

Miranda News

Journal Of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust

November 2012 Issue 86

Saving Tangaroa's Children

John Dowding on rescuing
the New Zealand Dotterel

Predator removal sees
chicks flourish at Miranda

Knots get NZ citizenship



From
the
editor



Something to cheer about

IT'S easy to feel depressed about the plight of shorebirds around the globe. So it's great that in this issue you'll be able to read about a few positive things that are happening as well.

*John Dowding writes on the programme to save the NZ Dotterel.

*Conservation Minister Kate Wilkinson tells us about greater recognition for the Red Knot.

*Adrian Riegen reports on a project to survey shorebirds in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

*Kristelle Wi describes the success of the predator control programme in the Miranda hide area.

*There's a review of Keith Woodley's wonderful new book, *Shorebirds of NZ*, telling the stories of our shorebirds.

*Gillian Vaughan reports progress towards the dream of developing the Shorebird Centre into a major conservation education facility.

*And, also on the educational front, there is the first of a new series of children's pages.

There have been such pages before but they faded due to lack of response. I've prevailed on my daughter Alex to produce these so I hope that won't happen this time.

Please, could you help by passing the pages on to your children or – as in my case – grandchildren and encouraging them to get involved.

The key to keeping shorebirds coming to Miranda is getting out the message about the challenges they face. And the best place to start is with the young people who will be those most affected if the birds stop.

Jim Eagles



KRISTELLE WI braves gluggy, oozy mud to haul a young mangrove out of the mudflat near the hides. Kris was one of a small band of hardy volunteers who turned out to keep the areas where the shorebirds like to rest and feed clear of encroaching vegetation. A couple of weeks previously a much larger group of cheerful helpers turned out to give the Shorebird Centre its annual spring clean (see the pictures on the back cover).

Photo / Keith Woodley

Lane family support for birders continues 100 years on

TRUDY LANE, whose great-grandfather Robert Graham Findlay first allowed birdwatchers free access to the old limeworks area more than a century ago, has been coopted on to the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Council.

Trudy, who grew up in the Miranda area, is a digital media designer with many years experience in the art and museum industry overseas.

Now back in New Zealand, she currently manages the family land at Miranda, including the limeworks area.

Recently she has initiated discussions with the trust about the possibility of habitat restoration around the stilt ponds.

Trudy did this year's Miranda Field Course which, she says,



Trudy Lane

encouraged her to "delve deeper into the wonders of the Miranda shoreline and . . . to become further involved with the Miranda Naturalists' Trust."

Earlier this year she used her digital talents to take the Shorebird Centre shop online.

Front cover: A New Zealand Dotterel covered with oil from the Rena.
Back cover: Miranda Shorebird Centre working bee.

Photo / John Dowding
Photos / Jim Eagles

\$920,000 for godwit research project

Researchers Phil Battley, of the Institute of Natural Resources, and Andrew Fidler, of the Cawthron Institute, get a chance to find out what makes godwit migrations tick

AN investigation into the role of genetics in the timing of the annual migration of godwits between New Zealand and Alaska is to receive \$920,000 from the Marsden Fund over the next three years.

Phil Battley, a former MNT councillor, said research – mainly on the Manawatu Estuary – found that while godwit departures from New Zealand spread over about a month, individual birds left at the same time each year. Birds that bred in the southern part of their Alaskan range departed earlier than those from further north where the spring thaw was later.

“What is particularly interesting is how a group of birds can advertise their intention to mi-



grate by calling loudly and bathing, then migrate an hour or two later, yet be ignored by other birds that leave just a day or two afterwards. So it is not as if those other birds were physiologically not ready to migrate; it seems instead that their time had not yet arrived.”

The aim of the project is to find out why a group of birds experiencing identical conditions would translate that information into different departure decisions. “We propose that it may be due to un-

derlying differences in their internal clocks, and that genetic variation in clock genes may in part determine their departure date.

“We also plan to look at whether there are non-genetic influences, such as northern chicks growing up in continuous daylight while southern chicks grow up with some darkness each night.”

Battley said they would study the timing of individual departures from sites around New Zealand; use remote tracking to see when birds left Asia after refuelling, arrived on the breeding grounds and departed from Alaska to return to New Zealand; and look at the underlying molecular variation in selected clock genes.

Dotterels and knots on Facebook

THE Miranda Naturalists' Trust has a growing presence on the internet.

The trust has for some time had an excellent webpage at www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz where you can catch up with all that's going on.

In the previous issue we reported that the shop has gone online so you can now buy from its amazing range of books and other goodies at <https://shop.miranda-shorebird.org.nz>.

And, thanks to Emma Pearson, for the past few months there's also been a Facebook page at www.facebook.com/MirandaShorebird-Centre which is regularly updated with photos and reports on our shorebirds and the centre.

There are some fantastic photos of godwits, wrybills, knots and other birds on display . . . and some pretty cute birdwatchers too.

Generous donation

The EB Firth Trust, which has regularly supported MNT over the years, has made a further donation of \$2,000 which will go towards general running expenses.

Now in residence at Miranda

THERE are now many godwits back at Miranda - over 4000 so far - including some juvenile birds.

Right now the juveniles are easy to distinguish in their brand new, spangled plumage, which gives them a spotted look.

However this will soon change as they moult into their first year plumage. In a few weeks most will be hard to tell apart from all the adult birds.

Other tundra species seen recently include 900 Red Knots, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover, Turnstone and a Black-tailed Godwit.

While most birds have arrived by now, there will be some still on their way including who knows what exciting rare vagrant?

Two pairs of New Zealand Dotterel and two pairs of Variable Oystercatchers have established territories on the shellbank, where they are joined at high tide by 250 Wrybill and over 300 Black-billed Gulls.

Our two White Herons are still around and so is the flock of 10 Royal Spoonbills.

Arctic Migrants

| | |
|------------------------|------|
| Bar-tailed Godwit | 4000 |
| Black-tailed Godwit | 1 |
| Red Knot | 900 |
| Whimbrel | 1 |
| Turnstone | 11 |
| Sharp-tailed Sandpiper | 1 |
| Marsh Sandpiper | 1 |
| Pacific Golden Plover | 8 |

New Zealand Species

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| SI Pied Oystercatcher | 650 |
| Wrybill | 212 |
| NZ Dotterel | 4 |
| Banded Dotterel | |
| Variable Oystercatcher | 4 |
| White-fronted Tern | |
| Caspian Tern | |
| White Heron | 2 |
| Pied Stilt | |
| Royal Spoonbill | 10 |
| Banded Rail | |
| Bittern | |



GULF EXPEDITION (clockwise from top left: Peter Driscoll with his new plane; the Gulf of Carpentaria; aerial view of the coast; birds waiting to be counted; typical meandering river. Photos / Adrian Riegen



Flying visit to the Gulf of Carpentaria

Adrian Riegen reports on a preliminary survey of one of Australia's great wader bird sites where some of our Red Knots take a break on the way to New Zealand

WHEN we think of great Australian wader sites, 80 Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay in the northwest come to mind, and rightly so as combined they hold half a million birds or more during the summer, and for a brief period in 2004 the area hosted an estimated 2.88 million Oriental Pratincoles as well.

But the next most important wader site is the southeast Gulf of Carpentaria, northern Queensland, of which little is known as the area is rarely visited by ornithologists. The Gulf is an extremely important area not just as a wintering ground but also as a key staging site for waders on north and south migration so it is disappointing that so few wader surveys have been undertaken there.

There are reasons for this inactivity. The Gulf is remote, hot and wet in the summer and the waders are only really accessible by boat or plane and crocodiles and stingrays patrol the waters.

But the real problem for anyone wanting to do wader counts is the tide. Unlike most places, the Gulf has only one high tide a day. This leads to weeks of high tides at night so waders are only roosting in the dark, or weeks with lower tides that do not force birds to roost in large flocks, scattering instead over large areas of sandflats, making it more challenging to count them.

Undaunted by these problems Peter Driscoll, one time chair of the Queensland Wader Study Group (QWSG) bought an Ultralite in the 1990s and learnt to fly, enabling him to undertake aerial surveys of the southern Gulf in 1997-99, backed up by two men in a boat. In March-April 1999 I was one of the men in the boat for what turned out to be the last systematic survey.

At long last the QWSG has plans to re-visit the Gulf in March 2013 but thought it wise to find out what had changed in the meantime. I joined Peter again in September for a brief visit to the Gulf using his new plane, still small but enclosed and with convex windows which

allow great viewing straight down. We flew the 1700km to the Gulf from the Sunshine Coast in a day and a half and based ourselves in Karumba, one of only two towns on the Gulf's 2000km coastline.

The next four days were spent flying sections of the coast starting at first light and flying north or west at an altitude of 30-100m while counting. High tides had occurred during the night but as it takes 12 hours to recede, there was still time in the early morning to find birds roosting in flocks of 3-6,000 on sandy beaches, usually at the mouths of rivers.

The coast is flat, often fringed with a band of mangroves 100-300m deep and backed by dry claypans which extend inland for up to 30km. Meandering tidal rivers dissect the plains, king tides can spill out to cover the vast claypans and tropical rains in summer produce floods.

Waders and other waterbirds, particularly whimbrel, curlew, greenshank, pied stilt, egrets and herons also roost in the mangroves. In order to count these we flew low enough to flush them out, Peter and I counting out of each side of the plane (Peter flying the plane as well!). This is an inexact method but the only one that works on this large scale.

During the flights we hardly went more than a few seconds without recording birds. The counts were recorded as voice files onto an iPad, and linked to the flight path, allowing data to be overlaid on maps so that later analysis would determine where all the birds were in relation to the habitat.

We landed on claypans close to large roosts to conduct ground counts to compare with the aerial count. Generally we felt we undercounted from the air and certainly picking up stints from the air was only really possible if they flew.

The ground counts were very rewarding although the last one was cut short when rain clouds appeared. Even a little rain on a

claypan would make it extremely difficult to take off again and there is no margin for error in the Gulf.

Peter is still working on the aerial counts but the three on ground counts have been transcribed:

Mark's Beach (named after Mark Barter): 5,243 waterbirds of 35 species including 23 wader species. Red Knot were the most numerous with 1,500, followed by Black-tailed Godwits with 1,250, Great Knot 1,000, Red-necked Stint 600, Pied Stilt 220 and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper 100.

Once the count was done we looked for flags and found two plain and three engraved flagged Red Knot from New Zealand, three orange-flagged knots from Victoria and others banded at Chongming Dao near Shanghai in China.

Gore Point some 100km from Karumba: 4,765 birds of 23 species including Great Knot 2,215, Red Knot 985, Red-necked Stint 393, Black-tailed Godwit 315, Large Sand Plover 295, Mongolian Dotterel 196 and Bar-tailed Godwit 33.

Camp Misery (an unpleasant spot to camp): 7,430 birds of 29 species, Great Knot dominating again with 2,354, followed by Red-necked Stint 1,620, Red Knot 1,321, Black-tailed Godwit 1,025, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper 315, Large Sand Plover 140 and Broad-billed Sandpipers 55.

More flagged birds were seen at these sites, all from Victoria, New Zealand or Chongming Dao.

Plans were also advanced for the expedition next March-April. The Gulf is almost certainly a significant staging site for New Zealand Red Knot on southward and northward migration and the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is very keen to learn more about its role. To this end the Trust will donate \$2,000 from the Sibson Award fund towards the survey in the hope that more light can be shed on New Zealand's Red Knot that stage there.

A follow up to this article will appear in the Miranda News next year.



A new NZ environmental classic

SHOREBIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND: Sharing the Margins, by Keith Woodley (Penguin, \$50), is reviewed by Stewart Chambers

“THE evening tide is almost full and the shellbank roosts a festival of chattering, preening, jostling birds when the eruption occurs...” so writes Keith Woodley, manager of the Miranda Naturalists’ Trust.

What lovely and descriptive words, and so evocative for anyone who knows the wrybill, the scene of the roost, and the Miranda shellbanks. And this is just some of the fine writing in the newly published, *Shorebirds of New Zealand: Sharing the Margins*.

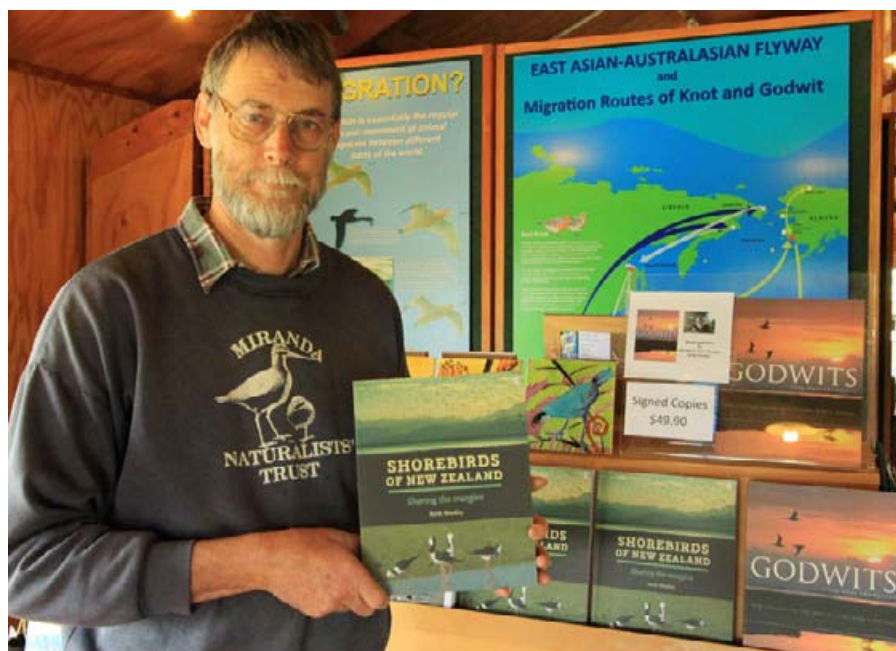
This very interesting book is a mixture of both poetic prose and science with the two quite beautifully married together in a way that keeps the reader reading.

As many will know, Keith is not a scientist but the manager of New Zealand’s only shorebird centre, on the Firth of Thames. This job has equipped him with the ability to interpret the shorebird world to a public audience in a way they can readily understand. He is one of those rare people who can read and understand science, then rewrite it in a way that non-scientists and non-birders can assimilate and appreciate its message. The end result is a fascinating story about the birds of the shoreline.

For those who have been bird-watching for many years and are regular visitors to Miranda, a cursory glance at this book might prompt a concern over whether it contains enough new material to justify the rather high price.

To these people I say do not be discouraged. The book is full of information and data they won’t have thought about. In fact it brings together into one publication much of the writing and science since Captain James Cook and wraps it carefully in easy prose.

Most of the shorebirds which will be encountered along the New Zealand coastline are written about, even including the “seagulls” which many consider irrelevant and even a nuisance, due mainly



to their obviousness and habits of scavenging.

There is also a large section on the state of bird numbers, where the various species might be headed, and discussion on measures needed to sustain them, be they on South Island riverbeds, pastureland or northern beaches where they co-habit so regularly with people.

It also touches on the flyway between New Zealand and their nesting grounds in the northern hemisphere and the problems along its routes.

This is not a field guide or a book aiming to introduce the species that we share the coastline with. Rather it assumes some knowledge of shorebirds and aims to provide further information about the different species.


Sharing the Margins does cater to the novice birder’s need for up-skilling on bird species by illustrating the text with many a picture. These might encourage a sale at the shop counter but they in no way make this simply a picture book. To think that would be to miss the point.

It is not for the pictures that you buy this book. You buy it for its fine writing, its poetry-like prose,

and for its thorough examination and recounting of many a scientific paper and much historical writing. It both entertains and educates at the same time.

At the launch, Geoff Chapple, author of *Te Araroa: a walking guide to New Zealand’s long trail*, likened Woodley’s book to Geoff Park’s *Nga Uruora*. Recognised as a New Zealand classic, *Nga Uruora* explores the forgotten parts of our islands, mostly in a kayak, and links the present to the past. Having read *Nga Uruora* and now Keith’s book I agree.

In fact, as one who has read much of New Zealand’s bird literature, I would place *Sharing the Margins* alongside the Fleming text in *George Edward Lodge*, T H Potts’ *Out in the Open*, J R H Andrews’ *The Southern Ark* and George Watola’s *The Discovery of New Zealand’s Birds*. These are all great books and this one stands firmly with them. It is a New Zealand classic which will meet the test of time.

Shorebirds of NZ is on sale at the Shorebird Centre bookshop for \$50 or you can buy it online at <https://shop.miranda-shorebird.org.nz> 

Removal of predators allows chicks to flourish

THERE has been a significant increase in sightings of both nesting birds and fledgling chicks, many of them endangered species, in the area around the hide since the pest control programme began and not long ago the endangered shore skink was also found there.

Over the two year period trapping has been undertaken the number of pests caught has steadily fallen providing further confirmation that it is having a real impact.

For the programme trap lines were set up around the boundaries, using 30 Fenn kill trap tunnels baited with rabbit meat and eggs, to try to catch predators entering the area.

The traps are serviced at least once a week which takes between 2-3 hours. For the first two seasons this was done from October to April as this is when birds are nesting so adults, eggs and chicks are more vulnerable to predation.

Pests caught over the two seasons were:

| | Season 1 | Season 2 |
|-------------|----------|----------|
| Stoat | 9 | 1 |
| Ferret | 8 | 3 |
| Weasel | 1 | 0 |
| Hedgehog | 22 | 7 |
| Rat | 22 | 11 |
| Feral cat | 1 | 3 |
| Non target: | | |
| Rabbit | 8 | 7 |

As can be seen, the only species of predator that didn't reduce markedly after a season of trapping was feral cats. That's because Fenn tunnel traps are small and are not made to target cats. When it became obvious in the first season that there was a feral cat problem the trust borrowed appropriate traps for the second season, with the result that more cats were caught.



A weasel caught in one of the new DOC-200 traps placed near the Bittern nesting area. Photo / Kristelle Wi

This year trapping was continued right through winter to allow us to assess the impact of a year-round programme and the results of this will be published in the next issue of MNT News.

The trust has recently purchased 15 new DOC-200 traps to extend the trap line from the hide area up to the Shorebird Centre in the hope that more birds will be encouraged to nest along that stretch of coast.

It's difficult to measure the effects

of trapping precisely, because nests and chicks are so well camouflaged, but it's clear that numbers have increased.

There are other factors that can effect the number of pests in the reserve (such as changes in climatic conditions and food supply but we are confident that the trapping has reduced pest numbers resulting in an increased number of nesting pairs and fledged chicks.

Kristelle Wi

Obituary

William (Bill) Motion

Bill Motion, who has died aged 82, was a good friend and neighbour of the Shorebird Centre from its early years.

Bill lived on the skyline slightly north of the centre where he farmed a large property with a milking herd, a South Down ram stud and a cattle rearing operation. From there he kept watch over what went on.

In the early days of the Trust, when there was some local opposition to the placing of the centre on the Miranda coast, Bill was always a supporter.

His wife Nan was also supportive and once the centre was built made it the headquarters for the local National Party. From time to time local MPs would gather there

under her supervision in what she came to regard as the Miranda "hall".

Bill also helped in practical ways. The shell driveway was part of his work. And it was his tractor and back blade which levelled the area around the centre.

He was a regular visitor, attending the occasional field day or New Year Party, and often dropped in just to keep Keith company.

After Nan died he regularly had Keith for a meal when they would talk into the night over a slow whiskey.

The Trust extends its condolences to his family. Thanks Bill for your welcome support.

Stuart Chambers





New Zealand Dotterel at Kidd's Beach.

Photo / Ian Southey

Rescuing the children of Tangaroa

John Dowding, guest speaker at this year's Miranda Welcome to the Birds, reports on his work to save the NZ Dotterel from predators, coastal development . . . and the *Rena*

FOR those involved with the northern New Zealand dotterel, 2011 was an eventful year. The fourth national census was undertaken, and the *Rena* went aground, prompting a flurry of activity to protect the Bay of Plenty population from the effects of the resulting oil spill.

The census

Attempts to count the whole northern New Zealand dotterel population within a single season began with the first national census in October 1989. There have now been four censuses at 7-8 year intervals, with the most recent in 2011. A preliminary analysis of the latest counts shows that numbers have risen quite sharply; the population now numbers about 2175 birds, up from 1700 in 2004, 1450 in 1996, and 1310 in 1989. However, these gross counts are not strictly comparable, because not all

the same sites have been counted each time. Many more sites were counted in 2011 than in 2004 for example, but there has still been an increase of at least 14 percent in that time.

One obvious feature, which continues a trend seen in previous censuses, is that virtually all the increase has been on the east coast of the North Island, with the west coast population remaining largely static.

Even on the east coast, the increase has been patchy, and most of it has occurred in just two regions – Auckland East and Coromandel Peninsula. Both areas may be approaching carrying capacity; if so, the rate of increase (both locally in these two areas and nationally), is unlikely to be sustained.

Another feature revealed by the 2011 counts is the steady expansion

of the population southwards on the east coast. A few pairs are now breeding in Hawkes Bay, a small number are seen regularly at Porangahau, and this season a pair appears to have established at Riversdale. While this represents a considerable expansion of range, the numbers of sites and pairs involved are small as yet.

A gamble

When the CV *Rena* grounded on Astrolabe Reef in early October 2011, it had two immediate consequences for New Zealand dotterels.

The first was to disrupt the national census that was due to occur only a week later, as volunteers and agency staff from around the North Island rushed to Tauranga to help with the wildlife response. In the end, the effect on the census appears to have been relatively minor, although counts

in some areas were delayed by a few weeks.

The second consequence was potentially much more serious. At least 5 percent of the global northern dotterel population was at risk from spilt fuel oil coming ashore, and had the oil spread more widely the figure could have been up to 15%. To make matters worse, the event occurred at a time when most birds were breeding. A decision on how to manage these birds had to be taken quickly.

One option was to capture some, move them to areas not affected by oil, and release them there. This was thought unlikely to be successful – dotterels are site-faithful and highly territorial during the breeding season, and would almost certainly have returned rapidly. A second option was to leave birds in the wild, monitor them, and catch and rehabilitate any that became oiled. The third option, and the one adopted after considerable discussion, was to catch a number of birds preemptively and hold them in captivity while their beaches were cleaned. In all, 60 birds were caught, and were held for an average of seven weeks. They formed an ‘insurance population’ that could have been used to re-populate the area, had the worst happened and all the oil on the vessel had leaked, killing the birds remaining in the wild. This approach was not without risk, because the technique had not been tried before, and only a handful of adult dotterels had ever been held in captivity.

In the event, the husbandry team and vets did a superb job. Late in the exercise, a few birds were lost to aspergillosis (a fungal disease), but 90% of those held survived the experience and were released at their capture sites when the threat had passed. At one such release at Pukehina, local kaumatua Huriwaka Rewa blessed the birds being freed, and described them as the “children of Tangaroa”.

There is reason to believe that rates of aspergillosis could be



Dotterel motels.

Photos / John Dowding



reduced in future, primarily by cleaning beaches more quickly, so that birds can be released sooner. One encouraging result was that three pairs bred within a few weeks of release, suggesting that for some birds the extended period in captivity may have been less stressful than we supposed.

Preliminary results from

monitoring one year after the event suggest that things are getting back to normal. While we undoubtedly had an effect at the individual level (some nests had to be abandoned, for example, and some birds lost their territories), the exercise looks to have been successful at the population level. Most sites appear to have about the same number



Rescuers treat a New Zealand Dotterel affected by oil from the Rena.

Photo / John Dowding

of birds as before the grounding, and many of the birds held in captivity are paired and breeding again. Much was learnt from the experience. There is international interest in the outcome, and the knowledge gained should be useful when other threatened shorebird species are affected by oil spills in future.

An uncertain future

We have known for many years now that New Zealand dotterels are conservation dependent; that is, without management numbers will decline by about 1 percent a year. Currently about 25 percent of pairs are managed, and this is enough to bring about an overall increase in the population.

However, if the gains made recently are not to be lost, management must continue.

Because DOC no longer has the resources to protect significant

numbers of them, the way in which New Zealand dotterels are managed nowadays is inevitably changing. The recovery group has not met for seven years, and although the recovery plan is still current, many of the actions it suggests are not being undertaken.

With a few exceptions, this is now a bird that must be managed by local communities and by agencies other than DOC.

While this approach can be very successful, there is still a need for national coordination and oversight of the various programmes being undertaken in different areas. In the past, this was a major role of the recovery group, and DOC is currently looking at less-expensive ways of coordinating activities and providing advice.

Current thinking is that a small technical advisory group of perhaps two or three people, probably from outside the Department,

could fill that role. Even that level of oversight would require some resources however, and it seems unlikely at present that DOC would be able to provide them on a long-term basis.

Another concern in the longer term is the current distribution of New Zealand dotterels. As noted above, the bulk of them are now on the east coast. As the human population grows, this coastline is coming under increasing pressure, with steady growth in the number of subdivisions and other developments. This will obviously lead to higher levels of recreational use of beaches by people, often with their vehicles and dogs. The inevitable result seems to be a gradual (and probably irreversible) increase in disturbance during the breeding season, and steady degradation of habitat.

My guess is that over coming decades, the increases we have seen



Portrait of a New Zealand Dotterel.

Photo / John Dowding

in various parts of the east coast dotterel population will level off, and that we could even start to see declines in some areas.

Dotterels are often thinly spread along the coast, which results in a perception that impacts at a particular site are unimportant because they only affect a small proportion of the population.

It is the cumulative effect of many such minor impacts that is of concern, especially when there may be no formal coordination of management activities and no effective national oversight of numbers and trends. And it should not be forgotten that the west coast population receives little management at present.

The future of New Zealand dotterels is undoubtedly secure in the short term, but whether numbers and range will be maintained in coming decades is much less certain.



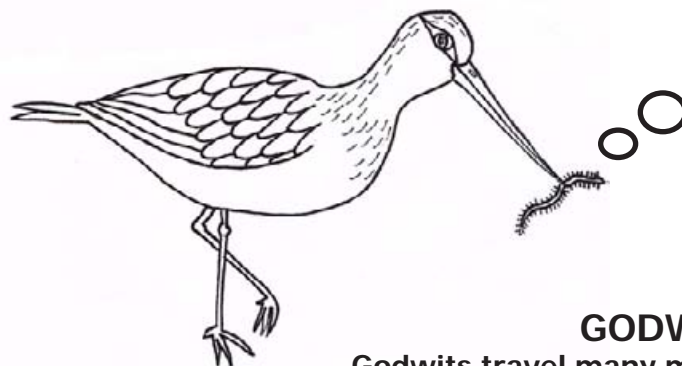
John Dowding with a wrybill.

Photo / Keith Woodley

GODWIT

Gidday or Waqaa
as we say in Alaska. My name is
Godfrey and I am an Eastern bar-
tailed godwit. We godwits nest in
Alaska during your winter then migrate
11,000 kilometres around the world to
arrive in NZ in time
for spring.

Around 100,000
of my friends and relatives visit NZ with
me. As well as at Miranda you can see
lots of us gathered at the Kaipara and
Manukau Harbours as well as Farewell Spit
in the South Island but smaller flocks are
found at lots of other
places too.



GODV

Godwits travel many m
To reach New Zealand'
Some leave Alaska in J
And fly a week or more
Perhaps going past Jap
Thousands of miles to
Before sighting our lan
Which may be in Septe
When arriving they spr
To harbours far and wi
Congregating in large
On sandbanks at high
They mix with other w
That arrive from foreig
Knots, sandpipers, whi
Can be seen upon the s
Feeding in our harbour
On crab and worm and
Getting weight back or
Then the trip back hon
Chests change to a rus
After spending the sun
Birds get their breedin
Thinking of the Northe
In March and April the
It will soon be time to
Back to their breeding
Then we say goodbye.

Rosern

Calling Godfrey the Godwit

Dear Godfrey

I sometimes come to watch the
migratory birds at Miranda. I have
my own pair of binoculars but
sometimes the MNT people let us
look through their special telescope
so that we can see the birds really up
close.

I once waded in the muddy water
behind the bird hide to see what it
would feel like. I got muddy water in
my gumboots but it was fun!

From Jamie of Tauranga.

Thank you for your letter
and photo, Jamie. I like
the feel of mud squishing
between my toes too. I
hope to see you again at
Miranda soon.
From Godfrey



TIMES

I like to spend the summer feeding on the animals that live in the estuary mud. My favourite are the polychaete worms but the crabs and molluscs are pretty tasty too.

In future issues of MNT News we will be finding out about other birds that spend time on the NZ coast with me. Can you solve this crossword puzzle to find out the name of the bird for next time?

WORD PUZZLE

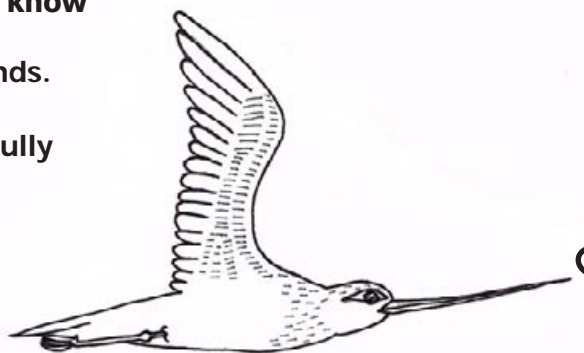
Collect the chosen letters from each answer to make up the name of our mystery bird. All the answers are in these pages.

1. Where are godwits most common in the South Island?
2. When do the godwits usually arrive in NZ each year?
3. & 4. Where do Bar-tailed Godwits nest during the NZ winter?
5. What colour do the feathers on the godwit's chest change to at the end of the NZ summer?
6. What type of coastal area do godwits spend most of their time?
7. What is the Maori name for the godwit?
8. On which Auckland harbour can you see large gatherings of godwits?
9. Godwits like to eat crabs, molluscs and?
10. What is the term for birds that travel to different countries?



DWITS

y miles
nd's shore.
in July,
ore,
Japan and Korea,
to remember,
land,
ptember.
spread out
l wide,
ge groups,
gh tide.
r waders
eign lands.
whimbrels
he sands.
ours
and snail.
k on again,
ome won't fail.
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If you would like to contact me, perhaps with a letter or a photo or drawing of you birdwatching, you can email to seagulls@clear.net.nz

Red Knot's status goes from carefree

The Government has officially acknowledged that the Red Knot is a New Zealand native bird and one we should be very worried about. **Keith Woodley** and **Jim Eagles** report on that and other recent skirmishes in the battle to safeguard migrants passing through the Yellow Sea.

FOR the first time since they started flying to New Zealand thousands of years ago, the Red Knots which have just arrived in Miranda for their annual summer holiday will not need a visa.

The sub-species which comes here, *Calidris canutus rogersi*, has just been officially declared a native bird rather than a migrant.

But, unfortunately for these new natives, the threat posed by loss of stopover sites on their route here is so serious that the sub-species has promptly been added to our list of birds that are nationally vulnerable.

The change in status for the Red Knot has been revealed in an exchange of letters between MNT chair Gillian Vaughan and Minister of Conservation Kate Wilkinson.

Vaughan wrote to the minister earlier this year underlining the threat posed by the loss of intertidal mudflats as a result of coastal development in China.

Refuelling stops in the Yellow Sea region are, she pointed out, vital for all of the tens of thousands of migratory shorebirds which visit New Zealand each year. But "Red Knots, in particular, are highly specialised in the food they require which is found in sufficient quantities in very few places. As a result they tend to be highly concentrated at just one or two sites during migration."

Vaughan enclosed an article from the China Daily newspaper outlining the damage being done by coastal development to intertidal flats, where the migratory birds



Red Knots in breeding plumage at Kidd's Beach.

forage for food, at Bohai Bay on the Yellow Sea.

This area was crucial, she wrote, because "at least 50 percent of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway red knot population was counted in Bohai Bay in 2012."

But, unfortunately, it was an

once such sites become degraded...

"What," she asked, "is the government's response to this pressing issue?"

In reply, the minister said the Department of Conservation was well aware of the growing body of literature showing that East Asian

The panel went on to assess rogersi as a threatened taxon with 'nationally vulnerable' status. Although the population is still well above 20,000 birds, the panel predicted the decline may be between 50 and 70 percent over three Red Knot generations.

- Kate Wilkinson, Minister of Conservation

area of the Chinese coast "under the most threat from development. If this habitat loss continues at the current rate the future for Red Knots is extremely bleak."

Vaughan added that already the number of knots in New Zealand had fallen from an estimated 58,000 in 1983-1994 to 32,000 in 2006-2011. "Experience from Red Knot populations elsewhere in the world, such as in the Dutch Wadden Sea and at Delaware Bay in the eastern United States, shows how quickly populations crash

sites such as Bohai Bay were critical stopovers for the Arctic migrant waders that spend the summer in New Zealand.

The department had commissioned the Ornithological Society of New Zealand to summarise its summer and winter counts of visiting waders "and the resultant data indicates a significant decline in the number of Red Knots."

The department had also recently convened a panel of ornithological experts to undertake an assessment

migrant to endangered native



Photos / Ian Southey



Kate Wilkinson

of the threat status of local birds.

“This panel decided that because the *rogersi* sub-species spent more than 50 per cent of its life-cycle in New Zealand (ie six months every austral summer, plus pre-breeding years) and because the New Zealand population makes up more than 25 percent of the taxon’s entire population, then it would be assessed as a native species rather than a migrant.

“The panel went on to assess *rogersi* as a threatened taxon with ‘nationally vulnerable’ status. Although the population is still well above 20,000 birds, the panel predicted the decline may be between 50 and 70 percent over three Red Knot generations.”

Hopefully this new status would raise international interest in the Red Knot “given that the International Union for Conservation of Nature currently regards the Red Knot species, on the whole, to be of ‘least concern’.”

Also, she noted New Zealand’s decision last year, to become a government member of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership allowed it to participate in discussions on the issue.

At the most recent meeting of the partnership the government representative had participated in the Shorebirds and Yellow Sea Working groups “both of which concentrated their attention on the ongoing threats in the Yellow Sea and especially Bohai Bay.”

Membership of the partnership, the minister said, “will undoubtedly lead to an increase in New Zealand’s effort in the conservation of migratory waders and their habitats – not only within New Zealand but also along the rest of the flyway – through research and international advocacy. Prioritisation of work resulting from partnership membership is being initiated with the department.”

She also noted that the government was awaiting with interest the final wording of a proposed resolution on Asian intertidal habitats at the IUCN World Conservation Congress. “A well-worded resolution in this forum could provide the impetus for affected governments to take a more proactive approach to protecting important intertidal habitats within their national jurisdiction.”

Jim Eagles

Minister encouraged by Congress resolutions on Yellow Sea habitat

CONSERVATION Minister Kate Wilkinson believes three resolutions passed at the recently ended World Conservation Congress will assist in the battle to preserve habitat for Red Knots and other shorebirds in the Yellow Sea area.

In her letter to MNT (reported in the adjacent article) the minister said a well-worded resolution at the congress could spark greater efforts to safeguard inter-tidal areas the birds depend on.

When the Congress ended *Miranda News* asked Mrs Wilkinson whether she felt that had been achieved.

“As you may already be aware,” she replied, “the Congress considered three motions that addressed different aspects of the management of migratory birds on the East Asian Australasian Flyway:

“Motion 29: International co-operation for waterbird monitoring

to support sound management.

“Motion: 32: Conservation of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) intertidal zone, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea and its threatened birds.

“Motion 66: Improving conservation and sustainability of the Yellow Sea.”

The Minister said she had been advised that all three of these motions were subject to extensive discussion in contact groups at the Congress.

Unfortunately, the final versions of the motions had not yet been posted on the Congress website and she was, therefore, unable to provide them at this point. But, when the motions were posted, MNT members would be able to access them at the following website: <http://portals.iucn.org/2012motions/?q=latest>.

Answering the specific question about whether the resolutions adopted on the subject of shorebird habitat in the Yellow Sea were “well-worded and helpful”

Mrs Wilkinson indicated they were.

“New Zealand supported the final wording of all three EAAF-related motions. In our view, they will send a helpful message to countries that manage key habitat sites for migratory species along the flyway generally, and particularly those within the Yellow Sea region.

“It is also notable that the Korean National Park Service and the Korean Ministry of the Environment both co-sponsored motions 29, 32 and 66, thereby indicating an increased degree of support by the Government of the Republic of Korea for these motions.

“In addition, given that all three of these motions received close to 100 per cent support in both the government and NGO houses at the IUCN Congress, this level of support, coupled with the clear text of these resolutions, will help to raise awareness within the region of the global importance of the Yellow Sea as a critical habitat for Red Knots, other water birds, and sea birds.”



But will Governments act?

Keith Woodley says the future of migratory shorebirds still depends on whether Governments turn words into action

EFFORTS to preserve stopover habitat for godwits, knots and other migratory shorebirds received a boost at the World Conservation Congress in Jeju, South Korea.

The Congress, convened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), passed a strongly worded resolution calling on governments around the Yellow Sea to ensure better conservation of intertidal areas and the threatened waterbirds that depend on them.

That immediate action is needed was further underlined in a report received by the Congress, documenting the “exceptionally rapid declines” of many migratory waterbird species along the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF).

“Waterbirds that depend on the Asian intertidal habitats of the EAAF during their non-breeding season are the world’s most threatened migratory birds, apart from albatrosses and petrels . . . Observed rates of declines of waterbird species of 5-9 per cent per year (and up to 26 per cent per year for the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper) are among the highest of any ecological system

on the planet. . . Unless major steps are taken to reverse current trends, the EAAF is likely to experience extinctions and associated collapses of essential and valuable ecological services in the near future.”

The resolution, adopted unanimously at Jeju, called on governments along the EAAF “to recognize the international importance of their intertidal wetlands for biodiversity and ecosystem services, halting further approval of intertidal mudflat reclamation (land claim) at priority sites for biodiversity, irrespective of protection status, until a full assessment of the economics of ecological services and identification of biodiversity needs can be completed.”

Governments were also called on to agree “on the key sites for endangered birds that require urgent conservation and restoration, leading to the conservation, before 2020, of at least 10 per cent of the intertidal zone as sustainably managed protected areas.”

The significance of the resolution is that both China and South Korea supported it.

However, its ultimate effectiveness - or otherwise - will depend substantially on both countries taking swift and effective action. In the case of Korea at least the signs are not encouraging.

The resolution noted that at the 2008 Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, the Government of Korea made a commitment that “intertidal mudflats should be preserved and that no large-scale reclamation projects are now being approved in the Republic of Korea.” Deleted from the final text was an expression of concern that “years later these commitments do not seem to have slowed the rate of reclamation” in Korea.

There is a role for all countries in the EAAF Partnership, including New Zealand, to encourage governments in East Asia to work towards achieving the goals set out in the resolution. There is also a clear incentive to do so. It is conclusively documented that large scale habitat loss at stopover sites directly leads to declining shorebird populations.

The Saemangeum development in Korea resulted in the Great Knot population falling by at least 22 per cent. Habitat degradation at Delaware Bay in the US caused a precipitous fall in the Red Knot population, but a recovery began once firm conservation measures were introduced.

Ongoing development in the Bohai Sea is causing the Red Knot population to be concentrated into smaller and smaller areas, with a population collapse predicted in the near future if nothing is done.

Finally, we know that the largest concentrations of Bar-tailed Godwits of the *baueri* and *menzbieri* populations occur in the Yalu Jiang region during northward migration, and that *menzbieri* birds also use the area during southward migration. We also know what the ultimate outcome will be if those areas are not sufficiently protected.

See: www.iucn.org/asiancoastal-wetlands/



The spoon-billed sandpiper

Small steps towards survival

The programme to find a future for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper appears to be making progress, reports **Keith Woodley**

THE SPOON-BILLED sandpiper was at the forefront of debate at the IUCN Congress because of its absolutely precarious status. With probably fewer than 100 pairs left in the wild, and an annual cycle that encompasses the Russian Far East, the Yellow Sea and South Asia, it is critically endangered.

However it is pleasing to report progress in a daring recovery strategy for this tiny sandpiper launched last year by an international team of scientists and conservationists.

The captive breeding population at Wildfowl and Wetland Trust Slimbridge in the UK is doing well. This year 20 eggs were transferred there from the Russian Far East and from these 17 chicks hatched.

But the UK part of the project is really an attempt to take out an insurance policy against extinction. Of greater significance is the rear and release method, known as “headstarting”, that was trialled on the tundra this season by an Anglo-Russian team.

Nine eggs were successfully hatched and reared in the nearest tundra village, Meinypil’gyno, before being released as fledglings to make their 8,000km migration to South Asia.

This, the team said, had paved “the way for eggs laid in the

UK in the future, as part of the conservation breeding programme, to be flown to Russia, hatched and released into the wild.”

The next stage will be trying to learn something of these birds outside the breeding grounds. What are their chances of surviving this first migration? More importantly, what are their chances of returning as adults to successfully breed?

After all, these young birds face the perils of being hunted in Myanmar or Bangladesh, or finding suitable stopover habitat amid the rapid industrial development on the coast of the Yellow Sea.

While there are encouraging signs of raised public awareness among local communities in South Asia, the relentless tide of habitat destruction in China and Korea continues. The entire Spoon-billed Sandpiper project is a series of desperate measures compelled by a desperate situation. But on this tenuous but tantalising thread hangs the future of the species. See: www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com/2012/10/news/conservation/russian-conservation-trials-pave-way-for-spoon-billed-sandpiper-recovery/

www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com/2012/09/news/conservation/an-update-from-the-conservation-breeding-flock



From the chair

A new book, building plans, habitat enhancement and successful events

Council chair **Gillian Vaughan** reports on a busy and successful period for the Miranda Naturalists' Trust

I'D LIKE to begin by congratulating Keith Woodley on the publication of his second book, *Shorebirds of NZ: Sharing the margins*. Between Keith's first book, *Godwits*, and this second volume looking at all of New Zealand's shorebirds, he has put into writing much of the evidence needed to support the conservation of shorebirds in New Zealand.

They are not only useful but easy to read and the trust owes thanks to Keith for taking the time and effort necessary to produce such excellent work.

I would encourage members to read Keith's new book and I am sure that if you purchase a copy he would be happy to sign it for you.

The Building

The building project had become somewhat stalled as council considered different options.

We therefore recently held a special meeting regarding the future building programme. The focus was around what we really need in a new building, then making sure that the connections between all of the areas allow for them to work together while still maintaining the culture of the organisation.

The vision which emerged is similar to what has been discussed, with a multi-use space capable of holding 150 people for a talk, which can be sectioned off into a smaller auditorium and a separate meeting room / research area. A full kitchen attached to the area will increase its versatility. A dedicated display area will be an important upgrade, as will a lockable shop, a separate lockable office; a better entrance and improved signage. The development will also include two more self-contained accommodation units and provision to be able to add, at a later



date, a coffee shop should that be decided upon.

It was a positive meeting and I hope that members will see progress in this area soon.

The Limeworks

We have made an application for funding to put in a short boardwalk covering the worst part of the trail to the high and we hope to hear back from this shortly.

In the meantime Keith is working on a series of interpretative signs that will be put up along the track and at the hide. Waikato Regional Council has provided a grant of \$5,175 towards this work.

It is summer again and I am happy to advise that members are likely to once again see Kristelle Wi down at the high over high tide periods.

An idea to have a volunteer sitting in a kiosk or caravan in the carpark was floated at a recent council meeting. The aim would be to provide security for the parked cars and to offer visitors information about the birds so they get something of interest even if the tide is out.

This is something we are considering proceeding with. If there

are members who would be willing to go on a roster to do this work please contact Keith at the Centre.

On a wider scale, in conjunction with the Lane family we are considering a habitat enhancement project in the area surrounding the stilt ponds.

The details of this are still very much in the discussion stage. Eila Lawton will be leading the first part of the project, determining what we would like to achieve.

Once the first round of discussions has occurred I am sure Eila will produce a report on the outcomes and would be happy to hear from members who would like to be involved.

The group will also be considering what to do with the land we acquired some years ago for restoration purposes.

I consider this a very exciting project and am looking forward to seeing what happens next!

Events

The second half of the year has seen several successful events.

I was pleased to see so many members present at the working bee and I have had great reports back on the photography and dotterel courses.

The highlight for me was the number of people who came together for a very relaxed and social potluck dinner. I would encourage those who have not attended previously to come along and join us next year.

Reports on the talks given at the open day and AGM are elsewhere in this issue. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Brian Gill and John Dowding for their time and effort in putting together very successful presentations.

Staff and volunteers

In early October the trust had



Gillian Vaughan and Keith Woodley discuss option for expanding the Shorebird Centre.

the opportunity to send one person to the Taipei Bird Fair with costs covered by the Wildbird Society of Taipei. Kristelle Wi was keen to go and as I am writing this has just returned.

On her first day back we asked her to give a brief talk to our open day crowd and it sounds as if she thoroughly enjoyed the experience, and had the chance to talk to a lot of people about the importance of the Yellow Sea. She has written a report for Miranda News which appears on page 22.

As noted above, Kris will be back on the shoreline and running the predator control over the summer months and I am sure members will make a her welcome when they run into her on the shellbanks.

At a council level, Tansy Bliss was unable to join us on Council due to the job opportunity of a lifetime, working for the Department of Conservation on the Chatham Islands. Council has since co-opted Trudy Lane as a member and a

brief biography of her appears on page 2.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Charles Gao for the work he has done in finalising our end of year accounts which are presented overleaf.

OVERSEAS NEWS

Yalu Jiang

We received confirmation in September that the east and west reserve boundaries at Yalu Jiang have been adjusted, moving the boundaries in and reducing the reserve size by some 20,000 ha. At the same time it appears that the boundaries of several other coastal reserves were also reduced.

These changes are to provide opportunities for reclamation and are obviously a major blow for shorebird conservation in the Yellow Sea.

More and more shorebird conservation in China needs to be pushed at a Governmental level,

As you can read on pages 14-17 in this issue the Trust has been in contact with the Minister of Conservation regarding what the government's plans are to support our birds on their northward migration.

North Korea

We are still working on a team returning to North Korea. We have also been contacted about the possibility of a group from North Korea visiting the Centre. It appears that this is difficult to arrange from both ends, however I see their interest in visiting us as a positive sign.

SEASONS GREETINGS

Advertising for Christmas has started, so the holiday period cannot be too far off. I therefore take this opportunity to wish all members a very happy holiday season.

I hope that we will see many of you at the Shorebird Centre over the upcoming months.



Treasurer's report and accounts for year ended 31 December 2011

THIS was my first year as treasurer and there has been a lot to learn. I apologise that the audited accounts were not available for the AGM but they have now been audited. A summary is presented here and the full accounts are on the MNT website.

There were several drops in income in 2011. Both shop sales and donations fell, mostly in the first 6 months, with a pickup at the end of the year. A drop in income from education is noticeable and has been discussed by Council. Course income fell, perhaps

reflecting wider economic conditions.

More positively, accommodation income was almost level with 2010. Grants were substantially higher due to support for the shorebird guide role. Net income from subscriptions is up, in part due to fluctuations caused by the payment date.

Overall expenses were similar to 2010. Magazine distribution costs were down due to buying postage in bulk before price increases in 2010. There were few banding expenses. Increases in expenditure occurred in

publicity and website design.

I would like to thank Centre Staff, for their support, Ashley for his help when I took over the role and Alister for ongoing support. Without Gillian's contribution I could not have completed this report.

The full accounts will be presented to the next council meeting (18 November) for adoption. I will now be away for several weeks. If members have comments or questions please contact the Chairperson.

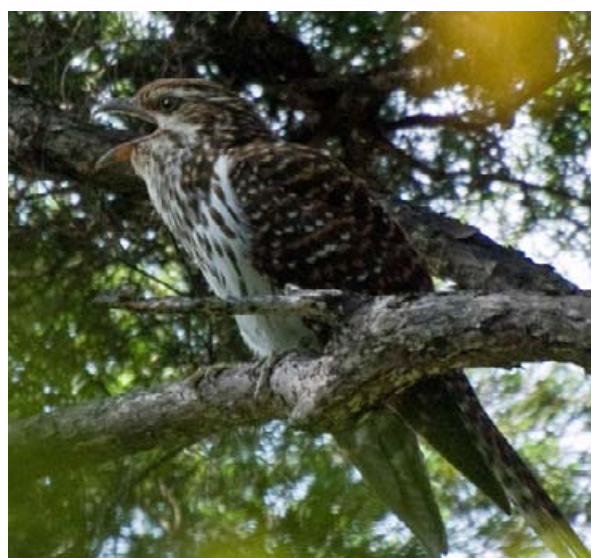
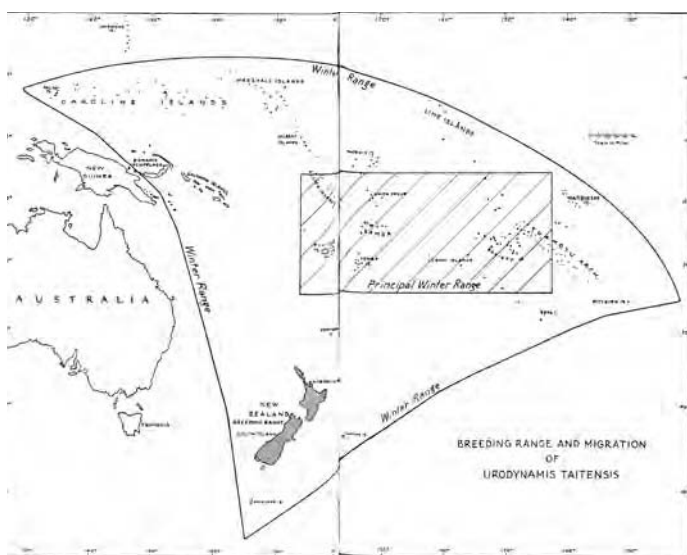
Charles Gao, Treasurer

Summary of Income and Expenditure Account for Year Ended 31 December 2011

| 2010 | Income | 2011 | 2010 | Expenditure | 2011 |
|----------------|---|----------------|----------------|---|----------------|
| 18,881 | Subscriptions | 16,926 | 8,130 | Magazine-Publication | 8,275 |
| 18,355 | Donations | 13,343 | 6,519 | Magazine - Distribution | 2,490 |
| 6,051 | Schools/Lectures | 3,590 | 307 | Publicity | 4,682 |
| 28,838 | Surplus on shop trading | 25,564 | 8,010 | Bird Banding Expenses | 410 |
| 2,324 | Profit on Field Course | 2,350 | 1,250 | Sibson Award Scholarship | 0 |
| 7,442 | Grants | 31,982 | 2,988 | Electricity | 3,206 |
| 21,719 | Accommodation | 21,621 | 9,662 | Building - running costs | 8,000 |
| 13,221 | Interest Received | 10,617 | 2,423 | Plant and Machinery | 2,463 |
| 4,800 | Lease - rental | 4,800 | 0 | Furniture and Fittings | 887 |
| | | | 1,313 | Printing & Stationery | 907 |
| | | | 5,894 | Administration Expenses | 6,360 |
| | | | 2,421 | Bank Fees | 2,942 |
| | | | 3,165 | Insurance and Rates | 3,712 |
| | | | 66,423 | Wages | 71,212 |
| | | | 345 | ACC Levy | 211 |
| 121,631 | Total Income | 130,794 | 118,850 | Total Cash Expenses | 115,757 |
| | | | 13,184 | Depreciation | 11,266 |
| | | | 0 | Loss on Sales | 218 |
| | Deficit for year transferred to Accumulated Funds | | -10,403 | Surplus for year transferred to Accumulated Funds | 3,554 |

Summary of the Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2011

| 2010 | Liabilities | 2011 | 2010 | Assets | 2011 |
|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| | | | | Investments | |
| 9,876 | Life Membership Reserve Fund | 9,358 | 183,202 | TSB Term Investment | 191,849 |
| 2,865 | Subscriptions paid in Advance | 4,166 | 33,799 | TSB (Sibson Award) | 34,158 |
| - | Overdraft at Bank | - | 217,001 | Total Investments | 226,008 |
| 6,710 | Accounts Payable | 12,987 | | | |
| 2,067 | GST Due | - | 4,905 | BNZ Current Current Account | 8,306 |
| 11,228 | Unspent Grants Income - Muddy Feet | 11,228 | 22,032 | BNZ Achiever Savings Account | 20,023 |
| | | | 27,746 | Stock on Hand | 31,354 |
| 32,745 | Total Liabilities | 37,738 | 861 | Accounts Receivable / GST due | 1,409 |
| | Accumulated Funds B/F | 1,058,681 | 812,873 | Property Plant & Equipment | 818,881 |
| | plus surplus 2011 | 3,554 | | | |
| 1,058,681 | Total Accumulated Funds | 1,062,235 | 1,091,426 | Total Assets | 1,099,973 |



Clockwise from top left: 1937 map of the migration of the Long-tailed Cuckoo; Long-tailed Cuckoo; Shining Cuckoo; study skins held by Auckland Museum; Brian Gill. Pictures / Whitney South Sea Expedition; Simon Fordham (2); Brian Gill; K Pfeiffer.

Tracing the migratory pattern of NZ's cuckoos

Auckland Museum's **Brian Gill** told trust members about the detective work necessary to trace the longest overwater migratory journey made by any land birds

NEW Zealand's two species of Cuckoo – Long-tailed and Shining – are among the least understood of our birds.

But cunning detective work by Auckland Museum's Curator of Land Vertebrates Brian Gill, sifting through sighting data recorded on museum skins and in ornithological literature, has succeeded in largely unravelling their migratory patterns.

Brian, a former member of the MNT council, was guest speaker at the August potluck dinner.

The endemic Long-tailed Cuckoo, he explained, winters in a vast arc of islands extending 10,000 km from Palau in the west to Henderson Island (Pitcairn group) in the east, with perhaps a principal wintering range between Fiji and Tahiti.

The native Shining Cuckoo, which also breeds in Australia, New Caledonia and Vanuatu, winters in the Bismarck Archipelago and

Solomon Islands. Because of the great sea-distances involved, theirs are the most remarkable overwater migratory journeys of any land-birds in the world.

There has, Brian said, been negligible banding of cuckoos in New Zealand and there are no recoveries overseas. The birds are also too small to carry satellite-tracking transmitters. Precise details of the migratory journeys are therefore lacking. For example, it is uncertain whether Lord Howe, Norfolk and the Kermadec Islands are a destination or a staging post for Long-tailed Cuckoos. Hence the need for his study.

Analysis of billwidths of Shining Cuckoos (which are wider on average in New Zealand than in Australian birds) has shown that many travel north via eastern Australia rather than directly to Melanesia.

Long-tailed Cuckoos parasitise whiteheads on the North Island and

yellowheads and brown creepers on the South Island. The shining cuckoo parasitises grey warblers.

At breeding time cuckoos probably return to where they were born and most likely seek out the same species that raised them.

Similarly, when migrating north they tend to return to specific tropical islands meaning that different geographical breeding populations of New Zealand Cuckoos are linked with particular wintering islands in the Pacific.

That means, Brian warned, environmental impacts, such as deforestation, on particular Pacific islands, have the potential to knock out Cuckoo populations in specific parts of New Zealand. Likewise, declines in host populations in New Zealand could eliminate Cuckoos from Pacific islands.

All of which underlines the importance of identifying the migratory patterns of these remarkable and mysterious birds.





Kristelle Wi on the Miranda Shorebird Centre stall at the Taipei Birdwatching Fair

Telling Miranda's story to the world

Kristelle Wi reports on the experience of representing Miranda Shorebird Centre at the annual Taipei Birdwatching Fair

TAIWANESE are nice, polite and helpful, but after trying to make small talk with "Eb" (a Wildbird Society of Taipei worker) I realised they don't have the same dry sense of humor as us Kiwis.

Day one in Taipei was no time for rest. As soon as the luggage was dropped at the hotel two Greek ladies and I were whisked away to lunch with the president of the WBST. The meal was a nice introduction to the local food.

They had also scheduled a cycle tour but even though my mind was buzzing my body was a zombie. So we all strolled back to the hotel for a rest before going out to the welcoming party.

The route to the party was over dimly lit, wobbly, dirt paths but at every corner enthusiastic WBST volunteers were holding big signs directing us to the "Bird Party".

This was unlike the parties I'm used to as we played team games involving passing around large inflatable noodles, running around a fire with a flaming torch and other weird activities. Still, there was a good meal and some half decent Taiwan beer.

Day two was the start of the Birdwatching Fair. Breakfast consisted of a few nice cakes and

pastries which came in a pretty pink box with gold writing. I had to giggle at what it said: "Sweet Memory, lead the happy way of life. How deep is your love, delicacies in fairy tales..."

I set up the MNT kiosk with posters explaining the migration routes and the methods we use in our research accompanied by a few of our brochures.

During the fair I talked with people from all parts of the world about bird migration and the MNT as well as answering any questions. Having a translator was very helpful as most of the people I spoke to were Asian and understood little or no English.

I gave a 30 minute presentation on "unlocking the mysteries of shorebird migration" which seemed to spark more interest in the Miranda stand.

Events at the fair ranged from traditional Taiwanese dancing to lectures from other conservation organisations from the Phillipines, Malaysia, Greece, China, Thailand and Japan. Learning about problems that other countries face and how they deal with them was one of the most interesting parts of the trip.


The fair attracts around 6000

visitors so it is a good opportunity to promote conservation. By the end of the weekend my pocket was bulging with business cards from the various people who had taken interest in the Miranda kiosk. I feel confident that our presence helped raise awareness of the need for habitat conservation, particularly around the Yellow Sea, for our migrating shorebirds.

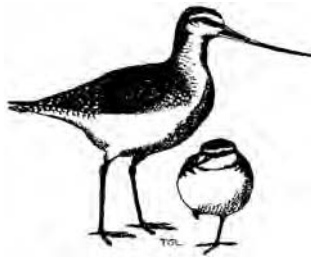
After the fair a local guide took us up into the mountains to see wildlife and I saw lots of new spiders, butterflies, plants and birds, my favorites being the rare Mountain Eagle and the Black Eagle.

Next day we went to the coast to the Yehliu Geopark where we saw birds on their migration journeys, local birds and unique volcanic rock formations.

On my last day Cynthia, a lovely local lady I met at the fair, showed me round the famous Taiwan Museum. I was breath-taken by the ancient jade, bronze and pottery artifacts from as early as 5000BC. Afterwards she also took me to the largest temple in Taiwan and gave a fascinating explanation of their rituals and beliefs.

Altogether it was a great experience and I'm grateful to have been given the opportunity. 

MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST



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Lee, Wendy Hare, Eila Lawton,
Emma Pearson, Phil Hammond,
Trudy Lane

Miranda News

Miranda Naturalists' Trust publishes *Miranda News* four times a year to keep members in touch and provide news of events at the Shorebird Centre, the Hauraki Gulf and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. No material may be reproduced without permission.

Editor: Jim Eagles
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See the birds

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.

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 join 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. That can include 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 *Miranda 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.

