



## Helping hands

Banding Wrybills in their Rangitata Valley home

New study shows 8% of Asian mudflats is lost every year

What shorebirds look for when it comes to prime seaside real estate



# Meet the new Editor

Gillian Vaughan has finally found someone to take over as editor so she can focus on being chair. **Jim Eagles** introduces himself and his

MY WIFE Chris and I have been members of MNT for several years but for various reasons – work, family, inertia – our involvement has been minimal. Like a lot of members, I suspect, we pay our sub, go to see the birds (we’ve got a bach at Kaiua), drop into the centre to see what’s new, look at MNT News . . . and that’s about it.

But now I’ve retired I’m keen to make more of a contribution to the work the trust does to safeguard the birds, their habitat and the flyway.

I’m also hoping that by editing MNT News I’ll educate myself about the shorebirds of Miranda. I’ve already managed to go on a cannon netting expedition, which was amazing, and I’m looking forward to many more such experiences.

Of course I will be bringing a very different skill-set to the magazine. I’m certainly no ornithologist. But I do have a lot of experience in editing publications, from community newspapers to business weeklies, and from regional daily newspapers to, most recently, the NZ Herald’s Travel magazine.

I’ve already got a few ideas.



For instance, while I want to continue the tradition of running serious articles on research into shorebirds and their habitat, I’d like to include more snippets of news about the centre and its activities, the birds and their habitat, the Miranda area and its surrounds, aimed primarily at casual supporters like myself.

But if there’s one thing I’ve learned during 50 years in journalism is that if you produce

a publication aimed at yourself you’re likely to have a very small readership. So I’d really like to get feedback from readers about what you think of the magazine, how you feel about any changes and what you’d like to see in it. I’d also be delighted to get any articles and photos, snippets of information or ideas for stories. Just email to [eagles@clear.net.nz](mailto:eagles@clear.net.nz). That way, hopefully, I can ensure we provide what you want.

## What’s on at the Shorebird Centre

**August 25:** Potluck Dinner and Working Bee. Working Bee 9am–1pm. Birdwatching 1–4pm. Pot Luck Dinner 6pm, guest speaker Brian Gill talking on New Zealand Cuckoos.

**September 4-6:** NZ Dotterel Management Course. Aimed at agencies, community groups and volunteers involved with monitoring and managing dotterels.

**September 14-16:** Photographing Birds. Tutor Bruce Shanks.

**October 21:** Welcome To The Birds Day. 10am, Guest Speaker John Dowding, the leading

authority on the status and management of the NZ Dotterel. High Tide is 12.40pm so birdwatching after the talk.

**November 4:** OSNZ Firth of Thames Wader Census

**9-15 January:** Miranda Field Course, now in its 15th year, perfect for any naturalist. Covers geology, botany and entomology with a focus on birds, plus identification, catching and ecology of our shorebirds.

**For further information** ring the Centre on 09 2322781 or email [shorebird@farmside.co.nz](mailto:shorebird@farmside.co.nz)



## Prime seaside real estate

Why is Miranda such a popular place for shorebirds from all round the world? **Keith Woodley** explains what birds look for in a roost

FOR ANY visitor wishing to see birds at Miranda there are two standard pieces of advice: ‘go down to the hides and check both shell banks and stilt ponds’ and ‘time your visit for several hours either side of high tide.’

The reason for this is simple: it is the best time and place to see the most birds. Why those two sites and not somewhere else along the coast? Because for shorebirds seeking a suitable high tide roost both places tick all the boxes.

For many shorebirds life outside the breeding season revolves around two interrelated factors: tides and real estate. Birds forage over the exposed flats during low tide, feasting on the benthic fauna found there, but with the flood tide these areas are inundated, forcing birds to leave. At this time a place to roost becomes critically important.

It is then, particularly at our larger harbours and estuaries, that one is likely to find thousands of birds clustered together into an active, noisy bustle – on sandbars or shell banks, salt marsh or adjacent fields, or other suitable locations above the tide line.

But not just anywhere will do. To be suitable, a good high tide roost must fulfil certain requirements. If it does so, it may be an extremely valuable piece of real estate indeed.

### Now in residence at Miranda

**The August hiatus is upon us. In recent weeks South Island Pied Oystercatchers have been pouring out of the Firth on their annual journey south, with wrybill set to follow, yet it is still several weeks before we can expect the return of the first tundra breeders. But as the Miranda flocks thin, there is still plenty of variety remaining on and around the high tide roosts. A recent highlight was regular sightings near the hides of a Whimbrel, a species not often seen on the Miranda side of the bay. The Sharp-tailed Sandpiper seen in late July was also unusual, for few if any are known to overwinter in New Zealand. An early returning failed breeder is one possible explanation. Also of considerable interest to many visitors are the bittern now regularly recorded in the vicinity of the shorebird centre or along the trails to the hides.**

<i>Arctic Migrants</i>	
Bar-tailed Godwit	c250
Black-tailed Godwit	1
Red Knot	c100
Whimbrel	1
Turnstone	2
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	1
Marsh Sandpiper	1
Curlew Sandpiper	1
<i>New Zealand Species</i>	
Pied Oystercatcher	
Wrybill	c1800
NZ Dotterel	
Banded Dotterel	130
Variable Oystercatcher	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	
White Heron	2
Pied Stilt	
Royal Spoonbill	36
Banded Rail	
Bittern	2

Front cover: Newly-banded Wrybill at Rangitata. Photo Keith Woodley  
Back cover: Little Terns at Kidd’s Beach on the Manukau Harbour. Photos Ian Woodley



**The dry foreshore of Kidd's Beach is popular with some shorebirds . . .**

Essentially a good roost is one where a bird can feel safe while also minimizing its energy expenditure. So for most birds a good field of view is important. Visual obstructions – such as tall vegetation, embankments or human structures – may provide cover for predators.

There is also safety in numbers. The eruption off a roost of a massed flock of shorebirds is among the great spectacles in nature. Sometimes the cause may not be apparent to the viewer – it could be merely an adjustment to diminishing roost area ahead of the rising tide. But often it is in response to a disturbance: it could be a predator – a gliding harrier, perhaps, or a marauding skua, or something related to human activity.

Faced with such danger, the advantages of roosting together become obvious: the risk to an individual shorebird is considerably lower if it is in the company of many others. Or, as one researcher put it: 'When a predator approaches a wader flock, it is clearly in the interests of each wader to be faster and more alert than at least one of its flock mates!'

The flock offers further advantages as well: enhanced shelter from weather and more energy savings. Wind and cold

induces higher maintenance costs, so staying sheltered and close together, means energy expenditure is considerably reduced.

There may be a further function of high tide roosts: a chance to catch up with the local gossip. Thus a flocking site may also be an information centre, providing intelligence on good feeding sites, for instance, though evidence for this remains somewhat circumstantial.

It has also been suggested that flocking may help coordinate preparations for migration. There may be something in that, although recent research indicates individual birds may follow their own rigid migratory schedules, precluding any need for group cues.

Different species have different requirements in what is an acceptable roost. At Miranda, depending on tide height and weather conditions, three main areas are generally inner mudflats left exposed during neap tides, the main shell banks and the Stilt Ponds. When adjacent farm pasture is wet it is not uncommon to see flocks also roosting in paddocks, though this is more often the case in winter, or during particularly rough weather.

Godwits and knots generally

favour wide open areas where they mass in dense flocks. Mudflats or shallows left exposed are often preferred, especially as godwits seem to like to keep their feet wet. An Australian study found 'that use of roosts by Bar-tailed Godwits increased with the proportion of the landscape occupied by water.' But if forced entirely from the flats they use both the shell banks and the Stilt Ponds.

Pied stilts are more generalist in their habitat requirements so while they may be found foraging on intertidal flats, they are just as likely to be found in more terrestrial areas such as pools of water above the high tide zone. Thus they may roost in such places and even continue foraging through the high tide period.

Some birds, particularly Turnstones, seem to prefer sites offering shelter from the wind.

At Miranda, while most birds are spread over the shell bank in full view of the visitor, it is not uncommon for Turnstones to roost on the seaward side of the bank, thus remaining hidden for much of the tide. In calm conditions Wrybill may roost on any area of exposed mud inside the main shell bank, although usually the shell bank is also acceptable. In strong winds



**. . . but others prefer a nice pond.**

**Photos / Ian Southey, Jim Eagles**

they will huddle in hollows and behind vegetation.

Oystercatchers often arrive on a roost earlier than other birds and stay longer after the ebb begins. This is thought to be because their best foraging opportunities are in the lowest areas of the intertidal zone - the first to be flooded and the last to be exposed. Oystercatchers in New Zealand find suitable roosts in a variety of places and are by no means averse to man-made structures. On most tides at Miranda they claim the southern end of the shell spit as their own, but may also use farm paddocks. At Mangere Bridge on the Manukau Harbour, the broad grass verges along Kiwi Esplanade fit the bill, presenting a grand massed spectacle of striking black, white pink and orange against a verdant background. At Sandspit, north of Auckland, the tarmac of the car park at the boat club is a regular roost. When a supermarket was built on a favoured roost site at Thames, the displaced birds took to roosting on the newly completed roof – until deterred by counter measures.

But the physical aspects of what makes a good roost – substrate type, topography, good field of view, the presence of water - are just one part of

the equation. As with much real estate, location is no less important. The evidence is overwhelming: if a potential roost site is not close enough to suitable foraging areas, birds may not use it.

Roosts used by Arctic migrant populations at Australia's Moreton Bay were usually close to foraging areas and rarely away from the coastal zone. A study on the Tagus estuary in Portugal, an important site for Dunlin, looked at bird densities in relation to roost proximity. It found the overall density of birds on suitable mudflat foraging grounds declined with the distance to the nearest roost. It was the lack of roosts that 'probably explains why the intertidal flats in the north-west of the estuary are underused by shorebirds.'

Furthermore, it was predicted that the loss of suitable roosts elsewhere on the estuary would result in an underuse of 28–40 per cent of the total intertidal area available for dunlins. If suitable roosts are lost or degraded, and alternative sites are too far away from feeding areas, the overall carrying capacity of the site will decrease. Why? It is all to do with energy budgets.

A shorebird needs energy to meet its daily maintenance

needs, and the further it needs to fly to find a suitable high tide roost, the higher its energy expenditure. A study in the Dutch Wadden Sea estimated a Red Knot spent about 10 per cent of its daily energy in flights between roosts and foraging areas, which appears to be of a similar scale to other sites.

Commuting flights for knots at Roebuck Bay in West Australia accounted for up to 8.5 per cent of total daily energy expenditure, while at the Dee Estuary in the UK it was over 12 per cent. These are significant costs for any bird, but for a long-distance migratory species they assume even greater significance.

Energy expenditure and required intake rates over a tidal cycle increase with body mass so are likely to be highest in the final stages of pre-migratory mass gain. Before migration flights birds need to rapidly store fuel reserves for the coming journey, so their energy intake is much greater than that simply needed for maintenance.

Heavier birds then need even more energy. Energetic costs of Great Knots at departure mass were almost twice as high as those at the usual non-breeding mass. It makes sense therefore, that heavier birds try and roost as close to the foraging areas as



**Shorebirds can take advantage of development by their human neighbours . . .**

possible. Changes in roosting behavior as they approach departure mass have been observed in both Dunlin and Red Knots.

However, there may be higher risks at such sites. On the Firth of Thames in late February and early March there is a significant increase in the use of the southern edge of the Kaiaua foreshore by Godwits. Most, if not all of them, appear to be birds that are well advanced in their departure preparations. Choosing a roost so much closer to human settlement where disturbance may be more likely is presumably balanced by the qualities offered by the roadside grass verge.

Some species are even more constrained by the tidal cycle than others. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, stilts and dotterels are able to continue foraging over the high tide period; others, such as Red Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit, do not regularly forage during such times so cannot supplement their low-tide energy intake during high-tide periods. Thus for them low commuting costs may be even more important.

A typical high tide wader roost may be a scene of much activity, with birds busy bathing and preening. However it is also a time for resting or loafing,

and, for many birds, a time to sleep. Sleep for a shorebird is a physiological necessity: it is also the most energy-efficient activity there is.

It has been suggested that birds are most predisposed to sleep in darkness. Great Knot slept for about 50 minutes during daytime tides at Roebuck Bay, but for 5 hours at night. This is suggested to be 'typical of coastal waders, and that the circadian cycle likely favours high tide sleeping mostly at night, as by day there are greater advantages to remaining vigilant.' In which case, what constitutes a good roost by day may not apply at night.

In regions where birds are faced with nocturnal predators avoiding or minimising such risk may have a greater influence on nighttime roost selection. Studies in northwest Australia showed birds preferred places where the background was pale, and away from tall vegetation, and that this was particularly so at night. It is thought that darker backgrounds could mask the approach of aerial predators such as falcons or owls. Thus at night birds avoided roosting in mangrove clearings, or on beaches that were typically used during the day.

Likewise use of man-made

structures as daytime roosts may not apply at night. Evidence from Roebuck Bay is that shorebirds avoid sites where they are exposed to artificial lighting such as streetlights or traffic. Possibly such lighting makes roosting shorebirds too easily detected by predators, or otherwise makes them perceive night-roosts to be too dangerous for sleeping. It was also found that birds were also prepared to fly greater distances to a night-time roost: 6-8 km compared with 1-3 km by day.

The tidal cycle also governs which roost may be used and when, day or night. Long after many birds have settled onto the shell bank at Miranda, it is common to see a succession of long undulating echelons of birds flying in from the southern and eastern margins of the Firth. This is because during higher tides in the cycle many otherwise suitable roosts elsewhere in the bay are inundated, forcing birds elsewhere.

This is why during spring tides the Miranda coast is an absolutely essential part of the overall shorebird equation. If its roost sites were to become unavailable at such times, the overall carrying capacity of the Firth of Thames may be severely diminished. This tells us that a



**. . . but it often carries a cost.**

**Photos / Ian Southey, Keith Woodley**

given roost site cannot be seen in isolation; that a network of sites on a given harbour or estuary may be used under separate conditions. It also implies that negative changes at one site may affect other sites as well.

Another factor affecting the energy budget of roosting birds is disturbance (see MNT News 81).

The combined costs of flying to roosts, and being disturbed into flight once at a roost, ranged from 17 to 29 percent of the total energy budget of both red knots and great knots in Roebuck Bay. These are significant numbers: for example, the half-hour of alarm flight per high tide observed at Broome consumed almost as much energy per day as does a typical rate of pre-migratory mass-gain. Sources of disturbance may be natural, predators for instance, or unnatural.

At Roebuck Bay, of 105 cases of disturbance observed along the Northern Beaches by day, 25 per cent were caused by birds of prey. In New Zealand there are considerably fewer species of aerial predators, but those that do occur can cause mayhem on the roost. Harriers, widespread and abundant, are a not uncommon feature over our major shorebird sites. Arctic Skuas are infrequent visitors

to areas such as the Firth of Thames, but when present will invariably provoke roosting birds to take to the air. Black-backed gulls are also not averse to harassing shorebirds.

Apart from these natural threats, a problem with many roosts is they bring birds closer to humans - and all our constructions and activities. In the same Roebuck Bay study, 21 per cent of disturbances were caused either by humans, their dogs or their vehicles. This is thought to be an underestimate as, unlike birds of prey, humans often remained on beaches for some time after disturbing shorebirds, potentially preventing them from resettling.

A Dutch study found that of all anthropogenic influences, recreational activities were by far the most observed potential sources of disturbance. Pursuits of disturbance may be natural, recreational activities were by far the most observed potential sources of disturbance. Pursuits as diverse as beach-visiting, day-hiking, tidal flat walking, kite-flying, recreational boating, wind and kite surfing, sea-kayaking, angling and bait-digging all meant disturbance to roosting birds.

Data on bird distribution and numbers of visitors in the Danish Wadden Sea, showed a negative relationship between the numbers of some duck, wader and gull species and the

number of visitors in spring and autumn, that is, in the period with highest potential conflicts between bird numbers and recreational activities.

Excessive or prolonged disturbance has severe implications. Models indicate that a relatively small increase in disturbance levels can result in a substantial increase in energy expenditure. Energetic costs to roosting birds may eventually exceed energy requirements for maintenance, moult and pre-migratory fuelling. 'The capacity of shorebirds to compensate for such increases will vary according to the feeding and roosting options available at a site, but it is very likely that circumstances can develop where roost costs could drive the energy budget into deficit.'

The outcome may well be diminished survival or birds abandoning a site completely. Shorebird population dynamics are complex and affected by various factors so it is very difficult to isolate key variables determining population levels and thus quantifying the precise impact of disturbance. Nevertheless, studies in Britain, the Netherlands and in the United States have all linked declines in shorebird populations to disturbance.

# Sun, shellbank, wrybills and a nice hot cup of tea

English conservation volunteer **Simon Buckell** explains why working for five weeks at the Shorebird Centre was a life-changing experience

Wrybills, Miranda and New Zealand has always been one of those must-do destinations for me but it was to the list of things-for-later-years.

Instead my plan was to do the difficult countries in my younger years, such as when I travelled in search of Ibisbills through Nepal on rusty, unsafe and un-roadworthy local buses, and found myself sitting on the back seat with a box of live baby chickens in my right arm and a six month old Nepalese baby girl in my left arm.

Or like the time I was looking for tigers in India, when I sat on the roof of a train surrounded by local people, one of whom offered me a samosa in one hand and a hammer and nails in the other. The hammer and nails was to secure my combat trousers to the roof for when we went around curved track at high speed so I didn't fall off.

However some times life doesn't go to plan and in 2011 I quit my London-based career to work as a volunteer on conservation projects. My travels took me to the Azores, Holland, Thailand, Australia, China, Russia, Malaysia and on to New Zealand.

I worked in the Russian Arctic helping to protect the endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, secured a short term contract on a deserted tropical island in the Seribaut Archipelago of Malaysia then continued on to New Zealand and Miranda. I quickly realised there was a lot more to this place than I had originally expected.

Upon arrival the first thing I noticed was how neatly organized the shop and display centre areas were. When you enter the Centre the first thing

you see is the informative display boards with information such as high tide times, species recently seen and relevant information on the importance of the area. After this you are among the finest collection of bird books in

**Simon's birdlist**  
**My sightings at Miranda included Little Whimbrel, Marsh Sandpiper, Glossy Ibis, over 140 ringed waders, including a Red Knot ringed in Northern Chukotka where I spent my summer, the endemic Wrybill, New Zealand Dotterel, Variable and South Island Pied Oystercatchers, large flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits, Pied Stilts and Red Knots, plus smaller numbers of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints and a Curlew Sandpiper.**

New Zealand.

On arrival I was briefed by Keith Woodley on my duties and after that pretty much left to my own devices. Maria, who runs the shop, gave me a few odd jobs to do such as securing nails on the decking area of the Centre. I also did vegetation control around the centre and in front of both hides and occasionally helped out with laundry, cleaning the accommodation areas and did the odd stint in the shop.

But I spent most of my time weeding the main shellbank and guiding visitors to the hides. This involved showing people the different species of birds

through the telescope and telling them about bird numbers, migration routes, the times of year that they visit Miranda and why it is such an important area for them.

I found these times at the hides not only interesting but also good fun. Some days when there was more than one guide - most often Kristelle Wi and me - we would split up and take a different hide each. One day Joy Gough and myself were at the old hide together and had a very busy time looking after a few coach parties including a group of Chinese tourists who really did seem to enjoy their time on the reserve.

When the high tide period was over and most of the birds had left the area directly in front of the hides I would make my way out on to the shellbank and start weeding. I enjoyed my times out there as I made a point of taking a break and having a nice hot cup of tea (through the loan of Keith's flask) sitting behind the shellbank looking across the Firth of Thames to the town of Thames.

When the weather was good I can't think of anywhere else in the world I would want to be. The sky above would be the bluest of blues, the sun would be warm with the gentlest of breezes that would cool me down and I would just sit there take in the view. Even though I was a long way from my home patch on the Thames estuary - a very different one - I couldn't help but have a sense of belonging.

I think that out of of all the days I spent at the hides my favourites were when young children came with their parents. I would go through the



**I'm from England. Where are you from?**

usual routine of setting up the telescope up at the correct height for them so that they could see birds such as the Wrybills. They were always a favorite as they were often easy to view on their special spot just the other side of the channel from the old hide.

I especially recall one proud father who enjoyed seeing his children admiring the Wrybills. When it was time to leave both the children said, "But we don't want to go yet, we want to stay and watch the birds." Then the father turned to me and commented, "You know I am going to have this all the way back to the car, don't you, which is parked at the Centre." I laughed and replied, "Well it's no big deal, is it, just promise them both that you will bring them here again another day," which he did.

You see for me the future of everything lies with the next generation, so it is these youngsters we have to get to, we need to get them interested,

aware and appreciating the beauty of what they have around them, because this is a very, very spectacular place to live, isn't it.

Planet earth is stunningly beautiful but none of us will be around for ever to fly the flag for conservation of all its critically important areas so we have to really get these youngsters on our side, educate them and let them build on the work that we have done. We need them and the planet and all the nature and wildlife within it needs them. So let's make them aware, help them, teach them, support them and do as much as we can for the next generation so that they can carry on with the work.

Being based at the Centre had many advantages as I got the chance to meet lots of different and interesting people. Some would just pass through staying a single night, while others stayed longer, like volunteers and members of the Miranda Trust.

Among those were Jackie and Laurie who stayed for a few days and left a big impression on me. But what I especially remember is when I advised Laurie that I had joined the Miranda Naturalists' Trust and he looked at me, shook my hand and said, "You are now one of us Simon."

It was at that point that the penny dropped for me. Miranda is a like a friends meeting place, like a close family where any one is welcome, where anyone with or without experience is treated like an equal, where nobody is better than anyone else, people are all equal and all welcome.

Finally, as I bring this article to an end, I would like to take the opportunity to thank everybody I met during my time at Miranda. And I would advise anybody with an interest in spending time at the centre, be short or long term volunteering, to just do it. It really will change and improve your life: that I can say for sure.

# That slinky skink might be one of our native lizards

New Zealand's indigenous lizards are under pressure but **Wendy Hare** reports that a recent survey near Miranda found three species.

IAN SOUTHEY'S excellent article on shore skinks in the previous issue of MNT News prompted the thought that readers might like to know a bit more about some of our

opening young. They are also long lived, frequently reaching over 40 years of age whereas similar sized species in other parts of the world are lucky to make 10 or even 5 years of age.

New Zealand lizards are significant pollinators and seed dispers-

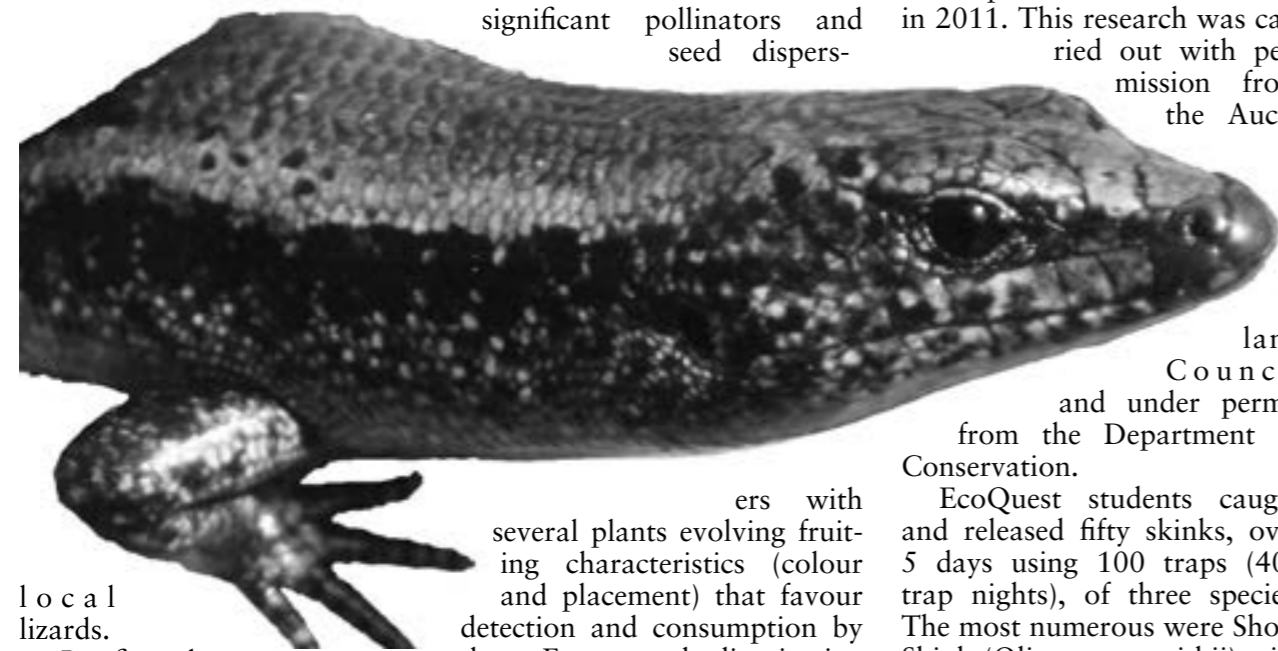
Chenier stonefields (gravel ridges), which typified this stretch of coastline, are found in good condition. No predator controls are currently being carried out in the reserve, although a new rabbit proof fence was installed in 2011. This research was carried out with permission from the Auckland Council and under permit from the Department of Conservation.

EcoQuest students caught and released fifty skinks, over 5 days using 100 traps (400 trap nights), of three species. The most numerous were Shore Skink (*Oligosoma smithii*) with 34 individuals, then Copper Skink (*Cyclodina aenea*) with 14 individuals and lastly Ornate Skink (*Cyclodina ornata*) with two individuals.

Ian's article detailed the life (as much as it is known) of the Shore Skink and this image (above) from one caught at the Whakatiwai reserve illustrates the "sharpish snout" he wrote of.

The Copper Skink is one of the more commonly seen skinks in the North Island often occurring in gardens and behind beaches. In fact, I have a healthy population in my own garden at Cook's Beach where I have provided plenty of lizard refuges (rock and wood stacks) and food (by encouraging invertebrates) and protection (by poisoning rats). They are most

active by night with young born January to February. Found throughout the North Island in dense herbage and leaf litter from forest to coastline these copper/brown skinks are about 13cm in length with a distinct denticulate ("like teeth") pattern on the "lips".



Local lizards.

But first, the big picture: New Zealand is home to over 90 species of native lizard, all of which belong to four genera unique to this country.

They fall into two large families. Geckos (more than 40 species) have loose skin which is not shiny and the pupils of their eyes are vertical slits. Skinks (over 50 species) have tight shiny skin and streamlined body and the pupils of their eyes are round.

Our country is a relatively cold place for these animals and so those occurring here show several adaptations to living in lower temperatures. For example all species, bar one, give birth to live young, rather than laying eggs, enabling the female to select the best available temperature for her devel-

ers with several plants evolving fruiting characteristics (colour and placement) that favour detection and consumption by them. For example divaricating shrubs like *Muehlenbeckia* have seeds inside their dense branches where frugivorous birds would have trouble eating them.

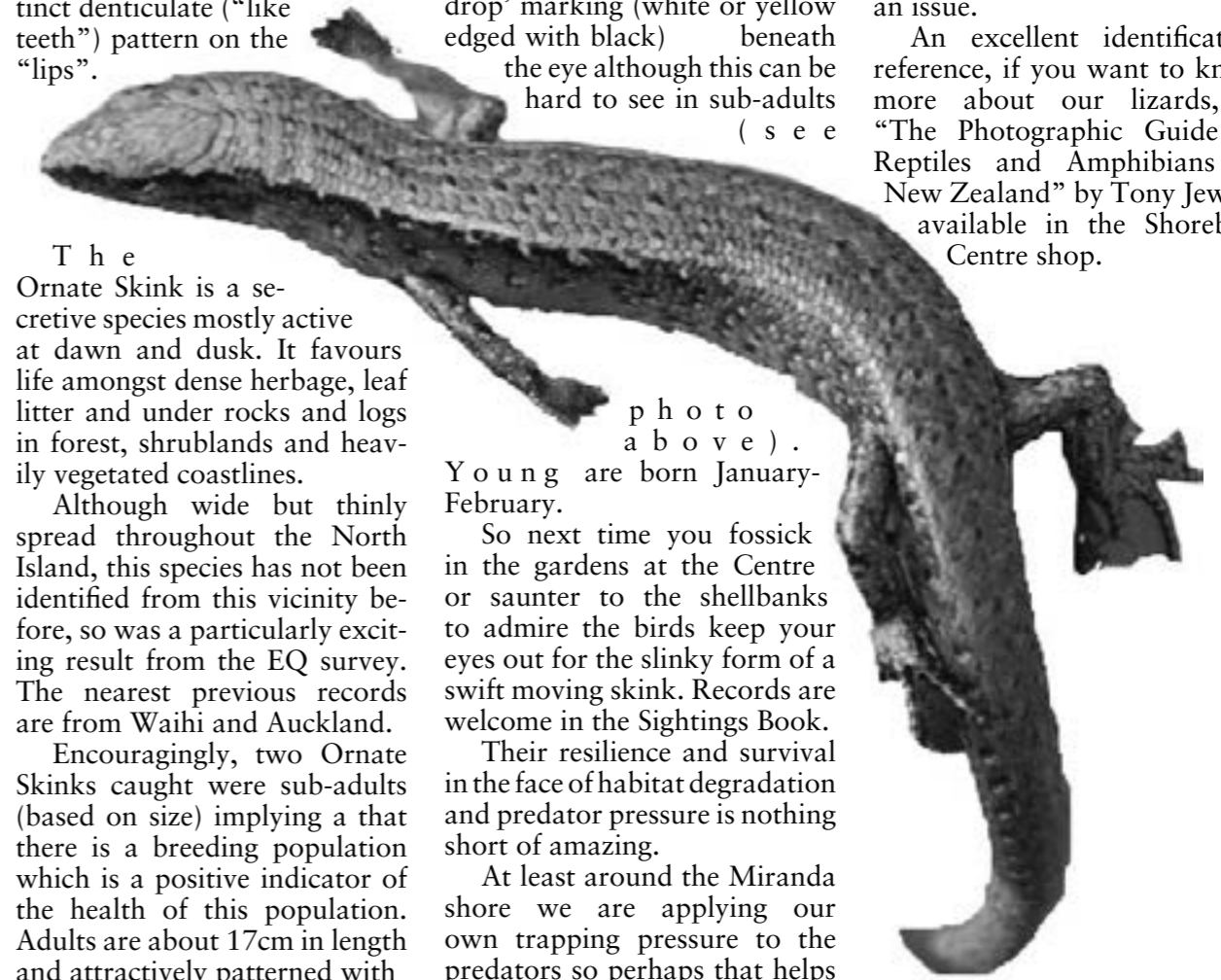
Lizards emit a variety of sounds from squeaks to barks and may have other sounds that are not audible to the human ear.

At the end of 2011 our friends and neighbours, EcoQuest Education Foundation (see box for more information on EQ) embarked on a study of the lizards in the Whakatiwai stonefields (just off East Coast Road, 20km north of the Shorebird Centre).

This reserve, part of the larger Whakatiwai Regional Park (324 ha), is the last remnant of coastal kowhai forest in the Auckland region, and is also one of the last places where the

patches which are orangey brown to dark brown in colour.

Ornate skinks can be quite hard to tell apart from copper skinks. They both have short, blunt snouts, but the ornate skinks have a distinctive 'teardrop' marking (white or yellow edged with black) beneath the eye although this can be hard to see in sub-adults (see



The Ornate Skink is a secretive species mostly active at dawn and dusk. It favours life amongst dense herbage, leaf litter and under rocks and logs in forest, shrublands and heavily vegetated coastlines.

Although wide but thinly spread throughout the North Island, this species has not been identified from this vicinity before, so was a particularly exciting result from the EQ survey. The nearest previous records are from Waihi and Auckland.

Encouragingly, two Ornate Skinks caught were sub-adults (based on size) implying a that there is a breeding population which is a positive indicator of the health of this population. Adults are about 17cm in length and attractively patterned with

photo above). Young are born January-February.

So next time you fossick in the gardens at the Centre or saunter to the shellbanks to admire the birds keep your eyes out for the slinky form of a swift moving skink. Records are welcome in the Sightings Book.

Their resilience and survival in the face of habitat degradation and predator pressure is nothing short of amazing.

At least around the Miranda shore we are applying our own trapping pressure to the predators so perhaps that helps

them a little. Competition from the introduced Rainbow Skink (*Lampropholis delicata*), an egg-laying Australian now well established in northern New Zealand but not yet found near Miranda, may also become an issue.

An excellent identification reference, if you want to know more about our lizards, is "The Photographic Guide to Reptiles and Amphibians of New Zealand" by Tony Jewell, available in the Shorebird Centre shop.

## Ecoquest students lend a helping hand

**ECOQUEST Education Foundation's vision is sustainability through education and research.**

**EQ's first programme was launched in 1999, to provide field courses for second and third year students of American universities. To date close to 600 students from 80 universities throughout the United States have enjoyed a semester at EcoQuest.**

**During their experience in New Zealand the students learn critical thinking and communication and develop their practical skills in field settings the length and breadth of the country. Among other things they learn about group living and growing their own food.**

**The students are regular visitors to the**

**Miranda Shorebird Centre and the shellbanks.**

**They also complete research projects on real issues during their semester. In the past this has included studying benthic fauna in the Miranda area and mud, snail and predator behavior on the Miranda foreshore.**

**The EQ field centre is at Whakatiwai (2km north of the Kaiaua Store). This proximity encourages mutual support between EQ and the MNT, for example EQ regularly provides microscopes and other technical equipment to aid with our annual field course.**

**EQ kindly provided the photos and detailed information for this article for MNT News.**



**A Wrybill chick finds a cosy temporary nest / all photos Keith Woodley**

# At the home of the Wrybill

An extract from Keith Woodley's new book 'Shorebirds of New Zealand: Sharing the margins' (published by Penguin in October) describes a visit to the Wrybill's home in the Rangitata Valley.

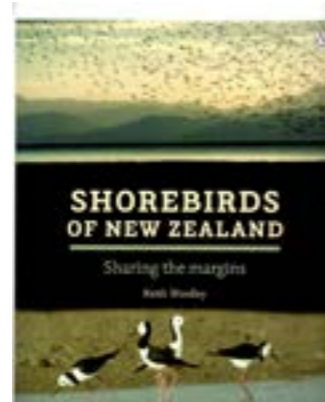
THE HI-LUX bounces across paddocks of matagouri and tussock, following a path that is part track and part creek bed. Across the valley, tussock and scree slopes ascend to remnant snow patches on the tops.

On a wooded knoll behind us are the buildings of our base at Mesopotamia Station; in front flow the many strands of the Upper Rangitata. The tyranny of the gorge downstream will shortly confine them to a single channel, but for now they are spread over several kilometres of flood plain. We park on the river edge.

Over the channel nearest the bank a black-fronted tern is flying upstream, proceeding jerkily in its hovering, dipping fashion. The sun is touching the tops but has not yet reached

into the valley as we cross this first channel. The current is stiff and the ice-cold water knee-deep; instantly my feet are like iceblocks. Our purpose is to catch and band wrybill.

The near side of the first gravel bar is steep-edged, over a metre high, but then slopes gently towards the next channel 50 metres away. Here, within a



few minutes, we flush the first bird of the day. It sidles around us, displaying at a distance.

Stead described a bird in a similar situation, displaying 'with the wing near the intruder trailing on the ground, the other lifted in the air; the tail spread fanwise, and depressed so that the tip is almost on the ground; and the bird all the time makes a continuous purring noise.'

But it appears the resources of cunning in wrybills are of shorter duration than those of some other shorebirds. Once we back away a few metres, the bird quickly returns to the nest and sits. As we approach once more, the bird again flushes, revealing the nest location. A rock tied with pink ribbon is immediately placed a metre or so away. Such is the cryptic nature of both nest

and eggs that this is an essential measure. The nest is barely a scrape among stones, lined with smaller stones, and the two eggs are stone-grey with minute black specks. Even standing close by, it is astonishing how quickly one can lose sight of it, and the wisdom of marking it is revealed. Inadvertently trampling these eggs would be ridiculously easy.

Several metres from the nest, ecologist John Dowding places a noose mat – a firm lattice about a metre long, with a grid of nylon loops. He walks slowly back and forth in an arc around the end of the mat, as the adult bird approaches and displays. Eventually the bird walks across the mat and is caught.

It looks simple, but Dowding cautions it has taken him 20 years to perfect this technique. The bird is banded with a metal band around its left tibia, followed by a colour combination on the tarsi, or lower legs.

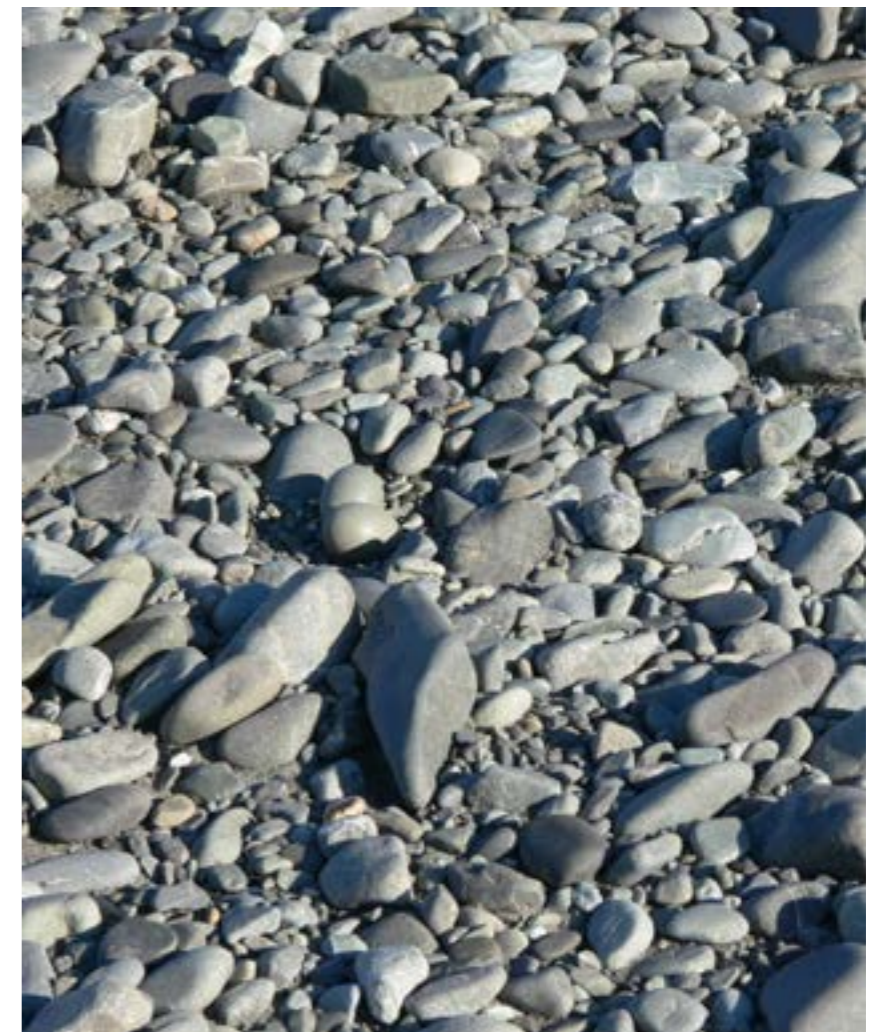
Placing the metal band around the upper leg is a comparatively recent measure; with most bird-banding the lower leg is used. However, such is the nature of this environment – with wrybill spending much time wading in water laden with glacial silt, and exposed to wind-blown dust abrasion – that the metal bands were being sanded smooth of any information within just a few years.

The colour combination enables individual birds to be subsequently recognised in the field. Once it is processed the bird is carefully released, although not before the beribboned rock is removed from the nest area.

Finding some nests is easier, as colleagues have spent the last few days locating and recording them with GPS. Others are more problematic, especially where the eggs have hatched and the chicks are now mobile. Almost all the nests are on high shingle banks devoid of any



**It's very hard to spot wrybill chicks, nests and eggs among the river stones.**





Fearless Wrybill displaying to the towering intruder.

growth or drift debris, with close access to a stream edge. Of five nest pairs in part of Hay's study area, four had access to a stream edge where they could forage, but a later arriving pair were forced to nest further back from the channel.

This pair attempted trespass to gain stream access but were apparently not successful enough; of the five, only this pair failed to raise young. While this could have been a result of their lateness in breeding, it was also 'evidence that access to stream margins is an important aspect of territory quality'.

Banded dotterel tend to nest on lightly vegetated areas away from the channels, but clearly for them stream access is also important.

At one site a tongue of lightly vegetated dotterel habitat reached to within a few metres of a stream margin that was frequented by a territorial pair of wrybills. A wrybill was observed moving along the water edge while, on top of a bank 1 m above the stream level, five banded

dotterel stood and watched. Once the wrybill was 50 metres downstream the dotterels ran to the water edge and foraged in the riffle until the wrybill turned and started heading back. The dotterels quickly returned up the bank and remained there until the wrybill had passed. This happened three times during an hour of observation, during which there were no 'agonistic encounters'.

There is movement on the edge of a riffle ahead of me – what appears to be a small stone rolling upstream. But then it stops – and disappears.

A short distance away an adult wrybill stands on a shallow ridge, calling softly. Its chick has responded to the alarm by freezing; adopting the perfect posture and appearance of one of the small stones among which it crouches.

A few metres downstream a second chick also freezes. Like most shorebird chicks, newly hatched wrybill can hit the ground running; fully developed legs and feet make them

immediately mobile. Within a day or two they can swim well. Stead believed a wrybill chick hatched at a nest on an island in the Rakaia, and later found with adults on a shingle bank further downstream following a major flood, had swum there when the island was covered by the flood, 'having been carried half a mile by the swift current'.

But while mobility is important to a young bird needing to forage for itself as well as deal with suddenly rising river levels, the ability to cope with aerial intruders is no less important. The fluffy bundle crouched at the water edge in front of me is doing just that. Nevertheless, despite such cryptic skills, by the end of the day we have caught both chicks and their mother, along with a further five chicks and nine adults.

Most shorebird chicks are cryptically coloured in the form of streaks, spots and speckles, designed to blend in with their various surroundings, often including vegetation. Young wrybill are quite different,

although the outcome is the same. The eye, bill, legs and feet of the young bird in my hand are all dark, but the rest of it is a uniform light grey without other markings. Already, at just the length of my thumbnail, the bill shows that particular sideways twist.

The two chicks are quickly banded and released, following a well-considered procedure. Release occurs at the riffle edge in full view of the female being held several metres back, so she can immediately see and follow the chicks. Otherwise there

environment routinely encounter – gale-force winds hurling down the valley; and eddying winds whipping up spinning clouds of rock flour and silt, reducing visibility to zero.

Ray Pierce recalls a time when he was camped out on the Upper Rakaia and spent the night wrapped up in his gale-demolished tent, anchored by small round boulders rolled against him by the wind. Today the only sounds are the rustle of water over the riffle and the clamour of other riverbed residents – the tedious honk of



## Once Bittern twice shy

Three excited German tourists approached me while I was checking traps. Language was an issue so they used a combination of hand signals, charades and a few English words. I gathered they were telling me they had seen a Bittern acting as though it had a nest.

One of them said it was near a "barrier like this" (holding an arm at an angle). I assumed they were talking about the stile.

Over the next week Keith and I paid close attention to the pond area near the Centre. But a week passed and hope was fading. I was driving to the reserve when I noticed a gate leaning over near the ponds. Ah ha! The barrier like this.

Scanning the pond I saw nothing. Then there was movement right in front of me: 4 fat Bittern chicks.

They were pointing their bills briefly to the sky, then looking at me to see if their poorly synchronized bobbing camouflage technique was effective. It needed a bit of practice.

I drove back to the Centre and got Keith's camera, but when I returned, the chicks quickly fled the scene, disappearing into the tall grass.

Kristelle Wi

**'Like most shorebird chicks, newly hatched wrybill can hit the ground running; fully developed legs and feet make them immediately mobile. Within a day or two they can swim well'**

is danger of the family being dispersed, with chicks heading upstream and the adult heading downstream, especially if that is where the chicks were first caught and where they were last seen by the adult.

On the other hand, a calling chick appears to be detectable by an adult at a considerable distance. But as there is a small black-backed gull colony just downstream, as well as patrolling harriers, all steps are taken to maintain a cohesive family unit. Once the adult is released we all back off quickly. Shortly afterwards the adult is seen brooding both chicks.

By mid afternoon the sun is scorching the riverbed. A few tiny fluffs of cumulus hang above the ridge across the river, but everywhere else the sky is clear. A faint whisper of a breeze begins, and ends almost immediately.

This is very different from the testing conditions that other people working in this

a pair of Canada geese, and the shrill female shriek and the male grunt of paradise shelducks.

In the middle of the riverbed we traverse an enormous area, perhaps several hectares, completely bare of anything except shingle. Dowding says it is rare to find such places now, as most other rivers have been degraded in some way.

Even on the generally less modified Upper Rangitata, exotic species have established. Sure enough we pass several clumps of dead broom that has been sprayed. But birds are also absent from some of these large stretches of seemingly pristine wrybill habitat. This is the case on other good 'wrybill rivers', too.

Clearly, then, it is not always limited habitat that constrains the wrybill population. The most likely explanation for there being fewer birds here than the area can support – and something we will return to repeatedly when looking at New Zealand



# Flyway delegates bogged down but making progress

**Keith Woodley** reports on a mix of bad news and good from this year's East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership meeting in Indonesia

FOR SOME travellers being stranded for hours under the tropical sun on a mudflat off the coast of Sumatra may have been cause for angst. The small vessel on which we were clustered was well grounded and the tide was still receding.

But my companions were not ordinary travellers, for all of us had an interest in migratory water birds. And arrayed on the flats between us and the tall mangrove fringe were many items of interest.

For me, the huge creatures towering over everything else – Milky Storks and Lesser Adjutants – were novel and intriguing. Asiatic Dowitchers in full breeding colour were also splendid. For others the Greater Crested Terns or Chinese Egrets were new. And for everyone, including those who had encountered them before, the Nordmann's Greenshank foraging 70-80m away, was significant.

Only yesterday we had all received the latest population estimate for the species: 90-130 pairs, 91 per cent of which occur outside protected areas in the flyway. Our own predicament was of no real concern.

We had been ferried in smaller craft to this vessel, stationed on the edge Sembilang National Park, following a two hour boat ride down the Musi River, the waterway of dubious fragrance which flows through Palembang. It was there, in the largest city in south Sumatra, that we had spent the previous few days attending the sixth meeting of the EAAF Partnership. Representatives of every country in the flyway, with the exception of Laos and North Korea, were present. That included 14 government partners and three

potential partners, Myanmar, Vietnam and Malaysia, two inter-government organisations, and 22 NGOs. Also present were 19 technical advisors and observers, including a substantial number of people involved with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper recovery programme. Three new Partners were admitted: Mongolia, New Zealand (represented by DOC's Dr Colin O'Donnell) and Rio Tinto, the first corporate to become a Partner. I represented MNT.

A key item on the agenda was



**Milky Stork**

the adoption of an Implementation Strategy for 2012-2016. A significant advance on the preceding strategy is the introduction of Key Result Areas (KRA) intended to provide measurable targets to be achieved within the reporting period. All are directed at the major aim of the partnership: the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats. Agencies and groups responsible for implementation of each KRA are identified along with mechanisms and processes that might be used in achieving it.

The document thus 'provides a framework to guide the Partnership towards its Goals and Objectives...[as well as] a means of assessing progress to-

wards desired outcomes over a five year period, based on annual reports from partners.' It is a substantial document that could achieve real dividends for conservation of waterbirds and their habitats. Of course, its overall effectiveness will ultimately depend on the actions of partners.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has identified loss or degradation of intertidal wetlands as one of the greatest threats to migratory birds. It has therefore commissioned a Situation Analysis Report which aims to summarise currently available information on intertidal wetlands in East and Southeast Asia, and document the impacts on migratory birds of the degradation and loss of these areas.

A draft report was completed in early April, in preparation for presenting a final report to the IUCN Congress to be held in Jeju, South Korea in September. This timeline reflected a theme that was very apparent throughout the Palembang meeting: a sense of urgency that action is needed immediately, especially in the Yellow Sea region, where habitat loss continues to occur at an alarming rate.

This was underlined in a graphic presentation by Nic Murray of the University of Queensland. Through comparison of satellite imagery since the 1970s, he has developed a programme which accurately maps the historical extent of intertidal flats compared with today. This dramatically demonstrated the extent and pace of intertidal loss on the coasts of China and Korea. About eight per cent of estuarine mudflats is being lost each year in the Yellow Sea.

That is a faster rate of loss than other more publicized concerns such as rainforests, polar ice, coral reefs and has accelerated in recent years. This is clearly the major factor behind one dubious distinction for the EAAF: it has more waterbirds than any other flyway, but also has the most threatened species.

The assessment of the draft IUCN report is blunt: 'Rates of [waterbird] species decline of up to 8 per cent per year are among the highest of any ecological system of the planet and the Flyway is liable to soon experience many extinctions and collapses of essential and valuable ecological services unless current trends can be reversed. This is a clear failure to meet targets and obligations under several key international environmental agreements.... The EAAF is a shared resource serving the heritage of 22 countries, so many of these steps need to be taken in an internationally cooperative context. Unless the fast economic development of this region can be balanced with adequate environmental safeguards, impressive looking economic gains will be short-lived and will precipitate a growing list of ecological disasters.'

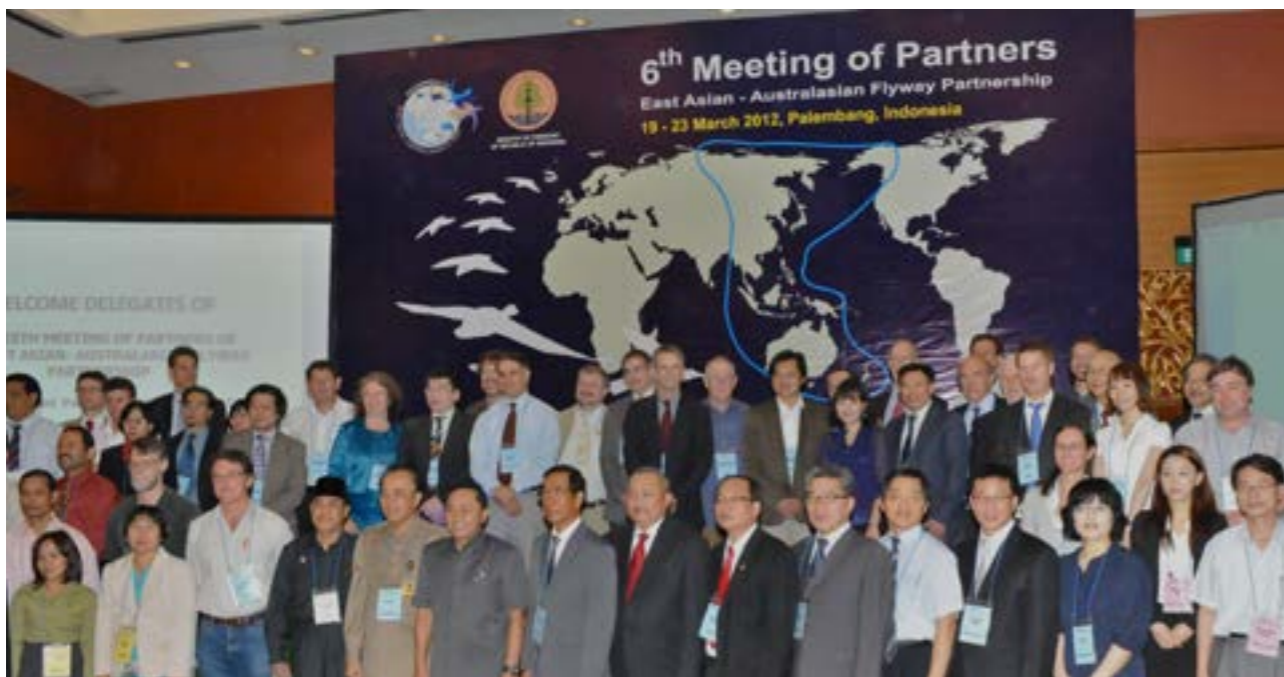
The presence of a large contingent involved with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper project was further evidence of urgency. This sparrow-sized wader is in desperate straits with recent counts indicating between 35 and 120 pairs remain. They face similar pressures to other migratory species in the flyway: at breeding sites in the Russian Far East, stopover sites in the Yellow Sea and wintering sites from Thailand to Bangladesh.

Such is their parlous status that an extraordinary effort is underway to try and secure their future. Last year eggs were taken from the wild to establish a captive breeding programme at WWT Slimbridge in the UK where there are now 11 young birds. That such a step was even considered for this long-distant



**Exploring Sembilang National Park.**

**Photos / Keith Woodley, Phil Straw**



**Delegates to the sixth meeting of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership.**

migratory species illustrates the desperate situation. Basically it is an insurance policy. This year further eggs were taken and the chicks hatched and reared close to the breeding grounds, so young birds can be released prior to the migration season.

A further positive piece of news was that progress is being made on the wintering grounds in South Asia, a region where historically Spoon-billed Sandpipers have been subject to severe pressure from hunters. It was recognised that socio-economic considerations needed to play a vital role in any conservation initiatives, and there are some indications of success.

For example, hunting of shorebirds is being replaced by training and alternative livelihood support offered to hunters. In Bangladesh 25 hunters have signed conservation agreements to protect Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

In its report to the meeting the Anatididae Working Group had a stark mixture of good and bad news. On the positive side is the successful re-establishment of a breeding population of Cackling Geese in the Kurile Islands north of Japan after they had been wiped out following the introduction of foxes in 1916. On the negative side were reports of sharp decreases in water bird populations in Ja-

pan following the tsunami and nuclear emergency.

Perhaps even more disturbing given the region's importance for many of our birds, were reports from the Russian Far East in the wake of recent changes in regional government. The pressures of a difficult economic situation together with an expansion in oil drilling prospects have led to reserve status for important waterfowl habitats in Kamchatka being cancelled. Included in this is the Moroshechnaya Estuary, one of the earliest sites in the EAAF Shorebird Site Network (a predecessor to the flyway partnership). Although retaining its 'protected' status for the mo-

ment, there is a definite cloud over its future, with the new local government in Kamchatka completely ignoring its listing as a Ramsar site.

A major focus for MNT at the meeting was exploring possible avenues of support and funding for our proposed shorebird surveys in North Korea over the next four years. It was widely recognised that the DPRK represents a significant gap in our knowledge of shorebird populations and their use of sites in the Yellow Sea region. Consequently our proposal aroused considerable interest and we are cautiously optimistic that some funding can be secured for this work.



**Greater Crested Tern**



## Shop at Miranda online

You can now buy books, shirts and pottery from the Shorebird Centre on the internet. Web designer **Trudy Lane** tells how the widely acclaimed centre shop went global

Years for the internet are like cat or dog years. There are two or three major technology overhauls every calendar year.

So I was at once nostalgic and horrified at the previous MNT website. Being at least 10 years old it was a proud veteran. But it used technology from many internet lifetimes ago.

I can't remember exactly how it all got started but I think it was when Gillian found I was a web designer by trade and asked whether the old soldier site could be gracefully retired. Luckily the timing was right, and I'd become experienced enough in a web-publishing platform that I knew could do a great job, so I was able to point her in the right direction.

Soon after came the follow-up request for an online shop. This was slightly new territory for me. But then in the web world solutions are a constantly moving target as things are upgraded, invented, developed, adjusted and reinvented.

As a result ways of creating and doing things online are constantly getting more robust, easier and cheaper. If, that is, you can isolate the right pieces within this 1000-piece puzzle in order to complete the jigsaw.

After much whittling down of options, I came to see a way that I could construct an e-com-

merce site for MNT that a few short years ago would have cost many, many thousands of dollars. I was amazed.

It was again good timing, as the solution I was most keen on had only just been released. It had been impressively robust in my testing, with many functions I could see making life much easier for the shop staff.

The only problem was there were still two missing pieces: plugins required to handle shipping costs and payment gateways specific to New Zealand.

The software developer's site promised those plugins would come. So we waited. Finally the shipping piece of the puzzle arrived. Yay. One to go. Again we waited. And waited.

There were alternatives. But we were so close. It would be

### Newly arrived books



**Visions of Nature.** by Trevor Penfold, \$59.90. Stunning photography, minimal text.



**New Zealand Bird Views: Terns** by Raewyn Adams, \$24.90. All about terns.

better and cheaper if we could use this solution.

Eventually, after much communication around the globe, a weird little palaver ensued one night between programmers in New Zealand, Brazil and South Africa. All were keen to resolve this maddening little problem. In fact they were suddenly racing to be the first to provide it. All at once I had two options for processing credit card payments. Yay and yay.

Since then I have been merily setting up the site, adding products, testing the system, sorting out the banking requirements (don't ask) and, as I write, preparing to train up the team to use the system.

By the time you're reading this the site will be open for business. I hope you will have a look around and consider purchasing something. After all you will be supporting the trust and providing an on-the-job training opportunity for the team.

You may notice some teething issues but in time - and with the help of the wonderful centre team - I'm sure we'll end up with a well-formed young shop which will do a great job for you and the MNT.

The Shorebird Centre Shop is online at <https://shop.miranda-shorebird.org.nz>

From the chair

# A busy year for the trust

**Gillian Vaughan** offers a summary of the report she presented at the Miranda Naturalists' Trust's annual meeting in May

IT IS with great pleasure that I write this report in the knowledge that the production of this issue of the magazine is safe in the hands of the new editor Jim Eagles. I am sure Jim will introduce himself elsewhere in this issue. I feel very confident that he will take the MNT News to the next level and I look forward to seeing the results. I am sure that Jim will be a valuable addition to the Miranda team and would like to take this opportunity to officially welcome him aboard.

At the AGM in May I presented a summary of the trust's activities in 2011. I'm repeating the details here for the benefit of those not present, adding some further comments about our progress this year

## Building

There is obviously a need for a change to the building as it stands but council wants to be certain that whatever plans are chosen are appropriate. Having more or less left this for the last six months council is once again discussing the way forward. Some members have expressed concern at the size of the original plans, others at the time involved in making a decision. I can confirm that both of these points have been raised at council meetings.

Adrian Riegen and John Rowe have been involved in some much needed building maintenance and Eila Lawton has been working with Warwick Buckman from Waihi in terms of weed control, first in the garden, with the idea of further plantings at some point, and now at the shellbank, to help control the fennel that came in



with the new path materials.

## Viewing area

2011 and 2012 have seen significant upgrades proceed at the bird viewing area and it is clear that the new tracks and hide system have improved the visitor experience. This is becoming more important as the numbers of visitors increases: preliminary numbers show that visitors to the Centre have increased by more than 10% this summer.

Council member Wendy Hare is in the initial stages of a plan for disabled access to the hide which may take some time to come to fruition. In the meantime Keith Woodley is working on further display and interpretation material for the viewing area. We hope that some of this will be finalised for the start of the new season.

We are also looking at further changes to the site and access to hides. You can now walk from the carpark to either hide without crossing a fence. We would ask members to note the signage and not walk directly along the top of the ridge be-

tween the hides. Using the track will keep people off the ridge line, thus reducing disturbance of feeding and roosting birds.

## Staff, volunteers and council members

Our team of Keith, Maria and Kristelle have once again kept the Centre running. However the work of the trust is impossible without the work of our volunteer team who help at the information centre, at the shellbanks, away from the centre and on council. We were also lucky to have long term volunteer Simon Buckell stay for over a month last summer. I would like to take this chance to thank all of our volunteers for the work they do. The Trust is active on many levels and that would be impossible within the resources the trust can afford to pay for.

We have been extremely fortunate to have Trudy Lane working with us on our website. The Lane family have helped the trust considerably over the years and we have been fortunate to be able to continue that relationship through Trudy. Trudy is setting up her own web design company and I would encourage members looking for help in this area to contact her. As I write this Trudy is planning a training session with Keith over the new online shop, and after that we hope to be live online!

With regard to council I was very pleased when our new treasurer, Charles Gao, joined us this year. This is a role that does take some time and we are lucky to have him to take it on. At the AGM in May 2012 the meeting

elected Tansy Bliss to Council. Luckily for Tansy but less so for us she has then offered a job on the Chatham Islands with DoC. We wish Tansy well in her role on the Chathams, however I have made it clear that we expect her back at some point!

Two council members chose not to stand for re-election at the meeting, Len Taylor and Keith Thompson have now stood down, I would like to thank them for the skills and passion they brought to the trust over the years. Both Len and Keith have advised they will continue to work with the trust on a less formal basis, with Len staying on as membership secretary.

## Regional

There is a lot of change occurring in the wider region we operate in, with the new Auckland city, the changes to Environment Waikato and DoC amongst others.

David Lawrie has put time in making submissions to the Auckland Council on their coastal plans to ensure that the shorebirds are not forgotten in the drive for more people and more growth. This work seems never ending and we are lucky to have David to take the shorebird message forward.

The trust has been peripherally involved in opposing the application to clear mangroves and dredge a channel at Manga-whai Harbour. Forest and Bird and the Department of Conservation have led the opposition to this. This case was heard at the Environment Court earlier this year, and we hope to see a result in the not too distant future.

## International

In 2011 we were pleased to find out that the New Zealand Government had joined the East-Asian Australasian Flyway partnership. An understanding of the importance of migrants to New Zealand's biodiversity has been slow in coming but this is one step in the process of increasing the protection of mi-



**A new hide and a new map of the migration routes have improved the visitor experience at Miranda**



# MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST



## See the birds

Situated on the Firth of Thames between Kaiua 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.

## Low cost accommodation

The Shorebird Centre has bunkrooms for hire and two self-contained units: Beds cost \$20 per night for members and \$25 for non-members. Self-contained units are \$65 for members and \$85. For further information contact the Shorebird Centre

## Become a member

Membership of the trust costs \$45 a year for individuals, \$55 for families and \$60 for those living overseas. Life memberships are \$1300 for those under 50 and \$750 for those 50 and over. As well as supporting the work of the trust, members get four issues of MNT News a year, discounts on accommodation, invitations to events and the opportunity to participate in decisionmaking through the annual meeting.

## Bequests

Remember the Miranda Naturalists' Trust in your will and assist its vital work in education and protection of migratory shorebirds. For further information and a copy of our legacy letter contact the Shorebird Centre.

## Want to be involved?

### Friends of Miranda

This is a volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre. Helping out can be anything from assisting with the shop, guiding school groups or meeting people down at the hide. Regular days for volunteer training are held. Contact Maria Stables-Page for details.

### Long term Volunteers

Spend four weeks or more on the shoreline at Miranda. If you are interested in staffing the shorebird centre, helping with school groups or talking to people on the shellbank for a few weeks contact Keith Woodley to discuss options. You can have free accommodation in one of the bunkrooms and use of a bicycle.

### Firth of Thames Census

Run by OSNZ and held twice a year, the census days are a good chance to get involved with ongoing field work and research. This year's is on November 4. Ask at the centre for details.

### 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 Jim Eagles at eagles@clear.net.nz.

### Help in the Miranda Garden

We can always use extra hands in the Miranda Garden, be it a half hours weeding or more ambitious projects. If you do have some spare time please ask at the centre for ideas, adopt a patch and call it your own or feel free to take up any garden maintenance you can see needs doing.

grant species.

Given the way in which migrant species cross borders and hemispheres, increasing their protection is something that must be supported at the government level. We have recently written to the Minister to ask the Government's intentions regarding the coastal reclamations in China that are affecting shorebirds and I am looking forward to her response.

No delegation from the trust visited Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve in 2011. A report was finished on the 10 years of survey results and is currently with the reserve staff for checking and approval. We hope to return to the reserve in 2013.

Throughout the year David, Adrian and Keith have worked towards returning to North Korea. The North Korean side of the team was interested in having us back but unfortunately we were unable to come up with funding and the government has indicated they are unlikely to fund a visit next year. Keith

discussed possibilities for funding at the recent EAAFP meeting. There is a chance that we may host a delegation from North Korea later in the year.

The trust has also contributed to a motion put to the IUCN on the importance of the mudflats of East Asia, particularly the Yellow Sea. My feeling is that we will have to spend time offering data and supporting initiatives like this one. Details of the IUCN report are now available online. Check the trust's website for a link.

## Donations

I would like to gratefully acknowledge that we have received several generous donations for activities ranging from work in China to local predator control and displays.

The extended work of the trust is very dependent on donations.

If anyone would like to see a list of the projects we are currently looking to fund please ask and I will make it available to you.

## Accounts

At the AGM in May the audited accounts were unavailable. We made a commitment at that time to publish them in the next issue of the MNT News. Unfortunately the accounts are not yet finalised as we are waiting on one remaining piece of information from the bank.

I appreciate the support that members have given us over this period and can assure members that next year will be more straightforward.

We would expect to publish the finalised accounts in the next issue of the News, and we will e-mail those on our members' e-mail list when the accounts are available online.

The Treasurer's Report that was presented to the AGM is published below.

I hope to see many of you at upcoming events or on the shellbank.

**Gillian Vaughan, Chair**

## Treasurer's report for 2011

This was my first year as treasurer for Miranda Naturalists' Trust and there has been a lot to learn about the activities of the Trust. I apologise that the audited accounts are not available for the AGM. The accounts are currently with the auditor, and we hope they will be available shortly.

## Income

There were several drops in income in 2011. Both shop sales and donations dropped this year. It appears that much of the drop was in the first half of the year and that there was a pickup at the end of the year. A drop in income from education is also noticeable and has been discussed by council. Course income also dropped again, perhaps reflecting the

wider economic conditions.

We hope in future years this will improve. More positively, accommodation income was almost level with the 2010 year. Grants were substantially higher than in 2010 and were to support the shorebird guide role.

The net income from subscriptions is higher than last year. As Ashley Reid has advised in the past, the actual payment date does affect this income source and fluctuates from year to year.

## Expenses

General operating expenses were once again up overall and as in 2010 the principal reason is the additional wages costs. There were no other significant changes to expenses.

## Thanks

I would like to thank the centre staff, Kris, Maria and Keith, for their great support, also Ashley Reid for his help when I took over the role and Alister Harlow for ongoing help and support. Without Gillian's contribution I could not have completed the report and presented it to the meeting, so many thanks Gillian.

## Adoption of Accounts

As the accounts had not been finalised I was unable to move their adoption at the AGM. Instead the meeting accepted my motion to authorise council to adopt the accounts and report back in the next newsletter with the final results.

**Charles Gao, Treasurer**

