

# MIRANDA NEWS

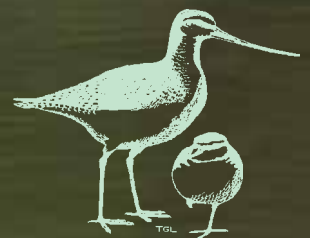
Naturalists' Trust  
February 2006 Issue 60



Snipe at Forest Lake

A Ruff at Miranda

What to look for in Binoculars



# February 2006 Issue 60

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 and along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission.

Cover Photo: A Japanese Snipe at Forest Lake in Hamilton November 2005. Photo Brian Chudleigh  
See page 20 for story.

## A word from the editor

Diversity is the word this time. We've recently had the regular birds and the rare birds, the locals and the visitors from overseas. Somehow the Trust manages to handle the diversity. As this issue goes to print two new Chinese visitors have arrived, again one from Yalu Jiang and one from Wetlands International in Beijing. At the same time school restarted and a large number of school children also arrived. My personal feeling is that the continuing input from outside sources is what keeps the Trust growing and developing, and I think its really exciting to see what comes next, I'm not sure whether to hope for a new person or a Stilt Sandpiper, but its satisfying to be involved in an organisation that would welcome both, while still managing to keep being excited about the everyday.

As part of that diversity it was nice to receive Michael Taylor's article on Blue Butterflies. I am aware that we are Miranda NATURALISTS' Trust, and although our focus is on a particular geographic area, and the birds that use it, the wider environment is also important, and of interest, to our members.

As part of the everyday activities of the Trust I am looking forward to the Autumn Migration Day on March 5th, the day is early enough so most of the birds should still be present, but late enough that they will be well coloured up, and possibly moving around the country a bit. My plans for the weekends before and after the migration day are to be out looking for colour-bands and Stilt Sandpipers, because during migration time anything might show up!

The deadline for the next issue of the MNT News is April 20th. I look forward to your contributions.

Gillian Vaughan.

## Upcoming Events

**March 5 10:00am**  
**Autumn Migration Day:**  
See the Arctic birds at their best. Speaker Michael Walker  
Navigation in Birds.

**May 21 10:00am**  
**Annual General Meeting**  
See notice page 17  
Guest Speaker - to be announced

**July 2**  
**OSNZ Firth of Thames Winter Census** Meet at the Shorebird Centre - contact Tony for details 09 238 5284

**August 19 5:30pm onwards**  
**Winter Potluck Dinner**  
Speaker Mike Cosgrove - mountaineer, adventurer, photographer.

**August 20 10:00am**  
**Working Bee**  
Annual Cleanup of the Shorebird Centre - come to the potluck dinner and stay overnight or come in the morning!

**NEW EVENT**  
**NOT ON YOUR CALENDAR**  
**November 18-19**  
**The art of botanical drawing**  
**Workshop with Sandra Morris**  
see page 17 for details

## CONTENTS:

Introducing Jenni Hensley	3
State of NZ birds	3
From the Manager	4
Chairman's Report	6
OSNZ Column	8
Farewell Spit	8
Long-tailed Blue Butterfly	9
Waders in Alaska	10
Members Contributions	11
Farewell to Miranda	12
Book Review: Charles Fleming	14
Book Review: Geoff Moon	15
Bird Flu	16
Nectar for Tuis	17
AGM Notice	17
Looking for a View?	18
Japanese Snipe	20
Census Results	21
Miranda Poetry	21



*Many visitors to the centre over the last year will have met our new staff member, Jenni Hensley works two or three days a week...*



I was born in Zambia, attended boarding school in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and grew up in Cape Town. After school I studied for & earned a National Diploma in Nature Conservation. I worked in conservation in southern Africa, including at the magnificent Cape Point Nature Reserve at the (almost) southern-most tip of

**Africa, in the hauntingly beautiful desert in South West Africa (now Namibia), and at the Potberg Environmental Education Centre on the De Hoop Nature Reserve.**

After a sojourn across the seas to NZ, Canada and England, I worked for a short while as a relief ranger at the huge gannet colony (alas, in winter, thus not many birds) and then as a student ranger at De Mond Nature Reserve, at the (true) southern-most point of Africa. This was a fabulous 8 months – I monitored the magic little Damara Terns who fly each summer from the bulb of Africa to the southern beaches to breed. They're very similar to the Eastern Little Tern in size and colour, and to NZ's Fairy Terns in nesting habits, i.e. singly in dune slacks as opposed to in colonies like most other terns. I also monitored the breeding success of

Oystercatchers, Caspian Terns, White-breasted Cormorants and Black-backed Gulls that season, as well as the comings and goings of other Arctic migrants at the estuary (De Mond means 'the mouth'). What a wonderful experience. I patrolled the beach on a quad bike, and spent almost as much time dealing with the public as I did monitoring the nests.

Not too long after that season ended, I returned to NZ to live, to be with my lovely sister and her family. I lived in the North Shore for 4 years, until last January, when I attended the Field Course at the Miranda Shorebird Centre (a life-changing experience for me!) and have, since then, moved out of the city, into a cottage on a farm on the hill above the Centre, where I work 2-3 days a week, and from where I return to the North Shore fortnightly to do another part-time job that I have there.

## The State of New Zealand's Birds 2005

For some years now Birds Australia has produced a document known as the State of Australian Birds. It is an ongoing document that allows a general overview of the situation their birds face. Such a document, encompassing all of the major birds groups and bird habitats it is a good basis for discussion, and provides a snapshot of what ornithologists think are some of the current problems and success stories. For the first time the Ornithological Society of New Zealand has produced a similar document. The State of New Zealand's Birds was first published in the Australian magazine Wingspan, and was more recently printed and sent out with the OSNZ's Southern Bird and Notornis. At only nine pages long it is worth digging into for information.

Some of the highlights from the report are unsurprising, both predation and habitat loss are seen as major threats to NZ birds, and eradication of those predators from offshore islands is considered vital. Habitat degradation is considered a lesser threat.

With regard to seabirds some of the key findings are that more and more seabirds are under threat due to

fisheries bycatch, and it is important that mitigation methods be developed. In addition the confinement of many species to offshore islands is a cause of concern. More reliable estimates of populations are needed.

On the mainland the report stresses the need for more managed areas, and looking at alternatives types of predator control including fencing areas off entirely. The last key finding of the report was that declines have been reversed for most endangered species that are being managed.

Shorebirds were not listed in the key findings of the report, but were included in two sections, one on Endemic Shorebirds, written by John Dowding, and one on Migratory Waders, written by Phil Battley and David Melville.

With regard to migratory waders the authors list a number of threats, largely due to the impact of humans, factors such as intensification of agriculture, aquaculture and shellfish harvesting and stopbank construction are all mentioned as potential threats, the impact of which little is known about.

The hope is that a renewed emphasis on population monitoring will give a better understanding of the status of migratory waders in New Zealand by 2010.

Of the 16 species of shorebird that breed in New Zealand 13 are endemic, the threats to these are largely based around predation and human modification of coastal areas. Banded Dotterel and Wrybill are shown as a species that are or may be declining, Black Stilts are considered to be increasing primarily due to captive breeding, the of the rest of the endemic shorebird species are considered to have stable or increasing populations.

Other species regularly found on the coast are the terns and gulls. White-fronted terns are considered to be a species in decline, and black-billed gulls show evidence of serious decline.

It is hoped that a copy of the report will soon be available online. When it becomes accessible the website will be reported here.

Gillian Vaughan

from the **MANAGER**



The departure for China on 23 January of Lu Yong (Wetlands International) and Zhang Guangming (Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve) concluded an important phase in the history of Miranda. This first in a series of extended visits by Chinese reserve staff marked the first stage in implementing agreements between Yalu Jiang and Miranda. During their time here both became familiar faces at the centre. They studied the activities of Miranda Naturalists' Trust and the operation of the Shorebird Centre. They also developed conservation and management proposals for Yalu Jiang, worked assiduously on their English skills, monitored the shorebird flocks for bands and flags, and generally assisted wherever needed. On several occasions they were able to perform the usual role of the manager in talking to visiting groups – but in Chinese. From time to time they also plied the centre manager with excellent Chinese fare from the kitchen.

Their visit to Miranda marks a significant step in developing our sister site partnership with YJNNR. This will be further advanced with the arrival in February of two further staff – one each from YJNNR and Wetlands International, China who will be with us until the end of April.

In late January Kevin and Kelly White arrived at the centre for an extended stay until March. The young American couple are working on a project following birds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. They started in Taiwan in October before moving to Thailand and Australia. After Miranda they will head for South Korea and far eastern Russia. Part of the project involves a survey of public attitudes and awareness about shorebirds and their habitat requirements. During their stay Kevin and Kelly will also be helping out around the centre.

The four people gathered around the counter had been out birding and were now contemplating purchases of Miranda souvenirs. It was another busy Saturday afternoon and people had been filtering in and out all day. One of the women leant across and said quietly: "Are you expecting a visitor?" "We always have visitors" I replied.

"No," she responded more firmly, "a particular visitor." "Not that I know of" said I. "Helen Clark" she muttered, gesticulating down the room. I looked up and saw Peter Davis reading the migration panel. Then I noticed the Prime Minister herself, contemplating the wader wall display. A glance through the window revealed several men in suits standing around in the parking area, wires protruding from their ears.

The Prime Minister was on a private visit with several other family members. We chatted briefly about the centre, godwit migration and bird flu. They were then dropped off at the Limeworks gate to walk the trail back to the centre.

Sightings of Banded Rail around Widgery Lake this season have been sporadic – certainly nothing like the daily spectacle of last year. Nevertheless they are still present. Meanwhile the situation at the Limeworks gate has been quite different with numerous reports of adults and young. Several times during the field course we had four individuals in view at once.

Two species made a welcome return this summer. Until about two years ago Red-necked Stint were regular annual visitors. Last season had barely a sighting. This was an unfortunate state of affairs, not the least because as the smallest of our migrant species they hold considerable appeal with visitors. Happily at least one bird has been showing well since November. Three Curlew Sandpipers, at least two of them juveniles, were the other returnees at the beginning of November. This too used to be a regular Miranda species until the late 1990s.

For the inaugural wader identification course in April 2005 the shorebird flocks performed very well. They arrayed themselves well on the roosts allowing good views for course participants. A sufficient range of species provided good identification challenges. The undoubted highlight was the opportunity to see three godwit species in the one scope view, with a Hudsonian and two Black-tailed Godwits roosting agreeably close to the Bar-tail flock. Scheduling the second course for November was in part designed to show how to identify

juvenile birds – particularly Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot, both of which have distinctive plumages at that time. So it proved to be with plenty of juvenile godwit on show. The bonus however was the completely unexpected bird that turned up among the flocks on the inner flats.

Adrian directed my attention to his scope. What is this, he asked? Not that he didn't know, but did I know what it was. The first few moments had me stumped; it was a large wader, smaller than a godwit but standing almost as tall. The long neck, small head and drooping bill however reminded me of something I had once seen at Miranda. Then it came to me: Ruff, I said. Only the second record for Miranda in fact.

Like the bird seen for two days in November 2001, this too was a male coming out of breeding plumage. Unlike the previous time, it hung around off and on for several weeks, often showing up on the south end of the Stilt ponds. Associating with Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and the three Curlew Sandpipers allowed for ongoing size and shape comparison. Perfect for a wader identification course! The two flocks of Golden Plover that appeared during the same session were merely icing the cake further.

In early February the centre hosted the latest in a round of workshops developing an integrated management plan for the Firth of Thames Ramsar site. Based on the *Muddy Feet* document compiled by Bill Brownell and Ecoquest, this project has engaged firm support and participation from all the statutory authorities with jurisdiction around the Firth. This includes both regional councils, four district councils and the Department of Conservation. Miranda Naturalists' Trust is also participating in the project. The February workshop continued work on refining a relative risk assessment model developed by staff at the Cawthron Institute in Nelson. Basically it aims to identify and predict the relative impact of a given source of stress on the Firth site, be it from land use practices, sedimentation, nutrients, human disturbance etc. This will then be used to inform policy and management decisions.

Keith Woodley Story and Painting



# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



of the work programme agreed in the sister site agreement and the terms were agreed prior to their departure, using the wonders of email.

They left Miranda on the 23<sup>rd</sup> but prior to their departure a barbecue was held at the Centre to farewell them and we wish them well on their return to China. It was good during that event to welcome to Miranda, Anna Van Paddenburg and her husband and mother and father. Anna works with Lu Yong in the office of Wetlands International – China Division in Beijing. She had just started work there in 2004 when the Miranda delegation visited, and she was a good interpreter, even though she was still learning her Chinese. She and her husband are in New Zealand staying with her parents on 6 months maternity leave, and we hope to see more of them at the centre.

In the middle of February there will be two further exchangees from China who will be at the Centre until early in May and these are Madam Yang and Madam Jia. They are here to also learn aspects of the Miranda operation and also represent Wetlands International China and the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve.

#### *American Visitors:*

Currently in residence at the Centre are Kevin and Kelly two Americans who are travelling and undertaking work along the godwit flyway visiting the same areas as the birds to get a full appreciation of the places occupied as the birds travel on their annual circuit. They have introduced themselves elsewhere in this issue.

#### *Other Distinguished Visitors:*

During November the Trust hosted the Governor General Dame Silvia Cartwright and her husband, Peter, on an official informal visit. Dame Silvia had previously shown an interest in visiting the Centre to view the migratory birds and was finally able to visit on 19 November.

This was a major surprise for the participants on the wader identification course which was held on the same day, as Dame Silvia freely mingled with

Welcome to the Year 2006. This is already shaping as being another busy year for the Trust. As you will see from this edition of the newsletter there have been many comings and goings at the Centre recently and many friendships made, and long may it continue.

I encourage you all to visit the Centre and meet our volunteers from overseas and where possible take them out for a day and give them other new experiences.

#### *Field Course:*

January is now traditionally the month when the field course is held and this year was no exception. Eila Lawton with assistance from her team once again organised a very successful 5 day event.

Each year the event appears to be better than the last and this is clearly a reflection of the quality of the voluntary tutors and also the interest that the attendees bring to these courses. I had the opportunity during the event to meet the participants and they all seemed to be enjoying the course and fully participating which is the only way that they can gain the maximum benefit. There is some suggestion that the course needs to be another week longer to enable some time for the participants to sleep between the very busy days but a lack of sleep is part of the challenge.

I would take this opportunity to congratulate Eila and her tutors for the

organisation and running of this very successful event and not forgetting Glenice Bullen who undertook the catering as part of her rest and recreation during her holidays.

#### *Chinese Visitors:*

Those of you who have visited the Centre since November 2005 would have met Lu Yong and Zhang Guangming who have been present as part of the exchange programme with China developed as part of the Sister Site agreement. Lu works for Wetland International – China Division in Beijing, while Zhang is one of the employees at Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve.

Their visit was intended to provide them with an opportunity to study the operation at Miranda and also gain experience in conservation work.

During their visit they had the opportunity to attend the Australasian Ornithological Congress and the Australasian Wader Studies Group Conference in Nelson. The funding to enable them to attend these conferences was provided by a private benefactor and we are grateful for that donation.

They also participated in the field course and during that event they were able to handle live birds for the first time and learn banding techniques that we hope that they can use in China. One of their tasks while in New Zealand was to develop an extension

them while they were in the field learning their new skills. Dame Silvia was highly impressed at the numbers of birds present, the ability to observe them at close quarters and to learn of the studies that are being undertaken along the flyway.

Following a visit to the shell banks Dame Silvia was hosted to a light luncheon at the Centre with the wader identification participants before driving herself home, (her husband had left his driving glasses at home, and he had two large pieces of Glenice's chocolate cake to eat in the car!!).

We are grateful for her interest in the Centre and we hope that she can return when she has more time following the expiry of her term of office.

Recently the Centre also had a private visit by the Prime Minister and her husband and two nieces. Unfortunately the timing of her visit was during low tide and the birds were well scattered on the mudflats and the Trust Council therefore intends to invite her to visit at a more appropriate time in the future.

#### Road Show:

As previously mentioned Keith Woodley with support from other Council members completed a three city road show to take the Trust's message about godwit migration to Tauranga, Hamilton and Auckland City. Each of these venues was well attended and I am aware that several new members have resulted from those visits.

It is hoped to travel to more distant centres during the coming year and if there are any opportunities where members feel that a visit from a Trust representative would be appropriate then they should contact Keith at the Centre.

#### Predator Control:

As advised in the last edition of the newsletter Dr Phil Battley has made a successful application for funding for predator control work to be undertaken along the Miranda foreshore. The contract with the Department of Conservation was recently signed and this programme is due to commence in the near future.

There have been a number of predators seen along the foreshore margin in recent months and also some evidence of predation taking place while the birds are on the roosts. It is also noticeable that N Z Dotterel and Variable Oystercatcher breeding success has been very low in recent years which could also be a result of predators operating during the breeding season. We look forward to the benefits that will accrue from this control programme in future years.

#### Display Spotlights:

Regular visitors to the Centre will be delighted to observe that a number of spotlights have been installed to increase the lighting for the display panels. Over the years there have been comments about the difficulty of reading the displays because of their situation within the dark alcoves.

The spotlights were installed by Doug Madgwick, from Cool Electric, who is a recent member living in Thames. Doug installed the spotlights on a voluntary basis recovering only the cost of various materials.

The actual spotlights themselves were donated by Carl Herbst, from Prolux Lighting, and we are also grateful for that donation.

#### Conclusion:

The Trust is now entering its 31<sup>st</sup> year and it is clear that the organisation has grown far greater and in different directions to what was originally intended. However as can be seen from the numbers and diversity of visitors it is fulfilling a very important role and the changed circumstances merely reflect the changed environment in which the Trust now operates.

While the Trust Council is a very good blend of experience and new ideas the annual meeting in May 2006 is an opportunity for new members to stand for election to further expand the pool of wisdom that runs the Trust. Remember all the good works that take place around the Centre do not happen by themselves and it takes a large and dedicated pool of people to achieve the results.

David Lawrie, Chairman

## THE GOVERNOR GENERAL VISITS



Photo G Vaughan

## THE FIELD COURSE 2006



Always fun at the Field Course. Photos Keith Woodley, Geraldine King, Lu Yong



# THE OSNZ COLUMN

## Australasian Ornithological Conference

The third biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference, hosted by the Ornithological Society of New Zealand and Birds Australia, was held in Blenheim from 6-10 December 2005. Over three full days of formal sessions, some 210 participants - including many from New Zealand and Australia, and some from much further afield - were treated to an excellent programme of informative and very ably presented plenary lectures, papers, and posters on a wide variety of topics relating to the avifauna of the Australasian region in particular. In addition, before and after the formal sessions of the conference, many participants availed themselves of opportunities to partake in field excursions that included bird watching off Kaikoura, in Marlborough Sounds, and at Nelson Lakes National Park.

Each day the formal sessions of the conference commenced with a plenary lecture. Hugh Robertson (New Zealand) addressed the question "Are kiwi doomed?", Richard Holdaway (New Zealand) spoke on "New Zealand Quaternary avian palaeobiology: perspectives and prospects", and Michael Clarke (Australia) addressed the issues involved in "Trying to save the black-eared miner: a flagship species or a waste of money?".

The large number of papers presented at the conference contained much of interest to all participants. Contributed papers dealt with different aspects of

such varied subjects as evolution and taxonomy, seabirds, waders, wetland birds, breeding and behaviour, single species conservation, conservation and habitats, fragments and corridors, climate change and avifauna, and bird song. Papers were also presented in four symposia - birds in developed landscapes, landbird population monitoring, avian influenza, and ethno-ornithology. In addition to the papers, poster presentations on a variety of topics were available for inspection. The opportunity presented by the conference was also availed of to hold a separate workshop at which the possibility of a landbird monitoring scheme for New Zealand was discussed by ornithologists from both here and overseas who have a special interest and expertise in the formation and operation of such a scheme.

The conference papers will not be published as a special volume. However, it is to be hoped that a significant proportion of the new research presented there will appear in various ornithological and related journals in due course.

This was the first Australasian Ornithological Conference to be held in New Zealand. The credit for its undoubted success must go to all involved in whatever way.

David Medway,  
President,  
Ornithological Society of NZ.

## Australian Shorebird Conference

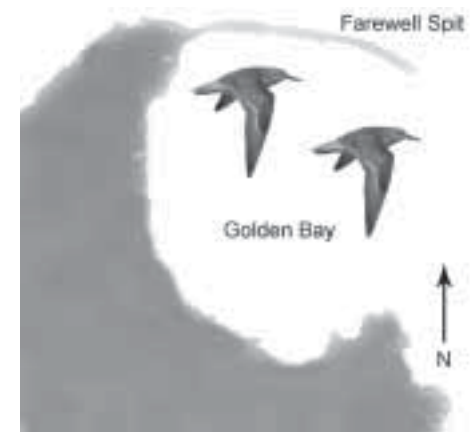
Shortly after the AOC the Australasian Shorebird Conference was held in Nelson. This included two days of talks, followed by a field trip to Farewell Spit. The subjects of the shorebird talks ranged from species specific accounts such as the current status of the Chatham Island Oystercatcher to theoretical talks on how to ensure accuracy of counts. The abstracts of the conference are available online at [www.nzshorebirds.com](http://www.nzshorebirds.com).

## FAREWELL SPIT

Several thousand waders are spread across the sand pan beneath the huge dune. It is an immense grey/brown landscape beneath a flat grey sky. In the scope the Curlew Sandpiper in almost full breeding plumage is the only splash of colour. Further along the coast irregularly spaced pairs of black spots break the dune profile. These are Variable Oystercatchers and they are everywhere.

This is Farewell Spit – the only other shorebird network site in New Zealand, and a place I have referred to during countless talks at Miranda. But this is my first visit. At once the contrasts with Miranda are stark: it is a totally different environment. From the outer beach and dune system, to the vast tidal flats along Golden Bay all is new. For one thing the substrate of the flats is firm and sandy with extensive areas of eelgrass, most unlike the Firth of Thames mud. The adjoining saltmarsh areas are similar although there are some unfamiliar plants. Beyond the saltmarsh are coastal shrubs and rush beds rather than mangroves. And the Fernbird flying over the track as we pass is certainly novel!

In this vast flat landscape one can lose sense of perspective and relative scale. Far out beyond the hazy tide-line float countless Black Swans. They could be so many stakes or navigation markers. They could even be oil derricks. But then with the incoming tide comes the





# Blue Butterflies

## “MAGIC”

familiar. Flocks of godwit and knot accumulate ahead of the flood. Very soon we too are waders, traversing flooded saltmarsh, as we continue down the spit.

A large group of us have come here following the Australasian Shorebird Conference in Nelson. We stay overnight in a collection of buildings clustered under macrocarpas near the lighthouse. There are 45 people for dinner at one of the country's most remote locations. The logistics of course are formidable. David Melville, with family assistance in the preparations, provides us with excellent fare. Given the circumstances it is an impressive achievement in both logistics and quality.

On the afternoon of our arrival, some head out with Phil Battley and Danny Rogers to look for bird food in the mud. Others make their way east beyond the lighthouse to the Gannet colony. Directions here are also disorienting at first. Given the basic axis on which New Zealand lies, and because Farewell Spit occurs at the northwest edge of the South Island, subconsciously one expects the spit to run north to south, instead of almost due east. A short distance from the lighthouse a series of small hillocks surrounded by beach and tidal flats are thickly coated with Gannets. And nearby is another little piece of the familiar – a small shellbank. Oystercatchers, Caspian and White-fronted Terns also help bring Miranda to mind.

There are legendary tales of wind in this place. Indeed it is one of the main forces creating and shaping the spit. The dunes themselves are endlessly remodelled by its gusts. But for us there is total calm for virtually the entire time we are there. Magic.

Keith Woodley

The North Island is home to two species of blue butterflies. The Common Blue, *Zizinia labradus*, is Australia's most common butterfly and, according to Andrew Crowe [1] had probably been arriving in New Zealand on storms for centuries until its establishment was ensured by the clearance of native forest for pasture land. The Long-tailed Blue, *Lampides boeticus*, of almost world-wide distribution, appeared in this country about 1965 and it too obtained a firm footing.

Hence the small butterfly fluttering over my rose garden on the sunny afternoon of 7th December 2005 could have been either of these kinds. It stayed long enough to tempt me into action with my digital Pentax Optio camera and returned time and again to settle on the buds. I set the camera to 'flower mode' and was able to obtain reasonable shots as close as 15 centimetres, some with the wings shut and others fully spread out. These views identify it as a Long-tailed Blue, and a female (the male is uniformly blue; the female has both blue and russet on its upper surface, as the photograph (back cover) shows). The 'tails' on the hind wings look like antennae and together with the adjacent 'eye-spots' serve to distract insect-eating birds from the creature's true head, worn butterflies often have peck-marks out of their hind wings.

I had seen a Long-tailed Blue before, at Taporā on the Kaipara Harbour, among lupins and gorse, but had found it much too flighty to permit a good view. So I was gratified by the quiescence of this individual on its visit to my Orakei garden. Several of the photographs provide a clue to the behaviour. From its posture the butterfly appears to be in the act of

laying an egg on to the rose bud. The caterpillar of this species is said to spend its whole life feeding inside the flowers and seed pods of legumes such as gorse, broom, lupins and sweet peas [1]. Hence it may have been on a false scent when investigating my roses. Having shown the pictures to John Early, Entomologist at the Auckland Museum, I searched the rose heads at his prompting and found what did seem to be a couple of eggs. By then eight days had elapsed and all that was left of the two suspected eggs was the outer ring of the shell (see accompanying photograph). No caterpillars were to be seen.

Legumes are also the preferred food plants of the caterpillar of the Common Blue, which feeds on the leaves of clover, lucerne and lotus. In my experience this attractive little butterfly is very much less abundant than it was ten or twenty years ago in and around Auckland. The reason is not obvious, although the spread of kikuyu grass at the expense of a mixed sward might be a factor. The arrival of potential predators such as the exotic wasp *Ancistrocerus gazella* of which I found the first specimen here back in 1988 [2] could be significant. Solitary wasps like this one and also the mason bee collect caterpillars as food for their own larvae and may be ravaging formerly abundant butterflies and moths. Keep a sharp look out for small 'blues'. You may find our two 'common' species are much harder to locate than you might expect.

[1] Andrew Crowe, *Which New Zealand Insect?* Penguin Books (2002).

[2] J.A. Berry, *New Zealand Entomologist*, 1989, Vol. 12, p. 63-65.

Michael Taylor story and photo



# Breeding Waders from Alaska

Many of our New Zealand waders like the Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) breed in Alaska. But Alaska has many more breeders than those that come here for the austral summer. I was fortunate enough to see several breeding species on a recent trip that I took this past June with two friends, one an expert birdwatcher and the other a first-class photographer. It was early summer and we saw several waders, without venturing far off the tourist route, including several species that have either never been recorded here, or only recorded once or twice.

We saw several Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) – currently considered a separate species from the Common Snipe (*G. gallinago*) of Eurasia – the second day on the open alpine tundra at Glen Alps in the Chugach State Park, overlooking Anchorage. To be more precise, we heard them first, as the males flew upwards making a weird whistle with their tail feathers. Otherwise they were very secretive and we seldom saw them clearly. We saw several more near Homer, on the Kenai Peninsula.

Both species of Yellowlegs, the Greater (*Tringa melanoleuca*) and the Lesser (*T. flavipes*) breed in Alaska. This pair of species looks rather like the Greenshank (*T. nebularia*) and Marsh Sandpiper (*T. stagnatilis*), respectively, except for their eponymous bright yellow (rather than green) legs and brown (rather than gray) plumage. We saw the Lesser Yellowlegs just south of Anchorage, at Potter's Marsh, a wonderful wetland famed for numerous breeding birds, including several ducks and Arctic Terns (*Sterna paradisaea*). We had wonderful views of both yellowlegs in a small marsh near Homer, where alarmed birds would fly up to the tops of small trees and call frantically. We saw also a further *Tringa*, the Spotted Sandpiper (*T. macularia*) the American counterpart to the Eurasian Common Sandpiper (*T. hypoleucos*). This constantly teetering bird popped up in several places: the Kenai Peninsula south of Anchorage, Denali National Park and the Denali Highway.

The American Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus bachmani*), a doppelganger for the black form of our Variable Oystercatcher (*H. unicolor*), is common on rocky shores and a small flock flew past while we were on Kodiak Island during a short ferry stop. I saw my first Aleutian Terns (*S. alantica*) at a small breeding colony on Kodiak Island, and several more at Homer a few days later. Like our White-fronted Tern (*S. striata*), this species has a white forehead and a black beak, but its body is a darker gray.

One of the real highlights for me was seeing my first Surf-bird (*Aphriza virgata*), an enigmatic sandpiper with no close relatives, but resembling a turnstone in its stockiness. Three very tame birds in full breeding colours posed nicely for photos on the alpine tundra of Twelvemile Summit, northeast of Fairbanks (the furthest north I have ever been). A small flock of what probably was this species had flown overhead in Denali National Park two days earlier, spooked by several Long-tailed Jaegers or Skuas (*Stercorarius longicaudus*).

Two species quite familiar from my visits to Maine were nevertheless exciting to see on their breeding grounds. We saw a Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) and a Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) as well as another Lesser Yellowlegs about halfway along the Denali Highway in a boggy field. Further along the highway, a small lake held about 20 Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) spinning around as they fed on the surface of the water. (As an aside, if you ever have the chance to drive along this road, take it: it is stunningly beautiful and very little traveled.)

Right at the end of the Denali Highway, on a trail a short way beyond a hand-written note warning that a Grizzly Bear had been seen on the trail the day before, was a real thrill: a pair of breeding American Golden-Plovers (*Pluvialis dominica*). Once considered the same species as our visiting Pacific Golden-Plover (*P. fulva*), this species is

very hard to separate in non-breeding plumage. But in its full colours there is no doubt: both male and female Americans have a broad white stripe separating the black underparts from the golden-speckled back that runs from the forehead down the neck, stopping abruptly at chest height. In the Pacific species, the white stripe is narrower and less well defined, but it extends all the way to the tail underlining the edge of the wing. The female we saw was less cleanly marked on her face compared to the jet black of the male. He ran around peeping, while at one stage she gave a classical broken-wing display. We kept carefully to the trail and never saw their nest.

To see some of the other species that breed in Alaska, we would have had to go to a much greater effort, including taking a plane trip to Nome, where we may have seen Pacific Golden-Plover, Bristle-thighed Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwit, or a flight to Barrow, on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, where several sandpiper species breed. Maybe next time, I suppose. But I wouldn't want to have missed any of the spots we did go, and Alaska is a very big place. Nor would I have wanted to miss out of seeing the mammals we did: Grizzly Bear, Caribou, Moose, Dall's Sheep Beaver, Porcupine, Snowshoe Hare, Pika, Ground Squirrel and, as adorable in real life as in every picture, Sea Otter. And there were many other birds, of course, but that is another story.

Hamish G. Spencer  
Dunedin  
August 2005





# OUT 'N ABOUT!

## Birdwatching in North-west Australia

In mid-June a South Island friend and I made trip to Broome in NW Australia. We stayed the first few days at the Broome Bird Observatory. Here there are basic rooms with shared facilities or camping. Cooking facilities are available with the dining area overlooking a large water bath where the birds and animals come to drink.

Although the huge flocks of shorebirds had left to breed in the Northern Hemisphere, there were many overwintering birds to be seen. We visited all the different habitats near the Observatory. Woodland, salt-marsh, mangroves and rocky sandy shoreline, seeing at least 70 species in those few days but many more would be possible.

During our stay the weather turned from Dry to WET! 70-80 mm of rain fell overnight limiting access to the Observatory and making it impossible for us to leave in our own transport. The observatory staff in their 4WD came to our rescue and we were able

vast cattle stations in the area, except in the Mitchell Plateau where we were in a "permanent" tented camp.

George was an excellent leader. He knew all the bird calls and where to find them in their different habitats. He ensured that each member of our small group had good views of each species, often through the scope. He was a tremendous enthusiast and had a great sense of humour! We birded from dawn till dark and sometimes later when looking for owls and nightjars! Although we saw many great birds the finding of the only Kimberly endemic, the Black Grasswren and several sightings of the rare Gouldian Finches were definite highlights.

An early morning visit to a wonderful wetland on Drysdale Station was also special. Here we saw 36 species, two of which had not been previously recorded in this part of the Kimberley (Freckled Duck and Yellow Chat). All this before breakfast! A total of 183 on the tour, a wonderful few days.

Betty Seddon and Julie Barker

However, while we observed 429 Oystercatchers over the period 17-April 2004 – 20 June 2005 we did not see any banded oystercatchers at all! I understand that banded birds were observed at Whangarei – I would have expected Whangaparaoa might have been on this flight path.

In retrospect: the Canterbury breeding birds were probably traveling with their young and may have "harbour hopped" i.e. Firth of Thames to Manukau Harbour to Kaipara Harbour to Whangarei. This would provide more resting and feeding opportunities for them and they would bypass Whangaparaoa in the western side. However this raises other questions such as where do Whangaparaoa oystercatchers nest.

Steve Ramsey

## Waders on Karikari Beach

Karikari Peninsula forms the eastern side of Rangaunu Harbour in Northland, and while in the area with a friend we went to several of the beaches on the peninsula to see what we could find. On one day we went up to Karikari Beach at the northern end of the peninsula. We had been told that there was a chance we could find some waders and so we wandered down the beach. At first we were surprised at the lack of New Zealand Dotterel and Variable Oystercatchers, but then we found an outlet where the swamp behind the dunes came up towards the beach. There were two outlets in a short distance and this was where we found the waders. Although in small numbers there was a reasonable variety to be seen - the endemics; New Zealand Dotterel, Banded Dotterel, Wrybill and Variable Oystercatchers, and the migrants, a small group of Turnstone, four Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and the surprise of the day a Marsh Sandpiper!

I can't decide the highlight, the Marsh Sandpiper, or the New Zealand Dotterel with coloured leg bands.

Gillian Vaughan



*The shores of Roebuck Bay Photo P. Battley*

to go on to the "second stage" of our trip. This was into the Western Kimberly from Broome. We joined a small tour group led by George Swann who operates "Kimberly Birdwatching" This ten day tour only visited a small part of this huge wilderness. The areas we visited were very remote and the birds and wildlife mostly unspoilt, although some habitats had been trampled and impoverished by cattle and wild donkeys. Our accommodation was on some of the

## Oystercatchers on Whangaparaoa Peninsula

Some time ago a request appeared in one of the Ornithological Society's publications for records of sightings of leg banded Oystercatchers from Canterbury.

We had recently moved to the Whangaparaoa Peninsula where we now live within a 10-30 minute walk of six beaches often frequented by Pied and Variable Oystercatchers: Stanmore Bay, Swann Beach, Manly Beach Little Manly, Tindalls Bay and Arkles Bay. At this time I was also endeavoring to come to grips with digital photography and thought it a good opportunity to try and record the leg banded sightings photographically.

# *Farewell to Miranda*



*Photo Geraldine King*

Today we have to say farewell to Miranda because our two and a half month study tour to New Zealand is finished.

We are two conservation workers from China who, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November flew to Miranda, New Zealand. This would be our home for the next ten weeks. As a matter of fact, a long journey took about 13 hours from Beijing to Melbourne, Australia on November 24, 2005 and it was the first time we have flown so far from our hometowns. As planned, we stayed ten days in that vast country. Thereafter another flight from Sydney was a short three and half hours to Auckland. The journey we had just completed was the same as that undertaken by some migratory shorebirds flying south from China to New Zealand.

We spent a lot of time at Miranda Shorebird Centre, which is situated in the heart of a wetland area of international importance. The area around Miranda has extensive shellbanks, which have formed along the coast and these provide excellent and safe roosting areas for birds at high tide. There are 132 bird species, 43 of them waders recorded at Miranda. A species of wader called Wrybill that

stop off at Miranda is unique in that it is the only bird with a bill turned to the side. The Shorebird Centre itself boasts accommodation and a comprehensive display area giving visitors from different countries a fascinating insight into this internationally renowned nature reserve.

It was very obvious that New Zealand is different from China in many ways. The main worry was the food we thought we might not be able to buy in New Zealand. We can eat any Chinese food, especially Sichuan's Pickle. It seemed to us that everything was tasty,

but we still had KFC and McDonald's a few times. We ate bread/sandwich almost once or twice a day, everyday so we got sick of eating that.

There are a lot of people living in China, while here there are not too many people, so they have bigger living areas, with huge gardens. There are four million people living in New Zealand, compared to 15 million people living in Beijing alone. Transport was an experience all of its own. There were different road rules, but it seemed that there are not traffic jams. Almost everybody is a gentle driver. Not only



*Lu Yong - The new Keith Woodley? Photo K Woodley*



wealthy people can afford cars, and in New Zealand cars are necessary tools similar to bicycles in China. To our surprise, a Kiwi has even told us there are six cars in his family. If in China every family would have at least a car in future, could you guess how many that would be?

As expected New Zealand is a natural and beautiful country. We were lucky enough to visit a number of places, including Thames, Auckland City, Nelson, Tauranga, Rotorua and Tiritiri Matangi and so on. Like New Zealand's birds, we had a wonderful time in this country. One of the most exciting things was watching a godwit with green over orange flags (banded at Yalu Jiang NNR) in a stilt pond of Miranda. Maybe you are able to imagine us suddenly meeting an old friend flying thousands of kilometers the same as us. Tiritiri Matangi Island, in the Hauraki Gulf, has been transformed into a remarkable wildlife sanctuary-one that is open to the public. For 140 years the Tiritiri light has symbolized a safe haven and security for mariners. Now, the island provides an equally safe haven for New Zealand's endangered birds. With the great guidance of Adrian, so many birds we have never seen, such as Takahē, Pukeko, Robin, and Saddleback were identified. In particular, the island is now administered and staffed in a partnership between the Department of Conservation and the Supporters of Tiritiri Matangi Inc. a non-governmental organization. It is the pride of Kiwis indeed.

Another interesting experience was the field tour with Estella Lee, a very powerful lady, during Christmas. Estella was very funny and erudite. We not only saw a lot of indigenous things such as shearing sheep, bee products, and kiwis, but also new stories of New Zealand

We also had a great opportunity to attend the shorebird conference in Nelson. There were many presentations with up to date information, and we met many shorebird researchers during the

conference. At the same time we realized that the Yellow Sea region plays such an important role for wader roosting and feeding in the whole the East Asian-Australasian Migratory Shorebird Flyway. Therefore, there are a lot of changes and challenges ahead for shorebird conservation in China. Miranda Field Course 2006 was held during our stay at Miranda Shorebird Centre. On those days we caught birds by both mist and cannon netting and banded birds for research purposes. This "bird-in-the-hand" experience was for most participants the highlight of the course.

We spent much time with Keith Woodley, who is the manager of Miranda Shorebird Centre. Almost every New Zealander was really friendly and treated us like friends. Sometimes it was difficult for us to understand fully some visitors if they speak fast. Although both of us can't speak really good and fluent English, it is easy for

Keith to understand us. So when it came to bargaining or communication with other people, as long as Keith was there it was easy for us!

We are only the first round of an exchange programme that was agreed during the April visit of the delegation from China. The exchange programme will be bolstered over the months from October to May by two groups of two conservation workers from China. One of each group will be from Wetlands International-China, and the other from Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve. This provides an opportunity for the workers from China to gain an appreciation of the way that the Shorebird Centre is operated and how conservation activities in New Zealand are organized. We would like to thank Miranda Naturalists' Trust, Wetlands International-China and Yalu Jiang NNR for their assistance in getting this good study tour under way.

Lu Yong & Zhang Guangming

## *And a welcome to Miranda!*

Greetings! If you find yourself at the Shorebird Centre over the next few months, you may encounter a couple of visitors. Although we are only two amongst the fortunate thousands who reside for the summer along Miranda's shoreline, we can easily be separated from the rest of the flock: we're students from the United States and we don't have wings. With the help of a grant from the Thomas J. Watson Foundation we are following the East Asian-Australasian Flyway for a complete migratory cycle. Although we don't possess our own sets of wings, since August 2005 we've been traveling south along the flyway, stopping over in Taiwan, Thailand, and Australia before arriving in the Firth of Thames in mid-January. The aims of our project include studying not only the migratory shorebirds but also the conservation efforts within the various countries concerning the birds and their habitat. Our days at Miranda will be spent at the bird hide executing counts and flag sightings for the centre as well as offering interpretation for visitors. Also, through the use of a questionnaire, we will be assessing local knowledge of the migrant shorebirds and their participation in conservation actions. In March, as the birds depart on their northward migration we will take to the skies as well and head for South Korea's Saemangeum Wetland along the Yellow Sea. The last leg of our journey, June to August, will be spent in the breeding grounds of Far East Russia. In the meantime, we look forward to seeing you at the hide.

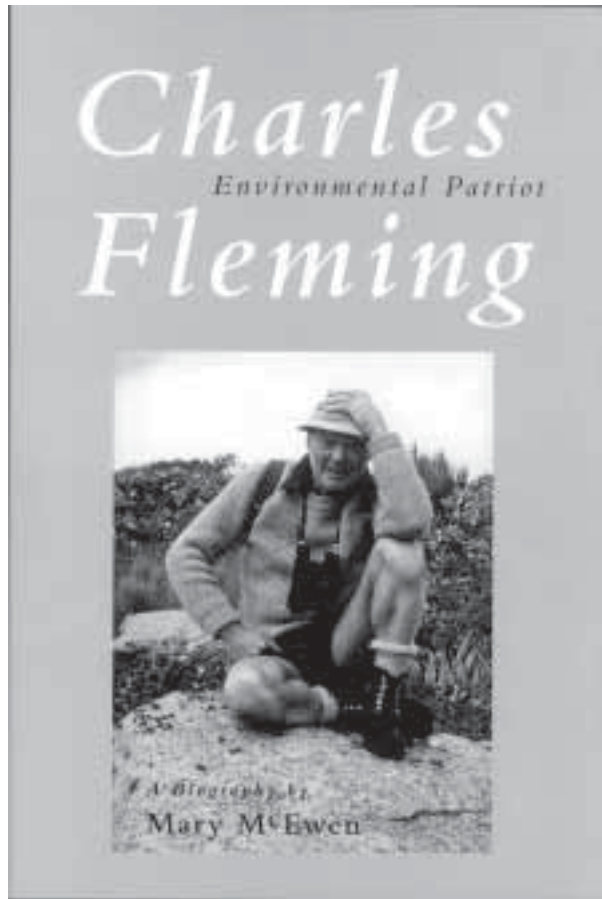
## BOOK REVIEWS

### CHARLES FLEMING- Environmental Patriot

A Biography by Mary McEwen

Publisher Craig Potton Publishing

Price \$49.99 (on sale at the Shorebird Centre)



The story of Charles Fleming, a Wellington scientist and conservationist, who died in 1987, has recently been written by his daughter Mary McEwen. This recounts the remarkable scientific life of one of New Zealand's earlier scientists.

Charles Fleming was a name which was well known in science, ornithological and conservation circles from the 1950s until his death in 1987. In some of these circles he was revered for his breadth of knowledge, his output of scientific papers and essays, his mastery of English, his determination over matters conservation, and his willingness to act as mentor and helper to many young nature lovers.

Outside of these circles he was perhaps less well known, but to those who knew him, his achievements, especially in areas of conservation where he

constantly preached a message of environmental enlightenment, are still around us, even though it is 18 years since his death.

Charles Fleming, we are told in the book, was brought up in a well to do Auckland home. His parents, it appeared, seemed to maintain a fairly tight rein over him and were very much in control, his mother even buying his clothes. But from this environment he nevertheless escaped, and as a young man regularly visited the out of doors and later some of the off shore islands of New Zealand at a time when they had seldom been visited before.

From these adolescent excursions he developed a love for their natural history and for science at the same time. This eventually led him to a career in science and after considering various avenues of employment, he settled for palaeontology with the then DSIR, a job he maintained for his total working life.

It was during this career that he plotted the geological history of New Zealand, very much through the examination of fossilised molluscs, but also through its ancient natural history. Some of his early manifestations, the book suggests, he described as 'educated guessing', mainly because much of the work had not been done before.

His career really started on the Auckland Islands where he was stationed as a coast guard during the Second World War. There he carried out

scientific studies in various ways during a one-year stint of isolation. During this time his wife Peg, whom he had only recently married, had their first child, and also during this period his father George Fleming died.

Upon his return to New Zealand and with the help of Peg, his career in the study of mollusc fossils got underway, and this book takes you through the many phases of his work, with his family life being the background thread that holds the narrative together.

It is very obvious from reading this narrative that the author too has a wide knowledge of science, a feature which differs from many biographies where the writer is only that. Mary McEwen has therefore taken the reader carefully and meticulously through such things as the introduction of plate tectonics and carbon dating, the newly described land mass called Gondwanaland, and changes to the boundaries between the Pleistocene and Pliocene periods of the earth's history, heavy stuff perhaps but told in an easily read manner.

The end result is that she has, inadvertently or not, written a history book recounting five decades of science in New Zealand. And not only are plate tectonics, carbon dating and the Gondwanaland theory touched on, but there are other histories too. These include ornithology almost from its inception, the ecological movement, the campaign to save native forests, the change of thinking towards the environment by a large group of previously uncommitted people, and a general history of political thinking as to the environment throughout a forty year period.

She has also documented the changes experienced by science and scientists following the 'quango' hunt and science restructuring of the 1980s. All this she has wrapped around Charles Fleming's thoughts, quoting verbatim from his letters and notes as she goes. This has been summed up by his words 'technology is the offspring of science, its by-product, but not its objective. Its objective is knowledge and understanding, which arises from man's questioning and curiosity...'



## New Zealand Birds in Focus: a photographer's journey by Geoff Moon 2005 Reed ISBN 9 780790 010335 120pp 49.95

In the last few chapters she concentrates very much on Charles Fleming's obsession with the saving of the last of the old podocarp forests in the North Island and the beech forests on the West Coast of the South Island. This goal, we read, took up much of his time in retirement, and so hard did he work at it that the book implies it could have affected his health and brought about his relatively early death.

After reading this book the reader soon realises that Charles Fleming was one of the forerunners of many of the large number of environmental projects we now know. If he lived today I feel sure he would think most of what he preached had not been in vain. In fact he would certainly regard it as full recompense for a fifty-year period of conservation campaigning.

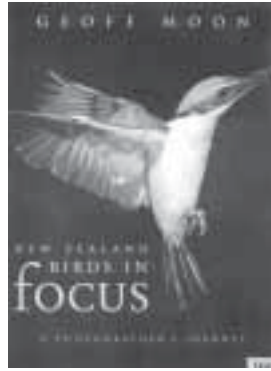
The outcome of this book then, will be that Charles Fleming will soon become much better known than he was when he was alive. At the same time he will be given lasting credit for all he did in helping to save New Zealand forests in particular, but the environment generally, from further development and despoliation.

So even if you have never heard of Charles Fleming and have no interest in science, ornithology or forest conservation, I still recommend this book, as it takes you through a period of New Zealand history most people know little about. It is told in a readable writing style with the science explained, and with Charles Fleming's human foibles and activities being a full part of it.

And he was generous too, making many large donations to environmental and scientific causes, all this stemming from a starting salary at the DSIR of £255 a year. He was obviously a financier too.

This is an excellent book about a wonderfully intelligent and generous person, but it is more than that. It is a most interesting tale about a period of our scientific and conservation history. It needed telling and has now very interestingly been told.

Stuart Chambers



With regard to New Zealand birds Geoff Moon is a very familiar name. Even people with barely a passing interest in things

ornithological will have one if not more of his books on their shelves. Doubtless even more homes will have had Geoff Moon images on their calendars. From coffee table items to field guides to school resources – his output has been prodigious. But then again he has been doing it for quite some time.

At the age of 90 his latest volume was published late last year. While sharing its title with one of his earlier books, the sub-title indicates this book literally has a different focus. Certain sequences of photos have become iconic images to many New Zealanders. The series of a kingfisher diving into a pool are perhaps the most familiar. Then there are the Morepork images - birds returning to the nest with prey, or chicks perched outside the nest. Or the close up of Kereru feeding on nikau berries, or a New Zealand falcon at nest. All these species have one thing in common – they are among the most difficult to photograph, especially when nesting. This book reveals the techniques needed to do so.

A number of images have been published elsewhere, although not always to this level of reproduction quality. Selected species are illustrated with a detailed account of how the images were taken, and the equipment used. Of particular interest is an extended section describing how the diving kingfisher series came about. It was literally a three year project.

One theme is the considerable effort required to locate a suitable site, construct a hide and patiently wait for birds to co-operate. Building a hide in some locations could only occur over

several days, usually to allow the subject to become used to the structure's presence, though sometimes it was because of the logistics involved. A cave where Reef Heron nested was one such site where the hide had to be built months before the birds next nested. To photograph falcon, a hide clinging to a high bluff was needed. And the image of a hide 22 metres up a pine tree opposite a White-faced Heron nest is not for the faint-hearted.

Then there is the endless patience required over many hours inside such places. But the rewards are often stunning. "At heart I am a naturalist and I use the camera as a valuable tool in recording facets of bird behaviour" writes Moon. He was able to observe intimate details of bird behaviour, some of it previously unknown. He watched grebes covering their eggs with weed before leaving the nest, White-faced Heron preening with worn feather powder and a serrated toe as a comb, and Kereru feeding pigeon milk and berry pulp to chicks.

Here too is attention to detail. In the Reef Heron cave for instance, sandwiches were wrapped in cloth to avoid any sound disturbance.

Many Geoff Moon images have been published overseas, particularly in birding media in the U.K. A photo of a Caspian Tern offering an impossibly large fish to its chick, was published in a French newspaper with the caption: "Do birds think?"

The experience of a lifetime is distilled into an accessible book that any photographer will find very useful. For technical buffs, an early chapter describes camera gear details from earliest days and traces changes to the present. It is however a relatively slim volume and the price may find some consumer resistance. But anyone interested in bird photography or how equipment and techniques have evolved will find interest here. At the very least the images themselves will bring considerable pleasure.

Keith Woodley



Congratulations on an excellent issue for November '05. There were some fascinating articles, especially the Chairman's Report and the New Zealand Wader Study Group News.

In connection with Keith Woodley's book review "The Big Twitch" by Sean Dooley, I can add a small item of news. In 1993 when an ornithological group from New Zealand travelled to the Iron Range National Park in Northern Queensland one of the group from Australia was a man from near Sydney, Reg Clark. He became a friend of Barrie's and mine and I have continued the contact and have been birding with him in Australia several times.

He is now 82 and sadly has cancer but called me last week to say that he had achieved his goal earlier in the year, by reaching 700 species. When this was put on the internet he had messages of congratulations from all over the world including one from Denmark. What a splendid effort!

Yours sincerely,  
Rosemary Heather

# BIRD FLU

## IN GENERAL

In late October 2005 media headlines were dominated by bird flu stories. Reports of the virus spreading to the fringes of Europe had clearly set alarm bells ringing. New Zealand authorities were reported as preparing scenarios for confronting a possible pandemic. Understandably, given that migratory bird movements were at the centre of these stories, we began receiving enquiries. Television, radio and print media were all seeking comment. Our response was that as things currently stand, while there is a need for ongoing vigilance, the chances of the virus arriving in this country via migratory shorebirds ranged from negligible to non-existent.

The known reservoirs of the virus are domestic poultry and wild waterfowl such as ducks and geese. Human fatalities known to have occurred to date are virtually all linked to direct contact with infected birds or their faeces. No such waterfowl migrate to New Zealand, nor even to Australia. Bar-tailed Godwit and Knot are known to stop in the Yellow Sea region during migration where they frequent intertidal flats and coastal margins. In such places contact with waterfowl and domestic poultry is possible, but given the areas affected to date the chances of any of 'our' birds becoming infected seem remote. Furthermore given the life cycle of these long distance migrants where they need to complete migration flights of between 5,000 and 10,500 km, it seems a reasonable assumption that any bird carrying a virus is unlikely to survive the journey. Birds can carry viruses which may not necessarily kill them, but even if their performance is only slightly affected it may well be enough to prevent successful migration.

Nevertheless as part of ongoing contingency planning, staff from MAF and the Epi-centre at Massey University

have been monitoring birds at Miranda for the last two years. Samples taken from Godwit, Knot, Wrybill and Mallards have produced no indication of viruses.

Keith Woodley

## CLOSER TO HOME

At the recent AOU Conference held in Blenheim in December last year a symposium on avian influenza was held. As part of that the results of the pilot study carried out in 2004/05 by the EpiCentre at Massey University were outlined by Ian Langstaff.

The pilot project was designed to look at effective methods of monitoring avian influenza virus. As part of that study they took samples around the Firth of Thames from Red Knots that had recently returned from migration, and Wrybill and Mallards as resident species that could interact with the migratory shorebirds. Samples were taken in two ways, first directly from the birds, and second fecal samples were taken from the environment. Part of the aim was to find out whether the presence of avian influenza was able to be detected using both methods of sampling and to incorporate this into recommendations for wildlife disease surveillance.

Of the 2578 samples that were taken from shorebirds no cases of avian influenza were found. Avian influenza of the low pathogenic variety (very different from the strains causing concern overseas) was present in mallards at a low level.

Reference:  
Surveillance for avian influenza virus in wild birds in New Zealand. Langstaff, IG and McKenzie JS  
*Abstracts of the Australasian Ornithological Conference.*

For details about avian influenza you can visit [www.moh.govt.nz/birdflu](http://www.moh.govt.nz/birdflu), in addition to their own information they have links to further sites that are useful.

**from the Shop:**



The latest items for sale at the Shorebird Centre are fridge magnets \$3.50 each, designed by Keith Woodley.




Miranda shorebird centre  
[www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz](http://www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz)



# Exotic plants as winter nectar sources for Tui

Almost all of the prime lowland native forest that once covered most of mainland New Zealand has gone, and the condition of that which remains has been seriously degraded by a variety of factors. Now, over much of mainland New Zealand, the flora is a mixture of native and exotic species, and exotic vegetation is often more common and widespread than is native vegetation. Exotic plants form an integral part of the New Zealand environment, and will always do so.

It appears that Tui in many parts of mainland New Zealand now rely on the floral nectar of a variety of exotic plants to help meet their energy needs in the cooler months of the year when those needs are greatest. Indeed, the maintenance of mainland populations of Tui in some areas may well depend in large part upon the availability of those nectar sources. However, the importance of exotic plants as a source of floral nectar for Tui in the cooler months of the year is not adequately acknowledged and remains virtually unstudied.

Pukekura Park is situated in central New Plymouth and is surrounded by residential development. It covers an area of c.54 hectares and contains a large number of many different native and exotic plants. Some Tui appear to be resident in the park, and several pairs nest there each year. Their number increases significantly from about April as birds arrive from elsewhere in search of floral nectar sources to sustain them

during the cooler months of the year. Tui are common in the park from then until about October when most leave the area with the end of Kowhai (*Sophora microphylla*) flowering.

I spent c.204 hours on 96 days in June-August 2003 and in June-August 2004 in the park. During this time I frequently saw Tui feeding on nectar of the flowers of various plants, both native and exotic. The results will appear in detail elsewhere. Suffice to say here that I saw Tui feed 1247 times on nectar of which a very significant number, 1117 times or 90%, were observations of Tui feeding on nectar from flowers of exotic plants. The exotic plants visited most for nectar were camellias, to which there were 646 observed feeding visits involving at least 33 species and identified cultivars, and the Formosan Cherry (*Prunus campanulata*), to which there were 339 observed feeding visits. These observations indicate that those exotic plants are of prime importance as sources of nectar for Tui in Pukekura Park during winter.

The presence in Pukekura Park of exotic nectar sources of value to Tui is likely to be the main reason why so many of those birds are attracted to the park, and reside there during the cooler months of the year. The provision of suitable exotic flowering plants in parks and gardens elsewhere in New Zealand could well help to enhance and maintain local Tui populations.

David Medway

## AGM and nominations for Council

The Annual General Meeting of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust will be held at the Shorebird Centre on Sunday May 21st 2006 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 eighteenth 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 15th 2005  
Matter Arising from the minutes  
Chairman's Report  
Treasurer's Report  
Election of Officers  
(Treasurer, Secretary  
Auditor,  
10 Council Members)  
General Business

## THE ART OF BOTANICAL DRAWING: WORKSHOP with SANDRA MORRIS

Love plants? Have a favourite you want to sketch? This workshop is an introduction to plant illustration ideal for anyone interested in the botanical world. We will start with a brief look at the history and contemporary development of botanical illustration, and some basic plant anatomy. Flower structure will be examined with a microscope. Exercises in observational drawing will be set and you will be encouraged to experiment with a choice of drawing tools such as pencils, pastel, charcoal, ink, paint. You will create a variety of works from the delicate small study to larger gestural pieces. Students are encouraged to bring any plants they want to work with and the gardens around the centre will also provide our inspiration.

Saturday 18 - Sunday 19 November 2006 Miranda Shorebird Centre  
For expressions of interest contact Keith at the Centre.

# Looking for a view?

Primarily birders want binoculars to see birds, there are a number of different features that binoculars can have, but the bottom line is simple – can you use them to get a good, clear view of the bird in reasonable comfort? There are many factors that contribute to a better view, young eyes definitely help!

Your eyes and brain can compensate for some faults in the gear but this comes at the cost of eye strain and tiredness, thus compromising your day out. There is a huge range in the market and there should be something for everybody. To choose which pair of binoculars is best for you it helps to know what the terminology means, and therefore what are the important features for your binoculars to have.

There are two main designs for binoculars:

**Porro-prisms** are the traditional style and still the most common. They have an obvious bend in the middle and may be quite large. Optically they are the easiest to get right and dollar for dollar should give you a better view than a roof prism binocular.

**Roof Prisms** are quite commonly seen in the birding world and have two straight tubes. They require a bit more precision to make as the light needs to be bent more times before it reaches your eye, so tend to cost more, but they are more durable and easier to waterproof.

Each design can come in a full size or a compact. When you first pick up a pair of binoculars you'll see two numbers, usually something like 8\*40, 7\*35, 10\*42 etc. The first number is the magnification, the second the size of the objective lens (more later). Full size binoculars will usually have an objective lens measurement of 30mm or higher, large binoculars 40mm or higher. Compacts will be lower.

**Compacts** can be either porro-prism or roof-prism design, and are small and light, which can be a tremendous advantage. The disadvantage is that they use lenses that are smaller, leading to less light transmission and tend to have a narrower field of view making it harder to find the bird in a hurry and increasing problems with steadiness.

## **The basics**

**Magnification** seems to be the whole point of buying binoculars but, as you cannot hold binoculars perfectly still, bigger is not always better. Hand shake reduces your ability to see all the detail present, the higher the magnification, the more this will affect your view. Tests suggest that a 7\* magnification is about the optimum but most birders like more, 8\* and 10\* are common in birding binoculars.

**The objective lens** is the large lens at the end of the binoculars and it limits the amount of light entering the binoculars. More light gives a brighter image and more detail. A lens diameter

of 30-35 mm should show most of the available details in good light, and 40-50mm should cope with almost any light conditions. In particular large objective lens are useful in poor light conditions. The ability of

the objective lens to pick up light is reduced as magnification increases. To make a comparison of relative brightness you can simply divide the objective lens diameter by the magnification.

The size of the objective lens has a big cost in weight as it takes more glass to make bigger binoculars and good quality optical glass is dense and heavy. This may compromise your ability to hold the binoculars still and may drag on your neck through a long day out.

## **The details**

**The exit pupil** is the measurement in mm of the size of image as it exits the binoculars. Large objective lenses generally lead to large exit pupils, compact binoculars have small exit pupils. Large is usually better, however there comes a point where the exit pupil is larger than your own eye's pupil, and you can not see all of the image that is available. As we age our pupil size decreases and we are able to take advantage of less of the available image to a point where a mid-sized binocular can provide an exit pupil as large as our own eye's pupil, and there is no point carrying the large binocular! As everyone's eyes are different guidelines are hard to give, but you can try using binoculars with different exit pupils in dusky light and seeing if you notice a difference.

**Lens Coatings** are found on almost all binoculars. This is because normally some of the light hitting the lenses and prisms is reflected back, coatings decrease this "back scatter". There are several different types of coatings; the more expensive the binoculars the more lenses will be coated. The classification goes from coated to fully coated, to multi coated to fully-multi coated. In addition roof-prism binoculars need an anti-phase shift coating, otherwise the image will look soft.

**Close-focus Distance** In some binoculars the closest you can focus can be as far as 5 metres away. When birding is going well the birds can end up closer than this! Some binoculars can focus on your bootlaces (its easier if you are tall), this is more common in the mid to high price ranges.

*Roof-prism binoculars with the two straight tubes Opposite Page, Porro-prism binoculars with the bend in each tube.*





**Eye relief** is the distance from the lens in the eyepiece to the point of focus. Binoculars often have soft or extendable eyecups so your eyes naturally sit at that point of focus.

**Long eye relief** is when the eye relief is particularly large, (usually 14mm or above although this varies with magnification), and therefore people who wear eye-glasses may be able to fold back the eye cups and use their binoculars without removing their glasses, saving time and trouble. Long eye relief can be found at all price ranges if you look for it.

**Diopter** The diopter allows you to adjust the focus to suit the differences between your eyes. To do this one of the eye pieces twists through a graduated scale. Set the fixed eyepiece for one eye and twist the mobile eyepiece until the image is at its best. Binoculars may differ in the degree of adjustment that is possible.

**Waterproofing** Even if you don't drop your binoculars in the tide if they get water vapour inside them it may cling to the lenses when you take them out in the cold causing them to fog up. Dust can enter the same way and will slowly dirty the inside glass. Seals can reduce this and many binoculars are completely sealed and filled with a dry gas such as nitrogen. They should neither fog up nor gather dust and you can wash them under the tap.

### ***In the shops...***

I went out in Auckland to see what was available to try or buy. What I found was that there is an art to buying binoculars in Auckland – patience, and I imagine that it takes even more patience in many other parts of the country. We are a small market and that means slow sales for the retailers. I didn't find anywhere that carried a huge range, most places seemed to carry only two or three brands. The exception to this was Meltzers, and if you are in Auckland, desperate for a pair of mid-range binoculars and you need them today that would be the place to go.

Places I visited included Camera Warehouse in Ponsonby Serious Shooters in Penrose Parallel Imports Ltd in East Tamaki Meltzers in downtown Auckland.

I visited a number of other sports and camera stores, but never found anywhere with more than one or two pairs of binoculars at the lower price range. What was missing on the shelves was a selection of 10\* magnification binoculars, and binoculars with 40mm+ objective lenses.

### **Top of the line**

If you are planning on spending several thousand dollars on a pair of binoculars (and you can!) you should do your own research, all of the top range are good binoculars, and what matters is the trade-offs between all the features discussed earlier, essentially what is going to suit you best. When it comes to these binoculars, while you are able to buy them in New Zealand there is almost nowhere you can go where binoculars worth thousands of dollars are sitting on the shelf so you can try them out. Your best chance of getting a comparison may be by hanging out in known birder spots like Miranda and looking through someone else's pair. If you know what you want you can ask the staff in the stores listed above (or probably many other stores) if they can order what you want.

Zeiss, Swarovski, Kowa, Nikon, and Leica are the current leading brands, but new binoculars are coming out every year. The new Zeiss seem to be the latest fashion, the Kowa the lowest price. No store had any of these in stock but you can contact David Stonex (09) 570 2234 and arrange a time to go and see him; he stocks the Kowa range and has a selection available to try. Camera Warehouse had two pairs of Zeiss binoculars on the shelf, 8\*20's and 8\*30s, (both were priced between \$1,100 and \$1,200), a pair of Nikon EII 8\*30s, (on sale at the time but normally \$975) and a brand called Steiner Wildlife 8\*24 and 8\*34 (that ranged up above \$2,000) so if you are interested in the 8\*30 size binocular this would be a good store to start in. Serious Shooters carried some Kowas.

### **Mid Range**

The binoculars under about \$1,000 are better represented in the shops, but again most stores had only one or two pairs at that price. The quality of the binoculars in the mid-price range is less

certain, but can be excellent. I looked for reviews of those binoculars that I found in the stores in Auckland and the Nikon Monarch found at Parallel Imports Ltd seemed to have the best reviews, significantly the model on the shelf was an 8\*42, a bigger objective lens than many of the others in stock in the same price range, often 8\*30. Parallel Imports also stocked the Canon 10\*30 with an image stabiliser, which is nice if you want binoculars with high magnification but find it hard to hold them steady. From personal experience I know that they can race through the batteries in the cold, but they do still function as a normal set of binoculars when the batteries are dead. Meltzers ([www.meltzers.co.nz](http://www.meltzers.co.nz)) have a website which shows a lot of their stock, the Bushnell 8\*40 Legacy or Natureview are good choices here.

### **Budget Binoculars**

In the under \$250 price range there is a wide range of options. Many local camera stores have a few pairs of binoculars for sale, and some of them are very good. A basic suggestion is to stay away from the roof-prism compact binoculars in this price range, and to think about one or two features that matter to you most and try and pick a pair that emphasises those. For all the reasons outlined earlier with a few exceptions you'll get the best quality in a normal sized porro-prism binocular, at this price level it shows when the manufactures have put their spending into optics rather than having to deal with complicated engineering.

The Bushnell H<sub>2</sub>O's were found at Parallel Import Ltd along with the Nikon Actions (also found at Camera Warehouse). A review of binoculars under £150 by Birdwatching Magazine considered both of these to be good buys. Waterproofing in the Bushnells is an extra bonus.

### **GOOD VIEWING**

Gillian Vaughan & Ian Southey



# Snipe in-sight

Fairly soon after the snipe was reported at Forest Lake in Hamilton, Gillian Vaughan and I became two of the many who went down to see it. It was quite an obliging bird and we found it easily, spotting it almost from the car park on a floating little mat grass and weeds not far from the shore just in front of Brian and Cushla Chudleigh. Not being too clued up on snipe I was immediately surprised at the size of it. Joining the Chudeighs, we had the pleasure of studying the intricate patterns on the feathers at leisure and watching it first at rest and then probing deeply and energetically in the soft peat until a Coot came along and chased it off.

But what was it? Many people had had fantastic views of the bird and some excellent pictures were taken. From precedent it was likely that it was a Japanese Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) but when you look up the reference books, the precedents are not so weighty. It seems as if the firm records were of two early specimens. The first was shot by Mr. C. C. Sandford in a paddock near Arch Hill, then on the western side of Auckland, in March 1898. It was strange enough for him to take it into the Auckland Museum where it was identified by Thomas Cheeseman. The next came to Castlecliff, near Wanganui. It must have been recognised as an oddity straight away as Mr. G. Shepherd noted that it was seen for several years, always in the spring, before he shot it in 1914. This rather definite way of documenting these birds was very helpful as snipe are a difficult group and, in those days, you really had to count the tail feathers to know what you had. Over the years there were about half a dozen more snipe records in New Zealand. The problem is that there are two other species, Swinhoe's Snipe and Pin-tailed Snipe, that are almost identical in all the delightfully intricate details of their plumage. Furthermore all three of these species winter in Australia so any of them could stray to New Zealand, but only the Japanese Snipe usually come close to us as they winter in eastern Australia south to Victoria while the other two species tend to remain in the north. No

firm identifications were claimed in the field until a snipe turned up briefly at Mangere in October 1985. There a group of more than usually determined birders tossed a pebble to startle the bird and managed to photograph the spread tail to help clinch the identification. Retrospectively, a snipe seen in Southland between December 1984 and March 1985 also seems to have been a Japanese Snipe based on the harsh calls, large size and a lack of foot projection in flight. More recently a number of other Japanese Snipe have also been identified in New Zealand.

On a later visit to Hamilton I was able to photograph the bird sunbathing with its tail spread and you can count five smaller dull feathers along the side before you get to the broad orange feathers that form the tip. This is what you would expect for a Japanese Snipe, but were they all revealed? Japanese Snipe have only 16 – 18 feathers but, at the other extreme, Pin-tailed Snipe have 24 to 28 with the small ones on

the side being very fine. Swinhoe's Snipe with 20-22 feathers is not so different. Unfortunately, you can't shoot it to check nowadays.

The field guides were interesting but not, in the end, particularly helpful. The New Zealand guide does not discuss the separation of these three species. In fact one picture shows the Japanese Snipe in flight with the feet projecting beyond the tail which is misleading. Taking off they may protrude briefly, but in normal flight they don't, apparently. Foreign field guides were not so helpful either, discussing details of jizz and full of maybes. For this to be useful it really helps to have some prior experience and that is hard to get in this country. Even good pictures would help.

Having worked through the book shelf without gaining any satisfaction, the only solution was to make it somebody else's problem. Some fairly useful looking pictures were sent to Danny Rogers so he could sort it out and the

Dear Gillian,

It was a real thrill to finally lay my eyes on a snipe. I have been looking at birds since the 1950s and this is my first view of a migrant snipe. I have seen Chatham Snipe in the flesh, a smaller species, not as strikingly patterned as the bird we saw on Friday. We went back yesterday for another try to get the bird doing something more interesting but we could not find it. It would have been good to get a shot of a wing stretch when birds usually flash their tail.

It all happened for me courtesy of Tim Barnard who emailed me a photo of the bird on Wednesday without saying where he saw it. He promptly emailed me instructions on where to find it in response to my request and Cushla and I took off from home just after 6-30am Friday. Photographing rare birds does not come any easier than with this bird. I walked 100 metres from the car park to the edge of the lake and there it was standing amongst rushes right in front of me in the most public area of the lake! The early morning light added a golden

hue to the beautifully patterned, brown plumage. A stunning bird, vastly more attractive than the usual dull grey or grey-brown winter plumage of other migratory waders I have photographed. The yellow/brown patterns of its back the nicest view, unusual in migrant waders. I fired off 3 photos, moved a slightly sideways and it was gone. Its flight out to mid lake quite rapid, in seconds it had disappeared on an island well out from the shore. It must have got a hot reception from Pied Stilts with chicks which were feeding out there, as a few minutes later when I had walked a couple of hundred metres round the lake edge for a closer view I found it quite close to the shore once more where it remained while I fired off over 50 photos. It was still in the same place when you and Ian arrived probably half an hour later.

A pity the coot had to swim straight up to it and flush it as it appeared to have settled nicely in our presence.

Brian Chudleigh



response was fairly interesting. He did agree that the tail had the right number of feathers for a Japanese Snipe and the lack of very narrow feathers along the side showed that it was not a Pin-tailed Snipe but he asked to see another set of pictures to be sure it wasn't Swinhoe's. These were much more normal; to clinch the identification he wanted to see a profile shot showing the wings and tail and another, of a relaxed bird front on, to show the breast pattern. The attenuated rear end is typical of a Japanese Snipe and resembles a "normal migratory wader", unlike the "stumpy bummed" Swinhoe's and Pin-tailed would be even more obviously so as the tail barely extends beyond the folded wings. In both Pin-tailed and Swinhoe's Snipe, the contour of the under tail has a little step between the vent and the under tail coverts but it is smoothly curved in Japanese Snipe. The large dark markings on the breast were broad and straight which is also diagnostic of a Japanese Snipe.

Danny wrote the piece about snipe identification in HANZAB, which seems to be the best that is available. When I read it and looked at the pictures, I found that most of the characters were quite subtle and I couldn't pick them with certainty. From my better photographs I could see the distinctive white shaft on the outer primary and that was all I was prepared to add. The legs and feet should have been olive grey to olive but on this bird they were definitely a yellowish olive as described for a Swinhoe's Snipe but this colour is also typical of young Japanese Snipe. Differences between adults and immatures in the patterning of the wing coverts had already been lost to moult but there were white tips to the flight feathers, although finer than described in the book, perhaps reduced by wear. The primaries were all slightly worn but fully grown and this also suggests that it was a young bird.

Japanese Snipe are reputed to be active mainly in the early mornings and evenings and to lurk in thick cover in freshwater wetlands. This one has been a fairly relaxed bird, providing good views to many people and staying long enough to become a local celebrity. On my first visit the birders were the object of curiosity, standing on the lake shore with all our fancy optics, but on my last I was approached by a woman and her family who were keen to see the little Japanese duck.

Ian Southey text and photos



*From the top the photos show the form of the bird and breast pattern the primaries spread to show white tips the tail feathers which can be counted when magnified*

### **And speaking of snipe...**

A smaller relation of the Japanese Snipe on the cover of this issue, the Campbell Island Snipe is making a come-back on the recently rat-free Campbell Island. New Zealand once had a number of different snipe species; the Campbell Island snipe was one that was thought long extinct. However in 1997 on Jacquemart Island, a small island off Campbell Island, a snipe was caught by a DoC group looking for teal.

In 2003, just two years after the rat eradication, signs of snipe were found on Campbell Island and in 2005 two individuals were seen, and one caught. This summer a team from DoC searched for and found evidence of a population of up to 30 birds on Campbell Island, of which 17 were caught. The birds have colonized the "mainland" by themselves showing the ongoing benefits of the rat eradication programme.

For details go to [www.doc.govt.nz/whats-new/presult.asp?prID=2095](http://www.doc.govt.nz/whats-new/presult.asp?prID=2095), or search for Campbell Island Snipe and look for a media release. The article is dated 20 January 2006.

Gillian Vaughan

# OSNZ Firth of Thames Summer Census Results.

These are the provisional results of the OSNZ Summer Firth of Thames Census held on 20 November 2005. The census counts the Firth of Thames from Kawakawa Bay to north of Thames. A big thank you to all of those involved in the count.

Pied Oystercatcher	3025
Variable Oystercatcher	147
Golden Plover	49
N.Z. Dotterel	14
Wrybill	118
Asiatic Whimbrel	17
Bar-tailed Godwit	6159
Terek Sandpiper	2
Turnstone	23
Knot	6180
Sharp-tail Sandpiper	14
Pectoral Sandpiper	2
Pied Stilt	498
Black/Smudgy Stilt	3
Ruff	1
Black Shag	29
Pied Shag	406
Little Black Shag	6
Little Shag	10
Spotted Shag	5
White-faced Heron	177
Royal Spoonbill	1
Spur-winged Plover	149
Black-backed Gull	149
Red-billed Gull	106
Black-billed Gull	649
Caspian Tern	108
White-fronted Tern	791
Gannet	1
Bittern	1
Banded Rail	3
Black Swan	295
Paradise Duck	89
Mallard Duck	761
Grey Teal	107
Harrier	6
Pukeko	32

Census Dates for 2006 are  
July 2 2006  
November 12 2006

## MIRANDA WALKWAY IN AUGUST

---

Green the grass, grey the tide  
Kahu on the wind does ride,  
Stark dry stalks of fennel rise  
Brittle sculptures against the skies,  
Waxeye small threads through the scrub  
Looking for nectar or maybe a grub,  
Swallow darts across our track  
Weaving for flies, forth and back,  
Solid rocks on waters edge  
Coloured with lichen , skirted with sedge,  
Crabs scuttle 'tween holes in the mud  
Sparkling movement in the Gulf's lifeblood,  
Walk past mangroves quiet with green  
Hiding whatever can't be seen,  
Soft the crunch of brittle shell  
That whitely adorns the path so well,  
Glassy ponds drain higher ground  
Reflecting the sky without a sound,  
Sprays of sea-rush nod in the breeze  
And grasses wave with elegant ease,  
Skylark springs to winter air  
It's shortened melody yet without care,  
Heron wings with graceful beat  
Seeking where to rest its feet,  
SIPO pipes from the distant tide  
And Caspian tern seeks far and wide,  
Dainty stilts feed on their pond  
Waving their lengthy bill like a wand,  
The track breaks open on the beach  
Where tide extends it's lapping reach,  
Dazzling shellbanks heap offshore  
As sun touches waders by the score,  
Godwits and knots form a mottled band  
And wrybills shelter along the sand,  
Pied Oystercatchers take to flight  
Over gulls and terns of silver and white .  
As we behold this peaceful scene  
We feel refreshed though the wind is keen,  
And the majesty of this glorious retreat  
Is balm to the soul, and grace to the feet.

Ken Pickett



Photos: Stilt I Southey, Silvereye G. Vaughan Caspian Tern J Vaughan



Look at recent issues of MNT  
News and NZWSG News  
[www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz](http://www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz)

From the Blackboard  
February 1st 2005

## Miranda Naturalists' Trust People:

### Shorebird Centre Manager:

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

### Council:

Kathy Barrow	Nigel Milius
Phil Battley	William Perry
John Gale (Ex officio)	Ashley Reid
<b>David Lawrie (Chairman)</b>	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>	5200
<i>Red Knot</i>	3000
<i>Turnstone</i>	15
<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	2
<i>Sharptailed Sandpiper</i>	20
<i>Pectoral Sandpiper</i>	1
<i>Terek Sandpiper</i>	2
<i>Red-necked Stint</i>	1
<i>Golden Plover</i>	1

## New Zealand Species

<i>Pied Oystercatcher</i>	
<i>Wrybill</i>	1500+
<i>NZ Dotterel</i>	
<i>Variable Oystercatcher</i>	
<i>Black-billed Gull</i>	
<i>Red-billed Gull</i>	
<i>White-fronted Tern</i>	
<i>Caspian Tern</i>	
<i>Pied Stilt</i>	
<i>Spoonbills</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.

### Friends of Miranda

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

### Long term Volunteers

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

**The Magazine**  
never forget you are  
welcome to contribute  
to the MNT NEWS

### 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.





*Long-tailed blue butterfly Photo Michael Taylor- see article page 9*



*Tui feeding on exotic nectar photo David Medway see article page 17*



*Greater Yellowlegs, Homer, Alaska, 4 June 2005. Breeding plumage Surfbird, Twelvemile Summit, 10 June 2005. Photos Vincent S. Smith See article page 10*