



NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP

In association with
Miranda Naturalists' Trust

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Compiled by Adrian Riegen

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Birders in Auckland are making a special effort this year to watch for departing waders. This is particularly important for Red knot which are likely to be passing through the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Queensland, as there is an expedition currently in progress to monitor arrivals and departures in that region. I hope to have more on this in the next newsletter.

Mike and Sharon Graham reported that at 0735, close to high tide on 15 March, they saw 1500-2000 Godwit in 4 'V' formations at possibly 1-2000 metres flying due north over Blockhouse Bay, an Auckland suburb on the northern shores of the Manukau Harbour. They were confident these birds were departing rather than moving between the Manukau and Waitemata Harbours (which is a common sight at this time of year.) Weather conditions were calm with clear skies and a light southerly wind. These are ideal conditions for a northbound flight. Similar conditions prevailed four days earlier at Miranda on the Firth of Thames, at which time David Medway reported watching a departure of c50 Godwit. The birds were flying higher than usual and calling constantly as they headed north up the Firth. Subsequent departures were also seen on 22 March.

WRYBILL STUDY UPDATE

Our banding programme has gone well this season. We spent more time ourselves down in the Mackenzie Basin this season harassing adult birds, while Mike Elliott and Richard Duirs (our very capable staff down there over summer) banded a good number of chicks. We have now banded 118 adults on the Tasman and Tekapo Rivers with individual colour combinations, all of which contain orange. Among these are 30 pairs in which both birds are banded. In addition 25 chicks were colour-banded this season, of which at least 14 are known to have fledged. The result of all this is that when you find a flock of wrybill this winter, roughly one in 38 should be ours on average.

Work on the Tekapo River didn't go quite according to plan this season. Last year, productivity in the area was very low; we suspected predation of nests and chicks was the problem and were interested to see if the same happened this year. However Lake Tekapo got a bit full in late September, so ECNZ opened the flood-gates. Not surprisingly we lost all the low-lying nests. However some on higher ground survived while some pairs that lost re-laid. Ironically most pairs succeeded this year, probably because the increased flow rates meant that the usual mammalian predators (such as cats and ferrets) could not get out to the islands. We certainly couldn't. Unlike a natural flood, which is usually over in a few days or a week, this one went on for several months. In a couple of places we could see large chicks on islands in the river but couldn't get out there to band them - very frustrating.



Wrybill nests almost always have two eggs. This rare example of a 3-egg nest in the Upper Tasman River was the only one we have found in two seasons.

As you will see in the “wader special” issue of *Notornis*, we found one of our birds breeding at one year old, about 1.5km from its own natal site on the Upper Tasman River. This had not been recorded previously and was a real surprise. Only time will tell whether it happens regularly; with quite a few chicks colour-banded this season, we are in a better position to learn more later in the year. Living in the South Island means we’ll also be able to survey more riverbeds early in the season, and check for young birds prospecting or breeding away from their natal site.



Wrybill chick on the point of fledging in the Lovver Tasman, about to be released after banding.

We have also found two of our adults (among a flock of about 90 birds) staging at Lake Ellesmere on the way north this autumn. Both stayed around for at least several weeks. Next season we will monitor this area more regularly and try catching a few birds, to see whether they are moulting before they migrate. Another bird, an adult male from the Tasman River, stopped briefly at Manawatu Estuary and then moved on. It would appear they do not all make the journey non-stop.

Next season we also hope to band some birds on rivers closer to Christchurch, probably the Ashley and Waimakariri. This will increase our sample sizes and provide us with another study area to compare with the Mackenzie.

Finally, many thanks to all those who have made the effort to record and send in sightings. Please keep them coming -these individually colour-banded birds give us a wonderful opportunity to collect a wealth of information on survival, pair-bonds (we’ve already recorded our first wrybill divorce!), movement patterns, and so on. Sightings can be recorded in the book at Miranda, sent to

the Banding Office, given to Adrian Riegen or Gwen Pulham, or sent directly to us by email (dowding@doyager.co.nz) or by post (PO Box 36-274, Merivale, Christchurch.)

**JOHN DOWDING
ELAINE MURPHY**

CHATHAM ISLAND OYSTERCATCHER CENSUS

A census of Chatham Island oystercatcher (CIPO) (*Haemantopus chathamensis*) was conducted during 13 to 18 December 1998. Approximately 310 km or 96-97% of the coastline and 100km (100%) of Te Whanga Lagoon on main Chatham, Pitt, Rangatira and Mangere Islands were covered, mostly by foot or quad bike. A total of 35 people participated in the census on the four main islands, including Department of Conservation (DoC) staff and contractors, Chatham Island landowners and residents, the Taiko team members, and other DoC volunteers.

A total of 141 adult CIPO, including 34 confirmed breeding pairs and seven additional possible breeding pairs were counted. This is about 20-40 more CIPO than in any previous census or estimate. Seventy per cent of breeding pairs were on Chatham Island, with 15% on Pitt Island. The remaining 15% were on Mangere and Rangatira Islands.

The majority of CIPO (79% of individuals and 74% of breeding pairs) were located in areas we broadly define as associated with rocky wave-cut platforms or other rocky coastline or outcrops; however 30 individuals and nine breeding pairs were located along sandy beaches. Only one bird was seen along Te Whanga Lagoon, all others being seen along the coastline.

Background:

The Chatham Island oystercatcher is listed internationally as endangered and is one of New Zealand’s ‘category A’ species, or highest priority for conservation action. Past counts between 1986-1996 have estimated the population to be between 65-120 adults, including 30-44 pairs. Because only one or two people conducted these counts, they occurred over limited areas and/or over relatively long periods (6-13 weeks) increasing the likelihood of undercounting or double counting of birds, as well as missing areas where birds might be located.

This census is the first to be conducted over all four known breeding islands of the CIPO in a relatively short time-frame (one week.)

CIPO are endemic to the Chatham Island archipelago, and are non-migratory, and almost strictly coastal in their distribution. Breeding pairs are fairly sedentary and display strong territorial defence behaviours during breeding season. As with most oystercatcher species they do not begin breeding until at least two years of age.

Frances Schmechel

CURLEW SANDPIPERS AT KARAKA

On 2 January 1999 I went to meet Broome Bird Observatory wardens Chris Hassall and Jan Sparrow at Auckland airport shortly after 6a.m. They had arrived in New Zealand direct from Broome for a holiday, but we couldn't have that, could we? As they had not seen a wader for at least 24 hours I felt it important to get them out onto the mudflats as soon as possible. Thus by 7a.m. we were on the shellbanks of Karaka on the south Manukau Harbour. Lack of sleep did not dampen their enthusiasm and the waders put on a special welcoming display. All 20,000 of them.

While we watched the vast flocks in aerial display, some 8,000 Red knot chose to land and roost tightly packed together on a narrow shellbank about 50m away. 7,999 of them were in full winter plumage and the other one was in full breeding plumage. This was a strange sight and something of a puzzle as to why one should be in this plumage. Had it got its clock wrong or had it become stuck in New Zealand for years and adopted a southern hemisphere cycle as some waders do?

Apart from the knot there were only a small flock of Wrybill about 10m distant, with two Curlew sandpipers among them, both with metal leg bands. We were close enough to be tempted to try reading the numbers through a telescope. Neither bird appeared willing to turn around slowly to reveal the full numbers, and so I made my way out into the sea and slowly around the birds until all the numbers of one band could be read. I had almost finished when everything took off (Harrier attack), but sufficient numbers were seen: B-6400? for me to know it was either B-64008 or 64009. In either case it was a bird banded at Miranda on 4 July 1992 probably as a second year bird.

As Curlew sandpipers are often very late leaving on northward migration we hope to keep an eye on these two birds to see when they depart. As they are obviously adults they must be going to Siberia when they depart as

opposed to first and second year birds which may depart New Zealand but only go as far as Australia. Curlew sandpipers are rare in New Zealand during the winter.

WADER CATCH AT MIRANDA 6 January 1999

A catch of Bar-tailed Godwit and some Red knot at Taramaire produced some useful results.

Totals

	New	Retrap	Flagged
Red knot	622	27	303
Bar-tailed godwit	143	3	61
Total	765	30	362

Total Birds caught 795

Knot Retraps

There were 24 from New Zealand, all banded at Miranda since 1990 which shows a good degree of site faithfulness.
5 banded on 03.11.90
3 banded on 04.07.92
2 banded on 18.12.93
14 banded on 20.10.96

1 with an orange flag was banded near Queenscliff, Victoria on 18.10.96
2 with yellow flags were banded on 80 Mile Beach in NW Australia on 09.08.98 and 21.08.98 and so have made the 5400km journey sometime over the last 4-5 months.. We are not quite sure what these two are up to but the state of their primary moult may help us determine this in future. A further 6 birds were in similar moult so could have also come from 80 Mile Beach.

The bird from Victoria is now the 22nd to have come to New Zealand from that part of Australia.

Godwit Retrap

All three were banded at Miranda
1 banded on 17.10.93
1 banded on 23.10.94
1 banded on 20.10.96

MIST NETTING ON THE MANUKAU 18 March 1999

Only 10 birds and one fish were caught but they included some interesting birds.

Three Bar-tailed godwit all very heavy and two Red knot one of which had been banded at Miranda on 06.01.99

Bar-tailed godwit	3
Pied stilt	3
Red knot	2
Wrybill	1
Banded dotterel	1

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

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231 Forest Hill Road,
Waiatarua, Auckland 8

Phone/fax (09) 814 9741

Miranda Shorebirds Centre
email shorebird@extra.co.nz

TOTAL BIRDS BANDED SINCE 1979 BY MIRANDA BANDERS/ NZWSG

Species	New Birds	Retrapped Birds	Total
Red knot	5,843	150	5,993
Wrybill	4,277	1,516	5,793
Pied oystercatcher	2,317	23	2,340
Bar-tailed godwit	1,650	13	1,663
Turnstone	96	2	98
Banded dotterel	68	-	68
Curlew sandpiper	19	2	21
New Zealand dotterel	16	2	18
Pied stilt	15	-	15
Red-necked stint	3	-	-
Pacific golden plover	2	-	2
Terek Sandpiper	1	-	1
Total:	14,307	1708	16,015