

MIRANDA

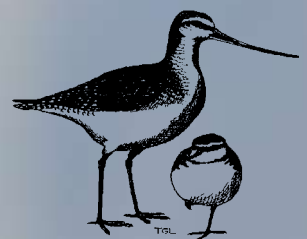
Naturalists' Trust

February 2008 Issue 68

NEWS



Chinese Delegation
NZ Dotterels on Motuihe Island
What do all those flags and bands mean?



February 2008 Issue 68

From the Blackboard
07 February 2008

Upcoming Events

February 24 2008
OSNZ new February Census.
Contact the centre for times. This census is designed to match up with census dates elsewhere in the flyway and to compare numbers between Nov and Feb, it is believed that all the arctic migrants may not have arrived by November.

March 16 11AM
Autumn Migration Day
A late start to go with the 3pm tide.

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
Volunteer days, see dates back page

Cover: 2008 Field Course Participant Annette Evans, winner of the Auckland OSNZ branch student prize for ornithology - it's all about the mud! Photo Keith Woodley

Back Cover: Gulls and Oystercatchers at the mouth of the Ashley River, Canterbury. Photos Ian Southey See article page 15.

A word from the editor

Some may consider it odd, but I still consider myself a relative newcomer to Miranda, so its hard to make statements about what the Trust was or wasn't, but as far as I can see MNT has never 'just' been about the birds, and its never been 'just' about the environment. It seems to have been about the place where people meet the natural history, where people meet the birds. It was however somewhat surprising when putting this issue together to realise that MNT isn't even just about Miranda. The visit from the Chinese was a part of that realisation as it shows the breadth of what Miranda is about, but the biggest part was the reunion of field course participants, because it shows the depth.

A number of people who attended the reunion very rarely come to Miranda, many others are overseas or otherwise couldn't make it and sent messages through saying what they are doing now. And it was very clear that the message that the Trust conveys, about the importance of the birds, and about the importance of the estuarine environments and shorebird habitat has been grabbed with both hands by many people, taken with them and used wherever they go. Some comments from participants of previous field courses can be found on page 14.

So for me this issue is about the connection between the people and the place, how to see the most you can and get the most out of it - no matter where you are. How we call all grab the message with both hands.

The deadline for the next issue of the news is early - April 1st. I look forward to your contributions. Gillian Vaughan

Arctic Migrants	
Bar-tailed Godwit	5000
Red Knot	4500
Turnstone	24
Red-necked Stint	3
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	14
Little Tern	2
Curlew Sandpiper	2
Large Sand Dotterel	1
Golden Plover	100
New Zealand Species	
Pied Oystercatcher	5000+
Wrybill	1700
NZ Dotterel	2
Banded Dotterel	10
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-billed Gull	
Red-billed Gull	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	
Pied Stilt	1100

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Sister Site Commemoration

Keith Woodley

During our visit to China in April 2007 an invitation was issued for officials from Yalu Jiang and the Dandong Environment Protection Bureau (CEPA) to come to New Zealand. In mid-December an eight member delegation arrived at Miranda. It was led by Dong Zhigang, deputy director of the Dandong CEPA, which administers the YJNNR.



Also present was Wang Tao, deputy director of the reserve. Both are familiar to those of us who have been to Yalu Jiang, and it was pleasing to give them an opportunity to meet more Miranda people during their brief visit. Chen Mingyue, Director of the People's Congress for Dandong, was also with the delegation. Other members were from various sections of Dandong CEPA, Kuan-dian County and Wetlands International, they were Li Shixiang, Jiang Chunhai, Zhang Lianming, Qiu Hualing and Xu Qiang.

While this visit had been flagged for some months, it eventually occurred at relatively short notice, so their was little opportunity to publicise it more widely. Nevertheless several events were organized for them during the three day visit. Somewhat fortuitously the day of their arrival coincided with a Department of Conservation function at the Area Office on North Head, Devonport. Largely a celebration of the Hauraki Gulf and island pest eradication and restoration projects currently underway or imminent, the event was attended by approximately 150 people including mayors, regional and district council members and various stakeholders in conserva-

tion and tourism operations around the region. Also in attendance was the Hon. Steve Chadwick, Minister of Conservation. The opportunity for delegation members to meet and chat with the minister was one of the highlights of their New Zealand visit.

Some readers will recall that several months ago a large rock suddenly appeared near the front steps of the centre. This now bears a plaque which commemorates the sister site partnership between Yalu Jiang and the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. On the morning of Saturday 15 December, a ceremony was held to bless the stone and unveil the plaque. We are very grateful for the support of Ngati Paoa in conducting this moving ceremony. As well as being much appreciated by the delegation members, it was a further opportunity to consolidate growing ties between Ngati Paoa and the MNT, and by extension with Yalu Jiang. Indeed, it is hoped that at some point in the future, we may be able to facilitate a visit to China by an iwi representative.

The opportunity to participate in a cannon netting operation was also available to the delegation. Three members took up the offer, while the others enjoyed an excursion to Rotorua. We are grateful to Wendy Hare for offering to be driver for this journey, a task not made easier



*Chen Mingyue speaking at the powhiri when the commemoration plaque was unveiled.
Photo Janie Vaughan*


by the fact that the only English speaker in the delegation had opted to go cannon netting! The catch was not a particularly successful one, but it was nonetheless of considerable value to Wang Tao who will be involved in banding activities scheduled for Yalu Jiang over the next two years. 



photo Wendy Hare

Crimson Footman Moth

David Lawrie



Who would have believed that I would one day be writing an article about a moth? However our semi-resident entomologist, Dr Peter Maddison, has suggested that a recent sighting is worth a short article in the newsletter.

On 28 October Tim Barnard from Rotorua and I were at the Karaka shellbanks when, on the way home, Tim noticed a small whitish moth flush as we walked through the *Sarcocornia*. Tim, who has a side interest in insects, immediately stopped and took some photos while I was an interested spectator. Tim thought that he would be able to identify the moth when he got home and checked through his field guides.



Magnolia fruits as food for birds

David Medway

Magnolia (Magnoliaceae) fruits are borne in a cone-like structure. As the fruit matures, the cone splits open longitudinally and the fruits are exposed and fall to the ground. Magnolia seeds are surrounded by a brightly-coloured fleshy aril that is rich in oil and sugars.

In North America, the fruits of at least two species of native magnolia are eaten by squirrels, other seed-eating rodents, and several bird species.

Magnolia species and cultivars are widely planted as ornamentals in New Zealand. Many are growing throughout Pukekura Park and Brooklands in central New Plymouth. Among them is a very large and old *Magnolia x soulangeana*, probably the best known of all magnolias.

However he was not able to identify it and I forwarded Tim's photo to Dr Peter Maddison who identified it as a specimen of *Utetheisa pulchelloides vaga*. This is a reasonably rare migrant from Australia.

Peter advised that this species has previously been recorded at Miranda and that it could breed on the Viper's Bugloss, *Echium*, growing there.

On completing a search on the internet I have discovered that sightings have been infrequently recorded over a large portion of New Zealand. There are several reports of sightings mentioned in various entomological newsletters. There is one record of


the species breeding near Nelson in 1975.

All the evidence however indicates that this is a migrant species that is not established in New Zealand. The species has a wide spread distribution throughout the world with a large number of sub-species, many of which are relatively restricted in their range. The sub-species that has been identified in New Zealand is established in Australia and also in areas of South East Asia.

While this particular sighting was not at Miranda it shows that field naturalists should always be observant of all things as they go about their activities and report any sight-

ings that may be unusual.

One footnote to my investigations was that the interest of Dr Maddison in this species has a personal basis as I note that there is a sub-species named after him, namely *Utetheisa maddisoni*, which was found on Niue Island.

Another interesting footnote is that when I first saw the photo of the moth, I showed it to my wife who told me that she had just put a similarly coloured dead moth into the rubbish. By the time had I sifted through the rubbish the body was not intact, although it certainly was very similar, and may well have been another specimen. 


I began observing this tree in 2001. It has developed fruit cones every year since then but, with one exception, those cones seemed to die on the tree, and they fell to the ground without opening. In 2004, there was a bumper crop of fruit cones most of which remained on the tree where they opened to reveal their orange-red fruits (see photo). Each compartment of the fruit cone contains two fruits. Many of these fruits fell to the ground after their cones opened.

I visited this tree daily from 19-30 April 2004. I saw up to six Tui in the tree at the same time. I watched them actively search many cones closely. Some of the cones they searched were not mature enough to have any exposed fruits, and the Tui

were unable to get anything from them. Other cones they searched had visible fruits which were still so firmly embedded that the Tui were unable to extract them despite their attempts to do so. On one occasion I watched a Tui repeatedly pull at a fruit until it succeeded in extracting it. I saw that the Tui were successful in extracting many fruits which they promptly swallowed. They undoubtedly managed to get more fruits than I noticed.

Numerous Silvereyes and several Mynas and Blackbirds, also ate fruits from the cones in the tree. They extracted and ate whole fruits, but they also pecked at fruits in the cones and were able to pick off portions without needing to remove the whole fruit. I never saw the Tui peck at the

fruits like these other birds did. The Tui used a tweezer movement and seemed to be dependant on extracting the whole fruit from its cone. Mynas and Blackbirds were often seen on the ground under the tree searching for fallen fruits and eating them.

I am not aware of any published records of birds eating magnolia fruits in New Zealand. It is not surprising that Silvereyes, Mynas and Blackbirds should do so because those species between them eat a wide variety of fruits, both native and exotic. My observations show that Tui, which eat fruits mostly of native New Zealand plants, will also avail themselves of the fruits of at least one magnolia cultivar should the opportunity arise. 

Chairman's Report

David Lawrie

I have just received a letter from John Brown's solicitors advising that in his will he had gifted \$20,000 to the Trust to be added to the R B Sibson Award Fund. John was involved in establishing this fund to mark the 80th birthday of Dick Sibson, another previous Chairman of the Trust.



It was established as an endowment fund to help provide financial assistance to young people undertaking research into aspects of the Miranda ecology. It has, until now, been very under-utilised as the capital sum was not large enough to generate meaningful income. With the very generous gift from John's estate, this should now generate sufficient funds to provide an annual grant.

The Trust will now work on formulating up-to-date guidelines and a mechanism for the allocation of grants.

Minister of Conservation:

The Cabinet reshuffle late in 2007 saw the previous Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, moved to a different portfolio, and Steve Chadwick appointed as the Minister of Conservation.

While we were not able to persuade Chris Carter to part with any money to support our work, he was, nevertheless, interested in our activities and visited the Centre several times.

Immediately following the new Minister's appointment I wrote to her and invited her to visit the Centre - she has recently replied that she will look for an opportunity to incorporate a visit to Miranda into her schedule.

We took the opportunity during the visit by the Chinese delegation to meet the Minister at the Department of Conservation Supporters' Function on the North Shore.

We look forward to working with her in the future and hope that we can

persuade her that our work deserves an appropriate level of funding.

Auckland Conservation Board:

Over the years the Auckland Conservation Board has annually held one of their meetings at the Centre and has taken an active interest in our shore-bird research work and findings.

They have on several occasions supported the Trusts' funding applications to the Ministers and Government and have also provided useful contacts.

We have recently received notice that the Conservation Board in conjunction with the Auckland Office of the Department of Conservation are undertaking the review of the Conservation Management Strategy which guides the work of the Conservancy over the next ten years. The Board and the Department will be holding a series of meetings during this coming year, I would urge as many members as possible to attend these and put forward the Trusts' perspective in relation to the protection of estuarine areas - the key habitat of the migratory wading birds.

Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society:

I have recently held talks with Dr Peter Maddison, the president of the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society. These talks largely centred around the possibility of our two organisations formalising a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enable much closer cooperation over areas of mutual benefit.

The Royal Forest & Bird Protection

Society has recently been made a full member of Birdlife International and a closer working relationship will enable us to tap into that organisation's world wide networks.

At a local level the Waikato branch of the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society recently donated to the Trust a number of copies of Dick Sibson's book "From Penguins to Parakeets". This is an account of Dick Sibson's first two years as a naturalist in New Zealand and also includes a post script prepared 50 years later, incorporating reference to the work of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. In addition the Kapaiti Coast branch recently sponsored Anna Deverell to the 2008 Miranda Field Course.

We thank the members of the branches for their donation and sponsorship and we envisage that this is the type of mutual benefit that could occur from the MoU mentioned above.

Chinese Visit:

The visit by eight members of the Chinese delegation will be covered in more detail elsewhere in this newsletter. The Trust Council apologises for the lack of notice relating to this visit but the final details were made known to the Trust only 10 days before the delegation arrived. We were also unaware of their exact intentions until they arrived, which made it all the more difficult to plan activities with any certainty.

As mentioned above, the day of their arrival was the Auckland Conservancy of the Department of Conservation's Annual Supporters Day and we were able to obtain permission to

take the delegation to that function. This was an ideal opportunity to meet the Minister of Conservation and the Departmental Officers from the Auckland Conservancy Office. We thank the Conservator for permission to attend with such a large delegation at short notice.

The Chinese were most impressed at our ability to obtain access to a Minister of Conservation to welcome



Eru Birch speaking during the powhiri. Photo Janie Vaughan

them to the country and they all took the opportunity to have their photographs taken with the Minister. During the visit we unveiled the plaque on the large rock at the entrance to the Centre, marking the signing of the memorandum between the Miranda Naturalists' Trust and the officials at Yalu Jiang in 2004. We were also pleased to be able to involve the local Marae and we thank the Ngati Paoa Trust for their support on the day. During the morning I held discussions with the chairman of that Trust and we are hoping to look into other areas of mutual cooperation as the Firth of Thames is vital to the Iwi and of course vital to the migratory birds that utilise the tidal areas.

Volunteers:

As mentioned in previous reports

the Trust is building some structures around the volunteers programme to give greater support and encouragement to this vital component of the Trust activities.

The small committee being organised by Jenni Hensley has been active over the summer months in developing a more organised roster for not only assisting in the running of the Centre but also ensuring that volunteers are stationed at the bird hide during the high tide period at the busy times of the summer months, mainly over weekends.

Jenni Hensley and Gillian Vaughan are running monthly workshops for volunteer training

and these will be further expanded during this coming year, with assistance from Keith Thompson, covering all aspects of the Trusts' activities including the running of the Centre, the gardens around the building and volunteering at the hide. These days will generally be on the last Saturday of each month and are also an opportunity for other members to attend in order to put something back into the Centre.

I would encourage members to either volunteer their services for some aspect of this volunteer programme or attend the regular workshop days and provide assistance wherever possible. The work that volunteers do was instrumental in establishing the Trust and that support is vital to enable the Trust to continue its activities into the future.

Trap Line:

For the past 2 years there has been a trap line in operation in the vicinity of the shell bank area to reduce the number of predators that could be having an impact on the birds in that area. That work was largely undertaken by Jenni Hensley but it has been decided to re-organise the trapping programme and the traps have been currently withdrawn from the field, while a new programme is developed.

While the catch rate in the previous trap line was relatively low it is clear that there are numbers of predatory animals roaming along the shore line. The recent field course attendees saw a stoat crossing the road just to the north of the Centre and there have also been several wild cats reported around Widgery Lake.

New Telescopes:

The Trust recently purchased six new telescopes using a grant provided by the Chisholm Witney Trust Fund. There are now sufficient telescopes to provide one to all participants at field courses and wader identification courses. This has already proved valuable during the recent field course.

It also allows for telescopes to be taken to the hide by the volunteers on hide duty to ensure that the visiting members of the public can have a good view of the birds.

The Trust is grateful to the Chisholm Witney Trust for their ongoing support of our activities.

Field Course:

I had the opportunity to share an evening meal, and mist net some birds, with participants during the current field course.

Once again I was highly impressed at the wide range of people attending

the field course and the close bond that had developed between these strangers. This highlights to me one of the key benefits of the residential field course, is the ability to make contacts with a wide range of people who would not normally come into contact with each other. The skills obtained during the course and the contacts made are highly beneficial to the attendees into the future.

My thanks to Eila Lawton for her work in organising this event, and

setting the demanding timetable. Also thanks to the tutors, without whom the event could not happen.

I would acknowledge here the support of the Auckland region of the Ornithological Society who provided the winner of the Ornithological project prize at the secondary schools science fair with the fees to attend the course. The recipient, Annette Evans was obviously benefiting greatly from the course and I am sure she will have an impact in whatever

endeavours she undertakes in the future.

M a n g r o v e Submission:

The Auckland Regional Council is currently reviewing their coastal management plan, in particular relating to the spread of mangroves. While the Miranda Naturalists' Trust acknowledges that the prolific growth of mangroves around the coastline is largely due to poor management of the surrounding farm land, it is also clear that the continued spread is impacting on the ability of wading birds to have secure roost sites.

The Miranda Naturalists' Trust therefore placed a sub-

mission to the committee considering the review supporting the Auckland Regional Council's proposal to enable mangrove seedlings to be removed where they are impacting on important bird habitat.

This is highly relevant as the mangroves are now spreading in front of the roost at the Limeworks site, the last remaining natural roost easily viewable by the public.

2008 Ramsar Meeting In Korea:

Following Christine Prietto's talk at the Spring Migration Day we organised a meeting with Nicola Scott from DOC Head Office in Wellington and with Waikato Conservancy Staff regarding Ramsar matters and in particular the report to be presented to the symposium in South Korea in October 2008.

An outcome of that meeting is that the Trust has been invited to provide comments towards the report that will be submitted by the NZ Government to that symposium. Another outcome is that we are now included on the circulation list for Ramsar issues that could affect migratory shorebirds.

Yet another outcome of that meeting was that the NZ Embassy in Seoul invited the Department of Conservation to provide a report on wetland organisations for the Korean Wetland project newsletter. The Miranda Naturalists' Trust was invited to submit a brief article about its work - this has been done and is now included in the newsletter. This is obtainable from the following website: www.koreawetland.org/news/letter_list.asp on Page 36-37 of Issue No. 7. This is certainly worth looking at; there are also several other interesting articles on that site. Be warned though it is a relatively large file for those on dial up.

Field Course Reunion:

On Monday 28th January a gathering was held at the Centre to mark the 10 years of field courses since the

Field Course 2008



Once again the field course left the participants muddy, exhausted and happy. Photos Eila Lawton and Keith Woodley

first event in 1999. This function was organised as a reunion of each year's participants, and approximately 60 people attended for a pot luck luncheon. Our thanks to Jenni Hensley for taking over the organisation of the event, and making sure that there was a good attendance by some persuasive arm-twisting.


The luncheon was preceded by a session on the shore line observing the birds.

It was excellent to see the friendships from each of the courses renewed and it is noteworthy that 8 of the 11 attendees of the 1999 course were present. The event was also an opportunity to acknowledge the work of Bev Woolley in organising the first field course and ensuring its success over the next 3 years. Elia Lawton, who took over from Bev, has organised the last 7 events, and maintained the high standards. We look forward to the continued success into the future.

Acknowledgment was also made of Keith Woodley's input into all of the courses and of the tutors, many of whom were present on the day.

It is clear from the continued interest of course participants in the affairs of the Trust and in their local communities that the course is of benefit not only to the individuals but the communities in which they serve.

On a disturbing note, however, while the event was taking place Keith Woodley and Adrian Riegen found two young men wandering around the car park apparently looking through all the cars. At the time they were challenged they were looking into my vehicle - but a quick check revealed that nothing had been taken (although my optics were in the car.)

This is a clear warning that nowhere is safe even if there are people around, so there is a need be vigilant at all times. 

Battley, P.F. & Brownell, B. (eds) 2007.

Population biology and foraging ecology of waders in the Firth of Thames: Update 2007.

Auckland Regional Council TP347.



Illustration Keith Woodley


A new report on the population biology and foraging ecology of the Firth of Thames waders has just been compiled by Phil Battley and Bill Brownell and published by the Auckland Regional Council. The project was initiated by Bill, and involved the close collaboration of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust along with two other Seabird Coast (Miranda-Kaiaua) conservation-focused organisations: Tikapa Moana Coastal/Marine Advisory Service and EcoQuest Education Foundation.

The ARC-funded project was initiated in late 2005 and involved updating and re-analysing the wader census information for the Firth and the Manukau Harbour (co-authored by Phil, Tony Habraken and Sue Moore) last reported in 1999 by Dick Veitch and Tony. It also addressed the benthic ecology and associated wader foraging issues in the Firth (co-authored by Bill and two students from EcoQuest). The report is illustrated with some fine photographs donated by Geoff Moon, Phil Battley and Brian Chudleigh, and drawings by Keith Woodley.

The current status, and changes over time, of 18 principal wader species seen regularly in the Firth are compared with census data from the Manukau, and also related to population trends in Australia. One of the

biggest concerns in the Firth is habitat loss (of both roosting and feeding grounds), mainly due to sedimentation (which causes smothering of shellfish and worm colonies, and the proliferation of mangroves along the coast). This could be a limiting factor for some of the species reviewed, and it certainly causes significant local changes in roost sites. One of the main conclusions of the report is that "major population changes have occurred in most species over the past 45 years". However, it is also noted that analysis is hampered by the difficulties of distinguishing between short term fluctuations and biologically significant declines or increases, particularly due to the limitations of the population monitoring techniques employed.

The report recommends a number of critical coastal restoration actions, many of which will be undertaken in 2008 by phase III of the Muddy Feet project. It also calls for the instigation of a comprehensive wader foraging and roosting research programme, particularly to document the changes that are occurring in the waders' natural habitats, and to propose any remedial action that may be appropriate.

Copies of this report can be acquired from the Shorebird Centre or from the Publications Dept. of the ARC in Auckland. 

MOWG'li and the New Zealand Dotterel of Motuihe Island.

Emma Stanyard

Ohinerau Bay on the south east side of Motuihe Island is a relatively reliable breeding site in the Hauraki Gulf for New Zealand Dotterel. A wide rock platform exposed at mid-tide provides an excellent foraging ground and is only scurrying distance from good nesting sites in the short grass above a modest shell bank at the back of the beach.



we'd now started to call her. There had been some changes in pairings (sometimes as a result of a known fatality) and territories. Unfortunately, apart from a quick viewing of 5 chicks from two pairs on one of our visits we were unable to collect much data on breeding success that season.

This breeding season the dotterels have another set of eyes watching them. Hester Neate, a student at Auckland University, is studying their breeding success and behavioural patterns for her summer project. We joined her and John Dowding in November 2007 to do an initial count of this year's hopeful parents and start colour banding them to assist Hester in her study and for future studies.

Although dotterels are not the most timid of birds, to the uninitiated, trapping them seemed like a difficult task. However John's 20+ years of experience showed as he trapped 3 adults and 2 chicks in a few hours. Two days later John and Hester had trapped and colour banded 13 adult birds. The total adult population is currently 21 adults, 16 of which are paired this season. Four of John's original 1997 birds are still present including Mowgli – now 21 years old. (The oldest known NZ dotterel is now 28 years old.) In addition an-

Location, Location, Location.

If you're a New Zealand Dotterel Ohinerau Bay on Motuihe Island has a few things going for it. In addition to a foraging ground within scurrying distance of the well hidden nest sites, the rock platform on this side of the island makes it unfavourable for mooring boats and as a result it is probably the least popular beach for the casual day tripper to the island.

Familiar DOC signage and fencing mark the most exclusive nest sites and the once rough neighbourhood has been cleaned up and is now considered to be free of all mammalian predators thanks to an intensive poisoning and trapping strategy. Brodifacoum was used in 1997 followed by 1080 carrot baits targeting rabbits in 2002. Pindone baits and two fumigants (the latter for burrows) were then used until the last rabbit (and also cat) was eradicated in 2004.

John Dowding was involved in ra-

dio-tracking of cats on the island in 1997/98 and colour banded four of the eight dotterels present on the island then. One of these eight birds, with band combination M-OWG, he'd first become acquainted with as a chick at Omaha beach in 1987.

Apart from annual autumn counts (mainly by Lauren Alston and Ted Kitching) little data is available on the Motuihe population from 1997 to 2006, which was the year when my partner and I became regular tree-planting volunteers on the island. Our visits revealed a population of up to 22 dotterels, at least 8 of which were paired. Four of John's 1997 colour banded birds were still there, including M-OWG, or Mowgli as

Motuihe Island Facts

Motuihe (approx. 180 hectares) is a recreation reserve managed by DOC and the Motuihe Trust, www.motuihe.org.nz

The Motuihe Trust, formed in 2000 has been actively re-establishing native vegetation and birds to the Island. Several hundred thousand native trees have been planted and saddlebacks have already been successfully reintroduced to pockets of remnant bush.

other bird banded as a chick at Omaha in 2004 has also decided to make Motuihe home.


Although the island is free from the harassment of mammalian predators, the dotterels still need to be wary of other predators. We witnessed one of the 2 chicks banded that day being devoured by a Black-backed Gull whilst we sat eating our lunch and pukekos, abundant on the island, are also likely predators of nests and small chicks.

The dotterels also share their beach with a few breeding pairs of Variable Oystercatcher (VOC). Anyone who has come across nesting VOC will know that although not the most harmonious of neighbours, VOC go to great effort (mostly highly vocal with occasional near-hit flying attacks) to deter human visitors and avian predators from their nests and chicks, which must work to the benefit of the dotterels.

As with all great locations, Ohinerau Bay seems to be near capacity as a breeding site for the New Zealand Dotterel. Mammalian predator eradication seems to have given them a great boost.

The next breeding hot spot?

So where will the next generation of successful fledglings make their home? Whilst Brown's Island and Waiheke have known, established breeding grounds, another possibility is neighbouring Motutapu Island. Predator eradication planned for the island in 2008-9 should improve survival of adults and their breeding success – both of which are low at present. John Dowding recorded 5 pairs on Motutapu in the 2007/08 season. However, there was also unoccupied breeding habitat, which could provide overflow territories for the Motuihe dotterels.

(Thanks to John Dowding, John Laurence and Hester Neate for their assistance with some of the data for this article.) 

Summer Census Results

Convenor Tony Habraken

The OSNZ Firth of Thames Census was run on 18-11-07, A total of 19,161 birds were counted, here are some of the results of that census.

Pied Oystercatcher	1418
Var. Oystercatcher	43
Golden Plover	57
N.Z. Dotterel	9
Wrybill	26
Whimbrel	22
Bar-tailed Godwit	6985
Terek Sandpiper	1
Turnstone	18
Knot	4270
Sharp-tail Sandpiper	9
Red-necked Stint	5
Pied Stilt	464
Hudsonian Godwit	1
Banded Rail	1
Black Shag	46
Pied Shag	1306
Little Shag	18
White-faced Heron	229
Royal Spoonbill	2
Spur-winged Plover	162
Black-backed Gull	166
Red-billed Gull	162
Black-billed Gull	873
Caspian Tern	304
Little Tern	1
White-fronted Tern	1030
Gannet	1

Those are the results of the census of the whole Firth. Some of the numbers found at the main "Miranda" roost including the stilt ponds and the shellbanks were:

SIPO	260
NZ Dotterel	4
Wrybill	26
Bar-tailed Godwit	3832
Turnstone	18
Knot	1220
Sharp-tail Sandpiper	6
Terek Sandpiper	1
Red-necked Stint	5
Pied Stilt	151
Hudsonian Godwit	1
Pied Shag	69
Black-billed Gull	860
White-fronted tern	287

It was a small tide so some birds may have been on mudflats that were not counted. The day before census the Firth was therefore surveyed from the air.

Other waterfowl counted included 1072 Mallard!

Thanks to all who participated!



*Not counted on census as it appeared for only one day this Little Whimbrel landed in front of the hide on New Years Eve 2007. It was a nice way to end the year!
Photo Ian Southey.*

from the MANAGER

Keith Woodley

In her broad Scottish burr Carol spoke quietly “I’ve got E7”. ‘Unlikely’, was my immediate thought. The bird in question had continued to be elusive, with no records of her from this side of the bay since last March. E2 and E3 on the other hand, were being seen relatively frequently among this flock. Carol was one of twelve participants in the annual Miranda field course.



That morning we were standing beside the Stilt Ponds continuing with our training session in bird identification, and recording leg-flags and colour bands. Several others looked through her scope and appeared to confirm her observation. But a quick glance was enough to discount this: first of all there was no aerial protruding beneath the tail of this bird, and as it shifted slightly ‘E2’ became clearly visible on the black leg flag. E2 was one of the males that lost its back pack transmitter (and aerial). The day’s normal business resumed.

At the end of the line of scopes Ramola called excitedly ‘I have got E7’. Almost simultaneously Wally, standing beside me, said in his soft Vermont accent: “this is E7.” Another quick glance this time became a lingering view. There was no doubt; standing in view was a female godwit facing slightly away from us. The first thing I registered was the long thin wire drooping out below her tail, then the flag partly obscured by her under body feathers. At last, having been tantalisingly close to her at Yalu Jiang last April, and having scanned through the Miranda flocks many times since they began to arrive back in September, here she was. The media star of 2007, this shy and elusive godwit was standing perhaps no more than 100 metres away. A particularly high tide, pushed up even further by the tropical low pressure system drifting slowly down the country these past few days, had flushed her out of her discrete hideaway along the mangrove fringes of the Piako, eighteen kilometres to the east.




*Banded Rail chicks grow up. From the top the photos were taken on the 1st the 11th the 18th and the 22nd of January, by the 18th the bands were beginning to develop.
Photos Janie Vaughan*

Light misty rain, just enough to be nuisance value for optical lenses, though not sufficient to dampen the ripple of enthusiasm among our group, swung along the line of scopes. No one appeared bothered by the conditions. There was a growing realisation that this was no ordinary bird sighting, indeed this was no ordinary bird. Her feats of the previous year, indication of what thousands of birds like her were also doing, were widely known. But perhaps less well known was just how elusive she had been. For me it was the completion of a circle. In the small hours of a February morning last year, I had stood on the beach at Taramaire and watched her flutter off into the night, bearing her new transmitter and leg flag. Now here she was, almost exactly 12 months later, on the Stilt Ponds – the same place where she had been captured.

Meanwhile, it was another rail summer at the Shorebird Centre. On or around 28 December eight chicks hatched and were seen on the drying algal beds of Widgery Lake. Nineteen days later at least seven chicks still survived, and were developing plumage patterns. They were becoming increasingly independent, foraging purposely for themselves. It was interesting to watch the extent to which the family would scatter the length and breadth of the lake area. It was not uncommon to have most gathered towards one end, with two or more chicks at the other end. Once again there was no predictable pattern to the timing of the family’s appearances in the open, so it was

always something of a lottery for visitors. Nevertheless many managed to see adults, chicks or both.

Towards the end of January however sightings dwindled. Several factors may have played a part in the dispersal or disappearance of the rails. The lake bed was completely dry and the invertebrate life in, or on the algae on which they had been feeding, is likely to have diminished. There were three sightings of rails, on one occasion with several chicks, on the road in front of the centre, suggesting they were dispersing. However the other factor which cannot be discounted was the feral cat seen stalking the lake bed. The cat was seen over several days and eluded attempts to capture it. In previous years birds have usually dispersed from the pond area by February, generally returning around November, so it remains difficult to be certain to what extent the presence of cats is a factor, although it must be regarded as a likely possibility! To be on the safe side next season we will need to be more proactive in establishing a trapping regime earlier.

With the drying of the lake each year come regular visits by the local heron pair. The attraction for them is the small eels stranded in the dwindling puddles. However this year there was very little heron activity, suggesting perhaps the eel quota was down. 

Why are we volunteers?

Janie and Kevin Vaughan:

Miranda is a special place. The migration loops that take some of the birds from here to China and on to Alaska or Siberia and others down to the braided rivers of the South Island give us a sense of connectedness. Links that are important. Sites that only work if they all work.

Who wouldn't want to be involved in that?


We started bird watching over 30 years ago when we were camping in the Serengeti. In the hunt for views of the big game animals a fleeting

glimpse of Superb Starlings opened our eyes to a whole world of things we had been missing. Janie has gone on to twitch herself a half way decent life list while Kevin is still trying to sort out how to combine jogging and bird watching (can't overcome the binocular shake).

We are now Kaiaua residents. Janie is another of the infamous field course graduates.

Sitting by the hide and sharing the views and conversation with the folks who pass through, learning the mysteries of the cash register, a bit of

weed pulling, that is all fun. Housekeeping, if it is necessary, can be a chore but to hold a godwit that has been taken out of the cannon nets, to feel the weight, warmth and fragility of these birds that can fly 29,000km, that is magic.

And you may be on the spot when a **Little Whimbrel** comes by. 



Kevin Vaughan, Dong Zhigang and Janie Vaughan.

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

from the Participants

10 years of the Miranda Field Course



I make a trip to the Sungei Buluh Wetlands every time I visit Singapore. It's nice to know what I'm watching and, more important, what to look out for. At home, I regularly encounter flocks of oystercatchers, dotterels and other waders at Shoal Bay in Bayswater (North Shore, Auckland) this time of the year. I don't see them as just little birds anymore, but citizens of the world which participate in no small way to maintaining the health of the environment. Shahrir Ariff

The Class of '99!



There is no doubt that field courses offer a wonderful chance to come face-to-face with interesting characters and new experiences - and that is just in the avian line! The HUMAN factor is probably the most dynamic force affecting groups of people living under one roof for the first time, and Miranda's first field course in 1999 was no exception. Here were 12 people from a swathe of diverse backgrounds, from Kombi-driving students to successful playwrights, all embracing the same strategies of completing, for most, something that they had never done before. The knowledge we gained from those tutors was put to use over the ensuing years - of the people I know of, some became Regional Representatives of their regions within OSNZ. Some became involved with their local regional parks, and some just became more appreciative of their natural environs and were satisfied with that. All those factors point to the value of such courses. On a personal note, these courses helped me in roles and projects run by OSNZ, University of Waikato, Lincoln University, Landcare Research and Waikaraka Estuary Managers, Inc. I especially like Miranda's courses for their role in educating youngsters - I notice a few courses over the years have had teens. This group is often hard to encourage, and if their up-close and personal experiences during this time of their lives includes these kind of activities, their adult lives often become more nature-oriented.

Paul Cuming



Eila, Keith and Bev cut cakes for the Field Course's birthday. Thanks Emma for the cake!

For a busy person like me, the 5 day, albeit intensive, Miranda Field Course worked so well. Personally, I'd choose this way to spend a week rather than any other holiday I can think of. I liked the balance of theory and practical side by side, not to mention those beautiful golden dawns on the shellbanks which really lift the soul. The experience I gained canon-netting during the course equipped me for the Delaware Bay Shorebird Project in the U.S. a few months later as a volunteer: what a thrill to be able to step outside one's usual profession and work alongside international shorebird biologists! But best of all from the 2006 course for me was getting to know the other participants and our local MNT members. And with that, the sense of being part of an organisation that is making a real difference to conservation.

Geraldine King



As one of the participants several years ago, I became very much more aware of the dependence of bio-diversity and the inter-relationship of field, stream, vegetation, marine life, and birds. From that I found an interest in N.Z. dotterels and their endangered status. Dotterel monitoring, trapping predators at nesting sites, and recording fledging success or failure for some sites has become my chief hobby for the past 7 years.

John Groom

I loved doing the Field Course! It changed the way I looked at birds and mud and stones and mangroves and streams and binoculars and gunpowder and Miranda. It was a chance to learn from tutors who up till then had been heroes, admired from a distance, but unreachable. They turned out to be not only modest, friendly and entertaining people, but great teachers, bursting with stories displaying their knowledge and experience. Ever since that 2000 course I have paid more attention to birds in flight or feeding, to markings and seasonal colours, to tiny crustacea in the mud or little insignificant plants hidden among the grasses. I learned about feathers and ageing and moulting and how to hold a bird the right way. I'll never forget handling those apparently ordinary looking godwits while thinking about their totally extra-ordinary flights, the raspberry pink delicacy of a pied stilt's legs, and the stout dignity of a 19 year old female SIPO. And I felt very close to a whole whanau of banded rail of all sizes, whose comings and goings I watched for days – sometimes very comical, and sometimes (when I found just a scattering of their beautiful feathers), unutterably sad. That course in 2000 gave me many friends (some of whom I see in the most unexpected places!), a much greater appreciation of the work the Trust does, and a wider understanding of the birds and their needs.

It also showed me that the Miranda Shorebird Centre was an excellent place for socializing, and I can recommend it for birthday live-in weekends with lots of friends.....

Miriam Beatson



The Field Course of January 2006, was a very memorable time for both John and I, as that is where we first met! As a result of that meeting, we have been together for the last happy 18 months. Quite a positive impact!!! Although we both had an interest in bird life prior to the Miranda Experience it has had the effect of increasing our knowledge and enthusiasm. Since then, we have done several trips in our bus, both North and South Islands, keeping a close eye out for signs of waders, as well as the more secretive birds, i.e. Fernbirds, Australasian Bittern and N.Z. Dotterel.

An increased awareness of our local birds also, has revealed some interesting facts. We have witnessed N.Z. Falcon swoop onto a sparrow's nest, high in a gum tree, and make off with the chicks, while the parent birds watched helplessly. The other day, a baby Shinning Cuckoo landed on our deck railing, looking a bit out of place, before flying off.

Melissa Skipworth and John Barraclough



A Mudflat Food Fight

Ian Southey

At the Ashley River mouth on 24-12-07 I was interested in a particularly dense feeding flock of Pied and Variable Oystercatchers. My initial interest was simply in the sheer number of birds packed into such a small area and it turned out they were feeding on a bed of pipis. Periodically a bird would leave the group carrying a shellfish with the end broken and then putting it down would work on snipping out the meat. Some of these pipis were large enough to afford a decent meal and this may be why there was a certain amount of bullying. The oystercatchers were shoulder to shoulder and periodically one would shove another out of the way.

This never amounted to much and both birds would get straight back to the job in hand.

Also hanging around were a couple of Red-billed Gulls. Not able to open the shellfish themselves they were attempting to take the meat from the oystercatchers after they had extracted it. The oystercatchers were aware of this and periodically lunged at the gulls but they were not being especially effective.



There seemed to be two ways of getting food from the oystercatchers. In some cases the gull would wait patiently at the shoulder of the oystercatcher hoping to make a quick snatch. At other times the gull would stand back and then fly at the oystercatcher presumably hoping to startle it into dropping its food. Unfortunately for the gulls, the oystercatchers were quite careful with their food and tenacious.

I did not see any cases when the gulls were actually successful in grabbing any in spite of some commitment to the cause yet they must have their moments.

See photos Back Page

Using your telescope and tripod– some basics.

Gillian Vaughan

Magnification makes a difference! Going out to the shellbanks with a telescope can provide much better views than just using your binoculars, so each year more and more birders are being seen at the shellbanks with their own telescopes. While every combination of telescope and tripod is different there are some tips that may be useful to know when you are first starting out.

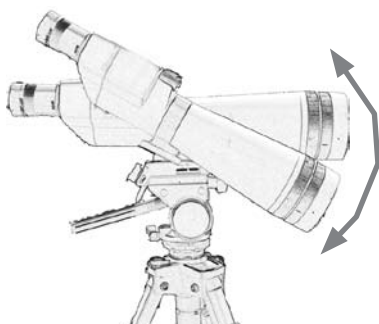


Hopefully they will make your birding a little easier and a little more fun.

Attach the base plate correctly.

Most birders use tripods with a quick release facility, this means that a base plate (which comes with the tripod) is attached to your telescope, then you slide the plate in and out of the mount on the telescope and lock it in place. Some base plates have very handy arrows which tell you which way your telescope should be facing, otherwise you have to work it out for yourself. Usually the base plate will only go in one way, if it goes in both sides check and make sure they are equally secure.

The eyepiece of your telescope needs to face the same way as the handle



that lets you move the head, if they are at right angles then instead of moving smoothly up and down you may find your telescope moving in an sideways arc.

When you attach the base plate to your telescope you need to attach it firmly. A common problem is the thread holding the scope becomes loose and the telescope swivels on the base plate, which on some models can ultimately damage the plate making it unusable. Some models come with an extra screw that will prevent this. Like most screws you don't want to overtighten it as you can strip the threads, instead retighten it as needed.

While some base plates have a grip that you use to tighten the screw others have a slot, if you have one of these make sure you carry a coin or something similar, as sometimes you will need to tighten this connection in the field.

If you wear glasses put the eyecup down.

Most scopes these days have eyecups, just like binoculars. If you wear

glasses make sure the (usually plastic or rubber) cup surrounding the eye lens is flat, this will make your view a little less tunnel like, the same advice can be given for binoculars! If you don't wear glasses and are having trouble keeping your eye at the right distance, make sure the eyecup is up. If your scope has a zoom you can easily move the eyecup by accident and find that you are straining your eyes.

Don't mix up the zoom and the focus.

All scopes have a focus, some have a zoom as well, some people new to telescopes have been known to try and focus their scopes using the zoom, things can start to look clearer as you change the zoom, but don't mistake that for real clarity!

Using the zoom can affect clarity.

Magnification is great but as well as increasing the size of the bird, or colour-band, you are looking at it increases the size of all the dust in the air, and the effect of shimmer from heat. It will also increase the effect of any vibration. Particularly during the heat of the day zooming up the

image can make your image fuzzier. Keep the magnification low unless you really need to zoom up. Keeping the zoom low also means that you'll see as much as possible at one time, making it easier to locate that bird you're looking for.

Get the height right.

If your tripod has a centre column then you can probably raise the head up. Don't spend hours bent over looking through your scope if you don't have too – just raise the column. But if the wind picks up you may want to put it down again to reduce wind resistance, the telescope will be much more stable, giving you a better view.

If the tripod is too tall for you just don't put the sliding legs all the way out. A small mark at the right spot on the legs will make it easy to pull the legs out to the right length.

Keep the telescope level.

If you are on uneven ground you should be able to adjust each leg to a different length, so that your scope is fairly level. This makes panning along the flock easier and eliminates the feeling that you might fall down a hill just to look through your scope. Some tripods have a built in level, don't get concerned about that, just get yourself comfortable.

When you move to your next site remember to readjust the legs, if you

move to a flat area and haven't readjusted the leg lengths your scope will quickly topple.

Keep your tripod stable.

If your image is moving around you won't get a clear view. If it's windy sitting down can be great for stability, and stability keeps your image clear. You can use an umbrella to shelter yourself and your scope from the wind, and you can hang your bag from your tripod to add weight. If it's really windy watch out that your tripod doesn't get blown over when you're not looking.

Sometimes sitting down is good, sometimes it doesn't help much.

If you are going to be out for a long time sitting is comfortable. But if there is a lot of heat haze around you may want to stand up. Heat haze is worst close to the ground and usually the waders are standing in it. Sitting down puts the maximum haze between you and the bird, standing up will cut some of it down.

Tripod legs may pull out to the side further than you realise.

There are two main types of tripod legs, ones where the legs are joined in the centre and the other where each leg has to be pulled out individually. With the second group if you pull the leg out part way you can usually move a part at the hinge of the leg

which allows you to pull the leg out further than usual. Widely spreading the legs can be useful to lower your scope a bit further when you are sitting down, and it will make your tripod harder to blow (or kick!) over.

If your scope isn't waterproof keep a plastic bag close.


Once water gets in your telescope it can be hard to get out. If your scope doesn't have a cover keep a plastic bag close to hand, if you want to keep using your scope in the rain use an umbrella to keep the scope dry. If you do get water inside your scope try putting it next to a dehumidifier. If you have an old raincoat you can make a cheap cover out of the sleeve and a couple of rubber bands.

Care of optics.

As with all optical equipment telescope lenses need to be treated with care. Anything on the lens, from dust to smears to scratches will diminish the clarity of your view. Using proper cleaning equipment such as lens tissues is strongly recommended

Keep your gear accessible.

It doesn't work for everyone but many people carry their scopes over their shoulders so that as they see a bird fly in they can set up quickly. There can be some wear and tear on the gear doing this, make sure that all the knobs are tightened before you move off to ensure that your scope doesn't move around. This will also mean you don't lose any of the bits of your scope, as the knobs can fall out if loose.

A bit of foam taped to the legs where it rests on your shoulder will make carrying it more comfortable. Just be careful not to drop your scope if you climb over any stiles! 



The left hand tripod has the legs attached to the centre column, the legs can only be pulled out a certain distance, and they always come out evenly. The right hand tripod has independent legs, they come out separately, and each leg can come out further than the first place that they stop, the last photo shows one leg pulled out further than usual.

Newsflash!

BAR-TAILED GODWIT CARRYING TRANSMITTER ARRIVES BACK IN NEW ZEALAND AFTER EPIC FLIGHT!

Tony Habraken

In the foot steps (or should it be flight path/wing beats) of E7, the bird which was tracked and monitored by American ornithologists and made ground breaking news across the world with her epic non-stop flight from Alaska during her southward migration back to New Zealand, there has been another unsung heroine traversing the oceans enroute to her destination.



E7 was tracked using the most up-to-date equipment yet used on godwits in the hope of better understanding the route they take when migrating over thousands of kilometers of ocean. Upon arrival she and many others took time out to rest, replenish body fluids and eat to regain the weight they had lost. Then they start moulting old feathers and growing new ones for the next part of their lives in one of the most amazing journeys any species endures to ensure their species survives. When E7 arrived at the mouth of the Piako River in the Firth of Thames, ending her non-stop flight back from Alaska, little was known about the rest of the birds that were still being monitored, awaiting improved conditions before taking on their journey south after the completion of another arctic breeding season.

The tale of our unsung heroine is that she has made this southward migration trip at least twice before, each time returning to the same place to spend her arctic winters in our south-

ern hemisphere summer. She had also been burdened with a transmitter similar to that which E7 carried, but hers had been implanted in Alaska on 6 June 2005; she is still carrying the equipment today. What's more incredible is that she has made the trip north twice and has now returned for a third summer in the sunny isles of New Zealand.


From all accounts she was last seen near the Guem Estuary in South Korea in March 07, thus confirming that she too uses the Yellow Sea as a staging site, refueling during north migration before departing on the last leg of her north-bound journey to the arctic breeding grounds.

Her arrival at the Karaka shellbanks this year seems late. January 6th, 2008 was the first sighting of this grand lady this summer; where she has been in the preceding three months will probably remain a mystery but the light condition she was in when first seen suggests she has not been back in NZ as long as most others. She still

appeared to be in a heavy moult; she has shed many of the inner primaries, some missing and some which are in growth mode, leaving only the outer most three which look very old and worn. Her scapulars and wing coverts are all new so some progress had been made, however her head and neck plumage lacked a new look about them.

The all important black identification flag she was wearing with white inscribed letters on it was still as stained as last year, appearing very orange instead of the clean cut white of other black flag bearers, but the letters were legible from a distance when zoomed in with a telescope. The aerial protruding from her right side (a remnant from when the transmitter was implanted, they are not yet designed to fall off) when viewed from behind seemed to point acutely out to the right, much the same as in previous years (when it was only seen from the side).

Her sighting was met with some jubilation as her absence at Karaka this season had been discussed earlier in the day, but with a twist of bad luck she flew away before she was completely identified. A check of a small group of birds nearby before a major search was deployed revealed she had not moved far, so with great relief the above events unfolded.

Though it was not one of the 2007 tagged birds from Miranda, it was undoubtedly indeed the one and only EO. 



The Mysteries of reading colour-bands: Unveiled

Gillian Vaughan

Over the years there has been a lot of mention in MNT News about the various banding projects taking place in New Zealand and along the flyway. We've tried to keep members in touch with those programmes as more people out looking for bands and flags means more information comes back, and the more sightings that are recorded the more valuable the projects become.



One of the consequences of having bands on birds is a number of people who walk into the Shorebird Centre saying they saw a green band on a Wrybill, and asking what that means.

Seeing just one band can mean a lot or it can mean nothing, it depends on the project. This article puts together the details on how much you need to see to know what it means! Having a little information about the birds you are looking at can add interest to your birding – and make you sound impressive to those standing around you.

Arctic Migrants

There are two main schemes involving the Arctic migrants, flagging and colour banding.

Flagging

The biggest banding programme on the flyway has been the flagging of the arctic migrants; for these birds you need to see if there is one flag or two, and what colour they are. This will indicate where that bird was banded and flagged.

Most of the time the flag or flags are on the upper part of the bird's leg (the tibia), where there are two flags they will usually both be on the tibia, but sometimes the second flag is on the lower part of the leg (the tarsus). Many of the different combinations in use are listed in the box opposite.

You'll note that all of the locations

Among the most common flags seen in NZ are:

1 flag

White - NZ, North Island

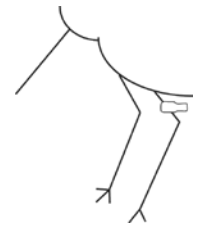
Orange - Victoria

Yellow – North West Australia

Green - Queensland

Blue - Northern Japan

Black flags – used for birds with transmitters from NZ or Alaska



2 Flags

Black over white - Chongming Dao Island China

White over Black - Chongming Dao Island China

(not used anymore, but some are still out there)

White over green - South Island NZ

Orange over Green - New South Wales

Orange over White - Korea

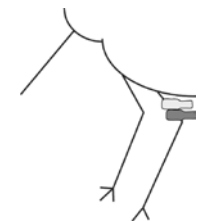
White over orange - Korea

(also not used anymore, but some are still out there)

Green over orange - northern yellow sea (Yalu Jiang)

Yellow over orange - Southwest Western Australia

Orange over Yellow - South Australia



But there are more!

You can also look for:

Yellow band over green flag - Alaska

Green flag over yellow band - Alaska

Pale blue - Northern Chukotka Russia

Pale green - Southern Chukotka Russia

Blue over white - Central Japan

Yellow over white - Sakhalin Island Russia

Pale Blue over White - Wrangel Island Russia

Yellow over black - Kamchatka Russia

White over Blue - Taipei

Blue over Blue - Northern Japan

Orange over Blue - Tasmania

Blue over orange - southern Japan

White over Yellow - Hong Kong China

Many of this group have never been seen in NZ, you could be first! Some sites like Chongming Dao and Korea have two codes as they began with one code and have switched to another.

shown above are in the East-Asian Australasian Flyway, other flyways also run flagging programmes, so if you see a familiar looking flag when in South America or England it will mean something else.

Recording the number of birds in a flock that were banded in other countries will, over time, allow for the discovery of main stop over sites, the amount of movement between non-breeding sites, and show us the relationship between the breeding and non-breeding areas. The NZ Wader Study Groups newsletter publishes the detail on these on a periodic basis; if you are curious what's been seen where in the past check out the archive at www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz.

More recently many sites have started engraving numbers and letters on the flags, these identify individual birds. However to know which individual means you need to see the species, the flag colour and all the letters on the flags then send them in to be recorded (see addresses at end of article). NZ birds have white flags engraved with three black letters on the flags, those with black engraved flags have a white letter and a number. Most of the overseas programmes have either a letter and a number or two letters.

Colour banding

In the last few years Bar-tailed Godwits, Red Knots and Turnstones have also been banded with unique colour band combinations. Until recently

this occurred only in NZ, however a similar project started about two years ago in North West Australia. There are four colours and a flag in each combination. The colours used in NZ are red, blue, white and yellow with a white flag, NW Australia is using red, blue, yellow and lime green with a yellow flag.

To know which bird you are seeing you need to know each band and the location of the flag, colour bands are read left to right (the birds left and right!) and top to bottom, the flag can be above the 'knee' on either leg, below the 'knee' but above the bands or between the bands (see illustration). Be careful with the whites and yellows as some of the whites become stained; if you aren't sure if its white or yellow write that down! You'll need to report these to get the details about the individual bird.

In general birds with a flag on the left leg were banded in the South Island, those with the flag on the right were banded in the North Island. Most (but not all!) of the birds banded around Auckland have a flag on the upper part of the right leg, position 2.

A different colour banding project was run in North West Australia for several years where arctic migrants of a known age were given a single colour band instead of a flag. Different ages were given different colours, this project has finished, and there are only a few records in NZ, however keep your eyes open for a bird with a single red, white, yellow, dark green or light blue color band.

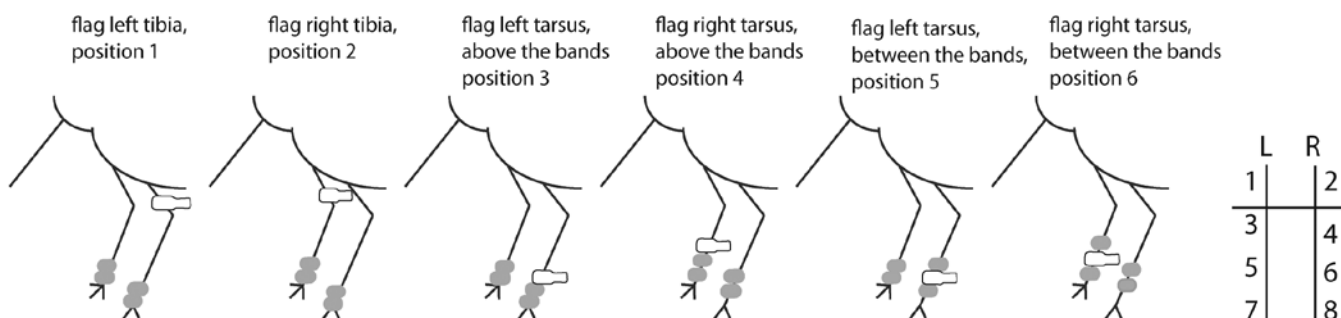
NZ Locals

South Island Pied Oystercatchers with a white flag were banded in the Firth of Thames, if they sport a plain yellow flag they were banded in the Kaipara – not North West Australia! If they are carrying an engraved yellow flag on the right leg they have been caught in the Nelson area in 2008. There are also a number with colour bands, banded as part of a small study down in Canterbury.

Wrybills have been colour banded on the breeding grounds, they can have three colours and a metal or four colours, if they have three colours on one leg the other leg only has a metal on it. If the combination doesn't have an orange band the bird was probably banded in the last three years. Other than that if you want to know the details of the bird you've seen you'll need to report the combination.

Black-billed Gulls Around the Firth of Thames there are two groups of colour banded Black-billed Gulls. Those that have only one colour and a metal band are banded as chicks; only chicks hatched from that site in that year have that combination. Those with a green band were hatched in the Firth, those with a yellow band were hatched in the Manukau (except for YM-nil which was a combination used twice in the Firth). Birds with a red band or bands were hatched in the Kaipara. By getting a look at both legs you can see how old the bird is and where it was banded

Flag positions used in the colour banding of arctic migrants, 7 and 8 not pictured as they have not been used yet in NZ. Keep a diagram in the back of your notebook to help you remember them all.



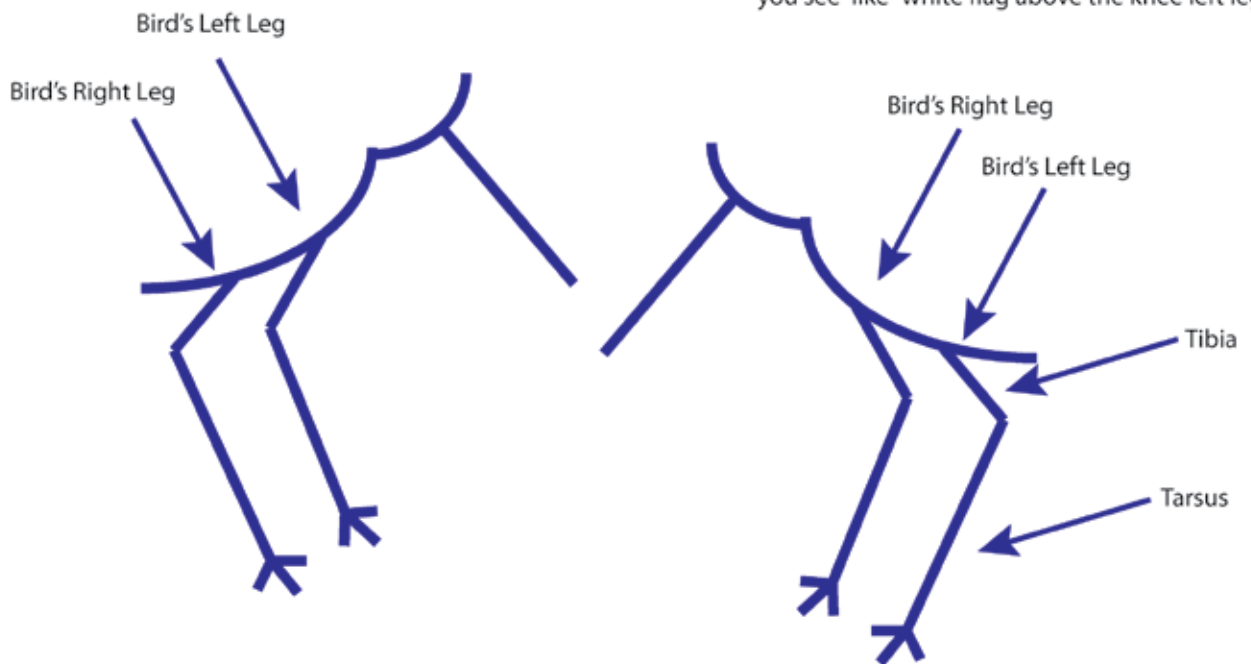
Flags and Colour Bands - reading them in the flock



In your notebook...
birds recorded from left to right

Knot 1YR-WB - flag white
Godwit, white flag NZ
Knot 2WR-BY flag white
Godwit, orange flag - VIC
Knot Black/White Flag E3!
Godwit 3 RB-WY (flag white)
Godwit 4YY-WR (flag white)
Godwit G/o - Yalujiang
What a day!

use the position codes if you know them - but they are just shorthand, so if you don't then just write what you see like "white flag above the knee left leg"



Always read the birds left leg first, then the right, so make sure you know which way the bird is facing!

The colour combinations used on groups of Black-billed Gull chicks banded in the around the harbours around Auckland.

Colour Combination	Banded the Summer of	in the
Y - M	94/95	Manukau
M - G	95/96	Firth of Thames
GM - Nil	96/97	Firth of Thames
R - M	96/97	Kaipara
Nil - GM	97/98	Firth of Thames
M - R	97/98	Kaipara
Nil - RM	98/99	Kaipara
R - RM	99/2000	Kaipara
G - M	2000/01	Firth of Thames
RM - R	2000/01	Kaipara
M - Y	01/02	Manukau
YM - Nil	02/03	Firth of Thames
YM - Nil	04/05	Mataitai

There are also individually banded birds, marked as part of an ongoing study looking at mate selection. These have three colour bands and a metal band (two colours on one leg and a colour and a metal on the other). If you see one of these during the spring and early summer see if it has a banded mate, if not it has probably changed mates since it was originally banded.

Black-billed Gulls in the South Island have also been colour banded, again different codes have been used for different ages.

NZ Dotterel Many NZ Dotterel have been individually colour banded as part of monitoring the population. Like Wrybill they can have 3 or 4 bands and the number on each leg can vary. Occasionally you will see one with a flag and no colour bands; these are flagged as part of year groups down in Tauranga Harbour.

There are colour bands on a number of other species, Banded Dotterel, Variable Oystercatcher, and Fairy Terns among others. Some Banded Dotterel also have Australian flags as some migrate their each year.

So what do you do if you see something – well first you enjoy it! The bird has been somewhere and whether it was banded here or somewhere else its telling us something about how that species works, it's part of the big picture and deserves a little appreciation! Work out what you can see already, does what you see tell you anything or do you need to see more to get the complete picture?

Then we hope you'll report your sighting.

Reporting colour bands and flag sightings

Flags and bands can be reported to the Banding Office, they can also be sent directly to the people running each project.

- Report flag sightings to Adrian Riegen riegen@xtra.co.nz
- Report colour band combinations to Phil Battley in the North Island p.battley@massey.ac.nz and in the South Island to Rob Schuckard rschckrd@xtra.co.nz
- Report Wrybill, NZ Dotterel and Variable Oystercatcher bands to John Dowding jdowding@xtra.co.nz
- Report Black-billed Gull bands to Tony Habraken familyhabraken@yahoo.com.au
- The Banding Office can be contacted at bandingoffice@doc.govt.nz

If you're not sure where to send a sighting ask at the Shorebird Centre and we should be able to point you in the right direction shorebird@xtra.co.nz


Happy birding! 

Engraved Flags!

To date 15.01.08, 427 Red Knot have been fitted with engraved flags, there has been 455 sightings reports of 244 different birds mostly in New Zealand, of which Tony Habraken has seen 217.

Some of the movements include

6 have moved to Clifton Beach	30 to Clarks Beach
2 to Big Sand Island	6 to Conifer Grove
5 to Farewell Spit	56 to Karaka
1 to Kooragang (Aus)	1 to Makatu
1 to Manawatu	9 to Mangere
29 to Mataitai	131 still at Miranda
1 to Motueka	3 to Papakanui
1 to Chukotka (Russia)	1 to Roebuck Bay (Aus)
1 to Seagrove	1 to Thames
1 to Taiwan	2 to Japan

and that doesn't include the ones that have moved back again or to another site! Further details in the next NZWSG newsletter. 

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



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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 Feb 23, Mar 29, Apr 26, May 31, Jun 28 and Jul 26. Contact Jenni Hensley at the Centre or gekkoomoon@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.



Oystercatchers are good at catching shellfish



Gulls are not



So they are forced to take extreme measures



Although oystercatchers usually win ...



they still find gulls irritating