dotterel, variable oystercatchers and black-backed gulls have successfully raised chicks. The extensive trapping program conducted by MIRO and Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) has increased the breeding success of these birds by stopping nest and chick predation. In previous years hedgehogs were the main nest predators of banded dotterels and mustelids and feral cats were likely killing chicks. Potential native predators include black-backed gulls and we observed a falcon killing an adult banded dotterel this year. MIRO and GWRC mitigated human interference of the nesting areas by new signage, temporary fencing and continuing to have the Taranaki Whanui place a Rahui on these sensitive areas. There are good numbers of pipits, a species that is declining in New Zealand and uncommon in many parts of the Wellington region. New Zealand dotterel are rare visitors to the Pencarrow beaches.

The wetlands support a good range and number of waterfowl including black swan, Canada geese, mallard ducks, shovelers, grey teal and paradise ducks. Dabchicks breed in this area. While spotless crakes and bittern have been reported at the Lakes they have not been seen in this area for many years. During the last 12 months a new breeding colony of pied shags (see picture) established at the outlet of Lake Kohangatera. This colony is unusual in that the birds are nesting on low shrubs rather than in tress like at Zealandia and the other pied shag colonies in the Wellington Region or the little shags nesting at the Days Bay duck pond.



The remnant bush at the head of Lake Kohangatera supports a range of bush birds such as tui, bellbird and kereru which are common in the bush above Eastbourne.

Geoff de Lisle and Parker Jones