

NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP

In association with

Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Newsletter No 23

-November 2008 -

Compiled by Adrian Riegen

ISSN 1173-387X

COMMENT

It has been rather a long time between newsletters, a tad over two years in fact and the fault is entirely mine. Too many other things filling my days it seems. A great deal has happened in the past two years particularly with the godwits and much of that has been covered in the Miranda Naturalists' Trust News.

Hardly a day goes by without some new information arriving on my desk, be it a flag sighting from Korea, a coloured banded bird seen in Queensland, a Broome colour-banded Knot seen in New Zealand, a recovery or information from one of the many wader study groups operating along the flyway. All these pieces of data add to our knowledge of what the waders are doing, hopefully we can use this knowledge to help protect them.

The interesting sightings are not confined to New Zealand. Earlier this year while at Yalu Jiang in China the MNT team saw a Bar-tailed Godwit and a Grey Plover with black and green flags (a new combination for us!). These had been banded in Thailand, the former only two weeks earlier and the latter one of only two ever banded. Needless to say the Thai people were very happy with that result. Stories like there are occurring frequently these days along the Flyway.

We have undertaken less banding work in the past two years but with most birds caught now fitted with colour bands, engraved flags or satellite transmitters the amount of data generated is far more than was possible when birds were fitted with just a metal band.

WADER CATCHES SINCE MARCH 2006

Results of the nine catches that were made between March 2006 and October 2008 are shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows total numbers of birds caught since the 'Miranda Banders' started in 1979.

GODWIT UPDATE

Of the godwits satellite tagged in New Zealand in 2008 none are still transmitting, however thanks to their black flags some are still being seen. Three were caught at Miranda on 18.10.2008. D0, D6 and E5. E5 was a bird from 2007 that took the long way back to Miranda, via New Caledonia and Gosford in NSW.

D0 was first seen back at Miranda by Gillian Vaughan and Ian Southey on 27.09.2008. This was the first tagged bird to reach the North Slope of Alaska.

D7 stayed around all winter at Miranda and was seen regularly. It hardly moved more than a kilometre from the shellbanks.

D6 did not migrate north and is seen regularly at Miranda.

D5 did not go north to breed and has been seen regularly at Miranda. It twice went to Okarito on the South Island West Coast in the late summer. Why it should go south, we have no idea.

D8 the other satellite tagged bird that made it to Alaska this year was also first seen back at Miranda by Gillian and Ian on 27.09.2008

E9 did not migrate but after moving around the Auckland and Bay of Plenty areas for a while after banding it returned to Miranda and has been there ever since.

Table 1. Catch Totals

Site	Date	Totals	Bar-tailed	Bar-tailed	Red	Red	Wrybill	Wrybill
			Godwit	Godwit	Knot	Knot		
			new	retrap	new	retrap	new	retrap
Miranda	25.11.06	274	21	3	227	23		
Miranda	23.01.07	21					19	2
Miranda	06.02.07	21	8		12	1		
Miranda	15.12.07	48	28		16	4		
Miranda	26.01.08	239					182	57
Miranda	11.02.08	14					11	3
Miranda	03.10.08	13	9	2	2			
Miranda	04.10.08	13	12		1			
Miranda	18.10.08	663	7*	10	594	52		
Total		1306	85	15	852	80	212	62

* About 50 more godwits were caught at this time but were released unbanded due to the large numbers of knots caught.

Table 2. Total birds caught in all years since 1979

Species	New	Retrap	Total
Wrybill	6,287	2,498	8,785
Red Knot	8,001	260	8,261
SIPO	2,850	30	2,880
Bar-tailed Godwit	2,267	62	2,329
Turnstone	149	12	161
Banded Dotterel	139	2	141
Curlew Sandpiper	22	1	23
New Zealand Dotterel	19	2	21
Pied Stilt	15		15
Pacific Golden Plover	5		5
Red-necked Stint	4		4
Variable Oystercatcher	1		1
Grey-tailed Tattler	1		1
Terek Sandpiper	1		1
Totals	19,761	2,867	22,628

We will watch carefully to see if any of those that did not migrate in 2008 do so in 2009.

FOCUS ON KNOTS

With so much attention being given to the satellite tagged godwits it is easy to forget about the Red Knots but we are slowly gathering information on their movements, although most sightings in the last two years have been from well known knot sites. No specific searches for 'the missing' knots along the migration route have been undertaken in the past two years.

It is still not clear where the major staging grounds in Asia are, either on northbound or southbound migration, although the western shores of the Bohai Sea holds good numbers northbound and Chongming Dao near Shanghai does appear to be at least a brief staging area, again on the way north.

Jesse Conklin is trialling dataloggers on godwits at Foxton. Once fitted these microchips gather data on day length, which, when downloaded and analysed, should give an indication as to where the birds have been during migration. If this works for godwits then dataloggers small enough for knots to carry could be a very useful tool for determining where they are stopping during migration.

Knot Engraved Flag Sightings

Since we started applying flags in 1991 2,231 knots have been fitted with a plain white flag and, since November 2005, 691 with engraved flags. The engraved flags provide a much greater understanding of how knots move around within New Zealand and overseas than plain white ones do, providing of course people are out there looking for them and are able to read the letters. Tony Habraken manages this particularly well and of the 348 that have been seen, Tony has seen at least 254 of them.

Table 3. Red Knots with engraved flags seen only overseas

Flag	Banding date	Age	Country	Date Seen	Location
ABZ	25.11.06	Ad	Japan	30.04.07	Yoshino R. Est, Tokushima
AUZ	25.11.06	2-3	Japan	07.05.07	Yoshino R. Est, Tokushima
ANM	22.10.05	3+	China	21.04.08	Chongming Dao
AKK	22.10.05	2nd	China	08.05.08	Shuanglong River Est - Bohai Bay

Table 4. Red Knots seen away from the Auckland region in New Zealand

Flag	Banding date	Age	NZ Region seen	Date Seen	Location
AMV	22.10.05	Ad	Golden Bay Tasman Bay	28.01.06 22.03.08	Farewell Spit Motueka Sandspit
AVV	25.11.06	2-3	Tasman Bay Firth of Thames	21.03.07 04.10.08	Motueka Sandspit Miranda
ALT	22.10.05	Ad	Golden Bay	16.02.06	Farewell Spit
AZB	25.11.06	Ad	Golden Bay	19.03.07	Farewell Spit
ABT	25.11.06	Ad	Golden Bay	20.03.07	Farewell Spit
AYB	25.11.06	2	Golden Bay	20.03.07	Farewell Spit
AKU	22.10.05	Ad	Manawatu Manawatu	02.02.06 07.03.07	Manawatu Est Manawatu Est
AXH	25.11.06	Ad	Bay of Plenty Firth of Thames	19.10.07 19.01.08	Maketu Miranda

Seven of these moved south within four months of banding

Table 5. Red Knots seen in New Zealand and overseas

Flag	Banding date	Age	Country/Region	Date Seen	Location
AAD	25.11.06	Ad	Chukotka Firth of Thames	23.07.06 04.11.07	Pnogytyn Lagoon Miranda
AAW	25.11.06	2.3	Firth of Thames China	28.01.07 11.04.08	Miranda Chongming Dao
ARK	25.11.06	Ad	NSW Firth of Thames	28.09.07 15.12.07	Korangan Dykes Miranda
ASU	25.11.06	Ad	China Firth of Thames	05.05.07 20.10.07	Beitang, Tianjin Miranda
ATK	25.11.06	Ad	Firth of Thames Western Australia	28.01.07 23.05.07	Miranda Roebuck Bay
AWE	25.11.06	Ad	Auckland Auckland Auckland Taiwan Taiwan	13.01.07 27.01.07 24.02.07 12.04.07 13.04.07	Mataitai Mataitai Mataitai Wu-Ku Taipei County Wu-Ku Taipei County
			Manukau Harbour Firth of Thames Firth of Thames	29.09.07 06.10.07 20.10.07	Karaka Miranda Miranda
AWV	25.11.06	3+	China China	06.04.08 12.04.08	Chongming Dao Chongming Dao

AAD was seen on the coastal breeding grounds of Chukotka with chicks.

ATK appears to have moved north via Broome although 23 May is quite late in the season to still be in the southern hemisphere. So whether this one made it back to the arctic in 2007 is unclear.

Red Knot Catch on 18.10.2008

An exceptional catch of birds was made on 18.10.2008 when close to 700 birds were caught, of which 663 were processed. We targeted Red Knot for a MAF study into avian flu. Last year we were only able to catch 18 birds for them but this year they ran out of swabs before birds so should produce valuable data on whether waders migrating to New Zealand are carriers of avian flu viruses.

Of particular interest were the retrapped birds in the catch and the lack of juvenile Red Knots; not one was caught. A similar catch in Victoria would probably have contained hundreds of juveniles.

The trend in movements from Victoria to New Zealand continues to strengthen and the evidence is now overwhelming that the majority of juvenile Red Knots spend their first year in south east Australia before a portion of them move to New Zealand where they become 'New Zealand' birds. Evidence that they don't regularly return to Victoria can be seen by the numbers of Victorian flagged bird sightings in New Zealand and visa-versa and the number of Victorian birds retrapped in New Zealand and visa-versa.

The numbers are:

	Flag sighting reports	Band recoveries
New Zealand to Victoria	1	3
Victoria to New Zealand	1171	64

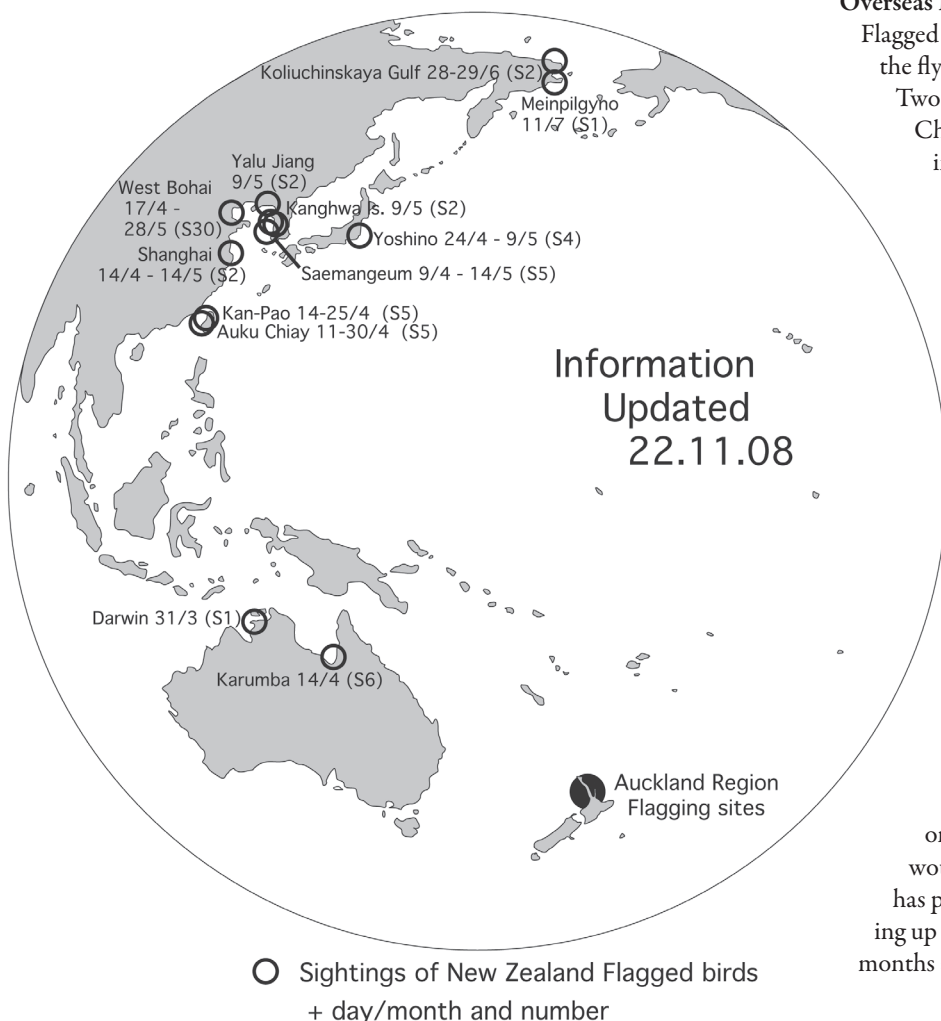
There have been 47 identifiable New Zealand banded birds recovered or sighted overseas excluding colour-banded birds, which are part of a different project, not discussed here.

Also in the catch on 18.10.2008 were 3 Red Knots from China, 1 from Japan, 1 from Siberia and 10 from Victoria. Two of the Chinese birds have been identified. One was banded at Chongming Dao near Shanghai on 16.04.2007 and another in the Bohai Sea on 17.04.2008. The Japanese bird has not been identified as yet but was banded on the island of Hokkaido. There must be at least two from Hokkaido in New Zealand at the moment because Tony Habraken saw another on the Manukau a few days after we replaced the Japanese blue flag with an engraved white flag on the one we caught.

The Siberian bird was very interesting. It had a pale blue flag, one of which was seen at Miranda on 04.10.2008 and one on 08.10.2008 at Mangere on the Manukau Harbour. This could be the same bird as they do regularly move between harbours. The bird we caught was one of only five Red Knots banded in northern Chukotka (the most eastern part of Siberia). It was banded as a chick on 26.06.2004 along with three other chicks and one adult.

This is the first Russian banded Red Knot to be recovered in New Zealand and gives us a direct link to one of the breeding sites.

Northbound Movements of New Zealand Flagged Red Knot



Overseas Flagged Birds to New Zealand

Flagged Red Knots from 15 different regions on the flyway have now been seen in New Zealand. Two of these regions, Chongming Dao in China and Broome in NW Australia have, in recent years, also been adding engraved flags. These identify individual birds and give a better understanding of just how many reach New Zealand from those regions. 48 different birds from Chongming Dao (a known brief staging site for northbound Red Knots) have been recorded in New Zealand. Seven birds with engraved flags from Broome have also been seen in New Zealand. It is generally thought that the Red Knots in NW Australia are the *piersmai* sub-species, which doesn't usually travel as far as New Zealand. Either some do come this far or they are the *rogersi* sub-species taking a more westerly migration route to New Zealand. Chris Hassell who bands waders in Broome caught several knots in August 2008 that, based on plumage, moult and age, he thought would travel on to other destinations. This has proved to be the case, with three birds turning up in New Zealand already, less than three months after banding.

2YYYYB was seen at Tapora, Kaipara Harbour on 02.11.08 and was banded at Broome on 16.08.2008.

2YYYYY was seen at Farewell Spit on 16.11.2008 and was banded at Broome on 02.08.2008

2YYLB was seen at Clarks Bay, Manukau Harbour on 16.11.2008 (waiting for banding details).

These are all very interesting sightings and tend to indicate these birds have not spent much time wandering to New Zealand but have made fairly quick flights. At least seven colour-banded knots from Broome have now been seen in New Zealand. Making sense of all this data is challenging but shows the value in getting out there looking for these marked birds. Untangling the knot will take a little longer.

OTHER INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

Pacific Golden Plover

Gwen Pulham was looking for flags on knots and godwits at Jordan's Farm, Kaipara Harbour on 07.01.2008 when 40 Pacific Golden Plover arrived one of which was sporting a white flag. This was one of three Pacific Golden Plover banded and flagged on 13.02.2005 at Jordan's. At least one flagged bird has been seen

at Jordan's in 2006 and 2007. This is the only information we have about individual Pacific Golden Plovers in New Zealand.

Pied Stilt

A commonly asked question is "How long do waders live". We can only find out by banding birds and hoping they are caught or seen again many years later. On 05.11.2007 Peter Field saw a Pied Stilt at Nelson Haven that had been colour banded as a chick in 1990, thus making the bird a venerable 17 years old.

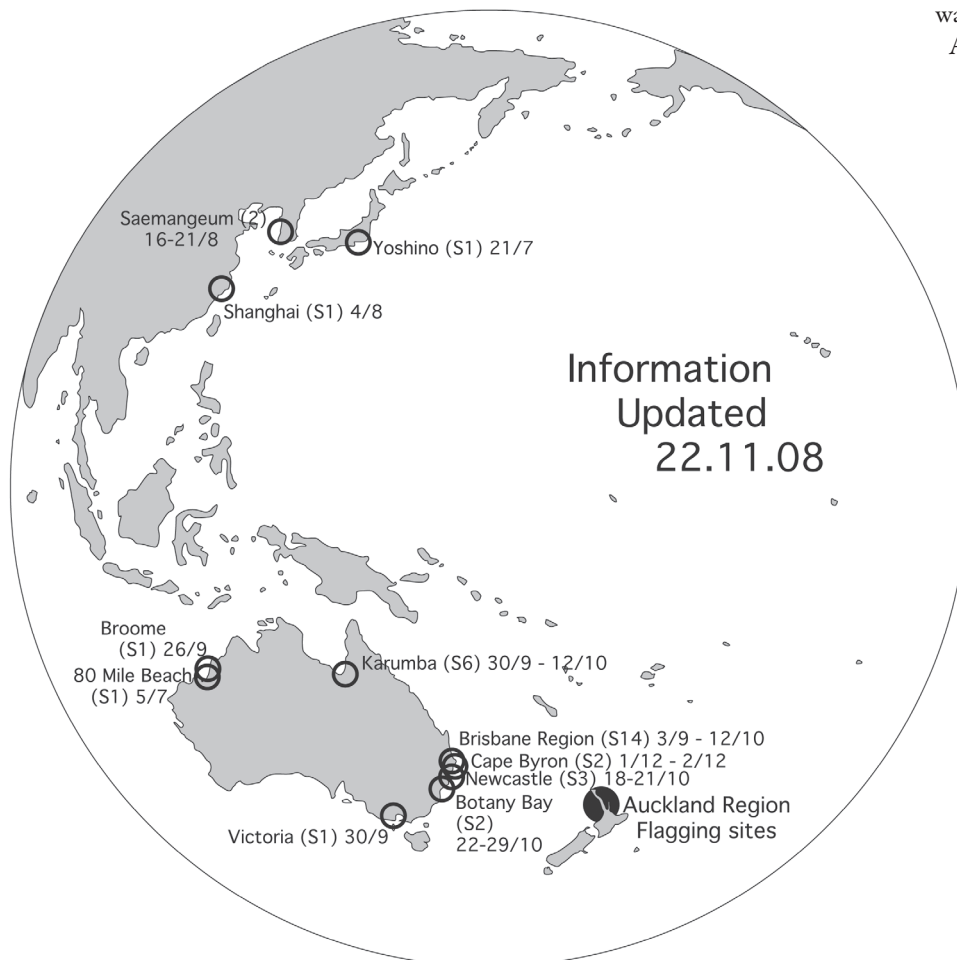
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

Several hundred juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were colour flagged/banded on the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta in Alaska over the past three years. All birds have a BLUE band above a GREEN flag on the tibia and a colour band on the tarsus. As yet no colour banded/flagged Sharp-tailed Sandpipers have been seen in New Zealand but it's worth looking out for them. For some reason (still unknown) juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpipers migrate from the Siberian breeding grounds across the Bering Sea to Alaska before migrating to Australasia. The adults appear to migrate down the Asian coast to Australasia.

South Australian Red Knot

A small number of Knots were flagged in South Australia in June 2006 and sightings in New Zealand have come from around the Auckland region and Farewell Spit, where the first sighting was only four months after banding. That bird was flagged as a first year bird so it was doing what so many nearby Victorian knots do – heading east across the Tasman as a young bird. This was the first overseas sighting of a South Australian flagged Knot.

Southbound Movements of New Zealand Flagged Red Knot



Information Updated 22.11.08

○ Sightings of New Zealand Flagged birds + day/month and number

Wrybill

On Sunday 07.01.2007 Gwenda Pulham was fortunate enough to encounter a group of c180 presumably, migrating Wrybill on the Kawhia Harbour. She was intrigued by the flight of the gently undulating narrow scarf of birds, as it travelled from south to north above the main harbour channel. There was no twisting or wheeling such as one sees in the northern harbours in the winter months. More like a 'waving scarf' than a 'flung one'. (Keith Woodley coined the phrase 'A flung scarf' to describe a flock of Wrybill in flight).

Bar-tailed Godwit

Bar-tailed Godwit Y-5461 was taken by a hunter in late May/early June 2006 about 42 km east of Nome, Alaska. This bird was banded as an adult female at Jordan's Farm some 11,341km away on the Kaipara Harbour on 07.03.1993. She was therefore at least 16 years old and may have made a dozen round trips to Alaska, clocking up 350,000km or more in the process.