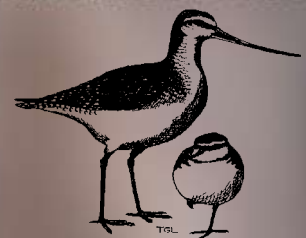


MIRANDA NEWS

Naturalists' Trust
August 2008 Issue 70



Letter from Alaska
South Korea 2008



August 2008 Issue 70

From the Blackboard
10 August 2008

Upcoming Events

August 29-31 Photography Course	November 2 OSNZ November Census. November 15-16 Wader ID Weekend.
September 9-11 NZ Dotterel Management Course	December 31 2008 New Years Eve Farewell one year and welcome the next. Special Guests: YOU!
October - 4-5 Keeping a Nature Diary	January 24-30 2009 Miranda Field Course 2009. For details contact the Centre. for Course details see pg 18
October 19 1pm Welcome to the birds Speaker Adrian Riegen 2008 Shorebirds in the Yellow Sea Note the time, High tide 11am so BIRDING FIRST!	

Cover: The Boatshed Male - a Bar-tailed Godwit on a nest on the tundra. Photo Keith Woodley.

Back Cover: Grey Plover and Shore Plover at the Manawatu estuary. Photos Alex Scott

A word from the editor

At the recent potluck dinner I discovered that some of our members have to work quite hard to read the text in magazines. I can send members who would prefer to read the magazine on screen, where they can blow the text up, a .pdf of each issue in addition to sending the hard copy. If you'd like to receive the magazine this way email me, gillianv@actrix.co.nz, and I'll arrange it for you.

This issue is full of articles about our shorebirds overseas, I was involved in much of it, even wrote some of it. And yet the birds most on my mind are the Spur-winged Plovers on the corner. They hatched three chicks and managed to get them through the weeks of big rains, I've been keeping an eye on them, watching the chicks grow up. They are in many ways more real than the godwits at the moment, they are just down the road, the godwits are miles away, remote.

Through the satellite tracking we have the opportunity to remove some of that remoteness, to find out what our birds are doing on a daily basis. It doesn't take away all the distance, but I hope people are finding that it keeps them feeling connected. One of the neat opportunities in this issue was to include some commentary from our northern hemisphere friends on how they see the godwits and the satellite tracking, for me it took away just a bit more of the distance.

The deadline for the next issue is 20 October - I look forward to receiving your contributions.

Gillian Vaughan

Arctic Migrants

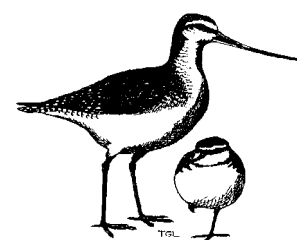
Bar-tailed Godwit	200
Red Knot	350
Turnstone	11

New Zealand Species

Pied Oystercatcher	
Wrybill	2000
NZ Dotterel	4
Banded Dotterel	90
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-billed Gull	
Red-billed Gull	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	
Pied Stilt	
White Heron	1
Spoonbill	18
Rooks	6

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Letter from Alaska

Keith Woodley

From the ski-plane, banking for its final approach to the frozen meadow along the Kashunuk River, the little church dominated the empty landscape. Actually, it was the two broad orange strips painted on the roof of the otherwise all white corrugated iron structure that made it stand out so well. On the vast snowbound tundra it sat in splendid isolation, attended on all sides only by piles of snow drift.



All other features in the landscape - the rivers, ponds, and marshes still lay locked and frozen. Yet it was not entirely a white world, for here and there lay strips of exposed tundra, the burnt umber and tawny yellows of the vegetation contrasting starkly with everything else. And along the northern horizon, once the cloud and fog lifted, lay the snow bound Askinuk range, highest point 714 metres, and the volcanoes Ingrisarak (111 metres) and Nushkolik (93 metres.) Further back lay the solitary bulk of Kusilvak (741 metres.)

Last used as a place of worship in 1950 the building has since functioned as many things, but mainly as a field camp for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The walls and ceiling of the main room - barely 8 metres long - are clad in narrow white panelling. Benches and shelves line each side and at the northern end sits a gas cooker and a small oil stove. A particularly splendid apparatus, the latter was of incalculable value over the first two weeks of our stay when temperatures seldom rose above freezing. Over that time, once birds arrived back but before the snow softened making their snow machines inoperable, a succession of local hunters passed by. A few stopped by for a chat, and I learnt some of the church's history. It has been a place of shelter for hunters caught out in the weather, and on other occasions, a hangout for young people from Chevak, 15 kilometres

away to the north west. "I brought my first girlfriend here." confessed one fellow. Others were here each year as part of goose banding teams, as testified by annual team photos on the wall. In 1953 Roger Tory Peterson, largely credited with pioneering the modern field guides to birds, and James Fisher stayed here during their epic odyssey through the continent, which became the natural history classic *Wild America*. A lifetime later, it has been my home for the last six weeks.

Outside there are hummocks and shallow ridges, and the slopes of sloughs and river channels. Here and there are strips of tundra - some a few hundred metres long, others patches of two square metres. Everywhere else there is snow - hard and compacted, its surface pitted by the wind. A vast, cold landscape but here and there are broad patches of clear sky, and fingers of blue grey shadows pushed out by the late evening sunshine. It appears denuded of life, though is anything but. Among the patches of tundra we find evidence of rodent activity, tracks and tunnels, diggings and droppings - most likely tundra voles or perhaps shrews. Tiny foot

prints scribbled in the snow show where passerines have been foraging. Along the edge of a small hump of tundra are ptarmigan tracks intersected by those of a fox. On each of the last few days we have seen one or more foxes, both red and arctic, trotting methodically over the snow, investigating. Loping along a frozen slough is a mink - dark and bulky in its winter fur.

The density of foxes is cause for concern. As the snow slowly recedes from the sloping ground surround-



Red Fox on the snow

ing marshes and ponds, even more sign of rodent activity is uncovered. However it is not clear how fresh all this sign really is; indeed it could be mainly from the autumn and early part of the winter just past. If that is the case it suggests sufficient rodents survived into the winter to support good numbers of predators such as foxes. The absence of fresh rodent sign is therefore most concerning, for

Earlier this year Keith Woodley spent 10 weeks in Alaska in pursuit of godwits. Having had experience of them in NZ and Australia and on stopover in the Yellow Sea, the major aim was to round off the story by seeing them in their breeding habitat.



if prey numbers have now dropped away, predators will soon be actively nest hunting. For even now there are birds here, though not many; within a few days however the tundra will be alive with them.

At the edge of the building itself, tucked into a corner sheltered from the north wind, is a small raised deck. For several hours each morning and afternoon during those first weeks, and sometimes in the evening as well, Brian McCaffery and I sat, clad in numerous layers, and observed the land for activity. For the most part it was a quiet, empty place, though not entirely deserted. Small flocks of Snow Buntings and McKay's Buntings, along with a few Redpolls, drifted through periodically. Astonishingly these small birds spend much of the winter up here. Likewise there are no temperate or tropical winter quarters for Willow Ptarmigan, endearing members of the grouse family, as they too spend winter out here on the tundra. Moulting from winter plumage, males are all white still except for rusty brown heads and black tips to their tails. A wedge of white upper tail coverts extends out to the middle tip of the tail, leaving only the corners exposed. The effect of this in flight, as the bird rockets low across the snowfields, is as if someone has thrown some lumps of coal. Before landing he soars upwards, wings and tail fanned giving a call reminiscent of the opening bars of the Laughing Kookaburra. A pair of Ravens also visits regularly, as much at home here as they are elsewhere in their wide range, even if they do strike a discordant note – large black creatures in a white world.

On 3 May the first two Lesser White-fronted Geese pass over the camp. They are the first genuine migrants, and they are the harbingers of an avian flood. Later that afternoon more geese arrive, some of them

Cackling Geese, a smaller version of Canada Geese from which they have now been split. Then a mournful cry drifts across the frozen tundra, announcing the first shorebird arrival – a Black-bellied Plover (Grey Plover). The croaks of Tundra Swans and the bugling of Sandhill Cranes indicate other newcomers. Over the next few days Western Sandpipers and Rock Sandpipers, Red-necked Phalaropes and Black Turnstones also appear in numbers. Then, late on the afternoon of 6 May a single bird flies up from the west, banks over the church and lands across the frozen slough: it is a male Bar-tailed Godwit and it is a significant event for the bird and myself, for both of us have traveled 11,000 kilometres to be here for this moment.

* * * * *

Fifty metres in front of me the female is sitting. She is largely obscured by vegetation although the sun catches her crown and the tip of her bill. Thirty metres further back the male lands, looking about watchfully. Gradually he approaches, but on an oblique course which takes him around the back of her position so he eventually approaches from the opposite direction. He comes nearer and she huddles down further, disappearing completely from view. Then he is standing right beside her, and she suddenly flies directly from where she has been sitting, heads into the nearby marsh and begins preening. Meanwhile he immediately settles down in her place. This is the moment that rewards the countless hours of observation of this pair over the past three weeks. The changeover by these Bar-tailed Godwit indicates they have re-nested, just six days after their first clutch was lost. This is the first time that a replacement clutch by this species has been confirmed; previously the literature has been somewhat vague about it, they 'may' re-nest, or

it is 'possible they may try and re-nest', but given the tight time budget of these long distance migrants it was by no means certain.

Immediately north of the camp, beyond two small ponds stands a solitary building, weathered and leaning as so many human constructions do in this land of permafrost. It is known as the boatshed and running beside it is a small channel connecting to the tidal slough. The channel is the outlet for a small basin, perhaps several hectares, with extensive sedge beds. Part of this area lies within the territory of the pair I have been watching, hence they come to be known as the boatshed marsh pair.

Since May 10 my daily routine has been closely bound with that of these two birds. I have seen the male in his display flights – loud, flamboyant and often disconcerting for any other bird that happens to stray into his airspace at that time. High above the tundra he performs the 'limping' flight, tilting to one side for five to seven shallow wing beats, before tilting to the opposite side for five to seven more,

Since May 10 my daily routine has been closely bound with that of these two birds.

all the time uttering a shrill, rapidly repeated cry, not unlike that of certain car alarms. If that other bird happens by – be it a diminutive Western Sandpiper or Red-necked Phalarope, or even a Sandhill Crane – ten times the size of the godwit – the male may stoop at speed and 'buzz' the other. With the smaller birds this often develops into an aerial chase in which every stratagem of the hapless pursued – swerve, twist, climb, dive – is imitated immediately by the godwit. It is not as if the godwit is seeking to catch the other bird, quite the contrary; the entire purpose is to impress any female that may be nearby. I have also watched other aspects of their courtship – bill fencing, nest scraping and nest scrape pointing. And I have witnessed their copulations.

Background photo - the camp at Big Slough, Top left the same stump on arrival and departure, the church in the distance. Right Bar-tailed Godwit nest, the second nest of the boatshed pair. Bottom left Willow Ptarmigan, red-necked Phalarope. Right Bar-tailed Godwit - the boatshed female who laid 8 eggs in under three weeks.



Western Sandpipers, common around camp.

The first nest is found on May 19 on an area of upland tundra overlooking the marsh. A deep scrape is strewn with pale lichen looking very like bean sprouts, and lying in its centre is a single egg. But the nest itself sits

A deep scrape is strewn with pale lichen looking very like bean sprouts, and lying in its centre is a single egg.

entirely within a patch of pale green lichen and is remarkably conspicuous. Well it is if one is standing over it; from just several metres back it is virtually impossible to see. Four days later the birds appear to be sitting tight, suggesting the clutch has been completed. But on May 26 the nest is empty. There is slight damage around it but no evidence of shell fragments indicating the eggs had been carried off, which in turn implicates a fox as a likely suspect. A few days later we watched as an Arctic Fox removes,

one by one, seven Willow Ptarmigan eggs and stashes each one individually in locations over an area of half a hectare. Another possible offender is the mink that was seen in the area a day earlier.

But whatever the identity of the culprit, the fate of the nest was an extremely disappointing

development, not least for the godwit pair but also for me. I would need to find another pair and start my observations all over again. Yet, later that afternoon I saw the male nest scraping. Did this mean they were going to try again? Over the next few days I was to see patterns of behaviour - courtship and copulation, similar to those of the period prior to the first nest being found. By 1 June all evidence suggested they once more had a nest. Over the previous two days I had watched much activity around

one particular site, where a lot of scraping had occurred. Several times the partly crouched female picked pieces of lichen and tossed it over her shoulders so it fell into or around the scrape. The male seemed to spend a lot of time around the margins of that particular area, prominently perched and watchful. And the pair was seen copulating at least twice within the same general area.

That morning I found the female foraging in the marsh. There was no sign of the male but that was not unusual, he having spent a lot of time in other parts of the marsh or as a sentinel on the tundra. I took the opportunity to investigate the nest site and it was while standing just a metre from the scrape that I discovered why I had not been able to find the male: he was huddled almost at my feet, his unmoving eye carefully watching my approach! Quickly retreating back to the spotting scope, I settled in to await further developments. Mid way through the afternoon the male flew off in apparent response to display calls from a male in an adjacent area, and after a quick check that the female was still foraging in the marsh, I seized the opportunity for further investigation, and found two eggs. Here was the proof of re-nesting, but would they lay a complete clutch? On 3 June we briefly flushed the male and there at my feet was the tight cluster of greenish eggs, lightly speckled and splotched - all four of them. Final confirmation. One of three nests known to still be active, these birds were still sitting tight on the afternoon of 6 June when we flew out of Old Chevak, the splendid culmination to the past six weeks in the field.



The church, as the season progressed tents were pitched outside.

* * * * *

The tide is lower than anticipated so the float plane has to land further out near the mouth of the slough. In taxiing back up the channel we run aground on a mud bank, which means the pilot and I have to get out and push it off – a very novel experience indeed. Then I am deposited near a higher bank covered in sedges. Before me in the mid-evening sun the Bering Sea glistens the colour of pearl, as the tide creeps over the flats. In every other direction a vast sedge meadow disappears to the horizon. In this flat empty land there is only me and a pile of gear; baggage, containers of water, boxes of re supply provisions, a package of mince meat and a water melon. Some Mew Gulls arrive to investigate, and an Arctic Tern hovers past, working up the channel. I am watching Semi-palmated Sandpipers and Black Turnstones forage on the opposite bank when I hear the boat coming down the slough. This is Big Slough, on the very edge of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and I am here in pursuit of more godwits.

Matt Sexson and Ty Donnelly of the U. S. Geological Survey ferry me back to the camp where we join Rob Schuckard from Nelson and Sarah Lovibond from Tasmania. The four of them have been out here for nearly two months, arriving a few days before I got to Old Chevak. They too have watched the winter landscape transform into spring abundance, but theirs was a rather spartan existence over the initial period. The camp consists of a weather port and a string of tents along the slough bank which, back in April were erected on a featureless plane of snow and ice. An infestation of tundra voles chewing into the tents, and a flood through the camp as the slough ice melted were other features of those early days. I quickly realize the church at Old Chevak is a veritable Hilton by comparison. This camp is primarily aimed at catching and implanting Spectacled Eiders with satellite trans-

mitters. But the brief also covers Red Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits.

Over three kilometres behind the camp to the east the edge of the sedge meadow is marked by huge piles of bleached logs, tide wrack from autumn storms - sobering evidence that the sea visits this place. This giant debris lies strewn against the upland tundra, so called because it is up to a metre higher than the sedge. The day of my arrival a godwit nest had been found, one of three to be located in this area.

Two nests are on the tundra itself, amidst the dwarf ground-hugging shrubs and lichens, as were all the nests at Old Chevak. The third however appears to be in an area of sedge – for that is certainly where a godwit pair has been very active. After several days of patient observation, we see what appears to be a nest change-over – but even in the scope view it is a considerable distance away. An initial check of the area fails to locate anything, despite the presence of a bird alarming loudly nearby. We decide to peg the entire area within the scope view and grid search. I place four stakes in the ground and begin walking down one edge of the plot, when something makes me pause with my foot still in mid air; for once more, virtually where my foot would have landed, a male godwit sits watching me. Once again the reputation this species has for being the tightest nest sitters on the tundra is confirmed!

This behaviour lends itself to a rudimentary catching technique; two people advance holding a mist net between them and place it over the nest. In this way we manage to catch both birds, and each time the same situa-


tion applies; the net is over the sitting bird which remains absolutely motionless. It is only when reaching to take the bird from the net, and then only when one's hand is a forearm length away that it flushes. The pair now bear leg flags with alphanumeric codes – J1 and J2. Incubation here is very well advanced and at our last visit the eggs are pipping. However it is also time to break camp so we leave before establishing the outcome of this nest. But overall the news is sobering; of the nine nests I see on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta all but two failed, usually due to depredation.

at least three chicks hatched, and at least two chicks are subsequently seen.

On 1 July Brian McCaffery manages to briefly revisit Old Chevak and checks all three nests. One is empty with no evidence of shell fragments which once more suggests a fox has visited. The other two nests however contain shell fragments with detached membranes indicating successful hatching. One nest was further advanced than the Boatshed pair's second clutch so any chicks



The boatshed pair chasing off a dowitcher

there would have been long gone. The Boatshed nest however was a different matter. Shell evidence indicates at least three chicks hatched, and at least two chicks are subsequently seen. Given the overall paucity of nesting success at this site, this is an extremely pleasing outcome. 

Yalu Jiang - 2008

Gillian Vaughan

In April and May 2008 two groups from Miranda visited Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve. The first group went in mid-April to help with benthic sampling and to try and catch some waders on migration, the second group went in the second week of May to assist with the yearly wader survey. I joined the first group, with Adrian Riegen, David Melville and Jesse Conklin from 19-27 April.



Top: Buses full of people heading for the bird hides. Bottom: Bird Photography has become popular with many people sporting 400-800 mm lenses. Photos A. Riegen

One of the most obvious changes between 2004 and 2008 was the number of locals who visited the better known birding sites, both within and outside the reserve. Last year more than 15,000 people visited Erdougou during the northward migration,

this year more were expected. Most of these were in organised groups, but in addition to the organised groups were the individuals we ran into, from the keen birdwatchers and photographers to couples just stopping for twenty minutes with a shared pair of binoculars. The management of large numbers of people around the bird roosts will be a new challenge for the reserve staff.

The Dandong Birdwatching Club was launched during our stay, with many prominent locals as members. Hopefully the higher profile of the birds will help with their protection.

As has happened in years past school visits were made by both teams to encourage knowledge and enthusiasm about shorebirds. School students were also present at the opening of the bird watching festival.

A major aim of the first visit was to help with benthic sampling. After

hours spent collecting samples on mudflats the reserve staff returned to the Management Station where samples were washed, sorted, then identified, counted and measured. Over the course of ten days samples were taken from both ends of the reserve and several sites in the middle. The results of this will be the first snapshot of food available to birds within the reserve, and how it varies from one end of the reserve to the other. The attempts to catch birds were largely unsuccessful with only a single Grey Plover caught.

May 6th to 12th

Nigel Milius, Wendy Hare and Bruce Postill took over the work on the second visit, from May 6th to 12th. The aim of this visit was to complete a wader survey of the reserve. Each year the reserve staff have this organised better than the year before, meaning more time spent counting and looking for flags. One question this year was, given the destruction at Saemanguem in South Korea would unexpectedly large numbers of Great Knot be present at Yalu Jiang?

Mud samples being washed (left) sorted (middle) then identified by David Melville (right) Photos A.Riegen (left and middle) J. Conklin right






Schoolchildren filing into the bird hides at Erdougou - photo G. Vaughan

The answer was no. While 19,917 Great Knot were counted this is about the number that were expected. For comparison:
 mid April 2007 19,897
 mid April 2006 16, 268
 late April 2004 32,880
 Combined with the details of the survey of the South Korean coast (reported elsewhere in this issue) this is further indication that the Great Knots displaced from Saemanguem have not simply moved to other sites in the Yellow Sea and that a decline in the population of this species can be expected.

This was the first survey run this late in the northward migration and the drop-off in the number of Bar-tailed Godwit, from as high as 66,000 to the 38,000 here was expected as many of the *baueri* birds would have departed for the Alaskan breeding grounds. It seems likely that most of the remaining godwits would be of the subspecies *menzibieri*, heading for breeding grounds in Siberia.

Some of the exciting sightings included an Oriental Dotterel, a Bar-tailed Godwit with a satellite transmitter, D8, a Temminck's Stint and two birds, one a godwit and one a grey plover that had been banded in Thailand. The godwit had been banded just two weeks earlier! 



A flock of godwits at the Yalu River - a flock of cranes in the background? Photo G. Vaughan

Final Count

Species	Number	Species	Number
Bar-tailed Godwit	38,283	Terek Sandpiper	22
Dunlin	32,837	Red Knot	21
Great Knot	19,917	Lesser Sand Plover	8
Eurasian Curlew	6,243	Marsh Sandpiper	7
Unidentified Curlew	5,930	Red-necked Stint	5
Grey Plover	4,643	Snipe sp	4
Eastern Curlew	4,001	Common Sandpiper	3
Kentish Plover	894	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	3
Spotted Redshank	210	Ruddy Turnstone	2
Eurasian Oystercatcher	190	Ruff	2
Common Greenshank	124	Black-tailed Godwit	1
Black-winged Stilt	104	Unidentified medium	700
Wood Sandpiper	102	Unidentified large	2500
Whimbrel	50		
Common Redshank	27	OVERALL TOTAL	116,856
Spotted Greenshank	23		

Species seen in numbers that are considered "internationally important":

Bar-tailed Godwit	Dunlin	Eastern Curlew	Great Knot
Eurasian Curlew	Grey Plover	Spotted Greenshank	Kentish Plover
Eurasian Oystercatcher			

South Korea 2008

Adrian Riegen

Previous issues of the Miranda News have covered the reclamation of Saemangeum and its effects on migrating waders. The story is rather depressing but we should not forget the disaster for waders and local people that is unfolding and what lessons we might learn for the future to stop similar disasters befalling sites of such high international importance.



To Recap

The Saemangeum reclamation was completed in April 2006, enclosing 40,000 hectares of shallow sea and huge tidalflats. The area formed the most important staging grounds in East Asia for migrant waders during northward migration, with around 400,000 birds refuelling there.

Saemangeum was particularly significant for Great Knot, which until 2006 numbered some 300,000 birds. They breed in mountains of northeastern Siberia and spend the non-breeding season mostly in northern Australia. Approximately one third of the entire population used Saemangeum during April and May.

Great Knots are specialist feeders, preferring shellfish small enough to swallow whole. With 80-100,000 birds to feed daily a very productive eco-system is needed, which Saemangeum provided, even while the sea wall was being built. As the wall grew

Korean authorities have done little to monitor the true effects on the waders

the amount of water getting through the ever-narrowing gaps reduced, so for several years before wall closure the upper tidalflats were rarely covered but there were still good tides.

Since wall closure in April 2006 tidal flow has been totally controlled at a reduced rate. There was sufficient food for the birds in 2006, but the



Once a roost for 70,000 Great Knots Okgu is now dry and vegetated.

drying tidalflats forced many shellfish to the surface where heated by the sun, their shells opened and they died. This was a short-lived bonanza for Great Knots, which could feed on prey usually locked inside a shell too large to swallow.

When the birds returned in April 2007 Saemangeum was a very different place, with most of the tidalflats permanently dry and lifeless. Arriving birds, hungry after non-stop flights from Australia were unable to feed. In April 2006 Keith Woodley and I estimated 70-80,000 Great Knots in one flock at Okgu, a major feeding and roost site. On the same day in 2007 we found less than 300. In 2008 even fewer birds were seen.

Korean authorities have done little to monitor the true effects on the waders and have simply suggested displaced birds would go to other estuaries like the Geum a few kilometres away, ironically itself under development threat. The Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Programme (SSMP), a three-year project (2006-

2008) to document the effects on waders of the Saemangeum destruction was therefore being jointly run by Birds Korea (an NGO group) and the Australasian Wader Studies Group.

Nial Moores (an Englishman living in Korea) is the driving force for the SSMP who, with Birds Korea have battled tirelessly trying to save Saemangeum. Few Koreans are prepared to fight these devel-

opments, so it has been predominantly an international effort, with people from around the world coming to document the changes in waders at Saemangeum and the Geum Estuary. The results of the three-year study will be presented at the Ramsar Conference being held in Korea later this year.

The Supplementary Survey

This year Nial also planned a supplementary survey of all known wader sites on the west and south coasts of Korea, repeating a surveyed he undertook in May 1998. I joined Nial and others from the SSMP for the 11-day survey starting at Gangwha Island, close to the North Korean border. We would work our way south and east to Pusan some 600 km away.

Gangwha Island, separated from the mainland by the Han River estuary northwest of Seoul, has vast tidalflats along its southern shore but surprisingly few birds and a distinct absence of Great Knot. Lack of suitable food is the most likely reason for this as although there were many people,

the coast was reasonably natural and disturbance levels seemed no higher than at the Geum Estuary where there is considerable human pressure but still many thousands of birds.

The use of chemicals on the paddies is at such high levels there is probably little food for any birds.

We surveyed Gangwha on a Sunday so had to share the coast with thousands of day-tripping city folk from Seoul and Incheon out for walks, picnics and a day at an artificial golden sand beach, which looked completely out of place amid all the mud.

After dropping three 'Mirandaits' at the airport to fly to Yalu Jiang we set off south to rendezvous with Nial and others who had been counting Songdo, yet another wader site being swamped with development. A huge new bridge from the airport comes ashore here, and close by is a vast housing estate with 30 storey high towers covering what was once tidalflats. In spite of the construction there were still waders, gulls and egrets feeding on what little tidalflat remained. Soon that too will be gone.

Confusing road numbers, rain, darkness and muddled instructions over the phone didn't help with the rendezvous and it was 11 p.m. before we eventually found Nial. We were greeted with the news we had to be on the road at 04:30 to get to the next count site for a dawn high tide, and thus the tone was set for the next few days; catch an early morning tide, count another area at low tide and then catch an evening tide somewhere else, as far as 100km away.

The day dawned fine and calm as we reached the first count site on an ebbing tide near a 5 km long sea barrage. The birds flew off to feed in a bay close to a beach resort. Its sandy beaches and grassy banks under shady trees were probably busy in summer with many little cafes just back from the beach. Only one thing spoils the place, and that was the 2m high fence

topped with razor wire separating the grassy bank from the beach. Locked gates in the fence could be opened on high days and holidays. Is the threat from North Korea really that bad that even 100km from the border the coast has to be fenced?

We continued through an area of rice paddies where we found 200 Black-tailed Godwits. Nial suggested we should find thousands of them over the next day or so, but alas that is another species struggling; we saw very few anywhere.

Ten years ago Asan Bay had been a great wader site but again huge developments, reclamations and other forms of habitat degradation have left almost nowhere for the waders and where there should have been tens of thousands, just over 2,000 were found.

Close to Sosan we went in search of waders in rice paddies beside a small river that some local people fought hard to protect. The river had a range of habitats from reed beds to open sand banks, long rank grassy banks and naturally there were waders, ducks and herons using the area. We had hoped to find thousands of Black-tailed Godwits but after zig-zagging for hours through the pad-

dies we found just two! In fact we found very few birds of any description. The use of chemicals on the paddies is at such high levels there is probably little food for any birds. An unexpected highlight was a Lesser Frigatebird flying up the river. A vagrant to Korea this was indeed a good record.

On our way south we stopped to help with the third Saemangeum count where Gillian and I checked the Airport site. Arriving at dawn we were confronted with 40,000 waders, mostly Bar-tailed Godwits, Great Knots, Curlews and Dunlins, which had fed in the Geum Estuary outside Saemangeum but were roosting here due to the very high tide. As we start-



Photo G Vaughan

ed counting, the birds started to leave in tens, hundreds and thousands for the short flight back to the Geum and the dropping tide. Soon we had only a thousand or so birds but this did include two of the now critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpip-



Mokpo fishing nets

ers. Saemangeum was a stronghold for this species in the past but habitat destruction has had a serious impact on this iconic little bird. Reasons for the decline are not totally clear but it seems to be under threat throughout its range, from the breeding grounds in far-eastern Siberia where it is still being shot, to pressures on the staging ground such as Saemangeum and the wintering ground of Thailand, Burma and Bangladesh where human pressures are enormous.

Moving south with Nial we reached Paeksu a small but almost natural looking part of the coast on a grey calm afternoon. We found a few hundred waders but a good species selection. Nial's remarkably sharp eye soon picked up flagged birds in the fading light and a wonderful haul of birds were recorded including a Bar-tailed Godwit from Queensland, one Dunlin from Taiwan, another from Alaska and a Turnstone from King Island, Tasmania.

Mokpo has a huge ship building industry along the various inlets that make up this sheltered part of the coast and pressure on what little tidal habitat remains is enormous. A very small tidalflat in Mokpo, separated from the main road by a wide footpath, is a superb place to see a small number of waders at very close range. The opportunity for using this site for wader conservation and education work is unquestionable but the developers have other ideas. A small group of local Koreans and expats are battling hard to save this site from further destruction and we were happy to speak to the media and add our voice to the appeal. If a small site like this can't be saved there seems little hope of protecting any of the west or south coasts of Korea.

Hampyeong Bay northwest of Mokpo is a relatively unspoiled tidalflat where a tidalflat centre has been built on a grand scale. Miranda would need a larger block of land for such a building.

Mokpo sits at the southwest cor-



Nial Moores, coordinating the count even from the mudflats

ner of Korea and so from here we headed east, counting birds at several areas along the way. Numbers of birds were fewer but the pressures on the tidal flats are immense with fish traps stretching in all directions, new roads and other developments at every turn. Suncheon Bay was infested with netting fish traps and it was hard to see how any fish could escape, not the fisherman's intention that they should of course! Waders still feed in these places but have to negotiate the traps.

The last survey was on sandy offshore islands near Pusan, Korea's second largest city. We had expected to find thousands of waders roosting on these islands but alas no. Sanderlings were there in small numbers racing along the tide line as Sanderlings do. A breeding colony of almost 900 Little Terns was impressive but a dead Whimbrel tangled up in a fish trap was yet another reminder of the pressures that abound in this part of the world.

The big question was "Have the Great Knots, displaced from Saemangeum moved to other sites in South Korea?" The Korean Government says yes they have but the real evidence says no and the count from Yalu Jiang in early May 2008 showed only the ex-


pected number of Great Knots there. Counts in Australia last summer indicated a drop in Great Knot numbers so there appears to have been a significant decrease in the population due entirely to Saemangeum.

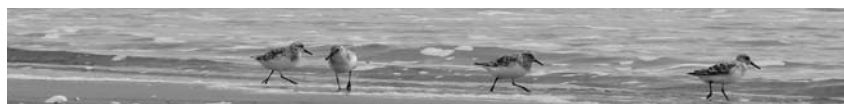
The supplementary survey was vitally important, fascinating and depressing with so much human environmental pressure. Achieving any positive outcomes for waders in Korea is an almost impossible task but we must try and Nial, in spite all the odds stacked against him, is not quite ready to quit. The pressure does weigh heavily on his sturdy frame.

You can add your voice to the cause by joining Birds Korea at no cost if you live outside Korea. They have a great web site, so I urge you to join and help the cause. We should not sit back and say, "There is nothing I can do". We can and must try or we are no better than those who seek to destroy such places and deny these record breaking global travellers – the waders - a right to exist.

And the numbers?

- Waders within Saemangeum itself have declined by 137,398 between May 2006 and May 2008 from 176,955 to 39,557.
- Numbers of waders in SSMP Study sites of Saemangeum, the Geum Estuary and Gomsu Bay declined by 97,261 in the same period from 244,349 to 147,088.
- Great Knot numbers in the SSMP area declined from 116,126 in 2006 to 21,593 in 2008. They were not found elsewhere in South Korea.
- The count at 11 internationally important sites (other than the SSMP sites) declined from 131,295 in early May 1998 to 111,625 in early May 2008.

As soon as we stepped ashore from the very last survey, Nial was off to do yet another TV interview! The fight goes on. 



Sanderlings near Pusan

Chairman's Report

David Lawrie

The Annual General Meeting of the Trust was held on 11 May and was well attended. All of the outgoing Council members were re-elected unopposed and I can assure the members that you have left the running of the Trust in good hands. During the Annual General Meeting there was a lively and lengthy debate over whether to retain life membership as a new category.



The meeting was equally divided over this issue as had the Council been at an earlier meeting. It was, however resolved to continue with the status quo in the meantime, but it was requested that the Council undertake further research into the costing of retaining the life membership category.

At the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting, Janie and Kevin Vaughan showed us some of their wonderful slides and stories from their trip in Indonesia. This was a very interesting talk and we thank them particularly as Jenni coerced them at very short notice.

Since the Annual General Meeting the Council has met and re-elected myself as Chairman for another term. We also furthered our discussions on the strategic direction for the Trust. Any feedback on that or other issues from members would be appreciated.

For those of you who have checked the website recently you will notice some changes as Emma Stanyard has been updating the layout and content. The further development of the website is one of the Trusts' current priorities.

Activities at the Centre:

The volunteers who help with running the Centre and also with maintaining the gardens and grounds have still been active, even through the winter period. While the numbers of volunteers are relatively low, Jenni has established a core group of people who not only achieve good things around the Centre but also

have an enjoyable time. This is after all exactly what assisting at the Centre should be all about - having fun while at the same time achieving something worthwhile.

The group has also expanded into having the occasional evening slide show of various members' activities. Keith Thompson showed an interesting selection of slides, taken while he was living in Africa. It is hoped that over the

coming months more people will join this group and thus expand the pool of knowledge and expertise that Jenni has available.

While acknowledging Jenni's achievements in organising the volunteers and running the Centre in Keith's absence, it is with much regret that I must advise that it is highly likely that she will be leaving Miranda towards the end of this year. She has decided that she is a sunshine lover and wishes to travel around Australia to seek a place where the sun shines throughout the year and where there is no cold and wet and rain!!!

The Trust will therefore not only be looking for an Assistant Manager but also a new organiser of the volunteers and so if any members wish to take on either of those activities or to discuss the roles in more detail do not hesitate to contact Jenni at the Centre.

I would also like to remind you of the upcoming weekend courses at the Centre that are more fully described

elsewhere in this newsletter. I understand there are also some places still available on the January field course and enquiries for these can be made through the Centre.

During recent months there have been a number of gatherings at the Centre as the inter-agency group that is being led by Bill Brownell continues the work into the Muddy Feet research project which is now

It is with much regret that I must advise that it is highly likely that Jenni will be leaving Miranda towards the end of this year.

gathering momentum. This project is pulling together key people from the Regional and District Councils and the Department of Conservation, and is achieving a coordinated approach to research and management of the whole of the Firth of Thames area, rather than just parts of the shoreline. We are grateful to Bill for his leadership in driving this group forward and we look forward to the outcomes as they develop.

International Activities:

As will be seen from the articles in this issue of the newsletter members of the Trust have been very active on a number of international fronts. All of these activities are based around the migratory paths of the birds from New Zealand to their breeding grounds.

North Korea:

In 2007 we heard that Winston Peters was to visit North Korea as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I took the opportunity to write to him to

suggest that he raise with officials in that country the possibility of a visit to undertake a shorebird survey along the Yellow Sea coastline. To my surprise I was contacted late in February this year by officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Wellington who advised me that not only did Winston raise this issue but the North Koreans had just accepted the possibility of a visit by a team from Miranda.

This is an area of coastline that has never been studied by foreign bird researchers and the use of these shores by birds is wholly unknown. This visit would have been of major significance toward understanding the movement of migratory birds through that area.

Unfortunately, despite a flurry of letters and emails and the contacts made at high levels in North Korea, it was not possible to obtain the necessary visas to enable the visit to take place this year.

However with the contacts that have now been established the Trust can work towards undertaking a visit during the 2009 migration period. As part of the flurry of activity an application was made to the Lotteries Ministers Discretionary Fund, which was successful in raising part of the money for the visit. However because of the lack of funds for this type of activity in North Korea it will be necessary to raise further funds to enable this visit to take place.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Winston Peters for his interest in raising this issue and achieving the invitation when no other official has achieved such a successful outcome.

Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve - China:

Two teams from Miranda visited the reserve in April and early May. The first group comprised Adrian Riegen, Gillian Vaughan, David Melville and Jesse Conklin. Their main task was to set in place a mud-sampling regime

to test the mudflats for the food species that the birds are utilising. They also were hoping to help the Chinese catch and band migratory waders.

The second team was Nigel Milius, Wendy Hare and Bruce Postill, whose main task was the continuation of the annual shorebird survey and this task was successfully completed. The number of waders was less than normal but that was to be expected because of the stage of the migratory cycle.

South Korea:

Adrian, Gillian, Jesse, Nigel, Wendy and Bruce also assisted on the Sae-mangeum wader counting project, which was undertaken throughout April and May to assess any changes in shorebirds utilising the reclamation area. This is an activity that is largely led by overseas people as the South Koreans show very little interest in the bird life along the coastline and clearly have no understanding of the importance of that area.


Alaska:

Keith Woodley spent considerable time on the Alaskan breeding grounds of the Bar-tailed Godwit and his activities are more fully reported elsewhere in this issue. Clearly this was a wonderful experience for him, which I am sure he will articulate in his forthcoming book on which he is currently working. We look forward with great anticipation to his book.

Rob Schuckard from Nelson, and Sarah Lovibond from Tasmania (who achieved fame by being the first to see E7 on her return to NZ!!), also spent a considerable amount of time on the breeding grounds as part of the United States Geological Survey team.

As you can see there has been a great deal of activity but it must be understood that the participants themselves pay for almost all of the costs involved. This is still a bone of contention for me, as I believe that the New Zealand Government should be making some contribution to-

wards the international efforts of our Miranda people.

I look forward to meeting with more of our members during this coming summer period. 

Assistant Manager Vacancy

The Trust is currently seeking an assistant manager for the Shorebird Centre as we will sadly be losing Jenni's services later this year. The successful candidate will be responsible to the Manager and will assist in the day to day running of the Shorebird Centre. Ideally the assistant manager will work 2 days a week (some flexibility is possible) to provide relief to the Manager. Duties would typically include (but are not limited to):

- management of all aspects of the shop, centre, accommodation and centre grounds
- providing information on shorebirds etc to visitors
- training centre volunteers
- processing Trust membership subscriptions
- liaising with local schools and providing educational talks to school groups.

This position would be suited to someone with an interest in tourism and the local environment and whilst previous relevant experience and some knowledge of shorebirds would obviously be preferential it is not essential. Training will be provided.

Interested? Please call the Centre to obtain further details including a detailed job description and remuneration package.

Roof-top Nesting by Urban Spurwings

Bruce Keeley

On several occasions during the last week of July and the first week of August 2007 I noticed the strident calls of a Spur-winged plover in the commercial heart of Howick village, in East Auckland. Realising that the calls were consistently of a stationary bird and in the same area, I investigated further.



Nest site is on front edge of roof directly above the lamp-post shadow Photo John Spiller

I was surprised to see a bird, in vigilant pose, on the roof edge of the former Howick public library, a three storeyed building in Central Terrace, now occupied by the Christian Outreach Centre.

My suspicions of territorial behaviour were confirmed when I tried to view the area from the adjacent Howickville roof-top carpark. One of the plover pair was there to meet me, promptly launching a series of head-high attacks as it circled me in full cry.

With the assistance of the C.O.C. pastor and two naturalist friends, John Spiller and Ken Bond, access was gained to the roof line and photos were taken of the two birds, though no sign of a nest was visible. A more productive tactic was the regular scanning of the roof by telescope from the top of Stockade Hill, which overlooks the whole of Howick and beyond.

The sitting bird was positioned at the northward-facing edge of the rusty corrugated iron roof, from where it could scan the human activity below. The roof sloped gently towards the south side, bordered by a parapet. A gutter along the south edge of the roof, inside the parapet, possibly would provide some plant growth and invertebrate food.

was seen to peer over the parapet, sheltering from the southwest wind, and presumably accompanied by the single chick which I saw only twice – on 4 and 6 September – feeding along the gutter.

The adult birds remained on the roof at least until early October, but with no further sign of the chick which presumably had died within its first few weeks.

The choice of roofs for nesting by this species in Australia is briefly mentioned in a number of publications (eg *HANZAB Vol 2*, and *Readers' Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*) but it is less well known in New Zealand. Tony Habraken (pers. comm.) has recorded a pair on two successive years in Newmarket, visible from the Newmarket motorway overbridge.

The choice of a roof site would have advantages such as ease of surveillance and, perhaps, a lesser risk of predation; but it presents a major issue of adequate food supply for unfledged offspring which forage for themselves from the time of hatching.


On three visits during August the incubating bird was seen being replaced by its mate. On each occasion the relieved bird immediately began to forage along the roof edge.

On 3 September the nest was unoccupied, but an adult

Do roof tops become a nesting option for a population which has reached a density exceeding the available supply of traditional sites?

In recent years within urban Auckland, many parks and reserves (even quite small ones) have come to be used by pairs of Spurwings for roosting and foraging. Frequent disturbance by human activities, dogs etc would make breeding success very unlikely, and thus a relatively undisturbed roof site might then present a positive alternative.

I would be most interested to hear of any other records of such behaviour within New Zealand. Contact: 15 Westview Court, Howick 2014 Email: millkee@nznet.gen.nz

Post Script: On 25 June 08, another roof-top nest with a (presumed) incubating adult was seen on a classroom block at Owairoa Primary School, in Howick, just over 0.5 km from the location of last year's nest. As before, the site was right on the roof edge, allowing the sitting bird to see movement below. This raises the possibility of a second nesting by the same pair with a propensity for high-rise living! 



Adult plover guarding roof-top nest Photo John Spiller

The Bird Day

Maria Stables - Page

Shellbank duty at Miranda. It's 11.00 am. Two hours until high tide. The air is warm and still, the sky blue, without clouds. The shellbanks scream white and there is a thick black row of oystercatchers along the far end. It's a low tide today, only 2.8m. The birds won't be pushed up too close. Shame. The tide won't completely cover the mudflats. Won't lap up to the dry old high tide mark which meanders along the beach just in front of me. Still, there should be a little activity as some birds feed.

I'm armed with a telescope, notebook, lunch, backpack, the Heather and Robertson *Handguide to the Birds of New Zealand* and a clipboard. I note down the weather conditions and tide height. Set up the telescope: extend the legs, set out to maximum stability, position scope, lens cap off, look through and focus. I scan the flock. I'm not counting, only looking.

The mudflats offer it all up except for the SIPOs, the Black-billed Gulls and the one Caspian Tern all resting on the shellbank. In between the crests and ripples of the mud are slithers of silver blue reflections of the sky. There are a few godwits and Wrybill, well scattered, providing me with a long unobscured look. The rest of the godwit flock is resting near the water's edge.

My first tourist arrives. Birder or tourist? Anthony from Australia appears to be a dedicated birder. He has the newer, fatter Heather and Robertson field guide and good binoculars. But that's not enough proof. He spots the one Hudsonian godwit in a flock of thousands. Well not quite. It was apart from the flock right in front of us. Anthony goes right on the clipboard.

I offer the scope to birders as they approach us on the shellbank. The Hudsonian becomes the star. Anthony calls it Hudwit. It chases off Bar-tailed Godwits and in turn is chased

by them. It feeds, relentlessly. To the inside of the rear shellbank, a Red-necked Stint stitches the mud like a sewing machine. Two Sharp-tailed Sandpipers rush around extracting lunch from the mud. The Wrybills hop around on one leg. They like to be close in. We all read their one-legged colour bands.

The tide laps in pushing the flock of resting godwits and knots closer in to us. SIPOs play musical chairs as they are squeezed off the edge of the shellbank. My clipboard fills. Birder's and tourists line the bank with tripods. I weave in and out of them focusing scopes on the latest find. A White Heron and a Royal Spoonbill. The stilts hardly get a mention.

Lets look for banded godwits. Bands and flags. Lets look for satellite godwits. Success, E3. She is standing still, not feeding, on one leg. A plump russet red godwit walks in front of her. The birders move to another vantage point eager to see the amazing bird that flew non-stop from Alaska to Miranda over the Pacific Ocean in eight days. Like every other bird here didn't do the same. But E3 has a name; therefore, she has a personality. Well, as much personality that having the name E3 can muster.


The Wrybills are at their closest now, still one legged and refusing to put two legs down to walk. Suddenly they are up. Every single one of them

taking flight to create a flickering silver and grey scarf. Split seconds later the godwits are up, ten thousand feathered wings beating the still autumn air. It's a show worth waiting for. That harrier probably put them up. The birders are ecstatic.

The great flocks make a pretence of landing, dipping almost to the mud. The lead bird doesn't land, none land. They circle the mudflat for a better spot. Finally they touch down, the flocks sticking together, apart.

The tide turns. Hard to tell today, being such a low tide and there being so much activity. Much consulting of watches goes on amongst the birders. We must carefully watch the channel in front of us. Confirmation. Yes, the tide has turned.

My clipboard list peaks with the tide. People are leaving now, like the tide. They are happy. Some saw a species for the first time. They are particularly happy. They have something to add to their life list. The non-English speaking non-birding tourists beam and nod their thanks as if I've put on the whole spectacle just for them.

The tide is out now. The light has changed. There is more sharp white shellbank exposed. There are no birders or binoculars trained on the birds. Anthony is gone. I break down the scopes, legs in, eyepieces on. I wonder who will be here next week. 



from the (assistant) MANAGER

Jenni Hensley

After a long, dry summer (most agreeable by my African standards!), we had two days of rain that filled the lake almost completely, having been almost completely empty all summer long, on the second day a Banded Rail appeared briefly on this 'newly formed' body of water. This was the day before Keith Woodley left for his Alaskan sojourn. A fitting send-off, I thought.



Our AGM in May was a success, ably chaired by David Lawrie, and attended by some 50 people. The illustrated talk was presented by Kevin and Janie Vaughan, who showed slides from their trip to Indonesia a few years ago, and who were fantastic to step in at almost the 11th hour (thank you both), as a number of other speakers who had been invited to present had bowed out; unfortunately our date coincided with Mothers' Day (yes, really – mothers ARE more important than birds!). The second highlight of that day - just after the meeting - was the appearance of a bittern on the pond, who stayed long enough to be admired and photographed by all of those who were still around.



Bittern on Widgery Lake. Photo Ian Southey

During the week of 19-23 May, we hosted a group of Conservation Volunteers from USA and Canada. The group spent most of their time down at the shellbanks clearing unsightly weeds and collecting a few loads of rubbish. Faye, who cleans the Centre for us, was roped in to showing the students the art of weaving flax flowers. Some were more successful than others, but they all enjoyed learning some Maori craft and tradition regarding the collection of flax leaves. We are expecting another group of Conservation Volunteers here in early August. We will get them to do some more cleaning up at the shore, and perhaps also some litter collection on both the road and the trail down to the Limeworks.

In May we also hosted, for just a few hours, a group of 20 ten-year old students from Singapore, organised

by Yellow Box Education Services; Alister gave them a talk about the birds, and then Keith Thompson and I took them down to the shore to show them a bit about the mud and the creatures that live there. Unfortunately they had to shorten their visit - drizzly weather and the need to get on their way to Te Kauri Lodge for dinner. However, it is great for us to be reaching little people from that far away, and they all were most interested and attentive. To their delight, they were able to each have a flax flower made by the Conservation Volunteers that very morning.

Also in May, the Centre was the base for the Pateke Recovery Group (a DoC initiative) which has used our

premises now for a couple of years in a row. A special guest, in the form of Don Merton – together with his wife Margaret and a friend from the UK - arrived perchance on their last day and were invited to stay for lunch – several of the people attending the workshop had previously met and or worked with or been inspired by Don somewhere down the line.

In May we took delivery of a new Eftpos machine, apparently required by the banks, in order to keep up with new technologies etc. Do not fret, volunteers, this one is simpler and easier to handle than

the previous one, truly!

In June the Centre hosted the Muddy Feet Forum, headed by Bill Brownell. David Lawrie and I accompanied the group to the shore, and then later back at the Centre David presented a brief illustrated slide show on the Trust's role in monitoring and researching the migratory birds that utilize the Firth of Thames and the management requirements at the roost site.

The second and last (for at least a couple of years!) roof treatment was carried out this month. Any of you who haven't been to the Centre for a few years will be pleasantly surprised at the difference from pre-treatment

– remember all those rare species of native lichens that used to cling to the roof? Clean as a whistle now, ha!

We have held two of our planned monthly gardening / volunteer training days at the Centre. The May day was shelved as it was on the Saturday of the long weekend and most folk were either away or busy with family fun, but in June we held our day on the 2nd last Saturday of the month, the 21st, along with a potluck dinner in the evening, to celebrate the longest night – or was it the shortest day – anyway we decided to celebrate something! The weather was great, although we were expecting rain and wind (which duly arrived on Sunday, the day of the FoT census – how DO you do that, Tony?), and we headed out on a guided walk along the trail to the shellbanks (but missed the birds, as high tide was at

8:30am), led by Keith Thompson, who gave us much information on the geology and botany to be seen along the way. Back at the Centre we had a lunch break, and then did a bit of gardening and tidying up around the cottage. After the potluck dinner, Keith T gave us a fantastic slide show of some of his travels in Africa – real old fashioned slides in a real projector!

During the Council meeting at the end of June, it was decided that the accommodation rates should be increased (see back page for new rates).

In July we hosted a small group of 12-13 year olds from Brazil. Stuart and Alison, who were working at the Centre for that week, gave a talk, after which Keith T and I accompanied them to the shore, where Keith gave his fun and informative mud talk. A

highlight at that moment was the arrival of a White Heron in the newly-formed pond behind the hide. Very photogenic...or would have been if I'd had my camera with me!

The first pied oystercatcher departures were observed on Tuesday 8th July, on a lovely (dare I say spring?) calm, clear day, the first after a fairly extended period of foul weather. At least ten departures have been observed, in flocks ranging from 11 to around 80 (seen by Alister Harlow) birds.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the volunteers who have helped for the duration of Keith Woodley's absence. Your input is very much appreciated and so very important to the running of the Centre, and each of you contribute something special. Thank you all. 🐦

Upcoming Courses

29 - 31 August 2008 Photography Course

A mix of lecture, entertainment with images, practical sessions, discussion about suitable equipment, and the practicalities of bird photography in general. Includes instruction on setting up a hide and how to approach birds.

9-11 September 2008 Conservation Management of New Zealand Dotterels - Training Course

The course is specifically targeted at anyone involved in the management or field monitoring of dotterels. While focussed primarily on dotterels, much of the course content will be applicable to other species such as terns, gulls and variable oystercatchers. Topics include species ecology, management strategies, pest control, data collection.



Sandra Morris

4-5 October 2008 Keeping a Nature Journal

This course led by Sandra Morris, is for those wishing to improve on their visual recording skills. A great course no matter how artistic (or otherwise) you consider yourself to be!

Contact the centre for details and prices. phone 09 2322781 email shorebird@xtra.co.nz

15 - 16 November 2008 Wader Identification Course

Learn how to sort out those tricky shorebirds. Two intensive days with expert tutors. A mix of theory and practice, but we aim to spend as much time as possible in the field.

24 - 30 January 2009 The Miranda Field Course.

Now in its eleventh year the Miranda Field Course is perfect for any naturalist. Topics covered in past courses have included geology, botany, and entomology, but with a focus on birds, identification, catching, and details on ecology of some of our shorebirds.

Course fee includes all materials, teaching, food and accommodation. Limited to 12 students (age range so far 14 to 82 on previous courses).

2008 Bar-tailed Godwit Satellite tracking

Gillian Vaughan

When we left our godwits in April some had just arrived in the Yellow Sea, some were well on their way and the first godwit from North-west Australia had started moving north. Three months later many of the birds have finished breeding and have started the journey home. All dates and distances presented here are approximate, the scientists involved will finalise and analyse the data.



Godwits from New Zealand

Of the five birds that migrated none are still transmitting, one bird died on the way north, two transmitters failed in April one in July and one in August.

D8 – Male

On March 23 D8 had arrived in the Yellow Sea, by April 3 he had moved to Yalu Jiang where he stayed until May 5. He was seen by Jesse Conklin on April 26 roosting on the mud of the Yalu River. D8 then flew to Alaska; on May 10 he was on the coast near the Kuskokwim River mouth. He didn't stay long, on the 12th he was inland on the Yukon Delta, where he stayed till July 5 when he moved back to the coast. The time spent on a breeding territory may have been enough time to successfully breed.

DO - Male

On April 1 DO had arrived at Yalu Jiang, where he stayed until May 13, on the 18th he landed on the lower Kinia River, about 40 km downstream from D8's breeding territory. He spent a week in the Tern Mountain area, a well known staging site for godwits, before heading to the Sagavanirktok River on Alaska's North Slope. In this area he spent the next month on a breeding territory, nearly all of the records were in a 3.5 km area, then he headed south to the Yukon-Kuskok-

wim Delta on July 1. By the 11th the battery on his transmitter had run out of power.

Although all the godwits tagged were adults the rest of the birds stayed in NZ over the breeding season.

D5 – Female

D5 was seen by David Melville in Okarito on May 23 with 6 other godwits, all in non-breeding plumage, it was a lucky sighting as on the 24th she was back at Miranda.

D6 – Female

D6 is now 17 years old. After her initial trip to Kawhia and Aotea harbours she returned to the Firth of Thames and now moves regularly between the Piako and Miranda roosts.

D7 – Male

D7 is the most commonly seen satellite tagged godwit. In the last three months there has been no sign that he is using any roost other than the shellbanks and stilt pools.

E9 – Female

Since returning to the Firth on April 6 E9 has stayed here. She uses the roosts at Miranda and across from the Holiday Park.

Godwits from NW Australia

15 godwits were given transmitters in NWA. Of these 12 left on migration, one signal was lost in April, and two

birds died on the breeding grounds.

A3 – Female

A3 headed north around April 8, reporting in just south of Borneo then 300 km south-east of Hong Kong, stopping in HangZhou Bay. On April 20 she was in North Korea, over the river from Yalu Jiang. She stayed until May 22 then moved north; on the 24th she was in the Indigirka River basin in Siberia. Late May and early June were spent in a 5 km area; her transmitter reported that she died in mid June.

A7 – Female

A7 headed north around April 7, recorded in the Makassar Strait (just to the east of Borneo), then east of Hong Kong on her northward migration. She stayed just south of Ji-aoZhou Bay for more than a month. On May 27 she was in Siberia, by June 8 she had moved further north, where she stayed until June 28. She continued north to the Arctic Ocean coast, then on July 4 flew to the New Siberian Islands, her transmitter failed in mid-July.

A9 – Female

A9 migrated north after April 14, she crossed over Borneo then inland 300km north east of Hong Kong, landing on the coast just north of Chongming Dongtan. On May 26 she was heading to the breeding

Brian McCaffery on D0

It was a pretty special because the bird arrived here at the same time we had our first passage migrants, which is after the local breeders arrive and for quite a few years Bob and I have suspected those birds are carrying on to the North Slope or the Seward peninsula. So D0 arrived at the north end of my Tern Mtn study site, which is one of two coastal study sites I have had over the last decade... it was down there for two weeks and then just a day or two ago it flew up to the North Slope and is along the Saganavirktok River, just a few miles below Franklin Bluffs which is exactly where I first encountered breeding godwits as a young biologist in 1982, so to have him come from NZ, land at one of my study sites and end up in effect at my first ever godwit study site was pretty darn remarkable and gratifying at the same time.

grounds, she moved widely, then from June 7 to 27 she settled on a breeding territory, recorded only in a 4 km area. On the 29th she was working her way to the north coast, then on to the New Siberian Islands. On July 26th she moved south, the last bird to leave, stopping at the mouth of the Yalu River.

C2 – Female

C2 was last recorded in Roebuck Bay on April 11; she was then recorded off the coast of Australia, north of Borneo and off the coast of Shanghai. She stopped in Liandong Bay in the Bohai Sea before moving to Yalu Jiang, arriving there on April 20. She departed for Siberia on May 20, arriving on her territory on May 29. All of her records until June 24 then came from within a 1.5 km area. She also headed to the north coast, and on to the New Siberian Islands where she stayed until mid July, on the 23rd she was back Liandong Bay.

C3 – Female

C3 was last recorded in Roebuck Bay on April 7. She too travelled through the Makassar Straits and into the South China Sea, she staged just north of Chongming Dongtan

from April 14 to May 23. She was on her breeding territory, with a range of about 1.5 km from May 29 to June 23, with one side trip to nearly 200km away. She then headed to the north coast and onto to the New Siberian Islands. She headed south on July 17, stopped in North Korea, then on August 1 she was back just north of Chongming Dongtan.

C6 – Female

C6 was recorded on April 13, inland north of Broome she moved north through the Sulu Sea, then between China and Taiwan. She staged on the coast about 200 km north of Shanghai, and was probably the last bird to leave the Yellow Sea. She arrived in Siberia on May 29, but possibly never settled on a breeding territory. On June 15 she moved towards the north coast then the New Siberian Islands. On July 11 she was one of the first two birds to start south, stopping 50 km south of her northward staging site.

C7 – Female

C7 was last recorded at Roebuck Bay on April 9, she moved north through the Makassar Strait, into the South China Sea and past the coast of Shanghai, staged at the Yellow River Delta until May 21, then headed north. She was on a breeding territory in Yana-Indigirka Lowlands from May 25 to June 21, then headed to the New Siberian Islands where she stayed until July 18, she stopped briefly on the north side of the Bohai Sea before returning to the Yellow River Delta.

H3- Female

The first bird to leave on migration H3 left Roebuck Bay about April 6. She moved north, through the Makassar Straits, passed east of Hong Kong and stopped on the coast north of Chongming Dongtan, before moving to Yalu Jiang where she stayed until May 16. She moved north and stopped at the Kolyma River Delta not far from the northern coast of Siberia. She ranged

	Left non-breeding grounds	Left staging site
Australian Birds	6 to 15 April	16 to 25 May
NZ Birds	14 to 23 March	5 to 13 May

From Pavel Tomkovich - on the way north:

Our knowledge about the biology of Bar-tailed Godwits on their breeding grounds is extremely poor and is based mostly on rather old occasional observations. Satellite tracking gives us a unique opportunity to learn quite a bit at least on movements of birds during the northern summer.

May 20th

Everything in general went as expected apart from the too early date of arrival to the Siberian Arctic, however, it is fantastic to see finally direct proof of all our expectations. The bird landed east of the Kolyma Delta in an area with low rolling mountains where I expect it is easier to find snow-free patches on some slopes. Flat lowland to the west is probably still under the snow.

May 22nd

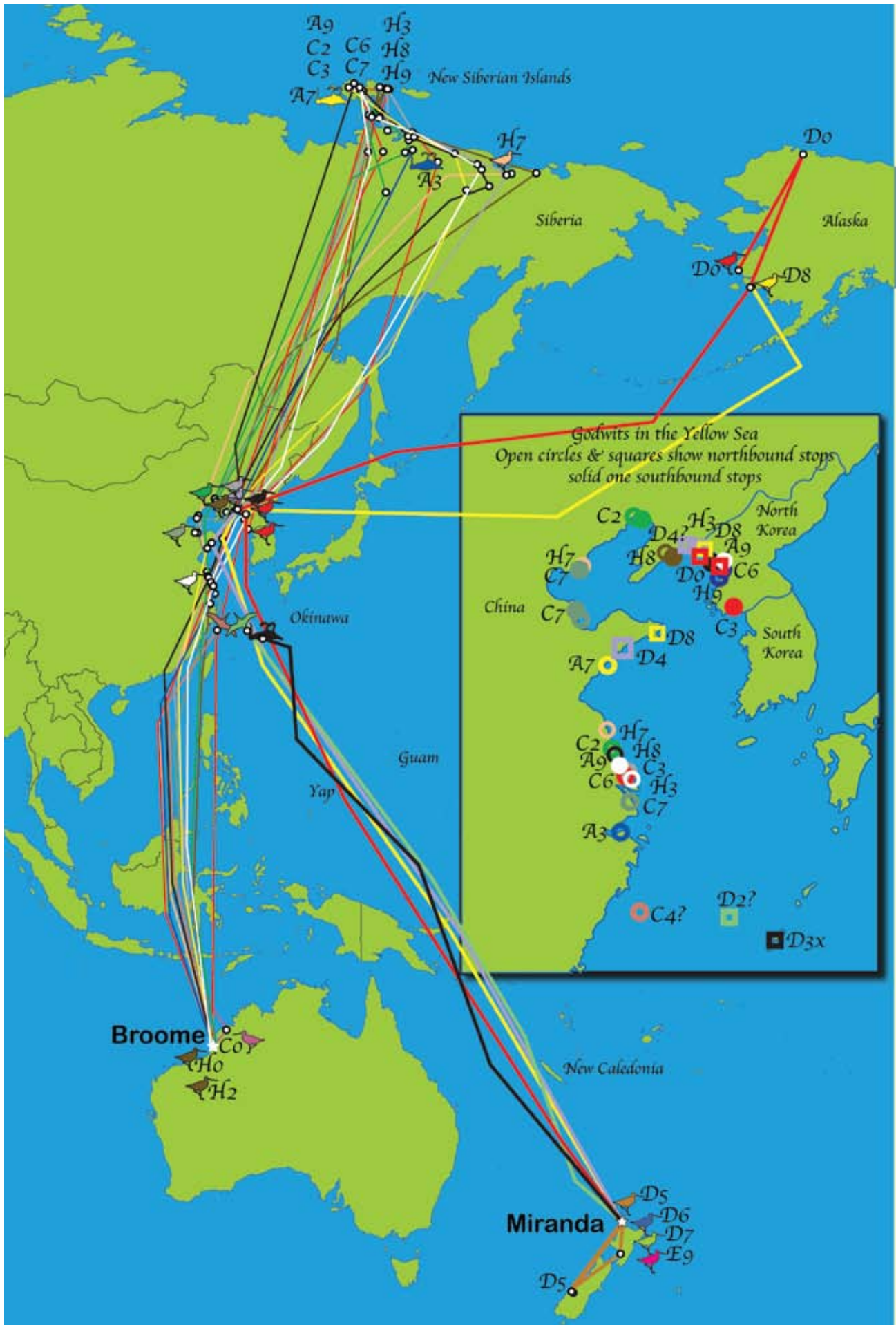
I checked Russian literature for arrival dates to the breeding grounds of *menzbieri* Bar-tailed Godwits. Available information is poor. All published earliest records are ranging between 25 May and 7 June with additional date of 14 June at the south of New Siberian Islands to the north of the breeding range. The earliest known arrival date to northern East Siberia just to the south of the breeding range is determined by a specimen in my Zool. Museum that was collected on 23 May 1963. Thus, the arrival dates revealed now with help of satellite transmitters are indeed the earliest.

May 27th

It is fantastic! Birds that arrived to Siberia are rather well spread over the breeding range of *menzbieri* subspecies from almost the Yana Delta at the west to mountains of NW Chukotka in the east. Birds are absent only in the area of Chaun Bay, the easternmost part of the subspecies breeding range. A3 is on the upland, a kind of low mountain plateau to the south of the Indigirka Delta. C7, the westernmost bird, is on the south-central part of the Yana-Indigirka Lowland, about 200 km to either of these rivers. It is flat marshy landscape with countless numbers of lakes and common pingo.

Following their tracks:

illustration Adrian Riegen



From Bob Gill - May 21st

A bit of irony here in that on 18-19 July 1994 I hiked within 19 km of where H3 last reported on the Kolyma Delta. It is indeed spectacular shorebird country. The low rolling mountains that Pavel described were full of *fulva* plovers and also the place where I saw my first (ever) dotterel; the lowlands produced my first Temminck's Stint and Spotted Redshank (in high plumage!!). At the same site on both the 18th and 19th under Bar-tailed Godwit my notes mention "pr giving alarm calls (birds very white on back); and 2nd pair appx. 7 km east of camp with 2+, 2- to 3-day-old chicks." In total, I hiked 35 km in the 20 h spent afield, most of it in the mountains in search of *C. tenuirostris* (wishful thinking). I closed my notes on the 18th with "mosquitoes so bad at midnight I fear they may take away my notebook."

Thanks for indulging me as I relived a very exciting field experience and, for those who have not been to the Arctic, maybe providing a mental image of where one of the godwits appears to have settled.

widely then on June 18 moved to the coast, then onto the New Siberian Islands on June 21. She stayed there until July 11 when she headed south at the same time as C7, stopping at Yalu Jiang.

H7- Female

Like the others H7 moved north through the Makassar Strait and the South China Sea. She stopped on the coast north of Shanghai then moved into the Bohai Wan. She was on her breeding grounds by May 30, and died there in mid-June.

H8 - Male

The only male tagged in Roebuck Bay H8 was the second bird to leave on migration. He landed on the coast of Sulawesi on April 7 but didn't stay


as on April 9 he was just south of Taiwan. He stopped north of Shanghai, then moved to the coast just south of Yalu Jiang. He moved further south 50km and stayed there to May 20. He moved to the breeding grounds, his territory was the eastern most of all the birds (east of the Kolyma River). He ranged over a 5km area until June 14 then moved to the coast and on to the New Siberian Islands. He stayed there until July 17, then moved back to the western end of Yalu Jiang.

H9 - Female

H9 left Roebuck Bay, moved north through the Sulu Sea, past Shanghai stopping on the coast of North Korea on April 18. She flew to the Indigirka River Basin where she had two territories, one from May 25 to

31, another 50 km north-east where she spent 8 days in a 5km radius. On June 21 she moved to the north coast then on to the New Siberian Islands. She moved south, ranging around the west coast of North Korea from July 23.

C0, H0 & H2 - Female

C0 was recorded in Roebuck Bay on March 5, then from March 11 to April 8 she moved north, near Derby. On April 10 she was recorded around 300km out to sea but turned back some time after that, 36 hours later she was about 500km directly east, then on April 14th she was back in Roebuck Bay where she stayed. H0 and H2 stayed in and around Roebuck Bay from the time they were banded. 

More from Pavel, the move south

June 30th

People continue to ask me what godwits are doing on the New Siberian Islands. Unfortunately I've never been there and can only judge on my observations farther west, at Taimyr. Godwits arrive there from the High Arctic tundra after failed or successful breeding for fattening before long-distance migration, similar to Alaskan godwits in the YKD. They feed in High Arctic tundra most probably on abundant large (and tasty?) and probably energetically profitable larvae and then imago Crane Flies (*Tipula carinifrons* etc.). Larvae Crane Flies are accessible for birds on snow-free patches especially in places with recently melted snow and wet areas where larvae can't escape from birds into deep soil or moss layer because of ice or water. Therefore the late season in 2008 (information of David Douglas via Bob Gill) should not be a problem for birds, but instead can be even an advantage.

What is clear now is the unsuccessful breeding of most or all Bar-tailed Godwits from NWA in 2008. They had to start nesting in early June and the whole breeding season lasts for almost two months. Mass movement of birds to New Siberian Islands and Arctic coast in late June obviously means that birds stopped breeding. We know nothing about the length of stay of godwits in the High Arctic refueling areas. Sometime in the near future they will probably migrate to coasts of the Sea of Okhotsk and/or the Yellow Sea. If we are lucky with work of transmitters we may learn also about this next period of bird migrations. My breath is breaking in waiting for coming events ...

July 22nd

The rumor says that this summer is unusually severe in NE Siberia. In early July locals of the lower Indigirka River thought that they may not have mosquitoes this year at all (they are unable to emerge). On Wrangel Islands several long-lasting snow storms happened between early June and recent days (the record situation for a couple of recent decades) which may mean that bird productivity can be close to zero on the island. This general climate situation may at least partly explain why Bar-tailed Godwits are hurrying back to their non-breeding quarters.

Keep up-to-date with events
visit
www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz



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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 Kaiawa 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 bunkrooms for hire and two self-contained flats:

Per bed / night member \$ 15.00

Per bed / night non-member \$ 20.00

Hire of Sandpiper member \$ 50.00

Hire of Sandpiper non-member \$ 60.00

Hire of Whimbrel member \$ 50.00

Hire of Whimbrel non-member \$ 65.00

For further information contact the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno

Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781 shorebird@xtra.co.nz

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

Membership of the Trust entitles you to:

Four Miranda News issues per year.

A discount on overnight accommodation

Invitations to Trust Events

The right to attend the AGM

The right to vote for council members

Membership Rates :

Ordinary Member - \$ 35.00

Family Member - \$ 40.00

Overseas Member- \$ 40.00

Life Member, under 50 - \$ 1200

Life Member, 50 & over - \$ 600

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. Contact Jenni Hensley at the Centre or on 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! If you would like to discuss your idea contact Gillian, gillianv@actrix.co.nz

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.



Among the interesting avian visitors to the Manawatu Estuary this year, both a NZ Shore Plover and a Grey Plover were notable and rare. I first saw the Shore Plover on 2 January 2008, then regularly up till the end of March when its moulting plumage became more evident. It associated comfortably with Banded Dotterels and Wrybill, and allowed my cautious approach. They are rarely seen on the mainland and this bird is one of several released on Mana Island (north of Wellington) from the Mt Bruce breeding programme for endangered birds. The Grey Plover was with the Pacific Golden Plovers at the perimeter of the godwit and knot flocks. In May it was still present though the Pacific Golden Plover had left. In flight the grey plover has a distinctive black patch in its "armpit". I had not seen one before.
Alex Scott

