Paradise Shelduck Moult Survey

January/February 2020

Results of annual counts at West Coast moult sites.



Glen Newton, Fish & Game Officer, February 2020



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Summary

The endemic Paradise Shelduck (Tadorna variegata) is the West Coast Regions most intensely managed game bird. Large concentrations of birds can cause conflict with landowners resulting in opportunities for hunters to harvest surplus birds. Each year repeat counts are made of known moult sites to gain an index of relative abundance. This year 27,292 birds were observed in total, this is a 44% increase from the previous year and about 10,000 birds above the 25-year average. Long term monitoring (over 25years) indicates that the northern population has slowly increased by 4% but in the short term (5years) has increased by 10%. Long term monitoring (over 25years) indicates that the southern population has increased by 18% but it has been declining for the last 10 years. Both the northern and southern populations have exceeded management levels. Staff recommendations are to retain current regulations within prescribed management levels.

Introduction

Paradise Shelduck (*Tadorna variegata*) ('shelduck') are an endemic New Zealand species and well distributed throughout much of the country. Highest concentrations of shelduck are typically found adjacent to areas of developed farmland. On the West Coast large concentrations of shelduck can be found in the Grey Valley and its catchments, the Buller, Karamea and South Westland.

Since monitoring began in the 1990s populations of shelduck on the West Coast have increased and numbers have exceeded the management levels prescribed in the West Coast Region Fish & Game Management Plan. This population increase is a response to improvement and expansion of their desired habitat – productive farmland (Kelly, 2010). Monitoring has now become critical, both in appeasing landowner concerns that the population is not escalating unchecked, and to allow and to promote opportunities for hunters to harvest surplus birds. This survey provides the baseline information to inform regulation setting, including season length, bag limits and special seasons.

Shelduck congregate during January to March at specific sites to moult. These areas are typically a small to medium sized water body with a nearby food supply. By identifying the location of these moult sites, shelduck populations can be monitored from year to year by counting birds present at each site.

The aim of the current survey was to:

- 1) Repeat the annual counts of known shelduck moult sites to gain an index of relative abundance of shelduck on the West Coast.
- 2) Identify any new sites holding shelduck for repeat counting in 2021.

- 3) Use route regression analysis to assess population trends in the northern and southern management units.
- 4) Provide recommendations for management of the shelduck population in context of the goals and objectives of the West Coast Region 'Sports Fish & Game Bird Management Plan'.

Method

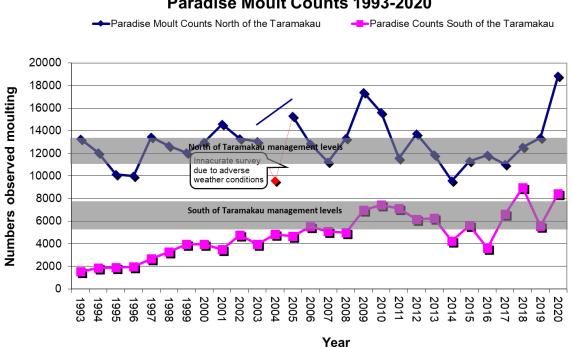
Most of the 2020 moult site counts were undertaken in late January using a DJI Mavic Pro drone. Sites were flown around first to identify what birds were present. Moulting shelduck tend to swim out onto open water when they hear the drone. Video and/or photos were then taken, and the footage reviewed in the office. The remaining sites were counted aerially, using a Piper Super Cub aircraft operated by Knights Point Air from Okarito on January 24th, or from the ground/boat using binoculars/spotting scope. Where accurate counts were difficult to obtain from the air sites were revisited with the drone or on foot to get a more accurate count. During the aerial flight the location any new or changed sites were identified and counts undertaken (Appendix 1).

The number of birds and the percentage change from the previous year was calculated for all sites and then for the northern and southern management units. Fish & Game best practice 'route regression analysis' was then used to analyse the count data. The annual change in counts at individual sites was calculated and summarised into the northern and southern management units. Finally, the data within the northern and southern management units was summarised for population change over time.

Results

Overall numbers

A total of 27,292 shelduck were observed moulting across all sites in 2020. This value was up 8,345 shelduck from the 2019 count of 18,947 this equates to an approximate 44% increase in overall numbers counted from the previous year.

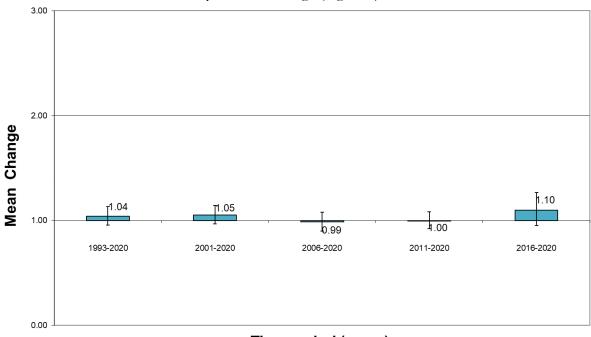


Paradise Moult Counts 1993-2020

Figure 1: Number of Paradise Shelduck observed moulting in each of the separate management areas since 1993.

Northern Management Unit (north of Taramakau River).

A total of 18,863 shelduck were observed moulting at sites north of the Taramakau River in 2019. This value was up 5,478 birds from the 2019 count of 13,385, this equates to an approximate 41% increase in overall numbers counted from the previous year (see Figure:1). Over the past 28 years (1993-2020) shelduck across all monitored sites north of the Taramakau have increased by 4% on average. However, over the past five years (2016-2020) numbers of shelduck across all sites north of the Taramakau have increased by 10% on average (Figure 2).

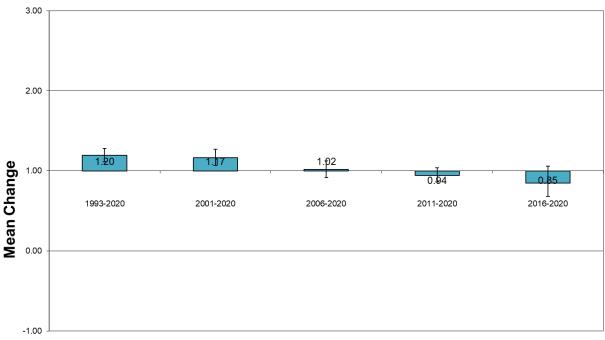


Time period (years)

Figure 2: The mean change (±standard error) in Paradise Shelduck moult counts at sites north of the Taramakau River over specified time periods. Values above or below 1.0 represent an increase or decrease in population over that period.

Southern Management Unit (south of the Taramakau River)

A total of 8,429 birds were observed moulting south of the Taramakau River in 2020. This value is an increase of 2,867 birds from the 2019 count of 5,562 and equates to a 52% increase in overall numbers from the previous year (see Figure 1). Over the past 28 years (1993-2020) shelduck across all monitored sites south of the Taramakau have increased by 18%. However, over the past five years (2016-2020) distribution and numbers of shelduck across many sites south of the Taramakau have declined (Figure 3).



Time period (years)

Figure 3: The mean change (±standard error) in Paradise Shelduck moult counts at sites south of the Taramakau River over specified time periods. Values above or below 1.0 represent an increase or decrease in population over that period.

Discussion

Methods

The use of a drone has enabled quick, cost effective coverage of many sites historically difficult to monitor. The accuracy of counts at these sites is thought to have improved greatly and as a result the numbers of birds recorded has potentially increased. While most known, significant moult sites, are counted each year the results are not a census of the population, rather a relative index of the actual population. The location of moult sites can vary from year to year and new sites appear. Therefore, the results will be an underestimate of the total birds on the West Coast.

Northern Management Unit (NMU)

The analysis shows that sites in the NMU have been relatively stable in the long term (1995-2019) with a gradual increase of 4% over the period. Only 9 out of 28 sites showed a decline while the remaining 19 sites showed an increase. However, in the short-term (2016-2020) half the monitored sites (14 out of 28) have shown a decline, 2 out of 28 sites have had no change, and 12 sites have shown an increase. This is reflected in the count data with high numbers of birds in the Grey Valley (>4,500), Lake Brunner (2,809), Lake Haupri (1,842), Westport (Collins and Gillows)(1,453) and Karamea (1,530) but a decline in many of the other traditional moult sites. One site at the Moonlight Creek (3,030) has a particularly high concentration of shelduck and the areas adjacent to this site is where many of the crop predation complaints dealt with come from. As the 2020 counts were higher than 2019, and above prescribed management levels, increasing hunter pressure in these concentrated areas may reduce some of the complaints received.

Southern Management Unit (SMU)

The analysis shows that on average the 15 sites monitored long term (1993-2020) have increased by 18% with only 2 of 15 sites showing a decline while the remaining 13 sites showed an increase. Interestingly, the analysis shows that on average the 22 sites monitored short term (2016-2020)

have decreased by 15% with half of the 22 sites showing a decline and the other half an increase. This suggests that bird numbers after an initial increase have stabilised and are now dropping. However, what has happened is that birds are now in low numbers or absent from many historical moult sites but in very high numbers at a select few sites. Since each site has the same weighting a suggested decline by the analysis can occur when total numbers are actually increasing. This meant this seasons count was the second highest on record after the 2018 count. The hot dry spell that predominated mid to late January potentially would have exacerbated this trend as birds were moulting early and found clustered in large groups. This was evident on Lake Rotokino (2,350birds), Okarito Lagoon (2,150birds), Groves Swamp (1,250birds) and to a lesser degree L&M pond Arahura (710birds), Lake Pratt (450birds), Fox Oxidation Ponds (400birds) and Lake Ianthe (400birds). These seven sites accounted for 91% of total birds counted. This could be due to birds moulting in new sites, or to different observers and planes undertaking the counts. The lack of crop predation complaints received from the SMU this season potentially reflects the concentration of birds in areas disconnected from pasture.

New sites

The preference for moulting sites is most likely influenced by the availability of food nearby and seasonal conditions such as rainfall. Dry summers could lead to birds choosing to moult on larger waterbodies as smaller waterbodies dry up. Site fluctuations were again noticeable in this year's counts with two new sites located and counted. One in the Waitaha Riverbed above the SH6 bridge and one in Glasseye Creek.

Gamebird Regulations

When the results from both the annual moult counts, and the game harvest survey are combined, management tools can be put in place to maintain a sustainable shelduck population while providing maximum hunter opportunity. In 2019, an estimated total of 3,630 shelduck were harvested by West Coast and out of region licence holders. West Coast licence holders harvested on average only six shelduck for the 2019 season. While there is considerable scope within the current regulations ie. a three-month season and 15 bird daily bag limit for the shelduck population to be kept within prescribed management levels the population is still increasing. Promotion of the hunting opportunity through organised hunts would be beneficial as is opening up the March summer season to all hunters. This provides a useful means for dispersing birds following the moult period when most of the crop predation complaints are dealt with.

Staff Recommendations

- Repeat the annual counts of all known shelduck moult sites including newly identified sites to gain an index of relative abundance of shelduck on the West Coast.
- Retain current bag limits and season duration.
- Continue to promote the West Coast shelduck population as an underutilised resource and rewarding hunting opportunity.
- Undertake organised hunts in areas with high shelduck populations and properties where significant crop predation occurs post moult.

References

Kelly, D (2010). Paradise Shelduck Moult Survey 2010. Fish & Game West Coast internal report.

Fish & Game West Coast Region (2011). Sports Fish and Game Management Plan for the West Coast Fish & Game Region. Fish & Game West Coast, internal report.

Newton, G. (2019). Paradise Shelduck Moult Survey January/February 2019. Fish & Game West Coast internal report.

Appendices

Appendix A: Aerial and ground counts of moult sites from 1993 to 2019.

NMU

Area	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
L. Haupiri	702	794	762	540	660	660	490	420	450	450	300	200	350	180	80	320	200	20	20	100	230	230	150	330	430	250	1491	1842
L. Poerua	190	216	298	480	210	300	160	320	150	600	300	450	300	160	70	110	450	50	300	30	120	108	232	596	790	400	592	460
Lake Brunner	2722	1400	1440	1200	2200	1950	2100	2550	2050	400	1680	750	1000	800	1000	1350	1400	300	500	900	500	700	1655	2100	1020	1500	1548	2809
Arnold River																											66	68
Ikamatua	1522	1500	2062	2500	2800	2200	1800	2000	2500	1900	1410	600	2500	1600	1200	1500	1000	1000	120	700	120	70	3	0	80	0	5	2
Ikamatua					600	550	400	400	1000	700	3	0	1000	1350	700	1500	1750	2000	1300	600	500	980	900	420	750	355	415	907
Barrytown Lagoon	156	219	164	204	266	230	215	165	270	300	210	150	300	450	450	320	400	370	400	290	230	290	330	170	192	333	450	628
Fergusons pond	300	2900	1600	0	175	350	550	12	450	0	5	0	0	150	200	150	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	0	0
Karamea	226	383	354	580	740	450	780	850	1450	1400	1120	1300	570	660	1000	1000	1100	2000	200	1200	1450	950	1450	1100	950	1050	967	1530
Glasseye Lake																												223
Virgin Flat																			700	650	600	450	580	700	124	218	195	53
Collins and Gillows	340	437	426	542	873	890	705	990	1186	1330	1060	1100	1050	1600	1085	700	950	1850	1200	1000	288	450	580	350	380	520	962	1453
Kokiri pond	2400	2200	2400	2280	3200	3000	2100	3500	3350	4000	3200	1800	2600	2500	1500	2500	3000	3500	3300	2000	1800	1900	1500	1100	426	560	937	733
Ahaura River	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	50	35	50	95	120	115	56	114	110	113	400	305	190
Grey River	3902	400	74	182	10	80	200	160	0	0	230	230	165	150	570	410	1960	200	280	320	747	191	910	1261	2579	2700	2571	<u>303</u> 0
Grey River Ngahere					450	510	530	580	750	1150	2500	1260	3000	560	350	900	500	1000	280	1950	2500	500	400	1150	309	2500	345	530
Runanga Oxidation Ponds															0	0	250	400	400	300	80	300	200	400	350	350	429	987
Inangahua/Buller	166	77	78	148	150	160	160	220	180	160	85	100	100	90	60	100	80	80	200	150	150	290	280	170	130	118	259	487
Bell Hill Airstrip			440	850	400	10	1400	310	4	100	550	1250	2200	1800	2200	1600	3000	1600	1400	900	950	450	276	250	120	68	166	215
Bell Hill house															0	0	450	500	400	190	1	300	290	17	8	0	178	730
Bell Hill New Pond																												159
Waipuna Farm Pond				163	0	220	150	1	0	0	2	50	50	50	30	70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Waipuna Farm				340	0	0	0	120	0	0	0	95	0	0	30	100	0	160	150	205	195	139	225	34	90	300	43	237
Lake Kangaroo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	130	0	150	180	160	0	8	20	30	6	27	10	30	20	0
Lady Lake					700	1110	270	360	800	820	410	200	110	350	80	310	200	250	80	250	120	60	145	25	40	0	64	89
Lake Swan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200	600	200	150	0	150	100	125	220	180	97	170	100	151	250
Mawheraiti							65	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	40	0	37	104	93	321	0	0	100
Greenstone Pond	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	350	20	100	110	40	55	50	0	85	70	87	60
Reefton Oxi ponds																					300	70	319	450	380	550	581	573
Camerons (new River pond)																							50	100	50	0	115	120
Reddale Pond																				1600	700	750	400	800	1100	200	360	398
Total	13267	12051		10011	13434			12968			13065	9535		12780		13340	17405	15610		13713	11181	9576	10879	10950	9867	-	13385	18863
Change		-1216	-1911	-129	3423	-764	-595	893	1622	-1280	-245	-3530	5760	-2515	-1525	2085	4065	-1795	-4035	2138	-2532	-1605	1303	71	-1083	2505	1013	5478
% Change		-9	-16	-1	34	-6	-5	7	13	-9	-2	-27	60	-16	-12	19	30	-10	-26	18	-18	-14	14	1	-10	25	8	41

SMU

Area	1993	3 1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
L. Arthur	10	D 68	150	239	200	120	170	135	50	60	58	20	30	20	0	0	20	4	40	50	86	135	175	80	190	50	92	80
L. Rotokino	119	6 840	1430	1307	1960	1992	2470	2825	2350	3120	3050	2300	2000	2000	1500	1900	2800	1000	700	1490	2070	430	1530	570	1210	4000	1440	2350
Lake Wahapo	(D 0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200	20	0	0	25	70	30	40	98	0	60	150	100	150	30
Saltwater Lagoon		940	0	0	0	0	250	50	0	0	0	0	30	0	50	0	10	0	60	100	90	61	45	50	31	50	90	0
Five Mile Lagoon	(D 0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	280	260	80	70	50	130	100	103	104	110	160	94	70	34	0
Totara Lagoon	23	90	320	420	210	370	165	170	160	165	80	0	100	100	70	135	0	120	140	170	295	81	38	235	295	20	225	122
Lake Pratt	(D 0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200	350	200	400	250	150	160	200	280	120	200	250	200	140	450
Cook Lagoon		0 C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300	350	300	300	350	1200	300	300	0	120	50	150	50	72	0
Cook River																					130	59	284	70	296	0	140	400
Waitaha Lagoon	(D 0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	170	350	400	350	370	250	360	240	140	300	230	150	5	30	10	4	165
Arahura	(0 C	0	0	0	0	0	200	390	780	88	230	280	940	500	900	1500	600	1200	920	500	665	450	184	422	450	384	710
Kapitea Reservoir	(D 0	0	0	320	810	610	450	510	650	520	136	390	100	30	110	120	20	5	65	5	29	54	20	2	20	40	30
Grove Swamp		0 C	0	0	0	0	300	140	40	0	150	2000	1500	700	550	700	1500	4000	2000	1100	1650	1300	1550	380	745	2000	1400	1250
Hokitika River	(0 C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300	500	180	0	100	50	240	64	56	53	208	205	50	137	170
Whataroa River																			50	0	110	0	66	170	0	10	14	0
Lake lanthe																			180	300	50	200	160	200	338	200	330	400
Lake Mapourika																			20	10	0	0	2	8	2	0	0	2
Okarito Lagoon		0 C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	500	0	0	550	900	780	70	484	530	565	1854	1600	600	2150
Wanganui Lagoon	(0 C	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	60	110	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	10	3	2
Poerua River pond																				70	18	0	65	60	140	0	70	30
Hari Hari farms																				150	20	6	0	185	68	0	55	4
Gillespies beach																							60	5	0	0	2	0
Lake Kaniere																					150	17	70	0	147	70	140	44
Waiho River																								120	0	0	0	0
Taramakau																											100	40
Total	153	5 1848	1900	1966	2690	3292	3965	3970	3500	4775	3946	4856	4680	5540	5090	4985	6970	7429	7135	6175	6251	4235	5632	3590	6619	8960	5562	8429
Change		313	52	66	724	602	673	5	-470	1275	-829	910	-176	860	-450	-105	1985	459	-294	-960	76	-2016	1397	-2042	3029	2341	-3398	2867
% Change		20	3	3	37	22	20	0	-12	36	-17	23	-4	18	-8	-2	40	7	-4	-13	1	-32	33	-36	84	35	-38	52

		NZTM Map grid reference									
Moult Area	Northing	• •									
L. Haupiri	5286391.6	1492479.8									
L. Poerua	5270574.8	1476089									
Lake Brunner	5283205.2	1475503.2									
Ikamatua	5320364.6	1491629.2									
Ikamatua	5321226.3	1491977.2									
Barrytown Lagoon	5327157.7	1460956.3									
Karamea	5434333.2	1524774.8									
Virgin flat	5366728.3	1476234.5									
Collins and Gillows	5374297.5	1480421.9									
Kokiri pond	5295944.1	1466377.7									
Ahaura River	5290399.1	1501656	5299918.4	1496530							
Grey River	5317371.8	1490202	5305236.3	1469544.9							
Grey River Ngahere	5303381	1468471.8									
Runanga Oxidation Ponds	5305572.1	1456214.1									
Inangahua/Buller	5363806.6	1510086.6									
Bell Hill Airstrip	5288284.4	1479090.3									
Bell Hill House	5286461.7	1485843.4									
Waipuna Farm pond	5219923.9	1496637.4									
Waipuna Farm	5309914.6	1496662.7									
Kangaroo Lake	5280914.9	1480401.7									
Lady Lake	5282324.1	1483041.4									
Lake Swan	5276598	1479592.2									
Mawheraiti	5335951.8	1497432.6									
Greenstone Pond	5277640	1454678.5									
Reddale Pond	5339256.4	1508720.5									
Reefton Ponds	5337230	1504823.3									
L. Arthur	5248056	1444683									
L. Rotokino	5218444.3	1391019.8									
L. Wahapo	5207542.5	1378773.9									
Saltwater Lagoon	5218445.1	1384909.2									
Five Mile Lagoon	5205162.7	1364472									
Totara Lagoon	5255928.5	1425496.2									
Lake Pratt	5196286.2	1370685.3									
Cook Lagoon	5184874.4	1339758.6									
Waitaha Lagoon	5239832.6	1407604									
Arahura	5270233.6	1442185.1									
Kapitea Reservoir	5272033.4	1452226.9									
Grove Swamp	5255748.5	1430778.7									
Hokitika River	5265407.4	1436224									
Whataroa River	5217600.8	1386907.3	5254807.1	1433662.3							
Lake lanthe	5230228.7	1406335.3									
Lake Mapourika	5199140.6	1372443.9									
Okarito Lagoon	5213936.1	1373735									
-	5231805.4	1390435.9									
Wanganui Lagoon	5222394.3	1393511.6									
Poerua River pond	5224603	1403356.4									
Hari Hari farms											
Lake Kaniere	5252602.6	1449532.2									
Gillespies beach creek	5188677.5	1343434.5									
Camerons pond	5287587.5	1447367.5									

Appendix B: West Coast Region Paradise Shelduck moult count sites.