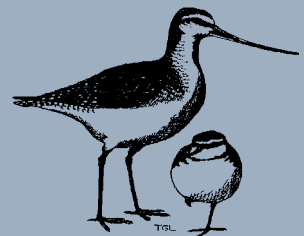


MIRANDA NEWS

Naturalists' Trust
May 2009 Issue 73



2009 and Yalu Jiang is not safe
The what and why of subspecies
MNT Annual Report



May 2009 Issue 73

Upcoming Events

SPECIAL EVENT May 16th

Help Protect the Miranda Bird Roost.

There is a weed problem on the Miranda shellbanks and the surrounding mudflats. Come along on May 16th and spend a few hours helping with a one off weeding-*bee* down at the shellbanks! We have weeding for all, you could get muddy and wet, stay dry and laugh or something in between. Afterwards the Trust will put on a barbeque, bring a salad and something to drink. Meet at the Centre at noon, or come earlier for a little birding first. Bring your gardening gloves!

May 17 10am Annual General

Meeting Speaker:

Andrew Swale on Mangroves

June 14

OSNZ Firth of Thames Census.

All welcome, contact the Centre for details.

June 21

Volunteer Potluck Dinner

August 29

Winter Pot Luck dinner

August 30

Annual Working Bee.

2009 course details see page 13

Cover: Superficially this appears to be a standard flock shot, taken each year at Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve. However the seawall in the background is new, it extends past the end of the photo where it is still under construction. The start of a seawall, now halted, is also present further west (not pictured). See article page 3. Photo Janie Vaughan.

Back Cover: Southern and Northern New Zealand Dotterels have only recently been taxonomically separated. The most obvious difference is in the richness of the colour. Northern NZ Dotterels also seem to have a small pale patch at the base of the mandible (bill) which is lacking in the southern form. Top of page is Northern NZ Dotterel taken at Miranda 13 September 2008. Bottom of page is Southern NZ Dotterel taken at Awarua Bay 8 August 2007. See article page 19. Photos Ian Southey.

A word from the editor

I've said most of what I want to say in the article on page 3. The thing is that I want to say it again and again and again to make sure everyone hears it. But I won't, I'll just ask you to read it.

If you want to do something to help my immediate suggestion is come and help us on May 16th with weeding the bird roost. Conservation starts at home and we can talk more there!

The deadline for the next issue is July 20th. If you have pictures, stories, poems, or research I'd love to hear from you.

Gillian Vaughan (gillianv@actrix.co.nz)

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

From the Blackboard

01 May 2009

Arctic Migrants

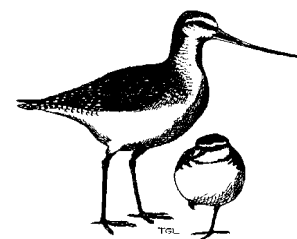
Bar-tailed Godwit	240
Red Knot	350
Turnstone	1
Arctic Skua	2

New Zealand Species

Pied Oystercatcher	3500
Wrybill	2300
Banded Dotterel	100
NZ Dotterel	13
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-billed Gull	
Red-billed Gull	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	142
Pied Stilt	1480
Spoonbill	42
White Heron	1

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10 years at Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve

Gillian Vaughan

In 1999 Mark Barter first visited Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve and discovered its significance for shorebirds. In 2004 MNT signed a memorandum of understanding which established a sister-site partnership with the reserve. Since then Adrian Riegen has led annual teams from the MNT to the area.



During those visits teams have been involved in conducting surveys, training staff, speaking to local schools and trying to raise the profile of birds and the importance of the reserve in the eyes of the locals.

So in 2009 what has been accomplished?

Eight surveys of the reserve have been done; early results indicate 300,000 shorebirds are likely to use the reserve as a staging site during April and May. The highest count in the reserve at one time has been 166,000 shorebirds.

More than half the Bar-tailed Godwits that come to Australia and New Zealand have been seen at the reserve at one time, and with birds arriving and leaving at different times during April and May it appears that more than 115,000 Bar-tailed Godwits use the reserve. Satellite tracking and visual observations have shown that the New Zealand and eastern Australian Bar-tailed Godwits are more likely to be present than those from West Australia. The New Zealand Bar-tailed Godwit flock is usually around 80,000 birds and we expect that around 90% of those migrating each year use this site during their northward migration.

Different species seem to favour different sites in the reserve. At the western end of the reserve Dunlin are the most common species, while godwits are most common at the eastern end; of the 74,000 godwit counted in the reserve in 2009, 64,000 were found at one site, Erdougou. Why this is

the case is as yet unknown.

As the surveys have covered the period before and after the closure of the Saemangeum seawall we can prove the Great Knots displaced from South Korea have not simply moved north to YJNNR.

What does the future look like?

YJNNR is located in Dandong Region, and located on the north eastern end of the reserve is the port of Dandong. Close by is the city of Donggang. This rapidly growing city and port are putting pressure on the eastern end of the reserve.

In 2006 the eastern boundaries of the reserve were adjusted slightly to allow for further development of the port. The area that had been counted as Site 1 was included in this adjustment. In 2007 and 2008 birds still used the area as a roost site, however in 2009 the level of construction was too high for birds to roost there.

In August 2008 the port started a reclamation project aimed at increasing shipping and freight handling capacity. This reclamation would have started within the reserve and encompassed a large area of mudflat and Erdougou, Site 2, the main roost site used by Bar-tailed Godwit.

The reclamation was appealed by the reserve and was stopped. A smaller reclamation is now proceeding in the mudflats adjacent to the reserve. The reclaimed area will be in what we

think has been until now part of the prime feeding area for godwits,

It has been suggested that a larger section of the reserve land and mudflat may be incorporated into city and port facilities. While there appears to be no set plan at this stage it is disturbing that it is being considered. If this were to happen the effect on the godwits in particular would be very serious.

On April 16, 2009 83,500 Bar-tailed godwits were counted; 64,700 in the reserve and 18,800 at the nearby Yalu River. All of these birds were roosting in areas currently being reclaimed, or now under serious threat.

YJNNR is located at the top of the Yellow Sea, many birds move north through the Yellow Sea, and YJNNR

If this site is lost there is no alternative

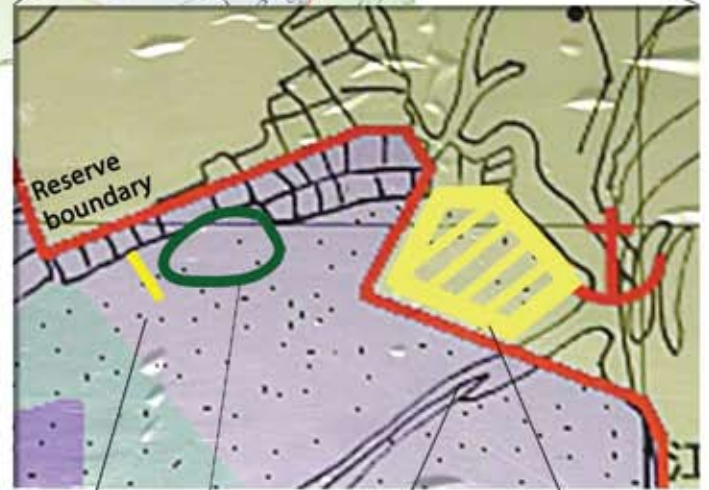
is the final staging site for their northward leap. If this site is lost there is no alternative, nowhere further north to move to.

At this point there are no plans for any reclamations at the western end of the reserve, however just outside the boundary approximately a square kilometre of mudflat has been reclaimed.

A road running through the reserve close to the sea wall has been under construction since 2000 and is now completed. This greater access has already led to an increase in small de-

Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve

It's around 60 km long, close to a growing city, and at least 14 shore-bird species are present in "internationally important" numbers. For now.



Stopped seawall

Site 2, Erdougou, 64,000 godwits

Channel to port

Apparent proposed reclamation



During the 2009 visit we met with members of the Dandong Birdwatching Society and Adrian Riegen was interviewed for National Chinese TV (CCTV), Liaoning TV, and Dandong TV as well as for newspapers. Once again the team visited the local high school to reinforce how important their area is.


velopments within the reserve with a new ferry terminal under construction, and a number of recreational parks and picnic areas along the sea wall. All of these small developments represent cumulative pressure on the reserve.

What are we doing next?

Over the next few months the Trust has committed to alerting people to potential threats, including informing the New Zealand and Australian governments of the situation as well as writing to various levels of Chinese government to support the work of the reserve. The United Nations Development Programme is running a project in the Yellow Sea and will also be contacted.

We are also working on the next five year plan with the reserve. Surveys will continue, and with development around the reserve these become more important to tracking the impacts within the reserve.

Emphasis will shift from training to more profile raising. As details are confirmed they will be outlined in MNT News.

Members who want to be involved over the next few years should contact Adrian Riegen. 



The 2009 survey was coordinated by Jia Na, pictured here with Janie Vaughan. Jia Na spent some time at the Shorebird Centre in 2006. Photo G Vaughan

Reflecting on Yalu Jiang

Janie Vaughan

The sun shines through a thin veil of fog, smoke and dust. As they stand on a slight rise the Dunlins' black bellies reflect in the still pond water. It seems very restful.



All around people are going about their business. The Dunlin have their eye on us, as we are behind those big threatening eyes called telescopes. But they also watch women mending their fishing nets, and men walking around the pond, they hear men polling boats in the next fish pond and pumps working to fill other ponds with water. Distantly Adrian Riegen is talking to a TV crew, spreading the word that this area is important to migrating shorebirds. It is an idea he hammers home whenever possible, and we are witness to just how important the area is.


The following day the same weather conditions allow us to see the colour variations, brick red to soft grey, as the godwit, curlew, Great Knot, Grey Plover, and Dunlin rest together on the mudflats at high tide. The conditions also allow us to see the new seawall, already several kilometers long and growing by the hour as trucks trundle back and forth along it with loads of rocks. There is a shorter wall on the other side of us. This looks ominous. Is this area to be reclaimed? The godwits have arranged themselves wall to wall, sixty four thousand of them. Yes that is correct, 64,000 godwits, with seawall on three sides, on this their favourite site where this time last year there was only the wall we were standing on. What will they find when they arrive here in two or three years time?

Meanwhile I stand with an English speaking Chinese couple, repeating the godwits story, and urging them to bring their son to see them too. The shorebirds cooperate, taking to

the air with a roar of 77,000 pairs of wings, and it seems nearly as many voices. They swirl and rise and fall and it is astounding. I always marvel at the flight of the birds at Miranda but this sight is in a different league, phenomenal!

The birds land again, no longer spread along the two kilometre tide line, but clumped together, not a flock of birds, there are far too many, a slab of shorebirds. There are not many curlews at this site but record numbers of these are being counted this trip. As expected the different species find different areas to be to their taste. We do, however, see mixed flocks and it was a surprise to see how small the godwits are compared with the curlews. It's not quite a Wrybill to godwit comparison but our big brown birds aren't so big here!

When we once again consider their awe inspiring migration, we realise godwits, even if not always the big guys on the block, are efficiently designed to suit the requirements their lives demand. As we jet overhead they are steadily beating their wings below us, trusting when they get to the end of this stage there will be food and rest, as there has been for eons past. I can only thank the reserve staff in China and the volunteers from Miranda for their work on behalf of all the migratory birds. It is no easy thing in this consumer driven world to try to convince developers to leave space for other species whether it be in New Zealand, China or Alaska.

A final reflection. There will be no shorebirds unless we are all activists. 

YJNNR - Through the lens

Pete Morrin




I am trying not to move as 40 metres from me is a female godwit. She is restless, feeding whilst the birds around her are resting, probing in the mud edge of the roost site for the small invertebrates that must be there. Not the usual food from the mudflats but morsels none the less.

I am not watching through binoculars or a telescope but rather through a telephoto lens on a video camera. She finishes probing and starts preening, it is then that I notice the ruffled appearance of her flight feathers. I realise that she has just arrived in China after a 6 or 7 day flight. For me it took 12 hours and I needed a day to overcome jetlag. She looks pooped. Finished preening finally she tucks her bill under her wing and goes to sleep. I look up from the camera and wonder maybe, just maybe it is her first time to Yalu Jiang or even to Asia, as it is for me. Is she on her first migration to nest in the arctic? If so, is she more familiar with the mudflats and roosts of Miranda or some other part of New Zealand as I am, rather than hustle and bustle of northern China? I will never know.

For the moment it is quiet. I am with Adrian, Gillian and Janie who are undertaking the annual shorebird count with the staff of the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve. I have come to video the shorebirds, especially godwits. Previously Judy and I have spent two and a half years in Te Urewera National Park videoing a documentary on kiwi, as well as documenting the Campbell Island Rat Eradication and the Campbell Island Teal Story. With assistance from the MNT we want to tell the story of New Zealand's godwits on DVD, to document their exceptional migration and to ask questions in an interactive section. How do you count 60,000 godwits in a single slab? How do you know they are NZ godwits? Simple questions: expert answers.

The quiet is shattered. At one end of the 500m long shrimp pond, a humungous pump starts up, powered by an even more humungously loud engine. All the birds are instantly awake and fly off. They had become accustomed to the road noise but the pump is an overload. I think "well that's it for my videoing today" so tuck myself out of the wind and wait for the others. Perhaps my quip of "pick me up tomorrow to Adrian and Zhang" was a little hasty. Some 10 minutes pass and the pump engine stops. Perhaps it is not pond filling day or they are having engine trouble. The birds return and settle on the dry strips down the pond centre. I scan the flock of mainly Great Knots and Kentish Plover, but cannot find my godwit. She along with the curlew that were on the pond have found another roost.

Later I am to video a flock of 60,000 godwits, and take the camera to get a glimpse of China. I realise that China is changing; the modern high rise city of Dandong, the tractor where once there was a mule cultivating the fields. I realise more than ever that the boundaries between wildlife and people are challenged in China, as they are in the rest of the world. There is a need to show people how special wildlife and how critical wildlife habitat is, but will it be enough? I am proud to be part of the MNT that has taken on this challenge.

Finally the van turns up to collect me and I return to the Gushan Management Centre to struggle with chopsticks, transferring the lunch spread from table to me – I get better as time goes on. 

Final Counts April 8-16 2009

In the reserve:

Bar-tailed Godwit	74,611
Dunlin	40,861
Great Knot	20,393
Eurasian Curlew	8,155
Eastern Curlew	6,818
Unidentified Curlew	4,377
Grey Plover	3,570
Kentish Plover	1,354
Eurasian Oystercatcher	159
Spotted Redshank	10
Whimbrel	26
Common Greenshank	19
Terek Sandpiper	12
Common Redshank	8
Spotted Greenshank	4
Sanderling	4
Lesser Sand Plover	2
Common Sandpiper	2
Little Ringed Plover	2
Ruff	1
Unidentified small	40
TOTAL	160,432

At the river mouth:

Bar-tailed Godwit	18,800
Dunlin	4,900
Great Knot	40
Unidentified Curlew	712
Grey Plover	800
Kentish Plover	60
Eurasian Oystercatcher	2
Spotted Redshank	273
Common Redshank	8
Little Ringed Plover	16
TOTAL	25,611

OVERALL TOTAL 186,043

In 2009 more Eastern Curlews were counted than had ever before, reflecting the early count dates. High numbers of godwit were counted, however of the 74,611 counted, 64,000 were counted at Site 2.

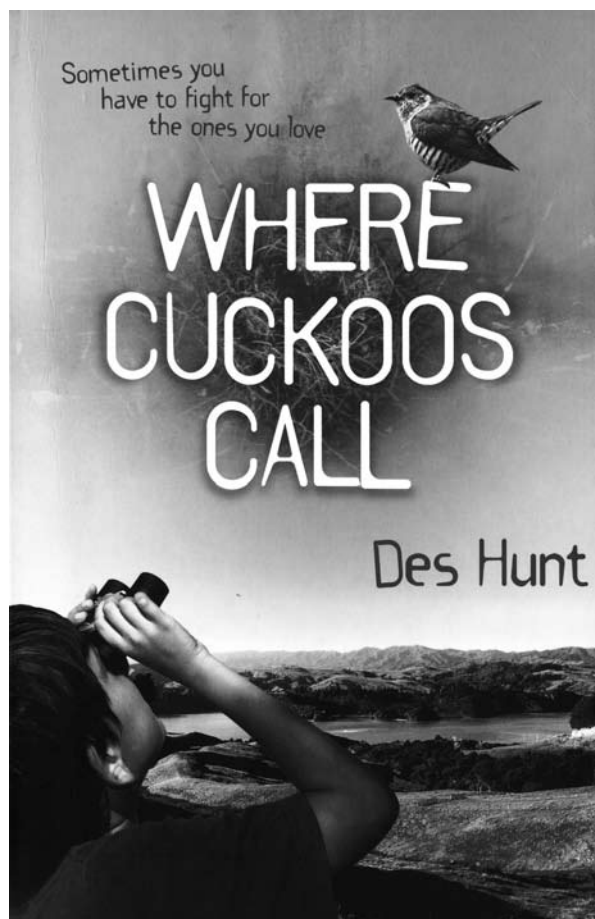
Birds move to the mouth of the Yalu River to roost when the tides are high, pushing them off the mud of the reserve. The birds counted at the river are likely to be feeding in the reserve.

Where Cuckoos Call

by Des Hunt 2007 Harper Collins

Review by Keith Woodley

From the perspective of a childhood decades ago in Invercargill, the North Island was impossibly distant. The Coromandel was a figment of legend, fabled and exotic. The first opportunity to see it for myself came towards the end of the 1970s, and as with many such places of the imagination, reality proved to be an unforgiving guide. Clear-felled hillsides, scrubby regeneration and tracts of pine




forest along with scruffy farms, had not featured in my idea of this peninsula: I had it as bush-clad and pristine. But other features – the fine beaches and coves for instance, or the Pohutukawa lined route up the Thames coast and into Fletcher Bay – more than met expectations.

An imaginary place rooted firmly in the real world is Mansfield Bay, on the northeast coast of the Coromandel, the setting for *Where Cuckoos Call*. Its isolation means twelve year-old Ben Mansfield is being schooled though correspondence, which leaves

him plenty of free time to pursue his outdoor interests – monitoring the bird life of the bay being the primary one. It is an idyllic existence in a beautiful place, where dreams are grand ones. His ambition for instance is to one day open a biological research institute at the bay – with him as director. But plans by his parents to sell their land to a property developer, descend upon Ben like one of the fierce storms which periodically batter the bay. The situation is not helped by the debilitating illness of his father, who is subject to violent mood swings, as a result of leptospirosis – the legacy of close contact with possum urine. Further complications occur with the arrival on the sand spit of three bullies on motor bikes, intent on mayhem.

One day Ben encounters a Grey Warbler nest within which is a Shining Cuckoo chick. Without thinking – beyond that it seemed so wrong that the poor warbler adult had to feed a chick twice its size – Ben removes the chick. He is then faced with the dilemma of what to do with it. He decides to keep it and raise it himself,

and so Bigmouth enters the story. What follows is a plot that unfolds in parallel with the life and movements of Bigmouth the cuckoo. As a plot device this allows us to follow not only this bird, but the whole story of migration. From Mansfield Bay to Vanuatu and back we follow its fortunes. At the same time Ben's efforts to hold back development of the bay, while also dealing with the biker trio and his father's mood swings, form the basis of the story. An improbable sub plot involving a vagrant Red-necked Phalarope and what subsequently becomes of it, proved initially distracting. However in the overall context of the book it proves a useful pivot on which the plot turns, while at the same time suggesting one means by which a new population can establish, or even speciation may occur.

The book touches many bases: a boy and his dogs at leisure in the landscape; animal biology and migration; environmental pressures from land development; a prospective All Black serving as a mentor for Ben; excavations for Lapita pottery on a volcanic island in Vanuatu; friendship with a young American girl; and life-endangering storms. But threaded through it all are observations of birds. This then, is good yarn which rattles along at a good pace, featuring plenty with which to engage the younger reader. More importantly, it is one that just may serve to prise a few young people away from their computer screens, and out into nature. Young recruits to the birdwatching fraternity are always welcome, and this may be just the vehicle to accomplish that. 

Chairman's Report

David Lawrie

This report is to be presented at the Annual General Meeting and it covers the activities of the Trust during the 2008-2009 year. This past year has seen the Trust very active on international activities while also running a very busy programme at the Centre.



Geoff Moon:

Most members will be aware that Geoff Moon died in the middle of March 2009. Geoff had been a supporter of the Trust ever since its formation and throughout the years he was a very generous donor of photographs for newsletters and display purposes.

There is little doubt that Geoff was one of the premier bird photographers in New Zealand and was a pioneer of the technique of using photographs to record bird behaviour. Geoff also freely provided advice to younger people and many members of the Trust would have been influenced by him as they began their bird studies or photography. Prior to his death Geoff donated to the Trust a number of books which are currently on sale at the shop; the Council has dedicated the income from those towards the film on the life cycle of the godwit that is in the process of being filmed at the present time.

Trust Council:

At the Annual General Meeting in 2008 there were no changes to the Trust Council and I can assure the meeting that all members were active during this current year.

The diverse range of interests and skills around the Council table means that the debates are sometimes lengthy but I believe that the Trust is moving in a positive direction, even with the diverse range of activities in which it is now involved.

Activities at Centre:

In May 2008 the Centre hosted a

group of conservation volunteers from USA and Canada. These were young people gaining conservation experience while travelling as part of an organised group. They spent most of their time weeding on the shell banks and also assisting around the Centre.

On the 9th August the potluck dinner was held with Simon Fordham as a guest speaker. Simon gave an illustrated talk on his trip into Borneo which was an interesting end to a pleasant evening of good company.

On the 10th of August the annual working bee was held when members come to attend to the multitude of maintenance tasks that need to be completed. I take this opportunity to thank all those who did attend, not only on that day but also throughout the year.

The weekend of August 29-31 saw the first photography course under the guidance of Bruce Shanks. Bruce has been a member for many years and has won numerous accolades through the photographic society. There is no doubt from the attendance and the comments that it was successful and Bruce has already committed to another course during 2009.

The annual NZ Dotterel Management Course was held from the 9th – 11th September under the guidance of Dr John Dowding. This course is a wonderful introduction for not only volunteers but also Government and Local Authority employees who are involved in coastal management.

The weekend of the 4th and 5th October saw a course tutored by Sandra Morris on keeping a nature diary. This involved field sketching and general skills using sketching pads to record appropriate details.

October the 19th was the spring migration day on which we welcome the migratory birds back to NZ. The guest speakers on the day were Gillian Vaughan and Adrian Riegen on their activities in China and Korea during the previous autumn migration. Also on the day Stuart Chambers from Arun Books was given the opportunity to launch George Watola's Book on the discovery of NZ Birds.

On the 15th and 16th November a wader identification course was held, which gives an introduction in how to separate the species and to recognise the subtle differences.

At the end of November a barbeque was held at the Centre as a thank you gesture for the numerous volunteers that assist in running the Centre and also in staffing the hide at the bird roost. Council members cooked the luncheon and this day was well attended but is only a small gesture that we can make to thank these volunteers. Also on that day the farewell to Jenni Hensley was held and her replacement Maria Staples-Page was introduced.

Over the week of January 24-30 the annual field course was held which was fully subscribed. This event was very ably organised by Eila Lawton who is assisted by a large number of voluntary tutors that make this

course extremely informative over a wide range of disciplines.

On March the 15th the autumn migration day was held with the guest speaker Keith Woodley giving us an insight into his time on the Alaskan Tundra.

Local Advocacy:

As reported last year the Trust made a submission to the Auckland Regional Council on their proposal to amend the Regional Coastal Plan in relation to mangroves. At hearings in September I presented written and oral evidence in support of the Trusts' submission.

This submission was built around the proposition that the extremely rapid growth of mangroves has been caused by unnatural circumstances, human induced, and that solutions also need to be unnatural. The solution proposed was that the removal

This proposal has now been incorporated in the decisions and will become part of the Operative Regional Coastal Plan

of mangroves in key bird roosting and feeding areas should be a permitted activity to protect those important areas. As part of the evidence I submitted a plan showing the key areas in the Firth of Thames, Manukau Harbour and Kaipara Harbour and this generated much interest by the hearings panel. The outcome was that the chairman directed that the Department of Conservation Representative and I retire from the hearing and bring back a firm proposal which we were able to do on a mutually acceptable basis. This proposal has now been incorporated in the decisions and will become part of the Operative Regional Coastal Plan in the near future.

While this gives us the ability to control mangrove growth in important areas it is a responsibility that we would need to operate with due

care and consideration. I believe the responsible approach that the Trust took to this issue is the key to the successful outcome and also provides confirmation of the Trusts' high standing in official circles.

The Trust through Adrian Riegen provided a speaker to the Birds a Plenty festival in Whakatane. This is a further means of spreading the Trusts' message about advocacy for shorebirds.

On the local front the Trust is one of the key players in the Muddy Feet programme which is an adjunct to the Hauraki Gulf forum. The local Muddy Feet group regularly meet at the Centre and are now proving to be not only a strong advocate for the protection of the key ecological aspects of the Firth of Thames but also as a driver for sustainable economic growth based around these attributes. One of the activities that had been discussed for several years was the possibility of a cycle way along the stop banks from Miranda to Thames. I note that this has now been promoted as part of the Government's national cycle way system and if that is developed it will provide a key opportunity for the Centre to be a hub in that network.

As part of the Trusts' role in education we applied for and obtained funding from the Auckland Regional Council to erect a sign at the Manukau Wildlife Refuge in the



Mayor Mark Ball (back row second from right) and Franklin District Councillors and staff at the shellbanks. Photo K Woodley

Kaipara Harbour. This sign was duly designed and constructed by Adrian Riegen with the key message being the wonders of migration and the importance of estuarine areas for wading birds. It was deliberately designed to be non-regulatory but educational in the hope that it would be respected. However within two weeks of its erection it was forcibly ripped out of the ground but thankfully not seriously damaged. It has been re-erected and we hope that it will now achieve its educational purpose.

Janie and Kevin Vaughan have been in discussions with the Franklin District Council and the local community with a view to establishing a similar sign on the shore front at Kaiaua. This is an important sub-roost for the Firth of Thames but is also a popular picnic and stopping area for the general public. It is hoped to establish a similar educational sign in the hope that people will respect the birds of that reserve, while at the same time learning something about the birds that are present.

The other perennial coastal issue relates to the campervans at Taramaire. While the appropriate regulations restricting the vans locating adjacent to the roost area are in place this has not been policed. We have held discussions with the Franklin District Council in recent months and it is



*This sign was erected again in March.
Photo G Vaughan*

hoped that some physical barrier can be erected to give the birds that roost on the end of that spit some privacy.

External Advocacy:

During the year discussions were continued regarding the strengthening of the link with Wetland Link International which is a network of wetland educational centres. The Trust has taken a lead role in this within NZ because we have the most active wetland centre.

It is intended that an Oceania network will be established as part of a meeting of interested people at the Hunter Wetland Centre in Australia later this year. It is intended that this will provide a network to share skills and information to make the most of limited time and monetary resources.

The conference of participating countries to the RAMSAR agreement was held in South Korea at the end of October. Trust council mem-

a trip to North Korea is taking place in 2009

ber Estella Lee attended and made many contacts and also disseminated material about the Trust. Prior to the official NZ Government delegation attending the conference I had

been involved in several meetings to discuss the NZ response to the various resolutions. The Department of Conservation will be providing a full report on the conference which will be published in a future edition of the MNT News.

The Trusts' activities in China continued during the year with a two teams visiting Yalu Jiang over a 3 week period in April and May 2008 continuing the training of local reserve staff and also continuing the shorebird monitoring on that coast line. Adrian Riegen was the main organiser for these teams but Bruce Postill and Nigel Milius led the second team. The work that has been undertaken has reinforced the importance of this area for the Bar-tailed Godwit migrating from NZ. The recent round of satellite work on godwits from North-west Australia has made it clear that these birds also travel through that reserve about a month later than the NZ birds. This increases its importance as it is a pivotal area for the birds from both countries.

During the year discussions continued with Jie-Un Chin from South Korea regarding the possibility of establishing a programme of interaction between school children from New Zealand and South Korea. This programme is to be designed around the connection between the two countries using the migratory birds as the key link. This is taking some time to establish as it is necessary to involve schools but Keith Thompson is taking the key role in making these links. It is hoped that this can be further advanced during the coming year.

The proposed visit to North Korea did not eventuate in April 2008, however the links with the Ornithological Organisation in that country have continued and a trip to North Korea is taking place in 2009. During the year I was invited to a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in Wellington

to discuss linkages with North Korea because of our involvement with that country. From this meeting it is clear that shorebirds are providing an international connection between NZ and North Korea and it is hoped that this can be used to break down some of the barriers. I will be able to report further on this link in future.

Finances:

Included in this newsletter is a summary of the audited accounts for the Trust activities throughout the past year. These have been prepared with great efficiency by the Trusts' Treasurer, Ashley Reid, and we thank him for those efforts.

I would also take this opportunity to thank Lance Feilder who completed the audit of the books and provided much assistance to Ashley during the year.

As part of my report I would like to acknowledge the donation from the EB Firth Charitable Trust of \$4,000. This was utilised to place a new water tank behind the Centre which we hope will ease the water problems in coming summers. Andrew Crowe from Thames made another donation which provided the opportunity for a participant to attend the field course and also for a young person to attend the wader identification course. I can recommend Andrew's books in the shop at the Shorebird Centre.

We also received substantial donations from D Bamfield and Colleen Seay during the year. There were also a number of smaller donations and all of those are gratefully received as they assist us to provide our services and facilities.

Conclusion:

This summary of activities of the Trust show that we have had another busy year but that is only possible by many people being involved. The Trusts' work both at and away from the Centre are far more than can be undertaken by one paid employee

and to achieve the remarkable outcomes requires a large number of volunteers freely giving of their time.


I would take this opportunity to thank Keith Woodley for making visitors experiences to the Centre so enjoyable that they keep coming back time and time again. Although I must note here that Keith was more conspicuous by his absence than his presence during this year, while he was away undertaking research into godwits in the Arctic and in writing his pending book. However Jenni

provided an admirable replacement during his absence and has now been replaced by Maria.

I would acknowledge Gillian Vaughan's efforts with the newsletter, which is not only the main means of communication with our members but has developed into more than that because of its informative articles.

I would also thank the balance of the Council members and as mentioned previously all of them have picked up some role in advancing the Trusts'

aims and goals. Involvement with the Council involves approximately five meetings during the year which occupies at least one day in a weekend, along with all the activities between meetings.

I would also thank all the numerous volunteers that help in various ways, either in the Centre, at the hide or working behind the scenes. These people are the real driving force behind the Trusts' operations and the success that it has achieved. 

Ramsar COP10 & World NGO Wetland Conference

Estella Lee



The first Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, was held in Ramsar, Iran, on 3 February 1971. Ramsar conferences have since been held every three years in different countries. The 10th Ramsar conference of the contract parties, Ramsar COP10, was held in Changwon, South Korea. I was lucky enough to witness all the draft resolutions being adopted in this international inter-government conference.

At Ramsar COP10, we adopted 31 Draft Resolutions and one Declaration. For details of the 31 Draft Resolutions, please visit: http://ramsar.org/cop10/cop10_docs_index_e.htm#dr

The Saemangeum reclamation, of course, was the hot topic at the conference. After a lot of discussions and negotiation with the South Korean government, all of the following was added to Draft Resolution 13.

“Congratulates the government of the Republic of Korea for providing information on the impacts of the major intertidal land-claim of Saemangeum, including on reported declines in the populations of migratory waterbirds.”


Before Ramsar COP 10, a “World NGO Conference on Wetlands” was held in Changnyeong and Suncheon, South Korea, from 24th to 27th Oct 2008. Over 200 NGOs attended this conference. I found this NGO conference even more exciting and useful than the Ramsar COP10 because the NGO members are the actual hands on people. They are passionate, committed to the cause they are working towards and know their wetlands well. In the conference, we shared our knowledge, our concern and our support for each other. At the end of the conference, we all felt that we need to continue the good work we have started. So, a World Wetland Network (WWN) was set up after Ramsar COP 10 with objectives in mind:

- To maintain contact with each other between Ramsar meetings

- To help with information exchange, sharing of best practice and lobbying on specific wetland issues
- To enable smaller NGOs to arrive at Ramsar COPs well prepared for the meeting.

WWN has also set up an email forum and website. They are as follows : world_wetland_network@yahoo-groups.com
www.worldwetlandnetwork.org

WWN welcomes all the Wetland NGOs to join in. Please feel free to contact them.

During the World NGO Wetland Conference and Ramsar COP10, there were lots of presentations on wetlands done by NGOs and contract parties. They were valuable highlights of the conferences. 



Treasurer's report for year ended 31st December 2008

Ashley Reid

The year has seen a big advance in the recognition of the role of the MNT and its international significance. The fact that our organisation has been the first to be admitted into North Korea to study wader numbers in that country is, in many ways, justification for the high regard international decision makers have in our society. The fact that we are essentially a bunch of dedicated amateurs punching well above our weight is purely coincidental, and our resident experts, currently overseas, must be very proud of the effect they have on the world stage.

Although the bulk of the cost is covered by Miranda funds and grants received, as Treasurer I am very aware and appreciative of the personal cost, in time and money, undertaken by members travelling to China and Korea each year.

The trust's overall financial position has continued to improve, with higher returns for a number of activities, some of which are highlighted below, and all of which are reflected in the Statement of Financial Performance.

Land and Buildings: The Centre, Manager's residence, and the leased farmlet were re-valued last year in association with Quotable Values NZ Ltd and the Franklin District Council, and now are properly represented in the fixed assets. Depreciation is provided at approved IRD rates.

Subscriptions: The net income from subscriptions is slightly lower than last year – this has more to do with the date of payment rather than an indication of a decrease in membership, as the number of current financial members remains constant.

Donations and Grants: We are extremely grateful for grants and donations received from charitable trusts and environmental organisations. This is a big improvement on last years' figures and reflects the additional funding received to continue ongoing research into wader breeding, migration, and the effects of industrialisation of wader sites in Asia.

Education: School tours and Lecture income was significantly lower than the previous year – however this had a lot to do with the fact that many schools could not fit field trips into their busy schedules and that our popular manager, and his extremely interesting talks, was away for six months.

Field Courses: Field courses continue to be very popular and in most cases become over-subscribed. Actual profit on the courses has been incorrectly reported in the past and the reduction in the overall profit this year is because this anomaly has been rectified. Special thanks to Eila for convening these courses.

Accommodation: The overall income for our accommodation continues to be steady. The council is always looking at ways to improve facilities and any practical suggestions are always welcome.

Shop Trading: Gross profit from shop trading is substantially up. This is the first full year of recording all stock at on a cost basis and distorts the gross profit for one year only. Consequently it looks as if we have had a brilliant year with shop trading and I believe the way this year is shaping up, we will continue to trade at a considerably better rate than in the past. It remains to be seen what effect the current international economic situation will have on our own trading but so far there has been none. The book display stand is also a great improvement – customers can see more books on display and consequently sales of these items have increased.

Staff: We are extremely fortunate to have our team of dedicated staff – all two of them! The smooth operation of the centre would be impossible without their dedication and support and I appreciate the assistance they give me with any queries I have.

Volunteers: I wish to thank our dedicated band of volunteers who help with a variety of tasks at the centre

AGM and nominations for Council

The Annual General Meeting of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust will be held at the Shorebird Centre on May 17th 2009 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 eighth of May. His address is on the inside of the back cover of this magazine. Your letter should have the name of the person you are nominating, your name and the name of someone to second the nomination. Everyone involved must be financial members of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

AGM Agenda

Apologies for Absence

Minutes of the last AGM May 11th 2008

Matter Arising from the minutes

Chairman's Report

Treasurer's Report

Election of Officers

(Treasurer, Secretary Auditor, 10 Council Members)

Subscriptions for the year ending 31/12/2010
General Business

– without their support it would be difficult to carry out the wide range of activities and services that we now do. It was largely due to their efforts that we were able to carry on during Keith's absence, without too much disruption to the activities at the centre.

Interest: With the reinvestment of our funds into higher interest fixed term deposits we have increased interest earned by 63% over last year's amount. However the rates earned last year will probably never be repeated so we will have re-invest very carefully to get maximum returns.

Adoption of Accounts: It is my pleasure to propose that the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2008, be adopted.

2 May 2009 

Summary of the Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 31 December 2008

2007	Income	2008	2007	Expenditure	2008
			3,572	Education	225
16,574	Subscriptions	15,580	8,900	Magazine-Publication	9,871
35,752	Donations	47,795	3,194	Magazine - Distribution	3,755
5,329	Schools/Lectures	3,474	2,982	Publicity	3,291
18,816	Surplus on shop trading	28,778	13,875	Bird Banding Expenses	8,915
5,633	Profit on Field Course	3,679	806	Predator Control	133
			2,879	Electricity	3,142
0	Grants	9,300	8,218	Building - running costs	10,152
25,121	Accommodation	25,412	861	Printing & Stationery	818
9,954	Interest Received	16,289	4,756	Administration Expenses	5,833
3,885	Lease - rental	4,419	1,504	Bank Fees	1,892
9,006	Bird Banding Income	0	2,794	Insurance and Rates	3,069
			49,408	Wages	55,730
			228	ACC Levy	274
130,070	Total Income	154,726	103,977	Total Cash Expenses	107,100
			16,393	Depreciation	18,946
			0	Loss on Sales	
	Deficit for year transferred to Accumulated Funds		9,700	Surplus for year transferred to Accumulated Funds	28,680
130,070		154,726	130,070		154,726

Summary of the Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2008

2007	Liabilities	2008	2007	Assets	2008
				Investments	
12,902	Life Membership Reserve Fund	11,612	158,508	BNZ Term Investment	169,153
5,624	Subscriptions paid in Advance	5,849	8,705	ASB (Sibson Award)	30,065
503	Overdraft at Bank		167,213	Total Investments	199,218
2,660	Accounts Payable	9,983			
1,441	GST Due	17	0	Cheque Account	11,572
			14,648	BNZ Achiever Savings Account	9,480
23,130	Total Liabilities	27,461	24,935	Stock on Hand	31,159
			6,046	Accounts Receivable	3,097
	Accumulated Funds		13,800	Plant & Equipment	11,426
	B/F	1,043,720	5,208	Furniture and Fittings	4,473
	plus surplus 2008	28,681	229,841	Building Expenditure	221,152
	Revaluation of land and buildings		605,159	Land - Centre and East Coast Road	608,285
1,043,720		1,072,401			
1,066,850		1,099,862	1,066,850	Total Assets	1,099,862

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

MINUTES OF THE 33rd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST HELD AT THE SHOREBIRD CENTRE ON SUNDAY 11 MAY 2008 AT 1300 hrs.

PRESENT:

The Chairman (David Lawrie), Secretary (William Perry), Treasurer (Ashley Reid) and about 52 others.

APOLOGIES:

Judy Piesse, Arn Piesse, Russell Thomas, Leslie Thomas, Ingrid Kuipers, Estella Lee, Keith Woodley, Adrian Riegen, Barbara Blyth, Liz Pascal, Bruce Postill, Nigel Milius, Wendy Hare, Betty Seddon, Stella Rowe, John Rowe, Monty Widgery, Peter Maddison. APOLOGIES ACCEPTED (Colleen Burge / Gillian Vaughan.)

The Chairman, David Lawrie, welcomed all mothers to Miranda Shorebird Centre on Mothers' Day. He also extended a special welcome to past-Chairman, Stuart Chambers and past-Secretary, Kay Haslett.

MINUTES:

The minutes of the 32nd AGM held on 20 May 2007 had been published in Issue 69 of "Miranda News".

The minutes were TAKEN AS READ (Gwenda Pulham / Nancy Payne) and APPROVED AS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD. (Gwenda Pulham / Stuart Chambers).

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:

1. Video / DVD: All applications for funding the DVD on migratory shorebirds have so far been unsuccessful. Some footage is being prepared; Pete & Judy Morrin unable to visit China for this project in 2008.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

The Chairman, David Lawrie, had published a report in Issue 69 of Miranda News. The sad news of the year was the death of John Brown, past-Chairman and strong supporter of Miranda Naturalists' Trust. New members of MNT Council this year have been Keith Thompson, Emma Stanyard and Estella Lee.

David Lawrie reiterated some of the issues from his written report:

1. The godwit migration story – D8 has gone to Alaska, E5 and E9 and D7 still at Miranda.

2. Working Bee in August – Jenni Hensley organised the volunteers for this working bee and for more regular activities.

3. Gardening – The gardening volunteers continue to maintain the area around the Shorebird Centre so that it remains neat and tidy.

4. Eila Lawton continues to organize courses at the Shorebird Centre, including the annual January Field Course, the Dotterel Course with John Dowding and the Sketching course with Sandra Morris.

5. Auckland Region of OSNZ and Kapiti Coast Branch of Forest & Bird each sponsored a young student to the annual week-long Field Course.

6. Guest Speakers through the year included Keith Woodley, Christine Prietto and Hazel Speed.

7. Regional Coastal Plan – MNT made a submission regarding control of mangroves.

8. Camper Vans – Franklin District Council has taken action but the site is still in use and the signage is wrong.

9. Thieves continue to break into vehicles parked at the Limeworks gate, All members and visitors are urged to remain vigilant and to report registration plate numbers of any suspicious vehicles.

10. Keith Thompson has enhanced the MNT Council with several contributions and suggestions for research projects.

11. Any research conducted at Miranda will be integrated with Bill Brownell's multi-agency Muddy Feet programme.

12. MNT continues its activities in China and South Korea Also an 8-person delegation from China visited the Shorebird Centre in December 2007.

13. MNT has now joined Wet-

land International.

14. MNT has adopted the Mission Statement to "Keep the Birds coming."

15. Estella Lee will attend the Ramsar meeting in South Korea later in the year.

16. The new Minister of Conservation, Steve Chadwick has not yet visited the Shorebird Centre but she is showing an interest in the Trust's activities.

17. Auckland Conservation Board is also offering support to the Trust.

18. Memorandum of Understanding with Forest and Bird.

19. MNT Finances are in good shape – special thanks to Ashley Reid, Treasurer, and to Lance Feilder, Auditor.

20. Interest from endowment fund is paying the wages of a part-time Assistant Manager.

21. Bequest from the late John Brown.

22. Grant from Chisholm Whitney Trust enabled purchase of telescopes.

23. David Lawrie expressed again the thanks of MNT particularly to the volunteers whose support is so valuable.

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

MATTERS ARISING FROM CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

1. Does DoC do anything about mangroves? Answer – Removal of mangrove plants is not officially permitted.

2. Gwenda Pulham requested that MNT inform her and other members when hearings on topics such as mangroves are taking place.

3. David Lawrie was congratulated (Nancy) for an excellent report.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

The Treasurer, Ashley Reid, formally

presented his report on the finances of the Trust for the Year ending 31 December 2007 as published in Issue 69 of Miranda News.

Land and buildings revalued through Quotable Values NZ

Subscriptions – see below.

Donations & Grants gratefully received.

Education continues to be an important Trust activity.

Field Courses very popular.

Accommodation facilities continue to be well used.

Shop Trading gross profit substantially up.

Dedicated staff and volunteers.

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

DISCUSSION following Treasurer's Report

1. Lynda Underhill asked how MNT makes money from banding. The answer is that some banding activities have been associated with contracting for Massey University to help with epidemiological studies.

2. Proposed (Ashley Reid / Gwenda Pulham) that Lance Feilder of Gyde Wansbone be appointed as auditor – CARRIED

3. Thanks to Ashley for looking after MNT finances so well – APPLAUSE.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Proposed (Ashley Reid / Brian James) that the option of Life Membership be removed as a new member category.

Ashley spoke to this proposal with the argument that the Life Membership Reserve Fund had been exhausted over a period of 10 years. About 220 of the Trust's 700 memberships are Life Memberships.

Following extensive discussion this proposal was put to the vote:

FOR: 6

AGAINST: 48

The Proposal was DEFEATED.

Individual Member: Increase from \$35 to \$40;

Family Member and Overseas Member: Increase from \$40 to \$50;

Life Member (under 50): Increase

from \$1050 to \$1,200;

Life Member (over 50): Increase from \$525 to \$600

Moved Ashley Reid; Seconded Geraldine King.

CARRIED nem con.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Treasurer – Ashley Reid elected unopposed.

Secretary – William Perry elected unopposed.

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

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

GENERAL BUSINESS:

1) Eila Lawton reported on future plans for Courses. Photography with Bruce Shanks in August 2008; Art Course with Sandra Morris in early October; Wader Identification Course in November; Dotterel Course in September; Geology Course suggested but not yet booked; January Field Course for 2009; Lichens Course suggested. Information about courses not currently on website but planned to be included. Eila welcomes other suggestions for courses.

2) Gillian Vaughan gave an update on the 2008 visit to China and

South Korea from 16th to 26th April. Birding has now become so popular in the vicinity of the Yalu Jiang Nature Reserve that crowd control is sometimes an issue. Attempts to catch shorebirds in China were not successful except for one Grey Plover. Benthic sampling, however, was very successful. In South Korea there are more shorebird feeding sites suffering the same fate as Saemangeum with the building of sea walls and destruction of tidal mud flats. Wendy Hare, Nigel Milius and Bruce Postill were still in China conducting surveys. The observatory at Broome has recorded a decline in Great Knot numbers. Niall Moores has reported a decline in bird survey activists in South Korea.

3) Reported that the Middle Gate post is broken – care required when using this gate.


4) Noisy neighbour. Letter written to the landlord.

5) Stuart Chambers suggested that the rates that we charge for accommodation are too low. David Lawrie reported that the MNT Council would consider this.

6) Stuart Chambers requested that email reminders of events would be useful.

7) Reminders of upcoming events would also be useful on the website.

8) Property for sale along the road from the Shorebird Centre. Also being monitored by MNT Council.

The meeting closed at 1528 hrs. 

2009 Courses

Botanical Illustration (with an emphasis on techniques)

1-12 July, Tutor Sandra Morris.

NZ Dotterel Management Course 7-9 September

Tutor John Dowding.

Photographic Course 19-20 September Tutor Bruce Shanks.

Wader Identification 24 - 25 October Tutor Keith Woodley.

Field Sketching course 7-8 November Tutor Sandra Morris,

Contact the Centre for details of any of these courses!

from the MANAGER

Keith Woodley

It was just a glimpse of a fast shadow disappearing into the foliage. Just as one's mind registered what it was most likely to be – it was out again, a flash of turquoise and blue hurtling along the shellbank. The kingfisher was the first I had seen this year – but it was earlier than usual. This was the third week in March, whereas I have come to associate their return to the Miranda coast with early April.



Kingfishers generally move out from late September, heading for suitable nesting holes away from the coast. Of course for some such sites may occur less than two kilometres away, along the terraces which mark the edge of the chenier plain. Others, presumably, need to range further afield. Their return is one of the lesser remarked harbingers of autumn in this place.

Somewhat inevitably I suppose, wider attention is usually drawn to the more high profile movements – the noisy departures of the glamour birds, such as godwits and knots and other species embarking for the tundra. Certainly, from early in the second week of March, there had been a succession of those. There were even at least four or five godwit departures on the occasion of our Farewell to the Birds day on the 15th. But in a lapse of choreography, all occurred several hours after proceedings had ended – after everyone had departed. Nevertheless it must be said our timing for this event was somewhat closer to the mark than the one held in Christchurch a full month earlier. For a week or so after television coverage of the latter, the phones at the Shorebird Centre ran hot, as panicked people who were keen to see godwits, called to ask if we still had some; “Because the Christchurch ones are already gone!”

It is in the nature of birding that some species are more consistently accessible to the lens than others. Miranda is renowned, for instance, as a reliable site for Wrybill, and visitors come from all over the planet to see them. Other species are no less forthcoming – Bar-tailed Godwits

and Red Knots being the two most numerous tundra-breeding species that will almost always be seen here. Likewise over the summer season the visitor is more than likely going to encounter a few Turnstones, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and a Red-necked Stint or two. What, however, can we make of Pacific Golden Plovers – the fourth most numerous tundra species occurring in New Zealand and regularly present on the Firth of Thames, but often extremely elusive. In recent years flocks of over a hundred have been recorded, and this last season between 30 and 60 were seen on occasions. But such sightings are erratic to say the least; one day the plovers may be dispersed over the dried mud to the south of the old Limeworks but then go unrecorded for several weeks. We know there is at least one regular roost behind the mangrove belt near the Hot Springs, but they are not always there either.

It was therefore most pleasing to have over 30 birds regularly placed around the creek channel in front of the hide for a few days in late March. Not only were they present on each high tide, but some of them had acquired over 80% of their breeding plumage – and there are few waders more stunning than a Golden Plover in full, or even approaching full, finery. Many visitors were able to get close views of these handsome creatures, and for some it was ample consolation for missing the bulk of the recently departed godwits.

The latest summer season at Miranda has been a rather busy one in many

ways. Firstly, the number of overseas visitors appeared to be similar to last year, if not slightly greater. This despite initial concerns that the financial hole the world appears to be in, would result in a drop off in travellers. It may be that many visitors already had trips planned and budgeted for, in which case the test of the situation will doubtless manifest itself next season. In most other respects things have remained relatively buoyant. There appears to have been, however, a slight decrease in the frequency of school visits. There was the usual flurry of activity in March this year, but the diary did not seem as full as in previous years. There may be a cyclical factor at play here with many schools only coming once every two or three years for instance. Or it may be a result of increasing constraints on school and family budgets.

The centre hosted the mayor and councillors from Franklin District Council in early April. Following presentations which included a background to MNT and its work and the Muddy Feet Project, they visited the roost at the Limeworks. This provided a good opportunity to discuss with them current issues such as mangrove encroachment and overnight camping. A few days earlier two council officers had come to investigate the camping situation. I escorted them up to Rays Rest, the recently designated overnight parking area just north of Taramaire Stream. In 2008 the council adopted a by-law which ostensibly regulates camping activity in this area. The regulations define a particular area within which overnight parking is permitted. In order to try and pre-



Keith Woodley and Liao Juhua, the Chinese Consul General in Auckland

serve the Taramaire mouth as a wader roost and breeding area, overnight vehicles are excluded from a buffer zone between the designated area and the stream. The regulations also stipulate a maximum stay of two nights only for fully self-contained vehicles, prohibits discharges and bans dogs. Over the recent summer season every single one of these restrictions was regularly breached. On one occasion in early February for instance, over 103 vehicles were counted, some of which were patently not self-contained. In addition there were several tent encampments, including one on site for almost a week. The council staff were to report back to council and hopefully these issues will be addressed before the next peak season.


Meanwhile in mid-April I had the opportunity to address a group of motor caravan people at the centre. They were from all over the country but some regularly used Ray's Rest. It was an opportunity to provide them with some context about shorebirds and their habitat requirements. What are those birds we see regularly on the shoreline? Where are they from? What are the issues confronting them and their habitats? I am sure people went away with a good understanding of the issues. More importantly, I am confident they will effectively impart this to other campervan people in due course.

In February, the centre was the venue for a local community forum to update progress with the Muddy Feet Project. The first two stages of the

project examined stresses on the Firth of Thames Ramsar site, the source of those impacts, and what needed to be done to address these. A significant number of the stresses identified were related to human activity, in particular intensive dairy farming. A small group of mainly local farmers gathered to hear what restorative measures were being proposed. Despite scepticism from some of the audience, Environment Waikato staff presented compelling evidence of how improved farming practices could greatly reduce negative environmental impacts, without seriously affecting financial bottom lines. There was also discussion on proposed tourism initiatives – such as a suggested cycle track along the stop bank system between Miranda and Thames. Given the current plans for a national network of cycle ways, this particular idea – first raised in workshops last year – is nothing if not timely.

The most recent manifestation of our links with both China and the local Chinese community was a visit, in early April, by Liao Juhua, Chinese Consul General in Auckland. Accompanying her were both staff and family members. A tour of the centre was followed by a visit to the shellbanks where a good number of birds were gathered on the high tide. Included among them were godwits a handful of which, given their plumage and plump body profiles, gave the appearance they were still intending to migrate north. These, as well as the Wrybill flock, aroused considerable interest among the visitors. Of course until recently one had to employ cautious language when

describing the migration routes of these godwits. “It may be these birds are flying to China without stopping,” etc. So it is most refreshing, in the wake of E7, to be able to declare with considerable assurance, that at least some of the birds then before us, would most likely be at Yalu Jiang or adjacent sites in just over a week.

The godwit sculpture mentioned in the last issue is now installed at the centre. A function was held on 18 April, during which the installation was unveiled by Warren Viscoe, the artist. A number of people, including Trust members, made donations towards the purchase of the sculpture, but principal among them was Trish Gribbens. We are also grateful to Annie Wilson and Sean Wilson of Miranda Orchards who ably facilitated the entire arrangement, including the work's installation on our grounds. A further highlight of the evening was hearing a song by Dave Calder of the Hamilton County Bluegrass Band, inspired by the exploits of E7. Subsequent discussions led to a plan for the song to be recorded and issued as education and publicity material by the MNT. 



*Warren Viscoe with the newly installed sculpture.
Photo K Woodley*

Coming back to Miranda

Tess Roberts

When I was eight I visited the Miranda Shorebird Centre for the first time. It was soon after the centre was built and must have been in March as I distinctly remember talk of the godwits looking fat glossy and ready to leave any day. I was always the kid of the class who loved nature – who was always muddy and took home giant centipedes in her lunchbox as pets etc. My class trip to the Shorebird Centre that autumn was an event in my life that has since developed into a love for shorebirds.

I do still recall some memories from the trip. The usual school camp stuff like no sleep, scary stories, friend's birthdays, and the boys playing tricks on the girls. The food was good and the big deck in the middle of the dorms was perfect for games and then lying in the sun together.

Keith, of course was there to meet us, funnily enough looking fairly similar to now as I recall. Same glasses Keith? He talked to us about the centre and the birds that we have here. A few things stood out for me: the fact that godwits fly to Siberia to breed; and the fact that a Wrybill is the only bird in the world with their beak curved to the side! This very quickly became my favourite bird and I still hold a soft spot for the quirky things today.

We went on to the shell bank and saw the flocks of godwit, knots and the very cool Wrybill. I focused binoculars for the very first time and learnt more about the importance of the Firth of Thames as a winter feeding area for many birds. Keith taught us how to draw birds and I came away windblown, head buzzing with information clutching my Wrybill picture, with a big smile.

I visited the centre many times after that, bringing friends from overseas and also using the facilities for scout camps. I left the Hauraki Plains to head to Palmerston North's Massey University and soon turned my studies to Ecology and Zoology. I graduated with a BSc majoring in these two fields. From there I got a job as


a student in the Auckland Regional Parks network. This job placed me at Ambury Regional Park, a working farm and an education centre on the shore of the Manukau Harbour.

Now things have turned a full circle. I am the one talking to the public about our shorebirds here in the Manukau Harbour, standing up in front of groups teaching them about all the waders and the NZ Dotterel.

Ambury has a large shorebird population supporting more than 20 per cent of NZ's total wading bird population including large numbers of godwits, knots, Wrybills, spoonbills and oystercatchers. These are found in the Mangere lagoon on the artificial shell islands along the Watercare Coastal Walkway. These islands are a roost for many shorebirds that use the Manukau Harbour for either an end of migration or breeding purposes. They also serve to keep the birds away from the ever tempting runway strips at Auckland Airport nearby. Metal tracks run near the Islands making it very accessible to the public to get near while the birds remain reasonably safe on the islands. During my first summer as a student I was involved in placing out a line of traps targeting stoats around the islands. We started with a trial run with five traps - within a week we

had already pulled out six stoats.

We have extended this line and currently remove at least 20 stoats a year from the dotterel breeding area hopefully one less thing the dotterel chicks have to overcome. These, as well as several lines of bait stations in the area, are now checked by an amazing team of volunteers. Ray Clough is a part of this volunteer team and has been an invaluable knowledge base, having been in the area looking after the birds for a great part of his life.

The centre has been a great support for my job; a place where I can go to get advice, experience and contacts to keep in the shorebird loop. I have attended the dotterel course run by John Dowding held each year in September. This I found very helpful in extending my knowledge in both theory and practical aspects behind dotterel management. I enjoy cannon netting with Adrian, getting some hands on experience with the birds, but also talking to all the shorebird experts who are there. This means fifteen years after first visiting Miranda Shorebird Centre, I still leave windblown, head buzzing with information, with a big smile. 



Species, Subspecies and Shorebirds

Ian Southey

Why do we bother about subspecies in shorebird conservation? A simple little question with a minefield underneath it. The “species problem” is a huge tangle where bright ideas clash, meet up with hard data and get interpreted from a variety of perspectives. It can be hard to see the wood for the trees.



Between modern DNA technology and some good old fashioned field-work the old ideas are being squeezed and a consensus has yet to be reached about just what the real taxonomic units are. This is the view from my armchair.

For the very early naturalists formal scientific names could be quite long, often being short descriptions of an animal or plant. Linnaeus changed this, officially from 1758, by consistently designating a species with just two names; a genus name which indicated similarity and a species name to characterise each particular species. The species were simply defined by the clear gaps between them. He based the classification of animals on particular features so some of his names are a bit of a surprise; for instance he regarded the Spoon-billed Sandpiper as a very small spoonbill. The full seven level hierarchy of names he proposed made a wonderful clerical system allowing any living thing to be put quickly in its place.

When Darwin published his theory of evolution in 1859 he didn't so much change taxonomic practice as add a layer of meaning to it. From this time the members of a genus could be regarded as sharing a common ancestor while the species name indicated the particular evolutionary modifications that set it apart. As well as being a convenient way to label plants and animals, names now also carried information about evolutionary history.

“Varieties” were the lowest rank in the Linnaean scheme, but they were

seldom used in zoology and could cover anything from odd colour variations to geographic forms. The use of subspecies names in the modern sense began with the opening up of America in the mid-1800s. Surveying teams looking for routes for railways often included ornithologists masquerading as medical men. They amassed vast collections of birds across the whole continent, studied them in detail, and had to deal with the problems they presented. Obvious new species were discovered but they also found birds that appeared to be “good species” in some places but blended into each other where they met. To describe this they added a third name to the scientific name, the subspecies. This increased the taxonomic vocabulary by explicitly telling them that there were intergradations between these forms. There was some resistance to the use of subspecies in Europe until the early 1900s.

As the names of animals became more elaborate so too could the added information they conveyed but this was different for different workers. When different forms of birds overlap in a narrow zone of contact, most of their populations are living in entirely separate areas. So for many taxonomists the subspecies name came to signify that the birds lived in separate areas and they used it in situations where there was no intergradation, for example the robins on different New Zealand islands. Here the different subspecies

are closely related so grouping forms together showed these relationships. Charles Fleming once noted that leaving forms as full species rather than making them subspecies of a more broadly defined species was an admission of failure to clarify relationships. Others used subspecies to justify naming forms that had not been previously regarded as worth naming because differences between them were small or inconsistent. It was not always possible to work out what was being implied by the use of subspecies names.

During the early the 20th century the first serious species concept emerged. Going beyond recognising the species

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as a category, it highlighted the process by which a species forms. Most importantly, the Biological Species Concept stressed that species in nature were interacting populations and, with birds, this mostly means that they breed together and not with other species. Seeing whether birds interbreed, or not, gave a useful practical test of species status and was used to solve some problems that had become apparent. Some birds that were named as different species bred freely together, such as the Pied and Black Fantails, and these could now be seen as a single species with two colour morphs. Some very similar forms of uncertain status could be recognised as truly different species when they were shown not to interbreed such as Orange-fronted and

Yellow-crowned Parakeets.

Different subspecies are often separated by geographical features such as mountains or sea that were thought to act as barriers. Population genetic theory in the early 20th century suggested that just the tiniest amount of interbreeding would be enough to stop populations from evolving into distinct species so geographic isolation was seen as vital. While the early stages of speciation had to start in segregated populations a point would be reached where the offspring of matings between the populations would not do as well as the parental populations if they were viable at all. At this point natural selection should tend to favour individuals that chose their mates well, complete reproductive isolation could be achieved in time and they could coexist as full species. Where there was evidence of interbreeding, or if the different populations did not live in the same place so that the evidence of natural reproductive isolation could not be seen, the populations were regarded as subspecies. This now meant that reproductive isolation had not been confirmed. They were often thought of as “incipient species”; on their way to species status but not there yet.

The Biological Species Concept has been widely discussed and modified in various ways but the variations all deal with the way populations function, or would function, if they were in the same place at the same time. There were a small number of well recognised problems but the main one relevant to bird taxonomy is that, strictly speaking, somewhere in their range two species had to coexist to know if they were actually different species and many well defined forms did not.

The most important rival concept is the Phylogenetic Species Concept (also with variations) which is based on historic relationships. It grew out of a body of theory primarily designed to clarify the relationships

between groups of organisms by considering which characters were shared between them. Since taxonomic categories reflect evolutionary history they can be drawn on a branching tree-like diagram as the higher taxonomic groups, like orders and families, split up through time down to the species level. After the species level the pattern changes into a web as individuals from different lineages mate with each other binding different branches together. Each of these interconnecting lineages can be identified and recognised as a species. Since these relationships are defined for practical purposes by identifiable characters shared within a group but not between groups, a criterion was formalised by stating that species must have at least one unique character found in all members of that species but not in any other. This allows firm conclusions to be reached easily and it has become very popular in modern ornithology. These Phylogenetic Species often coincide better with subspecies rather than Biological Species.

The use of subspecies names was intended to communicate information rather than relative value. Its chief proponent, Ernst Mayr, once went so far as to rebuke conservation authorities in the US government for downgrading priorities for subspecies but it must be admitted that the use of the category has become confusing and the theoretical basis for it is crumbling as new information is gathered.

Some new ideas

Adherents of the Biological Species Concept have been uncomfortable with hybrids and usually regard them as evolutionary dead ends. Pied Stilts in New Zealand can readily be distinguished from Australian birds by differently proportioned legs, especially a shorter tarsus, a longer tail and more variable plumage. That they are not recognised taxonomically presumably reflects their obvi-

ous hybrid origin. Natural hybridisation seems too common to ignore however as 25% of plant and 10% of animal species are already known to hybridise in nature and produce offspring and the process can be important in evolution. It becomes even harder when species are discovered to have originated from hybrids. Hybrid individuals inherit many of the traits that show in their parents but sometimes show quite different traits as well which makes them particularly adaptable. The formation of species from hybrids may be relatively uncommon but it is known for some plants and seems to have been important in generating some species complexes of fresh water fish and insects. It is not just a problem for the Biological Species Concept but for the Phylogenetic Species Concept too because the tidy distinction between the branches and networks on the tree diagram of relationships gets a bit messy.

If reproductive isolation is not keeping species distinct what is? Fieldwork seems to be showing that natural selection is a more potent force than had been realised. This means that strong local adaptation to local conditions severely limits the amount of foreign genetic material that can survive transfer between species.

Distinct forms of plants or animals may merge to some degree where they meet. Under the Biological Species Concept this implies gene flow between them and confirms their subspecies status. However modern DNA technology shows that genetic material does not always flow freely between them. Some genetic markers stop dead at the boundary, fewer creep a short distance across and very few penetrate to any distance. This suggests that the fitness of animals carrying these foreign genes is mostly reduced compared to the resident populations and genetic integrity is not usually compromised by interbreeding.



Top: The Red Knot on the left appears to be an extreme example of the piersmai knots, which breed on the New Siberian Islands. It is a very dark shade of red below, has a lot of red under the tail and quite a lot of black on the back. On the right is an equally extreme rogersi knot, which breeds on the Chukotka peninsula. It is paler all over and white under the tail. Exactly where the cutoff point between these two forms is, is not yet clear.



Above: How many forms of godwit are getting away? The interesting bird is not the Black-tailed Godwit but the Bar-tailed Godwit at the top left. The very pale lower back seems to fit comfortably within the range of the North-eastern Siberian subspecies L.I. menzbieri.

Right: Are some Pied Stilts from Australia reaching New Zealand? The leg proportions of the bird in the centre seem different to others in the flock, and the plumage pattern is consistent.



Recent advances in understanding species come from field and experimental work showing how animals respond in an evolutionary sense to observable changes in their environments; this has become known as Ecological Speciation. A long term study on seed eating Darwin's Finches in the Galapagos Islands offers a good example of this. Here few kinds of food were available and the bills of each finch were able to efficiently extract and crush particular kinds of seeds well but not others. During drought, finches with the average bill measurements for each species survived better than the extremes so the gap between each species widened. Hybridisation between these species occurred occasionally but hybrid individuals never succeeded in producing offspring until a period of prolonged rain changed the vegetation and provided an abundance of new types of weed seeds. Interbreeding remained rare but now the hybrids thrived on the new food source and began to reproduce successfully increasing in number. Presumably future droughts will push the birds back to being two distinct species similar to their original state. The fate of the hybrids will determine the outcome. It is a good example of how the evolution of each species tracks the environment that is available to it. The mechanism, natural selection is constantly operating but not usually in a consistent direction so the net effect is generally small. Potentially these kinds of change could lead to speciation or extinction if they are sustained.

The main focus of research under the Biological Species Concept has been on reproductive isolation but it contains another important strand of thought. It is based around the idea that there are "adaptive peaks" which are where the factors that animals need to survive and reproduce are clustered. These peaks are an imaginary conjunction of things like a comfortable climate, available food and mates and so on. For Galapagos finches the abilities to extract small

seeds well or to crack large ones can be critical to survive in hard times but the bill shapes that manage one of these jobs well do the other poorly so they can be seen as an important aspect of the "adaptive peaks" for these birds. Natural selection is a process that improves the way these "adaptive peaks" are exploited and can track them as they shift. While natural selection may vary in intensity over time, it cannot take a backward step, every change must lead to an advantage, or at least be neutral. This makes it hard to move from one peak to the next unless some factor in the environment changes to allow it. Ecological Speciation fits well within the adaptive aspect of the Biological Species Concept.

Practical Taxonomy and Conservation


It should be possible to recognise species as particular evolving groups of animals of the kind shown by studies of Ecological Speciation but they will be narrowly defined, resembling subspecies. Usually they will be identifiable from their external features in the normal way, but perhaps with more care than previously. The genetic structure within a more traditional Biological Species with several subspecies is either worth recognising as several different species or may just reflect the genetic flexibility of a single species to a variable environment. To add certainty in difficult cases DNA studies often help but they do not always give clear answers, some species have diverged too recently or have their differences obscured by hybridisation. What should always give them away are the different responses they have to their particular environments in terms of calls, the timing of moult or breeding, population dynamics and any other aspect of their life.

Much of the initial argument for distinguishing two kinds of New Zealand Dotterels hinged on differences in the length of the mid toe and intensity in colour, with support from

nesting habitat and nest construction. Further work has shown demographic differences in productivity and population turnover so confidence that they are different grows as more is known.

The population sizes and trends of northern hemisphere migrants are assessed on their non-breeding grounds. Knots migrating to New Zealand have been regarded as *Calidris canutus rogersi* from Chukotka and Kamchatka. Recent total population estimates for this subspecies have been around 100,000, it is thought that close to half of them come here. It now appears, however, that *C. c. piersmai* from the New Siberian Islands comes here too, but it is uncertain how many. With as few as 30,000 *piersmai* knots this may give a welcome boost to their population but it will mean that there are even fewer *rogersi* knots than expected. The two groups seem to differ in migration times and pathways as well as breeding range so their numbers might change independently but, without enough information to recognise them reliably, key conservation information cannot be gathered.

Wetlands International thinks that during the non-breeding season New Zealand may support almost the entire population of the little known but probably rare Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica anadyrensis* from Chukotka, it seems that at least some *L.l. menzibieri* from north-eastern Siberia come here but we only know with certainty that we get *L.l. baueri* from Alaska. If we knew which groups of birds were coming to New Zealand they could be assessed appropriately and conservation problems narrowed down to the areas that they actually use. Trends in small populations could be missed entirely if they are lumped in with a larger one.

Ultimately you have to remember the birds, it doesn't really matter how you name them, as long as they're real. 

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



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Bequests

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

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

Accommodation

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

Per bed / night member \$ 15.00	Per bed / night non-member \$ 20.00
Hire of Sandpiper member \$ 50.00	Hire of Sandpiper non-member \$ 60.00
Hire of Whimbrel member \$ 50.00	Hire of Whimbrel non-member \$ 70.00

For further information contact the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno 2473
Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781 shorebird@farmside.co.nz

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

Membership of the Trust entitles you to:

Four Miranda News issues per year.
A discount on overnight accommodation
Invitations to Trust Events
The right to attend the AGM
The right to vote for council members

Membership Rates :

Ordinary Member - \$ 40.00
Family Member - \$ 50.00
Overseas Member- \$ 50.00
Life Member, under 50 - \$ 1200
Life Member, 50 & over - \$ 600

Want to be involved?

Friends of Miranda

A volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre. If you'd like to help out contact Keith. Helping out can be anything from assisting with the shop, school groups or meeting people down at the shellbanks. Regular days for volunteer training are held. Contact Maria for details.

Long term Volunteers

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

The Miranda Garden

Help in the garden around the centre. A feature of the grounds is a pond with an island in the middle. At various times of the year Banded Rail, Bittern and Mallards use the pond. A walkway around the pond is in grass with flax and other native vegetation to the edges. To the south of the garden is an attractive Cabbage Tree grove with a seat and good views over the pond. From 1 September to 1 May, gardening days are the second and fourth Saturdays in the month. Over the winter months gardening days, ably led by Dr Keith Thompson are the fourth Saturday in the month. Meet at the centre anytime after 10.00 am. Stay overnight! Free use of bunkroom accommodation is a perk - and it's not all about gardening. We make plenty of time during the day to sample cheesecake! And of course, there are the birds. We have lots of fun. Why not join us? Contact the Centre for details.

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.

The Magazine

Never forget you are welcome to contribute to the MNT NEWS! To discuss your idea contact Gillian Vaughan, gillianv@actrix.co.nz.

