

MIRANDA

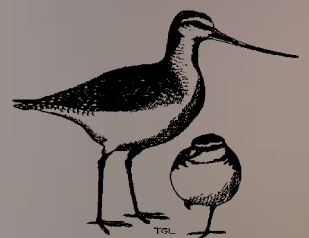
Naturalists' Trust

May 2011 Issue 81

NEWS



Shorebirds and Disturbance
Bohai Bay in Danger
Farming and Shorebirds



May 2011 Issue 81

Upcoming Events - note the times!

May 21 Sunday 9 a.m.
Annual General Meeting:
Birdwatching FIRST as early tide
TALK 11 a.m
Guest Speaker: Dr Robert Hoare –
The Ghosts on the Coast and other
Mythic Moths of Miranda

June 19 Sunday
OSNZ - Firth of Thames, Wader
Census: Phone Tony Habraken 09
238 5284 for details

June 19th (Sun) 2011 OSNZ
Firth of Thames Wader Census
Contact the Centre for details,
all welcome!

August 27th (Sat) Working Bee
and Winter Pot Luck Dinner
Guest Speaker: Tony Wilson –
Birding Travels
Working Bee 10a.m.-3p.m. Bird-
watching 4p.m.-6p.m. Then din-
ner. Come for one or all events.

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

Front Cover: The fenceline from Middle Gate, see article pg 9. Photo
Keith Woodley

Back Cover: The roost site at the southern end of Kaiaua is particu-
larly important from January to April but is regularly subject to dis-
turbance by vehicles. Photos Janie Vaughan.

Miranda Naturalists Trust Treasurer

At this year's AGM long term treasurer Ashley Reid will stand down from
the treasurers role. The trust is therefore seeking a new treasurer.

Below is a brief description of the role, a more complete job description is
available for anyone interested in the role. No detailed knowledge of shore-
birds is needed to fill this role, if you are interested in contributing to the
success of the trust in this way we would welcome your further enquiry.
Please contact Keith, Gillian or Ashley if you are interested in seeing a bit
more detail about the role.


Job Description

The treasurer is responsible for all receipts and payments and the allocation
of money received and expenditure made to the correct category within our
accounting system. The basis of the trust's financial system is the MYOB
Accounting package. Duties include

- Bank Reconciliations (Currently weekly)
- Maintain Accounting Records
- Annual Financial Statements to be prepared and presented for Audit
- Financial report to be prepared for each ordinary council meeting.
- Keep wages and salary records
- Pay PAYE Tax and GST Tax promptly when due.
- Arrange for Annual Stocktake in December.

To assist the Treasurer we do a considerable proportion of our payments
through Internet Banking, and we complete our PAYE returns through the
internet format set up by IRD.

I hope the above is helpful – I am willing to assist the new treasurer with any
help needed to get started.

Ashley Reid 

From the Blackboard
01 May 2011

Arctic Migrants

Bar-tailed Godwit	300
Red Knot	300
Turnstone	3
Golden Plover	12
Curlew Sandpiper	2
Terek Sandpiper	1
Marsh Sandpiper	1

New Zealand Species

Pied Oystercatcher	
Wrybill	2000
Banded Dotterel	120
NZ Dotterel	
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-billed Gull	
Red-billed Gull	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	
Pied Stilt	1600
Royal Spoonbill	22
White Heron	2

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The Newsletter of the Miranda
Naturalists' Trust is published
four times a year to keep mem-
bers 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 repro-
duced without permission.

Shorebirds and Disturbance

Ian Southey

A large flock of birds in flight is one of the truly great wildlife experiences no matter how often you have experienced it. This spectacle of swirling birds happens as a matter of course as flocks of shorebirds in the bigger harbours approach their high tide roosts each day and choose their places to settle. It can also be repeated when the birds are disturbed, usually by predators or people. Often they will land again



fairly quickly but on occasion they may circle for long periods or leave an area completely. While sometimes it seems people flush birds for pleasure it is usually an inadvertent consequence of other activities. While this can definitely ruin a good day's birding it doesn't appear to be good for the birds either. Given the other difficulties faced when trying to keep birds and people living together these days the effects of disturbance need further consideration. Various aspects of disturbance have been studied for several species of shorebirds under different circumstances and, while there is definitely more to learn, much has become known.

The impacts of disturbance can be understood as a balance of risk and reward using energy balance as a currency. While birds need good food sources and roosting space it must be available with an acceptable risk and cost as perceived by the birds. The energy required for movements to and from good safe areas for roosting and feeding provides the most obvious cost but if a satisfactory balance with food intake cannot be found the chance of starvation and death or injury from predation will increase.

In response to danger birds also secrete stress hormones (corticosterone) which change their behaviour

and physiology to assist escape. In several studies on wild birds chronically elevated levels of these hormones have been shown to detrimentally affect body condition, reproduction and survival, but sometimes there are no observable clues that this is happening. Similar work does not appear to have been carried out for shorebirds yet so there may be further costs to disturbance than those outlined here.

Different species of shorebirds have remarkably different temperaments, varying from the relaxed Wrybill to the wary Whimbrel. Natural behaviours are then modified by experience; frequent non-threatening use of an area by people can lead to habituation but there is always a point beyond which the bird's well-being may be impacted. Studies of several species of shorebirds show that as you approach a feeding or resting shorebird it will become aware of you and its heart rate will begin to rise, reflecting increased metabolic costs. As the bird becomes more vigilant you may then become aware of a change in behaviour; as it spends more time watching its surroundings its feeding rate slows or it becomes obviously awake, eventually becoming fully alert and ceasing its prior behaviour altogether. This means that energy

expenditure is rising while the energy intake falls. If you push its tolerance further it will move away, anywhere from a short shuffle to a long flight depending on the severity of the disturbance and the potential to resume the same activity in the new place. Recovery times, measured both by heart rate and return times to the same place or activity, vary with the severity of disturbance. When food or roosting space is scarce options are few and disturbance may be tolerated to a much greater degree than normal. While the birds may appear to be relaxed they are not, they simply have no choice.

Birds have a natural fear of predators, a general response to all predators is flocking behaviour. Not only is there a good chance that another bird will be taken instead of you, sentry duty can also be shared increasing the over all levels of vigilance with less effort from each bird. Although larger flocks are more likely to take flight than smaller flocks, the birds in these flocks are able to feed more intensively or relax more deeply.

The response of roosting shorebirds to Harriers is fairly obvious but measured. Harriers are tolerated when working away from the roost but a direct approach or an overhead flight, even at great height, will flush

Human use of our beaches is increasing, leading to increasing disturbance for coastal birds. Photo Ian Southey.







A Harrier being mobbed by godwits at Big Sand Island, Kaipara Harbour. Photo Ian Southey

the shorebirds. The most common response is to fly around and then settle but occasionally the Harrier will be mobbed at a low intensity, shadowed by flocks of shorebirds which ruin any chance of a surprise attack until they leave the area. Interestingly shorebirds respond more strongly to skuas, with more birds flushing and from a greater distance; perhaps a memory of greater danger from their shared Arctic breeding grounds. In other countries shorebirds face a much wider suite of avian predators that threaten them in different ways such as falcons that can snatch them out of the air and owls that hunt at night.

Cats and other ground predators are able to catch roosting shorebirds in New Zealand. Although it is rarely seen, the consumed corpses are sometimes found. This kind of predation impacts on choice of roost sites, which clearly reflects a desire for safety. In general shorebirds like wide open spaces and, as much as they can, avoid vegetation they cannot see over the top of or that could hide an enemy. They are even fussier at night and will travel further to the safest places they can reasonably get to, often an open space with a pale background such as sand or water so that they can see danger coming in the dark.

People are regarded by the birds as another kind of predator. Since legal protection from shooting in New

Zealand in 1940 people do not usually kill shorebirds and the birds have therefore become more approachable - but only to a point. Observations clearly show that the birds still recognise a level of risk and just a person walking or running on the beach is enough to cause a disturbance. Walking a dog clearly elevates the perception of threat, even more so if it is running free.

Responses to vehicles are generally more subdued but where the road passes close to a roost a slowing or stopped vehicle may cause birds to move away. At the Stilt Ponds at Miranda noisy vehicles (usually large trucks and motorbikes) may flush the entire flock of roosting shorebirds. There is some evidence to suggest that birds respond in a similar way to boats. Large commercial aircraft are often ignored even when passing overhead but light aircraft, microlites and helicopters, clearly do flush birds. Aerobic manoeuvres by a light plane over the main roost at Miranda creates a very strong disturbance even when very high, perhaps because the movements resemble those of stooping aerial predators like Peregrine Falcons or Hobbies that are major predators in other parts of the world. Kite surfing also creates a strong disturbance that can clear roosts, again perhaps due to the quick and erratic movements of the kites. Model aircraft can have similar impacts.

Flying from feeding areas to high tide roosts twice a day is already one of the larger costs facing shorebirds and the increased costs from displacement can be considered in similar terms. Generally shorebirds choose safe roosts that require minimal energy for commuting. Energetic costs limit

the distance that can be travelled between a roost and viable feeding sites so large areas of good feeding habitat go unused when there are no acceptable roost sites within a reasonable distance of them. The extreme consequence of losing a roost site to disturbance could be the loss of feeding habitat if no acceptable alternative roosts are available.

Prior to migration the energy intake of Red Knots must increase by about 17% to store the necessary fuel for their big flight. The extra weight also means that flight costs almost double and this changes the balance of cost and reward. Overseas studies on Red Knot and Dunlin show that birds may shift their roosts at this time. This is likely to be the period of maximum vulnerability as there is tremendous risk of failure to complete a migration, which means they cannot breed, or may die on the way.

Discussing the problem of disturbance in terms of general principles and highlighting some of the more drastic examples gives a rather extreme perspective. Some studies have suggested that responses of birds to people do not actually lead to any measurable impacts on the numbers of shorebirds using a site, yet others do. Some of the results may seem counter intuitive. Occasional spectacular disturbance events may be of much less consequence than frequent small ones that people may not normally be noticed if the birds return to their former activities.

In fact shorebirds have always lived in a dangerous world and their natural responses to natural predators are simply extended to impacts by humans. The birds usually have a degree of flexibility that can allow them to

Pictures facing page: Background, Kite surfing at the Karaka Shellbanks (Ian Southey), a major roost on the Manukau Harbour. Small pictures - Left: flying model airplanes on the roost site at Kaiua (Ian Southey). Right: A Helicopter flying low over the main roost at Miranda (Janie Vaughan).

live with many of these problems to some degree and people are no exception. When feeding and roosting opportunities are not limited the birds cope by moving to quieter places or choosing quieter times of the day. As these resources become limited local populations are affected. The trick is to work out how far these coping mechanisms can stretch and whether, or not, there are consequences for the viability of shorebird populations.

Analysis of disturbance in terms of energetic cost and benefit places the impacts of disturbance in an ecological context so any flexibility in the responses of the birds is actually a property of the environment. The reduction of areas suitable for feeding to mangrove expansion, increased sedimentation and eutrophication and the loss of traditional roosts to mangroves and other weeds and changes in land use have already contributed to a loss of leeway. Excessive disturbance is also habitat degradation. When birds are no longer able to compensate for the impacts of disturbance by adjusting their behaviour the carrying capacity of an area is reduced. In at least one study the impact of disturbance was rated as more harmful than actual habitat loss.


Looking at local examples disturbance has not clearly reduced population viability, although we are not in a position to disentangle it from other impacts. Some observed changes may, however, be consistent with intermediate level effects. At Miranda increasing use of the area near Taramaire by camper vans has turned a once important roost into a minor roost that is often not used by shorebirds. Combined with the loss of other roosts this leaves only the Stilt Ponds and Shellbanks as a

reliable, safe roost on very high tides in the Firth of Thames. Kidd's Shellbanks on the Manukau have reliably supported very high numbers of birds but in the last few years they have often been largely or entirely abandoned during late February and March, just prior to migration and birds seem to be commuting further from sub roosts at Kidd's to high tide roosts at Mangere or Whitford instead. During the higher tides in particular Kidd's has been heavily used by kite surfers in recent years. This particular period of abandonment suggests that the increased cost of flight for the heavier birds has made the level of disturbance at this roost unacceptable to them and forced them to travel to more distant roosts. Both of these examples imply an increased energetic cost to the birds but more importantly suggest a loss of the ability to withstand further detrimental changes to their roost sites, especially at Miranda.

Even if there have not been irredeemable consequences of disturbance locally these examples are clear signals that shortly there may be. Adverse impacts will generally add up to reduced fat storage prior to migration and this will reduce flight ranges, cutting safety margins and increasing the chance that birds will not complete the migration flight. Satellite tracking of godwits has shown that birds do fail to make it back to their breeding grounds with some bailing out on the way and others dying en route. Since the return of raptors to North America following pesticide regulation constant disturbance by them has meant that many shorebirds have been unable to put on weight as they once did. Their migration appears to have altered so they now fly shorter distances and stop more often. Dis-

turbance in New Zealand could potentially have similar impacts but the longer over sea legs limit the possibilities of changing migration strategies in a similar way.

Human disturbance has only recently become recognised as an environmental threat but it is significant. In the United States and Canada it is regarded as an ultimate factor threatening 23% and 35% of all of their endangered species respectively. In New Zealand there is a vastly greater threat from exotic species and many of our threatened species are already confined to islands and other remote places but the results of a similar analysis may be equally surprising once the problems have been adequately studied.

There are already some clear management guidelines for reducing disturbance to shorebirds from various studies. Reducing access and limiting some activities near key roosts and feeding sites has helped considerably overseas. Set back distances are often designated for coastal developments to avoid disturbance although these are usually set from flight responses of birds and do not take less obvious responses into account. It also seems that shorebirds recognise physical limits to disturbance. Consistent use of paths by people and the use of natural breaks in the landscape to direct them can mitigate these problems for at least some species. Good examples of such non-threatening use are the footpaths along the Esplanade at Mangere and the hide and fence at Miranda. Maintaining alternative sites for the key needs of shorebirds, especially roosts suitable for very high tides, would also provide a margin of safety when disturbance cannot be avoided. 

The increasing use of Ray's Rest by campervans has led to a decrease in birds using the Taramaire roost site. Photo Ian Southey



Visit to Miranda by an Education Group from Busan, South Korea.

Keith Woodley

The students waiting in the arrival hall looked cold. This was understandable given it was 8am on a Friday morning and they were clothed in their minimal kapa haka costumes, which meant bare feet for all and bare chests for the boys. But these kids from Birkdale Intermediate were keen to be there, as our Korean visitors discovered as they emerged from immigration. The rousing reception brought



Students from Nakdong Middle School, Morundae Elementary School and Birkdale Intermediate outside the Shorebird Centre

the immediate area of the terminal to a halt and then loud applause from everyone nearby. We were there to welcome a party of students, teachers and support staff from Busan, South Korea, here as part of a joint initiative developed by MNT and the Busan Education Department.

A key objective of MNT is to promote awareness of migratory shorebirds and their habitat requirements.

This has led to increasing involvement in activities along the Flyway, taking any opportunity to foster links between countries and shorebird sites. Such initiatives become even more important as severe pressures on shorebird habitat in the Yellow Sea region grow steadily worse. Following the visit of a delegation from Busan in 2009 it was agreed that MNT would facilitate links between schools in New Zealand and Korea.

With New Zealand colour-banded godwits recorded on the Nakdong Estuary at Busan, a tangible ecological link between the two already existed.

Following the delegation's visit Keith Thompson and I met with teachers from schools in the Hauraki-Waikato area, all of whom were enthusiastic about exploring opportunities for educational links with Korea. In December last year, we received notification that a group of 23 students, teachers and support staff were planning to come for six days commencing Friday 25 February 2011. Notification of the visit came just as school holidays here were starting so communicating with schools became somewhat challenging. Fortunately we had retained good links with Parawai School in Thames, as well as Birkdale Intermediate in Auckland, where Richard Coote the principal already had interests and connec-





tions with Korea. These two schools were therefore the obvious choices for hosting visits by the Korean students. In addition the Korean party was hosted for three nights at the centre.


In addition to studying shorebirds, activities for the students included investigating freshwater stream ecology at Wharau Regional Park with John Charteris, using microscopes to examine shorebird food – worms and crabs collected from the mudflats, and visiting the Torehape peat dome on the Hauraki Plains. The next two days were spent visiting Parawai, where the entire school turned out to welcome the visitors, and Birkdale which also provided an excellent programme of events. The final day in New Zealand was spent on Tiritiri Matangi. For the mud-sampling session on Sunday as well as the visit to Tiri we were joined by a small group of Birkdale students. A further bonus for the Koreans was that their Miranda visit coincided with the Kaiaua wine and food festival.

Overall we were left with very positive feelings from this exchange. The students clearly enjoyed the experience and, judging by the number of perceptive questions received, the educational component was also appreciated. The Busan officials expressed deep gratitude for the programme and our facilitation of their visit. They were also clearly impressed by the Shorebird Centre. There was very strong support for continuing with this programme and we are both looking to

organise further visits, as well as facilitate visits to Korea by New Zealand students. As for the New Zealand schools, they too were happy with proceedings. Richard Coote writes: 'Not only do they gain from meeting with children from another culture but they get a deeper understanding of the

difficulties of international conservation issues. Our students undertake a science study we call, 'The Hunt.' It asks them to decide if iwi should be allowed to resume cultural harvest of the Kereru and godwit? With the Kereru being a bird only found in New Zealand it is solely our problem, either we do what is needed and the Kereru survives or we don't and it goes extinct. With the godwit we have the chance to introduce to our students the complication of the flyway and the international effort needed. What better way to emphasise this than for them to meet people the godwit visits on the next leg of its journey.'

Once the New Zealand school year started we became aware of interest from other schools that would have liked to be included. Given the tight time frame we were faced with on this occasion, we were limited in what we could do. But we envisage widening the programme to include other schools in future visits. The Koreans also advised that they were setting up a website in both Korean and in English, which should make the task of organising future exchanges much easier.

As a postscript, the day after the Korean party flew out we had reports of the first departure of godwits from New Zealand for this season. Whether any of the birds leaving Otago were heading for Nakdong is not known, but it remains a tantalising possibility. 


Bohai Bay in Danger

One of the long held mysteries of the northward shorebird migration was "where are the Red Knots going?" Surveys around the shores of the Yellow Sea showed few large concentrations of knots, and it has only been in the last few years, through the work of Chris Hassell and the Global Flyway Network that we have come to understand that the area near Cao-feidian Industrial Park in the Bohai Bay is the main staging site for Red Knots on their way north.

Unlike Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve this is not an area that has any protection, and the team that is working in the area this spring has now sent out the following information:

"We now have some very disturbing news that has recently been passed onto us. There currently are plans to reclaim the internationally important Nanpu mudflat that we are currently working on after the destruction of Beipu. This is the last site for the Red Knots and thousands of other Shorebirds as they have been pushed into the several km strip of mudflat with the rest of the Northern Bohai Bay reclaimed. If you have not done so already I urge all people to write to their ministers to try and halt not only this reclamation but all that is occurring in the Yellow Sea at an alarming speed despite China signing an agreement with Australia CAMBA agreement."

While NZ does not have a formal link with China over migratory species as Australia does I would still urge members and interested parties to write to their ministers, the Ministers of Conservation, Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Environment to ensure they are aware of this development and how it will affect NZ's second most common migratory wader.

For more information visit www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au 

from the MANAGER

Keith Woodley

From the dense mat of saltmarsh stretching ahead along the shellbank, a few fence posts protrude. Several are all but buried, others sit at odd angles – strung with rusted barbed wire. The landward end of the fence line is now anchored in mangroves, the other just fades out. It is a largely unremarkable feature – for much



of our coastal environment is littered with such remnants – the detritus of human activity. But this one tells the story of a dynamic system; it illustrates just how quickly the Miranda coastline can change.

The fenceline was erected in September 1993, across what was then the tip of the shell spit. Where I am standing on the shellbank is directly in line with the middle gate on the road at the north end of the Stilt Ponds. The hide at that time sat a few metres to the north and faced a narrow area of embayed mudflat that was semi-enclosed by the spit. This was the main wader roost – it was not uncommon at high tide to have 8-10,000 birds massed immediately in front of the hide on the mud and up on the shell bank. The spit had also, however, become accessible to cattle. Alan Lane (the Lane family owns the coastal

block where our hide sits) tried to solve this problem by putting up the fence. It seemed to work for a while, but the constantly moving shell soon reduced its efficacy.

Since then the shellbank has extended several hundred metres further south; it has also broadened so that beyond what was the seaward end of the fenceline there is now 30 or 40 metres of saltmarsh and shell. Meanwhile the mangrove zone, which had been confined nearer the top of the embayed area further north, advanced southward and now completely smothers the entire bay. The hide is now located several hundred metres further south. The shell ridge, or chenier, system of the Miranda coast is, along with the wader flocks, a key feature and one we celebrate at the Centre. We know it is a dynamic, ever-changing system – the configu-

ration of the outermost shell ridge moved around by every major tide or weather event. But gradual changes in the landscape, or even ones that may be less gradual but which occur on a fairly regular basis, often slip from our consciousness. Living in a landscape one doesn't always detect alterations. But on this occasion the sight of the old fenceline, and the massive area that has developed beyond it, was a good reminder.

* * *

On 7 March Joy Gough reported what appeared to be a departure of about 50 godwits. This was the first record for Miranda this season but five days earlier a small departure had been reported from Blueskin Bay just north of Dunedin. There may have been further small departures from Miranda after that although numbers on the roost appeared to remain

relatively stable until 17 March, after which there was a steady stream of both godwits and knots heading out. As usual other species lingered longer, and a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, a Pectoral Sandpiper and about 20 Pacific Golden Plovers were still here by the second week of April. Meanwhile a Wandering Tattler was seen on the Open Day on 6 March, but was not reported subsequently, and a Marsh Sandpiper turned up on 9 April. Other records of inter-




Part of the crowd at the Christchurch Farewell to the Godwits. Photo Keith Woodley

est were a Glossy Ibis seen on the Stilt Ponds in early February, a Bittern flushed off the hide trail on 7 March, and a juvenile Black-fronted Tern, also on the Open Day, which then hung around over the next two weeks. On 13 March a flock of Gannets – estimated to be in excess of 300 – provided a spectacular display as they worked a section just off the coast between the hide and the centre. Finally while there was no breeding of Banded Rail on Widgery Lake this season, despite a copulating pair observed in January, at least two families – both with well developed chicks were seen in late March – one on the trail to the hide, and the other near the Limeworks gate.

Recessionary times here and abroad do not seem to have affected traffic through the Centre to any great extent. The past summer season appears to have been as busy as previous years – particularly in terms of visitors and shop sales. If there has been any drop-off in overseas visitors compared with last year it is not immediately apparent, as there have been plenty of people passing through from our usual main countries of origin – Australia, the UK and the US. There has been much in the way of other activity as well. As reported elsewhere in this issue we hosted, in late February, a school visit from Busan, South Korea. Coinciding with that was a visit from members of the New Zealand-China Friendship Society. Given our involvement with China, and our pressing concerns at shorebird habitat loss in the Yellow Sea, this was an excellent opportunity to explore further useful links with China. Around the same time we hosted two film crews, one of which was filming a documentary on godwits for Korean television. The other was filming for a series on our coasts – hosted by Craig Potton – in a follow up to last year's successful series on rivers. A particular highlight of this session was being able to direct the cameraman towards recording an actual departure of godwits.

Finally, in mid February the Miranda outreach programme caught up with an event that has been going for some years now, and which has, on occasions, induced interesting communications with the Shorebird Centre. For something like the last decade Christchurch has held a farewell to the godwits event on the shores of the Avon-Heathcote estuary at New Brighton. Now time and tides hold sway there just as they do for us at Miranda, and invariably each year this event ends up being scheduled prior to our own open day – sometimes as much as two weeks before, and always on a Sunday. The southern event also seems to draw considerable media attention including television network news coverage. Which is where the fun begins because invariably, as is the way with television news, presentation often supercedes content, which leads viewers to develop conclusions at variance with the facts. Thus often is the case our phone rings hot the next morning, the callers anxious to know why, if our event is not for another week or longer, have all the godwits already left? They know they have left because it was on TV last night.

This year I found myself in attendance at the event on Sunday 20 February as guest speaker. And I was most impressed. It is a Christchurch City Council event in association with OSNZ and Friends of the Avon-Heathcote, so is well organised and resourced. It is also well attended with over 900 people turning out. It is a fantastic occasion, which left me pondering yet again, the potential for a national celebration – as godwits are present, and depart from, sites from Invercargill to Parengarenga. Moreover there seems to be a great opportunity for an Auckland wide-event, given more than half of the godwits in New Zealand each year are found in the greater Auckland region. Alternatively a national festival each spring as the birds return to these shores. 

World Migratory Bird Day

World Migratory Bird Day is May 14th, an annual event promoting the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. This year's theme for World Migratory Bird Day is "Land use changes from a bird's-eye view".


"Flying thousands of kilometres each year, migratory birds have a unique perspective of the Earth. Unfortunately, this unrivalled view also enables them to notice the dramatic changes which are currently threatening many of our planet's ecosystems. Each year more and more of the sites migratory birds depend on during their journeys disappear. As these ecosystems change, there is no guarantee that the habitats migratory birds need along their migration path, will be there the next time they return."

"While human survival depends on these transformations of natural areas, a sustainable use of land is vital to reduce the impacts on our natural resources, such as water, soil, nutrients, plants and animals – including migratory birds."

To find out more about World Migratory Bird Day visit:

<http://www.worldmigratorybird-day.org/2011/> and click on the map to see events around the world. There are no registered events in NZ this year, that may change in future!

or go to

<http://www.wetlands.org/News-andEvents/CalendarofEvents/WorldMigratoryBirdDay2011/tabid/2559/Default.aspx> 

MINUTES OF THE 35th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST HELD AT THE SHOREBIRD CENTRE ON SUNDAY 23 MAY 2010 AT 1000 hrs.

PRESENT:

The Chairman (David Lawrie), Secretary (William Perry), Treasurer (Ashley Reid) and about 60 others.

APOLOGIES: Nancy Payne, David Crockett, Ruth Crockett, Brian Jones, Judy Piesse, Arn Piesse, Bruce Postill, John Gale, Alister Harlow, Estella Lee, Russell Thomas, Jackie King, Laurie King

APOLOGIES ACCEPTED (Gwenda Pulham / George Schischka)

MINUTES:

The minutes of the 34th AGM held on 17 May 2009 had been published in Issue 77 of "Miranda News".

The minutes were **TAKEN AS READ** and **APPROVED AS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD**.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES:

1. Charities Commission.
2. Car Park at Limeworks – Security continues to be an issue.
3. Minutes of Special General Meeting. Amendment of Constitution. Taken as read.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

The Chairman, David Lawrie, had published a report in Issue 77 of Miranda News.

Dorothy Mulvey died recently at the age of 92. She was a Life Member of Miranda Naturalists' Trust and had been a founder member.

David Lawrie reiterated some of the issues from his written report:

1. Local and International Advocacy – Research on godwit migration by Adrian Riegen and others; Publication of Keith Woodley's book; Visit from Brian McCaffery; MNT team to North Korea.
2. MNT Application to join the East Asian / Australasian Flyway.
3. MNT team to China in 2009 found that there had been further de-

struction of mudflat habitat in the name of reclamation.

4. Alister Harlow has become an active member of MNT Council.

5. Eila Lawton has retired as Field Course convener. Brigid Glass has replaced Eila as Field Course convener. David thanked Eila again for organizing the Field Courses – **APPLAUSE**.

6. Thanks to Janie Vaughan for facilitating the production of a sign in Kaiaua.

7. Acknowledgement of the contribution of the Muddy Feet initiative to research and restoration in the Firth of Thames with funding organised through MNT.

8. Cycleway Proposal.

9. Building Extension funding.

10. Next door neighbour has offered to sell us his house.

11. David Lawrie is resigning from the Chair of MNT Council. He is happy to have committed so much time to the job because of the other people who are also involved.

12. David thanked the people who have supported him throughout his tenure as Chairman. He specifically thanked Ashley Reid (Treasurer), Will Perry (Secretary), Gillian Vaughan (Editor of MNT News), Keith Woodley (Shorebird Centre Manager), all people who have served on MNT Council, Jeni Hensley, Maria Stables-Page, Kristelle Wi and countless volunteers

Moved that the Chairman's Report be adopted (David Lawrie / Betty Seddon) – **CARRIED** nem con.

Stuart Chambers asked why David Lawrie needed to retire as Chairman.

TREASURER'S REPORT: The Treasurer, Ashley Reid, formally presented his report on the finances of the Trust for the Year ending 31 December 2009 as published in Issue 77 of Miranda News.

Ashley commented that the profile of MNT has increased significantly.

Shop trading has increased.

Gross Profit on Shop Trading fell from \$28,778 in 2008 to \$24,974 in 2009.

TSB offered the best interest rate on the investment account and so he changed to TSB

Treasurer's Report and Auditor's Report moved (Ashley Reid / Phil Hammond) – **CARRIED** nem con.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Proposed that subscriptions for the year ending 31.12.2011 remain unchanged (Ashley Reid / Phil Hammond). **CARRIED** nem con.

ELECTION OF AUDITOR:

Lance Fielding of Gyde Wansbone proposed (Ashley Reid / Gwenda Pulham) **CARRIED** nem con.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Treasurer – Ashley Reid elected unopposed.

Secretary – William Perry elected unop-




posed.

11 nominees for 10 positions on Council, namely Alister Harlow, David Lawrie, Eila Lawton, Adrian Riegen, Gillian Vaughan, Phil Hammond, Len Taylor, Wendy Hare, Estella Lee, Emma Standyard, Keith Thompson.

Proposed (George Schishka / John Rowe) and the meeting AGREED that all eleven nominees for Council be ELECTED.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

- 1) Report of MNT's high quality of accommodation at a reasonable price.
- 2) Chris Thompson asked how many members are in MNT. Answer: 667. This total includes 621 listings in NZ and 46 overseas. There are 182 Life Members (172 in NZ and 10 overseas). Membership is static with a turnover of between 80 and 100 per annum.
- 3) Question from the floor regarding benefit of Charitable Trust membership. Answer: MNT has always been a Charitable Trust and it was necessary for us to re-register with the Charities Commission.
- 4) Parking area at Limeworks Gate – David Lawrie expressed thanks to Stuart Chambers for his help in establishing this improvement in security. DoC will renew the kissing gate; stiles are temporary.
- 5) David Lawrie also expressed special thanks to John & Stella Rowe for their contribution to establishing the new Car Park at the Limeworks Gate.
- 6) Keith Thompson commented that "E3 Call Home" by Janet Hunt won the NZ Post Award for Children's books.
- 7) Eila Lawton reported that E7 is now at Maketu.
- 8) Gwenda Pulham expressed praise for Maria, particularly for the impact she has made on the shop and on the profile of MNT.
- 9) Eila Lawton proposed a formal vote of thanks to David Lawrie for his contribution as Chairman of the Trust. Seconded by Betty Seddon. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY AND WITH APPLAUSE.
- 10) New next-door neighbours are quieter.
- 11) Renewed appeal for more gardeners.

The meeting closed at 1112 hrs. 

from the Chair

Gillian Vaughan

This report is to be presented at the Annual General Meeting and covers the activities of the Trust during the 2010 – 2011 year. I look forward to seeing as many members as possible at the AGM.



On an international front the Trust was active at many levels in 2010.

China:

In 2010 a team from Miranda, Adrian Riegen, David Lawrie, Estella Lee, Gillian Vaughan and Keith Woodley visited Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve (YJNNR) in Dandong, China. Threats to the reserve are becoming increasingly clear and the team walked away with a commitment to producing a report that the Reserve staff can use which shows the importance of YJNNR on a global scale. While it was hoped that this would be finished earlier the report is now nearing completion.

EAAFP

The importance of working within a framework where NGO's can work with countries to protect shorebirds and their habitat is becoming increasingly clear. In 2010 the Trust joined the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, and David Lawrie, as the international liaison of the MNT attended their meeting in Cambodia.

South Korean Visit

Throughout 2010, ably led by Keith Thompson, the Trust has been working towards an educational partnership with schools in Busan, South Korea. The hard work and effort of this group paid off in early 2011 with a visit from students from two South Korean schools to NZ. Further information about this visit is provided elsewhere in this issue. In addition to building the partnership and providing education to South Korean students this visit has led to stronger

links with several schools around the Firth of Thames and Auckland areas. These strong connections with schools are a must for the future protection of shorebirds.

In addition in October 2010 Keith Woodley visited Mokpo, South Korea, to address a symposium on migratory shorebirds hosted by the Korean National Parks Service and Shinan County.

Activities At Centre:

In addition to activities on an international scale the Trust has been very active close to home.

Courses

A new course was developed in 2010, the first Shorebird Counting Course was developed in conjunction with OSNZ and was held on the weekend of the November 2010 census. People from around the country attended this overnight course, and participants considered it to be a success, going home with a greater ability to count shorebirds than they arrived with.

As a follow on to the Miranda counting course a one day counting course was held in March 2011 by the OSNZ Bay of Plenty Region, to up-skill counters from that region. Again this was a joint venture between the MNT and OSNZ. Obviously there are very close links between the two organisations, and I am pleased to see the organisations working together on events like this.

The Shorebird Counting Course did undercut the normal Wader ID

course that the Trust usually runs at a similar time of year, now that we have a feel for how the course will work it is time to find a place for it in our calendar.

Other courses ran as normal, however the NZ Dotterel Conservation Management Course was cancelled in 2010, a lack of enrolments was probably due to funding restrictions on councils and government departments. This course has been cancelled on occasion before and I expect that it will return, as the training provided is very valuable to those involved in coastal shorebird protection.

I'd like to thank our new course convenor at this point, all courses run at the Centre require a large input of time to organise, Brigid Glass who has ably taken on the role this year, and pushed the new courses through to fruition.

If you are interested in any of the courses this year please contact the Centre.

Open Days

The normal round of open days occurred in 2010 with the now traditional Autumn migration day, AGM, Potluck dinner and then spring migration day in October to welcome the birds back. Each of these has been reported on in their own way in previous issue of MNT News.

At the 2010 AGM David Lawrie retired as Chair of the Trust, we are very lucky that he has chosen to stayed on the MNT council and taken a role pushing the Trust's agenda on an international stage. I was elected Chair at the first council meeting following the AGM. With the exception of this role change there were no changes to the makeup of the Council.

Staff and Volunteers

Keith Woodley, Maria Stables-Page and Kristelle Wi still make up the staff at the Shorebird Centre. Keith Woodley will be on leave for some of April, May and early June to devote time to his upcoming book, Maria and Kris will be covering in his ab-

sence, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them, and to acknowledge the strength of the team that now runs the Centre.

We receive support from volunteers on a regular basis and I would like to thank those that are a part of the Miranda team. Volunteers perform many different tasks for the Trust, from building new fences, gardening, assisting in the Centre and shop or helping at the shoreline and all of the help is appreciated.

A further group of volunteers are those that make up the Council, who have supported me through this year of transition from David's long term leadership. Council members put in a lot of work to keep the Trust and the Centre moving forward and I would like to thank them for their efforts.

Long term Treasurer Ashley Reid has indicated that he will be standing down as Treasurer at this AGM. Ashley has been Treasurer of the Trust since 1999 and will be leaving the Trust in a strong financial position, ready for its next round of growth. As Ashley moves on to other projects I would like to thank him, and on behalf of the Trust wish him all the best with his new projects.

We are looking for a new treasurer and magazine editor, if you have an interest in these roles please contact any council member or I.

Wider Community Activity:

While the international work that the Trust does is headline grabbing there is no doubt that there is work to do in New Zealand. In 2010, as with most years members of the Trust were seen giving talks around the country. OSNZ meetings, tramping and walking clubs, Forest and Bird meetings, Senior Net, Chinese Conservation and Education trust meetings amongst other were all treated to various talks from members of the Trust. If you have a group that would benefit from a talk by MNT members let Keith at the Centre know, or


contact me directly on gillianv@actrix.co.nz. While talks around Auckland and Waikato are the easiest to arrange it is sometimes possible for us to attend other parts of the country in conjunction with holidays or business trips.

In the coming year

The Department of Conservation has recently restarted consultations for both the Waikato and Auckland Conservation Management Strategies, the Trust will be looking at these and taking advantage of any opportunity to promote or include the conservation of shorebirds.

My feeling is that as development pressures on the coast increase the need for the Trust to become involved in submissions and consultations will also increase. Earlier this year council members have presented positions on behalf of the Trust at hearings around opening up both the Manukau and Mangawhai Harbour for recreational access. I feel it is important for the Trust to be taking a role in pushing for shorebird and shorebird habitat conservation at these type of hearings in line with our aim - Keep the birds coming.

The extension of the Shorebird Centre into a bigger building has been a subject of much discussion by council and Trust members and some thoughts about the development by Stuart Chambers are included in this issue. I would urge members who have comments to contact a council member to discuss those thoughts so they can be included in any discussions that are had about this subject.

It seems to be a time of change for the Trust; threats to shorebirds are increasing at alarming rate, we are getting ready for an expansion of the building, and our operations will expand to fill it, and the roles of those on the Trust Council are changing. Looking back through the history of the Trust it seems we've been here before, and that one of the strengths of the Trust is the ability to embrace change and move with it. 

Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Treasurer's report for year ended 31st December 2010

Ashley Reid

I write this annual report with the news that once again the habitat of our waders is under threat. Today we received news that by the time you have read this, another hectare of wader habitat will have disappeared from the Yellow Sea. However, always an optimist, I hope that the Japanese experience will make authorities realise that, at any time a tsunami could be created in the region and destroy all

the current reclamation projects and persuade them to leave the remaining habitat for the eastern flyway waders.

Having briefly solved the world problems for our waders I must now return to the mundane subject of my dry as dust annual report.

Last year we reported on the initial contact with North Korean authorities and the success of that particular visit. This year we further cemented the relationships with Korean authorities with a visit from a delegation of officials and school children during the year. They were suitably impressed by the birdlife at Miranda, and our facilities at the centre and the opportunity was taken to introduce them to other ecological projects in the Auckland area, including Waitakeres and Waharau Regional Park, and a very educational and interesting trip to Tiritiri Matangi Island.

Subscriptions: The net income from subscriptions is considerably higher than last year – the actual payment date does affect this income source and fluctuates from year to year.

Donations and Grants: We are extremely grateful for grants and donations received from charitable trusts and environmental organisations. It is pleasing to report that, although the total received was not as great as previous years, a couple of sources were new and as we progress into our proposed projects I am confident that the number of grants and donations we receive will dramatically increase

Education: It is again pleasing to report that this year there was another

significant increase in income from school tours and lectures.

Field Courses: Unfortunately some of our proposed field courses for the year had to be cancelled because of insufficient participant numbers. We try to make the courses as interesting and attractive as possible but need active support of people interested in the course subjects to make them viable.

Accommodation: Use of our accommodation has increased by almost 9% for the year. We are attracting more interest from overseas tourists keen on experiencing our natural features and special shorebird environment.

Shop Trading: Shop sales showed another big increase – up \$3080.00 on the previous year. Gross profit on the shop trading amounted to \$28838 compared to \$25279 last year. Our overall Gross profit was 39.89% on turnover, up 3.37% over last year.

Expenses: General operating expenses were up overall, principal reason being the additional wages costs. However we have since received a substantial grant to cover some of last years' wages and this grant will not be shown in the accounts until next year

Volunteers: Once again, I wish to thank our dedicated band of volunteers who help with a variety of tasks at the centre. We continue to rely on our volunteers to provide backup support, and man the centre when the regular staff are not available. Many organisations similar to ours use volunteers to do guiding, property maintenance, general admin-


istration, manning the centre and generally keeping the organisations going and looking tidy. Without the continued support of our volunteers, it would be very difficult to run our trust to the high standard it currently enjoys. I cannot stress too often how much their input is appreciated and thank them for their continued support of this great organisation

Interest: It seems we have survived the worst of the economic downturn, with visitor numbers, accommodation both increasing, and more realistic interest rates being earned on our investments. Interest rates, however, have not recovered to the extent it was predicted last year. However we have been able to place our 'legacy' funds on investment with Taranaki Savings Bank at very competitive rates. Interest earned last year amounted to \$13,221.00 compared with \$11,779.00 the previous year.

Treasurer : Most people know that I will be giving up my role as treasurer this year. I took over from David Lawrie in 1999 and have seen the organisation grow from strength to strength. I will leave the finances of this organisation in good health with over \$240,000.00 in bank balances, and the total assets of the Trust worth \$1,091,426.00. I could not have operated effectively without the support of the Chairmen, David and Gillian, and the Centre Staff, Chris, Maria and Keith who I thank for their support. A special mention must be made of Keith – he answers all my impossible questions with cheerfulness and understanding and carries out all the necessary

cash handling and balancing so essential for the smooth running of the organisation. We now can produce a spreadsheet with our regular banking, which effectively balances all takings, and EFTPOS transactions.

I could not have successfully fulfilled the position of Treasurer from afar without his continuing input and support. Thank you, Keith for your contribution to date.

Adoption of Accounts: It is my pleasure to propose that the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2010, be adopted. 

Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31 December 2010

2009	Income	2010	2009	Expenditure	2010
			0	Education	0
16,946	Subscriptions	18,881	8,904	Magazine - Publication	8,130
27,374	Donations	18,355	4,078	Magazine - Distribution	6,519
4,444	Schools/Lectures	6,051	4,153	Publicity	307
9,913	Surplus on Field Courses	2,107	15,619	Bird Banding Expenses	8,010
24,974	Surplus on shop trading	28,838	0	Predator Control	0
0	Grants	0	3,092	Electricity	2,988
19,986	Accommodation	21,719	10,771	Building - running costs	12,085
11,779	Interest Received	13,221	923	Printing & Stationery	1,313
4,400	Lease - rental	4,800	4,725	Administration Expenses	5,894
0	Bird Banding Income	0	2,101	Bank Fees	2,421
1,228	"Muddy Feet"	0	3,263	Insurance and rates	3,165
			48,889	Wages	58,981
			325	ACC Levy	345
			0	Sibson Award Scholarship	1,250
121,044	Total Income	113,972	106,843	Total Expenses	111,408
	Deficit for year transferred		16,251	Depreciation	13,184
2,050	to Accumulated Funds	10,620		Surplus for year transferred	
				to Accumulated Funds	
123,094		124,592	123,094		124,592

Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2010

2009		2010	2009		2010
10,451	Life Membership Reserve Fund	9,876	172,142	TSB Term Investment	183,202
6,948	Subscriptions paid in advance	2,865	31,984	TSB (Sibson Award)	33,799
0	Overdraft at bank	0	204,126	Total Investments	217,001
7,670	Accounts Payable	6,710		Current Assets	
1,084	GST Due	2,034	14,047	Cash at bank	4,655
	Balance - Muddy Feet Account	11,228	11,717	BNZ Achiever Savings Account	22,032
26,153	Total Liabilities	32,713	787	Accounts receivable	861
			34,597	Stock on Hand	27,746
	Accumulated Funds				
	B/F		7,715	Plant and Equipment	7,715
1,070,351	less deficit 2010	1,058,464	3,565	Furniture and Fittings	3,820
	Revaluation		212,265	Buildings	199,662
			607,685	Land -	607,685
				Centre and East Coast Road	
1,096,504		1,091,177	1,096,504		1,091,177

Full Accounts and the Auditors Report will be available at the AGM

Building Plans for Miranda

– should the MNT seek a new site?

Stuart Chambers

Before the Miranda Naturalists' Trust seeks funding for its new building programme, should it not first ponder on seeking a new site? Should it not move closer to the birds and cater for the new age of birding and research? Could not its aims and objectives be better served right where the birds are and always have been? These are questions I have often asked and which I think are relevant today.

In the many years I have been associated with the Miranda Naturalists' Trust its direction has altered and its role has changed and evolved. In the late seventies and eighties its main ambition was to provide an accommodation "lodge" at Miranda, close to the bird-watching places of Tara-maire and "The Limeworks", for its small number of members. The reason for the need for this accommodation was to do with the poor roads to Miranda, and also overnight stays created better use of cars, giving the driver two or more days at Miranda for the cost of the one trip. So after some 15 years of fundraising, from a small membership base of about 250 people, the Trust eventually reached this goal and an accommodation building was the result.

The Miranda Centre, which was opened in 1990, was never the ultimate. It was built on land away from the prime birding spot, only because it was the only land available on the Miranda coast. Attempts to build at the old lime-works' site had failed due to a variety of reasons, and wary landowners along the coast to Kaiaua were reluctant to part with land to an unknown group whose motives they couldn't yet contemplate. Nevertheless, land was acquired, it was better than nothing, and eventually a building was erected which satisfied at the time the accommodation needs of the Trust's members.

However at about completion of the building, roads to Miranda improved dramatically and day trips to Miranda became

common and easy. With this went much of the car-sharing of old with people not so intent on making the best use of their vehicles. This change meant a large number of the foundation members never stayed overnight at the Centre and instead used it primarily as a place to eat lunch, shelter from the weather and use the toilets. Time had altered its role.

This brought about a change of role for the Trust generally. The building soon became used for teaching and advocacy, and more importantly it absorbed under its mantle the newly formed Wader Study Group of enthusiasts, with their emphasis on bird study and education especially to do with the migratory flyway of waders from Miranda. This new teaching role was suitably catered for by the Miranda building, while the flyway research programme used the name of Miranda and its visible presence at a shorebird site, to heighten its worth. Today these activities have become the Trust's main work and the original accommodation activity has become relegated as a means of

making money to support the above.

To cater better for this modern role the Trust council has developed a plan to enlarge the existing centre and adapt it for a future era. This new plan was displayed to members and visitors by a brief Powerpoint presentation at the "Farewell to the Birds" function in March 2011 when the magnitude of the proposal and its expense was explained to what might be called a slightly surprised audience. For a voluntary organization of limited membership, the plan shown, although catering for wide use, had a feeling about it of being over and above what the organization, on past experience, could ever achieve.

Several such plans have been drawn up in the past for Centre improvements but none have ever got off the ground mainly due to their expense and the problems associated with volunteers of limited available time and means. Was this new plan then any different from those of the past? Probably not, I pondered, for the main reason of failure in the past



has always been that for an idea to become a reality, it first and foremost has to be exciting. Adding a new room and a new septic system to a building, which is actually sited in the wrong place in the first place, is hardly exciting and hardly likely to generate the funds required, even if everything about the new plan is exceptional.

When you look hard at Miranda you quickly discover that its attraction lies with an old hide, duly photographed and placed on Google Earth, on the land owned by the Lane family near the old lime-works' site. The excitement here is of the large numbers of birds, either on the ground or in the air, associated with the sea beyond and the wilderness around. This is what draws people to Miranda.

Over 7 days, when I built the fence at the car park on the Lane property in April 2010, I asked everyone who went through to the hide if they had visited the centre. Only 50% had. Only occasionally those that hadn't said they would. I also asked people how they knew of Miranda. Most said via the internet and other people's travel sites. Most who entered thought they were walking on DOC land, although one thought it was owned by the Trust. No one knew it was privately owned. These people were mostly from England, Canada and Australia. Seeing the birds was their main interest, especially the Wrybill. Visiting the Shorebird Centre was not on their itinerary.

What showed up from this little bit of private investigation was that the Trust was losing money to finance its present role, as these people weren't much interested in visiting the Centre. It was also losing acknowledgement for its advocacy. Quite simply it was the generosity of the Lane family in allowing the public to wander freely over their land that had been their real draw-card to Miranda and not the Shorebird Centre.

This made me ponder on what could




Osprey House in Queensland

be done about this situation. If the main roles of the MNT, advocacy, teaching and wader study, were moved nearer to the old limeworks' site, rather than catered for in an enlarged centre on the existing site, it is quite likely that the modern aims of the Trust would be better achieved. A modern building, raised on poles, with an outlook over the Stilt Ponds and to the sea, more or less where it was meant to be in the first place, would gather up everyone who went to the hide as that would be where they would park away from thieves and where the toilets would be.

This site would not only have birds viewable from the Centre but it would be just a short pleasant walk to the coast. It would also have a unique atmosphere that would attract volunteers, a bit like Tiri Tiri Matangi does today, and Osprey House and Mary Cairncross in Queensland do. Osprey House, in particular, is a most exciting shorebird watching spot no matter whether the tide is in or out. The board walks and hides give great views and the volunteer helpers it attracts are most welcoming. So a correctly sited Shorebird Centre, with a few volunteers to help, could provide similar excitement. It could even run high tide paid escorted trips to the shellbanks, all making money for the Trust in the process.

This site not only has the outlook and the atmosphere to become exciting but the electric power is there and a water supply is not far away. The base is shell for safe parking, there is space for a large sewage system and for cars and campervans to park, and wet areas nearby could create lakes for waterfowl bigger and better than the Widgery Lake. Further if the Lane property was to sell to a private buyer and rights of way were prevented for bird-watchers, there is easy access to a walkway around the south coast. It is also often cheaper to build afresh than to alter existing buildings.

I suggest this idea should be explored before the plan for enlarging the current centre is finalised. By all means update the current accommodation centre for accommodation and even build a modern manager's house on that site, but move the teaching, advocacy, flyway work and the shop, to a new building on a new site overlooking the Stilt Ponds. Add a lunch bar and even more money would come the Trust's way.

As mentioned earlier, to get money out of people, the project must be exciting. In my view this place is exciting. That is why between 30 – 40 people visited the area each day I was working on the carpark fence. 

Miranda Building Location - A Response

David Lawrie, Past Chairman

The letter from Stuart Chambers printed in this newsletter has been referred to me for comment, presumably because I have been associated with the Trust Council since 1976. Clearly the young people see merit in retaining us older folk, if only to make comments on historical issues.



Stuart raises some very good issues and in an ideal world without any outside influences the present Centre would have been built largely in the position that he describes. However the Trust does not operate in isolation and to construct the building anywhere on the coast line required approval from not only the Territorial Local Authority but also the Regional Council and the Wildlife Service of the Department of Internal Affairs, who were subsequently incorporated within the Department of Conservation.

The Trust was in the early years so confident that it would be able to construct a Centre near the lime-works site, about where the new carpark is located now, that a very senior Government Minister was invited to the site to turn the first sod for the new building.

This was discovered to be premature as all three of the official agencies were vehemently opposed to any building on the seaward site of the road. The chairman of the time, Dick Sibson, even travelled to Wellington to plead the case at the very highest levels.

Stuart has summed up these difficulties in his history of the Miranda Trust when he states on Page 125 – “Certainly a coastal site for the Centre would have been the ultimate, but it was very obvious that this was never going to be allowed to happen. It took 10 years, though, for the Trust to realise this was never going to happen.”

Once the Trust realised that the seaward side of the road was out of the question, it turned its eyes to the Lane property on the landward side. The portion of land that was of interest to the Trust is the portion that Stuart describes in this letter. However despite many meetings with the Lane Family and in particular their Solicitors that opportunity was also abandoned.

The laws that applied to land development at that time would have caused very serious disruptions to the land holdings of the Lane Family by the imposition of Esplanade Reserves and also queries regarding the reclamation work that had been undertaken by the landowners on that side of the road.


Once the option of utilising the Lane property on the landward side of the road opposite the Stilt Ponds was ruled out the Trust widened their investigation until the Newbold Family agreed to sell the land where the Centre is currently located. While that portion of land was accepted as not being ideal, the Council at the time agreed that it was still worthwhile to build the Centre at that location even though the buildings use as an actual observatory was not possible.

The local Authority restrictions that still apply at the present time also preclude the construction of any two storey building along the road corridor. There are very definite height restrictions on the present building and on any further buildings likely to be constructed in the area which

would rule out the opportunity for having a second storey observatory.

Before the Trust Council commenced on the current design proposals for expanding the Centre, the option of having two buildings as Stuart has suggested was seriously considered. However the logistics of operating two separate buildings had very serious disadvantages that overruled the benefits that Stuart has mentioned.

To partly compensate for not having a building presence close to the birds the Trust has employed on a part time basis over the summer period Kristelle Wi, whom many of you would have met, either at the Centre or at the hide. One of her tasks is to encourage the visitors to the bird hide to visit the Centre, while the other key role is to enhance the viewing opportunities for those people.

The Trust accepts that the current position of the building is not the absolute ideal but now that it is well established the Council believes that it is best to improve those facilities rather than split the Trusts activities over two sites. 

Want to keep up with what's going on in the Hauraki Gulf?

Subscribe to Weaving the Strands, the newsletter of the Hauraki Gulf Marine Forum, you can find it at:

www.arc.govt.nz/environment/coastal-and-marine/hauraki-gulf-forum/hauraki-gulf-forum_home.cfm

Where Farming and Shorebirds come Together.

Joe de Jong

After living for 40 years in my adopted country we have seen many changes and like everybody else, have also changed ourselves. As a recently married farmer we arrived in 1970 in the Waikato. Two years later we scored a share milking job in Pipiroa on the Hauraki Plains, in the 'swamp country' as my boss called it at the time. Miranda was just down the road from us and to us it was a place to collect some shells for the garden. Later we came to understand the way the shellbanks had been

created over many, many years, creating a habitat for shorebirds and that really, the shells were not for the taking.

Being taught farming in The Netherlands in the 1960s we learnt all about how to grow extra grass. We learnt that we could fast track the development of land by putting on capital potash and phosphate. Once that was on, we could add nitrogen to speed up the growth.

During the 1980s in New Zealand, we first became concerned about the heavy metal cadmium we were putting on our land with the phosphate. In the early 1990s the perception slowly developed that perhaps all the fertiliser farmers put on the land was not just used to grow grass, but some of it also disappeared into the groundwater or was wasted in the drainage systems.

Fertiliser was subsidised well into the 1980s and was relatively cheap, especially budgeted against the risk of not putting on enough. At the time there was no publicity to explain to the farmer about the impact to the environment caused by the runoff of the extra manure. Sadly we know now nitrogen rich grass results in nitrogen rich urine, which consequently leaches into the groundwater.

You might think – what does this have to do with the shorebirds in Miranda?

Well, I understand that ground water often takes many years to reach the surface again were it can be drained, so

there is a fair time lag. With the flow of these nutrients eventually reaching our main drainage system, the Waihou River, a lot of these nutrients end up on the mudflats of Miranda. This is, according to Dr Mark Bellingham from Forrest and Bird, what NIWA's latest research shows.

Apparently, the current in the Hauraki Gulf comes from the north and travels along the Coromandel Coast to the west, continuing along the mouth of the Waihou and Piako River and slowing down to a very slow current at Miranda, before it goes north again along the Kaiaua coast.

Historically a lot of silt has come down the hillsides, whenever land

was cleared for farming or for mining, often creating slips. Later, the cheap fertiliser was not always applied properly and nutrients ended up in the drainage systems, eventually ending up in the Firth of Thames. Alternatively excess fertiliser leached through the soil into the groundwater and also finished, or will finish, up in the drainage system towards the Firth of Thames.

But by now in 2011, farmers are well aware of soil erosion, be it through slips or through land management practices and they certainly are not happy to waste fertiliser.

Farmers running a business on their own dirt have chosen to accept a job

Region Significant non-compliance (%)

	2007/08	2008/9	2009/10
Northland	26	27	24
Auckland	7	23	6
Waikato	10	20	27
Bay of Plenty	9	9	10
Taranaki	0.2	0.5	1
Hawke's Bay	11	5	4
Horizons	22	14	15
Wellington	28	4	1
Tasman	2	5	8
Marlborough	0	2	5
Canterbury	20	19	8
Otago	8	5	2
Southland	13	13	13
Actual average from farms inspected	12	11	10
'Weighted' average from the report	12	15	16

Reported in Farmers Weekly, 21 March 2011

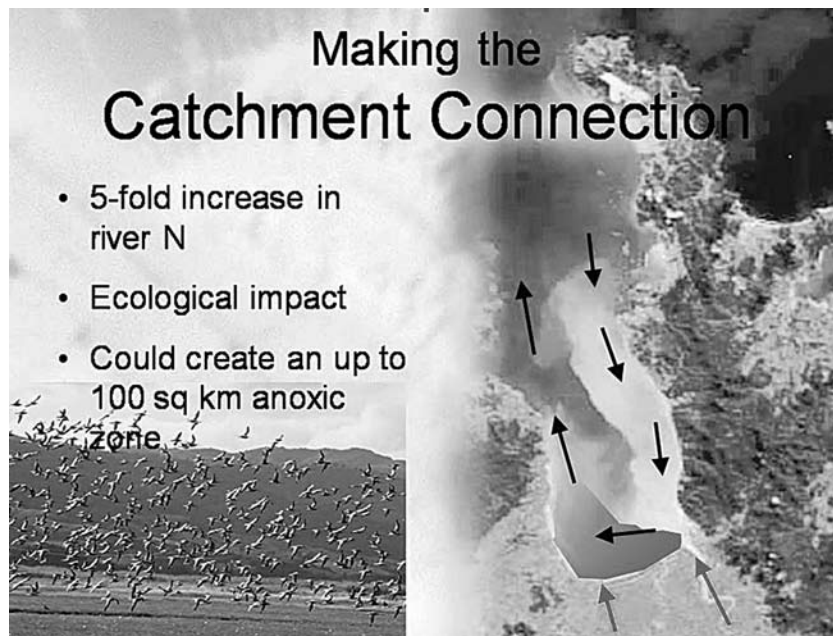
as an efficient food producer. They primarily argue that the \$ is the measure of the success of their enterprise.

While farmers first run a business, they too like to see a clean and unspoiled environment and many farmers do their utmost to do that bit of extra for a good natural environment. The table shown was recently sent out to farmers by Federated farmers and it illustrates that 90% of farmers are compliant, which to me, indicates that generally farmers are doing a good job.

However, as can be seen by the figures above, Environment Waikato's (EW) statistics are not very good, which, according to many farmers is partly due to EW not being very 'farmer friendly'. But EW have since stated in the Rural North newspaper, March 22, that they have improved and their compliance figures for our present year look a lot better, and so I hope that this is the case.

In 2003, the Regional Clean Streams Accord was signed between Fonterra, Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and regional councils nationally. This accord is an agreement to plant riparian margins and other actions to improve the water quality of our streams. But each region seems to be doing things slightly differently and in my view, the introduction of nationwide industrial standards, which are currently being developed, will hopefully be a step towards better environmental outcomes nationally. Standards should also make it possible to compare the Regional Clean Streams Accord compliance figures a bit more accurately.

Being a farmer I understand the cost involved in making improvements for our environment. Ponds and effluent irrigation schemes cost lots of money and time. For farmers to ensure that they are compliant with the management of effluent they have to learn additional skills. In general I think, while huge progress has been made in the last eight years, more



Slide from Dr Bellingham's presentation at Miranda Shorebird Centre on 6-3-2011.

progress could be made.

Awareness of nutrient flows through the drainage system and the groundwater is improving too, with the knowledge evolving into a useful format. But although 99% of farmers have nutrient budgets, they are only advisory and in my opinion they need strengthening.

The whole idea of how to look after our environment is evolving. Technology is continually evolving, knowledge is improving and society's wider awareness of environmental issues is continuing to improve, which all together puts more pressure on farmers to improve. That is why I personally enjoy discussing these matters with as many people as possible. But this discussion should take place with all interested parties. It is never them and us. It is all of us together. I think that knowhow is an important catalyst, but unless it becomes mainstream it will always be hard to implement.


In my opinion, if as a society we want farmers to treat the soil differently, there should be clear guidelines, but farmers like everybody else need an appropriate timeframe to implement changes. Guidelines need to keep up with changing expectations and farmers also need time to keep up. But investment into effluent disposal

systems up to the current standards that are required, can easily run into 6 figure sums per farm, not withstanding that it can take years to see results from this investment.

Furthermore, in my view everybody in society needs to do their bit to live more environmentally friendly, instead of just looking over the fence and pointing the finger at farmers. People have to look at their own systems too.

I think changing environmental management could eventually lead to an improved environment. But this could change the cost structure of life as we currently know it. Society will have to accept the cost in \$ terms, as a trade off for a better quality future for us all. Alternatively we will all have to make do with less....

As a farmer, I enjoyed sitting in on the speech from Dr Bellingham. It was very interesting that many of the same concerns he raised are also raised in farming circles. And in the meantime, I also enjoyed learning about the godwit and how it interacts with such a great part of our mother earth in such an amazing way.

So let all of us that are interested in the health of Miranda's ecosystem work together for the benefit of this special environment. 

Suspicious Instrument Seen at Miranda

Jamie Steer

On the afternoon of December 15th 2010 a flock of crackpot scientists alighted at a remote location in the Firth of Thames. Arriving in a tight convoy of polished four-wheel-drives, the scientists were seen tentatively emerging from behind dark doors and tinted windows. They carried cups of dark coffee and wore dark sunglasses, reputedly to conceal rapid horizontal eye movements. One of them wore a goatee. Even more suspicious was the elaborate trailer-bound instrument in tow. A device



An image shows bird trails from one hour of activity approaching high tide. The different colours represent directions of movement. Activity is clustered around the Miranda shell-banks where birds are arriving to roost.

described by one witness as an 'otherworldly contraption of spinning wands, dishes, hydraulics, masts and levers.' A small vestibule housed a 'vast bank of hard drives, screens, switches, monitors, cables and charts.' The machinery emanated a quiet hum and it was said that myriad colours winked within.

Rumour quickly spread. It was a Government conspiracy; that much was clear. The scientists were signalling space aliens. The scientists were monitoring Russian cosmonauts. The scientists were tracking local resident Keith Woodley. It was all perfectly obvious.

And the two radar wands spun atop the shiny vestibule throughout the day and long into the night.

Early the next morning a series of

The bird monitoring radar in action at Miranda. The viewing hide is visible in the background to the right of the vehicle.



vigorous vertical head movements were traded among the members of the group. A ream of printouts was emphatically gesticulated at by a large hairless man; presumably the head scientist. The action invoked a further round of vertical head movements among the group followed by sporadic chin stroking. Clearly the experiment had been a success; the desired data had been obtained. Either that or the printer was out of ink. Later that day the convoy quietly slipped out of town never to be seen again.


There are many potential ways to explain the events foretold. The below is but one of them.

Over the past two years Meridian Energy has been using a new radar technology (DeTect ©) to monitor bird movements across a potential windfarm site in Northland. The technology is used to support an ecological effects assessment being carried out by Boffa Miskell, a New

Zealand environmental design consultancy. Ecologists from Boffa Miskell visited Miranda to train in the use of the radar and to gain experience in tracking different bird species. Miranda was selected because of its extraordinary bird diversity and abundance which facilitates the detection of a wide range of species. The radar is able to detect bird movements in both the horizontal and vertical planes, meaning that accurate information can be obtained on flight directions and heights. Bird movements are able to be tracked day and night to a maximum horizontal range of approximately 5.5 km.

Accounts by witnesses are largely accurate. The radar technology is indeed supported by a suite of computing equipment that allows bird movements to be recorded and analysed. The various dials, switches and levers within the vestibule allow the radar technology to be customised to the terrain and tweaked to the desired sensitivity. The dark coffee is a factor of the long hours of training and the dark sunglasses a response to the eye sensitivity caused by a lack of sunlight while manning the vestibule. Hair loss is the result of sleeplessness and stress caused by keeping the radar operating twenty four hours a day for almost two years, while the goatee is apparently a legitimate style of facial hair.

The December 2010 excursion to Miranda follows an earlier trip by Boffa Miskell in August 2008 when Miranda was visited to help calibrate the radar tracking equipment. As previously, the visit was very successful - hence the satisfied chin stroking - and the team had a great experience viewing bird movements on the radar screen and learning the procedures required to digitally record and document these.

We'd like to thank Trudy Lane for access to her property and Gillian Vaughan and David Lawrie for assistance from the Shorebird Centre. Also thanks to Shane McPherson for putting in such a big effort in implementing the training. 

A Very Old New Zealand Dotterel

Phil Hammond

In 2009 and again on 19 February 2011 I saw and reported to Adrian Riegen and John Dowding a NZ Dotterel with leg bands M/ROW, seen at Big Sand Island, near Taporā in the Kaipara Harbour. The feedback from John was that it is the oldest living NZ Dotterel that he knows of and has an absolute minimum age of 32 years, and is more likely 33.

It is very much a west coast bird, and was originally banded at Mairētahi in the south Kaipara harbour by Sylvia Reid in January 1980 as a breeding adult, and although it could have been only a year old, it was much more likely to have been two or more.

John rebanded it at Whatipu at the northern head of the Manukau Harbour in December 1986 and then again at Pararaha stream Whatipu in November 1997. He says it bred at Whatipu for at least 20 years, and has flocked at Big Sand Island for most of the time that he has kept tabs on it. It has turned up at Whatipu during the breeding season in recent years but doesn't seem to be paired.

The gender of the bird is uncertain but John says, the breeding season colour and measurements taken in 1986 and 97 suggest it is female.

When I saw it in February this year there was no sign of orange on breast or belly. There were no obvious signs of illness or injury.

It will be interesting to see how long this bird lives so if you see it I'm sure John and Adrian would like to hear and so would I ---email me at philxhammond@yahoo.com.



photo Ian Southey

Keep up-to-date with events
visit
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 units:

Per bed / night member \$ 20.00 Per bed / night non-member \$ 25.00
Hire of self-contained unit member \$ 65.00 Hire of unit non-member \$ 85.00
For further information contact the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno 2473
Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781 Email: 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.

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.

