

MIRANDA NEWS

Naturalists' Trust
May 2005 Issue 57



Banded Rails and more Banded Rails!

A Return Visit from Yalu Jiang

The Subantarctic Islands



May 2005 Issue 57

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. Drop in to investigate, or come and stay a night or two. The Centre has three bunkrooms for hire, plus two self-contained flats. For rates see Back Page. 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.

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

Cover Photo: Banded Rail. Drawing by Keith Woodley

Back Cover: Top: Zhao Changfu, Vice-Mayor of Dandong holds a Wrybill ready for release. Middle: Four members of the delegation on the shellbank. Bottom: The Chinese Delegation with members of the Miranda Naturalists Trust.

A word from the editor

Apparently it's all about Banded Rail. If you like people watching go down to the Centre and see the rush of people to the verandah as the call for "Banded Rail" goes up. Of course, if you like bird watching, go down to the Centre and be one of those people. Stay around long enough and you can be both! My personal view is they stay exciting because we keep waiting for the fun to be over "it surely can't last", yet they keep showing up.

As editor of the news I am highly appreciative, as they have obviously given Keith inspiration, and I love to be able to put his drawings on (or in) the magazine. From the images he produced for the wader wall Keith has also put together a montage of the waders seen on the Wader ID course.

Looking up from the Banded Rail I found it very worthwhile to be involved in the two of the few days the group from Yalu Jiang was here. Between Keith's report on page three and David's review of the outcomes in his Chairman's Report on page seven the content of the visit is fairly well covered., and I have little to add but a personal note that while in China, and despite the language barrier, I felt an individual relationship starting to establish with some of those who journeyed to Miranda recently. I hope that their visit here will help to encourage that. I have always felt that one of the strengths of Miranda is the people involved and the relationships that are formed, and I'd think it was really cool if that spread to China!

See you at the AGM!

Gillian Vaughan

Upcoming Events

May 15 10:00
Annual General Meeting
After the AGM Nigel Milius will speak on his recent trip to Antarctica..

June 12
OSNZ Firth of Thames Census. All Welcome! Contact the Centre closer to the date for a time to meet.

August 20th
Working Bee and Potluck Dinner.
Working Bee starts at 10am Potluck Dinner from 5:30 onwards come for part or all of the day.

September
New Zealand Dotterel Course
Dates yet to be finalised.

October 23
Spring Migration Day
Guest Speaker to be announced.

CONTENTS:

Chinese Visit	3
Banded Rails	4
Spartina	6
Chairman's Report	7
OSNZ Column	9
Wader ID Course	9
AGM	
Treasurers Report	10
Balance Sheet	11
Previous Minutes	12
Muddy Feet Launch	14
Song Thrush and Blackbird	15
30th Anniversary	16
from the Manager	18
I have seen the snipe	19
An unusual Donation	22
Obituary - Alan Underhill	22



DELEGATION FROM CHINA

That migration of Kuaka or godwit was being mentioned on the marae at Kaiaua was not unusual, but what happened next certainly was. The reference to migration came as the delegation from Dandong, Yalu Jiang and Beijing were being introduced to the whanau and guests of Ngati Paoa. In response the visitors from China lined up and sang a waiata – in Chinese. To a very warm reception. Many thought it one of the highlights in what was a very special day for Ngati Paoa.

The delegation had been in the country barely 36 hours but had already covered a lot of ground.

THURSDAY 7 APRIL

A missed connection in Sydney pushes dinner at Miranda back from 6.30 to 10.30 p.m. Eventually there are three familiar faces wandering into the centre: Mr Yu Liansheng our genial host in Dandong last April, Madame Yan Meifang director of the Yalu River National Nature Reserve, and our old friend from Wetlands International, Beijing, Chen Kelin. Accompanying them are the Vice-Mayor of Dandong City, Zhao Changfu, the Governor of Kuandian County, Lu Bingyu, and the Director General of the State Environment Protection Agency for the city of Dongan, Yu Zhenbin.

FRIDAY

Miranda in daylight is a revelation to all but Mr Chen. The centre, its displays and its outlook, are an impressive backdrop to breakfast.

The education centre at Mangere Mountain is the next focus, where Estella Lee, from the Chinese Conservation Education Trust (CCET) joins us. Ambury Park and the new-look Mangere sewage treatment operation follows. Where the treatment ponds once were is now open to the tide, and the interpretation trail with hides offers fine views of shorebird flocks and spoonbill. This example of environmental rehabilitation deserves to be exported far and wide. Members of the delegation are impressed by what they see.

The itinerary for the day originally extended from Mangere on the Manukau to wetlands in north Waikato. We merely reach as far as Bombay and a late lunch at home with David Lawrie. A menagerie of creatures – from horses to goats, partridge to pigeon, attract great interest from our guests. A provisioning trip to Pukekohe allows Mr Chen to indulge all of us with his cooking over the next two days.

SATURDAY

Breakfast now has a distinctly Chinese flavour. Then we are due at the launch of the Ngati Paoa Trust Board. Powhiri and korero extend into the afternoon. The Chinese waiata is followed by lunch. A presentation on the history of Ngati Paoa is a learning experience for all of us. The delegation come away expressing considerable satisfaction with their experience. The day consolidates links between iwi and Miranda Naturalists' Trust, and forges new ones along the migration path of Kuaka.

Back at the centre a meeting with Yalu Jiang officials reviews the first year of our sister-site partnership. Priorities and actions for the immediate future are identified. The centre is then given over to delicious aromas of northern Chinese cuisine, as Mr Chen prepares dinner.

SUNDAY

Just after 5am we are on the shellbanks of Taramaire. Starlight sprinkles the dark channel as we begin ferrying equipment across. Cannon netting and banding is the next item on the itinerary for the delegation. Over 300 Wrybill are caught and processed. There is ample opportunity for all to experience, in the hand, this part of our "core brand".

Back at the centre a barbecue lunch is followed by an exchange of gifts. By mid-afternoon we are en route to Auckland, where there is time for a sightseeing excursion to the top of Mt Eden. We meet Estella and other members of CCET for a splendid dinner.

The long days and late nights since Thursday begin to take their toll on all of us. But an early night back at Miranda is thwarted. Road closure following yet another accident on State Highway 2 means a long diversion home.

MONDAY 5.30 A.M.

The demands of an early flight to Melbourne mean farewells under starlight. A useful and important visit to Miranda is at an end. Until next time.

Keith Woodley



Chen Kelin, Yan Meifan and Yu Liansheng helping band Wrybill at Taramaire

Photo Xenia Meier

BANDED RAIL

For a bird reputed to be wary and often difficult to see the Banded Rail family on Widgey Lake this summer were a remarkably regular and, on the whole, reliable attraction for countless visitors. From the windows at the south end of the Sibson room, or from the front deck, many were able to observe them closely and at some length. Numerous rail sightings were reported from elsewhere on the Miranda coast as well. The mangroves lining the trail down to the shell bank, and the area immediately inside the Limeworks gate, were two such locations. The Limeworks pair had chicks in mid-December, and either they or another pair were also seen with chicks in February. So just what do we know about this species?

The scientific name for Banded Rail, *Gallirallus philippensis*, may derive from the Latin *gallus* (farmyard cock) and *rallus* (rail) meaning thin, and thus applicable to the thin body shape of rails. But it may also derive from *rallum* meaning a sort of scraper. Thus a suggested origin of the term 'rail' is a bird that makes a noise like a scraper when cleaning a ploughshare.

Banded Rail are widely dispersed throughout the south western Pacific region. The nominate race occurs in the Philippines, with others

found in Indonesia, New Guinea, western Melanesia, New Caledonia, western Polynesia, Australia and New Zealand, including Stewart Island and the Auckland Islands. It did occur but is now extinct on the Chatham Islands and Macquarie Island.

The birds found in New Zealand almost certainly originate in Australia (where the species is known as Buff-banded Rail). Evidence suggests that Banded Rail are still dispersive and possibly migratory in some of their range, and thus there is some gene flow between different populations. It has been suggested that this may be also true of the New Zealand population, with continued gene flow from Australia.

However this has not been confirmed. In fact plumage patterns of New Zealand birds have been found to differ slightly from that of the Australian subspecies and this may indicate our population has become more isolated.

Banded Rail were once widely distributed throughout New Zealand but had disappeared from many regions by the 1930s. Loss of wetland habitat



is believed to be the main cause of decline, although undoubtedly predation was also a factor. Today the population is largely confined to a line north of Opotiki and Kawhia. However, two South Island populations are found in Golden Bay and western Tasman Bay, and the Marlborough Sounds, with occasional reports also from



Photos!

Bottom: A young Banded Rail stretches its wings March 1st 2005. Photo Brian Chudleigh

Middle: Slightly older but still stretching April 16th 2005 Photo Ian Southey

Top: An Adult Banded Rail works the edges of Widgey Lake Photo Ian Southey

Stewart Island. They are relatively common on Great Barrier Island.

Like many of the rail family, Banded Rail relish plenty of cover. Typical habitat is dense vegetation bordering many types of wetlands, estuaries and beaches. Clearly the policy of maintaining a thick cover of grass and reeds around the edges of Widgery Lake has paid off.

They have a reputation for being secretive and wary. It was interesting to observe the marked difference in behaviour between the adults and juveniles on Widgery Lake. The three juveniles were often seen foraging in the open, sometimes seemingly oblivious to danger or distraction. The adults on the other hand seemed all too conscious of being exposed, remaining watchful and ready to bolt for cover. The juveniles did however learn caution. On one occasion a Harrier made a low pass over the lake sending all birds running for cover, from where persistent calls were heard for some minutes afterwards.

Like many birds, rails take a mixed diet of invertebrates, plant material and other items. Prey recorded in published literature includes crustaceans, molluscs, worms, insects, young plants, seeds and other vegetable matter, fruit, frogs and eggs (HANZAB). The Widgery Lake birds were seen taking a variety of food. I watched them taking flies or midges that were hovering just above the drying lakebed. One of the juveniles was seen with what appeared to be a grasshopper. All birds were seen gleaning, often at full stretch, from foliage around the lake edge. Immediately prior to the chicks first appearing, one adult was seen foraging widely in areas away from the lake. This included the line of plantings between the cottage and the centre (where I virtually tripped over it!), the immediate surrounds of the cottage itself, and the edges of the farm road adjacent.

Banded Rail nests in New Zealand have been reported as a roughly woven platform of grasses or rushes or both with a slight depression on top. They are usually unlined but with a flimsy bower of rushes or reeds pulled down

over the nest (HANZAB). The Widgery Lake nest was not located, but I suspect it was somewhere around the peninsula directly outside the centre (where the Widgery Lake sign is).

The usual clutch is four to six creamy buff eggs dotted and blotched red, and purplish grey. Both parents incubate over a 19-22 day period, and both also care for and feed the young. However, after the first week, young birds will forage alone for long periods. They are fully grown and able to fly at two months, but can be evicted from the territory when five to six weeks old. When first observed in the last week of January, the Widgery pair had six chicks, but within a week only three appear to have survived. In the days immediately prior to this two chicks became noticeably smaller than their siblings. The three survivors were then seen regularly and often until they were almost fully fledged (about 51 days after they first appeared).

HANZAB reports "an observation of one bird {that suggested} a display of unknown significance: 'some sort of dance' {in which} it flew and ran in front of mangroves, then darted and dived, jumping in the air, displaying its back and both wings, and describing a rough figure of eight pattern on the ground." Several years ago I recall seeing something similar at the old Access Bay site. Just on dusk, two birds were displaying across the north facing edge of the mangroves, running and flying back and forth in a spectacle that lasted several minutes.

From about five weeks old the Widgery juveniles were often seen behaving in a similar fashion, although the purpose on these occasions seemed somewhat clearer to the observer. They appeared to be exercising their still developing wings. A bird would run back and forth over a small area, darting in small loops, all the time holding its wings erect and sometimes jumping as well. At times there was almost something manic about this activity. Teenage exuberance blended with impatience would also fit.

Towards the middle of March sightings of the juveniles became less frequent.

This may have been related to the rapid disappearance of the lake itself. The remaining two large puddles dwindled rapidly, much to the discomfort of the mosquito fish (*Gambusia*), and many small eels that became concentrated in ever decreasing water, and thus simple pickings for the local pair of White-faced Herons. By March 21 the lakebed was completely dry. It appeared the juvenile rail may have been evicted from the territory – in subsequent days at least one adult was still being seen on occasion. Another, more ominous, explanation was suggested by the evidence left on the dry lakebed. For there, among the few small eels lying scattered and dead, and the numerous footprints of heron and rail, were cat prints.

From February onwards I had a trap set around the lake. Following the sighting of a cat with three large kittens, this took on a degree of urgency. Over five nights all three kittens were caught, but the adult remained elusive. A few days later the cat from the house next door turned up in the trap. There was no further success for the next few weeks, although nor were any cats sighted. At the same time the three juvenile rails appeared day after day. But another cat was seen on 23 March, and not caught until two nights later. A close examination of the lake edge areas most frequented by rails turned up no signs of predation, although dense vegetation does not give up such evidence easily. Thus the precise reason for the disappearance of the young rails remained elusive.

Then on the morning of Good Friday the rains came, and in dramatic fashion. Over several hours an electrical storm dumped 45 millimetres on Miranda. Widgery Lake enjoyed instant restoration. So too did those eels that had managed to survive, for very soon the herons were back and busy. Subsequently, over the rest of the Easter period, at least two juveniles and one adult also reappeared around the lake. Since then sightings have become sporadic once more, with only two birds seen at any one time.

SPARTINA FOUND NEAR KAIUAU



Spartina is a grass that grows in tidal areas. Like other grasses the stems are round and hollow. This is an easy way to differentiate it from the native sedges - since "sedges have edges" - the stems of sedges feel angular when you hold them between your fingers. Spartina anglica also has distinctive flower spikes (shown in the photo). Spartina has salt glands in its leaves that excrete salt onto the leaf surface where it crystallises as a fine white coating (although this can be washed off by the rain or tide).

The problem with Spartina is that it can form dense stands out on the mudflats even as far out as the mid tide mark, sediment is trapped around the plants, unnaturally raising the areas where Spartina has invaded (which can cause flooding upstream). It can take over eelgrass beds, and has been recorded as causing decreases in estuarine fish, invertebrates and of course, bird populations.

There are three species of Spartina in NZ, all introduced; so far all of those identified in the Firth have been *Spartina anglica*. *Spartina anglica* can be dispersed by seed as well as by vegetative spread.

DoC knows of some areas of Spartina around Waitakaruru and also around Thames, but this patch at the north end of Kaiua is the first patch known on the western side of the Firth. DoC are planning to survey up the western coast of the Firth, but anyone who finds Spartina in the Firth should contact Keith at the centre and he can pass the info on to Doc (just in case a new patch turns up).

Sue Moore

Our records indicate that rail have been sighted around Widgery Lake every year since 1995, but only on three occasions is breeding known to have occurred. Three fully grown juveniles is the best breeding success yet. While it is unclear whether anything happened to the young rail that did not return, cats cannot be eliminated as a cause. Clearly a cat control programme should be maintained around the lake.

Further Reading:

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. 1993 *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds Vol 2 Raptors to Lapwings*
Heather, B. & Robertson, H. 1996 *Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*
Schodde, R.; de Naurois, R. 1982 Patterns of variation and dispersal in Buff-banded Rail in the South-west Pacific and description of a new subspecies. *Notornis* 29:2;131

Keith Woodley

AND MORE BANDED RAILS - an excerpt from a letter from Brian Chudleigh, photo also Brian Chudleigh

Following a meal and a rest I headed back to the wildlife centre to have a look for the now famous Banded Rail family. We have this species in our local salt marsh just a couple of hundred metres from my home. Local birds have none of the bravado of the Miranda family, it is a lucky day if you manage the faintest glimpse of one sneaking through the mangroves, then usually in the very early morning or late afternoon and only at low tide when the mud is exposed.

Sure enough, the fab 5 were out and feeding, in bursts anyway with up to 3 of them at times visible and this was very early afternoon. I set up the camera, tripod and 600mm lens beside the pond, squatted behind it with hat pulled over my eyes and face screened behind the camera. Soon I was rewarded with glimpses of 2 of the birds steadily making their way around the edge of the rushes on the far side of the pond, heading in my direction. My anticipation was rapidly flattened when an elderly

gentleman came padding up to ask if I had succeeded in obtaining some good photos at Kaiua earlier in the day. My quarry went scarping back in the distant rushes and out of sight! After the frustrations of the morning my mood turned rather black! I am afraid I was rather short with him!

Fortunately it was not long before the rails were out feeding again but it took quite some time before they headed back in my direction. There was a plus in this delay, the sun was dropping as the afternoon progressed and when the birds approached within close enough range that wonderful eye glint which brings life to bird portraits was clear and shining on most shots. It was the juveniles which had the least fear. They had been brought up with humans about them and one of them actually ran across the pond towards me and disappeared below the bank right in front, barely 2 metres from me. At one stage one of the juveniles stopped to preen in the middle of the pond, then arched its wings over its head giving me several nice images. One of the adults stopped for a time directly opposite me and stood there posing beautifully, so close it almost filled my camera screen.



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Founders Luncheon:

The event on the 20th February 2005 was the first time that the Trust had organised outside caterers to provide the food for an event at a Centre. This event was to launch the 30th year celebrations. This was an opportunity for those members who had been involved in earlier years to come together and share experiences from the past and also give their thoughts on the future directions. The event was well patronised with 64 people seated for luncheon and several arriving after lunch, including Mrs Dorothy Mulvey and her husband. She was the very first life member of the Trust, signing up 30 years ago but as she was 57 at the time she did hesitate as she wondered whether she would get value for money!!

During the luncheon several people paid tribute to the founders and gave an insight into the background of some of the major events during the Trusts history. This generated much discussion as memories of the difficult periods were remembered and the drive and foresight of the appropriate individuals to overcome those obstacles.

The event was very ably organised by Nanette McLauchlan who had spent the previous 6 months making the necessary arrangements. Unfortunately Nanette became ill early in the year and was not able to attend on the day. This was most unfortunate as we know that she had been so looking forward to meeting the people associated with the early days of the Trust and hearing their tales.

Judy Piesse, the very first secretary of the Trust, had prepared a folder containing various cuttings that she had acquired from newspapers relating to the Trust's earlier activities. This also brought back memories of some of those earlier events. Judy would however still like any other members that have newspaper cuttings to forward her copies and even photos from the early days of the Trust to ensure that copies are retained.

This was a highly successful event, perhaps a little different from our normal informal activities but did provide the opportunity for many old

friends to re-meet and renew acquaintances. Well done Nanette, and we hope that you fully recover soon.

Autumn Migration Day:

The guest speaker at the autumn migration day in March was David Melville from Nelson. David for many years was the Director of World Wildlife Fund for Nature in Hong Kong and was responsible for the construction and development of the Mai Po Reserve.

He spoke to us relating to the recent outbreaks of bird flu, particularly in the South East Asian region, and the part that migratory birds may play in its spread and the dangers that there may be for a country such as New Zealand. This is clearly a complicated issue and the role that birds may play in its spread is little understood and in many cases birds are receiving much of the blame with very little supporting evidence.

At this stage it would appear that the disease requires three vectors and these are domestic poultry in close association with pigs and humans. At this time the disease requires all three vectors to complete its transfer to humans.

The real danger as described by David is when the virus mutates to the stage that it is able to be passed from human to human without the other vectors. The key message that David left us with was that it is not a matter if this will happen but when. At that time with the ability for people to move rapidly around the world the virus will be spread very quickly and there could be very dire consequences. The topicality of this talk was shown as on TV the same evening there was a programme which contained virtually the same message.

On a more positive note, the research that has taken place so far has shown that while migratory birds can carry the virus there is very little evidence that they are actively spreading it along their migration routes. Ducks and geese, in particular, are carriers of the virus and some populations of shorebirds have been found to contain a high percentage of the virus. However it is unclear whether they are carrying it into that area or whether they are picking it

up on the local feeding grounds. Testing has begun in New Zealand but the tests so far have revealed that there is no incidence of the virus in shorebirds in New Zealand.

In summary this was an excellent talk on a topic of which most of us had very little prior understanding but the high level of questioning indicated that David had imparted that knowledge in a way that the bulk of us understood.

Wader ID Course:

Early in April a weekend course was held to help a small group unravel the mysteries of identifying waders. For the uninitiated these are very difficult species as they are all similar in colour and often of similar sizes.

This course was well organised by Eila Lawton along with several of the more experienced wader people associated with the Trust. A more detailed report on this event is included elsewhere within the newsletter. The success of this event is a further indication of the ability of the Trust to organise and run such events and gives some indication of the demand and the opportunities that exist in the future. However care needs to be taken by recognising that the success relies on the skill of Eila in organising these events and the voluntary time that she and the tutors put into them, which is also the reason that they can be run at such a low cost.

The Ngati Paoa Trust:

On behalf of the Miranda Trust I was pleased to receive an invitation to the launch of The Ngati Paoa Trust which is the new governing entity for the Iwi that are mainly based around the western shores of the Firth of Thames and the inner Gulf Islands. This event was held at the Wharekawa Marae just north of Kaiaua on the 9th April 2005.

The Iwi have been working for a number of years to bring unity within the various factions and to establish an overall governing entity. With that base now organised Ngati Paoa intend to work towards achieving their vision; to be recognised as the finest Maori Authority in the world.

The Miranda Trust and The Ngati Paoa Trust will have many common

aspirations for the Firth of Thames area and there will be many opportunities to work closely together. We look forward to learning and developing together into the future.

Assistance For Keith:

As mentioned on previous occasions, the Trust Council has been exploring ways to provide some assistance to Keith, particularly during the busy period of the year. The Trust was also concerned that Keith was effectively on call seven days a week and was getting no time away from the Centre.

The Trust has been blessed with a number of keen volunteers who assist and fill in when Keith is away and we are thankful for those people. Kathy Barrow has recently taken over the task of organising the Friends of Miranda and there have been two recent training courses for volunteers to assist at the Centre. The more people that we have who can undertake that task the easier it would be for everyone.

The Council has also taken the complementary measure of making arrangements to pay an assistant on two days a week. In making this decision the Council wishes to emphasise that the paid assistant will not replace the need for volunteers as the main intention is to allow Keith to have two days away from the Centre each week. Having a permanent part time worker also provides some continuity and will make the role of the volunteer more useful in having someone else within the Centre available for guidance.

The funding for the additional person is coming from the interest on the Bequest Fund which is being used as a type of endowment fund.

Chinese Visit:

Between the 7th April and the 11th April the Trust hosted a six person delegation from China at the Centre. This delegation was in response to the invitation that I made to the Vice-Mayor of Dandong City during the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2004. The delegation consisted of the following officials:

Zhao Changfu, the Vice-Mayor of Dandong Government (a city of 2.4

million people); **Lu Bingyu**, Head of Kuandian Manchu Self-Governing County (an area containing 400 thousand people); **Yu Liansheng**, the Director General of the Dandong Environment Protection Bureau; **Yu Zhenbin**, Director General of the Dandong Environment Protection Bureau; **Yan Meifang**, the Director of the Dandong Yalu River Wetland Nature Reserve; **Chen Kelin**, the Director General of Wetlands International – China Division.

The intention was that this visit would show the senior officials how the Miranda Centre operates and is utilised. The concept of having volunteers operating such a Centre and undertaking research such as happens at Miranda is not normal in China and neither is the emphasis on providing educational materials relating to nature. We wanted to show these officials the benefits that could accrue from utilising both of those resources.

It is noteworthy to record that within half a day of being at the Shorebird Centre the Vice-Mayor had already phoned his office in China and arranged a budget of the equivalent of \$150,000 US dollars to be made available to provide education material in the Management Centre within Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve (YJNNR). That is the sort of outcome that we were hoping to achieve as it is only by being exposed on a personal level that the full benefits of display material can be appreciated.

A cannon netting session was also organised to provide hands-on experience for the officials, some of whom had not spent time in that type of field situation previously. We were pleased that the Vice-Mayor took the opportunity to handle a live bird even after initially indicating that he would not take part. We understand that he now acknowledges that as one of the highlights of his visit to New Zealand.

During the visit the two officials who were present from the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve met with those Council members of the Trust who were available to discuss a joint

programme for the next 12 month period. The key outcomes of that meeting were:

1. If necessary the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is to provide support for the YJNNR Officials in obtaining banding and flagging materials.

2.YJNNR would like the MNT to provide some thoughts on how they could provide the type of education information that is available at Miranda at the Gushan Management Centre.

3.YJNNR will provide Miranda with information relating to their reserve so that we can prepare a new display for the Shorebird Centre outlining the importance of that area.

4.The main outcome of the joint meeting however was a proposal for Miranda to host four Chinese Management Reserve students in New Zealand for periods of 3 months each to gain experience working with people and in providing education services at the Miranda Centre. These students are to come from both Wetlands International and the YJNNR and will be a wonderful opportunity to provide direct hands on experience for those that will be working on the ground in China. The final details of the exchange are still being finalised and there will be more to report in the near future.

The Vice-Mayor of DanDong City issued an invitation for Miranda to send a team to work within the Reserve to undertake a shorebird survey in April 2006. The logistics of sending that team will be considered by the Council over the coming months but we believe that it is essential that the momentum be maintained as there is now much greater evidence of the importance of that reserve to the godwit on their migration from New Zealand to the breeding grounds.

While this was a relatively brief visit by the Chinese Officials to Miranda I believe that it was highly successful and will provide a platform for further research and information exchange.

David Lawrie
Chairman

THE OSNZ COLUMN

The Bird Distribution Mapping Scheme

I mentioned in my article in *MNT News* 51 (November 2003) that this scheme is designed to obtain information on the distribution of birds in New Zealand, and their habitats, in the 5-year period 1999-2004.

The fieldwork associated with the scheme has been completed. The scheme has introduced many people, both members and a large number who are not, to new countryside and birds. As at February 2005, over 1000 observers had completed a total of 29,500 record sheets which equates to some 560,000+ individual species reports. This is a very significant result compared with the last mapping scheme that produced just under 19,000 record cards over the 10-year period 1969-1979. It is hoped that data from the present scheme will be entered by May 2005, with a draft of the final atlas being ready for the Society's AGM in Hamilton the following month.

As at the 25,000 sheet mark at the end of August 2004, some 3,100 squares, which is about 94% of the total landmass of New Zealand's three main islands and associated inshore islands, had at least one record from any season. The seasonal coverage was summer (76%), autumn (65%), winter (60%), and spring (68%). The average number

of species recorded per sheet remained steady at 19-20, with one sheet containing 72 species. The best observing team averaged about 32 species per sheet. Some 15 teams had returned 46% of the records. One of those teams had visited more than 1050 squares, which is a third of New Zealand.

The 15 most commonly observed species as at the 25,000 sheet mark were (% of sheets where recorded): Blackbird (73%), Starling (67%), Australasian Harrier (65%), Australian Magpie (63%), Chaffinch (62%), House Sparrow (61%), Spur-winged Plover (59%), Fantail, Goldfinch, Welcome Swallow (56%), Silvereye, Paradise Shelduck, Grey Warbler (53%), Song Thrush, Black-backed Gull (52%).

The information in this article was taken from reports by Chris Robertson, convenor of the Bird Distribution Mapping Scheme, that appeared in the Society's quarterly magazine *Southern Bird*, No. 19 (September 2004) and No. 21 (March 2005).

David Medway,
President,
Ornithological Society of NZ.

SUMMING UP A NEW MIRANDA SHOREBIRD CENTRE COURSE

Totting up at the end of Miranda's first Wader Identification course in early April, I noted:

11 participants, ranging from experienced birders to raw beginners
16 wader species (and a smudgy stilt)

2 experts on tap for each of the 2 days

8+ on a scale of 10 the average ranking for improved ID skills.*

All involved agreed it added up to an excellent weekend.

The unusually high species count was enhanced by a 23-27 strong flock of Pacific Golden Plover, a comparatively unusual visitor to Miranda. These, plus the different godwit and sandpiper species, gave ample practice in the finer points of wader identification, under the expert guidance of Keith Woodley, Adrian Riegen and Gillian Vaughan.

The Wader Identification course arose in response to repeated requests over the years from participants on the annual January field course. Three of the ID group were field course people but the new short course attracted others as well, including some who could not so easily commit to a full week.

The success of this course means we will include it in next season's programme.

The Wader Art Workshop in October is the next event on the course schedule.

Eila Lawton

*Oh yes – number 1 came up too – lunch was delayed while the chef added *Limosa haemastica* to his New Zealand list!

ID Course Participants



The waders refused to stand still for a photo, so Keith had to provide drawings.



The people from left to right rear Eila Lawton, Keith Woodley 3rd row John Winters, Xenia Meier, Shelley Heiss-Dunlop 2nd row Adrienne Meier, Jan Hoverd, Phil Hammond, Steve Hayns front Maria Staples-Page, Cherry Gordon, Laurie Hoverd absent Steve Simpson, Nigel Milius (cook)

For Presentation to the AGM

Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Treasurer's report for year ended 31st December 2004

I have much pleasure presenting my report for the year ended 31st December 2004.

The overall financial position of the Trust is slightly better than it was in 2003 despite a considerable increase in building running costs. Increased costs of running the centre as the building ages are to be expected, but in addition to this many items which have reached the end of their economic life, have been replaced. Where possible, we have replaced 2nd hand appliances with new ones as the cost of repair would have gone a long way towards their replacement.

Subscriptions: Income from subscriptions amounted to over \$15,000 again this year. Our membership is constant which is to be expected in our organisation with some not wishing to renew subscriptions and new members joining all the time. Len Taylor has taken over membership control and has reminded members who have not renewed to do so, to ensure they received their quarterly

magazine. Income from subscriptions continues to exceed magazine publication and distribution costs.

Donations and Grants: Grant income has been greatly reduced this year mainly because we currently have no qualifying projects in the pipeline. However donations increased by over 6%. This additional support that we receive from members and visitors alike is very much appreciated and contributes a substantial amount to our operating income.

Education: The income from this activity has increased slightly from last year reversing a downward trend. The quality of the educational presentation is well known amongst education providers and a large number and range of school groups are regular attendees. We have been able to offer guided walks to the shellbank without closing the centre thanks to some extra help from volunteers. The cost of the presentation and shellbank experience has been kept to a reasonable level and it is anticipated that further school groups will participate in the future.

Accommodation: Although accommodation facilities continue to be well used, there has been a drop in income when compared with last year but it is intended that tariffs will continue to be maintained at an affordable level. The Council is continually investigating ways and means of improving the accommodation, having recently renewed bedding, improved facilities in the kitchens, planned for the upgrading of items that need replacement.

Relievers: It is a pleasure to report that progress has been made in providing relievers for Keith – at times he has been unable to get adequate time off but thanks to Kathy and her efforts in obtaining volunteers to relieve Keith he is getting better time off from the Centre. This year we intend to formalise an arrangement to get a regular two days off per week for him.

Shop Trading: The shop continues to be one of our main sources of income. Our mark up on goods purchased is competitive and some of the products that we offer for sale these days are quite expensive to source. However, as the old catch phrase goes, no one ever regretted buying quality, and there has been a conscious effort to improve the quality and standard of the goods offered for sale. Some of the books Keith has sourced are quite technical but it is noticeable when relieving at the Centre how well they are appreciated by people who are looking for that type of publication. At the other end of the scale the range of excellent children's books always sell well. It pays to always have a look around in the shop as there are often new "gems" of books, clothing, postcards and soft toys that may not have been there last time you looked!

Equipment and Facilities Upgrade: During the year the following items have either been fully replaced or upgraded:

AGM and nominations for Council

The Annual General meeting of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust will be held at the Shorebird Centre on Sunday May 15th 2005 at 10 am.

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 twelfth 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 23rd 2004

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 31/12/2005

General Business

Pillows, duvets and covers, sheets and pillowcases.

Crockery (progressive replacement of any cracked or chipped crockery)

Cooking hardware

Stove in kitchen (now user friendly domestic stove)

Microwaves

Hot water urn

Telescope tripods

There is an ongoing programme to check for items that are “past their use

by date” but anything that needs replacement will be looked at if its replacement is within our budget.

Acknowledgements: I wish to thank all members of Council who have helped out during the year, our dedicated group of volunteers who make the whole system run smoothly, Keith for his untiring dedication and support and David for putting up with us all. Without the assurance that I can

call on assistance whenever it is needed my position would be much more difficult.

Adoption of Accounts: It is my pleasure to propose that the Income and Expenditure Account, and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31st December 2004, as circulated, be adopted.

Ashley Reid
Treasurer 14 April 2005.

Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 31 December 2004

Income		Expenditure	
2003	2004	2003	2004
15,491	15,849	3,736	0
17,040	18,116	1,088	2,465
3,424	3,547	2,664	480
		9,757	9,734
13,629	18,365	2,957	4,088
0	522	3,285	3,850
23,015	21,136	1,452	2,986
4,329	5,725	1,702	2,615
4,532	3,885	14,904	17,694
128,892	0	31,473	33,500
200	0	167	203
		1,734	3,481
		1,794	0
210,552	87,145	76,713	5,000
			Total Expenses
			86,096
			Surplus for year transferred to Accumulated Funds
		133,839	1,049
210,552	87,145	210,552	87,145

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2004

2003	2004	2003	2004
Life Membership Reserve Fund	14798		
Life Memberships	1400	131,786	134,869
	16198	11,901	7,498
14,798	1480	143,687	142,367
			Total Investments
6,653	7,561		Cash at bank - 11254.27
		8,675	less due to Sibson fund <u>200.00</u>
		20,551	11,054
		270,609	21,549
716,160	716,160	293,909	270,609
	1,049		Land - Centre and East Coast Road
			293,909
		0	GST
			0
737,611	739,488	737,431	739,488

For Presentation to the AGM

MINUTES OF THE 29th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST HELD AT THE SHOREBIRD CENTRE ON SUNDAY 23rd MAY 2004 AT 1300 hrs.

PRESENT:

The Chairman (David Lawrie), Acting Secretary (Pam Agnew), Treasurer (Ashley Reid) and about 70 others.

APOLOGIES: Will Perry, Alison Stanes, Bev Woolley, Brian Woolley, Ken Pankhurst, Dorothy Bagnall, Barbara Blyth, Nancy Payne, Betty Seddon.

APOLOGIES ACCEPTED (David Stonex/Judy Piesse).

The Chairman, David Lawrie, welcomed all members present and particularly past Chairman John Brown and past Chairman Stuart Chambers and past Secretary, Judy Piesse and past Secretary Gwenda Pulham.

MINUTES:

The Minutes of the 28th AGM held on 11th May 2003 had been published in the May 2004 edition of "Miranda News".

The minutes were APPROVED *nem con* (Nanette McLauchlan/John Brown).

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES: None

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

The Chairman, David Lawrie, reiterated some of the points made in his written report published in the May 2004 issue of Miranda News. The role of the Trust has substantially altered in recent years. The Council believes it is going in the right direction. Keith Woodley & Adrian Riegen attended the Wader Study conference in Canberra last December. The recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in China was taken very seriously by the Chinese with highlights broadcast live throughout China. Land purchase: Currently there is no urgency to develop the site. Council is investigating options to swap for lower lying land in the future. Activities: Last years speakers included Bill Brownell; Jack Grant-Mackie; Paul Harrison; The Minister of Conservation, Chris Carter, & Warren Lee-Long. The Field Course organized by Eila Lawton was once again competently run (APPLAUSE). The success of the Field Course is due to the facilities at the Centre and the many volunteers giving their time. The NZ Dotterel training course was run to gauge interest and will be re-run as weekend courses during the next year. The Chairman thanked the Treasurer, Ashley Reid, for his work. Substantial bequests were received during the year and a "Bequest package" is now available. DOC have been planting more host plants for mistletoe. They will be trying to seed the mistletoe onto the newly planted trees. Aquaculture in the Firth of Thames: The Trust has supported the Kaiaua community but have otherwise remained remote from the discussions. The Trust needs to be vigilant but, until the effects are known, need to have a

precautionary approach. The Trust hosted a luncheon for 170 people for the World Wetlands Day in February and the Chairman thanked all the helpers. It is because of the highly committed and dedicated people of Miranda that we are so successful and should all feel proud of this. The Chairman acknowledged that Keith Woodley is the face of the Trust that leads to the public success of the Centre. He thanked Ashley Reid, Will Perry, Gillian Vaughan and all Council members that share the load. He also thanked the gardeners, the helpers in the shop and the people who run the Centre in Keith's absence.

Moved (David Lawrie / Ashley Reid) that the Chairman's Report be adopted – CARRIED *nem con*.

DISCUSSION following Chairman's Report

1. John Brown congratulated the Chairman, David Lawrie on all his work (APPLAUSE). David responded by saying that it is a multi-person operation.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

The Treasurer, Ashley Reid, formally presented his report on the finances of the Trust as published in the May 2004 issue of Miranda News. His report included the Income & Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet for the year ended 31.12.2003. Development of the Mizen property will be subject to attention in the future. Subscriptions are up on last year. Donations and grants continue to be a major source of income. The education facility continues to be well used by schools, however the Auckland, Waikato & Bay of Plenty visits are slightly down on last year. Accommodation usage is similar to last year. Shop trading is doing well. A new PC was purchased during the year which has been used for new display panels in the Centre. The Treasurer, Ashley Reid, acknowledged the assistance which he receives from Keith Woodley and various volunteers.

Moved (Ashley Reid / Eila Lawton) that the Treasurer's Report be adopted – CARRIED *nem con*.

DISCUSSION following Treasurer's Report

1. Chris Thompson asked what "publicity" covered. Ashley Reid explained that "publicity" includes brochures, membership brochures, Coromandel/Seabird Coast advertising column, local productions, birding network, anything promoting the Trust as a whole.
2. Judy Piesse asked whether the membership application asks "Where did you hear about Miranda"? Gillian Vaughan and Nanette McLauchlan are looking into this.

3. Eila Lawton asked whether there was any cost involved to provide the website. Ashley Reid confirmed that the cost was within the PC cost. This could be apportioned to publicity in the future.
4. Stuart Chambers asked if "rental" was the land grazing. Ashley Reid confirmed that it was.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Treasurer – Ashley Reid elected unopposed.
Secretary – William Perry elected unopposed.
Auditor – Richard Dew no longer wishes to continue this role. It was proposed that "The Treasurer have authority from the AGM to negotiate to arrange a new auditor". Ashley Reid/Gwenda Pulham. The motion was CARRIED *nem con*.

10 nominees for 10 positions on Council, namely David Lawrie, Kathy Barrow, Eila Lawton, Adrian Riegen, Gillian Vaughan, Nigel Milius, Len Taylor, Phil Battley, Nanette McLauchlan, Sue Reid.

ALL ELECTED UNOPPOSED.

David Lawrie paid tribute to the departing Council member, Alison Stanes, who has taken on the role as Gardening Co-ordinator.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Council proposed that the subscription rates for membership of Miranda Naturalists' Trust be revised to the following:

Individual Member: \$35 from 01.01.2005;
Family Member: \$40 from 01.01.2005;
Overseas Member: \$40 from 01.01.2005; Life Member (under 50): \$1050 effective immediately; Life Member (over 50): \$525 effective immediately.

Moved (Ashley Reid / David Stonex).

Discussion: There was a question from the floor as to how the membership was going. Ashley Reid confirmed that there are currently 732 members which is steady. 205 life members make up a substantial percentage. As people are living longer we need to ensure that Life membership is not a burden on the Trust. The motion was CARRIED *nem con*.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

- 1) Aquaculture in the Firth of Thames. Kathy Walsh from the Kaiaua Citizens & Ratepayers Association (KCRA) is concerned with the Auckland Regional Council's lack of treating the Firth as an ecosystem and is asking the Trust to formulate a policy to talk to the ARC. Comments from the floor were that the Trust is an interested party and should be intensively active in the talks. Bill Brownell and the KCRA requested a meeting with the Trust council. Phil Battley, also a member of the KCRA said that the ARC have limited information on the Miranda end of the Firth and he believes that it would be appropriate for the Trust to have a role in negotiations. A motion was put

to the meeting: Council to endeavour to ensure that no action is taken in the Firth of Thames which would detrimentally affect birdlife and the visual appearance of the marine area. Alison Chambers/Judy Piesse. The motion was CARRIED *nem con*.

- 2) David Lawrie acknowledged the work done by David Baker on plans for a new auditorium. David Lawrie welcomed any suggestions from members to improve the building.
- 3) Eila Lawton mentioned the working bee to be held on 28th August 2004 and requested volunteers.
- 4) Stuart Chambers asked what was the future direction of the Trust. David Lawrie replied that one of the key objectives is to keep the shorebirds coming to Miranda. This means safeguarding the important staging sites like Yalu Jiang. Another important sister site could be in Alaska and we need to establish a relationship with the local native people. The Mizzen property was purchased for the purpose of setting up a roost that can be managed for waders.
- 5) Mangrove control: John Brown queried whether anything could be done about the increasing mangroves. David Lawrie replied that work was ongoing to look at long term strategies but mangroves are a protected species and are a symptom of problems such as siltation. Creating artificial roosts will give waders an alternative site.
- 6) Eila Lawton queried whether we can talk to DOC about changing their management practices of the land opposite the centre eg: grazing. DOC only started doing management when the Trust Council put pressure on them.
- 7) David Lawrie asked the floor whether members were happy with the direction of the Trust, especially the involvement in China. This was confirmed, all members in favour. Stuart Chambers said we need to keep an eye on finances. David Lawrie replied that much of the recent trip to China was financed by the participants themselves.
- 8) Judy Piesse applauded the Council on the increasing educational role.
- 9) Kathy Walsh advised that the Franklin City Council is relaxing dog control on beaches and a strong submission should be sent to them.

The meeting closed at 1433 hrs.

Following the meeting, David Lawrie introduced guest speaker, Adrian Riegen, to give a talk on the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in China.

Websites to Check Out

Shorebirds and Climate Change

The British Ornithological Union held a meeting on Coastal Birds and Climate Change. The proceedings of this meeting were published in *Ibis* in September 2004. *Ibis* has made available on-line the entire contents of that issue of the journal. You can read each article on line or download them to read later. Issues with climate change and migratory shorebirds in particular are discussed in several of the papers. Visit www.ibis.ac.uk and look under free to view articles.

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network

A recent summary showing a decline in Red Knot populations in South America is a timely reminder why the MNT is so interested in being involved in China. They suggest that the problems at the Delaware Bay staging site in the US are responsible for a dramatic decline in the numbers of Red Knots present in Tierra del Fuego during the non-breeding period. Visit www.manomet.org/WHSRN and look under Latest News.

Upcoming Conferences

The **OSNZ Annual General Meeting** is on Queens Birthday weekend (3-6 June), this year in Hamilton. Programme highlights include the field trip and AGM on Saturday the 4th and the Scientific Day on Sunday the 5th.

The third biennial **Australasian Ornithological Conference** is to be held in Blenheim, New Zealand between December 6th and 10th 2005 it will focus on the exchange of information and ideas on the ornithology of this region

Following on from that the **Australasian Shorebird Conference** will be held in Nelson, New Zealand between 11th and 13th December 2005. This conference will focus on the ecology and conservation of shorebirds in the Australasian and Pacific region.

The website www.osnz.org.nz has full details of all of these conferences.

More Disabled Birds



A quick update on some disabled birds as reported in the last issue of the MNT News.

The Red Knot with no feet shown in that issue was seen again at the end of March, still at the Karaka shellbanks on

the Manukau Harbour. It is still looking healthy, however showed no signs of breeding plumage, and did not look nearly heavy enough to migrate. Ray Clough has since told me of a NZ Dotterel (affectionately known as Stumpy) who has lived for at least eight years with no feet.

This photo of a Bar-tailed Godwit was taken at the Avon-Heathcote Estuary in December 2004. How long the cockle stayed attached to the godwits foot is unknown.

Gillian Vaughan
Photo Ian Southey

MUDDY FEET LAUNCH

As both a Ramsar Site and an East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Network Site the Firth of Thames is well protected, right? Well, maybe not.

“Although a significant portion of this coast, extending from Kaiaua in the west around to the Waibou River in the southeast, was officially recognized as an internationally important habitat by its designation as a Ramsar Site in January 1990, no integrated ecosystem research was carried out in the area either before or after the designation, and no specific national protective status has been granted.” It is mentioned in policies and plans developed under the RMA by local and regional governments, but this does not necessarily mean specific protection for the Ramsar Site.

This is one of the difficulties highlighted in *Muddy Feet: Firth of Thames Ramsar Site Update 2004**, which was officially launched at the Shorebird Centre on 1 April. Edited by Bill Brownell, it was produced under the auspices of Ecoquest and funded through a foundation grant from Environment Waikato with assistance also from Hauraki District Council and Thames Coromandel District Council.

At the launch Ria Brejaart, co-editor of an earlier draft of the report, referred to the particular difficulties associated with any comprehensive study of the Firth of Thames. The region falls within the boundaries of two Regional Councils, four District Councils and two Department of Conservation conservancies. She described the mire of issues and agencies relating to the area, with information scattered everywhere.

Clearly there was a need to draw together all known information and policy data before any coordinated action could occur.

The 198 page report gathers virtually all known information under one cover, with chapters on the following: Hydrology; Vegetation; Terrestrial invertebrates and mammalian predators; Mangroves; Birds of the Miranda coast; Estuarine fish, Fisheries and marine farming; Benthic ecology; Land tenure/Statutory management;

Raising conservation awareness; Risks, threats and current research; Firth of Thames Ramsar Site Workshop report; Conclusions and recommendations.

The report highlights four features of the Firth of Thames Ramsar Site (FOTRS) that make it distinctive and worthy of special protection:

- Migratory waders and the intertidal feeding zones and coastal roosting areas that sustain them – particularly internationally significant numbers of Wrybill, Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot and SIPO,
- High primary productivity of waters, with robust benthic invertebrate communities and pelagic food chain that support rich diversity of fish, shellfish and bird species,
- Chenier plain – unique geological feature that causes coastal land building through advancing stone/gravel and shell banks,
- Rapid progradation of coastal mangrove forest and associated sediment deposition, causing emergence of a new ecosystem, creating habitat and nutrient supply to support an apparently increasing diversity and abundance of invertebrate and vertebrate species.

But while the international ecological importance of the FOTRS has been clearly established, as well as recognised by the government of New Zealand, it is not clear where it fits in our national policy and planning structures (and our historical, heritage and biodiversity values) for two main reasons:

1. Extreme modification to the vast wetland that originally occupied surrounding land, and the continuing effects of ecosystem engineering on the coastal environment covered by the Ramsar Site,
2. Complexity of overlapping statutory management structures and ownership/ custodianship issues, together with vague national policy concerning the site.

Current policy and planning structures both nationally and locally are limited by scarcity of knowledge of physical, chemical and biological processes at

work. The report identifies a clear need to refocus research to what is physically happening (particularly with regard to sedimentation), what is ecologically significant, and how the two can best be managed through improved policy and planning tools to fairly serve the cultural, economic and conservation interests involved.

Recommendations of the report include:

*Nominate the site for World Heritage site status.

*An ecosystem-wide management plan, in which catchment, streams, coastal, and marine areas should all be treated as one.

*Balanced protective measures – with effective consultation and empowerment, that could include esplanade reserves, scenic and scientific reserves, rahui, maitaitai, and taiapure, marine protected areas, and world heritage status.

*Development of sustainable recreation, tourism and commercial enterprises, with more and better interpretation and facilities, and stronger district coastal zones management strategies.

Among those attending the launch of the report were Environment Waikato and Auckland Regional Council officials, Franklin Mayor Mark Ball, Hauraki District Mayor John Tregida, councillors from several districts, Waikato Conservator Greg Martin and Beau Fraser, Auckland Conservancy area manager. Auckland University, Landcare Research and ECO were among other organisations represented. From those who spoke it became clear there is a growing level of interest in the Firth of Thames Ramsar Site. Recent changes to the statutory responsibilities of local governments, along with changes on the councils themselves at the last election, all suggest a more positive approach to environmental management and planning can be expected.

There is also a growing consensus that any ecosystem-wide management plan should encompass strategies for the

entire catchment of the Firth of Thames, extending from the Coromandel and Kaimai Ranges, around the Hauraki Plains to the eastern slopes of the Hunua Ranges. Given the myriad of local and regional governments and other agencies within the catchment, an overall coordinating

role is essential. Such a role should, in the view of many people, fall within the responsibilities of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Forum. In the five years since it was established under the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park Act 1999, the Forum appears to have achieved little apart from producing a State of

the Environment Report in 2004. A number of people expressed the view that an integrated management plan for the entire Firth of Thames catchment could be the perfect vehicle to activate the Forum and provide it with focus.

** Muddy Feet is available at the Shorebird Centre for \$24.95*

Keith Woodley

Adult song thrush feeding

Pat Greenfield lives in the rural countryside near New Plymouth. Her property is surrounded by pastureland that is used for dairying. There is an extensive area of grass around most of her residence that is mown from time to time and serves as a large lawn. The lawn contains abundant earthworms that provide food for various birds that live in the immediate area, principally for Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) and Song Thrushes (*Turdus philomelos*). Small shelter trees and shrubs that grow on outer boundaries of the lawn provide nesting sites for some of the resident birds.

During the 2003/2004 breeding season a resident pair of Blackbirds first nested on the property in September and successfully raised two young as a result. On 19 November, Mrs Greenfield noticed that they had a second brood under way. Unfortunately, the male of the pair vanished about three days later when the young were still in the nest. The female carried on feeding the young that left the nest during the early morning of 24 November. A few days later, Mrs Greenfield noticed that two fledglings had survived. The female fed them in the nearby shrubbery, or on the lawn.

Early on 13 December, Mrs Greenfield was "amazed" to see an adult thrush feeding earthworms to both juvenile Blackbirds, an activity that she had never seen or heard of before. During the course of that day, the juvenile Blackbirds were fed "in rotation" by both the adult female Blackbird and the adult thrush. However, by the

following day the thrush had completely taken over the task of feeding the juvenile Blackbirds.

I visited the property on 19 December and observed an adult Song Thrush spend most of a continuous period of 4½ hours actively collecting earthworms and feeding them to two well-grown juvenile Blackbirds. I was not able to tell whether the thrush was male or female because it is not possible to sex adult Song Thrushes reliably in the field. I saw the thrush feed earthworms to one or other of the juvenile Blackbirds on the lawn at least two dozen times during the period I had it under observation. However, it fed them many more times than that while I was there because it also took many beakfuls of earthworms into adjacent shrubbery or other vegetation where I could not see what was going on, but I could hear the juvenile Blackbirds calling from those places every time the thrush arrived there with food. On two or three occasions, one or other of the juvenile Blackbirds, and on one occasion both of them together, flew a short distance to the thrush and sought food. However, on every other occasion, the thrush collected food and took it to the juvenile Blackbirds. The juvenile Blackbirds did not take any notice of other Blackbirds feeding on the lawn, nor did those other Blackbirds take any notice of them, despite their sometimes close proximity. I did not see the thrush feed the juvenile Blackbirds on anything but earthworms.

juvenile blackbirds

Mrs Greenfield last saw the thrush feed the juvenile Blackbirds on 30 December. It had been feeding them for a continuous period of 17 days by then. Thereafter, the juvenile Blackbirds were left to fend for themselves.

I do not know why this adult female Blackbird chose to abandon the feeding of her offspring in favour of the thrush. It is not as if she had a new clutch with a new partner that required her attention. She seems to have remained alone and was not seen to mate again until 28 December, some 15 days after she left her young in the care of the thrush. On the other hand, I do not know why the thrush should adopt the juvenile Blackbirds and continue to feed them thereafter as if they were its own offspring. Perhaps the thrush had lost its own young shortly before.

I have no idea how common, or otherwise, the relationship recorded here might actually be in nature, except to say that a quite extensive search of the published literature has not revealed any records of adult Song Thrushes feeding juvenile Blackbirds in the wild. I am therefore grateful to Mrs Greenfield for bringing her observations to my attention. It is hoped that publication of this record will stimulate others to look more closely at the behaviour and relationships of some of the common birds around us, and to properly record and publish anything unusual that they see.

David Medway

30th Anniversary Lunch

The collection of people gathered for lunch at Miranda on 20 February were an interesting bunch. The average age was undoubtedly towards the higher end of the scale, but then so was the degree of institutional memory. For among our number were former chairmen, secretaries and treasurers of Miranda Naturalists' Trust. Included also were long-time members, some from the very beginnings of the Trust. With the arrival of Dorothy Mulvey we also had one of our earliest life members.

The lunch was held to commemorate 30 years since the formation of the Trust. Much has happened since then, and the Trust today in many respects differs markedly from the organisation established in 1975. But the basic aims and objectives remain close to those set out in the original constitution. Current chairman and former Treasurer David Lawrie spoke of this, and of the early gatherings at the limeworks or the old Miranda hall. Original chairman John Brown told us of the earliest origins of the Trust, and the part played by his late wife Beth. Former treasurer Russell Thomas spoke of the early fund raising and the major hiccup that occurred with the collapse of Securitibank in 1977. While the Trust eventually got back most of the money that had been invested, it did serve to delay building plans.

Unfortunately Stuart and Alison Chambers could not be present, however we were all reminded of the significance of Stuart's term

as chairman, during which the building we have today was conceived and constructed. John Gale spoke of his early time as manager and then chairman, a period during which the Shorebird Centre evolved into the present facility.

Former secretary Judy Piesse put together a file of press clippings which chronicles the many events and activities with which Miranda has been associated over the years. This file is on view at the centre, and further additions to it are most welcome. Also on view are a collection of photo montage posters depicting various aspects of the Trust – from its origins to our international outlook today.

The lunch itself was largely instigated and organised by Nanette McLauchlan. Unfortunately Nanette was unable to attend the event, but it nevertheless went off very well. Her choice of caterers in particular proved to be most excellent.

Keith Woodley



It looks like Kareoke! From top to bottom John Gale, Michael Thomas, Judy Piesse, Russell Thomas, David Lawrie, John Brown. Photos Will Perry.

The floral displays (above) were greatly admired. Photo Chris Thompson

Miranda

What a tremendously exciting day it was! Four completely new species sighted and two more confirmed for the record.

What is it that makes a keen birdwatcher? The thrill of seeing a new bird? The opportunity to be out in the open air, to stop and forget civilisation for awhile, the children, tonight's dinner, tomorrow's washing? Perhaps it is the uniqueness of each species, the fascination of their daily lives to be watched and noted, or is it the fact that birds can fly while we earthbound mortals can make but a poor imitation and therefore gaze in wonder at this marvellous creature soaring, hovering twisting and turning in complete harmony with its fellows and the elements? Whatever the reason, possibly a combination of all these ideas, drew sixty men and women out of their daily routine to travel for two hours enclosed in an overwarm bus along all kinds of roads for a too brief time spent, aching arms holding binoculars to straining eyes, gazing first at shags grouped in a dead tree – pied, little black, white-throated and large black, baffling us with identification problems. On to a reedy patchy of water, delicate stepping stilts and a sudden flurry as grey teal take wing, wheeling away in a tight group to a



Notes from John Brown Chairman of the MNS 1975

- 8th March 1976

more private spot. Then to the ultimate, Miranda, where, as Ross Mackenzie so enticingly said, "The Wrybills are awaiting you." These tiny birds, barely eight inches in length, resting on the dried mud, individuals constantly moving about for reasons unknown, and then - the whole flock rising, turning in complete unison so that the wondering watchers see first the upper side of the birds, then a startling white at the turn, every one, towards us. Further along the shellbank a large group of several species, godwits, so soon to commence that amazing journey of ten thousand miles to Siberia, Eastern Curlew, Turnstones and knots along with them, all bound for the north.

There is a magic about that fantastic journey which seems to lessen the fascination of those with smaller ranges seen in company with the travellers or living in nearby hedges and paddocks, Caspian Tern, oystercatcher, Black-backed Gull, Red-billed Gull, right down to the humble sparrow. Nevertheless, this should not be so, as even that humble sparrow has an interesting story to tell, so Ronald Lockley assures us.

Margaret Willis

Ross McKenzie and Ronald Lockley
with a group on the shellbanks
Photo Margaret Willis



When speaking after the thirty year celebration meal I spoke mainly about the people who had supervised and helped build what we have there today. I would like to have said something about the history of birding at Miranda, the first two gentlemen that put Miranda on the birding map of the world, Ross McKenzie and Dick Sibson.

Dick Sibson came to New Zealand from England to teach at Kings Collage in the 1940's. He had an interest in birds in the UK. Petrol was scarce at the time so he rode down to Miranda along the coast on a bike, slept in the old lime works before riding home again. He met Ross in Clevedon when passing through and they teamed up together and later were founding members of OSNZ.

After Beth and I had met David Lawrie at Clarks Beach (he was a school boy and we did not know much about birds) when looking for another place to see birds we met Juliet Urquhart down their road at Karaka. She introduced us to Ross at a South Auckland Ornithological Society meeting at the Fire Station in Papakura around 1965.

It was all on from then. David and Tony Habraken (whom we met soon after that) went out to the birding places and became Ross's scouts. Ross had been blown up in the trenches in the First World War and had one artificial leg. He had difficulty walking, and therefore walked with the aid of a very large stick. He had a very large old brass telescope mounted on a very big wooden tripod. He would direct people out around the birds and when they came back he would tell them what they should have seen there. He took Beth under his wing and taught her everything about the birds while she helped by frequently driving him around. He got her to take over organising South Auckland and later nominated her to the council of the

OSNZ which she later became Chairwomen of, a position she held until she became ill and had to resign.

Beth and Sylvia Reed, who was organising Auckland Region of OSNZ at the time, went out birding together often and first thought about a place to stay overnight at Miranda so birds seen on one tide could be further studied later. We carried this idea on and formed the trust after a meeting in Auckland. Our first efforts met with a lot of frustration and no help from local bodies, DOC (as it was at the time) or OSNZ. We eventually had some money and bought the converted garage in Kaiaua to prove the idea worked until we could do better. This has turned out better than we ever thought it would. Unfortunately both Beth and Sylvia became ill and died before it all happened. Dick Sibson was in hospital and Ross was put in a retirement home in Hamilton when his wife Hetty died.

We started the Sibson fund at a birthday party for Dick which was attended by friends, family, ex-pupils and OSNZ friends to keep his name alive and honour all the good work and encouraging of young members he had done.

Their good work went on because they had helped and encouraged so many younger people to carry on. I just wanted to record some of what happened in the early days leading up to what is there now, more than we ever hoped for. It really is pleasing for those of us who were in at the beginning.



Dick Sibson
Photo Unknown

from the MANAGER

The kingfisher flying parallel with the road fence by the Stilt Ponds, underlined the pattern. It was the first week in April, and the slightest autumnal chill was evident each morning. For several weeks small flocks of godwit and knot had been lifting off into clear, afternoon skies and setting course for north Asia. Flocks of up to 150 Paradise Shelduck could be seen scattered over neighbouring paddocks. Banded Dotterel were increasingly common along the shore. From late October to now kingfishers had been absent from the coastline. The Indian summer continued, week after rainless week, but these avian indicators of seasonal change remained constant.

But this year there was an extraordinary addition to the pattern. Pacific Golden Plover have been few and far between at Miranda in recent years. While flocks are present each summer at several other sites around the country, Miranda is not one of them. So the 27-30 birds that appeared in late March were a surprise. Among them were birds in every stage of pre-nuptial moult, from almost full breeding plumage to complete eclipse. That they were still present over the first weekend of April was quite a bonus for the participants in the Wader I.D. workshop. A regular site for this species is Maketu in the Bay of Plenty and it is thought the Miranda birds may have been from this flock.

Elsewhere in this issue, Widgery Lake features prominently as host to the family of Banded Rail. By mid-March the lakebed was almost completely dry, apart from two large damp patches. The rails of course had by then become regular features in the landscape. Countless times, visitors to the centre would be led toward the ranch sliders in the Sibson Room, and very seldom was there not a rail or two in view within a few minutes. Then on 17 March another bird appeared. A species that is far from uncommon at Miranda, indeed one of the most numerous seasonal visitors, it was nevertheless highly unusual. For it was the first record for Widgery Lake of a knot.

In non-breeding plumage, possibly a juvenile, it stayed for several hours, quietly fossicking about on the lakebed. Like the young rails, it appeared quite unperturbed by people standing on the deck. The bird showed no indication of injury or illness, so what possessed this bird alone to visit the centre remains a mystery.

From time to time I have been fortunate enough to visit other shorebird sites – in Australia, in Taiwan, and in China. In early February I added another to the list. But this was closer to home – literally, in that I grew up in Invercargill. An arm of Bluff Harbour, Awarua Bay is host each year to significant numbers of arctic waders, particularly turnstone. I had last been there as a reluctant participant in a high school field trip. Decades before my conversion to the world of shorebirds, a history book in a warm classroom held more appeal than a windswept saltmarsh on the Southland coast. Now I relished the opportunity to be back there, on splendid tidal flats, bordered by the coastal shrubland of the Tiwai Peninsula. Not only was I in the company of godwit and turnstone, but other species rarely or never seen at Miranda. Here were Redpoll and Pipit, Fernbird and Stewart Island Dotterel.

A group of us had travelled south to assist the Nelson branch of the NZWSG with bird banding and monitoring. Interesting sightings included the Bar-tailed Godwit Phil Battley saw on the Invercargill estuary; it was a bird he had banded at Miranda last year. There were also at least 5 birds on the Southland coast that had been banded at Chongming Dao in China.

Meanwhile back at Miranda, late February and the entire month of March vanished in a succession of school visits. Apart from three Probus clubs, two of which came on the same day, virtually every weekday saw at least one school present. For many of these visits I had volunteers assisting, and as always, that made an enormous difference.

Kathy Barrow is spending generous amounts of time organising a volunteer roster for the next few months. The aim is to maintain a database of volunteers with indications of what times they may be available – be it half a day, or a weekend, or several days at a time, and what contributions they can make – such as staffing the shop or guiding etc. This will not only help regularise time off for me, but will allow me to work on other projects for the Trust.

Kate and Dan, the two English visitors referred to in the last issue, stayed for three weeks – long enough to be missed once they departed! They both proved to be excellent in all roles, with Dan's devotion to birdwatching something of a bonus. Every day he could be found on the shoreline over the high tide, while Kate assisted back at the centre. Anyone visiting the roost could be directed to Dan for guidance and information, a service that all found invaluable. This was revealed once the visitors returned to the centre expressing appreciation both verbally and through the donation box. This experience confirms just how desirable it is for us to have a presence on the shoreline on each tide, as often as possible over the summer season.

Judy Piesse put together a folder of press clippings about Miranda in time for the 30th Anniversary lunch. She managed to get copies of many items that had appeared in various newspapers, particularly the Hauraki Herald. However there are still likely to be many gaps in the collection. If anyone has clippings or copies of stories about Miranda that have appeared in any media, Judy would love to hear from you. A good photocopy of any original would be sufficient for her purpose. **Judy Piesse, 108 Reservoir Rd , Thames. Phone 07 868 7170**

Keith Woodley

"I have seen the little snipe ..."

"It's very secretive. It'll look a bit like a rat, running." And as we step carefully among the flowering plants of Enderby Island we keep a close eye on any open patches. Suddenly there it is! Yes! And it does look like a rat running - just a grey-brown blur before it disappears among the plants. But a moment later - "Look!" - there it is again, and this time I have a clear view - tiny, brown striped head, little bright eye and that wonderful long bill. The snipe. The Auckland Island Snipe, what a treat to see it even for a moment. No time for a photo, but I have seen the little snipe! I don't even envy F.R.Chapman, who in 1890 reported that during an expedition to New Zealand's Subantarctic Islands "One [snipe] got loose on the ship and visited my bed early one morning, and sat upon my chest, close to my face, jumping at flies about the porthole". His snipe died, but mine is still fossicking around in its island home way down there in the Southern Ocean.

Two days before, I had stepped ashore on Campbell Island. Perseverance Harbour gleamed metallic in the early morning. The sun warmed us from a sky arced blue above, with not a single wisp of cloud, and New Zealand sealions lay belly up, oblivious in their slumber. We followed a boardwalk through flowering dracophyllum and past fragrant golden spires of

bulbinella. Up and up, and here's the first of the *Pleurophyllum speciosum* - the buds purple and plump as the day's warmth coaxes them from their sheaths. Huge, glorious flowers, sprouting out between leaves like hairy corrugated iron. As we approach a crest of a hill there's something else huge and glorious. A bare five metres from the boardwalk, dozing in the sun, is our first albatross, a southern royal. The big bird is utterly relaxed. As we look around we see more and more albatrosses - the hillside is dotted with them. All snoozing, it's so warm, and they feel completely safe. This island was cleared of millions of Norway rats in the winter of 2001, and it shows. The birds are relaxed - the plants appear to be very busy.

From the boardwalk we have a clear track through thick swathes of abundantly blooming megaherbs - three species of *Pleurophyllum*, some with flowers like bunches of purple daisies, some like big buttons. *Stilbocarpa* with tumbling yellow flowers and massive fan leaves. *Anisotomes* - pale mauve cauliflower heads waving from improbably tall stalks over a huge area, with the bright yellow *bulbinella* standing erect among them. Here and there are smaller plants too - the dark-eyed *damnamenia* daisies, papery *helichrysum*, little *epilobium* faces bending to the sun, *cotula*'s tiny

yellow beads. And wherever there's a panoramic viewpoint among the flowers, you can see a great sculptural albatross, as if positioned by a landscape architect.

We eat our picnic lunch on a clifftop overlooking Dent Island, where the Campbell Island Teal was rediscovered in 1975. Pipits wander up to check us out and Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses swoop over us, so close that we can hear the soft ruffle of their feathers as they pass. Their feet hang like paddles and with each waggle we can see light through the webbing.

It is late afternoon as we head back down the hill, and now the great albatrosses are active - the adults changing shifts on the nests, the younger birds gamming in groups, with wings held aloft and necks stretched, their huge pink bills open in cavernous display, bobbing, clicking, crying and moaning as they commune in albatross.

We cruise in the *Naiad* to Tucker Cove and see a King Penguin standing handsome in the afternoon sun, and a nursery group of young Giant Petrels practising their take-offs. One late bloomer can only watch, still perched ridiculously on its chimneypot nest, all grey fluff and no feathers.

The following day we land on Auckland Island. What a difference. Here conditions are more difficult for everyone. The landing is tricky - we must time our leap from the *Naiad* onto the rocks just as the swell surges. The climb up the island is steep and rough, with tangled thickets of *coprosma* and *cassinia* to push through. Worst of all is the mud. Often we sink knee deep into the stinking mud of pig wallows. Our parties see 12 pigs on the island that day. And one cat, right in the middle of a colony of White-capped Mollymawks.

We sit in the tussock for a long time watching these beautiful birds. The colony covers an entire cliff face across an inlet from where we perch. We can see all their comings and goings, their tender greetings when one returns to



Colony of NZ Sealions, Sandy Bay Enderby Island. Brown Skuas squawk near the creche of pups.

its mate, their striking eye makeup and yellow tipped bills. But these birds aren't relaxed, nor are the Wandering Albatrosses we see further up the hill. Hidden and anxious on nests in the tussock, the wanderers stretch their heads up like periscopes, and we stay well away. Pigs constantly threaten these birds, eating eggs and chicks. They were introduced in the early 1800s as food for shipwreck survivors, and despite repeated attempts to shoot them all, the difficult terrain of this island means they have never been entirely eliminated. However we find little *Myosotis capitata* plants with the deepest midnight blue of any forget-me-not, and a whole carpet of gentians in every shade of pink and purple. I guess pigs don't like the taste of gentians.

Next stop is Enderby Island, off the coast of troubled Auckland Island. Now this is a different kettle of birds entirely. It was here on Enderby that we saw that little snipe. We had walked through miniature rata forest to a garden of gentians, orchids, cushion plants and mosses. Elated after my vision of the snipe, I had turned to walk on, and stopped in my tracks. Just beyond the boardwalk was a banded dotterel – a local race - standing on a hummock of cushion plant, looking at me. A few seconds later, I burst out laughing. In this flat landscape of low flowering plants a big white head glowed like a beacon, about ten metres away. An albatross on its nest, the huge bird looking completely out of scale among these little plants. On Enderby, you never know what you're going to find.

There used to be rabbits, cattle and mice on Enderby Island but they were all cleared out in the early 1990s. Now flower fields stretch as far as the eye can see. Every turn in the track opens up a new landscape and a new bird community. It seems like a hundred ecosystems put together just for our delight. Little streams gurgle over white-lichened rocks, grasses wave in the breeze. On one stream we spot an Auckland Island Teal with two downy ducklings. In clearer areas there are swathes of pink and mauve gentians,

with tiny green orchids among them. We walk across whole patches of liverworts with their fruiting bodies standing up like fairy umbrellas. Larger, and less pleasant, is the giant bidibidi which sweeps up and over everything – will it take over the entire island?

As we wander on round the island we pass Light-mantled Sooty Albatrosses nesting on a cliff face, and a group of young Auckland Island Shags tearing apart a stilbocarpa flower. They look away as we watch, as if to say "Who, us?" A little further on Yellow-eyed Penguins trot tight-footed along the bank looking very busy, and Red-crowned Parakeets, their flash of scarlet bright against the velvet green of the groundcover, hop about, pecking at seeds. Penguins and parakeets in the same place? It could only happen here. In the tussock another little snipe darts between the clumps. Behind us in the twisty rata forest Bellbirds gong, and tomtits dart out to see us.

It was a tomtit that had first welcomed us onto Enderby, perched rather incongruously on a washed up bull-kelp frond on the beach where we landed. It twittered and pirouetted at us and then flew out of the way as a young New Zealand Sealion came flopping down the beach. Sandy Bay is the main breeding ground for this, the rarest of sealions. From a safe vantage point we watched as the domestic rules of sealion life were played out. Towards the centre of the colony was a mass of the lighter coloured females. Among them, skuas squabbled and squawked, waiting for an afterbirth, or an unguarded newborn. The big male sealions, rising huge, dark and heavy-necked over the crowd, roared and postured, exerting their superiority over any beast which dared come near. Older males lay apart on the sand, many showing raw wounds – reason enough to stay out of that seething, heaving mass of mammalian power covering most of the beach. As we watched, a huge male in the main mob approached a female where she lay resting with her new pup. She sat up and lowered her head in submission. He sniffed her closely as she swayed, head down, and then he bent down to the pup. I held

my breath. He sniffed the pup all over, pushing it with his nose. Please don't hurt it! Sniff, sniff.... Then he lay down beside the pup, the female relaxed and lay down too, and they looked like the perfect sealion family.

Behind the beach we spotted an odd pile of grey fluff tucked in under a bush. This, when it showed its head, turned out to be a Giant Petrel chick, motionless except for an occasional vast yawn with its strangely complex bill. Nearby marched a skua chick, also just fluff, but far more energetic, stalking round as if on stilts and repeatedly yanking at its parent's feathers, looking very aggressive while repeatedly uttering a pathetic reedy squeak – feed me, feed me!

From the flower-lined clifftop track we can see fluted basalt columns along the cliffs, with swirls of giant kelp below, and as we walk along we find a little teal resting just beside the track. A few more metres across daisy-speckled grass with Yellow-eyed Penguin tracks, and our walk round Enderby is over.

Our leader and guide on New Zealand's Subantarctic Islands is Rodney Russ. In the 1970s he worked here as a wildlife officer. Among other wildlife service officers at that time were Rod Morris and Don Merton. All three have since gone on to become heroes of NZ conservation – Rod as a wildlife photographer and documentary maker, Don as the saviour of the Black Robin and the Kakapo, and Rodney as the chief advocate for these remote islands through his company Heritage Expeditions NZ Ltd (www.heritage-expeditions.com). Here on this trip to "The Forgotten Islands of the South Pacific", all three were together for the first time in decades, Rodney as leader, Don as lecturer, Rod as passenger. So you see, even the people you find on these islands are a treat!

Text and Photos Miriam Beatson

Photos next page
Centre Megaherb Pleurophyllum speciosum, Campbell Island.
From Top Left Clockwise Northern Giant Petrel chick, White-capped Mollymawks, Field of Anisotome latifolia (also opposite), the flower heads are the size of cauliflowers! Yellow-eyed Penguin, Megaherb Bulbinella rossii.



An unusual and very welcome donation

Of all the fascinating New Zealand true life adventures stories published “The Totorore Voyage” must take its place in the very top rank. Written by Gerry Clark, formerly of Kerikeri, the book is an enthralling account of some of the most hair raising ocean adventures ever undertaken in the cause of ornithology. Apart from his love of boats and birds, Gerry was a seaman and yacht skipper of undoubted mastery. So unnerving were some of his exploits that it was understandably not always easy to get crew members to stay on board. Enter Miranda icon Anthea Goodwin, former MNT council member and gardener extraordinaire. At that time Anthea was librarian of the Ornithological Society of New Zealand. Joining “Totorore” in February 1984 at Punta Arenas in Argentina she remained on board until returning home in May of that year. It must have been an amazing and unforgettable experience as during that time the “Totorore” explored the treacherous waters of the many islands which make up the extreme south of Argentina including the notorious Cape Horn itself.

A few years ago it was with great delight that I discovered that my newly arrived neighbour in Oratia was no other than Gerry's charming daughter Elsa, who, together with her partner Steve Edwards, had come to live in Auckland. By that time Gerry Clark had perished at sea whilst on yet another voyage. When I first heard the news I found it hard to be sad. Gerry had died doing what he had most loved doing. I think that, having recovered from the shock, his wife Marjorie and family came to agree with that. In the meantime a new edition of “The Totorore Voyage” had been printed and Steve was engaged in marketing the book in New Zealand and overseas.

In Kerikeri in 2002 Marjorie Clark, Gerry's widow, was taken seriously ill. During a prolonged coma towards the end of her life Marjorie regained consciousness long enough to whisper to Elsa and Steve who were at her bedside “Gerry says that he wants the

rest of the books to go somewhere where they can be made good use of”. As a result the copies, in both hard and soft back editions, now on sale at the Shorebird Centre were donated to the Miranda Naturalists' Trust by Elsa and Steve. It is difficult not to believe that somehow or other Gerry Clark himself was also involved in donating what is a most welcome and unusual gift.

It is interesting to note that Elsa and Steve are shortly to embark upon their own adventure in a boat which is very like the “Totorore”. They plan to go on a round the world trip in 2006. Steve is an able and experienced sailor. Let us all hope that Elsa proves to be a “chip off the old block”. I'm sure that all fellow Miranda Naturalists' Trust members join me in wishing them well on their voyage.

John Gale

Alan Underhill Obituary 26 April 1929 – 1 April 2005



There are many who will have encountered Alan Underhill at Miranda, often in my absence. He and Lynda were among my most regular and reliable relievers, sometimes doing weeks at a time. When not relieving they were still regular visitors, seldom missing one of our functions.

I first became aware of Alan as being the man responsible for ending what had become a Miranda tradition. For several years prior to my arrival at the Centre, and for two years afterwards, Lynda and a couple of friends spent Christmas here. It had become a familiar ritual, when the place was otherwise closed. But then Lynda met Alan and they married, after which there were other options for Christmas. Yet the end of one tradition quickly evolved into a more enduring one – beneficial not just for me or Lynda and Alan, but for the countless people who visited or stayed here while they were in residence as relieving managers.

An affable, genial demeanour did not always disguise the keen observer – the talented photographer's eye for an image, or the storyteller's eye and ear for items to be stored as future material. Such items would be accompanied and informed by a dry wit.

By the time I first met Alan he had retired from a career in photography, first as a photographer for DSIR, and latterly as a lecturer at AUT. He and I enjoyed several sessions of tales from his childhood in Brooklyn, Wellington (which also happens to be one of my home towns) and his DSIR experiences.

I had the pleasure of several of Alan's slide shows. We have all sat through other peoples' slide evenings – sometimes there are stunning images and many that are less so, and invariably too many selections. But Alan transcended these flaws. His images of say, Namibia, or the Silk Route of central Asia, were always excellent, products of a superb eye for a subject, matched by the skills to realise it into an enduring image. When a slide show ends leaving the audience wanting more, you know you have been experiencing quality.

Our condolences to Lynda, and to Alan's family. He is already greatly missed at the Shorebird Centre.

Keith Woodley



Check out the website for
the latest events news.
www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz

From the Blackboard
22-04-2005

Miranda Naturalists' Trust People:

Shorebird Centre Manager:

Keith Woodley: RD 3 Pokeno. Phone/Fax
(09) 232 2781 email: shorebird@xtra.co.nz

Chairman: David Lawrie, R.D. 2, Pukekohe.
Phone (09) 238 -8407.

Deputy Chairman, and Banding Convenor:
Adrian Riegen, 231 Forest Hill Road, Auckland
8. Phone & Fax: (09) 814- 9741.

Secretary: Will Perry, 34 Morrin St, Ellerslie,
Auckland. Phone (09) 525-2771 hm; (09) 526-
1944 wk; (09) 526-1960 fax at work.

Treasurer: Ashley Reid, 1 Picquet Hill Road,
Te Awamutu. Phone (07) 871-5729. email:
reid.AandS@xtra.co.nz.

Editor: Gillian Vaughan, 54 Appleby Road,
Drury Phone (09) 294-7610 Fax (wk) (09) 522-
5518 email: gillianv@actrix.co.nz

Council:

Kathy Barrow	Nigel Milius
Phil Battley	William Perry
John Gale (Ex officio)	Ashley Reid
David Lawrie (Chairman)	Sue Reid
Eila Lawton	Len Taylor
Nanette McLauchlan	Gillian Vaughan
Adrian Riegen (Deputy Chairman)	

Membership Rates

Ordinary Member - \$35
Family Member - \$40
Overseas Member- \$40
Life Member, under 50 - \$1050
Life Member, 50 and over - \$525

Membership of the Trust entitles you to –

- Four Miranda News issues per year.
- A \$5 discount on overnight accommodation
- Invitations to Trust Events
- The right to attend the Annual General Meeting
- The right to vote for council members

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

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.

Accommodation

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

Per bed / night member	\$12.50
Per bed / night non-member	\$17.50
Hire of flat member	\$40.00
Hire of flat non-member	\$50.00

For further information contact Keith at the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno
Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781

Arctic Migrants

<i>Bar-tailed Godwit</i>	300
<i>Red Knot</i>	100
<i>Sharp-tailed Sandpiper</i>	3
<i>Marsh Sandpiper</i>	2
<i>Terek Sandpiper</i>	1
<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	2
<i>Hudsonian Godwit</i>	1

New Zealand Species

<i>Pied Oystercatcher</i>	lots!
<i>Wrybill</i>	1000+
<i>NZ Dotterel</i>	6+
<i>Banded Dotterel</i>	
<i>Variable Oystercatcher</i>	
<i>Banded Rail</i>	
<i>Black-billed Gull</i>	
<i>Red-billed Gull</i>	
<i>White-fronted Tern</i>	
<i>Caspian Tern</i>	
<i>Pied Stilt</i>	

Want to be involved?

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 Alison on 09 524 0291.

This is your magazine!

If you have a story, poem, photo, or piece of research you would like to include in the MNT news please contact the editor, Gillian Vaughan, on 09 294 7610 or gillianv@actrix.co.nz

Friends of Miranda

A volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre during busy periods or in Keith's absence. If you'd like to spend time from a half-day up to a few weeks at the Centre helping out contact Keith. Helping out can be anything from helping with the shop, school groups or meeting people down at the shell-banks.

The Working Bee and Potluck Dinner

If you want to get involved but aren't sure how to meet people the working bee is a good chance to get to know a few people, followed by the potluck dinner it can be a nice social night!.

Firth of Thames Census Run by OSNZ and held twice a year the Census days are a good chance to get involved with ongoing field work and research.



Chinese Visit
see page 3

