



# NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP

*In association with*

Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Newsletter No 12

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## BANDING REPORT FOR 1997-98

The 1997-98 year was a more successful year than the previous one, both in terms of numbers of birds banded and of interesting birds caught. There were also some very exciting recoveries and sightings from the flyway.

A total of 10 catches were made between 20 October 1997 and 17 May 1998 on the Kaipara and Manukau Harbours and the Firth of Thames. A total of 874 new birds was banded and a further 23 were retrapped, giving a total of 897.

Species	New	Retrap	Total	
Red Knot		296	12	308
Bar-tailed Godwit	79			79
Pied Oystercatcher	434	9		443
Wrybill	52	1		53
Turnstone	10	1		11
Banded Dotterel 2			2	
Little Tern	1			1

The following totals show the number of birds banded by Miranda Banders and NZWSG since 1979.

	New	Retrap	Total
Total 1979-1982	2,896	496	3,392
Total 1986-1998	10,522	1180	11,702

Grand Total 1979-1998 13,418 1676 15,094

44 people participated in the banding work this year, including first timers and many old timers.



Des Agnew in typical plumage. Usually found on the edge of the bander flock. Often seen shaking head in disbelief (while listening to the cricket).

## CATCHES AND STUDIES

This year the NZWSG has been involved in two scientific studies of waders, as well as the normal banding.

The first, on 14 February, involved Red Knot at Jordan's. Catching any that day proved a tougher than normal challenge. Nets were set on the dry mud of a small lagoon. SIPO arrived first and landed on one of the nets. They were moved to another lagoon --- twice! --- before they realised they were not welcome. Eventually 4000 Red Knot did arrive from a sub-roost and they settled quickly. Typically, they were not close enough to the catching area. Stephen, our ace twinkler, tried to move them closer, but between him and the birds was an unpleasantly muddy, tidal creek. Crawling through the creek had the desired effect, as the birds moved closer to the catching area. One more move and 500 would be in position. Then a lone sheep appeared from the spartina grass and headed straight towards Stephen, flushing all the birds in the process. With the tide turning we needed to get on with things and a last ditch effort netted us 88 Knot and 2 Wrybill.

Wlodek Stanislawek took small blood samples from about 30 birds. These samples would then be analysed for avian borne viruses. There is considerable interest in whether diseases (such as Newcastle's disease, which affects chickens) could be carried from country to country by migrating birds. We are still waiting to hear the results of this work.

The other study involved David Thompson, from National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research Ltd (NIWA). He took blood samples from at least 20 Pied Oystercatchers at Jordan's Farm, Kaipara on 16 March and from another 20 at Kiwi Esplanade, Manukau Harbour on 17 March. The study's aims were:

- \* to establish whether heavy metal levels in shorebirds from the AucAkland Region vary spatially and in a manner which can be associated with perceived local pollutant burdens.
- \* to determine whether heavy metal concentrations measured in shorebirds from Auckland provide evidence of a wider toxicological threat.
- \* to assess whether an investigation of this type could be applied to othAer New Zealand coastal/estuarine locations holding shorebirds, in order to make inter-regional comparisons of heavy metal burdens using shorebirds as biomonitors.

The upper Manukau was expected to be a 'polluted' habitat when compared with the relatively 'pristine' habitat of Jordan's, on the Kaipara.

When this week-end was planned it was hoped to have birds in Ambury Park Farm where a cannon net could be set. However, during that week the only place Pied Oystercatchers were roosting was Kiwi Esplanade, which is a very public place. The only feasible way to catch them at midday on a Sunday was with John Dowding's noose mats. Two were set in the grass and 500 Oystercatchers moved into the area from the foreshore. John walked them across the mats and soon caught two birds. This was repeated with Ted Kitchin flushing more birds from the rocks and two more were caught. Ted, Adrian and Aaron then took over the catching so John and David could do the sampling. After four hours of working the birds - with interruptions from locals walking their dogs, driving cars through the flock or running after them to see them fly - we finally caught 20 birds and the sampling could be completed.

Samples were checked for three metals: mercury, cadmium and lead.

In brief, results were that:

- \* Mercury levels were relatively low and similar between sites.
- \* Cadmium levels were extremely low in both samples.
- \* Lead concentrations were significantly different between sites, being higher overall in the Manukau sample. Juveniles had significantly higher blood lead levels than adults, although the reasons for this are not clear.

No doubt further studies will be undertaken in the future, as Oystercatchers would appear to be good biomonitors of coastal/estuarine pollutants.

### Acknowledgments

The NZWSG wish to thank all those who gave freely of their spare time to help with the banding work and a special thank you to the land owners who allow us access to the birds and to the banding office for the daunting task of sorting out the paperwork.

### FLAG SIGHTING UPDATE

Since the last update in NZWSG News 9, April 1997, there have been at least 180 reported sightings of flagged birds, although many of these are likely to be of the same individuals.

As usual, Miranda and the South Manukau produced the most records, which is not altogether surprising as these are the haunts of Tony Habraken and David Lawrie, two formidable leg men! There is no substitute for regular and careful observation. Below are listed the most significant records. Many sightings of white flag (New Zealand) birds are not included as they occur at sites where the birds are flagged, but we are still keen to receive them, so please keep looking.

Orange Victoria  
Green Queensland

Yellow North West Australia  
White New Zealand  
Yellow on SIPO Jordan's

### RED KNOT - WHITE FLAGS

A total of 889 have now been white-flagged in NZ at four locations. Most interesting was the one from Korea. (See later in this Newsletter.)

Date Seen	Qty	Location	Observer
Firth of Thames			
19.10.97	6	Miranda	T Habraken
17.10.98	8	Miranda	T Habraken
Kaipara Harbour			
01.02.98	8	Jordan's	A Riegen
North Island			
09.01.98	1	Waipu Cove Nthland	G Pulham
00.01.98	2	Waipu Cove Nthland	K Hansen
19.09.98	1	Manawatu Est	I Saville
Overseas			
09.05.98	1	Kanghwa Is Korea	Jin-Young Park

### RED KNOT - YELLOW FLAGS

It is interesting that Knot banded in north-west Australia are regularly making it to NZ, albeit in small numbers. This trend was quiet unexpected.

Date Seen	Qty	Location	Observer
Firth of Thames			
20.01.97	1	Miranda	R Mavor
17.09.97	1	Miranda	K Woodley
19.10.97	1	Miranda	T Habraken
17.10.98	1	Miranda	T Habraken
Manukau Harbour			
15.11.97	1	Karaka	P Agnew
28.02.98	1	Karaka	T Habraken
North Island			
04.11.97	1	Manawatu Est	I Saville
16.11.97	1	Manawatu Est	I Saville

### RED KNOT - ORANGE FLAGS

Orange-flagged Red Knots continue to show the strong link between Victoria and NZ. 21 Victorian banded Red Knot have also been caught in NZ.

Date Seen	Qty	Location	Observer
Firth of Thames			
20.01.97	1	Miranda	R Mavor
17.10.98	1	Miranda	T Habraken
Manukau Harbour			
16.10.97	1	Mangere	R Clough
26.07.97	1	Karaka	T Habraken et al
15.11.97	1	Mangere	R Clough
28.02.98	3	Karaka	T Habraken
03.03.98	1	Mangere	R Clough
27.06.98	1	Karaka	P Agnew
13.09.98	1	Karaka	T Habraken
Kaipara Harbour			
15.11.97	1	Jordan's	G Grant
29.11.97	3	Jordan's	A Riegen
06.12.97	1	Waikiri Ck	G Pulham
01.02.98	2	Jordan's	A Riegen

**North Island**

07.02.97	1	Manawatu Est	R Slack et al
30.11.97	1	Manawatu Est	P & R Slack
02.12.97	1	Manawatu Est	I Saville
09.01.98	2	Waipu Cove Nthland	G Pulham
00.01.98	2	Waipu Cove Nthland	K Hansen
06.02.98	1	Portland Northland	G Grant
27.09.98	1	Mangawhai Est	G Grant

**RED KNOT - GREEN FLAGS**

Four birds at Karaka on 28.02.98 was the best single count of Queensland birds at one site.

**Firth of Thames**

14.03.97	1	Mataitai	T Habraken
19.10.97	1	Miranda	T Habraken
17.10.98	3	Miranda	T Habraken

**Manukau Harbour**

28.02.98	4	Karaka	T Habraken
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**North Island**

02.12.97	2	Manawatu Est	I Saville
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**BAR-TAILED GODWIT - WHITE FLAGS**

A total of 593 have now been white-flagged in NZ at four locations. More later on the Korean sightings.

**Firth of Thames**

22.01.97	8	Miranda	R Mavor
14.03.97	1	Mataitai	T Habraken
19.10.97	6	Miranda	T Habraken
30.11.97	23	Miranda	K Woodley
17.10.98	10	Miranda	T Habraken

**Manukau Harbour**

22.02.97	2	Conifer Grove	E Ward
24.06.97	1	Mangere SP	R Clough
28.02.98	6	Karaka	T Habraken

**Kaipara Harbour**

12.03.97	5	Papakanui Spit	G Pulham
16.11.97	1	Haranui R	T Habraken
06.12.97	1	Papakanui Spit	G Pulham
06.03.98	1	Waikiri CK	G Pulham
14.04.98	1	Waikiri CK	J Dowding

**North Island**

19.09.97	1	Manawatu Est	P & R Slack
06.02.98	1	Manawatu Est	R & D Batcheler

**Overseas**

18.04.98	1	Kanghwa Is Korea	Jeong-Yeon Yi
23.04.98	1	Kanghwa Is Korea	Jin-Young Park
25.04.98	1	Namyang Bay Korea	Jeong-Yeon Yi
04.05.98	1	Aphaedo Mokpo Korea	Nial Moores
09.05.98	1	Kanghwa Is Korea	Jin-Young Park

**BAR-TAILED GODWIT - ORANGE FLAGS**

Very few godwits with orange flags are seen in NZ, indicating that few godwits arrive in NZ via Victoria.

**Manukau Harbour**

23.11.97	1	Karaka	T Habraken
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**Kaipara Harbour**

12.12.97	1	Papakanui Spit	G Pulham
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**BAR-TAILED GODWIT - GREEN FLAGS**

Three from Queensland this year. Could the Miranda bird be the one from Papakanui Spit a week later, still moving?

**Firth of Thames**

17.10.98	1	Miranda	T Habraken
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**Kaipara Harbour**

08.10.98	1	Papakanui Spit	G Pulham
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**North Island**

30.01.97	1	Matarangi Coromandel	B Woolley
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**BAR-TAILED GODWIT - YELLOW FLAGS**

These sightings are the most interesting and unexpected as few godwits are known to travel between NW and SE Australia, and so onto NZ. Just one bird it would seem this year.

**Firth of Thames**

30.11.97	1	Miranda	K Woodley et al
28.02.98	1	Miranda	T Habraken

**TURNSTONE - WHITE FLAGS**

64 turnstones were flagged at Karaka in October 1996. Some are still being seen there and the one sighting from Korea is very interesting. It shows the worth of flagging even small numbers of birds.

**Manukau Harbour**

23.11.97	2	Karaka	T Habraken
28.02.98	3	Karaka	T Habraken
13.09.98	2	Karaka	T Habraken

**Overseas**

05.09.97	1	Dongjin Est Korea	Jin-Young Park
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**PIED OYSTERCATCHER (SIPO) - WHITE FLAGS**

White flags are fitted to SIPO only at Miranda. We are interested to see if there is movement within the Auckland region.

**Auckland**

14.10.97	1	Weymouth, Manukau	H E Ward
18.04.98	1	Shoal Bay, Waitemata	H D Pye

**PIED OYSTERCATCHER (SIPO) - YELLOW FLAGS**

Yellow flags are fitted to SIPO only on the Kaipara Harbour. It was particularly unexpected that one should turn up in Auckland just two weeks after flagging at a time of year when SIPO are expected to be fairly settled.

**Manukau Harbour**

30.05.98	1	Kiwi Esp	T Habraken
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**OVERSEAS RECOVERIES**

There were only three in the past twelve months. All were Red Knot and from an area near Shanghai, where there is considerable hunting still. Although it is always disappointing when birds are hunted, at least some of the bands are returned and we are able to learn a little more about their migration. At the same time, over 30 Australian banded birds were recovered from the same sources.

The three Red Knot banded by NZWSG were all recovered from same site some time in April 1998:

Jiuduansha, Yangtze, Nr Shanghai, CHINA 31.10.N - 122.00.E by scientists from the East China Normal University, Shanghai. All were killed and had travelled a minimum 9300 Km from the banding site.

C-45131 banded Jordan's-Kaipara H 36.30.5 -174.20.E 23.02.89 aged Adult. Elapsed Time 9y 2m - Minimum age - 11 years

C-46818 banded Miranda FoT 37.10.5 - 175.10.E 04.07.92 age Unknown. Elapsed Time 5y 9m - Minimum age - 6 years

C-49403 banded Jordan's-Kaipara H 36.30.S -174.20.E 07.03.93 aged Adult. Elapsed Time 5y 1m - Minimum age - 7 years

### WADERS IN KOREA

South Korea is at last receiving attention from local and international teams of waderholics. This year most sites were visited and waders were counted during their northward migration in April and May. Very interesting results are emerging and there will be more details in the next newsletter. There are extensive tidal flats along the whole of the west coast of the Korean peninsula. It was here that the sightings of white-flagged birds that are reported above were made.



MAP Showing position of flagged sightings.

**ALASKAN BAR-TAILED-GODWIT (R-YM)** 'Old Friend Returns'. This bird was colour banded Red-Yellow/Metal on 16.06.1990 as an adult female on the Seward Peninsula of Alaska. It was first seen at Miranda by Pam Agnew on 31.12.1994 and it has been observed at Miranda each year since then. The latest sighting, by Keith Woodley and Tony Habraken on 17.10.1998, marked a welcome return of an 'old friend'. This bird is now a minimum of 10 years old and has made at least 8 round trips to New Zealand, clocking up more than 220,000 Km solely on migration in the process.

### COLOUR BANDED WRYBILLS

Many colour banded wrybills were sighted in the northern harbours during the winter. Elaine Murphy and John Dowding, who were banding these birds in the South Island last summer, wish to thank all those who took the trouble to get the Wrybill to put down that other leg and reveal its true identity and most importantly, who sent in their sightings. John informs me they have already caught good numbers of Wrybill in the study area this year, so we can expect to see many more in the north next winter. Please help by looking for colour banded birds and passing your sightings on.

### STILT SANDPIPER AT ELLESMERE

A fax arrived on my desk on the morning of 11 September this year titled 'CMF @ Ellesmere'. Those familiar with Bill Oddie's 'Little Black Book' will understand the meaning. Those who don't know the book should track down a copy and learn something about birders.

The Stilt Sandpiper was first seen by Colin Hill a few days earlier at Lake Ellesmere just outside Christchurch. It caused a flurry of activity among the local birders, some of whom were able to see it at very close quarters and photos were obtained for the record - and to convince the sceptics, no doubt. It was significant enough as a record to make the front page of the New Zealand Herald. The latest news is that it had disappeared for a while but was back again.

This is the first record of this species in New Zealand. There are three confirmed Australia records, from Darwin, Alice Springs and Werribee, near Melbourne. Stilt Sandpipers breed in the subarctic of Alaska and Canada and the main wintering grounds are in South America, south of the Amazon, but not in the southern quarter of the continent. The preferred habitat is shallow water, so Lake Ellesmere would suit this straggler very well.

Normally they would migrate through the central States of the USA and across the Gulf of Mexico, then on across the Amazon. Those that reach Australia and New Zealand are well off course, but cover about the same distance overall as those taking the correct migration route.

What does it look like? Stilt Sandpipers are similar in size and shape to the Curlew Sandpiper (a regular migrant to New Zealand) but have a heavier, more robust decurved bill, much longer legs and in all plumages have more spotted underparts.

Any articles for this publication or sightings of banded or flagged birds should go to:

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