

# MIRANDA

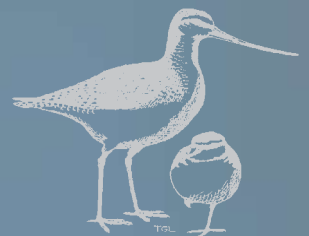
Naturalists' Trust

August 2010 Issue 78

NEWS



Flyway Partnership  
Richard Sibson



# August 2010 Issue 78

## Upcoming Events

September 7-9

New Zealand Dotterel Management Course, tutor John Dowling

September 25-26

Photographic Course with tutor Bruce Shanks.

October 23-24

Wader ID Weekend: - Learn about wader identification and other interesting aspects of waders.

October 30 Saturday 10 a.m.

Working Bee - The Garden.

We could really use your help!

October 31 Sunday 10 a.m.

Welcome To The Birds Day: Guest Speaker - Julian Fitter - NZ biodiversity through an outsider's eyes. High Tide 1.50 pm

13-14 November

Field Sketching Course with tutor Sandra Morris

27 - 28 November

Shorebird Counting Workshop  
New this year!

19 - 25 January 2011

The Miranda Field Course.

Contact the Centre for details of these events. 09 232 2781

Front Cover: Eastern Curlew, a surprise visitor to Kaiaua this winter, photo Neil Fitzgerald.


Back Cover: 2010 - Winter at Miranda. from top to bottom - Grey Teal on the Stilt Ponds, a hybrid stilt in flight, Grey Warbler in the mangroves, a Curlew Sandpiper feeding in the soft mud, and a Black-tailed Godwit, photos Ian Southey.

## We Want You!

The day was actually a nice day - for winter; it was late June and several of us were sitting around a table at the Shorebird Centre after finishing the OSNZ Winter Firth of Thames Census.

Finishing the census had been a bit of a mission, with not enough people present to cover all the sites. Sitting around that table we therefore decided it was time for a formal workshop on counting - to increase the skill base amongst people who come along occasionally, or those who are interested but have never been on a census.

So we've put together a workshop, to be held November 27, the day before the November Census. The workshop will include theory and practice on the Saturday, and on Sunday participants will join the Census teams.

We haven't finalised a price for this workshop yet, but it won't be more than \$60.00, and that includes your accommodation Saturday night. If you've ever wondered about how to get more involved this is going to be a great chance, tutors will include Adrian Riegen David Lawrie, Gillian Vaughan and others. Please join us and be part of this workshop that will lead you into the larger obsession of shorebird counting. Contact the Centre on 09 232 2781 if you are interested in attending. 

From the Blackboard  
01 August 2010

### Arctic Migrants

Bar-tailed Godwit	600
Bk tail	1
Eastern Curlew	1
Red Knot	
Turnstone	14
Curlew Sandpiper	4
Red-necked Stint	1

### New Zealand Species

Pied Oystercatcher	
Wrybill	2100
Banded Dotterel	100
NZ Dotterel	
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-billed Gull	
Red-billed Gull	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	
Pied Stilt	
Royal Spoonbill	15
White Heron	1

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

# from the Chair

Gillian Vaughan

David Lawrie has been Chairman of MNT as long as I have been involved with the organisation. He has led the Trust through eleven years of discovery, years that have included the Trust becoming heavily involved in shorebird conservation and education in China, increasing staff numbers, increasing visitor numbers and a huge increase in our knowledge of shorebird ecology.



The Trust has developed a long way over his time as Chairman and while David often passes off thanks with comments such as “it was a team effort” and while much of the work the Trust does is a team effort one way or another, David's leadership has been an essential part of all of that change. He has left behind him an attitude amongst council that everything should be considered, nothing should be ignored as too big to deal with. In many ways this is the attitude that has led to the Trust's work along the flyway being so successful. In standing down from the Chair David has left big shoes to fill.

At this year's AGM the same Council was returned; at the first meeting in June elected me to the position of Chair. What do I see for the future? The next few years will also be big years of change for the Trust. At home we are contemplating a large building project, in and around NZ we will be looking at increasing challenges to conservation which will threaten us both locally, for example aquaculture development in the Firth, and nationally, for example water management in the South Island threatening the breeding habitat of Wrybill. Internationally the main staging sites of both Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots are under threat from development.

More and more the linkages that we make with other organisations, the education of New Zealanders about the value of shorebirds to NZ's biodiversity and economy, will be the key to our long term success. The Trust has come a long way since its

inception, there is also a long road ahead. I can't say that I take on the role of Chair with no sense of trepidation. But there is also a sense of excitement - because over the last few years the Trust has made a difference (I feel very strongly that without the work that MNT members have done at Yalu Jiang that the main staging site for godwits would already be lost) and I expect us to continue to make a difference.

So- the mission statement - keep the birds coming. To do it we'll need local, national and international connections. And we'll need you. Your support, as volunteers, as members, and financially. Lots of work to do!

## The Trust

### Members

The current membership fluctuates around 650 - 700 members. This number has been largely stable for several years. May we suggest that when looking at Christmas or birthdays that a gift membership may be appropriate for some of your friends? This benefits the Trust in a number of ways - we have the opportunity to reach someone new, which can lead to more long term members - it also gives us a higher number of members which we can use in submissions or for funding applications.

The Trust has recently received a bequest of \$2,000 from Betty Searle, a long-term member. Bequests and donations are an important source of funding for the Trust and are always appreciated.

### Sibson Award

The Sibson Fund has been around for some time, started by the Trust and the family of Dick Sibson, added to by many people and substantially reinforced from a bequest by John Brown. The fund has been used several times to support research into shorebirds, however no formal structure has been placed around the use of the funds until now.

In late June the final touches were put on the Sibson Award, which will support research into shorebirds and the ecology of the Firth of Thames, for which postgraduate students can apply. The first closing deadline for applications for the award is later this year. At the end of their study the successful applicants will be expected to either write an article for MNT News or give a talk at the Centre.

The Trust Council has been talking about supporting research into shorebirds, and the ecology of the Firth of Thames for some time now. The launch of this award is an important step on this path. Further details about 'Sib' are elsewhere in the magazine.

### Shorebird Centre News

The new carpark at the Limeworks was constructed in April, the ground has now had time to settle down after being bulldozed around, and the area can be used to keep your car off the road. The carpark will be locked overnight to prevent people camping there, if for some reason the gate is locked when you arrive please feel free to go up the Centre to get a key. At present the access through the





Ashley Reid, David Lawrie and Will Perry at the 2010 AGM. Photo Chris Thompson



Emma Pearson looking at the lizards brought to the AGM by Duncan Munroe for his very well received talk. Photo Chris Thompson



The Yalu Jiang Identification and counting workshop. Photo Keith Woodley

fence is a stile, however a kissing gate should be in place soon.

### *Courses and Events*

After years of running the courses at Miranda Eila Lawton has handed the Course convenor position to Brigid Glass. I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome Brigid to the team and convey our thanks to her for taking on this challenging role. I'd also like to reiterate David's thanks to Eila from his last report on her efforts in the course convenors role. And speaking of courses...

In the upcoming months we have several courses and upcoming events. I would encourage members to join in on those that they can, by the time this issue is published the pot-luck dinner will have passed - I hope that all those who attended enjoyed themselves.

### **Local News**

#### *Aquaculture*

Long term readers will be aware of previous issues around aquaculture development in the Firth of Thames. In 2006 it was decided that no Aquaculture management area would be established in the Firth of Thames. It appears that this decision is now being revisited as the government has made it clear that they wish to see an expansion of aquaculture in NZ waters. Environment Waikato's website indicates that there are about 2500 hectares of suspended aquaculture applications in the western part of the Firth of Thames which will be reactivated. In addition Kingfish farming in the Firth is also now under consideration.

Last time aquaculture was an issue Council's main concern was that the impacts of this large a development at the head of the Firth of Thames were unknown, and that this was an unacceptable situation to be in with

a Ramsar site at the base of the Firth. Government will be looking to introduce new legislation around aquaculture later this year, the Trust Council is concerned about the recent events and is looking at what the appropriate steps are to take at this point.

## International

### EAAFP

MNT has recently joined the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership. This is a development that came out of a conference in Donggang that was held at the end of the 2010 Yalu Jiang Survey. On the way back to New Zealand David, Keith, Estella and I took the opportunity to stop at the flyway offices in South Korea, where we met several of the staff and were able to see some of the work they are doing (they then kindly took us bird watching for a few hours before our flight out). Aram Lee from the flyway office will be visiting NZ in September, and will spend some time at the Centre. David Lawrie is currently helping arrange for meetings with Department of Conservation officials during her visit.

### North Korea

While North Korea is not yet considering mudflat destruction on the same scale as South Korea, it is something they are putting thought into, with a recent press release stating that Kim Jong Il "said the reclamation of the tideland is essential for the country's prosperity and (he) set new tasks to be fulfilled in the future". It is therefore crucial that contact about flyway issues and shorebird conservation be on the agenda with North Korea now.

MNT members were unable to complete further survey work in North Korea in 2010, and due to the current political situation the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is not presently planning any visits to North Korea.

## EAAF Partnership

David Lawrie



The partnership is an informal and voluntary initiative which was launched on 6 November 2006. It aims to protect migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them.

Partners include Governments, intergovernmental agencies and international non-government organisations. The goal of the partnership is that "migratory waterbirds and their habitats are recognised and conserved for the benefit of people and biodiversity." The partnership provides a flyway wide framework to promote dialogue, cooperation and collaboration between a range of stakeholders to conserve migratory waterbirds and their habitats.

The key functions are:

- Provide a platform for international cooperation for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and the sustainable use of their wetland habitats.
- Support the development of a flyway site network to ensure a chain of internationally important wetland sites are recognised and sustainably managed into the future.
- Support a range of activities to increase knowledge and raise awareness of migratory waterbirds, while building capacity for the sustainable management and conservation of migratory waterbird habitats along the flyway.

The EAAF flyway includes New Zealand, Australia, South Eastern Asia, parts of Russia and Alaska. Included within the flyway is 45% of the world's human population and hence much of the pressure is through human induced activities which is increasing. The pressure on the migratory birds habitat requires international cooperation and that is the real strength of the flyway partnership as it is the only opportunity where organisations such as the Miranda Trust can sit around the same table as representatives from the Governments of the countries along the flyway.

At this stage the New Zealand Government has chosen not to join the partnership and the Miranda Naturalists' Trust will therefore be the sole representative from New Zealand but with the expertise available it is a role that it can easily fulfil.

David Lawrie has been in contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NZ-DPRK Society regarding pursuing that relationship further. The Trust will continue to remind the ministry that North Korea plays an important role in conserving New Zealand's biodiversity, and that the

Trust is in a valuable position to help the government with this.


To see the press release discussed visit  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-07/16/c\\_111962998.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-07/16/c_111962998.htm)

## Yalu Jiang

Not covered in the last issue was a conference and workshop held in Donggang (adjacent to Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve) in April 2010 sponsored by Wetlands International. Those members of MNT who had travelled to China for the annual survey were able to attend, and give a presentation on the importance of Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve to those gathered, as well as learn about other Chinese shorebird sites, many facing similar pressures. Attendees of the conference included members of the local government as well as staff from coastal reserves around China. The MNT presentation was delivered by Estella Lee (in Chinese) and was then made available to those who might be in a position to use it.

Prior to the conference a separate shorebird identification and counting workshop, sponsored by Ramsar was held at the Gushan Management station. Approximately 15 people from reserves along China's coast participated in this, and despite the cold wintery conditions that existed at 5am when we started, they took the chance to practice counting large numbers of birds.

As well as the chance to meet staff from other reserves we were able to meet staff from Ramsar, the EAAFP, and catch up with old friends from Wetlands International. This was a gratefully received opportunity to put the issues that Yalu Jiang is facing to a wider community.

While the MNT team was present no work was occurring on the sea-wall adjacent to the reserve, however Jimmy Choi, a student doing PhD work at Yalu Jiang, reported in May that work had begun again. This is an issue of great concern, as the wall could easily be built back into the reserve, enclosing the main roosting area of Bar-tailed Godwits. Adrian Riegen is keeping in touch with Yalu Jiang staff over this issue. 

# Upcoming Courses

7-9 September 2010

Conservation Management of New Zealand Dotterels - Training Course

The course is specifically targeted at anyone involved in the management or field monitoring of dotterels. While focussed primarily on dotterels, much of the course content will be applicable to other species such as terns, gulls and variable oystercatchers. Topics include species ecology, management strategies, pest control, data collection.

24-26 September 2010

Photography Course with Bruce Shanks.

A mix of lecture, entertainment with images, practical sessions, discussion about suitable equipment, and the practicalities of bird photography in general. Includes instruction on setting up a hide and how to approach birds.

23-24 October 2010

Wader Identification Course

Learn how to sort out those tricky shorebirds. Two intensive days with expert tutors. A mix of theory and practice, but we aim to spend as much time as possible in the field. Tutors Adrian Riegen and Gillian Vaughan.

13-14 November 2009

Field Sketching Course

Don't just return from holiday with that empty diary! This course led by Sandra Morris will inspire you to record in words and images the environment around you. The shell banks and bird roosts of Miranda will be your inspiration. Suitable for beginners and non-beginners.

## NEW COURSE!


27 - 28 November Shorebird Counting Workshop

Designed to help you take that next step towards counting, whether that be your first steps or moving on to larger flocks. This course will do theory and practice, culminating with participation in the Firth of Thames Census. Tutors David Lawrie, Adrian Riegen, Gillian Vaughan and a host of others!

19 - 25 January 2011

The Miranda Field Course.

Now in its thirteenth year the Miranda Field Course is perfect for any naturalist. Topics covered in past courses have included geology, botany, and entomology, but with a focus on birds, identification, catching, and details on ecology of some of our shorebirds.

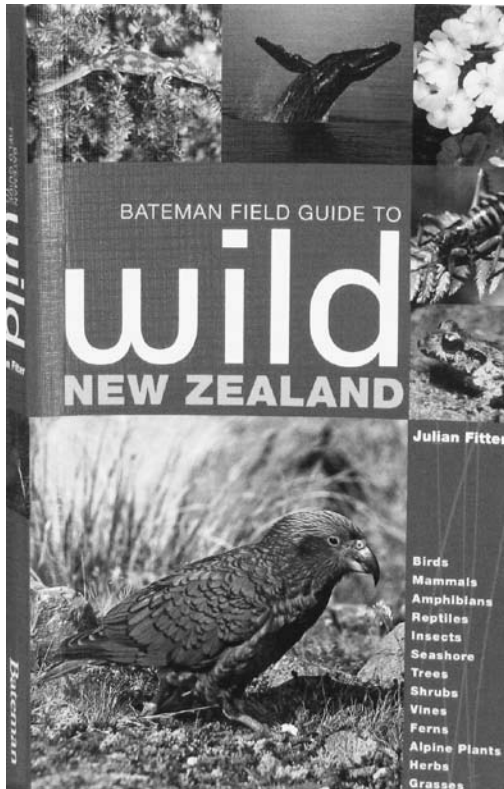
For details of these courses contact the Centre by phone - 09 232 2781, or email, [shorebird@farmside.co.nz](mailto:shorebird@farmside.co.nz). We'd love you to join us, or pass the information on to someone else who may be interested. 

# Bateman Field Guide to Wild New Zealand

by Julian Fitter

2010 David Bateman Ltd Soft Cover \$59.00

This book, just published, is a beginners' guide to much of the natural history of New Zealand. In what must have been a mammoth task, Julian Fitter, a new arrival to New Zealand, has brought together all aspects of our world of nature into one handy book of 276 pages. It covers everything from birds to grasses, with mammals, insects and trees all getting the major part of the coverage.



The book starts with the author's introduction and his arrival here about five years ago from the Galapagos Islands. His introduction is of interest to the New Zealand reader as we are seldom told how outsiders see us and soon we are to read his appreciation of New Zealand's "amazing biodiversity" and "uniqueness". Further on in this introduction he goes on to say "we do not really recognise it [this amazing biodiversity and uniqueness] for what it is or look after it".

As much as I like this statement for its complimentary nature and as for its note of warning, I do feel, that over the last 30 years at least, we have, as nation, been looking after it. The many kilometres of fencing


for the protection of forests, and the 1080 debate, are testament to that as is the Black Robin.

After the introduction the real book commences with some geography and geology and also a section on habitats, all these sections being copiously illustrated by informative and attractive landscape pictures. This gives the reader a brief insight into the New Zealand landscape before the book embarks on the species of the natural world that live here. This background to New Zealand is of interest to everyone but especially the visitor.

The text is not large on each species described, but sufficient to get one pointed in the right learning direction, and each description is illustrated with a quality picture which is most helpful with the

identity of the new discovery.

Some sections, such as the cicadas and fungi are minimal. For those wanting to make bigger studies in these fields, further research would be required, but for the sections of most common interest, the birds and the plants, there is plenty of information to get people right into the subject. And again, the pictures are quality and informative.


I suggest this book fills a gap in New Zealand literature and the author is to be congratulated on bringing so much information together in a succinct and frugal way so that the final book fits into a back pack and is not cumbersome. It is notable too that someone who has lived here for just 5 years, has managed to bring together such a book in such a short time with the facts correct. I recommend it for beginners mainly, and know it will be especially useful to visitors from abroad with basic natural history interests. 

## Websites to Check Out

The details of an unusual Banded Stilt breeding event can be found at <http://www.shorebirds.org.au/news/?p=306>

<http://worldwaders.posterous.com> A great place to see what's going with waders around the world.

If you are heading to Australia you might want to check out the South East Queensland Wader Guide, it's free to download. Visit [www.shorebirds.org.au](http://www.shorebirds.org.au) and click on news.

And for local new don't forget [www.birdingnz.net!](http://www.birdingnz.net!) 



# R B Sibson

by Stuart Chambers

Occasionally someone, when in the main room of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Centre, will look up and read the words "Sibson Room" above the main door. Once in a while someone will read the Trust's Balance Sheet and see the words "Sibson Award". So what does this rather different name stand for? Richard Sibson, Sib to his friends, was a foundation member of the Ornithological Society in 1940, and of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust in 1974, he later become its chairman. But he was more than

that. In the view of many early bird-watchers he was the founder and main supporter of popular bird-watching in New Zealand from the 40s onwards. He was the person who took birdwatching to the people and enthusiastically encouraged them to embrace it at a time when such an interest was regarded as eccentric and unusual.

He was born in Kent, England on 27 May, 1911 and was educated at King's School, Rochester. This was followed by the reading of classics at Oxford University and then 4 years of teaching at a school in Cheshire. It was during his early years of schooling in Kent though, that he discovered "the gentle art of bird-watching", and soon he was making regular excursions to the salt marshes and wet areas of the River Medway nearby in search of them. It was here that his bird-watching interest was initially stimulated and in later life he would talk of it fondly and of its similarity to the Miranda foreshore to which he would make comparisons.

Not only did the wading birds attract him in those early years but he also became absorbed in the many garden birds around his home and in the fields beyond. His copious field notes recorded the first songs for the season of Blackbirds and thrushes, the first sightings after migration of Spotted Flycatchers, warblers and swallows, and the start of the nesting season of many of the garden birds.

Sib left England in 1939 just prior to the Second World War and travelled to New Zealand where he immediately got employment as a teacher at King's College at Mangere, in those

days situated in the countryside near Auckland. He always said his salary at the time of arrival was meagre but this was compensated for by the handiness of King's College to the "Causeway" and "Chinky's Spit", to where he could comfortably bike, often with college students in tow. These two areas were early discoveries and often rich in both godwits and knots. The "Causeway" was the road that linked the mainland to Puketutu Island, where the Auckland sewage works now is, and "Chinky's Spit" was an area of land that jutted into the Manukau Harbour, now buried somewhere under the Auckland Airport. In the 40s and early 50s it was an area of market gardens mostly run by Chinese. There was no such thing as political correctness in those days.

As a school teacher Sib quickly set up a birdwatching group which went by the name of the "King's College Bird Club". This club always had an attendance of about 30 students and one of its first far-afield excursions in August 1942 was to Miranda, undertaken on bikes in the school holidays. This has been recorded in the Miranda Trust's "Newsletter 16" of February 1995 by Gordon Nicholls who was one of the bird club cyclists. The success of this excursion led to further explorations but to handier locations.

After the war Sib finally bought a car. This allowed him to travel further afield to the shellbanks of Karaka on the south Manukau Harbour and then on a regular basis to the Miranda he had "discovered" on a bike. On

*Photos: Top three photos, Dick Sibson the teacher. Bottom some of the Kings College Bird Club on Big Chicken Island. Stuart Chambers is at the back.*





most excursions he was accompanied by students.

As always, on any excursion, his enthusiasm for birds was ever present and infectious and many were touched by him. In those days his one pair of binoculars had to be shared around ten to a dozen people so birds were only glimpsed, rather than properly studied, but no one cared. They were glad for the glimpse and pleased to be out with him. At that time Sib had no telescope or camera. Photographing birds to him was another discipline and in some ways, in his eyes, it demeaned the occasion. The satisfaction of seeing and learning the bird, to him, was enough.

Other than the King's College Bird Club, in the 1940s there was the fledgling Ornithological Society of which Sib was the Auckland organiser and his role there encouraged the society to grow. There was also Forest and Bird and the Auckland branch ran interesting excursions to places such as Bethells Beach to see Spotted Shags and New Zealand Dotterel, Motuihe Island to see Pipits and also Bellbirds in the coastal Pohutukawa, and Kawakawa Bay and Miranda to see shorebirds. Most of these trips were led by Sib who, in the late 40s, usually arrived to confront the gathered bird-watchers in collar and tie and tweed jacket and brown dress shoes. Occasionally Graham Turbott from the Auckland Museum also led trips or accompanied Sib as a joint leader. Such excursions were informative and enjoyable.

On one of these trips away Sib met up with Ross McKenzie from Clevedon. Ross was a First World War man, missing a leg and with some ear discomfort from shell shock. He was a very keen botanist but somehow Sib got to talking and Ross in no time became an ardent follower of Sib and his birds. So was put in place a great duo, which really got popular bird-watching underway in the Auckland and South Auckland region. Coupled with the King's College Bird Club, short forays to Kara-

ka and then longer ones to Miranda, seemed to be ongoing events, and new places became explored and their unknown bird potential assessed. Sib also led trips of the Bird Club to many of the islands of the Hauraki Gulf where boys would stay for up to two weeks in December and experience the old New Zealand and its bird life. These excursions were to places of endless Bellbird song and the wailing of shearwaters and petrels by night. They were to become occasions fixed in the memories of many a King's boy.

There was no doubt that Sib was a much loved school teacher. It has been written that schoolboys love an intellectual eccentric and that really was Sib. It was nothing for him to have the blackboard covered in shorebird bills rather than Latin verbs, and often in his classroom there would be the aroma of a beach-wrecked Cooks Petrel or some such rarity. It has also been written that Sib was the educator rather than the teacher and that seems to sum him up.

With the advent of the Ornithological Society in 1940, set up by a small group of mainly scientists and Sib the Latin teacher, bird-watching became more organised and with the help of Ross and Hetty McKenzie it started to touch a further group of people. And this was where the Miranda Naturalists' Trust came into it. People were visiting the area more and more but there were problems. The roads to Miranda were poor and hard on cars and because the area was restricted to high tide viewing only it was not always convenient.

That was when a group from the Auckland Ornithological Society decided it was time to make the area more accessible and the idea of a lodge came into their thinking. Sib became very interested in this concept and was soon made the chairman of the new organisation, he held this office from 1976 to 1980.


From that time onwards, until his death, he continued to promote bird-watching and Miranda as essen-

tial parts of a rounded New Zealand character. With Miranda he adopted a role as a father figure to the idea and never failed to promote it whenever he could. Many of those left to get on with the building of the lodge were treated to short Sib missives from time to time thanking them for what they were doing and for their continued involvement. He also retained a fund-raising role for the organisation and many a King's old pupil was approached by him for money.

Hence when the time arrived to open the Shorebird Centre it was felt that Sib should be the person to do it and so he is commemorated on a plaque in the building and the main room of the building is named after him.

The Sibson Award was set up similarly. On his 80th birthday, organised by his daughter Penny, the Trust decided to create a Sibson Award as a present to him to commemorate his role in establishing bird-watching and bird research. This fund was to be collected and used to finance worthy bird projects from time to time. It was to be administered by the MNT. Today the fund contains something like \$35,000.

Those wanting to learn more about Richard Sibson can read obituaries to him in *Notornis*, *The Journal of the Ornithological Society*, Volume 41, Part 4, December 1994, and Newsletter 14, the Miranda Trust's journal, of August 1994. He is also recorded in *Bateman's New Zealand Encyclopaedia*, Fifth Edition, Page 580.

Sib died on July 13th, 1994 aged 83. It was said of him that until just before he died he was still putting pen to paper with his usual effusiveness, enthusiasm and adjectival ability. So when you next encounter the name Sibson, or see his name on the wall of the Centre, just give a quick thought to a great watcher of birds, shorebirds in particular, and remember that it is largely thanks to him that the buildings are there and the international importance of Miranda is recognised. 

# from the Manager

Keith Woodley

The transition from drought to winter seemed rather dramatic. By the end of May there had been some rain – fitful for the most part, but sufficient to leave several small puddles on the bed of Widgery Lake. Otherwise, the bed itself remained as it had been since the digger did its work in the middle of March – a bare expanse of shell. The intention had been to ‘clean’ it of dried algae and



some of the reed beds that were beginning to take over. As it happened, the outcome was more a ‘scorched earth’ approach with everything including all the reeds taken out. Thus from scraped bank to scraped bank all that remained was levelled shell. Of course, if weather patterns had followed those of the last few years, the restoration of the lake would have commenced with the rains of early April. Only they did not arrive. So the long dry summer continued, with some long time locals of the district declaring it to be the longest dry spell in over 60 years. So for day after day the dominant feature in front of the centre remained Widgery Shell Pit.

Then in early June the rain came... and lingered. By July there was a metre of water in the lake, and as a water feature – a smooth pane of sky and foliage reflections – it looked splendid. Indeed, all the surrounding paddocks came to look somewhat similar, except there the extensive pools were attended by huge flocks of birds. In the paddocks behind the cottage were hundreds of oystercatchers, stilts and gulls. There were also godwits and a few Banded Dotterel, along with Spur-winged Plovers, White faced Herons and a White Heron. There were, as well, a few brave Mallards and Paradise Shelducks; for periodically from around the district, there came the gunshots of duck shooting season.

The SIPO were particularly active, with constant comings and goings between wet paddocks and the shore. But the first migration departure I saw this year did not come until 9 July. That afternoon I watched four flocks heading out, the first just before 1400 hrs, the others between 1630 and night fall. This was considerably later than the dates of the first known departures in recent years, which were usually around 24 June. Indeed last

ing departure. Approaching the hide on reconnaissance for wader banding scheduled that weekend I became aware of birds overhead – 41 oystercatchers in good formation heading south. What was surprising, apart from the hour, was that they were largely silent. It was only the sound of wings that had alerted me. As I watched there came one or two individual calls – but quite sporadic. This is quite unlike the pattern of most if not all afternoon/evening departures,

when the birds are calling constantly. Further to the west there were several dozen other birds on the same bearing, but strung out somewhat more loosely. Those I lost sight of against dark cloud, but the first flock I followed until they were out of view – still on course slightly to the west of south.

In further variations on the norm, Miranda is blessed this year with the most diverse list of over wintering tundra-breeding birds for some years. Along with the 600 or so Bar-tailed Godwit and several hundred Red Knot, there are 14 Ruddy Turnstone, one Red-necked Stint and one Black-tailed Godwit. However, two further species are of particular note. The first is Curlew Sandpiper, four of which are still here. That in itself is noteworthy, but even more remarkable is that this species, once a regular feature on the Firth – albeit in small numbers, have been

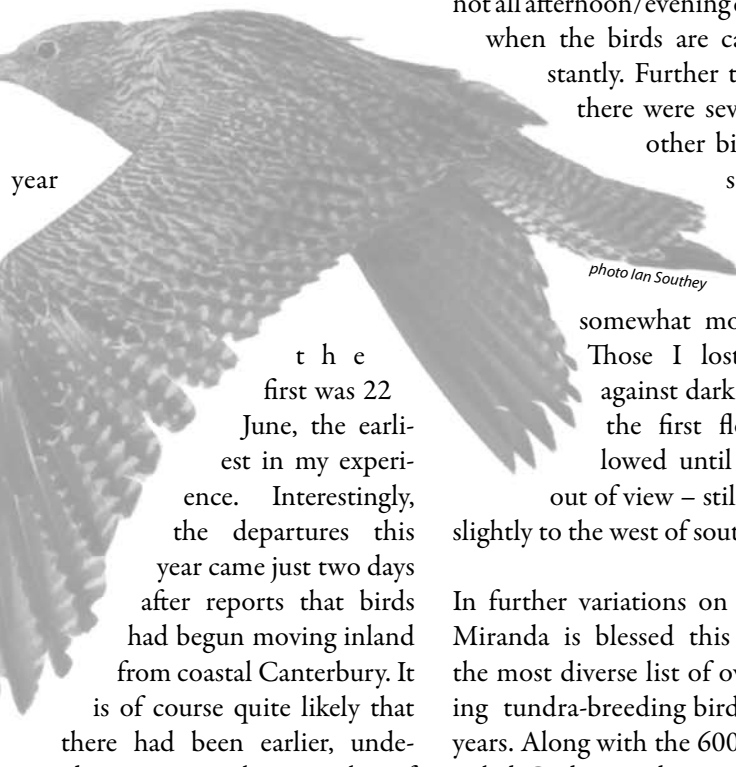



photo Ian Southey

At 0730 hours on 12 July I watched something a little different – a morn-

largely absent for over 10 years. Their disappearance has coincided with data from Australia which show an alarming decline in the entire population. Whether the four birds here, presumed to be immature, reflect a good breeding season last year can only be speculative.

The status of the other species is almost a mirror image of Curlew Sandpipers. Until around 2000 Eastern Curlew were regulars among the wader flocks on the Firth of Thames, with anywhere from one to thirteen usually present. Then they were gone, apart from one or two fleeting records in the interim. This too appears to correlate with a marked decline in the flyway population. So the immature bird reported from Kaiaua in late June was quite an event. Over the next two weeks it was regularly found roosting among a few oystercatchers, stilts, godwits and gulls directly opposite Kaiaua Motors. This location also served up echoes of previous years. Curlews are exceptionally shy, wary birds which generally do not permit close approach. In a mixed flock of waders they are often the first to alarm and depart. Yet in past years it was not uncommon to have the few birds present that season roosting at Kaiaua – the most densely settled area anywhere on the Miranda coast. Still, like those oystercatchers departing south into the depths of a south-


ern winter, one has to assume these birds know what they are doing! 

### Shorebird Centre Garden from Maria Stables- Page

The Shorebird Centre was most fortunate to gain the services of Chas Rhind a local farmer. Chas spent three weeks working tirelessly rotary slashing and generally doing the hard tasks that the garden requires. At the beginning of May, when the pond was still dry, he cleared the weeds off the island (By the end of his work here the pond did have some water in it.) Thanks to Chas we are also rid of the pile of rubbish that had accumulated behind the building.

Following hot on the heels of Chas was Esther from Taumaranui and Ann from Auckland who spent days removing drought-stricken plants and weeds. They appeared tireless as well!

June has seen the pond finally fill to over the one metre mark. Yes, the poles now have height indicators on them.

There is a garden working bee scheduled for Saturday 30 October. The spring growth will be upon the garden with vengeance so please mark this day in your diary and let's not lose all the fabulous work that has been done this year. 


## OSNZ Wader Census

Each year the Ornithological Society organises two censuses of the Firth of Thames waders. These are some of the provisional results of the 2010 winter census, held on 20 June 2010.

These results are for the entire Firth of Thames, not just the Miranda area.

Species	Number
Pied Oystercatcher	8424
Variable Oystercatcher	123
N.Z. Dotterel	27
Banded Dotterel	117
Wrybill	2010
Eastern Curlew	1
Black-tailed Godwit	1
Bar-tailed Godwit	912
Red Knot	92
Curlew Sandpiper	4
Red-necked Stint	1
Pied Stilt	5111
Black/Smudgy Stilt	4
Total Waders	16827
Black Shag	16
Pied Shag	318
Little Black Shag	4
Little Shag	5
White-faced Heron	582
White Heron	2
Royal Spoonbill	11
Spur-winged Plover	172
Black-backed Gull	264
Red-billed Gull	1335
Black-billed Gull	170
Caspian Tern	36
White-fronted Tern	24
Pukeko	50

The Census was organised by Tony Habraken, thanks to all of those involved.

If you'd like to take part in this activity then the next round of census es are in November 2010. You can contact the Shorebird Centre for details of the Firth of Thames Census, or to find out if there is a census in your region contact your local OSNZ representative. Visit [www.osnz.org.nz](http://www.osnz.org.nz). 

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Contact the Centre to order - we will ship! 09 2322781

# Mission Impossible

by Estella Lee

Since Miranda Naturalists' Trust set up the sister relationship with Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve in 2004, people from Miranda have been going to Yalu Jiang to do shorebird surveys almost every year. After all these years of survey, the Miranda people saw changes in Yalu Jiang region and understood well that the wetland was under enormous development pressure.

They don't want to see another version of Samangeum in Korea. They want to do something. They want to convince the Chinese Government to save the wetland for the birds. It is very much contradictory with the Chinese Government's thinking. It is an impossible target to achieve. Anyway, they still want to try. They planned to carry out the "Mission Impossible" in April 2010. They needed a Chinese to help. They invited me. Though the chance of success was very minimal, I still committed myself because the work they are doing is necessary and meaningful.

Five of us, David our Chairman, Adrian, Gillian, Keith and I, flew to Shenyang, China via Seoul, South

Korea on April 16<sup>th</sup> 2010. I was told the temperature at this time of the year should be above 10°C. When we got to Seoul, it was 7°. By the time we arrived at Shenyang, it was 3°. The mountain was still covered with snow. I was not warned that it could be that cold. I was not warned about the tough living condition either.

There was no heating in the building where we stayed. We felt thankful that our bedrooms were heated from time to time. Our rooms were on the first floor. The only "sit down" toilet was on the ground floor. There were two more toilets in the building. Both of them were for people who could squat. Fatty like me will not be able to stand up again after doing my business. So, when I needed to relieve myself in the middle of the cold nights, I had no choice but to go downstairs for the sit down toilet. Every time after I finished, I was wide awake and needed some time before I could get back to sleep.

The shower had no shower curtain. There was no way to dry my feet after the shower as everywhere was wet. So, with my cold and wet feet, I had to rush back to the cold room and dry my feet quickly so that I could warm myself under the duvet in my bed.

I was not warned that I had to stand at the water front in the cold wind for 3 to 5 hours everyday for over a

week to do bird counting AND there was NO TOILET! There was no bush to hide. Everywhere were farming ponds. We would be lucky to find a meter high hiding place for a toilet! In some days there were no lunch or a very late lunch and the departure time could be as early as 4 o'clock in the morning.

It was freezing cold with strong wind and rain on the first two days and the last day of bird counting. I had 5 layers of clothing, plus one polar fleece jacket, one good wind proof jacket, 2 long johns, 2 layers of socks, 2 pairs of gloves, etc. I had more clothes on than my Antarctic trip. I was still shaking with cold. It was not only a "Mission Impossible". It was a "Mission Indescribable". Well, I told myself, I did not come here for a vacation. I came for a mission. The Miranda people can sacrifice their own leisure time, pay their own airfare and expenses to come so many times. Why shouldn't I?

I just can't imagine how the Miranda people can survive these kinds of conditions for so many years and still want to come again and again!!! I want to salute them!

Anyway, to talk to the Chinese government officials was our dream. We were very lucky to have the chance to meet some of the high ranking government officials on the second day we arrived. Their sudden visit, gave us surprise and joy. Though we could only talk to them briefly about the birds and the wetland, we had passed the message of how important Yalu Jiang wetland was.



*Estella Lee, all rugged up for long hours on the seawall of Yalu Jiang. Photo Keith Woodley.*



We also had a lunch meeting with the head of the Dandong Conservation Department. Mr. Hua is new to the post. New people normally have more enthusiasm and drive. He agreed that China should save the wetland for the shorebirds. He told us he wanted to do that too. However, according to China's government working system, the leaders from the central government are the people in charge. If we can convince the head of the central government to give an order, the wetland will be saved. He suggested us to get the international NGO like WWF to lobby the central government. We decided to send our survey reports to the Chinese Government through the international NGOs.

The climax of our operation was to give a presentation at the Wetlands International Conference while the influential people were still there. Adrian, Gillian, David and Keith had prepared the presentation and I had translated it into Chinese before we started our journey. We used almost a week's time to polish it while we were in Yalu Jiang. I, as the presenter felt a lot of pressure. There would be approximately eighty people listening to me. Among them, there would be government officials, staff from other national nature reserves, bird experts and professors. Would I be like teaching a fish to swim? Mandarin is not my mother tongue. Would I be able to talk freely with this second language of mine? There were a number of key messages I must present well in the presentation. They were not written on the slides. I need to memorize them by heart.

It was the only chance we had. I had to do it. I had to give my best shot. I had to hit the bulls eye too. I practised the presentation more than twenty times. I was not able to sleep well the night before and had all sorts of nightmare.

The tactic we used was the positive approach. We wanted to raise the national pride of the audience and to impress them that Yalu Jiang is of paramount importance. It feeds the migrant birds from a lot of countries. It is treasured by people all over the world. It is the most precious jewel of the crown. China should be proud of it and protect it.

The message was well received. When I talked, there was absolute silence. Everybody paid close attention. Nobody moved or talked. There was applause two or three times during the talk and a big round of applause at the end of the talk too.

The presentation was touching and well written. Well done, folks! The message should have gone through. Whether the audiences are the decision makers or not, at least we would have more supporters and we had empowered them to talk to the Chinese government and the general public. All the hardship we had endured was worth while. Our team effort had not been in vain.

Yalu Jiang wetland is really a great place for the birds. Each day we saw thousands and thousands of birds. A lot of times we could see more than thirty thousand birds roosting together. When they took flight to-



*Top. Doug Watkins of Wetlands International, Gillian Vaughan, David Lawrie, Estella Lee and Keith Woodley at the Yellow Sea Ecoregion Collaboration Workshop in Donggang, where Estella Lee presented a very well received talk of the importance of Yalu Jiang National Nature reserve (Bottom). Photos Adrian Riegen and Gillian Vaughan*

gether, it was just fabulous! This year we counted over 175,000 birds in the week long survey.

Yalu Jiang wetland is very important for the birds. We must do our best to protect it. Miranda will send a survey report to the Chinese Central Government through an international NGO after we come back to Auckland. We have done our best. May God help us too! 🐦

# Shorebirds of the Northern Hemisphere

by Richard Chandler.

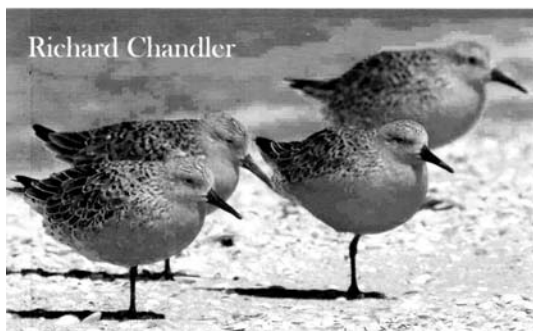
2009. Helm. Soft cover 448 pp. \$98.50

When choosing field guides most birders prefer ones with illustrated plates. Generally this means each plate can show age, sex and plumage distinctions for a given species, along with any other aspects such as a wing bar in flight or a tail/rump pattern which may be a diagnostic identification feature for that species. The same plate may also illustrate similar species - which can be essential when trying to sort out the tricky



## SHOREBIRDS OF THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE

Richard Chandler



identification of Australian honeyeaters for instance, or North American flycatchers, or small sandpipers.

Until recently these considerations usually won out over choosing a photographic guide which tended to have severe limitations. For instance many books only gave one or perhaps two images of a given species, which could be quite adequate for a bird that looks pretty much the same all year round, but which presents serious difficulties when it comes to other groups of birds. A single photo of a Bar-tailed Godwit for instance would not give the reader any idea of the extreme sexual dimorphism or annual plumage changes for this species, let alone other features such as

juvenile plumage or variations among different races. The quality of the photo itself could also be significant. A bird shown all or partly in shadow for instance, could conceal key features useful for identification. If it is shown only in profile, or partly turned away, this too could hide important distinctions.


Well, that used to be the case with photographic guides, but in recent years the quality bar has lifted dramatically. The advent of digital technology in particular has greatly expanded both the range and quality of bird images now available. There have

been a number of publications focusing on shorebirds in recent years, including two particularly good ones for North American species, *The Shorebird Guide* by O'Brian, Crossley and Karlson. (2006 Houghton Mifflin) and *Shorebirds of North America: The Photographic Guide* by Dennis Paulson (2005 Helm). But the latest appearance is a book with more relevance to this part of the world, for it includes all species of Northern Hemisphere shorebirds occurring in New Zealand and Australia.

The vast range of many of these species, encompassing for the most part significant changes to their appearance over different seasons at different locations presents a formidable

challenge to anyone wanting to record it all. Richard Chandler has spent years doing just that. I first encountered him in South Korea in 2007 during the Saemangeum monitoring project and last summer he spent a few days at Miranda; just two of the numerous sites where images were acquired.

This then is a useful resource for any shorebird enthusiast. Along with brief written descriptions, multiple pictures for each species provide an easily consulted guide. There is much here to assist with identification questions, along other issues such as plumage variations among races. For most species there are flight images, or at the very least, a wing stretch, which addresses a major deficiency of many earlier photographic guides. Most photos are taken by the author but where necessary they have been sourced elsewhere thus greatly expanding the book's coverage

However there are, inevitably, limitations. Some species are more comprehensively covered than others. Then again with some species, sorting out age and race variations in plumage for instance, is still very much a work in progress. The work of Jesse Conklin along with Phil Battley, referred to in issue 75 is expanding our knowledge of such variation in Bar-tailed Godwits. Similarly, there is still much to learn about variations among Red Knot populations. But for the moment, when it comes to photographic identification of shorebirds, this book is as good as it gets. 

Keep up-to-date with events  
visit  
[www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz](http://www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz)



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## 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.

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. 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. Drop in to investigate, or come and stay a night or two.

## Accommodation

The Shorebird Centre has bunkrooms for hire and two self-contained flats:

Per bed / night member \$ 15.00

Per bed / night non-member \$ 20.00

Hire of Sandpiper member \$ 50.00

Hire of Sandpiper non-member \$ 60.00

Hire of Whimbrel member \$ 50.00

Hire of Whimbrel non-member \$ 70.00

For further information contact the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno 2473

Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781 Email: [shorebird@farmside.co.nz](mailto:shorebird@farmside.co.nz)

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

### Membership of the Trust entitles you to:

Four Miranda News issues per year.

A discount on overnight accommodation

Invitations to Trust Events

The right to attend the AGM

The right to vote for council members

### Membership Rates :

Ordinary Member - \$ 40.00

Family Member - \$ 50.00

Overseas Member- \$ 50.00

Life Member, under 50 - \$ 1200

Life Member, 50 & over - \$ 600

## Want to be involved?

### Friends of Miranda

A volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre. If you'd like to help out contact Keith. Helping out can be anything from assisting with the shop, school groups or meeting people down at the shellbanks. Regular days for volunteer training are held. Contact Maria for details.

### Long term Volunteers

Spend four weeks or more on the shoreline at Miranda. If you are interested in staffing the visitor centre, helping with school groups or talking to people on the shellbank for a few weeks contact Keith to discuss options. Free accommodation is available in one of the bunkrooms. Use of a bicycle will be available.

### 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.

### Contribute to the Magazine

If you've got something you've written, a piece of research, a poem or a great photo send it in to MNT News. If you want to discuss your ideas contact Gillian Vaughan, [gillianv@actrix.co.nz](mailto:gillianv@actrix.co.nz).

### Help in the Miranda Garden

While our formal gardening program has ceased if you do have some spare time while around the Centre please feel free to do any garden maintenance you can see needs doing!

### Become the Editor

This one's not always on the list but if you are looking to be in the middle of the information loop and take on a bigger role in the Trust then MNT News is looking for a new editor. Contact Keith or Gillian if you'd like to discuss the details.



# Winter at Miranda

