

Trends in the occurrence of some birds in Pāuatahanui Inlet from 1982/83 to 2022/23

A report by Ian Armitage from the Ornithological Society of New Zealand.

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand has monitored birds in Pāuatahanui Inlet since 1982/83, a survey that is repeated every 10 years. The fifth series of counts of this long-term programme commenced in April 2022 and will continue until March 2024. Counts are made each month for two years and then are paused for eight years before the next cycle begins. The counts are carried out on the first Sunday of each month by Wellington members of the Society.

A reliable record of the change in the occurrence, numbers and seasonal distribution of Inlet birds over a period of 40 years will have accumulated once this current series of counts is complete. So, what have we learned, so far?

Overall, 31 wetland, estuarine and oceanic bird species have been recorded in the Inlet as well as 26 land species. More bird species are being recorded now than in 1982, due to the natural arrival of several new species and by one recent introduction (the North Island fernbird) by members of the Pāuatahanui Wildlife Reserve. Pied shag, royal spoonbill and Canada goose are well established now but these species were not present some 30 to 40 years ago. Some species are now more numerous than they were 30 or more years ago, notable amongst these being the South Island pied oystercatcher and the little black shag. Uncommon wetland species are New Zealand dabchick and Bar-tailed godwit. Three recent and natural arrivals of land birds are bellbird, kereru and New Zealand falcon.

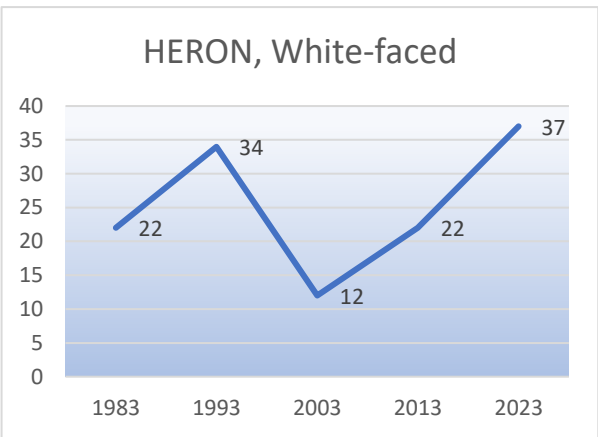
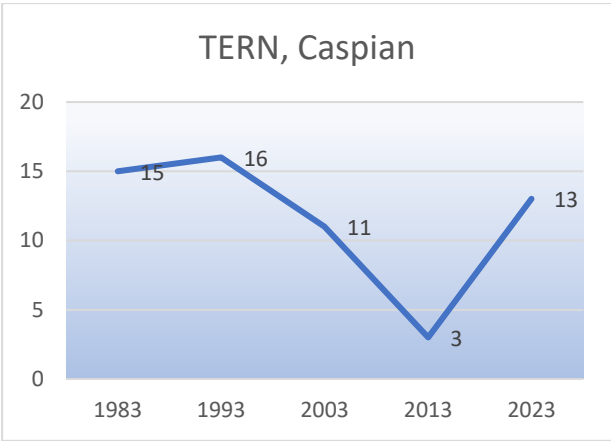
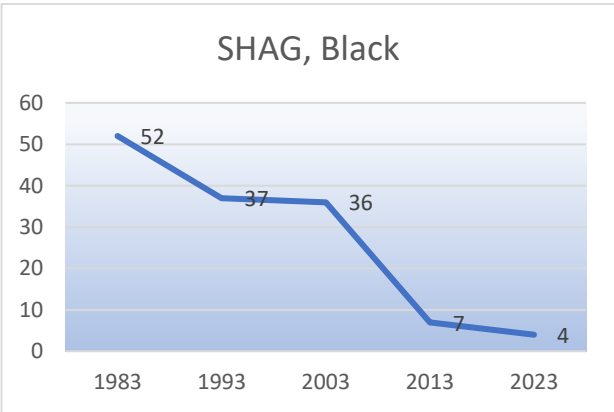
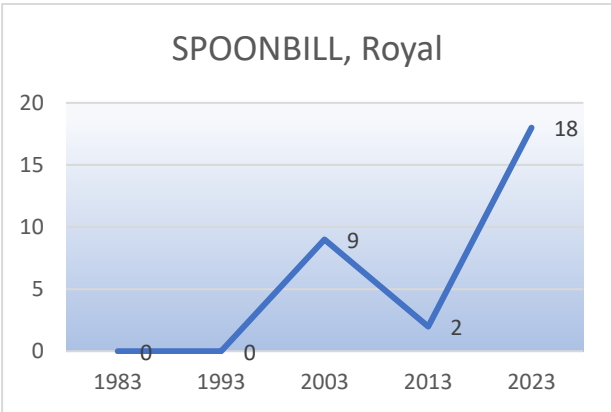
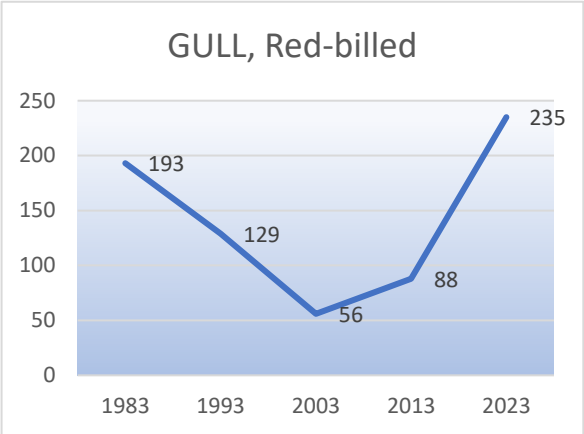
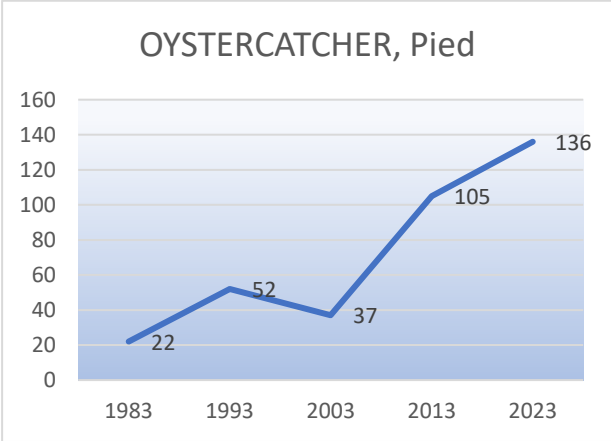
It appears that the total number of birds in Pāuatahanui Inlet's wetland habitats may be decreasing. On-going surveys will determine whether this worrying trend continues, whether or not it is seasonal and which species are most in decline. At least part of the decline is that of black-backed gulls, fewer now being counted than there were 40 years ago.

Comparisons for the July-August-September period (winter months) between 1982 and 2022 illustrate this broad trend and are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Changes in number of birds and species in winter, 1982 to 2022

Year	Average No. Birds	Average No. Species
1982	1,700	29
1992	1,262	30
2002	729	39
2012	661	36
2022	869	41

Trends for six named oceanic and wetland species (some having conservation-threat rankings) from 1983 to 2022 (June & July) are shown in the following charts.



It is evident that the numbers of several bird species are increasing while others are in decline. Most, however, have generally stable populations. The reasons for this pattern vary but are probably caused by adaptation to changing land and wetland habitats. Some species are better able to adapt to the changes than others. Declining or increasing food supplies, improved protection from predators and changes to nesting environments are all factors that can influence bird populations.

Some information from this Pāuatahanui Inlet bird survey programme is being used for regional environmental planning purposes by the Greater Wellington Regional Council and Porirua City Council.

Ongoing monitoring is desirable and it is hoped that members of the Ornithological Society will continue this project for several decades more.

This information can also be used to raise awareness of the various bird species found in Pāuatahanui Inlet and to encourage their continued protection.

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August 2023
