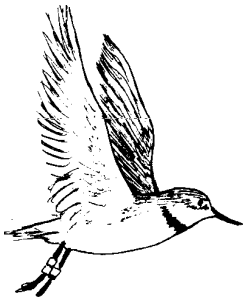

NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP

in association with

Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Newsletter No. 3 **August 1994** Compiled by: Adrian Riegen

ANNUAL REPORT OF NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP'S BANDING WORK

1/7/93 - 30/6/94

During the season eight attempted catches were made of which seven were successful. A total of 2172 birds of 5 species was captured. No new species were added to the banding list this year. The top three species were Wrybill (1366), Pied Oystercatcher (SIPO) (342) and Bar-tailed Godwit (317). 460 of the birds captured already were banded, 445 of these being Wrybill. SIPO became the third species to top 1,000 banded since the group resumed activities in 1987. The total of birds banded since 1987 stands at 10,354; including retrappings of banded birds, the total captured stands at 11,762.

SPECIES	SIGHTED	LOCATION		OBSERVER
Knot	30.9.93	Altona Beach	Victoria	Rohan Clarke
Knot	25.2-14.3.93	Farewell Spit	Nelson	Phil Battley
Knot	21.10.93	Waipu Estuary	Northland	Ray Pierce
Godwit	25.2-14.3.93	Farewell Spit	Nelson	Phil Battley

Species	New	Retrap	Control	Total
Knot	110	9	1	119
Bar-tailed Godwit	315	2	0	317
Pied Oystercatcher	339	3	0	197
Wrybill	921	445	20	1366
Turnstone	5	1	1	6
Total	**1690**	**460**	**22**	**2172**

Again we fitted Godwit (146), Knot (50) and SIPO (50) 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, 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. Other countries also are flaggers. Australia is using orange, green and yellow flags. Green and orange flags have been sighted in various parts of NZ. A full report of flag sightings should appear in the next newsletter.

Many of the birds flagged in NZ have been seen locally- not only in the Kaipara and Firth of Thames, where the flagging takes place, but also on the Manukau. Table B is a list of the more distant sightings of white-flagged white flagged waders; only N.Z is using white flags.

The largest catch of the season was the first, with 1276 Wrybills captured. These included 9 birds first banded in 1980-82. A further 260 had been banded more than two years earlier. This session provided invaluable data for our long-term study of Wrybill biometrics and population dynamics. A statistical analysis of data collected so far will be attempted late in 1994

Long-distance migrants proved elusive this season. Our best catch of Palearctic migrants took place in mid-December, with 119 Knot and 239 Bar-tailed Godwit trapped. A further 78 Godwits were caught in October. As usual, valuable biometric data were collected from the birds.

Our records show that about one in 100 Knot carries an Australian band, so it was no surprise to find

one such among the 119 Knot captured in mid-December. This bird had been banded 18 months earlier at Stockyard Point, Victoria. While we have captured 19 Knot that had been banded in Australia, the only pre-1993 recovery in Australia of a Knot banded in New Zealand was of a bird on the north Queensland coast in March 1981, five months after banding. So we were delighted not only by the sighting of one of our flagged Knot in Victoria at the end of September but also by the recapture of one of our Knot in Moreton Bay, Queensland on 17.10.93 (four years and eight months after banding). This bird was caught and released by banders.

The highlight of the season was provided by a Turnstone, though, rather than a Knot. We have banded only 18 Turnstone since 1986. One that was captured at Miranda on 28/10/91 was caught by banders in Moreton Bay, Queensland on 19/ 9/93. The bird was released after a green flag had been added to its leg. This very same bird then was trapped by us at Miranda on 17/10/ 93. A "return bounce" is extremely rare. Because most of the banded birds that are reported are dead, whereas banders trap and release live birds, recoveries of this kind are made possible only through banding. In this case, the recovery provides direct evidence about the route by which Turnstones sometimes enter New Zealand and the timing of their flights.

Our thanks for financial support and equipment go to the Banding Office and the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. As ever we are especially grateful to Graham Jordan, Alan Lane and A. Den Haan for allowing us access to their land. Finally, we wish to thank the many people who participated in the group's activities throughout the season and look forward to their support in the 1994-95 season.

- Stephen Davies & Adrian Riegen

NATIONAL WRYBILL CENSUS 29.05.94

As we indicated in the last newsletter the NZWSG has been concerned about the status of the wrybill population and as winter counts over the past 10 years had indicated a possible decline in the population, we felt it was time that a full census of the wrybill population be undertaken. This was the first such census of wrybill.

The aim was to cover as many of the known roost sites around the country on one day. May 29th was chosen as the tides were good high ones, which would ensure most wrybill were forced to go to known roost site rather than stay out on the mudflats. It was also felt that at this time of year there would be very little movement of birds between the regions. In fact during the month leading up to the count, when various sites were checked, it was found that there was indeed some movements between sites and regions. Most notable was the steady build up in numbers at Miranda.

The census was a joint project of NZWSG, MNT and OSNZ. In spite of the less than favourable weather on the day (there were gale force westerlies and squally showers throughout the day) all went well with all the main roost sites in the country except Parengerenga being covered on 28 or 29 May. It was disappointing that we were unable to get Parengarenga covered as it generally has the largest wintering flock outside the Auckland region, (156 on 28/2/94). It has since been covered and whilst the number was lower than expected it has been added to the total.

Of 67 sites listed to be covered 63 were counted by at least 70 observers, many thanks to all those who took part, some found no birds while Hugh Clifford and Paul Harrison grappled with the largest flock at Miranda, which in the end because the birds were so restless and the weather so bad was only countable by checking the photos taken by Paul. Even then it took several people and enlarged prints to come up with an acceptable total. Special thanks should go to Pam Agnew for organising the Firth of Thames count and Tony Habraken who organised the counts at the 12 complex Manukau sites, as well as giving valuable advice on the movements between the Manukau and the Waitemata Harbour and Tamaki Estuary. A problem area as the Waitemata and Tamaki being on the east coast have a high tide 3 hours before the Manukau, but are just a few minutes flight away for the wrybills. This did prove to be a problem area as at least two flocks of birds left the Manukau before high tide and flew to the Tamaki Estuary and Waitemata Harbourafter the scheduled high tide counts at those sites had been completed. These areas will have to be covered more carefully on future winter census counts. In the end the figure was better than we expected with a total of 5111 birds being counted.

From these figures it can be seen that 13 sites held more than one percent of the total population. Under the Ramsar Convention they would all rate as wetland sites of international importance. Only the two FoT sites are Ramsar sites. The FoT holds by far the largest percentage of the total population at 52.48%. It is therefore most important that every effort is made to see that the site is well managed for the wrybill.

A more detailed account is in preparation for future publication.

-Adrian Riegen, Convener

BLACK STILT BREEDING SEASON 1993-94 AND RELEASES OF CAPTIVE STOCK

There were 15 pairs of black stilts in the wild last season, 7 of which were pure black x black pairs. There were also another 4 pairs that did not attempt to breed. The total population stands at 52 pure black adults and 27 sub-adults. We artificially incubated 81 eggs at Twizel. Many of these were hatched in captivity. Including chicks from captive laid eggs, 32 young birds have been reared for release wild Sept. 94. Of the 35 juvenile black stilts DOC released into the wild from the Twizel aviary in September 1993, at least 16 were still alive in February 1994. Rising lake levels has made it difficult to locate more than 10 of these on a count in May 1994. So early results from the first major release of young birds looks very encouraging and our predicted mortality of approximately 50% was reasonably accurate. The wild population did not do very well again this season. Only two chicks fledged and both these have disappeared. Habitat restoration continues as part of Project River Recovery funded by ECNZ, with willows being removed from the Ahuriri delta and the planned removal of more from the lower river soon.

Some black stilts and hybrids continue to migrate to northern harbours and we have not yet located all wintering areas. So OSNZ and NZWSG members could help this programme significantly by reporting any sightings to our Twizel office. Most black stilts are colourbanded on the tarsus. The last two seasons we have been using 2 bands on each leg. Prior to that, there may be 2,1 or no bands on a leg. Metal bands are not being used and it is uncommon for existing birds to have these.

- Christine Reed DOC
Private Bag, Twizel

SUMMARY OF WADER MOVEMENTS TO AND FROM NEW ZEALAND

ALL EXCEPT 3 BIRDS, ARE BIRDS CAUGHT OR BANDED BY NZWSG.

14 LESLESSER KNOT MOVEMENTS FROM VICTORIA TO AUCKLAND REGION

Some of these birds have been caught in the same season so we know that at least some of the 60,000+ Knot in N.Z. each non-breeding season come via Victoria. The reason for this is not clear but it appears to be pre-planned as some of the birds when caught in Victoria were in suspended moult, which is an indication that the birds are still on migration. Interestingly as yet none of the almost 4,000 Lesser knot banded in N.Z have been caught in Victoria.

1 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENT FROM AUCKLAND TO MELBOURNE, VICTORIA

Although no New Zealand banded knots have been caught in Victoria, there has now been one white flagged bird sighted on a beach close to the centre of Melbourne.

2 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENTS FROM ALBANY, WEST AUSTRALIA

These two birds were banded in late March in Albany both were still in moult which at that time of year would indicate they were probably 2nd year birds which did not return to the Arctic to breed but instead spent the *14* months between banding in Albany and capture in N.Z., making their way across southern Australia and then coming to N.Z. probably in the October along with other Victorian birds. Other waders are known to travel across southern Australia during the southern winter.

1 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENT FROM PERTH, WEST AUSTRALIA

We know very little about this bird as it was picked up dead in N.Z. but it may well have followed much the same course as the Albany birds.

2 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENT FROM BRISBANE REGION, QUEENSLAND TO AUCKLAND

Now that the Queensland Wader Study Group is well established we hope to see more movements between these two regions. Brisbane and Moreton Bay lie in a direct line between Auckland and the Gulf of Carpentaria, which we suspect is a major stopping place on both north and south migration for knots.

1 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENT FROM AUCKLAND TO QUEENSLAND COAST

This bird was found on the coast of Queensland around Bundaberg in March *1981* having been banded in August *1980.* They are not particularly common on this part of the coast.

1 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENT FROM AUCKLAND TO BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND

Banded in February *1989* and caught in April *1990* this is the first New Zealand banded knot to be caught and released again in Australia.

2 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENTS FROM AUCKLAND TO IRIAN JAYA

These two were recovered on their way north at a good wetland site in southern Irian Jaya, close to the Papua New Guinea border and also close to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Between this part of the world and China knots are very rare indicating that they probably fly non-stop from this region to China

4 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENTS FROM AUCKLAND TO SHANGHAI, CHINA

These 4 birds were all recovered during northward migration and this region of China has proved to be the most important refuelling area between Australasia and Sibe-

ria for many wader species. Interestingly this region of China doesn't seem to be as important a stopover site on southward migration.

3 LESSER KNOT MOVEMENTS FROM AUCKLAND TO THE SEA OF OKHOTSK

All three birds were recovered during southward migration in late July and August. The area around the Tugur Peninsular and the northern tip of Sakhalin Island on the southern shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, seems to be a regular staging places for birds returning from breeding grounds. It appears that they may carry enough fuel from Shanghai to get them to the breeding grounds, however they probably are unable to put on enough weight in the breeding ground to get them much further than the Sea of Okhotsk on their southward migration.

1 BAR-TAILED GODWIT WITH WHITE LEG FLAG SIGHTED IN JAPAN

This bird was seen on the coast of the Ariaki Sea in southern Japan, along with leg flagged Godwit from Queensland and Victoria. This would indicate that Godwit from different non-breeding area migrate though this area of Japan. This bird was seen in Japan on northern migration 4 months after being flagged on the Kaipara Harbour.

1 BAR-TAILED GODWIT MOVEMENT FROM AUCKLAND TO BERING ISLAND

This bird was shot during northward migration on Bering island off the east coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula in the C.I.S, indicating that the bird was heading for Alaska, one of the known breeding grounds for bar-tailed godwit.

1 BAR-TAILED GODWIT MOVEMENT FROM PRIBILOF ISLANDS, ALASKA TO NEW ZEALAND

Not much known about this bird, but presumably one that was breeding in Alaska.

1 BAR-TAILED GODWIT MOVEMENT FROM AUCKLAND TO KAMCHATKA

Another record from this region, this bird was taken in October, ten months after banding on the Kaipara Harbour

1 TURNSTONE MOVEMENT FROM AUCKLAND TO BRISBANE AND BACK

This bird which is mentioned in the banding annual report in this newsletter was certainly a rare double catch, made even more remarkable when one considers that few turnstone had been banded in Queensland or New Zealand.