

NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP

In association with

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Compiled by Adrian Riegen

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COMMENT

It is at this time of the year that we look to the north for waders returning from their breeding ground on the distant tundra. The ever vigilant Tony Habraken was at Karaka, Manukau Harbour on 7th September 2002 and saw many Red Knot some newly arrived as well as two Pacific Golden Plovers, but even more remarkable was a juvenile Turnstone. Although little more than ten weeks old it had nevertheless travelled at least 10,000 km from the breeding grounds.

On 9th September, Mike Twyman counted 900 Bar-tailed Godwit at Port Whangarei and among them were two juveniles. Both these would have hatched about 10 weeks earlier on the Alaskan tundra. It is remarkable to think they can hatch from the egg as tiny chicks, feed themselves and grow to the size of an adult, then move from the tundra to the coast of the Yukon Delta in Alaska to fatten up and fly 11-12,000 km all in 10 weeks. This must surely rate as one of the natural wonders of the world. On 19th September Keith Woodley counted 1516 Bar-tailed Godwit at Miranda (so he says!), including one juvenile. Then on 5 October David Lawrie and Gillian Vaughan recorded 3500 godwit at Ohiwa Harbour, Bay of Plenty. On 13th October at Miranda there were around 2000 godwits, which included at least 7 juvs. The number of juveniles has steadily increased as the season has progressed and on 28 October Tony Habraken counted at least 40 juveniles in a flock of around 2200 Bar-tailed Godwit at Miranda. This was surpassed on 3 November when at least 60 juveniles were seen at Karaka in a flock of about 4700 Bar-tailed Godwit. Most juvenile counts amount to no more than 1-2% of the flocks. This ties in with similar observations in Queensland and Alaska.

Keen to see what birds had arrived in the Far-North Gillian and Tony headed to the northern harbours and along with Roger Cawte and Fred Walker from DoC Kaitaia, visited Walker Island in Rangaunu Harbour

on 23 September, where they found 1250 Bar-tailed Godwit, 2300 Red Knot and 200 Turnstone. Parengarenga Harbour the day before had revealed 1150 Bar-tailed Godwit, 600 Red Knot and 206 Turnstone. Very few counts at this time of year from the Far-North have been published so it is difficult to determine whether many of the migrants make first land fall in the Far-North before moving south. There is a need for much more work to be done there during spring to ascertain this.

They also saw four Red Knots and one Bar-tailed Godwit with orange leg flags (Victoria) but no white (New Zealand) ones. Without doubt, the most exciting flag sighting was a Turnstone with white over orange flags. This was banded in South Korea and is the first bird banded in Korea to be seen in New Zealand although several New Zealand flagged birds have been seen in Korea including two Turnstones.

While on flags David Melville from Nelson and Pete Collins from Victoria ran a banding training course at Yalu Jiang in northeast China at the end of April 2002 during which they banded and flagged 73 Bar-tailed Godwit. This is not very many but the value of flagging even small numbers is clearly demonstrated by the fact that one they had flagged green/orange was seen on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Alaska prior to migrating south in early September and another was seen in Moreton Bay, Brisbane during October. This prompted a request from David Melville to find one in New Zealand! The request was made on Friday 25 October and David Lawrie obliged by finding one at Miranda on Sunday 27 October. So in six months there have been three sightings of the Bar-tailed Godwits flagged at Yalu Jiang.

Many more flag sightings have come in from around New Zealand of various colours. Each sighting adds to our knowledge of the bird's migration strategies, so please keep looking and send all records to Adrian Riegen.

STOP PRESS

It is difficult to keep up with all the flag observations but on 5 November Peter Gaze saw a green/orange flagged Bar-tailed Godwit at Nelson Haven, The Miranda bird was seen on 09.11.02 so there are at least two in NZ. There have now been four sightings of the Yalu Jiang banded godwits since they were banded in April.

FROM ALASKA Bob Gill & Brian McCaffery

Again, this year juvenile recruitment appears to be very low, nothing above 3% and many counts less than 1%. We had folks at two camps on the Yukon Delta in part to learn if juveniles might be off by themselves somewhere, but that was not the case.

Observations at Tutakoke River, central Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta between 17-25 August 2002 by Dan Ruthrauff and Marin Sardy produced a maximum single day count of c2000 Bar-tailed Godwits and at least 21 individual with flags including 13 orange (VIC), 4 green (QLD), 4 white Auckland region and 1 white/green from Nelson.

At Tern Mountain, south coastal Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta between 18 Aug-14 Sep 2002, Chadd Fitzpatrick, Melanie Spies, and Marin Sardy saw a maximum single day count of c4000 Bar-tailed Godwits and at least 12 individually flagged birds including 8 orange, 1 white, 1 green 1 blue (Japan) and the green/orange bird mentioned earlier.

THE LATEST BAND RECOVERIES

Wrybill

John Dowding caught a Wrybill in the Upper Tekapo River area on 2 September 2002 that we had banded at Miranda on 28 July 2002, just five weeks earlier.

Bar-tailed Godwit

No new overseas recoveries since the last newsletter but plenty of flag sightings and at least 10 white flagged godwits were seen at Yalu Jiang during the banding course at the end of April.

Red Knot

Three birds banded in June 2001 at Corner Inlet, Victoria, as first year birds were retrapped at Miranda in July 2002 (see banding at Miranda)

RECENT OVERSEAS FLAG SIGHTINGS OF NEW ZEALAND BIRDS

Flag sightings have included

Red Knot

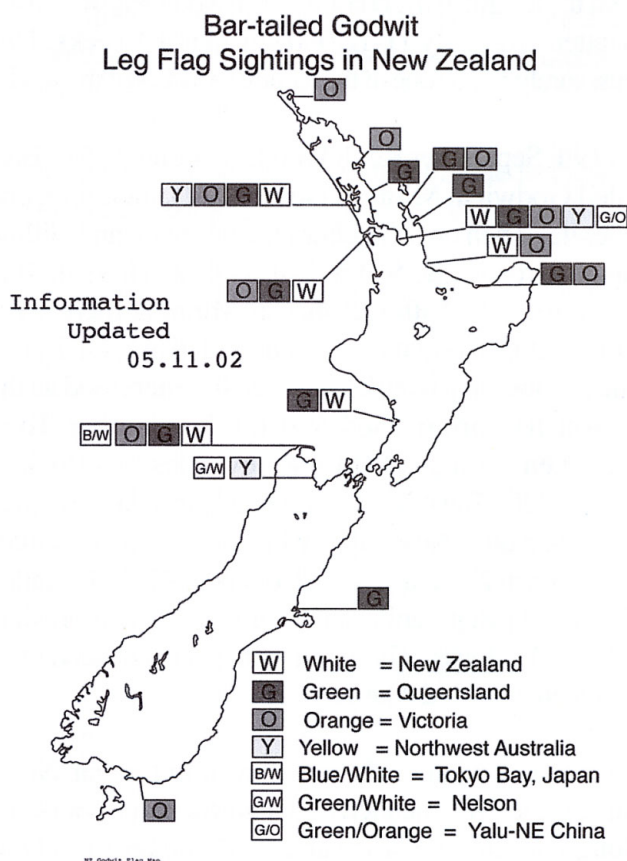
One seen at Dongjin Est, South Korea on 27.08.02 by Jin-Young Park

One seen at Manly H, Moreton Bay, QLD on 01.09.02 by A&S Keates/D Edwards and another at Toorbul, near Bribie QLD on 22.06.02 by P&L Cross

The Red Knots are proving to be an elusive species during migration, particularly in Asia with only 24 of the several thousand flagged being sighted anywhere in the region, as the table shows.

Flag location	Sighting				Total
	Taiwan	Hong Kong	China	Japan	
VIC	3	2		1	6
QLD				1	1
NW Australia	1	8	2		11
New Zealand			2	4	6

Flagging at all sites started in the early 1990's. As has been reported in the NZWSG News and Miranda News in the past, so far very few important sites have been located in Asia for Red Knot on northward migration.



BANDING AT MIRANDA

GODWIT CATCH

An overcast morning greeted us at Miranda on 27 October but we unloaded all the equipment onto the shellbank and just as we were about to set the net the rain arrived, light drizzle really but enough to halt proceedings. We were almost at the point of giving up when a tiny chink of blue sky appeared in the west. David Lawrie said it would be fine in an hour so that was good enough for me and we set the net as quickly as possible. The tide and birds were getting very close.

David was right and an hour later the sun was shining as birds swarmed onto the shellbank but somehow short of the net. Stephen twinkled them into the area and suggested we would catch 50 birds. We would have liked a few more but the risk if we moved them would result in too many birds so we settled for a smaller catch. All went very well and the fine mesh net worked a treat. All the birds were out of the net in 10 minutes and processing could begin.

The result was 51 birds not 50 as Stephen had predicted, however he claims he only meant godwits. The 51st bird was a Red Knot. Of the godwits one was a juvenile and the rest second years and adults.

Two birds were retraps; as usual, both from the Miranda shellbanks one banded in October 1994 the other in October 1996. Further evidence of how site faithful adult birds are. Of the 25 godwit we have retrapped since 1986 all were at the same site as they were banded. All these birds were flagged with a single white flag on the right tibia. We hope this will lead to more sightings on the flyway.

The rain returned shortly after we had packed up, so a larger catch would have caused us some problems.

KNOT AND WRYBILL CATCHES

A rare opportunity arose during the winter when the waders were reliably roosting at Taramaire, Miranda. At least Wrybill and Red Knot were, and the weather was fine (even rarer!) if slightly on the cool side. We made a catch on 14 July followed by another on 28 July.

Red Knots Caught:

14.07.02, 170 new birds, 10 1st year, 159 2nd year and 1 adult

28.07.02, 74 new birds, 3 retraps, 7 1st year, 66 2nd year and 1 adult

These were two very useful catches of overwintering Red Knot with the only other July catch being in 1992. Three more birds banded in Victoria were caught, all banded in 2001 as first year birds. This brings to 31 the number of birds caught from Victoria. Winter catches in Victoria are predominantly first year birds, yet first years make up a very small percentage of our catches, most in New Zealand being second year birds.

A picture is emerging of a two part strategy to the Red Knot life cycle with juveniles heading to Victoria from the breeding grounds of Siberia and overwintering there before moving across the Tasman to New Zealand in their second year. They stay in New Zealand until reaching adulthood when they return to Siberia to breed. It appears that on their subsequent journeys south they fly directly to New Zealand. Why this should be it is not possible to say but it does illustrate how complex these birds can be and the value of banding and flagging as without these tools it would be very difficult to determine what they are doing.

Wrybill Caught

Summary of both catches combined

New	636 R
Reband	140
Total banded	776

Age of birds:

1 st year	10
Adult	313
Unaged	453

347 were sexed with 47 unknown, 178 male (51.3%) and 122 female (35.2%). It is hard to know if there is a serious imbalance in the sexes as the sexes could be roosting in separate parts of the flock.

Of particular interest were the retraps. The metal bands on Wrybill wear badly, so much so that 140 had to be rebanded, some for the third time since they were first caught in 1992.

Many of the retrapped birds were from big catches made in 1992-93 and 1997 at Miranda some had been caught three times and three birds four times. Most of those were adults in 1992 so they are now at least 12 years old. It is possible that one or two birds were banded as far back as 1988 at Jordan's farm on the Kaipara Harbour, but the bands were too worn to be sure.

These were important catches for gathering population age data, and given the increasing problems Wrybills face on the breeding grounds from predators and other threats the more we know about the species the better. John Dowding continues to work with them on the breeding grounds and many of the individually colour banded birds have been seen in the Auckland region during the winter. What is particularly interesting is just how much individual birds move around the Auckland region. Birds have been seen at Miranda one week then on the Manukau Harbour or Tamaki Estuary the next and a few weeks later back at Miranda again

FROM VICTORIA WADER STUDY GROUP

A frequently asked question about waders is 'how long do they live?' Two Bar-tailed Godwit were recaptured at Queenscliff, Victoria in January 2002 that had been banded at the same place in August 1980, 22.5 years earlier, the other 19.5 earlier. A Red Knot banded 17.5 years earlier was also caught and was one of the oldest of this species. The 22.5 year old has probably flown more than half a million kilometres.

A Pied Oystercatcher banded at Corner inlet, Victoria on 30 December 1979 was caught at the same site on 23 February 2002 and at 23.25 years is the oldest known in Australia.

Another long lived species is Banded Dotterel, many of which migrate to southeast Australia after breeding in New Zealand and at Queenscliff in May 2002 four were caught that were banded 16.5, 15.5, 13.5, and 13.5 years earlier.

Since 1975 the VWSG has caught:
3193 new and 323 retrapped Red Knot,
2543 and 166 Bar-tailed Godwit,
2108 and 612 Turnstone
and flagged
1452 Bar-tailed Godwit,
1412 Turnstone
1998 Red Knot.

BIRDS KILLED BY HAIL

A series of recoveries of banded Little Terns at the breeding colony at Lake Tyers in east Gippsland, VIC, on 24 December 2001 resulted from a severe night-time hailstorm. It is unusual for birds to be reported as being killed in this way, but it is probably not as rare as it appears. Birds living in open areas must be extremely susceptible to injury by hailstones. In the Moreton Bay region of Queensland where storms with much larger sized hail are not infrequent, many Bar-tailed Godwit and other waders were found killed and injured after a severe hailstorm about 15 years ago.

WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL

The Government of Japan has designated two new Wetlands of International Importance, both chiefly because of their great value for migratory shorebirds. Fujimae-Higata (323 hectares, 35°04'N 136°50'E) is a tidal flat at the mouths of the Shonai, Shinkawa, and Nikko rivers as they flow into the port city of Nagoya. The site is an important staging site along the East Asia-Australasian Flyway with one of the highest shorebird counts in Japan. Some seven species of shorebird surpass the 1 % threshold in the area, and more than 20,000 waterbirds have been counted frequently.

Once part of extensive tidal flats in the northern part of Ise Bay, the site remains relatively unaltered itself amid widespread transformation of the surrounding areas for development

This is welcome news from a country that has lost almost all its natural coastline.