

# NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP

*in association with*

Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Newsletter No 6

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Compiled by Adrian Riegen

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### ANNUAL REPORT 1.7.94 - 30.6.95

During the season only six attempted catches were made all of which were successful. However overall it was not one of our best years. There are various reasons for this. Although there were the usual good numbers of Arctic waders in the Auckland region, they had generally chosen roost sites which were proving difficult for us to use. Either the tides did not come in as far as predicted or they came in too far or the winter was too wet to attempt anything. So for all the effort, a total of only 513 birds of 5 species was captured. No new species were added to the banding list this year.

#### The species in order of catch size were –

	Flagged	New	Retrap
Pied Oystercatcher (SIPO)	171	1	13
Wrybill	95	53	0
Bar-tailed Godwit	143	3	140
Knot	29	1	30
Banded Dotterel	7	0	0

The total of birds banded since 1986-87 stands at 8882 including retraps of banded birds. The total captured since 1979 stands at 12,274.

As can be seen above we fitted godwits, Knots and SIPO with white leg-flags, as well as metal bands. Because SIPO have been flagged only at Miranda, sightings from other Auckland harbours will indicate inter-harbour movements, (see **Newsletter No 5** for details) something we know very little about. In future we intend to flag SIPO caught at the Kaipara with yellow flags. We will continue to leg-flag long-distance migrants in the coming years and hope that

this will yield valuable sightings of our birds elsewhere in New Zealand, as well as overseas.

The last newsletter had all flag sightings listed. Since then more sightings continue to be reported and a better picture of wader movements is gradually building up.

#### 18.12.94 - Jordans, Kaipara Harbour

While the catch was a small one, even though 10-12,000 Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits were in the area all around the nets, it still managed to produce an Australian banded Knot, from Victoria, the 14th between the two areas.

#### 21.1.95 - Jordans, Kaipara Harbour

This was the first time we have fired three nets in one day. The first net was set in a field containing Banded Dotterels. As usual they were well scattered and were moving and feeding most of the time. A net was set across the field close to a small drainage ditch. We walked the birds towards the net hoping to bunch up 20 - 30 of them. However, they either flew over the net as they got close or just walked straight over it. Rather frustrating and in the end we settled for a small catch.

The other catches yielded small numbers of Knots, godwits and SIPO on a shell bank. In this catch was a Bar-tailed Godwit with a metal band so worn that the banding office were unable to detect a single number or letter on it, so we have no idea of its history.

#### 19.2.95 - Pollok's Spit, Manukau Harbour

This was the first time we had attempted a catch on the Manukau Harbour. Pollok Spit is an isolated spot consisting of a kilometre long, 50m wide, shell spit running across the entrance to a mangrove and mudflat filled bay, at the southern end of the Awhitu Peninsula. Tony Habraken had visited the site several times to check on tide height. The 19th February was picked, as we calculated the tide would leave only a small part of the shell bank exposed. We set the nets accordingly and waited.

The tide, although officially expected to reach no higher than the previous night. continued to come in above that point. The birds arrived in big numbers, mainly godwits and Knots, and it proved fairly easy to get them close to the nets. The tide was close to the back of both nets as a large flock of godwit settled in the catching area.

We didn't fire the net as we could not be sure of clearing all the birds before the net was swamped. Soon after the net did become swamped by the incoming tide. However, on the falling tide we caught 17 Wrybills, 4 Bar-tailed Godwits and 2 Knots.

Of particular interest was a Wrybill that had been banded the previous year at Jordans. This bird had settled into its moult so was presumably at Polloks for the season.

Our last catch of Wrybill at Jordans, while not too successful, filled in several important gaps in our data and understanding of their movements around the Auckland region. It appears that many birds return from the South Island to places like Jordans to moult and then depart about May for Miranda, where they stay until August. A paper discussing these and other aspects of Wrybill by Stephen Davies, is in preparation. Phil Battley is also using our data to try and unravel the mystery of how far the birds can fly between refuels. Watch this space...

As always our thanks for financial support and equipment go to the Banding Office and the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. We are especially grateful to the landowners for allowing us access to the shores through their land. Finally, we wish to thank the many people who participated in the group's activities throughout the 1994-95 season and look forward to their support in the 1995-96 season. We would also like to extend a welcome to new participants, so if you are interested please contact **Adrian Riegen** on (09) 814-9741. Let's hope the coming year will be far more successful and answer more of the questions relating to wader biology and migration

**Adrian Riegen & Stephen Davies.**

## WHITE FLAG SIGHTING

Good news from Japan. While Peter Driscoll from QSWG was in Japan recently he was looking at the Sone Tidal Flat on 17 April, 1995 with several Japanese people. They saw a white flag on a Bar-tailed Godwit. On closer inspection Peter saw another Bar-tailed Godwit with a green flag, one of his own.

This is only our second overseas sighting of a white-flagged godwit. The other was also from Japan. Both sites are on the southern island of Kyushu. Sone is a heavily modified tidal flat, the shore of which is all concreted. Sone is only 20 or so kilometres from Hakata Bay and Fukuoka City. This sighting is yet more proof of the value of flagging and shows that the island of Kyushu is certainly on the migration route of at least some of the godwit from New Zealand. The bird had travelled a minimum distance of 8,880km from its banding site.

The Japanese bird-watching groups, including the Japan Wild Bird Society, are publishing an article in Japan on the flyway flagging programme, which all members will receive. This is an important step as many Japanese bird-watchers (and there are many) have good telescopes and cameras, so we can hope for more sightings in the future.

Japan has been flagging some waders although mostly with blue or brown flags so we should be on the look out for them as well.

Since the last **Newsletter** there has been at least another 12 flag sightings in NZ. The data keeps rolling in and we thank all those who take the trouble to look at the birds legs!

## FROM THE SOUTH ISLAND

### Black Stilt Breeding Season

It was a better breeding season than average for wild Black Stilts last year (1994-95). Five pure black and seven black x dark hybrid pairs were located nesting. Another five pairs were located but did not nest. The total population was 72 adults and 12 dark hybrids. 70 eggs were artificially incubated, 3 of which were hatched in captivity and 29 fledged. 18 artificially incubated eggs were returned to wild parents and seven chicks fledged. This was a considerable improvement in fledging success of around 40% (c/f. 14% equating to two wild chicks fledged in 1993-94).

10 of the 3 juveniles released from captivity in September 1993 were still alive one year later in the wild. Four of these were involved in breeding activity. Another 30 juveniles were released in September 1994. As at July 1995, there had been five of the 1993 and five of the 1994 released birds located alive. Others may also be alive but not yet re-located.

One adult black and three dark H hybrids were banded on the nest and five wild reared chicks were banded before fledging. Band combinations now involve two colours on each tarsus, with a total of

four colour bands per bird. This brings the percentage of black stilts banded to approximately 80-85%.

Several dark hybrids have again been seen at Kawhia this winter and at least four full black seen on the Kaipara.

Any sightings should be sent to - **DoC Twizel Field Centre, Private Bag Twizel**, or to Adrian Riegen, 231 Forest Hill Road, Auckland 8. Phone (09) 814 9741, who will pass them on.

**Christine Reed**

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## **BANDED DOTTEREL NESTS AND TIME LAPSE VIDEO CAMERAS**

During the 1994 season Project River Recovery staff have monitored eight Banded Dotterel nests on a river in the McKenzie Basin with two time lapse video cameras. Our aim was to get more information about nest predation and predator species of the Banded Dotterel and other wader species in our study area.

A lot of time and hard work went into the study: large (heavy) batteries and video tapes had to be replaced daily.

At the end of the season we had only one predation event (during two successive nights). A cat found a Banded Dotterel nest with two eggs and a chick, with the male on the nest (2200h). It "played" with the chick, but was more interested in the adult bird. It looked like the male Banded Dotterel was flying low over the cat, and with one well executed jump, the cat caught the bird in the air and walked away with it in its mouth. The cat returned to the nest after 35 minutes and finally left just before 2300h. The chick had survived the "playing" of the cat, but died between 0300-0900h.

The following night the cat appeared immediately after sunset (2035h) and headed straight for the nest. Both Banded Dotterel eggs had survived 8.5 hours of exposure in the nest the previous night and hatched during the morning. The female dotterel was on the nest when the cat arrived. It flew away and the cat started "playing" with the chicks. Again, it was more interested in the adult bird and left the nest after 15 minutes without success. One chick did not survive the cats "play" (or died shortly after the cat left), but the second chick was brooded for the remainder of the night and left the nest the next morning with the female. The adult dotterel was seen three weeks later

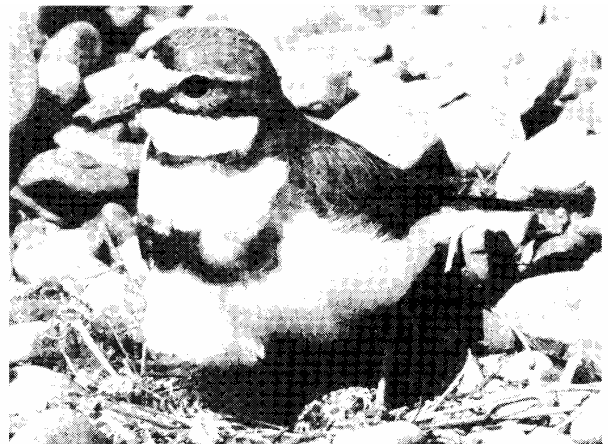
with chick behaviour, indicating that the chick was still alive.

During the 1995 season we will continue the monitoring of Banded Dotterel nests with time lapse video cameras. I have taken all incubation information from the tapes, (so far 83 tapes with 24 hours of observation each) what sex incubates, when and for how long, periods without incubation, change over, display etc.

Mary Blomford did a MSc study on Banded Dotterel behaviour in 1977 and spent some time observing the incubation of Banded Dotterels from a hide. She only made observations during day time, but suspected that male Banded Dotterels incubate at night. She was right.

In general the male takes over from the female just after dark and the female reappears during the first hours of day light. However, there are exceptions, and I have seen a few cases with females incubating until midnight. Once the male takes over for his night shift the female does not reappear until the next morning.

**Aalbert Rebergen**



*A Banded Dotterel on its nest*

**Photo: Jim Hague**

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## **PIED OYSTERCATCHER (SIPO) BANDING IN THE MACKENZIE BASIN**

Since 1991 Ron Nilsson and I have banded 64 SIPOs in eight study areas on the Ahuriri, Tekapo and Ohau rivers. In most cases we have banded only one bird of each breeding pair, with an individual colour combination of four bands on the tarsus. Each colour combination includes at least one black band: eg. BkM/YR. or WBk/Bkm. We have now used all the

available combinations with BkM on the left or right leg. Colour combinations also include double colours; eg. BkM/GG.

We have banded SIPOs, Banded Dotterels and Wrybills in our study areas to identify pairs during the breeding season and to monitor nest success. Our study is not a population study. However, we like to gather as much information about our birds as possible.

After four seasons, the Ohau and Tekapo River study areas will not be monitored by Project River Recovery staff in 1995-96. Instead we will concentrate on the five study areas on the Ahuriri River. However, I will visit the Ohau and Tekapo River once a fortnight to keep track of our colour banded birds.

Several people have sent us their SIPO observations (via the Banding Office), for which I would like to thank them. I would appreciate receiving any further SIPO observations. These will tell us where our birds go in winter, and if birds are still alive. For example, the very first SIPO (chick) that I colour banded, BkM/WY, has been seen on the Manukau Harbour each year, but has not yet returned to its natal area, the Ohau River.

The first SIPOs return to the McKenzie Basin rivers (mainly at the deltas) in the first week of July. This year (1995) they arrived to a white winter landscape. The first colour banded birds were seen in the last week of July including a pair that are both colour banded and nest each year at the same spot on the Tekapo River delta.

Last season we found a nest with two SIPO and two Spur-winged Plover eggs, incubated by the SIPOs. Only the SIPO eggs hatched.

Very sad was the find of two dead SIPOs (BkM/BR +ub), that died a most terrible death. Both got caught by the legs in the same fishing line near the Ahuriri River

**Aalbert Rebergen**

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## FROM "THE STILT"

### News of two impressive wader movements from Siberia to Australia.

Firstly a Curlew Sandpiper banded as a juvenile on the Yana Delta, 72°21'N -140°15'E on 5 August 1994, was seen at Perkins Island, Tasmania, on 30 October

1994, just 2 month. 25 day and 12,579km later. Not bad going for a youngster!!

A Great Knot banded as an adult by Pavel Tomkovitch on the breeding grounds of the Anadyr River in far eastern Siberia 64°55'N-168°35'E on 22 June, 1994 was sighted at Broome, Western Australia, on 9 September, 1994, 2 month 18 days and 10,011 km later. This bird was seen back on the same breeding ground for the 1995 breeding season.

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## FROM "THE TATTLER"

A Long-billed Dowitcher was caught by the Victorian Wader Study Group during one of its cannon netting jaunts to Barry Beach, Corner Inlet in SE Victoria, on 18 June, 1995. This is the first confirmed Long-billed Dowitcher for Australia. They breed from Alaska to Siberia as far as 130°E. They generally winter in California and central America but not South America.

## DANISH BIRD BANDER IN NEW ZEALAND

Henrik Stromfjord, a Danish bird bander was with us for a few days last summer. He had written to me from Denmark to see if there was any chance of doing some banding during his visit to NZ. He arrived on a Thursday night and was helping to band Black-billed Gulls on the south Manuka Harbour on Friday night. On the Sunday he was banding waders on the Kaipara while checking on Fairy Terns with Gwen Pulham on the Monday and with Kiwi monitoring in Northland on Tuesday.

We can't promise the same service for all overseas banders but Henrik went away a happy man.

Since leaving New Zealand he has been banding Peregrin and Gyr Falcon chicks on the west coast of Greenland, as part of a long term study of those species in that part of the world. As well as the falcons he has been banding Ravens at the town dump and various passerines just inside the Arctic circle.

Adrian Riegen

*Any articles for this publication or any bird sightings of banded or flagged birds should go to - Adrian Riegen, 231 Forest Hill Road, Waiaatarua, Auckland 8. Phone (09) 814 9 741*