



Wetland site pre-construction, October 2022



Orkney Wetland Bird Monitoring Factsheet

June
2025

Bird monitoring has been an important part of tracking changes at the Orkney wetland, starting even before its construction. We're grateful to Ben Sowry from Fish and Game Otago, who led the early rounds of monitoring. Since January 2024, a dedicated group of local volunteers has taken over, regularly heading out to observe and record bird activity at the site.

This factsheet summarises the bird monitoring results so far.

Early Bird Monitoring

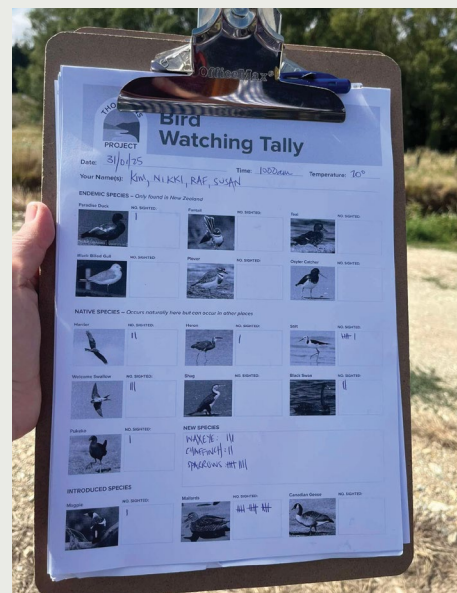
Before the wetland was constructed, the area was dominated by crack willow and included a duck pond. Ben Sowry from Fish and Game Otago carried out bird monitoring in January 2021 and January 2022, focusing on species associated with permanent water. Observations were made using binoculars and a spotting scope from three locations. In January 2022, counts were taken from a rocky outcrop near the cycle trail, recording only the maximum number of each species to avoid double-counting.

Comparing the two years, most species were slightly lower in number in 2022, with some, like the paradise shelduck, shoveler, and scaup, not observed at all. Grey teal numbers also declined, which is common for this highly mobile species.

No monitoring was carried out in January 2023 due to pond drainage and ongoing wetland construction.



Ben Sowry bird monitoring, January 2021



Species	Maximum Numbers Observed January 2021	Maximum Numbers Observed January 2022
Pūkeko <i>Porphyrio porphyrio melanotus</i>	4	2
Mallard Duck <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	136	117
Australasian Shoveler <i>Anas rhynchotis</i>	9	0
Grey Teal <i>Anas gracilis</i>	56	16
Paradise Shelduck <i>Tadorna variegata</i>	35	0
NZ Scaup <i>Aythya novaeseelandiae</i>	3	0
Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>	5	2
White Faced Heron <i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	1	-
Black Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	-
Black Swan <i>Cygnus atratus</i>	-	4

Current Monitoring: January 2024 - May 2025

The volunteer group monitoring birds at the Orkney wetland has been active since January 2024, establishing a regular monthly monitoring routine.

Results

A variety of bird species are now using the new wetland, with regular sightings of pūkeko, stilts, plovers, and occasional visits from herons and oystercatchers. While duck numbers have decreased compared to 2021–22, paradise ducks, teal, and mallards are still present. A pair of black swans has consistently occupied the site, nesting in June 2024 and January 2025, and is currently on another nest as of June 2025. Their young tend to leave after fledging, and a second pair of swans has recently arrived. Welcome swallows are commonly seen flitting over the water.

Black-billed gulls nested from September 2023 to January 2024, with numbers peaking at over 1,000 individuals. A second influx in August 2024 did not result in nesting, possibly due to flooding. A marsh crane (small, elusive bird species in decline due to habitat loss) was also recently spotted in the wetland.



Nesting black-backed gulls took a liking to the flood zone rocks from August 2023 to January 2024

Orkney Wetland Bird Monitoring Jan 2024 - May 2025													
	17-Jan-24	12-Apr-24	16-May-24	16-Aug-24	27-Sept-24	25-Oct-24	22-Nov-24	29-Nov-24	3-Jan-25	30-Jan-25	21-Mar-25	30-Apr-25	31-May-25
Teal	31			5	2			2	2		4	4	14
Paradise Duck	2	3	6	10	3	6	5	2	8	1	11	4	1
Plover	2		2	3	2	2					3	5	5
Black billed gull				60	2								
Harrier					1					2	2	1	2
White-faced Heron					3			1		1			
Black Shag													
Pied Stilt	10			8	10	9	9	8		6			
Magpie													
Mallard duck	18		8		15	5					20	40	
Black swan		2	2	2	2		1		3	2	2	2	
Canada Goose												40	
Welcome swallow		13		2	0	2				3	2		1
Pūkeko	2	11	4		4					1	8	6	10

Table 2: Main species monitored

Key learnings

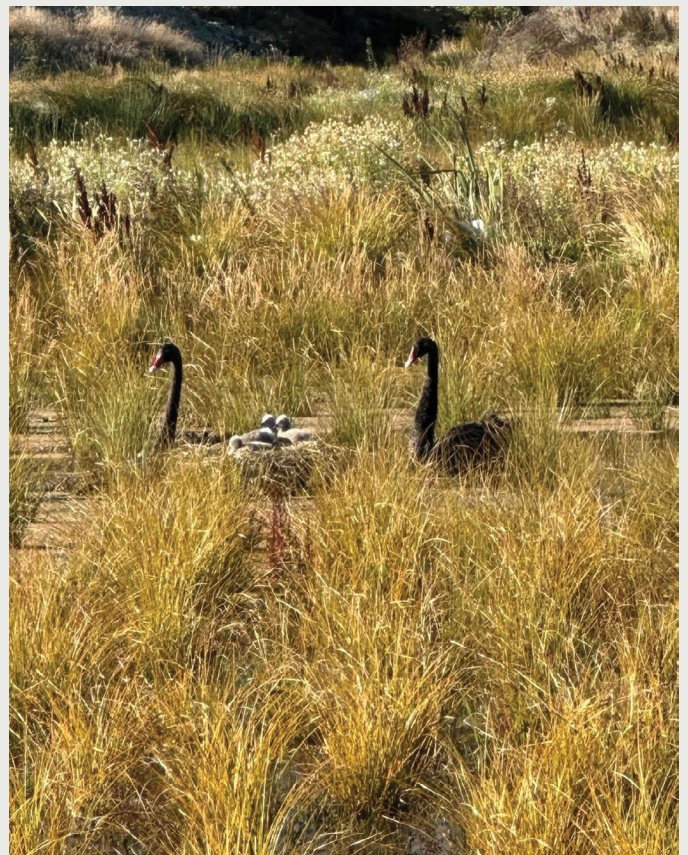
- ▶ The wetland was created to improve water quality, so the thriving birdlife has been an unexpected and welcome bonus.
- ▶ Most bird breeding occurs between August and January, although the swans appear to breed year-round, with three nests recorded in a single year! Spring and early summer are the best times to spot birds.
- ▶ The variety of bird species has been surprising, ranging from pied stilts and black-billed gulls to a grey teal and, more recently, a marsh crake.
- ▶ There were fewer nests in spring 2024 compared to spring 2023. Four significant floods between mid-September and early November 2024 may have disrupted the breeding season. It will be interesting to see how spring 2025 compares.
- ▶ Native plantings on the “islands” and along the wetland edges are helping to create habitat, while the trapping team plays a vital role in keeping the area safe for wildlife.



Bird monitoring from the public viewing platform



Some of the keen bird monitoring team:
Raf Wyatt, Susan Heal, Nikki Williams



Swan pair with their cygnets, March 2025



Visitors can access the wetland via the rail trail and enjoy birdwatching from the viewing platform.

By staying on the hill, you help give birds a safe space to feed and nest. Thank you for respecting their habitat.

Email us directly at thomsonscatchment@gmail.com to join us. Take a look and see what you can spot on your next visit!