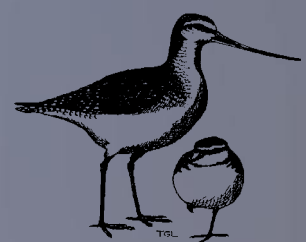


MIRANDA NEWS

Naturalists' Trust
April 2008 Issue 69



2008 Godwit Satellite tracking
Wrybills in Paradise
Banded Stilts in the Coorong



April 2008 Issue 69

From the Blackboard
07 April 2008

Upcoming Events

- May 11 1pm AGM,
Note the time. High tide is at 11am so come and go birding first.
- June 22 OSNZ Winter Census.
Contact the Centre for details.
- August 9 6PM
Winter Potluck Dinner
Speakers: Detlef and Carol Davies,
birding in Panama
- August 10 10AM
Working Bee, come and help with
the annual maintenance of the
Shorebird Centre.
- September 9-11
NZ Dotterel Management Course
- October 19 1pm
Welcome to the birds Note the
time, High tide 11am so BIRDING
FIRST!
- November 2
OSNZ November Census. Con-
tact the Centre for details.
- November 15-16
Wader ID Weekend. Contact the
Centre for details.
- January 24-30 2009
Miranda Field Course 2009.
For details contact the Centre.
- Volunteer days, see dates back page

Cover: Only a portion of the vast Kokota Spit which encloses
Parengarenga Harbour. See article page 8 Photo Keith Woodley.

Back Cover: Banded Stilts on the Coorong in South Australia. See
article page 22. Photos Inka Veltheim

A word from the editor

Someone asked me recently if the “birding thing” ever gets old. It doesn’t get old. I read stories about migration, local shorebirds and terns, and sometimes I even write them, and I give talks about it, and I talk to my friends about it (those that will still listen), and somehow, amazingly, it doesn’t get old. Because in all the details, in all the facts, both little and big, that keep appearing there is an amazing story of these amazing birds doing these amazing things, and they are just outside, and if I need to remind myself why I do it I can just go out and there they are, pulling me in again. It doesn’t get old.

I realised putting this issue of the News together how privileged I am to be involved in the unfolding of the migration story, to be involved at a time when there are still basic questions to be answered, and finally the technology and the access to help us answer some of those questions. And it’s not just the techno-godwit story, its being able to go to China to do counts, and being able to take photos with digital cameras, and having the ability to put engraved flags on birds, and then read them once they are on. Its being able to get a look in, and be a part of, the whole shorebird story.

In putting this issue together it was very clear that I’m not alone. The genuine enthusiasm with which several people have written about their birding experiences for this issue adds to the sense of community that I feel at Miranda. And I’d like to thank you all for that.
Gillian Vaughan.

Arctic Migrants

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Bar-tailed Godwit | 700 |
| Red Knot | 500 |
| Turnstone | 36 |
| Red-necked Stint | 1 |
| Sharp-tailed Sandpiper | 14 |
| Hudsonian Godwit | 1 |
| Golden Plover | 1 |

New Zealand Species

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| Pied Oystercatcher | lots |
| Wrybill | 2500 |
| NZ Dotterel | 7 |
| Banded Dotterel | 100+ |
| Variable Oystercatcher | |
| Black-billed Gull | |
| Red-billed Gull | |
| White-fronted Tern | |
| Caspian Tern | |
| Pied Stilt | |
| White Heron | 2 |
| Spoonbill | 2 |

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from the MANAGER

Keith Woodley

On Wednesday 26 March the entire Centre was transformed into a conference room for a meeting of the Hauraki Gulf Forum. The forum comprises mayors and councillors representing all the local and regional authorities around the Gulf. They normally meet in Auckland but their new chairman, Hauraki District Mayor John Tredgida, managed to entice them out to Miranda.



The first activity of the day was to gather at the hide on the high tide, to view the wader flocks – liberally represented by SIPO and Wrybill, with the godwit flock having thinned considerably within the last few days. This was followed by a welcome ceremony from Ngati Paoa.

The Forum meeting offered an ideal opportunity to launch the third phase of Muddy Feet. As many readers will be aware completion of a relative risk assessment model identified and ranked in order of significance key stressors on the environment as well as the source of those impacts. The project has now reached Phase III which involves the implementation of an integrated management plan for the Firth of Thames Ramsar site and its catchment. This next stage envisages direct action by associated agencies to address some of those issues. Those of us involved in this project have long seen it as an ideal project for the Hauraki Gulf Forum to coordinate, and a presentation was made to the meeting making that point.

The dynamic shell formations of Miranda continue to be just that. The Chenier Plain display panel at the centre has, as its background, an aerial photo taken in 1996. Some distance off the then shell spit a tiny island of shell can be seen. Since then this small deposit has developed into an extensive ridge extending south east into the bay. Until several years ago any birds on it were readily visible from the shore, but now the ridge is high enough to hide substantial

numbers of the oystercatcher flock which regularly roost there. Access to the new shell bank required negotiating a broad band of very soft mud, but now it has joined to the old shell spit north of the hide. Meanwhile two broad pans of shell have begun forming elsewhere; one as a south easterly extension of the new spit, and one several hundred metres north of the hide.


If past patterns are any indication, these pans could well be the beginning of new chenier ridges. Watch this space over the next ten years!

Banded Dotterels are not uncommon at Miranda, especially from late summer but they are normally widely scattered, often sprinkled along the coast or around the roosting wader flocks. This year they became a regular and prominent feature on the walk out to the hide from the Limeworks gate. It was not unusual, through late February and March, to have more than 100 birds spread over the grassed ridges between the Stilt Ponds and the beach. I do not recall previously seeing so many of them in this area on such a regular basis.

The Hudsonian Godwit, a faithful presence among the Miranda flocks over the past three years, disappeared sometime over the summer. From late January many visitors scanned the flocks hoping to find it, but to no avail. Perhaps it was a young bird when it first appeared here and had now matured into migratory restlessness, wandering off elsewhere in the country or further afield. It was

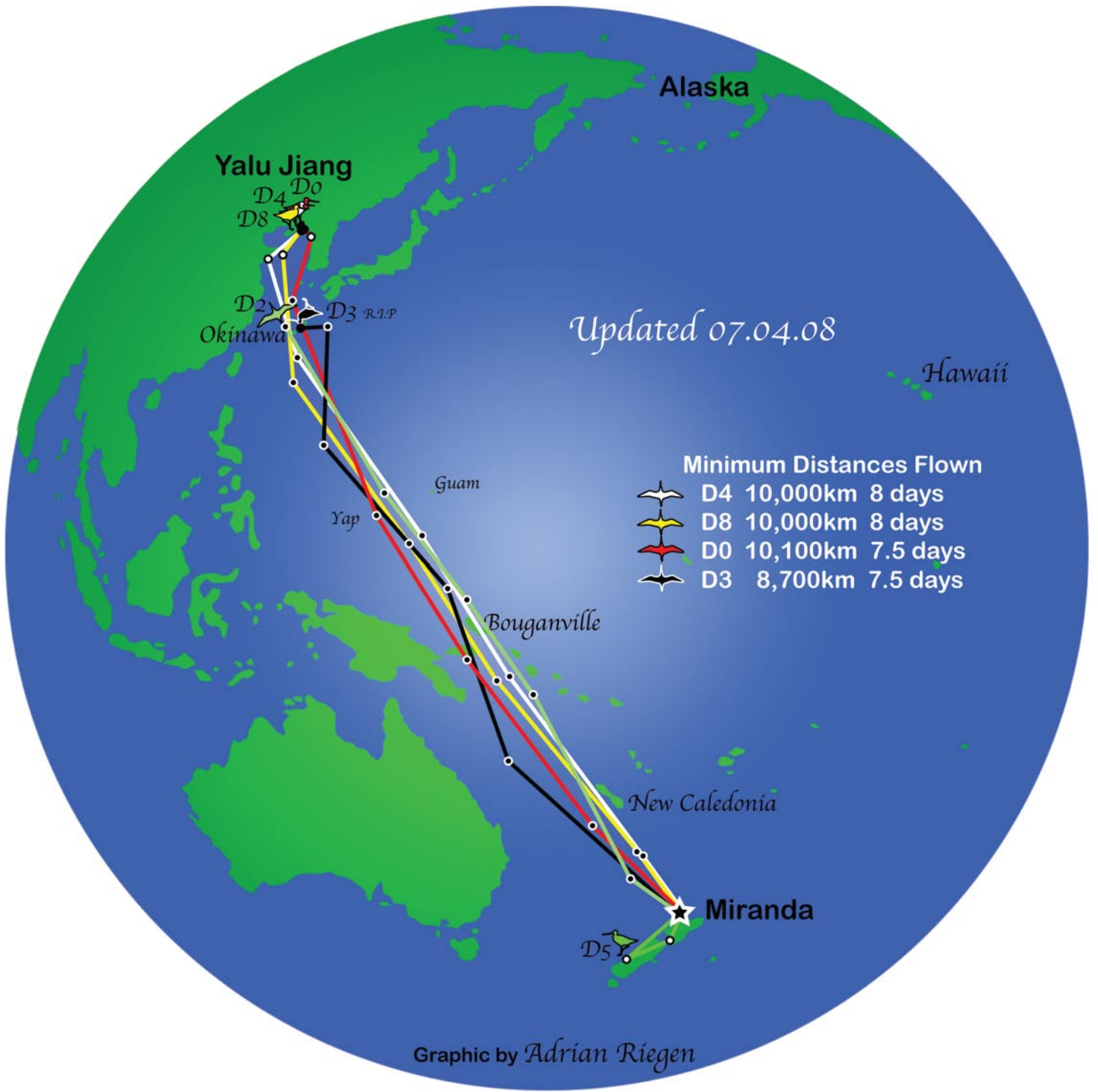
missed, including during the March Open Day when conversation on the shellbanks turned to speculation about just what had happened to it. From the birders perspective it was good while it lasted, and at this point the discussion ended. I was somewhat astonished therefore, the very next day to see it sitting immediately in front of the hide, well advanced into breeding plumage.

One unusual sighting was, however made, on the Open Day: a juvenile Black-fronted Tern, sitting at the edge of the Wrybill flock outside the hide. While this species has occurred here in the past, it remains an extremely rare visitor. Sitting close by, for useful purposes of comparison, was a Little Tern resplendent in breeding plumage. A flock of up to 100 Pacific Golden Plover also added variety and colour to the day.

I am going to be taking leave of absence from Miranda over the next few months to complete research on a book about godwits. Jenni Hensley will be stepping in to manage the day to day affairs of the centre, assisted by a coalition of volunteers. 



*The return of the Hudsonian Godwit.
Photo K Woodley*



D5's journey to date. Images prepared by USGS.



E9's regular movements between harbours

What a difference a year makes: 2008 Bar-tailed Godwit Satellite tracking

Gillian Vaughan

The satellite tracking of Bar-tailed Godwits done in 2007 was reported on in detail in issues 66 and 67 of MNT News. Eight transmitters were placed on godwits caught at Miranda and a further eight on godwits caught near Nelson. This year transmitters were placed on nine birds caught at Miranda on February 11th and 12th, and 15 caught at Broome in North West Australia between the 18th and 23rd of February.



Once again the work was undertaken by a team headed by Bob Gill. There have been some interesting differences between the 2007 and 2008 groups at Miranda. In 2007 the birds banded at Miranda stayed in the Firth of Thames until they departed on migration. In 2008 three of the birds have left the Firth to other New Zealand estuaries. In general adult Bar-tailed Godwits have been considered to be very site faithful, so the movements of these three have been followed with interest.

D6 - Female

On February 28th D6 reported in from Kawhia Harbour, around 120km to the southwest of Miranda, on March 4th she'd moved north to Aotea Harbour and by March 9th she was back at Miranda. Since then most of her records have come from the Piako area (where E7 was usually found last year) rather than Miranda. Given that she is known to be 17 years old, we presume she knows what she is doing.

E9 - Female

Having stayed in the Firth until the end of February, on March 4th E9 reported in from Matahui Point just to the south of Katikati in the Tauranga Harbour. On the 5th she was on the ocean beach of Matakana Island and by March 7th she was back in the Firth. On March 18th she reported in from Miranda, on the 19th from the Manukau Harbour, on the 21st once again from the Firth, on the 23rd and 25th she was again in the Manukau, and on the 27th she was back at Miranda. On the 28th she once again

moved south to Matahui Point, the 30th of March showed her back at Miranda, while on the 1st of April she was in the Manukau Harbour. On the 3rd of April she was recorded using a roost at Okaro Creek, one of two godwit roost sites on the North Kaipara Heads; this was not a first step towards migration as on the 5th of April she was once again recorded in the Manukau.

D5 - Female

D5 initially stayed very close to Miranda – up until the 21st of March the furthest she had been recorded from the Stilt Ponds was 2.7km north, 1.3 km south and 1.75 km east onto the mudflats. On March 22nd however she reported in from Okarito Lagoon on the West Coast of the South Island, 800km to the south. She stayed there until March 30th when she began to head north. She was seen at Foxton on the 30th and was tracked pausing briefly at Wanganui on the 31st. She reported in from Miranda on the 2nd of April however by April 4th she was back at Okarito. Simply on the flights to Okarito and back she's flown more than 2,500 km.

D7 - Male

In stark contrast on the 4th of April D7 hadn't been recorded more than 1.5km from the Miranda Stilt Ponds.

The group that left on migration in March didn't stray from the Firth of Thames before their departure.

D8 - Male

D8, a male, was probably the first

to leave. He first reported in on the 15th of March, around 1480 km from the Stilt Ponds at Miranda. He had arrived on the west coast of the Yellow Sea by the 23rd of March, having flown for around 8 days while covering between 10,000 and 10,100 km after leaving Miranda. He stayed there for 10 days, then by April 3rd had moved up to Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve in China. This is the first confirmation that males, as well as females, make a massive flight direct to eastern Asia.

D4 - Female

D4 also reported in on 15th of March slightly further south than D8, but by the 21st she had overtaken D8 in the western Pacific. On March 23rd she was in China after a flight of around 7½ days, having flown almost 10,100 km. On 1 April she reported in from Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve.

D3 - Female

D3, another female, reported in on the 19th, northwest of New Caledonia, on the 20th she was north of Papua New Guinea, on the 24th she was in Okinawa, where she stopped. Sadly, based on the information about her temperature, she died there between the 25th and 27th of March. Adrian Riegen had seen her shortly before she left and commented that she didn't seem to have put as much weight on as the other birds have when they leave.

D0 - Male

D0, the first male tagged this year, stayed very close to Miranda before leaving, venturing only as far north

as Taramaire and a similar distance south. He was recorded south of New Caledonia on the 20th of March and arrived in North Korea on the 27th. On April 1st he reported in from Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve.

D2 - Female

D2 left on the 24th of March, by the 1st of April she was out to sea slightly between Taiwan and Okinawa, just moving into the East China Sea.

In Australia

Godwits in NW Australia are a different subspecies of godwit than those that come to NZ, with breeding grounds in the Yakutia region of eastern Siberia. Until this year no tracking had been done on these birds. One bird, C0, left Broome and


relocated to an estuary north of Derby sometime between the 5th and 11th of March. There were no other long-distance movements until April 7th, when H3 signalled from near the west coast of Sulawesi, 1440 km north of

Broome, Migration had finally started for the Australians! The comparison of the migration of the two subspecies is one of the aims of this research.



Some of the truly global team at the Centre. Photo Jenni Hensley

The individual migration journeys can be followed at the website:

http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg_updates.html 

House Sparrows robbing Kowhai nectar

David Medway


The earliest record I have found of the House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) feeding on the nectar of a native New Zealand plant is that of Stidolph (*Emu* 31 (1931): 7) who, in January 1928, saw that bird obtaining nectar from the flowers of Pohutukawa (*Metrosideros excelsa*) trees at Pukekura Park in New Plymouth.

McCann (*Notornis* 5 (1952): 8) observed that House Sparrows and Chaffinches (*Fringilla coelebs*) have devised a means of feeding on the nectar of the native New Zealand Kowhai (*Sophora spp.*). He said that they do this by nibbling a hole out of the calyx of the flower into the “cage” in which the nectar is imprisoned. The only record of House Sparrows feeding on Kowhai nectar in the definitive Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds 7B (2006) is that of Stidolph (in *Notornis* 21 (1974): 88) who mentioned that a group of House Sparrows fed on Kowhai nectar over several days by piercing holes in the base of the flower. An excellent photograph by Brian Chudleigh depicting a female House Sparrow nipping

through the base of a Kowhai flower to reach the nectar within appeared in *New Zealand Geographic* No. 76 (2005). There are no records of Chaffinches feeding on Kowhai nectar in the Handbook. I have only once seen a Chaffinch feeding at Kowhai flowers like House Sparrows do, but Chaffinches may feed at Kowhai flowers more often than I have noticed.

Nectar robbers are birds, insects, or other flower visitors that remove nectar from flowers through a hole pierced or bitten in the corolla. They obtain a reward without contacting the anthers and stigma, thereby failing to effect pollen transfer. Charles Darwin assumed that nectar robbers had a negative impact on the plants that they visit, but research done in the last 50 or so years indicates that they often have a beneficial or neutral effect. Several studies document that robbers frequently pollinate the plants that they visit. Robbers may also have an indirect effect on the behaviour of the legitimate pollinators, and in some circumstances, the change in pollinator behaviour could result in improved plant fit-

ness through increased pollen flow and outcrossing. The effects of nectar robbers are complex and depend, in part, on the identity of the robber, the identity of the legitimate pollinator, how much nectar the robbers remove, and the variety of floral resources available in the environment.

Mature Kowhai, nearly all *Sophora microphylla*, are common in Pukekura Park and Brooklands in central New Plymouth. They generally flower from early August until early October. I have seen House Sparrows, sometimes several in a tree at the same time, feeding at those flowers on numerous occasions in recent years. House Sparrows undoubtedly rob nectar from them. I am not aware of any studies of the effects of this nectar robbing on the reproductive success of Kowhai. However, it seems unlikely that such behaviour, particularly where it occurs in the presence of legitimate pollinators such as the Tui (*Prosthemadera novaeseelandiae*), would have a significant detrimental effect on the reproductive success of that plant. 



First of all, in looking back to the beginnings of Miranda Naturalists' Trust (MNT) with focus on the first publications during 1974-76, it is very clear that the present editor, Gillian Vaughan, along with other MNT people, deserve considerable praise for the fine quality of the current magazine, illustrated for example by the November 2007 Issue 67. As this is written I have alongside me a personally compiled (with assistance from Stuart Chambers) hard bound collection of the Trusts' Newsletters and Publications 1975-1995, and an identical volume was presented to MNT. The development from the beginning of the News to Issue 67 is amazing, and, along the way a significant part was played by Stuart.


In May 2008 it will be twenty years since a letter signed "Sib" and headed: BIRD OBSERVATORY AND NATURE CENTRE APPEAL, was received from R.B. Sibson. That included the following paragraph:

"Some of you may remember a pioneer expedition, made on bicycles, in

August 1942. We went via Clevedon and spent a night in the hayshed of Ross and Hetty McKenzie. Then in the rain over the winding 'Khyber Pass' between Kawakawa Bay and Orere; finally down to the Firth, where unbridged streams were in flood a primitive road was rough and corrugated. A brief account over the initials G.A.N.; now a D.Sc appears in the Collegian of 1942."

There are a dwindling number who continue to remember the August 1942 expedition but none of us would have come remotely near being able to imagine any person, in reality Adrian Riegen, would have been in a position to report the continuing Bar-tailed Godwit migration story as he did in the November 2007 Issue 67.

That extensive original research work, and it is work for the many people involved, was facilitated by the invention of the micro-chip after the mid-1950's. As outstanding international research extending over a significant number of years, those people who have carried the project successfully forward, with leadership input by Adrian Riegen, deserve a great amount of recognition as well as continuing financial support for their research as members of Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

G.A. Nicholls, D.Sc. 

from Kings Collegian XLI
Dec 1942

"Our most ambitious project was a trip at the end of the winter term to the Firth of Thames. Twelve went, although the interests of all were not strictly ornithological. At Clevedon we enjoyed the unforgettable hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie; and at Miranda, Mr. Whittlestone kindly put at our disposal an empty cottage. The weather was mixed: and the rough roads, the rain, the swollen fords and other things were not conducive to the welfare of the bikes, but for those interested in birds the trip was an unqualified success. Over 40 species were observed. Stilts and Banded Dotterels were on their nesting grounds; a pair of the rare Red-breasted Dotterels was found; a Skua was watched chasing Terns: and most remarkable of all three kinds of Oystercatchers were seen. For a watcher of birds, five black Oystercatchers calmly feeding on the pebble beach at Kaiaua were a real treat. Those who went will not quickly forget the road to Miranda."

GAN

(the text of the full article can be found in MNT News Issue 16 (1995))

The Limeworks as it was in the late 1950s. Photo Noelle MacDonald



Far North Wader Census

Keith Woodley

The flat deck of the oyster barge carries the five of us and our scopes, two children and two overly friendly dogs, down the channel towards the harbour entrance. The ferryman's family are along for the ride. Across the still water to the north the settlement of Te Hapua straggles down its ridge to the harbour edge. There are a mixture of dwellings – the well cared for and those at the other end of the spectrum.

On the shore sits the twin towers of the Ratana church, while further along horses graze among derelict vehicles. Immediately to the south is the long flat peninsula at Paua, dominated by the high gabled old fish processing shed - one of the landmarks of Parengarenga Harbour where the day before we had watched a Sooty Tern circle the building.

Immediately in front of us is another landmark, but in a different league entirely. The enormous white dunes of the Kokota Spit glisten beneath the low flat sky like a snow bank. An undulating fringe of small dunes lines the edge of the spit, dotted with vegetation patches – Toetoe, Maram and Pingao are all here. Passing along the northern end of the spit we move out of the lee of the harbour to where the Pacific registers its presence. Silky green swells push the barge beam-on towards the metre or so of flat sand along the beach, where we clamber ashore. The bargeman arranges to pick us up at 2pm – so four hours are available to us to seek out the wader roosts.

We are here to count birds for the OSNZ national wader census. Immediately beyond the coastal fringe of dunes an astonishing new world is revealed. A broad vista of undulating sand and shallow pools extend southward around two massive dune systems; scattered clumps of vegetation are mirrored in the grey-blue panels of water - everything bathed in a soft white light. Immediately we disturb two pairs of Variable Oystercatchers and the first of numerous Banded Dotterels. A hundred metres or so further on a ragged line of waders is spotted – still over half a kilometre


away. We are still some distance off when the flock is spooked and lifts off – perhaps 1500 birds, mainly godwit. They settle again but immediately the problems of censusing in this dune country become clear; the birds straggle out along and over shallow ridges and into the gullies, so they are never all visible at once. This is not the flat unobstructed census of a mudflat. We are not much closer when they lift off again, streaming out of sight through a saddle between the highest dunes.

We decide the big dune will offer a better vantage point. Climbing the steep pile of sand over 60 metres high is warm work now the sun is with us. The panorama from the top is spectacular. To the east the Pacific booms against the outer beach – there is still a big sea running following the storm of the last two days. To the south another big dune looms beyond a broad flat valley of sand, water and Toetoe. Westward lie further small vegetated dunes, and across the harbour the central ridge of the mainland peninsula north of Te Kao. Immediately to the south east I find where the main flock have landed, and count once again – but cannot get beyond 800 godwit. Clearly we are still missing birds.

We then head east into the gap between the two large dune ridges, heading for the inner coast. It is from on top of the second big dune that we find the main concentration, once again straggled out in uneven lines of birds, some on the slopes and ridges, some obscured below. Over 40 Whimbrel, 68 Golden Plover, 332 Turnstones, 300 Red Knot, 62 NZ Dotterel, 7 stints, 64 Wrybill

and approximately 3000 Bar-tailed Godwit are counted. A solitary Grey Plover was a good find; it is a bird I have become very well acquainted with in China and Korea, but this is the first I have seen in New Zealand.

The godwit on this harbour are exceedingly wary. The distance one can approach before putting birds to flight is three to four times what I am used to at Miranda. The fact that some illegal harvesting of godwit continues here is a likely explanation. Any such hunting may well be on a small scale, but sufficient to keep the birds alert.

This harbour is a challenge to survey; it is big and remote, and its communities are suspicious of outsiders. Establishing relationships with those communities is the key to effective work in the future. During our visit to the Far North we dropped in at Te Hapua school – the northernmost classrooms in the country. A presentation on godwits and their migration was well received. For these children Kuaka are a familiar feature in their landscape, but the story of what the birds do once they depart in autumn was a revelation. It is hoped to visit the region again later in the year and make a presentation to the wider community. 



Looking back from the spit

A Bittern, a Harrier and a Perch

Phil Hammond

On an afternoon in April last year I had some business in Waiuku and decided to buy a take-away coffee and drive 2 or 3 km down the road to Hoods Landing for a break. Hoods Landing is a boat ramp popular with duck shooters on a swampy arm of the lower Waikato. As I pulled into the carpark I saw a brown lump a couple of hundred metres away and thought it was a Bittern, so I got the scope out of the boot (I never go anywhere without it).

It took me a second or two to figure out what I was looking at; then I realised that what I was seeing was the underside of the birds rear end and tail pointing skyward, the back of its legs, and the throat viewed between its legs. The head and beak were buried in weeds and ooze.

The beak emerged clasping a medium sized fish by the body near the tail. The fish wasn't flapping so I guess it was dead or dying, I think the fish was a Perch or Rudd --certainly more humped and deep bodied than a Cat-fish or Mullet. In order to swallow the fish the Bittern had of course to flip it around and get it down head-first so the dorsal spines were laid flat pointing backwards. I would guess the fish was about 200mm long and

perhaps a quarter kg. The Bittern got the head and gills, about a third of the fish, past its gape, but couldn't get it down any further. Despite violent gulping motions with throat and breast plumage flailing like a Charleston dancer's skirt it just wouldn't go down.

It dropped the fish, took a couple of steps then adopted a variety of frozen postures familiar to many people reading this. After a minute or two it had another go at swallowing the fish with the same performance and same result. In all it tried 4 times over about 10 minutes with the whole scene being observed by a couple of harriers, a couple of White-faced Herons, and no doubt other prying eyes hidden away somewhere in the Raupo or Willows.

After the fourth attempt and a bit more standing around the Bittern slowly wandered off and out of my view, and one of the harriers moved in. The Bittern obviously hadn't gone far, and reappeared making an impressive lunging charge at the harrier with wings spread, neck stretched out, and bill open at about a 30 degree angle, the harrier obviously also found it impressive and took off without hesitation.

The Bittern guarded its fish for another minute or two and then stalked off into the willows, not to be seen again, and the harrier took its chance again landing on the fish and starting to eat it on the spot. Fish and harrier tarsi sunk slowly into the matting and with a short legged appearance, thigh plumage out, and wings spread with outer primaries touching the surface, for some reason that I can't explain it looked like a small eagle that I'd seen somewhere. It managed to extract itself as well as the fish and labouriously flapped off at low altitude with fish in talon.


The whole saga lasted about 20 minutes and provided me with a most entertaining (if somewhat extended) coffee break. 



photo Brian Chudleigh

Moratorium on Horseshoe Crab Harvest in New Jersey

On March 25th the Governor of New Jersey signed legislation imposing a ban on the harvest of Horseshoe Crabs. Over decades of harvest the numbers of horseshoe crabs have declined along the eastern United States, this led to a severe drop in the food available to Red Knots as they fuel up for their journey to the arctic breeding grounds, which has in turn led to a sharp decline in the numbers of Red Knot along the Atlantic Flyway. In recent years there has been a ban on the harvest of horseshoe crabs and now that ban has been extended indefinitely in New Jersey.

This new moratorium covers a part of the essential staging site Delaware Bay and places a ban on the harvest "until the populations of both horseshoe crabs and red knots have returned to a level where they will be self sustaining as determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service."

While the northern coast of Delaware Bay in New Jersey the southern coast is in the state of Delaware where harvesting still continues. Between the states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, and Virginia over 600,000 Horseshoe Crabs are taken each year. This step by New Jersey is important for the preservation of both knots and crabs.

E5 = M³

Barry Stevens

Not some vague mathematical equation but simply, godwit E5 equals yet another “Miranda Magic Moment”.

It was Friday 14th March and I wondered as I journeyed the four hours down from Dargaville, what the “Farewell to the Birds” weekend would offer this year? Arriving at the Centre late morning I found Keith busy expounding his vast knowledge to a group from a Ladies Probus Club, so decide to grab my gear and head off to the hide.

The tide was still coming in and a large flock of mixed waders were assembled off the outer shell bank. However, there, much closer to the hide, was a group of around 20 Bartailed Godwits and a few knot, so attention was duely given to these first with a quick scan with my bins... just an impression of something unusual caught my eye....a more careful inspection revealed a transmitter aerial protruding from a female godwit.

That set the pulse racing and then, clearly in the lens of my 30x60 scope was the black flag with the orange-stained, white alpha numerics E5! Double check but yes, there it was for sure. The moment was almost indescribable. Was this really the missing E5?

The arrival at the hide of an American visitor, Mike Rogers from California, armed with an even more powerful scope brought the confirmation I sought. So did the report from a couple from Leeds, UK. Yes! it was E5, no question.

Many of you will recall the saga of tracking the birds accompanying our famous E7 and that E5 suddenly veered right and headed for New Caledonia and subsequent silence! Had she gone down exhausted? Had she been shot? Nobody knew her fate

The Little Tern

Tony Lancaster

November now, return again to Hauraki’s sea-bird shore, Godwits, Knots, newly arrived from Asia and beyond. Drab greys and browns, feathers frayed and worn, Feed, grow fat again, soon your colours will be regained.

Beyond the main flock, almost one of the throng - yet separate, The Little Tern, white, almost tidy, yet lacking lustre. Remnants of a once black cap now blotched white Reminiscent of a friars ring of hair on balding pate.

Comfortable in it’s isolation though; maybe? The gregarious Godwits present no threat , The Knots, small groupings lost within the flock for safety, A mass of grey shapes, only one white form projects.

Viewed from above, the vulnerable Tern must fill the Gull’s eye. Prowling, not for food, just teenage testosterone at play. The Black-Billed Gull, like a stuka dives, levels and back to the sky. The Gull’s intrusion, instinctively launches the Tern into the game.

A miss-match of size maybe, but the Tern accepts the challenge, With barely a movement of wing, it rises into the sun, the game is on! The Gull in pursuit, impressive enough on its own, is no match here. Spiralled inside, outside, above and away out of sight - gone.

Sensing the failing chase of its foe - the premature end of the ride, The Tern returns and, like children, the chase resumes, but the heart is gone, Only one is able, the other tries but there is a sense wounded pride. The Gull lands far off, and snatching a piece of sea-weed relieves its aggression.

The Tern powers for height once more, then drops, levels off and descends, And lands precisely where things started, before equanimity was disturbed. Time had stopped still - not one bird in the flock had thrilled at the chase, Older birds these, content in their oblivion - must be ready for the next migration.




photo lan Southey

on that southerly migration. Keith tells me that in fact she was seen in NSW but here in my lens, was almost certainly the first record of this bird reaching NZ and more importantly, back here at Miranda.

It’s moments like these (you need Minties) which, even after some 40 years of birding around the world, give you a buzz so powerful it almost leaves you breathless. For me, a special place like Miranda never fails to

draw you with the lure of “expect the unexpected”.

What I know is also important, is that sense in which we ordinary rank and file birders can at times like these, supply the vital missing piece to the jigsaw of professional data on a given species. In this case E5 was no longer a “missing piece”. Keep your lens polished and your eyes peeled, there is something special awaiting your discovery. 

Chairman's Report

David Lawrie

This report is to be presented at the Annual General Meeting, it covers the activities of the Trust during the previous year. This past year has continued the previous years activities but has also established the Trust as a leading authority on shorebird research in New Zealand and has also reinforced our role as a non-Government Organisation in Ramsar-related activities.



John Brown:

On 22 October 2007 the first chairman of the Trust, John Brown, died. John had been struggling with an illness for 2-3 years but up until that time had still been an active member of the Trust, regularly attending functions well into his eighties.

John was one of the organising committee that established the Trust in 1975. The foundation that John and the other early members laid has provided the base on which the Trust has been developed.

While John was the highest profile member who died during the year I am aware that there are several others and we should pause now to recognise the contribution that all of those people have made to the Trust. These contributions were made in a number of ways and the contribution that every member made is a block in the structure that makes our Trust so successful.

Trust Council:

At the annual meeting in 2007 there were three changes to the Trust Council. Retiring for various reasons were Dr Phil Battley, Nanette McLauchlan and Kathy Barrow.

The replacement members elected by the annual meeting were Keith Thompson, Emma Stanyard and Estella Lee. Profiles on these three new members have been incorporated in past newsletters. Keith is a recently retired lecturer from Waikato University who regularly brought his classes to Miranda to study the various aspects of the estuarine wetland system. Estella Lee is well known in the Auckland / Chinese community and is a graduate of the 2006 field course. Emma Stanyard is a recent immigrant from Britain who is a graduate of the 2007 field course. All three of these members have brought different ideas to the Trust's activities and have helped broaden the discussions through the year.

Godwit Migration:

Without a doubt the avian star of the year was the godwit banded as E7 who completed a round trip from Miranda to the breeding grounds in Alaska and back to Miranda while maintaining contact through the satellite transmitter that she was carrying. During the course of this migration, she established the direct link between Miranda and the reserve at Yalu Jiang in China before moving to Alaska and then completing the non-stop flight back to Miranda across the Pacific Ocean. She demonstrated the migration routes utilised by

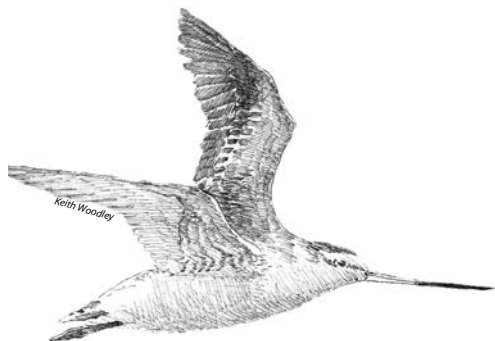
the thousands of godwit that migrate from New Zealand each year, confirming previous banding data, sightings and records.

Without a doubt the publicity generated through this journey has bolstered the number of visitors at the Centre and at the hide viewing area. It also demonstrated how unprepared the Trust was for this influx of visitors and highlighted areas where we need to improve our marketing to the new visitors that arrive. We have commenced activities to enhance visitor experiences.

Activities At Centre:

During August the annual working bee was held, when some of those jobs around the Centre that require extra sets of hands are undertaken. This is an opportunity for people who live some distance away to attend and provide input into the maintenance of the building and grounds, and to share in the pot luck dinner held that same weekend. It is hoped that some of those tasks can now be spread throughout the year with the intention to hold monthly training days and working bees to ease the load of that day.

The Dotterel Management Course was held again this year from 11-13 September. The success of this course is largely attributed to the input of John Dowding, and we thank him for providing his time and expertise. This course is now providing a pool of minders throughout the areas where the NZ Dotterel breed.



The loss of older members, however, gives us reason to reflect on our aging membership and provides a challenge for the Council to look at ways of attracting younger people to join and participate in the Trust's activities.

AGM and nominations for Council

The Annual General Meeting of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust will be held at the Shorebird Centre on May 11th 2008 at 1 pm.

Nominations are called for the positions of Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor and 10 Council members. Please have your nominations with the Secretary, Will Perry, by the eighth of May. His address is on the inside of the back cover of this magazine. Your letter should have the name of the person you are nominating, your name and the name of someone to second the nomination. Everyone involved must be financial members of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

AGM Agenda

Apologies for Absence
Minutes of the last AGM May 20th 2007
Matter Arising from the minutes
Chairman's Report
Treasurer's Report
Election of Officers
(Treasurer, Secretary Auditor, 10 Council Members)
Subscriptions for the year ending 31/12/2009
General Business

Subscriptions for the Year ending 31/12/2009

It will be recommended to the AGM:

That Individual Member Subscription increase from \$35 to \$40.

That Family Member Subscriptions and Overseas Member Subscription increase from \$40 to \$50.

That the option of Life Membership be removed as a new member option (see below).

That if the AGM votes against abolishing the Life Membership category that the Subscription fees be increased from \$1,050 to \$1,200 (under 50) and from \$525 to \$600 (50 and over).

Life Memberships: For many years the Trust has offered life memberships to members on payment of a life membership fee. This has worked reasonably well especially in the early years of the Trust, when capital finance was required and the life membership was in reality a non-repayable interest free debenture. Time and costs caught up with the scheme. Many members today are life members and historically the fee they paid does not now generate sufficient income to cover membership costs.

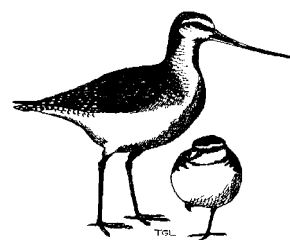
Consequently over the years the Trust has revised the fee in line with the annual subs increase and the system has worked reasonably well. However interest has definitely waned with only one or two members a year taking up life membership in recent years.

The life membership category is difficult to record and maintain, and with inevitable cost increases, does not keep up with inflation. Consequently it has been decided to put to the AGM a proposal that "Life Membership" as a new member category, be removed. I might add that this was a split decision of Council and it is appropriate that the members of the Trust attending the Annual General meeting should decide this fundamental change to our membership classes.

It should be clearly understood that the removal of this classification does not affect any existing life members.

Accordingly, I will move at the Annual General Meeting of the Trust "that the option of "Life Membership" be removed as a new member category."

Ashley Reid
Treasurer



The Centre also hosted a course about field sketching under the guidance of Sandra Morris which was fully subscribed. This a very popular course which everyone enjoys thanks to Sandra's skills.

The major activity during the past year however was once again the week-long field course held in January. This course was fully subscribed with people of all ages and from throughout the North Island. The success of this course is largely due to the organisation of Eila Lawton and her team of voluntary tutors. I would also acknowledge the support of the Auckland Region of the Ornithological Society and the Kapiti Coast branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society who each sponsored a student to attend the course. The introduction of these younger people to the course is a great initiative and will, I am sure, help develop interest in natural activities.

Guest Speakers:

Following the Annual General Meeting in 2007 Keith Woodley gave us a presentation on the activities on which the Miranda team had been involved during the 2007 trip to China and South Korea. The interest that the Chinese are now taking in the reserve at Yalu Jiang is heartening and there are clearly major benefits in the advocacy work that the Trust has been undertaking in that area. The devastation caused at Saemangeum however is a real cause for concern. The long term effects on the migratory birds that utilise that huge mud-flat area may not become apparent for several years but it is likely to have a major detrimental impact.

The speaker at the Spring Migration Day was Christine Prietto, who is the Chairman of the Trust that manages the Hunter Wetland Centre in Newcastle, Australia. Christine gave us a very informative talk on how the Hunter Wetland Centre is run and also how the community has embraced the Ramsar site and used it to their advantage in raising the tourist profile of the Hunter region. The day following the migration day I had arranged for Christine to meet representatives of the Waikato office of the Department of Conservation and also Nicola Scott from the DOC Head Office in Wellington. This enabled her to discuss her roles within the Ramsar Organisation and how New Zealand can learn from her experiences, particularly as we head towards the next Ramsar meeting in November 2008. Following that meeting it is clear that the Department of Conservation has now become more active in meeting their Ramsar responsibilities and have also involved Miranda with NGO input into the New Zealand Government report that will be submitted to the Ramsar meeting.

Hazel Speed was the speaker at the Autumn Migration Day, talking about her work in acoustic anchoring of the Kokako in the Hunua ranges on the backdoor of the Shorebird Centre. This was a very interesting talk on a topic completely different from shorebirds, but it involves a habitat that is in close proximity to the Centre and is an area that has been overlooked. The numerous questions following the talk clearly

indicated the interest that Hazel's address triggered.

Local Activities:

The Trust made a submission to the Auckland Regional Council on their proposal to amend the Regional Coastal Plan in relation to mangroves. The Trust's submission was based on controlling the spread of mangroves at important roosting areas which we believe are now becoming compromised by the continued spread of mangroves around the fringe of the Firth of Thames in particular. However the same issues are also becoming apparent in the Kaipara and Manukau Harbours and will have major impacts if the control of man-

The Trust's submission was based on controlling the spread of mangroves at important roosting areas

groves is not permitted in terms of the Regional Plan. The hearings have not yet taken place but we are expecting the decisions later in 2008.

Another continuing problem on the shores of the Firth of Thames and at the Taramaire roost in particular is the growth in use of camper vans parking overnight. The Franklin District Council have amended their Camping By-law to restrict the campervans to the area to the north of the fence angle but up to the present time this has not been policed or enforced. We understand that signs are to be installed in the near future with a promise that they will be policed and we hope that this does indeed take place. Another option will be the installation of some form of physical



The increasingly popular campervan roost at Taramaire. 93 campervans were present on this day. photo Ian Southey

barrier that would restrict vehicular access from the end of the spit.

However restricting the vehicles is only a part of the solution, as the vehicles often have dogs and a number of them are not self-contained with regards to sanitation. With the increased people movement the roost at the mouth of the Taramaire Stream may be largely compromised. This is something that the Trust will continue to monitor.

I have reported in the past about the break-ins to cars parked at the Lime-works gate. Unfortunately these have continued on an infrequent basis through the past year. A disturbing trend however has been a number of thefts from the Centre itself and I would therefore urge all members when in the area to be vigilant and keep an eye on any suspicious behaviour and take a note of any number plates of any cars with occupants acting suspiciously.

Keith Thompson's appointment to the Council has brought a new aspect to our considerations relating to research projects that would benefit the Miranda area. He has provided the Council with several papers which we are currently considering, regarding research proposals that should be set in place later this year; these will almost certainly have long term benefits to the ecology of the area. Any new research in the area will also be integrated with that undertaken by

During the year the Trust joined the Wetland Link International network of educational centres

the Muddy Feet Programme which recently completed its second phase, and which is the accumulation of a multi-agency research project lead largely by Bill Brownell.

Keith Thompson has also made a number of suggestions as to the management of the Limeworks area to help preserve and restore the estua-

rine wetland plant succession that exists there. The Trust is also investigating options to better utilise that plant resource for educational purposes.

International Activities:

As I mentioned at the beginning of this report, the Trust is now considered to be a centre of excellence for shorebird research in New Zealand and with our activities in the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve in China we are also well-respected on the international stage. A team of Miranda volunteers visited Yalu Jiang in April 2007 to continue the ongoing training and shorebird counting work that has been undertaken there every year since 2004. There is another team planning to visit that area in April 2008 to continue that work.

In 2008 the team will also be undertaking training in cannon-netting techniques and benthic investigation into the mudflat areas in the Yellow Sea area. This will greatly increase the knowledge of those areas and provide training so that the Chinese can continue the work into the future.

In December an eight-person delegation from China visited the Centre for 4 days, on a fact finding mission to see how the Miranda Shorebird Centre operated. This delegation consisted of several high-ranking officials and also of a number of the on-ground reserve staff from Yalu Jiang. During the visit we unveiled the plaque on the large rock near the entrance steps, commemorating the signing of the Sister Site agreement in 2004. This unveiling ceremony also involved the Ngati Paoa Trust, who acknowledged their interest in the bird life of the Kaiaua area.

External Advocacy:

During the year the Trust joined the Wetland Link International network of educational centres which will provide a source of international support and sharing of knowledge and activities. This project is run through

the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in London. Further details relating to this organisation can be found through the website www.wwt.org.uk and follow the appropriate links under the tab marked "Our work".

The mission statement informally adopted by the Trust Council of "Keep the Birds Coming" is generally the basis of any external advocacy work that we undertake. The direct linkages between Miranda and the reserves in China and Alaska have been clearly established through the godwit satellite tagging programme. The importance of those overseas stopover points to the birds that utilise Miranda is the key to our international advocacy, as without those vital links the birds would not be able to return each year. During the year Adrian Riegan, Keith Woodley and I have attended a number of speaking engagements throughout the North Island, spreading the advocacy role undertaken at Miranda and the importance of protecting estuarine wetlands throughout the country. While much of this work goes unnoticed by the ordinary members it helps enhance MNT's position as a meaningful organisation and indeed an organisation of which all of our members should be proud.

The MNT's involvement with the preparation of the Ramsar report for the New Zealand Government is also increasing our standing in the conservation community. Estella Lee, one of the Council members, will be attending the Ramsar convention in a private capacity but we hope that others can join her and provide a meaningful contribution to this very important international event. During the year we were requested by the New Zealand Embassy in Seoul to provide an article on our activities for inclusion in a Korean wetland newsletter - also increasing our profile in that country.

Volunteers At Centre:

Following an examination of the role of volunteers for the Trust, Jenni

Hensley has been appointed with a small committee to establish a system of providing support and training for the large team of volunteers that is needed to operate the Centre. During the year a roster was prepared to provide personnel at the hide and shore during suitable high tide periods, to provide interpretation for the large number of people that visited the site. For many of them, this was their first opportunity to see the birds through telescopes. To have some interpretation on what they are observing greatly enhances the experience for those visitors and also supports our advocacy work.

A series of training workshops/working bees are also held for people wishing to assist at the Centre – this has resulted in a number of new volunteers, which helps spread the work load. The work of these volunteers is greatly appreciated as without their assistance it would not be possible to run the programmes currently undertaken.

In this annual report I would like to acknowledge the efforts that these volunteers provide.

Other Agencies:

Towards the end of 2007 the previous Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, was allocated a different portfolio and Steve Chadwick was appointed to fill the role of Minister of Conservation. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chris Carter for his interest in the Trust's activities and hope that we will see him again at the Centre at some stage.

We also welcome Steve Chadwick to the position and hope that she can visit the Centre in the near future as she has promised during our recent exchange of correspondence. As reported previously the Chinese delegation arrived in New Zealand the same day as the Auckland Conservancy Office Supporters' function, and we took the opportunity to take the delegation to meet the Minister

at that event. She has expressed interest in our work and we hope that this may translate into some active support in the future.

During the year the Auckland Conservation Board continued its interest in our activities at Miranda and has actively campaigned on our behalf for Government funding and has also investigated other funding sources. We thank them for their interest and would like to remind members that the Auckland Conservation Management Strategy is now due for review and I wish to urge all members to participate in the public process to ensure that the document accurately reflects the interest in estuarine wetlands in the Auckland region.

During the year I held discussions with the President of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society, in particular with regards to the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding. That Society has now received full membership status with Bird Life International and a closer working relationship would enable us to develop our migratory shorebird work in conjunction with that international birding organisation.

Finances:

Included in this newsletter is the summary of the audited accounts for the Trust activities through the past year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Treasurer, Ashley Reid, for his efforts in keeping the books in what is now a relatively large business.

I would also like to thank the Auditor, Lance Fielder, who not only completed the audit of the books but has also provided useful comments on ways in which to improve the running of the business.

As reported last year the Trust is now operating an endowment fund, the interest of which is utilised to

support the wages of the Assistant Manager. This is an opportunity for people to make donations to a fixed capital fund that will ensure the ongoing work of the Trust can continue in future years.

I would also like to acknowledge the large bequest from John Brown that has been added to the Sibson Award account in accordance with John's wishes. There have also been a number of other donations which I would like to acknowledge, as it is

the Auckland Conservation Management Strategy is now due for review and I wish to urge all members to participate in the public process

only through these extra funds that the Trust is able to continue its wide ranging programmes.

I also wish to acknowledge the grant from the Chisholm Whitney Fund that enabled us to purchase six further telescopes, which provides a full set for field course attendees and other functions where extra telescopes are an advantage. These also ensures that the person on hide duty can have a number of telescopes available to share with the public.

Conclusion:


This report has only summarised some of the key activities that have been undertaken by the Trust during the previous 12 months. The day to day activities at the Centre have continued under the guidance of Keith Woodley and his able assistant, Jenni Hensley. While I have reported on the glamour events, the day to day school visits and individual visits to the Centre are just as important in spreading the advocacy word. It is for this reason that the Trust needs to ensure that the building and the experience is something that people would wish to revisit in the future. This is where the support of the volunteers is so important to Keith and Jenni as running the Centre is now more than a one person operation.

While I have mentioned some names during this report I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Council members for their input during the year. The people that the members have entrusted with this responsibility are busy people but they still fully support the meetings and volunteer for tasks to spread the

load. On behalf of the membership I would like to thank those Council members for their input and support of me during the year.

I have already mentioned volunteers without whom the Centre would not be able to successfully operate. I should also not forget to thank Keith

and Jenni for their work at what are reasonably minimal wages.

However one of my biggest thanks is to the members who continue to support the Trust and its activities and that is the support that keeps all of us active and willing to continue. 

Full Accounts and the Auditors Report will be available at the AGM

Summary of the Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 31 December 2007

| 2006 | Income | 2007 | 2006 | Expenditure | 2007 |
|----------------|---|----------------|---------------|---|----------------|
| | | | 1,179 | Education | 3,572 |
| 15,728 | Subscriptions | 16,574 | 10,908 | Magazine-Publication | 8,900 |
| 11,903 | Donations | 35,752 | 3,319 | Magazine - Distribution | 3,194 |
| 5,055 | Schools/Lectures | 5,329 | 3,164 | Publicity | 2,982 |
| 21,887 | Surplus on shop trading | 18,816 | 1,979 | Bird Banding Expenses | 13,875 |
| 4,915 | Profit on Field Course | 5,633 | 71 | Predator Control | 806 |
| 11,000 | Grants | 0 | 13,262 | Building - running costs | 11,097 |
| 22,333 | Accommodation | 25,121 | 1,282 | Printing & Stationery | 861 |
| 13,569 | Interest Received | 9,954 | 5,000 | Administration Expenses | 4,756 |
| 3,885 | Lease - rental | 3,885 | 2,117 | Bank Fees | 1,504 |
| 0 | Bird Banding Income | 9,006 | 2,643 | Insurance and Rates | 2,794 |
| | | | 47,036 | Wages | 49,408 |
| | | | 273 | ACC Levy | 228 |
| | | | 373 | Research Project | 0 |
| 110,275 | Total Income | 130,070 | 92,606 | Total Cash Expenses | 103,977 |
| | | | 15,074 | Depreciation | 16,393 |
| | Deficit for year transferred to Accumulated Funds | 0 | 817 | Loss on Sales | 0 |
| 110,275 | | 130,070 | 1,778 | Surplus for year transferred to Accumulated Funds | 9,700 |

Summary of the Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2007

| 2006 | Liabilities | 2007 | 2006 | Assets | 2007 |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| | | | | Investments | |
| 12,761 | Life Membership Reserve Fund | 12,902 | 149,350 | BNZ Term Investment | 158,508 |
| 6,338 | Subscriptions paid in Advance | 5,624 | 8,284 | ASB (Sibson Award) | 8,705 |
| 0 | Overdraft at Bank | 503 | 157,634 | Total Investments | 167,213 |
| 0 | Accounts Payable | 2,660 | | | |
| 716 | GST Due | 1,441 | 14,308 | Cash at Bank | 14,648 |
| 19,815 | Total Liabilities | 23,130 | 29,341 | Stock on Hand | 24,935 |
| | | | 0 | Accounts Receivable | 6,046 |
| | Accumulated Funds | | 6,634 | Plant & Equipment | 13,800 |
| | B/F | 722,770 | 1,341 | Furniture and Fittings | 5,208 |
| | plus surplus 2007 | 9,700 | 239,418 | Building Expenditure | 229,841 |
| | Revaluation of land and buildings | 311,250 | 293,909 | Land - Centre and East Coast Road | 605,159 |
| 722,770 | | 1,043,720 | | | |
| 742,585 | | 1,066,850 | 742,585 | Total Assets | 1,066,850 |

For Presentation to the AGM

Treasurer's report for year ended 31st December 2007

Ashley Reid Treasurer

4 April 2008

What a memorable year it has been. The interest generated by the successful implantation of E7 with a satellite tracking device and the remarkable achievements of this and other godwits tracked over their respective migration journeys has increased awareness of the Shorebird Centre with more people wanting to come and perhaps catch a glimpse of this world famous bird – quite a snowballing effect.



The Trust's overall financial position has continued to improve, the most notable contribution was payment for undertaking critical research in association with our normal banding programme. Higher returns were received for a number of activities, some of which are highlighted below, and all are reflected in the Statement of Financial Performance.

Land and Buildings: The Centre, Manager's residence, and the leased farmlet have not been revalued since they were purchased. In association with Quotable Values NZ Ltd, the most recent Franklin District values have been applied to our properties, and now are properly represented in the fixed assets – hence causing a well known member of the Council to exclaim "We're millionaires!"

Subscriptions: The net income from subscriptions is higher than last year. This has more to do with the date of payment rather than an indication of an increase in membership, as the number of current financial members remains pretty constant.

Donations and Grants: We are extremely grateful for grants and donations received from charitable trusts and environmental organisations.

Education: Last year I reported on the success of the education programmes and use of our excellent educational services continues to increase. Education includes wider interest groups as well as schools, and extra telescopes were purchased

in 2006 to enable more people to use good viewing equipment on the shellbanks. These also proved a wonderful asset for use at the field courses, so much so that an extra six scopes and tripods have been purchased for this purpose thanks to another generous donation.

Field Courses: Field courses continue to be very popular. Each year course participants produce a booklet and it is always interesting to browse through these books to see how the participants enjoy the various modules presented. Special thanks to Eila for convening these courses. It was great this year to attend a "Courses reunion" with attendance from a great cross section of participants who have attended over the years.

Accommodation: Accommodation facilities continue to be well used. After many years use all the mattresses in the bunkrooms have been replaced with higher density (and considerably more expensive) foam rubber mattresses. So far people seem to appreciate the greater comfort level in these mattresses. The fold up double bed/settee in the flat has also been replaced and, while still not as good as a "home" bed, the improvement should be noticed by anyone who used the old facility regularly.

Shop Trading: Gross profit from shop trading is substantially up. Stock on hand at the end of the year has been revalued in accordance


with acceptable accounting practice and is now valued in true purchase price terms rather than estimated sale price less profit margin. This has meant re-classifying all our stock and entering purchase values on every item stocked. It has involved many hours of research and prime entry into a spreadsheet, but now we have an accurate database and stock control is far more accurate.

The book display stand is also a great improvement – customers can see more books on display and consequently sales of these items have increased.

Staff: We are extremely fortunate to have our team of dedicated staff – all two of them! The smooth operation of the Centre wouldn't be possible without their dedication and support and I appreciate the assistance they give me with any queries I might have.

Volunteers: I wish to thank our dedicated band of volunteers who help with a variety of tasks at the centre. Without their support it would be difficult to carry out the wide range of activities and services that we now do. It is pleasing to acknowledge the efforts being made to train volunteers and the participation in these courses.

Adoption of Accounts:

It is my pleasure to propose that the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2007, be adopted. 

For Presentation to the AGM

Minutes of the 32nd Annual General Meeting of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust held at the Shorebird Centre on Sunday 20 MAY 2007 AT 1030 hrs.

PRESENT:

The Chairman (David Lawrie), Secretary (William Perry), Treasurer (Ashley Reid) and about 49 others.

APOLOGIES:

Adrian Riegen, Hugh Clifford, Zoe Clifford, Kathy Barrow, Barbara Blyth, Bev Woolley, Jan Butcher, Alison Henry, Arn Piesse, Judy Piesse.

APOLOGIES ACCEPTED (David Walter / John Rowe.)

The Chairman, David Lawrie welcomed all members present to this, the 32nd AGM of the Trust and particularly welcomed former Chairman Stuart Chambers, former Council Members John Whittle and David Walter, Anna and Arthur van Pattenberg.

MINUTES:

The minutes of the 31st AGM held on 21 May 2006 had been published in Issue 65 of "Miranda News".

The minutes were TAKEN AS READ and APPROVED AS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD. (Bruce Postill / Nan Rothwell).

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:

1. David Lawrie was continuing to lobby the New Zealand Government to fund the Trust's activities in China. No funding was offered by the Minister of Conservation 12 months ago. However, the Government has committed \$8.8 million to Wetland Conservation including protection of migratory shorebirds.

2. Eila Lawton commented on the use of a notebook for registering ad hoc working bee tasks.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

The Chairman, David Lawrie, had published a report in Issue 65 of MNT News outlining another busy year of activity at the Shorebird Centre and elsewhere including another delegation to China. Kathy Barrow

and Nanette McLauchlan stepped down from Council. Phil Battley had also stepped down from Council but has been retained as a Scientific Advisor. Wendy Hare and Phil Hammond were welcomed as new members of Council. Former Chairman, John Brown has been unwell recently and it was hoped that he would recover soon. Adrian Riegen and Gwenda Pulham had both received medals for their respective contributions to nature conservation. He thanked Eila Lawton for yet another highly successful Field Course and commented that half of the current members of Council are graduates of Miranda Field Courses. Continuing issues include Predator Control, Camper Van / Motor Home activity at Taramaire. Photographer Brian Chudleigh died during the year and has bequeathed many of his photographs to the Trust. Finally David reiterated that the Trust is built on voluntary effort and he paid tribute to the efforts of many people who have brought the Trust from its beginnings at the Karaka Shell Bank in 1971 to the successful activities of today.

Moved (David Lawrie / Wendy Hare) that the Chairman's Report be adopted – CARRIED nem con.

MATTERS ARISING FROM CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

1. The extra meeting organised for guest speaker Jan van de Kam was missing from the list.

2. Alison Chambers asked about the Sibson Fund. David Lawrie responded that the fund continues to exist and that it is still intended for its original purpose.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

The Treasurer, Ashley Reid, formally presented his report on the finances of the Trust for the Year ending 31 December 2006 as published in Issue 65 of MNT News. He commented that Subscriptions were down on the

previous year. Donations and Grants had been particularly valuable in helping to fund the China initiatives. Field Courses had generated a surplus again and had proved their value in many ways. Accommodation continues to generate revenue and reminds us of the importance of maintaining the premises. Surplus on shop trading was up on the previous year and Ashley attributed this partly to the successful deployment of volunteer helpers at the Shorebird Centre. The endowment fund that was originally \$132,000 has grown to nearly \$150,000 and we have spent some of the interest that we have earned from it.

Moved (Ashley Reid / Nan Rothwell / Stuart Chambers) that the Treasurer's Report be adopted – CARRIED nem con.

DISCUSSION FOLLOWING

TREASURER'S REPORT:

1. Stuart Chambers congratulated the Treasurer for maintaining the Trust finances so well.

2. Eila Lawton asked for clarification of the \$817 Loss on Sales.

3. John Rowe queried the value of the Shorebird Centre at \$10,033. Ashley commented that this was a historical figure and was due for correction later in the year.

4. Chris Thompson commented that the figures for accommodation for 2006 and 2005 were comparable.

5. Chris Thompson also asked about the membership. Len Taylor reported that membership remains static at around 620 to 650 members depending on when it is measured.

6. Barry asked whether there is a plan to replace the Security Alarm. David Lawrie commented that recent incidents have prompted the Council to think again about the security of the Centre.

7. Chris Thompson asked why the distribution costs of the magazine had increased from \$1,970 to \$3,319. Gillian Vaughan commented that most of the apparent increase was caused by the timing of expenses claims.

8. Colleen asked whether we sell MNT News in the shop. The answer is "Yes" - \$2.00 for current edition and \$0.80 for back copies.

9. Brian asked about leasing land from the farmer for parking – deferred to General Business.

10. Brian also asked about Smoke Alarms – Keith Woodley reported that they had all been fitted with new batteries 6 months ago.

11. David Lawrie thanked the Treasurer for his report and for his work through the year.

12. Moved (Ashley Reid / Gwenda Pulham) that Gyde Wansbone, Chartered Accountants, Te Awamutu be retained as Auditors – CARRIED nem con.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Proposed (Ashley Reid / Lynda Underhill) that the subscriptions for membership of Miranda Naturalists' Trust for the year ending 31.12.2008 remain at the following rates:

Individual Member: \$35

Family Member: \$40

Overseas Member: \$40

Life Member (under 50): \$1050

Life Member (over 50): \$525.

CARRIED nem con.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Treasurer – Ashley Reid elected unopposed.

Secretary – William Perry elected unopposed.

11 nominees for 10 positions on Council, namely David Lawrie, Eila Lawton, Adrian Riegen, Gillian Vaughan, Phil Hammond, Len Taylor, Sue Reid, Wendy Hare, Estella Lee, Emma Stan-yard, Keith Thompson.

Proposed (Stuart Chambers / Stella Rowe) and the meeting AGREED that all eleven nominees for Council be ELECTED.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

1) Gillian Vaughan was acclaimed again for doing such a great job as editor of the Miranda News magazine. AGREED by all.

2) Stuart Chambers initiated a discussion of the idea of a "Twitchathon" or a prize for a "Big Year" / "Annual List" just for a bit of fun. Phil Hammond suggested having different categories, eg a 30 km radius from the Shorebird Centre. Nigel Milius pointed out that the OSNZ Twitchathon has struggled to attract support and did not need any competition from MNT. Gillian Vaughan felt that the important thing was to encourage people to go birding. Gwenda Pulham suggested liaising with the OSNZ Twitchathon organizer.

3) Norah Peachman had weaved a tapestry of the Miranda shore. David Lawrie officially unveiled the tapestry and thanked Norah for her artistic contribution.

4) Tony Habraken added his voice to the thanks particularly to Keith Woodley and Gillian Vaughan for their contributions to the success of Miranda.

5) Brian Jones suggested that we send more people to Alaska.


6) Lynda Underhill asked about the visitor survey. We plan to ask Rowena West to repeat her survey of visitor numbers.

7) David Lawrie mentioned the proposal to produce a DVD on godwit migration. We plan to apply to ASB for funding for this project.

8) Stuart Chambers initiated another discussion of the Trust's use of its land. Stuart suggested that the Trust create a hide close to where the birds roost as a commercial venture at which visitors can see birds, buy lunch, buy bird books. Stuart also suggested that Miranda could be a subsidiary headquarters for the Wetland Trust and become a first in New Zealand as this sort of commercial venture. Colleen pointed out that the land currently owned by the Trust is not suitable for

this purpose. David Lawrie said that the ultimate goal is to return a large portion of the area to more natural habitat. Phil Hammond compared Stuart's suggestion with the London Wetland Centre, which has created an environment that attracts the birds and operates in a commercial fashion. Barry Stephens felt that the Shorebird Centre is in the wrong place currently and that we need a proper observatory. Ian Southey said that not everybody wants the same thing in their birding experience, that some people like to do a bit of walking to find their birds. Eila Lawton expressed reservations about placing a Visitor Centre in the middle of a shorebird roost. Nigel Milius felt that the Trust should focus more on habitat enhancement than on creating a public observatory. Liz Pascal remembered that the Wildlife Service originally objected to a building on the Shellbank. Eila Lawton commented that Mangere Ponds would be a better place for a facility similar to the London Wetland Centre. David Lawrie commented that plans for an upgrade of the Shorebird Centre included the option of incorporating a coffee shop into the building. Gillian Vaughan said that she would be opposed to charging people for watching birds. Martin Day asked whether Trust members would continue to have a facility. David Lawrie drew a comparison with the Hunter Wetland in New South Wales. Bruce Postill said that Hunter Wetland is a good example of what Miranda could become. He also said that DoC regards the Limeworks as an important site and would not be keen to see a commercial venture replacing the unique volunteer organization that is Miranda Naturalists' Trust. Keith Thompson commented that the area is a prime example of a chenier plain and should be restored as a botanical habitat.

The meeting closed at 1240 hrs.

Following an adjournment for lunch, Keith Woodley spoke and showed photographs of the 2007 surveys by the Miranda delegations to Yalu Jiang in China and Saemangeum in Korea. 

Wrybills in Paradise

Ian Southey

I volunteered for a river bird survey on the Dart River above Glenorchy last October. I have done quite a bit of Yellowhead work in the area over the years but, to my shame, had never walked out onto the river bed to see the waders breeding there. It seemed like time. After a long drive, I pitched my tent outside the hut at Diamond Creek, just about as near to Paradise as you can get.



I was early enough to get a good spot and the crew trickled in slowly through the night, some arriving quite late.

The next morning we trooped back to Glenorchy and were taken across the lake to the edge of the wide braided river by jet boat. We were organised and given our gear – GPS, compass, radios and data sheets, and a handful of convenient birds enabled us to school everybody up on the differences between Wrybills and Banded Dotterels. We spread out into a big line 100m apart across the river bed and walked predetermined transects using the navigational aids and a bit of guesswork with the radios to make sure that only one person counted each of the birds.

I drew a transect close to the river and walked up clean flood washed shingle. The river was broken into many channels and I had to cross quite a lot of them getting fairly wet but managing to keep more or less to my line. From the radio chatter the people on the other end of the line were in Banded Dotterel habitat and seemed to finding birds and their nests with depressing frequency. I shouldn't complain as I was seeing a few birds feeding in the channels, more Wrybills than dotterels, a few Black-billed Gulls and Black-fronted Terns hunting the channels. There were quite a few Black-backed Gulls as well which were nesting in several colonies of about 20 nests or so. The familiar Pied Oystercatchers were widely spread, and like all of the birds here, particularly spectacular against the mountain backdrop.

Some hours later, near the end of my transect, I saw a Wrybill get up just in front of me in a crouching run with a spread tail. I took a few steps back and barely had to wait before he ran back and sat down on his eggs. I stepped forward again to get a better look at the eggs – grey like the river stones with black speckles so fine that they were almost not there. They were laid on a bed of fine stone chips and didn't look much different from some of the smaller stones around them. The bird on the nest didn't look so different from the larger stones there either, a site well-chosen for camouflage. Although they actually spend a little more of their time down on the mudflats, they fit well on the shingle rivers. Much of the sharp end of their evolution must have occurred here to have made them such remarkable braided river specialists. I didn't have a lot of time to sit and watch but I didn't see any of the birds using the bend in its bill to probe under the river stones. They simply used that slightly odd asymmetric peck familiar from their winter haunts. What was odd was seeing them on the gravel banks among the plants catching flies and beetles.

Soon after this the river narrowed and we just had a straight walk to the bridge where we finished. There was a nice patch of Kowhai trees in heavy flower where we stopped with pigeons and Tui feasting on the flowers while everybody gathered. There was plenty of chatter about the finds of the day; nests of Wrybills, Banded Dotterels, Pied Oystercatchers and Canada Geese, a small Black-fronted Tern colony, an odd lichen growing on the sand and whether the Black-

backed Gull colonies were likely to cause problems for the other birds. It was a good day.


The next day we surveyed above the bridge to Paradise with similar results. I even found another Wrybill nest close to the end of my line. Another highlight for the day was noticing a Wrybill with metal bands on both tibia and tarsus – one of ours - a multiple victim of the NZWSG! The major disappointment was the lack of a Black-billed Gull colony. We sent someone off to Diamond Lake as they have nested there in the past but no sign of breeding was found.

In total, we covered 1254 ha of river bed spread along 17km; it's a pretty big place, similar in size to many of the Canterbury river beds. We counted 49 Wrybills and 264 Banded Dotterels which seems to be a fairly average density for them and possibly a small increase for both species since the last count in 2002. Black-fronted Tern numbers, at 193, are similar to past counts but big fluctuations make it hard to be sure of any change in status. The Black-billed Gulls are definitely declining from about 700 birds in 1967 to 90 in 2007.

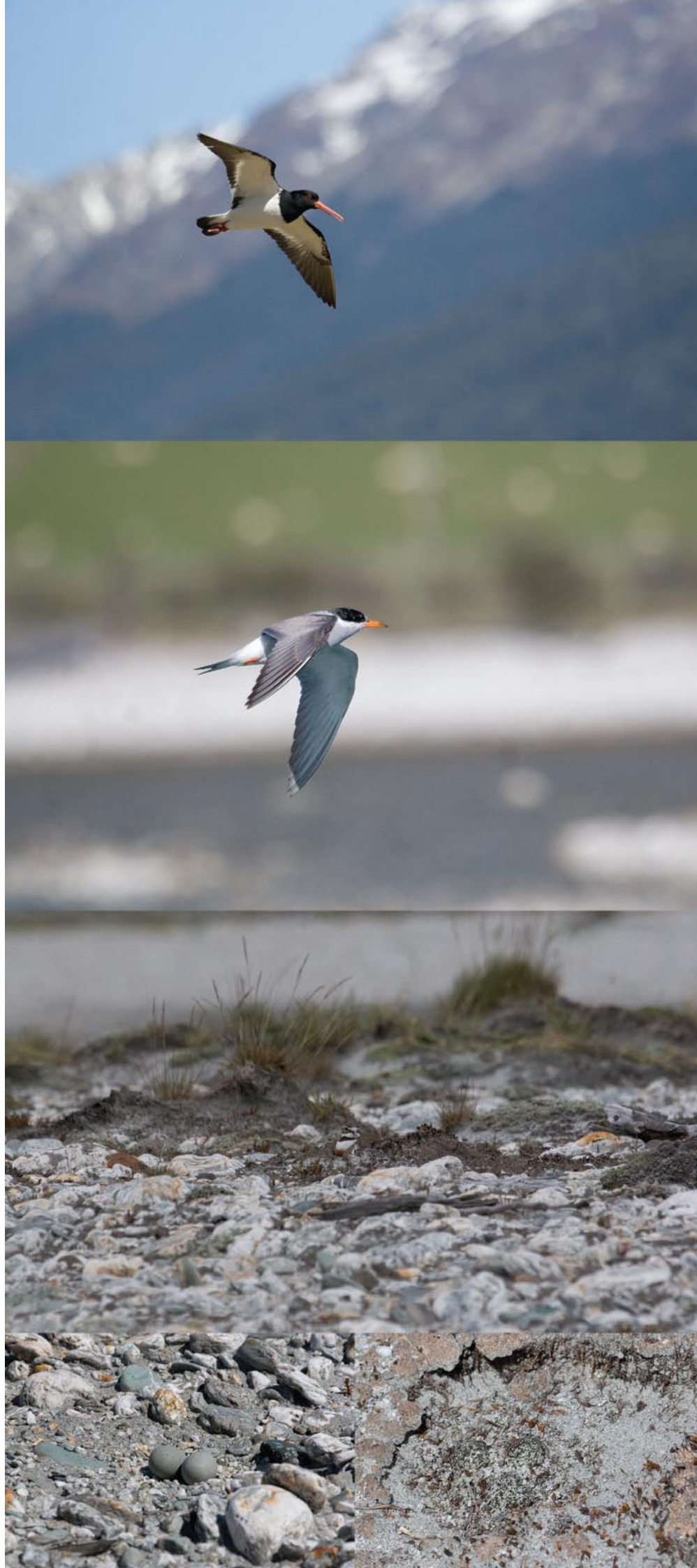
The Black-fronted Tern colony found on this survey was monitored. At least 18 nests were present at first and all was well on November 20th when 5 large chicks were seen. A week later Gillian Vaughan and I were back at the colony to make a further check. There were no large chicks remaining nor any of the smaller chicks found previously. We found a hollowed out egg shell under a log and a few nests with eggs or very small chicks.

A little further away we noticed a colony just starting and tried to find and mark the nests so they could be further monitored. We did manage to mark several nests with eggs but some birds were sitting on empty nests, not having laid yet. The birds defended their nests fiercely, diving at us and calling. When we bent down to mark the nests with a painted stone we were hit on the back of the head by them. Such a small bird doesn't hurt a person but they strike hard enough that they must risk damage to themselves. We quickly backed off. Black-fronted Terns are rare birds now and the loss of these nests is a concern. The colony of Black-backed Gulls nearby may have been the culprits; the damage to the egg shell seemed consistent with having been broken into by one of them.

On this day I also made a better acquaintance with Banded Dotterels and we found two nests. The birds ran off their nests and quickly began a distraction display. We withdrew a little and watched them return to their eggs. One clutch had an olive brown background colour and the other grey with black speckles all over. It makes fair camouflage amongst the sand, stones and plants but they have another trick too. The eggs are partly buried in the substrate which breaks up their outline and makes them particularly hard to spot. The nests were close to debris and the brown back of the bird matched the driftwood well with the bands on the breast breaking up the outline there.

Braided river beds support a very distinctive group of birds, attractive, interesting and well worth visiting. Some of the Wrybills and Pied Oystercatchers will be among the flocks we see wintering in our local harbours and it is fascinating to see something of them in their other lives. 

From the top, South Island Pied Oystercatcher against the mountains, Black-fronted Tern flying along the river, Well camouflaged Banded Dotterel on a nest, Bottom left Wrybill nest on stone chips, Bottom right Banded Dotterel nest with eggs partially buried.



Banded Stilt at the Coorong

Maureen Christie and Gillian Vaughan

Banded Stilt is an Australian species known for forming large flocks and moving over wide areas as the erratic Australian rains create and dilute saline wetlands. In 1994 the total population of the species was estimated at 206,000 divided into two populations, one in the south and one in the west. One site used by Banded Stilts is the Coorong in South Australia where a flock of 100,000 was seen and chicks were banded 2006.



Juvenile Banded Stilt Photo Danny Rogers

Still it was somewhat of a surprise to all when on the 2nd of February 2008 four counters on the Coorong count came back with a count of 250,000 Banded Stilts, more than the total estimated national population. This simply had to be confirmed and on the 21st of February an aerial survey was done - Maureen Christie reported in the Friends of Shorebird Newsletter 34:

“As we flew north, the first unanswered question was – will they still be there? Both Pam and Josie had reported that the night air was filled with the sounds of Banded Stilt. The next question was, will they ALL be still there? Late last week Glen had taken out an Age photographer and had located a flock opposite Woods Well which was only about 1/3 the size of the 250,000 flock he and Inka had seen during the AWSG count – perhaps there were more opposite Braeside – but the water was too shallow to get there, and the heat haze made observation impossible. And the final question, would they be congregated into a tight roosting flock or be feeding, scattered, like confetti, across the water’s surface?

First stop was to be Meningie, to

pick up Paul who had driven down from Adelaide. But we could not resist a sneak preview – and so a small deviation. We were past Woods Well and no Stilt sighted – when suddenly Iain called ‘There they are!’ – looking out the rear window he had spotted a large congregation probably exactly where Inka and Glen had originally found them. Content we continued on to collect Paul.

The plan was to fly the western shore first – this would put Paul on the best side for photographs on both the outward and the return journey. Water levels in the Coorong are extremely low, and there is very little bird life. What are those white birds? – Silver Gull!! Small flocks of Shelduck congregated at fresh water soaks. One or two small flocks of grey waders. And so we continued south. And it didn’t take long – a smudge of white on the shoreline - Banded Stilt. In two separate flocks. And so the serious business of the day began, with Paul leaning out of the cockpit window to take photos. I was sitting behind him and had hoped to manage some ‘happy snaps’ with my camera, but no, it was my task to hold the window open and stopping it suddenly falling and sacrificing Paul’s camera to the Coorong.

Finally enough photos had been taken, and we took stock of our surroundings – we were still in the Northern Lagoon – on the western shore opposite Rabbit Island. This wasn’t the flock that we had seen earlier!!! Were these additional birds, or had the flock moved whilst we were at Meningie?


And so we continued southward. It didn’t take long – there were two more flocks on the western shore opposite Woods Well. Earlier we had only noticed one flock – the second flock was stretched out on the inside edge of a sandbar, and would have been difficult for us to see coming from the south.

Holding the window open once again, I was grateful for the fresh air as we circled around and around for more photos.

As we flew back to Meningie, the BIG question – how many!!! We were agreed on one thing – we had seen A LOT of Banded Stilt!

Hopefully, analysis of Paul’s photos will enable us to arrive at a figure. The four separate flocks contained the vast majority of Stilt seen, although a relatively small number were observed feeding, scattered on the surface of the water.”

The full analysis of the numbers has yet to be completed, but it wasn’t as if the whole of the Australian population had moved to the Coorong for a few days; there were reports of significant numbers still at regular sites in West Australia in the same time period.

At the same time several flag sightings were coming in, including the first record of a bird flagged in eastern Australia moving to Western Australia, and a bird flagged in South Australia photographed in Victoria. Other recent sightings have included a Victorian flagged Banded Stilt seen in the Coorong in August last year. 

Order from the Miranda Shop,
order form online at
www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz



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Eila Lawton Emma Stanyard

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Phil Hammond Sue Reid

Wendy Hare Gillian Vaughan

Keith Thompson

John Gale (Ex officio)

Bequests



Remember the Miranda Naturalists' Trust in your Will and ensure that our vital work in education and protection of the migratory shorebirds can continue. For further information and a copy of our legacy letter contact the Shorebird Centre.

Situated on the Firth of Thames between Kaiaua and the Miranda Hot Pools, the Miranda Shorebird Centre provides a base for birders right where the birds are. The best time to see the birds is two to three hours either side of high tide. The Miranda high tide is 30 minutes before the Auckland (Waitemata) tide. Drop in to investigate, or come and stay a night or two.

Accommodation

The Shorebird Centre has three bunkrooms for hire plus two self-contained flats:

Per bed / night member \$ 12.50

Hire of flat member \$ 40.00

Per bed / night non-member \$ 17.50

Hire of flat non-member \$ 50.00

For further information contact Keith at the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno

Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781

Help support the Trust's efforts to educate and promote conservation awareness.

Membership of the Trust entitles you to: **Membership Rates:**

Four Miranda News issues per year.

Ordinary Member - \$ 35

A \$ 5 discount on overnight accommodation

Family Member - \$ 40

Invitations to Trust Events

Overseas Member- \$ 40

The right to attend the AGM

Life Member, under 50 - \$ 1050

The right to vote for council members

Life Member, 50 & over - \$ 525

Want to be involved?

Friends of Miranda

A volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre. If you'd like to help out contact Keith. Helping out can be anything from assisting with the shop, school groups or meeting people down at the shellbanks. Regular days for volunteer training are held. Upcoming dates are Apr 26, May 31, Jun 28 and Jul 26. Contact Jenni Hensley at the Centre or gekkomoon@slingshot.co.nz for details.

Long term Volunteers

Spend four weeks or more on the shoreline at Miranda. If you are interested in staffing the visitor centre, helping with school groups or talking to people on the shellbank for a few weeks contact Keith to discuss options. Free accommodation is available in one of the bunkrooms. Use of a bicycle will be available.

The Miranda Garden

If you want an excuse to stay at Miranda for a couple of week nights free of charge, come and help a small team of gardeners maintain the gardens. It is satisfying and worthwhile work in the outdoors. We make the time enjoyable especially when we down tools at high tide and go and watch the birds on the shell banks. If interested phone Keith on 232 2781 who will put you in touch with a gardener!

Firth of Thames Census

Run by OSNZ and held three times a year the Census days are a good chance to get involved with ongoing field work and research.

The Magazine

Never forget you are welcome to contribute to the MNT NEWS!

The Newsletter of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is published four times a year to keep members in touch, and to bring news of events at the Miranda Shorebird Centre and along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission.

