

MIRANDA NEWS

Naturalists' Trust
February 2005 Issue 56



Visiting the Far North

Southern Salt Marsh Mosquitoes

30 Years at Miranda - or longer!



February 2005 Issue 56

Situated on the Firth of Thames between Kaiaua and the Miranda Hot Pools, the Miranda Shorebird Centre provides a base for birders, right where the birds are. Drop in to investigate, or come and stay a night or two. The Centre has three bunkrooms for hire, plus two self-contained flats. For rates see Back Page. The best time to see the birds is two to three hours either side of high tide. The Miranda high tide is 30 minutes before the Auckland (Waitemata) tide.

The Newsletter of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is published four times per year to keep members in touch, and to bring news of events at the Miranda Shorebird Centre. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission.

Cover Photo: A Red-Necked Stint at Moroshechnaya Estuary
Photo unknown but one of the expedition participants, see article page 3.

Back Cover: A Weka at Kawakawa Bay
Photo Nova Coory

A word from the editor

I always get to write this bit last, when the rest of the magazine is finished. One of the real advantages to this is that, by the time the magazine is finished, I've talked to so many people about what's going on in the Trust, that I feel like I start to get an overview of where we are. (Of course this feeling never lasts long!)

As a comparatively new member of the Trust I didn't really understand until putting this issue together how important the 30th Anniversary is to so many people, particularly the more long-standing members. Many of the people I have mentioned the anniversary to have a real sense of achievement about getting this far, and about where the Trust is now. In some ways it might be a little like growing up. At 21 you think you're all grown up, at 30 you realise you are only starting to discover who you can be! Given how far the Trust has come so far, and the changes occurring in just the last four or five years, it will be interesting to see where the Trust is 30 years from now.

I won't be able to attend the celebratory lunch on the 20th of February, as I'll be overseas (looking at waders in North-west Australia). I regret that more now than I did when I started putting this issue together, and recommend to others that they attend and hope the day goes well.

My favourite part of this issue is the opportunity to once again use a Keith Woodley original, check out page 17. The concept of Cattle Egrets in the backyard can take a little beating! Banded Rail chicks would probably do it though.

I hope you enjoy this issue, as usual your articles, observations, poems, bits of research, drawings etc would be welcome. The deadline for the next issue of the news is April 15th.

Gillian Vaughan

Upcoming Events

February 20

Celebratory Lunch

Bookings essential. Please contact Keith at the Centre (09) 232 2781 or Nanette on (09) 486 2515

March 6 11AM Start

Open Day.

Guest Speaker David Melville on his work on the flyway and the avian flu issue.

(note the last issue gave the open day date as March 9, this was incorrect)

April 2-3

Wader ID weekend course

Learn about Wader Identification and other interesting aspects of waders. For details and costs contact the Centre.

May 15

Annual General Meeting

Speaker to be announced.

June 12

OSNZ Firth of Thames Census. All Welcome! Contact the Centre closer to the date for a time to meet.

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The Moroshechnaya Estuary, the most northern Shorebird Network Site in EAAF

By Rob Schuckard and Dick Veitch

Moroshechnaya Estuary is one of the many river mouths along the western shores of Kamchatka. It is the most northern shorebird network site in the East Asian Australasian Flyway (56° 50'N, 156° 10'E) providing an exciting comparison with New Zealand's most southern site, Farewell Spit (40° 32'S 172° 55'E).

Early 2004, expressions of interest were sought to participate in a shorebird research expedition from self-funding volunteers. In August 2004 a group of international volunteers joined Dr Yuri Gerasimov (Kamchatka Institute for Ecology and Nature Management, Far-East Branch Russian Academy of Science) on an expedition to the west coast of the Kamchatka Peninsula to monitor shorebirds during southward migration. The group of volunteers comprised Dr Falk Huettmann (University of Fairbanks, Alaska), Steve Kendall (US, Alaska), John Geale (Canada, currently residing in NZ), Rob Schuckard (NZ), Dick Veitch (NZ), Ken Gosbell (Australia) and Warren Geeves (Australia) who also coordinated the volunteer participation. Three other Russians joined the expedition, Alexandre and Katya Matsyna (Nizny Novgorod) and Sasha who was our hunter-protector for potential bear interactions.

Wetlands International - Oceania, endorsed the expedition.

The team developed four objectives for the expedition:

1. Study southward migration on shoreline and tundra-like habitat.
2. Collect blood samples to identify subspecies of Dunlin passing through Kamchatka.
3. Collect feather samples for stable isotope studies to identify origin of juvenile shorebirds.
4. Identify occurrence of Avian Influenza.

Kamchatka and Koryakia form a long landmass peninsula in NE Russia. The area is 372,300 km² with 4 million people, a third bigger than New Zealand with 267,826 km² and 4 million people. Of these 4 million people, 250,000 live in the capital, Petropavlovsk. A range of snow clad active volcanoes surrounds the city and hot water is bubbling up everywhere. The place is truly situated on top of "the ring of fire".

Travel agents do not often deal with trips to these desolate destinations but

it was surprisingly simple, Auckland, Seoul, Vladivostok to Petropavlovsk.

At arrival, our host, Yuri Gerasimov, kindly rearranged his house to accommodate all seven overseas visitors. In Petropavlovsk required permits took about five days to organise. Meanwhile the lush green patches of deciduous trees between the apartment buildings were inspected daily for birds.

Finally with permits, food and equipment, a yellow bus took us 500km north to Esso. From this little Arctic place, our helicopter was leaving for the final destination. The forest changed from low deciduous broadleaf to smallish conifers and then mixed patches of both with fine streams and wetlands – plenty of space for birds, but all this is under many feet of snow in winter. Between Esso and the Estuary we had passed over some grand hills clothed in varying forests and grasslands, and huge wetlands. Rugged, extensive, untracked, inhospitable, frozen for many months each year.

Unlike the Petropavlovsk scene of so many apartment buildings, the town of



The city of Petropavlovsk, with a nearby volcano towering over it!





Photos

Top:
A flagged Dunlin seen after release.

Middle:
the Moroshechnaya Estuary and the first yellow over black flagged shorebird (a Dunlin).

Bottom:
Do bear prints make it more exciting? and locals pulling in their catch.

Esso consists of individual wooden houses. No lawns – every house was surrounded with potatoes mixed with small patches of other veggies and, huge lush Delphinium gardens, revealing a very fertile soil.

Having slept in the parked yellow bus from 1 am to daybreak not far from Esso, we arrived early. With some delays, we finally loaded our gear and boarded the big most commonly used helicopter in the world, the MIL 8. An hour later we landed at our destination and stayed there between 7 and 22 August 2004. The Rangers House (two rooms proudly built from locally gathered bits) beside the Moroshechnaya Estuary was the only obvious human construction on the flat tundra. We pitched our tents not far from the hut and the birding began. Our nearest neighbours were about 5 km to the north, a small settlement of local fishermen living off the migrating salmon. They are land-based fishermen, hauling out the daily catch with long set nets at high tide. Once in a while small old rusty boats pick up the fish and other products. The most valuable part of the salmon is the orange egg mass, which is preserved with brine and sold as salmon caviar.

As soon as the ice begins disappearing from the rivers in May, the first fish that is caught is Char. The season ends in early November when everything is frozen again. The salmon run in these rivers is overwhelming. Six species are known to migrate into the river for spawning. Not only people make a habit of living from this oily delicacy, a whole ecosystem is dependent on this phenomenon of salmon run. Brown grizzlies, big white Beluga's, seals, Steller's Sea-eagles, etc. are all very dependent on salmon. We were told that the bears are so well fed, that they do not hibernate and are able to sustain themselves between November and May. The rangers, who arrived a few days after our arrival, were also catching fish for personal use. It only required a smallish net to stay in the water a few minutes to catch an overabundance of fish.

The river has created an extensive coastal plain and the fine gravel spit between the river and the Sea of Okhotsk was covered in short tundra vegetation. The Moroshechnaya River is 270km long and one of the largest rivers along the west coast with a catchment area of 5450 km². The estuary is 20 km long and up to 2 km wide near the mouth. Maximum tidal range is 7 m. At low tide, large sandy beaches and mudflats are exposed which are important feeding areas for large numbers of the shorebirds during migration. In 1974 - Zakaznik (Game refuge) "Moroshechnaya River" was established to protect breeding areas of Thick-billed Bean Goose and this important staging place for ducks and shorebirds. About 250 pairs of Thick-billed Bean Goose breed here, while 5000–8000 Middendorff's Bean Goose *A. F. middendorffii* moult here. In 1994 the territory of Zakaznik was included in the newly established Ramsar Site "Moroshechnaya River" by the decision of the Russian government. Organised poaching of geese and illegal shooting of other wildlife is still regarded as a big problem. In 1996 the Moroshechnaya River estuary was included in the East Asian – Australian Shorebird Reserve Network. On southward migration up to 1,000,000 shorebirds pass through, including 350,000 Dunlins; 300,000 Red-necked Stints; 100,000 Great Knots; 100,000 Whimbrels; 50,000 Bar-tailed Godwits; and 10,000 Black-tailed Godwits (Gerasimov & Gerasimov 2000).

A total of seven counts of the whole area were carried out during this visit and we compiled a list of 70 bird species. This happened during low tide while birds were feeding. The major roosting areas at high tide are unknown and may well not be suitable for census work due to the height of the vegetation, inaccessibility, etc. Though some birds were seen at the other site on the river, the majority were feeding in the census area. Some birds that were feeding from the many berries of the tundra, like Whimbrel, were not a part of the full census. It was also noted that some of the Great Knots

that we caught with mist nets had very purple coloured faeces, most likely from eating the widely available berries.

The most dominant shorebirds during our two week stay were: Mongolian Plover (days max. 751), Dunlin (days max. 9161), Red-necked Stint (days max. 1205), Great Knot (days max. 1198), Red Knot (days max. 104), Eastern Curlew (days max. 34), Whimbrel (days max. 3490), Black-tailed Godwit (days max. 80), and Bar-tailed Godwit (days max. 1867). A highlight was of course the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, with two on one day. A great challenge is to differentiate between the numbers that are staging and passing through. Due to our retraps, we know that Red-necked Stint can stay at least six days in the area and Dunlins up to 10 days. Therefore the overall estimate for shorebirds that use the Moroshechnaya Estuary is very complex. It was also noted that in particular the juvenile Red-necked Stints and Dunlins were using the small brackish ponds on the tundra. After spring tides all the ponds fill with water where small amphipods provide a short source of food when the water is slowly retreating.

On the 9th August 2004, Yuri added a first yellow over black flag to a Dunlin. This was the first time this colour combination was used in EAAF. In total 123 Dunlin, 85 Red-necked Stint, 11 Mongolian Plover, 1 Red-necked Phalarope, 5 Great Knot, and 2 Whimbrel were caught and flagged.

We have already received an interesting number of resightings with 3 Red-necked Stint and 1 Dunlin sightings from Japan and another Dunlin sighting from China.

Through the expedition, a series of flag observations revealed some rather unexpected sightings from New Zealand:

ORANGE (Victoria, SE Australia) - 1 Red Knot

YELLOW (NW Australia) - 6 sightings of Bar-tailed Godwit (assessed to be 4 individual birds)

World Wetlands Day February 2 2005.



This year's World Wetlands Day saw the release of a new book sponsored by the National Wetlands Trust. The book goes over details of five wetlands listed as internationally significant by the Ramsar Wetlands Convention, one of which is Miranda. As well as providing a brief overview on each site features and history, maps are provided showing where the public access is available. As wetland sites are often difficult to access this is a particularly important feature. The book will be launched on February 6th at the wetlands day celebrations and will be available through DoC or the Shorebird Centre.



Also released recently is the book *Wetland Types in New Zealand*, which will be available through DoC. This book is more of a textbook, but will be of interest to those who wish to delve into the details!

WHITE (New Zealand) - 7 sightings of Bar-tailed Godwit (assessed to be 2 individual birds)

This is the second report from Kamchatka of white flagged birds from New Zealand during southward migration. On 2nd October 1992, a white flagged bird was shot in southern Kamchatka (52°30'N 156°23'E). Either a small portion of the *baueri* population from Alaska is following the Russian and Asian shores on southward migration or a small portion of the *menzbieri* population from NE Russia is also hosted in New Zealand. Yellow flags have been seen earlier on migratory Bar-tailed Godwits in Kamchatka and Russian Far East by Yuri Gerasimov and Falk Huettmann, e.g. in August 1999.

A range of passerines were also caught and processed by our Russian colleagues; Lapland Bunting, Olive backed Pipit, Pectoral Pipit, Scarlet Rosefinch, Yellow Wagtail, and Yellow-breasted Bunting.

The expedition was most successful in reaching the other objectives. We took almost sixty blood samples from Dunlins. Where this species is the most common in our flyway, huge gaps of knowledge occur in the distribution during their winter

staging. The blood samples will hopefully reveal which subspecies are actually passing through Kamchatka in August. One subspecies is breeding in Kamchatka but at least two other subspecies are also expected to migrate southwards, one from NE Siberia and the other from North Alaska. Feather samples from most of the juvenile Dunlins and Red-necked Stints will be used for further analyses in stable isotopes. It is likely this can likely reveal the areas where those juveniles were raised.

Though we were really thrilled to see some of the New Zealand flagged birds, that was the only true overlap with home. The landscape, species composition of shorebirds and overall setting makes Moroshechnaya truly unique.

Gerasimov, Yu and N.N. Gerasimov 2000. The importance of the Moroshechnaya River estuary as a staging site for shorebirds. *The Stilt* 36:22-25.

Unfortunately the names of those associated with each photo in this article were unavailable. All photos were taken by the expedition members. Shown below.

The "A" Team. - Expedition Members



The Residential Field Course 2005

Deeper



Photos Keith Woodley, except for bottom right Lyn Scott



Further



Broader



More

Expanding Horizons

Seven years on, the Miranda Field Course continues to evolve. The latest was one of the smallest, with only ten participants, but some of us who have been involved from the beginning consider it to be the best yet.

Expanding horizons was a theme this year, and muddy feet was often the outcome. Out in the mud with Warwick Sandler was actually out at the low tide edge of Miranda Stream mouth, at least a kilometre off shore. In brilliant conditions, the great vault of sky and cloud spread as a sparkling carpet around our feet. An excursion into the mangrove zone off Karito Canal with Bill Brownell focused a wider ecosystem overview, down to this confined and often secret

zone. Focusing down even further – literally microscopically -we came to the world of invertebrates with Peter Maddison. Also new this year was the dissection by Richard Norman of a migrant wader (fallen foul of a power line), revealing the layers of fat being laid down in preparation for departure.

Even after seven successful years, we strive to improve the course. Traditionally we finish the last morning with a field session on coastal vegetation. This is usually conducted by Bruce Clarkson, but this year Catherine Beard led the exploration. Next year this session is rescheduled to the middle of the week, with the

final morning devoted to an extended wader watch in the field.

This wader watch will be much more than a pleasant ending to the course. Participants will be practising newly acquired skills, not only identifying different wader species, but counting birds, collecting banding data, and observing and recording bird behaviour. It will also be a chance to look from a more informed optical perspective through the various binoculars and telescopes available.

You could be there. We are taking bookings now for the limited number of places on Miranda's eighth field course, 14-19th January 2006.

Keith Woodley



The new shell bar off the coast from the hide. Photo K Woodley

from the MANAGER

In the 1996 aerial photo used as the backdrop to our chenier plain display, a small white patch of shell is visible about 400 metres offshore from what was then the end of the shell spit. Over the next few years this gradually formed into a shell bar. It became a regular sub-roost for waders, especially oystercatcher and godwit, until they were pushed off by each tide. Since 2000 a dramatic expansion of the bar has occurred, a process which appears to have accelerated over the last 18 months. The formation is now at least forty metres wide, sloping up to a ridge on the landward side. Tides of less than three metres no longer cover the ridge, and waders roosting on the outer edge of the bar are not always visible from the shore.

Thanks to a research project by Ecoquest, we have a vivid illustration of how quickly this new bar has expanded. A series of tall poles were used to mark a mud-sampling plot in 1999. As late as 2001, mud sampling still occurred in this plot. The entire plot is now completely within the new shell bar. (see photo)

The axis along which the bar is lying suggests it will shortly be joined to the

mainland several hundred metres south of the area that was once Access Bay. This is very similar to the formation of the current shell spit as recorded in the two earlier photos on display at the centre, from 1977 and 1988.

A notable absence from the blackboard list of sightings this year is Red-necked Stint. None have been recorded since a sighting of 3 on 21 September. The two Marsh Sandpipers that were present throughout last year also appear to have decamped. Taking their place

on the Stilt Ponds by mid-January were two Pectoral Sandpipers and six Sharp-tailed Sandpipers.

In late January Widgery Lake was as full as it has ever been at this time of year. This seemed most agreeable to several Mallard families. Swallows and two Little Shags also relished the situation. A Banded Rail or two were seen around the lake margins, and sometimes on the lawn immediately outside the Sibson Room. (On one occasion I virtually tripped over one while crossing between the cottage and the centre!) However one doesn't maintain a water feature in such good condition over summer by having a good summer! Throughout December and the early days of January it was a universal topic of conversation with visitors; where is summer? Some travellers from overseas reported three rain-sodden weeks travel throughout the country with minimal sightings of the sun. Indeed one birder said that when recording such solar events, she found no need to trouble her other hand!

A low flying aircraft incident was reported in Miranda News 54. We have since received a letter of apology from one of the pilots concerned, along with notification from the Civil Aviation Authority that an official warning has been given. However low level aircraft activity continues to be an issue. The one aerobatics pilot who has long been a source of concern, still makes

Twelve "trampers" visit the Shorebird Centre. Photo K. Woodley



periodic visits. With the support of some community members we have resolved to seek a “special use” classification for the airspace over Miranda, and will pursue this with CAA.

This summer we have taken another step forward with regard to alternative staff for the centre. Last summer two German students Bastian Schmitz and Felizitas Rupp arrived to do a three month term as interns, a requirement for their university degrees. Felizitas had to return home after six weeks due to a family bereavement, but Bastian stayed on and proved to be excellent at all tasks. In mid December 2004 Rachel Pierard, a fourth year university student from Auckland, began working as an assistant and relieving manager on a part time basis. Generally this has worked out as one or two days a week. Then in mid-January, two English visitors Dan Bennett and Kate Kellett began a three week stint as volunteers. Dan brings ten years experience of working in the government environmental agency in the UK together with plenty of experience on various volunteer projects around the world. Kate has experience in public interpretation, and is pursuing interests in environmental education.

Late on Saturday afternoon in early November a vintage tractor rolled through the gate. It was soon followed in by several others. Before long eleven such machines, of all manner of model and vintage, along with a modern utility vehicle travelling in support, were parked in front of the centre. The dozen drivers, all members of the Franklin Vintage Machinery Club on a two day trek through the Hunua Ranges, had come to stay overnight at the centre. Apart from the nature of vehicles involved, there was really nothing unusual about this arrangement. The only thing which had me initially scratching my head, was that it wasn't quite what I had been expecting. When the original telephone booking had been made, instead of “12 tractors” I had heard “12 trampers!”

Keith Woodley



T O R E A M A N G U

“A long time ago before people came to this country, the largest land animals were birds. Torea mangu was the mother of all Oystercatchers. She had laid the first egg and had seen all the good, all the bad and everything in between. (A message revealed itself where her tail feathers had fallen out.) A growth had appeared on the end of her beak. Some Oystercatchers saw the shape of the bird and believed that this shape told what was yet to happen.”

The first rays of dawn on Sunday 23 January picked out a giant shape on the shoreline near the northern edge of Kaiaua. Around its shrouded form people were gathering. Ngati Paoa kaumatua and kuia were there to welcome a gathering of community groups, local councillors and Franklin mayor Mark Ball. Also present was local artist Tony Johnston, for it was his creation that was about to be unveiled.

The giant sculpture of an oystercatcher stands between the Seaside Store and Kaiaua School. Over four metres long and three and a half metres tall, the 2.5 ton bird is constructed of ferro-cement. The one metre long bill consists of a series of ceramic rings. A stainless steel flute is being specially designed for the small structure near the tip of the bill.

In theory this will whistle when it catches the wind. Erected facing north east, the direction of prevailing winds, the sculpture symbolises the wildlife of Tikapa Moana – the Firth of Thames.

The project was funded from the Auckland Regional Services Trust Arts Fund, and administered by Franklin District Council and Kaiaua Citizens and Ratepayers Association.

Prior to the unveiling, Trust member Phil Battley gave a brief outline of the biology of Variable Oystercatchers and their status as a vulnerable endemic shorebird.

Some years ago then Miranda Naturalists' Trust chairman John Gale and I made approaches to local community groups seeking to get the Seabird Coast renamed the Shorebird Coast. Given the large flocks of shorebirds present on the Firth all year round, we believed a name change would more accurately reflect the wildlife values and attractions of the area. Understandably however, given the existing name had already become reasonably well established, we were unsuccessful. It is ironic but entirely welcome to now have a shorebird representing the Seabird Coast.

Keith Woodley

General information on Southern Salt Marsh Mosquitoes

new Zealand Status: introduced and being eradicated

The Australian Southern Saltmarsh Mosquito *Ochlerotatus camptorhynchus* is one type of mosquito that we don't want. The presence of the Southern Saltmarsh Mosquito in New Zealand was discovered in 1998 after Napier residents complained of vicious biting by a mosquito. An intensive eradication programme began in January 1999 and continued using BTI and later S-methoprene. Infestations discovered since this time are probably established populations not previously detected.

behind the mangrove communities, on what is called the 'high' marsh, where pools of water in mudflats or Saltmarsh vegetation are left by the highest tides (spring tides) of each month, or are filled by rainfall/runoff, and are not flushed by the daily tidal movements during the weeks thereafter. In wetlands that are not well drained, mosquitoes are also able to exploit impounded 'stagnant' pools retained within stands of mangroves, and other vegetation on the 'low' marsh, caused by siltation or other blockage of the normal tidal channels and thus not subject to the normal daily flushing.

perfect environment for the Saltmarsh Mosquito to breed.

Life cycle

Fertilised eggs are laid by female mosquitoes on drying soil and the base of plants at the edge of depressions on the high marsh and at the edge of impounded pools in the mangroves. The embryo in the egg completes development in one to two days dependent on temperature.

After a period of growth the first instar larva moults, shedding its skin to form a larger second instar larva. This process is repeated twice more to produce a much larger fourth instar larva. At the end of the development phase of the fourth instar larva it moults to form a pupa, which is the comma shaped stage sometimes referred to as tumblers. In this stage the larval tissue is completely reformed to produce an adult insect which emerges from the pupa.

Male mosquitoes normally emerge 24 hours prior to the females. The insects on emergence are very vulnerable until their cuticle hardens. Usually within 24-48 hours of emergence the female mates and goes in search of a blood

Around Miranda

Miranda happens to have just the right type of environment conducive for the Southern Saltmarsh Mosquito to breed and survive. The old Chenier ridges are composed of high areas of raised shells separated by lower areas where water can pool, either after particularly high tide, or heavy rainfall. In addition there are areas such as the Stilt Ponds which often contain still water. Around the Shorebird Centre itself places such as the swallow pools, or the flats on the other side of the road may be the



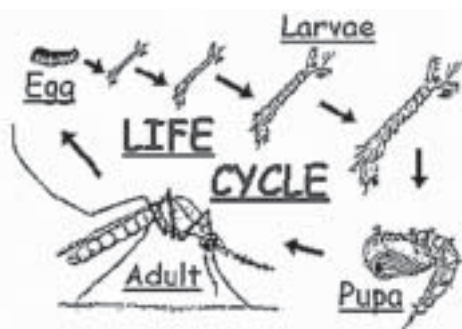
The Southern Saltmarsh Mosquito is said to be a vector of Murray Valley encephalitis, Barmah forest disease and Ross River virus. Though it has not been responsible for transmitting any of these diseases to NZ, Ross River virus has been isolated from this species in temperate Victoria and Tasmania. The presence of this mosquito in New Zealand therefore increases the risk of an outbreak of Ross River virus here. Disease from Ross River virus infection ranges from mild flu-like symptoms to debilitating joint pains.

The Southern Saltmarsh Mosquito breeds in well drained saline wetlands that are principally found in the areas



The Stilt Pools are only one of many areas of still water around the Miranda coast that would be suitable for the breeding of the Southern Salt Marsh Mosquito. Photo G Vaughan

meal. The development time for eggs is from 48-96 hours dependent to temperature, then the cycle starts again with the female selecting a suitable ovipositor site, depositing her eggs and going in search of a blood meal to mature the next batch of eggs. The number of eggs laid can vary from less than fifty to more than two hundred depending on the species and nutritional state of the insect. The period of aquatic development varies with temperature. The higher the temperature the shorter the development time.



Surveillance

A surveillance programme for Southern Saltmarsh Mosquitoes commenced regionally 10 years ago in the Auckland area.

Priority areas were identified early at that time and Miranda was targeted as a high priority risk. No Southern Saltmarsh Mosquitoes have been trapped as yet at Miranda but there is a need for monitoring to continue as results are in no way immediate. Over the ten year period no Southern Saltmarsh Mosquitoes were trapped at Shakespear Regional Park, on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula, until 18 months ago. The same set of circumstances may well arise at Miranda.

Shaun Yu

Technical Officer, Environmental Health
Auckland Regional Public Health Service

references

- (1) Eberhart-Phillips 1999
- (2) Cook et al. 2002
- (3) <http://www.mcaa.org.au/>

An Urban New Zealand Pigeon Nest

In late October 2003, two New Zealand Pigeons (*Hemiphaga novaeseelandiae*) began building a nest c.13 metres up in a Tanekaha (*Phyllocladus trichomanoides*) growing among other trees only c.8 metres from our house in New Plymouth. They appeared to abandon the site later the same day, but were seen there again on 15/11/03 and 27/1/04. On the latter occasion, they spent several minutes adjusting twigs they had taken there before. However, these pigeons did not proceed any further with this nest at that time. I am not aware if they nested elsewhere on our property during the 2003/2004 nesting season.

Pigeons were not seen at the same site in the Tanekaha again until two, probably the same birds as previously, were courting there on 24/7/04. Both birds were at the site again on at least three subsequent occasions in July, August and October 2004.

The pair started serious nest building in the Tanekaha on 4/11/04 when both of them spent at least an hour going regularly between it and a nearby Lilly Pilly (*Acmena smithii*) from which they collected twigs and placed them at the site of the nest that had been commenced in October 2003. One or both pigeons were seen there for varying periods on most days over the following three weeks. On several occasions, one of them was observed making forays every few minutes into nearby trees, including a Mangeao (*Litsea calicaris*), from which it took twigs to the nest where they were placed by its mate that was sitting on it. The *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds* tells us that New Zealand Pigeon nests are probably completed in two days. This pair took three weeks to do so from when serious nest building started on 4/11/04 until 25/11/04 when incubation probably began.

One or other of the pair seemed to be on the nest almost continuously from the time incubation began. We saw them changeover on nine occasions in the evening, between 6.20pm and 7.30pm. The changeover usually took a

very short time to complete. The sitting bird would depart from the nest as soon as its mate arrived in the tree, and the arriving bird would then move quickly to the nest and settle on it. The egg hatched on either 23 or 24/12/04. The parents brooded the chick for varying periods from then until at least 2/1/05. We could see the chick through the bottom of the nest. It grew steadily, but we never saw the adults feed it.

When I went to check on the young pigeon during the morning of 11/1/05, I was disappointed to find it sitting on the ground directly under the nest. It had probably not been there for long because it was on the nest when I had last checked it at 6pm the previous evening. The young pigeon was not injured despite the considerable distance it had fallen. It was 18 or 19 days old by then, and was developing well, in perfect condition, and bright and alert. I do not know if it had accidentally fallen from the nest, or whether the strong north-westerly wind gusts occurring at the time, that moved the branches in the nest tree around quite a lot, were a contributing factor in that event. Unfortunately, I was not able to get the young pigeon back up to the nest, so I took it to the local zoo in the hope that it could be raised there. It was still alive and doing well at the time of writing (24/1/05), so this story may yet have a happy ending.

Breeding efforts of New Zealand Pigeons that end when young of various ages fall from the nest are not unknown, although this is not included in the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand & Antarctic Birds* among the causes of failure of their nests. Such incidents may in fact be more common than we realise. Unfortunately, even older young that fall are unlikely to survive, even if they are not injured as a result. They would be totally defenceless on the ground against marauding cats, dogs, mustelids, rats, and probably possums. If a fallen young is not killed by one of them, it would almost certainly die of starvation.

David Medway

THOUGHTS OF MIRANDA AND THE TRUST OVER 55 YEARS

(By Stuart Chambers – chairman 1986 – 93)

My first visit to Miranda was at age 12 on November 12th 1949 as part of a Forest and Bird party led by Dick Sibson, Dick properly dressed in collar and tie. The party travelled in a bus and numbered about 30 people. Notable among the group were Barry Heather, John Davenport and Don Urquhart. Travelling in cars that followed the bus were Ross and Hetty McKenzie, Jimmy and Mrs Prickett and Mr and Mrs A H Hooper. All the above were well known at the time in New Zealand bird watching circles.

To get to Miranda we travelled the well known route leaving the highway at the Maramarua turnoff as we do today but in 1951 that was where the seal ended. We returned via Kaiua and Kawakawa Bay being rewarded at Kawakawa Bay with two New Zealand Pigeon sightings, my first.

The roads around Miranda itself were very corrugated and basically followed the existing shell chenier ridges. Surrounding farmland was hard to view because of pampas hedges right along the road verges and along canal banks.

Our first stop on this occasion was at the pump station at Karito where we walked to the stopbank in the hope of viewing Wrybills. Nearby, steam rose through the Manuka at what is now the Miranda Hot Pools.

Then it was on to the lime works. These really were lime works in those days and

during a shower we sat on bags of lime within the building. Everywhere outside was grey and wild but with many birds on the mud nearby. My first impressions were of a bleak place to which I never felt I wanted to return. It was lifeless, apart from those birds, and not a single car passed along the Miranda road beyond the lime works while we were there.

Birds seen on that day were mostly godwits, knots, Wrybills and Pied Oystercatchers. New birds for me were Wrybills (20), Black-billed Gulls (2), Curlew Sandpipers (2), Red-necked Stints (2), Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (6). The most memorable thing was a view of two stilts' nests with four khaki eggs in each and a Banded Dotterel nest with three fawn speckled eggs. These were in the Taramaire area.

However, upon leaving Miranda in the rain that day, even after adding all those new birds to my list, I never wanted to return. Its loneliness, bleakness and remoteness had got to me. Little did I know though that one day I was to spend so much time there.

Dick Sibson subsequently talked me into further visits to the area and with time I began to enjoy the sense of wilderness and space the area had to offer, so much so that eventually I came to visit Miranda just for that feeling alone. The need to see birds was unnecessary.

Birds though were what Miranda was always about and why most people went there. They added to the overall wilderness feeling and completed the picture. So when an idea was floated among bird watchers to place a building on the lime works site with views from it to the endless low-tide mud, I became interested. I started to think a place to stay on the coast would have appeal to many people, both bird watchers and the general public alike.

Other people obviously felt the same way and when the Miranda Trust held its first ever field day at Miranda the response was overwhelming, with an estimated 800 people attending. This February day in 1980 was at a time when nature pursuits and the outdoors were starting to become popular and people were looking for interests away from their home vegetable gardens and the mowing of lawns on Sunday. Hobbies were becoming fashionable.

Although other Trust events never quite showed so much enthusiasm, subsequent field days, always held in the old Miranda Hall, nevertheless drew good crowds. This enthusiasm convinced me and others that a small building for overnight accommodation at the lime works could work. It would allow people to spend weekends in the area and so minimise travel on what were then very poor roads. And it would allow people to bird watch over several high tides at a visit. I therefore

An early Open Day at the Limeworks. Photo unknown



joined the Trust, even though I farmed in the area quite handy to Waitakaruru.

There was no doubt that the early enthusiasts and council members on the Miranda Trust saw the Trust's role as that of placing a small lodge beside the old lime works looking on to the roosting high-tide birds. Early plans showed a simple building with sleeping accommodation downstairs and living accommodation upstairs. This was the well-known ski lodge concept but adapted for bird watchers.

This idea was supported by many, its main enthusiasts being Dick Sibson, John and Beth Brown and Sylvia Reed. Such was their enthusiasm that they quickly started fundraising with the hope of raising sufficient funds (\$15,000) in a year to get a building underway.

However progress wasn't easy. There were objections from local people including the Franklin District Council and the Wildlife Service. Then investments were lost in a financial upset and generally the Trust idea of a building at the lime works faded away.

At this stage Dick Sibson, the chairman, got dispirited and resigned leaving the Trust in the hands of Brian Ellis and a council with a different direction. This direction was the result of spirits dampened by the failures of the past. Nevertheless the council was somewhat buoyed by the success of the 1980 field day which drew the big crowd, and the Trust moved into a different role of becoming educational. Its motivation centred around its news-sheet and two field days a year, and later for those who wanted to stay overnight in the area, it purchased a small cottage at Kaiua, later known as "The Roost".

That was where the Trust remained during the chairmanship of Brian Ellis. At this time it had a membership base of about 220 people, and continued to muster good attendances at its field days on the coast.

When I took over the chairmanship the direction of the Trust changed again. The council at this time had co-opted some pragmatists. They were people

who were not daunted by past hindrances. The lime works' site, as the site for a building, was forgotten and a new site found. "The Roost" was sold and the building as we know it today was quickly erected.

And with this building has come a completely revamped Miranda Naturalists' Trust. It is an organisation far removed from the simple sleeping accommodation envisaged initially at the lime works.

Now instead it is a well-known visitor facility on a tourist highway receiving bus-loads of people at a time all with a desire to learn. It has become a major centre for shorebird knowledge, a centre for education and has a strong conservation role in protecting the flyway to the breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere.

Further its members attend overseas conferences to do with shorebirds and a group has even led a delegation to China in an effort to secure the flyway and its feeding and breeding grounds for the birds. It has become a major voice in conservation circles worldwide.

Those of us who raised money for the centre in order to provide a simple lodge on the coast never anticipated a move in this direction. Had we done so, the building we now know would probably have been different.

Nevertheless, this building fulfils a purpose and is a fitting monument to many members over the years. In my view though, it wouldn't be there at all if it hadn't been for John and Beth Brown's determination to keep it going when all the odds were against it. They wouldn't let it go.

Further, there is no doubt that the push given it by the likes of Dick Sibson, Kay Haslett, Anthea Goodwin, David Lawrie, David Baker, David Stonex, David Walter, Adrian Riegen, Monty Widgery and an enthusiastic team of supporters from the Waikato, saved its day and got it up and running.

And what has been the Trust's greatest feature in its first 30 years? In my view it has been the camaraderie it has

engendered among its members. These members have always been a disparate bunch from all walks of life. They have included full-on twitchers, genteel bird watchers, nature lovers and non-bird watchers, as well as the local people from the Miranda and Waitakaruru areas.

This divergent group has always enjoyed each other's company and this desire to meet and greet has become a notable hallmark of the Miranda centre. This feature, plus the addition of a congenial Miranda host in its centre manager Keith Woodley, has encouraged people to use the centre as a base for their personal social activities.

It is obvious too that this congeniality among members is a reason why the Trust's current events are always so well attended by members as well as outsiders. It would be nice to think this mood started with that first field day which drew the masses in 1980.

When looking back though, probably the greatest asset the Trust ever possessed has been its association with the Alan Lane family. For those who don't know or have forgotten, the Lane family are the owners of the lime works site, and as such they have given bird watchers unlimited access to the best birding spot at Miranda since 1940. Without them the Trust would have been that much the poorer.



Stuart Chambers when Chairman of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. Photo unknown.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

30th Anniversary:

As has been well advised 2005 is the 30th Anniversary since the inaugural meeting held in Auckland in mid 1975. In all of the discussions that led to the formation of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust at that time even the most optimistic view could not have envisaged the position the Trust is in today.

In the past 10-15 years there has been a proliferation of single purpose trusts formed but 30 years ago that type of organisation did not exist. Even the establishment of the constitution at that time provided a major hurdle for the Trust as there were no examples and the Solicitors had great difficulty in establishing wording that satisfied the Registrar of Incorporated Societies and also the Inland Revenue Department.

The constitution that was established has been used as a model for a number of other organisations since that time.

Even with the launch of the Trust at the inaugural meeting it was believed by most government departments and Territorial and Regional Government Organisations that the Trust would ultimately fail. The model of a voluntary organisation of that type was so far ahead of its time that it received very little if any official support from government departments. There were of course committed individuals in those departments who provided assistance but there was clearly a culture of "ignore them and they will go away" syndrome in official circles.

However all that has changed in recent times with the continued success of the Trust, not only in meeting its principal aims of providing overnight accommodation but now in being a major education and conservation organisation recognised not only in New Zealand but around the world. This has now led to much greater acceptance in official circles and hopefully that will continue as the Trust is now advancing into areas

outside the financial resources of the relatively small membership to sustain.

Founders Luncheon:

On the 20th of February it is intended to have a sit down lunch to officially launch the 30th Anniversary celebrations. This will be an opportunity for members of all ages and length of membership to share memories and celebrate the successes and laugh at the failures which seemed fatal at the time.

I would urge you to attend if you can, although numbers will be limited to 70 as that is the maximum number that can be comfortably seated. Nanette McLauchlan would also like people to provide brief stories and anecdotes of the people involved in the Trust and events that have helped shape our destiny. Please contact Nannette, (09) 486 2515, before the day so that she can make the appropriate arrangements.

Judy Piesse who was the very first secretary is also intending to organise a display so if you have any snippets from the past, and in particular the Ronald Lockley articles in the New Zealand Herald, you should contact Judy to ensure that they are displayed during the day. (Contact details are available from the Shorebird Centre.

Field Course:

Early in January Eila Lawton organised and supervised the running of the week long field course. I took the opportunity to pay a brief visit during the course and was most impressed at the obvious enthusiasm of the attendees. This is also a reflection of the excellent organisation and the skill of the voluntary tutors without whom the success of the field course would not be possible. From the attendees to whom I spoke it was obvious that they were

gaining a great range of skills and knowledge in a relaxed atmosphere.

I would take this opportunity to publicly thank Eila and her team of voluntary tutors along with all the other people who make the field course such a success.

Chinese Visit:

We have recently received confirmation that a seven person delegation is coming from China to visit Miranda sometime in March or April 2005. This visit has resulted from the invitation that I extended during the visit that the Miranda delegation made to Yalu Jiang in April 2004.

The final dates and details of the visit have not yet been made known as the delegates are in the process of obtaining the appropriate visas at the present time. During their visit we hope to show them the workings of the Shorebird Centre and take them to other shorebird sites around the Auckland area so that they can gain an appreciation of the work that is being undertaken in New Zealand.

The Trust Council believes that this type of visit is important as the



David involved in the Black-billed Gull banding project at the Maitaitai Shell-banks January 2005. Photo G. Vaughan

shorebirds were the key to the establishment of the Trust in the first place, and we believe that it is important to ensure that the migratory shorebirds keep coming to the Miranda area. It is now clear that China is a key stopover point on their journey to the breeding grounds.

We are trying to ensure that the delegations visit coincides with the autumn migration day so that they can get a feel for the educational opportunities that such a day provides. The officials at the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve have a building which could serve similar purposes to that at Miranda but at this stage they have not woken to the opportunities that it provides. It is hoped that this visit will show the benefits of educating the surrounding residents and the wider community into the wonders of nature that are taking place in the surrounding reserve.

Black Billed Gull Colony:

Of a more practical nature I provide a brief summary of the banding study that Tony Habraken has been undertaking on the Black-billed Gull colony that is often present in the Miranda area. Anthea Goodwin and Ross McKenzie frequently observed a few Black-billed Gulls attempting to nest in the Miranda and Clevedon areas over 30 years ago always without success.

In 1994 however a small colony established in the Manukau Harbour and Tony commenced a study to investigate the dispersal of the birds from that colony. Over the intervening 11 years it has now been confirmed that the colony that nested that year in the Manukau Harbour is the same group as that which has also nested at Miranda, Thames and at the Clarks Bay shell banks. There is also some transfer of birds to the small colony that has now established in the Kaipara Harbour.

This year for the first time the birds were successful in nesting at Mataitai near Clevedon. This followed earlier failed attempts at Miranda and also early investigations on the South Manukau Harbour. A total of 150

chicks were banded with year cohort combinations of yellow over metal on the left leg and nothing on the right leg.

Since the commencement of the project Tony and his team have banded approximately 1900 chicks and the majority of the colony that now nests in this northern area is banded. Tony has received very few records of birds away from the Firth of Thames or Manukau Harbours so members on their travels should inspect all gull flocks to help find where the birds travel in the winter period. I am sure Tony will write a more detailed report for the Miranda News at some time in the future.

Conclusion:

I look forward to meeting as many members as possible during this 30th Anniversary year. The one thing that has kept me involved with the Miranda Naturalists' Trust has been the wonderfully enthusiastic people that have been involved or are members. No matter what level of interest in either birds or natural history or even just the tranquility of the area we all have a common interest at the Centre. It is indeed our marae of which I am, and I hope all of you are, intensely proud.

David Lawrie
Chairman

THE OSNZ COLUMN

Upcoming Conferences

Australasian Ornithological Conference

The Australasian Ornithological Conference is a biennial conference that provides a regular forum for the exchange of information and ideas between avian researchers and conservationists throughout the Australasian region. It is a joint Ornithological Society of New Zealand and Birds Australia initiative to promote ornithology.

The third Australasian Ornithological Conference will be held in Blenheim from 6-10 December 2005. The scientific programme will include papers, poster sessions, and discussions. Field excursions are planned to Kaikoura to see albatrosses and other seabirds; to Nelson Lakes National Park to visit a Department of Conservation Mainland Island Project; to outer Pelorus Sound calling at the important bird sanctuaries of Maud Island and Outer Chetwode Islands; and to Motuara Island in Queen Charlotte Sound.

Australasian Shorebird Conference

The Australasian Shorebird Conference is the conference of the Australasian Wader Study Group. It provides an opportunity for wader enthusiasts to exchange ideas and information in an international forum. The conference focuses on wader research and conservation.

The Australasian Shorebird Conference will be held in Nelson from 11-13 December 2005, immediately following the Australasian Ornithological Conference. The scientific programme for this conference will also include papers, poster sessions, and discussions. It will be followed by a two-day excursion to Farewell Spit.

Further information about these two conferences and registration forms are available on-line at the Society's website <http://osnz.org.nz/conference.htm>, or from Sue Bell, 35 Selmes Road, RD 3, Blenheim (email: wmilblenheim@clear.net.nz).

David Medway,
President,
Ornithological Society of NZ.

Disabled Birds



A Red Knot walking on its tarsus. Photo I Southey

In May 2004 on a grey, wintery day I visited the Karaka shellbanks. The numbers of birds were down dramatically from their March and April numbers - as you'd expect, and this makes scanning the birds that are present an easier prospect. It also makes picking up anything that is different easier.

The knot flock, nearly a thousand that day, was roosting on the mudflats, as the tide wasn't big enough to push them up onto the shellbanks. In the middle of the flock there was a constant disturbance, one bird constantly fluttering its wings. David Lawrie, who was with me that day, said that he had seen a Red Knot with no feet on an earlier visit, and expected that this was the same bird, constantly using its wings to keep itself balanced. Later on the individual bird was seen, and it while the bird did have both its tibia and tarsus, both legs ended in a stump.

At the time I thought that this was a bird who would not last long. The energy requirements in simply standing upright must be incredibly high under these circumstances, so I thought even if it could feed it would be unable to feed enough to keep itself going. In addition the mudflats during winter are often wet, so, if the disabled bird chose to roost with the flock, during most high tide periods it would not be able to sit down to roost without getting its feathers muddy, and losing the insulation they provide. If the disabled bird

chose to roost on the shellbanks, away from the flock, it would also be away from the protection the flock provides.

During several visits over the winter I did not see the bird again, and didn't think more of it. However on a visit in late September 2004 a knot with no feet was seen, I assume it was the same bird. At this time the bird was able to stand easily, without using its wings for balance, and was able to walk easily, using the lower part of its legs as a new foot, sometimes raising itself up onto its stumps.

While its unlikely the bird migrated that year, as it would have been unable to put on enough weight to migrate, and no breeding plumage was seen on it at either end of the season, if it is indeed the same bird then it has been able to learn to deal with what would appear to be a large disability, and do it over the winter period, when conditions are harsher than over summer.

This is not the only record of a bird coping with this type of disability. A Bar-tailed Godwit was reported from the Avon-Heathcote estuary in December 2004 that "wormed its way through the flock". This bird also had no feet.

I regularly see waders with injured legs and bills when out birdwatching. Recently I decided to see how many injured birds I could find if I looked. In a flock of around 6000 Bar-tailed God-

wits and Red Knots I saw 7 individually identifiable birds with leg injuries of some sort. On the same day I also saw a Turnstone and a Pied Oystercatcher with leg injuries.

There seem to be a number of ways in which they can get injured. I've seen birds with shellfish, particularly small cockles attached to their toes (this is not a new observation - see box). Pied Oystercatchers with swollen feet can sometimes be seen with sheeps wool, presumably picked up when they are breeding in the South Island, wrapped around their feet and toes. But what causes a bird to lose both feet I don't know.

Birds can however recover from injury. One example is a colour banded Red Knot that has been seen several times since banding. On the first few sightings the bird was fine, however when I saw it in September 2004 it was not using one leg, and the foot on the leg not being used was curled up. In January 2005 the bird was seen again by someone else who said it showed no signs of a limp. It's nice to know that not all of the injuries we see birds with are permanent.

Gillian Vaughan

A tale of a curlew and a shellfish

Translated from a well known Chinese story by Liu KeDa

One day a curlew caught a very big shellfish while looking for food by the shore. When the curlew thrust its bill at the shellfish something happened, the shellfish grabbed the bill of the curlew. Neither the curlew or the shellfish would let go, so neither could leave.

A very lucky fisherman was passing by just at that time, so he caught both a curlew and a very big shellfish.



Drawing Keith Woodley

Back Yard Birds?

The only thing unusual about the paddock full of cattle immediately south of the cottage were the four small white patches moving around among the stock. They were Cattle Egrets, small numbers of which regularly visit New Zealand each winter. But this was mid November, and all four birds were in breeding plumage – the dark tawny heads and necks prominent even at a distance. They were present in the same paddock over the next four days, after which one

or two birds continued to be reported from somewhere in the district up until Christmas.

This contributed to something of a “white bird” theme over spring and early “summer”. The White Heron that had been present through much of the year was not reported after early October, and the Royal Spoonbill flock had reduced from 15 to three. Then in mid November the four Cattle Egrets appeared. Sporadic sightings of white birds subsequently occurred until late December. One of these was of two

egrets and a spoonbill sitting in the small macrocarpa south of the shorebird centre. On 26 December while Nigel Milius was at the centre, an English observer reported a Little Egret sitting with a spoonbill on the shell bank. He was very familiar with Little Egret from the UK and persuasively eliminated Cattle Egret from contention, so we took his report to be credible. Later that day however a second spoonbill was sitting on the shell bank, and no small egrets have been sighted since.

Keith Woodley



Banded Rails have been regularly, if not commonly seen around the Shorebird Centre and Widgery Lake. Answering the often asked question - do they breed around here a pair brought their chicks into view on Widgery Lake on January 29th 2005. The photo of the single bird was taken the day before.

photos right G Bullen below K Woodley



OSNZ colour-banding study update



Photo: A Red Knot being weighed.
Brent Stephenson - www.eco-vista.com

As many readers will be aware, colour-banding of common Arctic-breeding waders is going on in the Auckland region, and also now in the South Island as part of an Ornithological Society project on the movements of waders within the country (see MNT News 55 and NZWSG Newsletter 19; details on the colour-banding project have been put on the ornithological society's website: www.osnz.org.nz/nzwaderstudy.htm). Phil Battley and MNT members have been marking birds at the Firth of Thames since last February, and this summer Rob Schuckard and David Melville have caught and banded birds in Nelson, Canterbury, and Christchurch. Around Auckland, 137 Bar-tailed Godwits (123 in the Firth, and 14 in the Kaipara Harbour) and 126 Red Knots (120 in the Firth, 6 in the Kaipara) have been individually marked. In the South Island, 159 godwits have been banded (17 in Southland, 56 in Christchurch, and 86 in the Nelson/Golden Bay region), along with 3 Ruddy Turnstones and a single knot in Southland. These have been the source of many interesting resightings already.

On the international scene, the last northward migration saw a surprisingly good return from just the 35 godwits that were banded and on migration at that point. As mentioned in the NZWSG newsletter #17, two birds were seen in South Korea and China. The story got even better when the Chinese bird was spotted in Alaska in August before heading back to the Firth where it was seen in October and is still here at the end of January. Four other

birds were seen in Alaska preparing for migration, and all returned safely to the Firth. With many more birds marked this year, and godwits being the focus of some major international research efforts in Alaska, we anticipate a

deluge of sightings in 2005!

Godwits are proving to be very site-faithful within New Zealand (the top bird has been seen 17 times since banding), with only a few exceptions so far. One female was caught at the Firth on 21 September, right in the arrival period for adults, weighing just 264 g (which is very light for a female). She was later spotted at Maketu, in the Bay of Plenty, and was probably always heading towards the Bay but had to stop in short for a little refuelling. Another stopped off in the Manukau before coming to the Firth, but it is unclear whether a momentary glimpse of a bird at Rangaunu Harbour in the Far North by Tony Habraken in September was of a returning migrant or a local overwintering explorer. The biggest movement recorded to date within New Zealand is of a juvenile caught at the Avon-Heathcote estuary in Christchurch in October. It is evidently unsure where to reside, as it has subsequently been seen at the Avon-Heathcote, at Lake Ellesmere, and most recently at the Manukau Harbour. South Island birds have a white flag on the left leg as part of their combinations, whereas North Island birds have it on the right. Clearly, it is important to spot the flag as well as the bands if possible.

Knots are proving to be a lot more mobile than godwits, though this may be partly because we caught more overwintering subadults, which seem quite prone to wandering. Internationally, we have just two partial band-readings from Australia, so it is

unclear exactly who was involved and what age they were. The most mobile knot on record to date has already been mentioned in NZWSG Newsletter 17. Banded in June, it was seen at Tabora in the Kaipara on 7 July, made a quick trip back to the Firth where it was seen on 8 and 12 July, and by 25 July was with a large group of colour-banded knots at Karaka on the Manukau Harbour. It was seen there again on 21 August but was then lost from the record, until spotted at Parengarenga in the Far North in late January. Keeping track of birds as mobile as these is a challenge, but shows the detail that can be gathered on how bird use the networks of estuaries and tidal flats around the country.

Phil Battley



Luddism all but Gone

Remember the man who did not want to know about the fax machine? Or the grump about email just doubling the disappointment each day – once when you look in the letterbox and again when you check the email.

Now he trains people to use the EFTPOS and is in the field with cellphone and digital camera. The Luddism remaining is just a little bit in his brain and his failures with modern equipment are manageable.

Yes, he was avidly pointing out features on the laptop screen in front of him while his audience could see only the big picture on the wall. We trained him out of that (shut the laptop lid).

Text and Photo Dick Veitch



Check out the website for
the latest events news.
www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz

From the Blackboard
February 3rd 2005

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Nanette McLauchlan	Gillian Vaughan
Adrian Riegen (Deputy Chairman)	

Membership Rates

Ordinary Member - \$35
Family Member - \$40
Overseas Member- \$40
Life Member, under 50 - \$1050
Life Member, 50 and over - \$525

Membership of the Trust entitles you to -

- Four Miranda News issues per year.
- A \$5 discount on overnight accommodation
- Invitations to Trust Events
- The right to attend the Annual General Meeting
- The right to vote for council members

Help support the Trust's efforts to educate and promote conservation awareness.

Bequests

Remember the Miranda Naturalists' Trust in your Will and ensure that our vital work in education and protection of the migratory shorebirds can continue. For further information and a copy of our legacy letter contact the Shorebird Centre.

Accommodation

The Centre at Miranda has three bunkrooms for hire plus two self-contained flats: (new rates effective May 1st 2003)

Per bed / night member	\$12.50
Per bed / night non-member	\$17.50
Hire of flat member	\$40.00
Hire of flat non-member	\$50.00

For further information contact Keith at the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno
phone /fax (09) 232 2781

Arctic Migrants

<i>Bar-tailed Godwit</i>	3000+
<i>Red Knot</i>	4000+
<i>Turnstone</i>	20
<i>Sharp-tailed Sandpiper</i>	6
<i>Pectoral Sandpiper</i>	1
<i>Marsh Sandpiper</i>	1
<i>Terek Sandpiper</i>	1
<i>Little Tern</i>	4

New Zealand Species

<i>Pied Oystercatcher</i>	lots!
<i>Wrybill</i>	1000+
<i>NZ Dotterel</i>	6+
<i>Banded Dotterel</i>	
<i>Variable Oystercatcher</i>	
<i>Banded Rail</i>	
<i>Black-billed Gull</i>	
<i>Red-billed Gull</i>	
<i>White-fronted Tern</i>	
<i>Caspian Tern</i>	
<i>Pied Stilt</i>	

Want to be involved?

The Miranda Garden

If you want an excuse to stay at Miranda for a couple of week nights free of charge, come and help a small team of gardeners maintain the gardens. It is satisfying and worthwhile work in the outdoors. We make the time enjoyable especially when we down tools at high tide and go and watch the birds on the shell banks. If interested phone Alison on 09 524 0291.

This is your magazine!

If you have a story, poem, photo, or piece of research you would like to include in the MNT news please contact the editor, Gillian Vaughan, on 09 294 7610 or gillianv@actrix.co.nz

Friends of Miranda

A volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre during busy periods or in Keith's absence. While so far somewhat informal, plans are being made to try and arrange for a more regular volunteer programme. If you'd like to be involved (or a co-ordinator!) or if you'd like to spend up to a few weeks at the Centre helping out contact Keith at the Centre.

The Wader ID Weekend a fully catered weekend course going over some of the basics of watching waders. A good chance to pick up new skills and meet some of the people involved in research! Contact the Centre for availability and costs.

Firth of Thames Census Run by OSNZ and held twice a year the Census days are a good chance to get involved with ongoing field work and research.



This photo of a Weka was taken by Nova Coory at Kawakawa Bay, at the northern end of the Firth of Thames. Weka have not been recorded in the area for many years, so when reports of Weka calling began around Christmas 2003 it came somewhat of a surprise. However at least one pair of Weka have been being seen since September 2004, eating worms turned up by a tractor doing landscaping, and looking for food on local's decks. There could be to be up to four pairs in the area. One Weka was handed into Bird Rescue in late November from Kawakawa Bay where it had been found with an injured leg. Where did the Weka come from after their long absence? As yet this is unknown, but if any further information is available it will be in a future issue of the News.