



## **Shorebird Breeding Monitoring Report 2015/16**

The 2015/16 year has been a successful one for all of the species that we monitor. We think that this demonstrates the benefit of having an effective pest control programme. Maketu Spit is the harder of our two sites to monitor as it is larger, more heavily vegetated and we have failed to find a means of persuading the dotterel stop hiding behind the grass.

### **Pest Control**

We have maintained a year round pest control operation on Maketu Spit using DOC 200 traps and Good Nature self-resetting traps. We caught a total of 14 mustelids (stoats and weasels) 28 rats, 16 hedgehogs and five mice. Most of these were caught either on the Papahikahawai causeway (13) or the #2 fence (38). At Pukehina we trap mainly before the nesting season and produced only one rat and one hedgehog, though we did run a rabbit control operation as well.

### **Maketu Spit**

The distal end really needs to be renamed 'Bird Point' as at the height of the season there are in the region of 3000 birds in the gull and tern colonies. We started the year with a concerted pest control operation in the area east of the Ngaio bush. Initial track tunnels showed significant numbers of rats and some mice. 120 bait stations, baited with brodifacoum were laid in a grid in early July and removed a month later. The tunnels were set again after the removal of the bait stations, no rat prints were found and just a few mouse prints.

### **Newdick's Beach**

We recorded no nesting shorebirds at Newdicks this year. NZ Dotterel were observed from time to time and Variable Oystercatcher more frequently, the beach is heavily frequented with no spit or isolated area that would be attractive for shorebirds. We have fenced off the upper beach at the eastern end, this has helped to enable the beach to grow, but there was also some natural erosion late in the season. There is also an issue with vehicles, or rather their owners who do not always appreciate the reason for the fence. We have continued our trapping programme.

### **Dotterel Point, Pukehina**

The semi-permanent fence has continued to be a great success with all birds agreeing to nest within it. We had to re-arrange it significantly thanks to Cyclone Pam, since when the build-up of sand has been impressive, with no wash over during the high tides and swells in February 2016. Prior to the season we replaced the temporary fence at the foot of the old dune with our more robust semi-permanent one, allowing a 2m passage between to end of the dune and the main fence, after a small amount of vandalism - sign stolen, rope cut, all has been well.

The sandbank in the estuary continues to grow and there has been significant erosion along the inside of the vegetated part of the spit as far east as the Surf Club.

While this has washed out three of our posts, it has the benefit of preventing quadbike access except at low tide.



*Realigned fence at Dotterel Point post Cyclone Pam. Note well trained waders resting inside the fence*

## **NZ Dotterel**

This was an excellent year, as always it is difficult to judge numbers of breeding pairs, but we would estimate a total of 22, with 8 at Pukehina and 14 at Maketu. We also had very good breeding success with at least 12 chicks fledging and possibly significantly more. Pukehina appears to have increased by one pair, Maketu similarly, and with room to expand. Interestingly we had two very small chicks at Pukehina as late as February 8th, one of which was about to fledge a fortnight later.

Nine monitoring visits were made on Maketu Spit between 19/09/15 and 25/01/16, an average of 27 birds were observed, however during the peak period, September-November the average was 31. This compares with an average of 29 in 2014/15 and appears to indicate a modest increase in the breeding population. Of greater significance was the number of young birds that fledged, which looks to be at least 5, while last year we had only one chick sighted and no confirmed fledgings. While it is likely that some young fledged in 2014/15, the numbers this year are impressive and tie in with similar success at Pukehina.

Pukehina was visited 12 times, with an average of 17 birds observed, this would indicate 8 or 9 pairs, and an increase from the average of 15 observed in 2014/15. The first chick was seen on October 25th, and the last, just before fledging on February 21st. A maximum of seven fledged juveniles were recorded on February 21st so it seems likely that at least 8 birds fledged here this year.

## **Banding**

13 Maketu birds were identified on at least two occasions, nine of these birds were regularly recorded in 2014/15. At Pukehina there were 14 regulars, all of which were

also observed the previous year. Two, possibly three birds were recorded in both locations, one was a Pukehina regular making a mid season visit to Maketu, the other was a seen just once in each location in October. One Pukehina bird lost a leg during the year and appeared to be a non-breeder and always seen in the same location.

### **Variable Oystercatcher**

Numbers of variable oystercatchers were also good with an average of 44 (32 in 14/15) at Maketu and 25 (20 in 14/15) at Pukehina, this is a healthy increase especially when at least 5 young fledged at Maketu and 9 at Pukehina (5 & 5 in 2014/15).

### **Black-billed Gull**

Black-billed gulls again nested with the red-bill at Maketu Spit, 36 nests were observed, two down on 14/15, but still well up on the 32 nests in 2013/14. Nesting was successful with most young fledging.



*Black-billed gull and chick, Maketu Spit, November 2015*

### **Red-billed Gull**

The red-billed gull colony was larger than last year, an aerial photograph count (our thanks to Peter Frost for being patient enough to count the dots) came out at 770 pairs. While the colony was observably larger than last year, the estimate from 14/15 probably underestimated the numbers. Breeding success was similar to previous years, though a few late nesters who nested outside our fence, lost their nests to spit erosion late in the season.

### **White-fronted Tern**

We are also indebted to Peter Frost for a more accurate count of the white-fronted terns, which nested as usual, a little later than the gulls, and a little to the west of the gull colony, though there was quite a lot of territorial overlap this year. Peter counted 518 nesting birds - quite an increase on what I have estimated in the past. This count was done in November, my last count at the end of January included four unfledged young including a chick about 5 days old.

## **Conclusions**

Overall an excellent year all round, there was also only one reported interference by a dog on Maketū Spit, hopefully both the culprits from last year have by now left. It appears that the gull and tern colonies are now a regular feature and it is not unreasonable to put this down, at least in part, to our pest control programme. We intend to maintain and improve this programme. With the start of the Kaituna Rediversion project in November 2016, we expect one of the first tasks to be the removal of the causeway connecting Papahikahawai Island to the spit and the one connecting it to the Brain Land. This will reduce the danger of pests reaching the spit via Papahikahawai. The spit itself remain quite stable but we continue, with the help of BOPRC to monitor the erosion by the #1 fence, so that we can take action should there be any indication of a possible breakthrough.

## **Thanks**

While the monitoring programme is showing that we are having a beneficial impact on shorebird numbers, this would not be possible without the help and support of a number of individuals and organisations. Firstly of course thanks need to go to the members of MOWS, without whom the whole project would not be possible. Thanks are also due to BOP Regional Council and Western BOP District Council, whose financial support, along with that of DOC is key to our operation. Additional essential financial support has come from WWFNZ, Baytrust, TECT and F&B Te Puke Branch. We must also acknowledge and thank Ryan Standen, Hamish Dean, Glenn Ayo and Mark Anderson, who provide the essential advice, support and backup that is so crucial to a small community based organisation such as MOWS.

Julian Fitter  
Maketu  
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