
# Pūkorokoro Miranda NEWS

Journal of the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust

August 2025 Issue 137

# Editorial

**In this special commemorative issue, we continue our review of 50 years of the Trust. Two people pivotal to the Pūkorokoro story, Stuart Chambers and Adrian Riegen reflect on their long involvement. During his term as chair, Stuart pushed for the building of the Shorebird Centre and saw it to completion.**

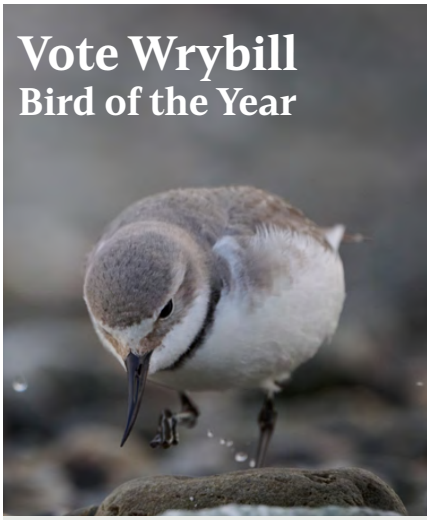
The Trust's long engagement with the East Asian Australasian Flyway has become one of our defining roles. The extraordinary phenomenon that is shorebird migration, especially the fascinating godwit story, have helped raise our profile. It is one of the reasons the numbers of people visiting the Centre continue to increase. Adrian has made immense contributions to the Trust in many ways, among them his role as primary driver of our Flyway activities. Just how significant that is, and how the Trust is regarded internationally, is recorded here by recently retired New Zealand Flyway Representative Bruce McKinlay.

Former Trust secretary and chair Will Perry and long-time council member Wendy Hare share their reminiscences of Pūkorokoro and its people, as well as their experiences working for the Trust in East Asia.

Tim Lovegrove, Bruce Keeley and Nick Ledgard also reflect on their association with the area. Along with Stuart Chambers, each of them records the towering influence of Dick Sibson and Ross McKenzie.

Other stories featured here include the evolution of the Shorebird Centre and shop, the ever-changing coastline, and the Trust's interactions with government. There is also an update on activity at the Piako roost.

**Keith Woodley**




And then there is our aim to make Wrybill Bird of the Year. As official managers, we are in full campaign mode. Read how your vote can help raise the profile of these special New Zealand birds. And encourage your family, friends, and networks to do the same.

***shorebirds.org.nz/bird-of-the-year-wrybill***

# SNIPPETS FROM THE PAST

## Miranda 8 March 1976

**Early Trust member Margaret Willis recalled a memorable outing in 1976.**

What a tremendously exciting day it was! Four completely new species sighted and two more confirmed for the record.

What is it that makes a keen bird-watcher? The thrill of seeing a new bird? The opportunity to be out in the open air, to stop and forget civilisation for a while, the children, tonight's dinner, tomorrow's washing? Perhaps it is the uniqueness of each species, the fascination of their daily lives to be watched and noted, or is it the fact that birds can fly while we earthbound mortals can make a poor imitation and therefore gaze in wonder at this marvellous creature soaring, hovering, twisting and turning in complete harmony with its fellows and the elements?

Whatever the reason, possibly a combination of all these ideas, drew sixty men and women out of their daily routine to travel for two hours enclosed in an overwarm bus along all kinds of roads for a too brief time spent, aching

Ross McKenzie (left) and Ronald Lockley and admirers. MARGARET WILLIS

arms holding binoculars to straining eyes, gazing first at shags grouped in a dead tree – pied, little black, white-throated and large black, baffling us with identification problems. On to a reedy patch of water, delicate stepping stilts and a sudden flurry as Grey Teal take wing, wheeling away in a tight group to a more private area.

Then to the ultimate, Miranda where, as Ross McKenzie so enticingly said, 'The Wrybills are awaiting you.' These tiny birds, barely eight inches in length, resting on the dried mud, individuals constantly moving about for reasons unknown, and then – the whole flock rising, turning in complete unison so that the wondering watchers see first the upper side of the birds, then a startling white at the turn, everyone towards us. Further along the shell bank a large group of several species – godwits, so soon to commence that amazing journey of ten thousand miles to the tundra, Far Eastern Curlew, Turnstones and knots along with them, all bound for the north.

There is a magic about that fantastic journey which seems to lessen the fascination of those with smaller ranges seen in company with the travellers or living in nearby hedges or paddocks: Caspian Tern, oystercatcher, Black-backed Gull, Red-billed Gull, right down to the humble sparrow. Nevertheless, this should not be so, as even the humble sparrow has an interesting story to tell, so Ronald Lockley assures us.

Flight of the Wrybills IAN SOUTHEY

## Miranda News August 1983

**How times change: Do you want to see a Spur-winged Plover?**

A pair of Spur-winged Plovers with newly hatched young was seen at the Wharekawa gravel pits 3 May 1983 by Dick Sibson and Tim Lovegrove. This is a new nesting record for the area. The pair must have been incubating over much of April and as Dick Sibson says 'if the species is a winter nester, a summer nester and also an autumn nester, the sky's the limit for this bird in the north.

This sighting has been followed up by a further sighting from the Ngatea area. There a pair were seen with young of half-grown size on 9 August. The young were starting to show black caps and had darker feathers coming in the wings.

This pair must have incubated through much of July and is a first for the Ngatea area. It is quite likely it will remain in the same locality into September so motorists should keep a watch for it. The family can be seen about one mile from Ngatea on the Auckland side of the town and on the southern side of the road.

Spur-winged Plover family IAN SOUTHEY

## An early birding day at Pūkorokoro Miranda

**Nick Ledgard recalls an early visit to the area, and how he has since completed the 'Wrybill circle.'**

In the early 1960s, I visited Pūkorokoro Miranda a few times as a student with the King's College Bird Club. I well remember being fascinated by my first sighting of a 'flung scarf' of flying Wrybill. Our leader was the legendary Dick Sibson, and we sometimes called in en route to pick up his good friend and ornithologist, Ross McKenzie, who lived in Clevedon. There was no accommodation nearby, so we stayed in the woolshed of a local farmer. My memory of the Miranda coast in those days is of extensive mudflats bordered by gleaming white shell banks with occasional groves of dark green mangroves.

Needless to say, we saw heaps of birds, but my abiding recollection is of the day when we tried to observe them more closely - by installing a hide on a shell bank. The farmer had an old steel square water tank, to the top of which he welded a half 44-gallon drum. He cut the top few inches off this, then reattached it with a hinge, and made observation ports in the drum sides just below that. The idea was to bury the tank in the shell bank, with just the top showing - and a couple of us inside. As the tide rose, the birds would arrive and those inside would get eye-to-eye viewing. At low tide on the appointed day, the farmer got his tractor and trailer, with hide on board, out to the shell bank and buried it using his front-end bucket. With much excited anticipation, two of us climbed inside, while the rest retreated to the shore and lay in the long grass to watch events unfolding.

As the tide came in, the first birds arrived at the end of the shell bank, looking suspiciously at this new presence further up. We waited for them to move closer, but the next movement was not from the birds. It was from the hide, which slowly rose out of the shells as the tide got under and floated it. Once we realised what was happening, our initial alarm turned to amusement, especially when the top hatch opened and our mates rapidly abandoned ship. They stood alongside and watched as the whole hide was popped out like a pip squeezed from a cut lemon. The next day, the farmer returned with his tractor and trailer to recover the hide and smooth out the shell bank surface. We returned to observing birds the normal way.

In the early 1970s, I migrated south to the Canterbury plains and mountains, and reacquainted myself with the Wrybill which returned every summer to breed in the local braided rivers. I joined the Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group (chair from 2002 -2022) and helped form BRaid (Braided River Aid) Inc., serving as chair from its inception in 2007 to the present day. Every spring, I compete to see the first Wrybill arriving back on the Ashley-Rakahuri river, and closely follow their breeding thereafter. I feel that my 'flung scarf' circle is now complete.

### Recent sightings at Pūkorokoro

690 Bar-tailed Godwits
3800 South Island Pied Oystercatchers
1900 Wrybill
134 Banded Dotterels
2 Australian Terns
1 Dabchick
235 Caspian Terns
59 Royal Spoonbills
1 Cattle Egret

### Recent sightings at Piako

2 Glossy Ibis
1 Black-tailed Godwit
43 Cattle Egrets

## Miranda January 1999

The first ever field course was held in January 1999. That first event was very much a prototype, but it laid the foundations for what would become a flagship entry in our annual calendar of events. First initiated and developed by Bev Woolley, the course still contains elements of the original structure, but it is now a whole day longer and is packed with extra activities. Bev's successors as convenor, Eila Lawton, Brigid Glass and Audrie McKenzie have continued to develop and fine tune the course. The 27th course begins on January 31, 2026.

Inaugural participants in 1999. Rear (L-R) Roger Hall, John Simmons, Brian Tyler, Paul Cuming, Judith Tyler, (front) Judith Cuming, Bev Woolley (convenor), Dianne Hall

## Mangrove Clearance at Piako

Mangrove incursion into the new roost at Piako was not unexpected. Waikato Regional Council were aware that ongoing management to keep the area clear would be required. But it was envisaged this would merely involve the periodic removal of the odd seedling that crept in through the flood control infrastructure. What was not expected was the massive influx of thousands of propagules that occurred over summer.

A combination of circumstances lay behind this. A huge mangrove seeding event, followed by a king tide exposed a slight design flaw in the flood protection infrastructure. The outlet control was built with a floating screen that would rise and fall with the tides and prevent most mangrove propagules getting in. The screen was designed to rise as far as predicted water levels. However, it was found that the entire structure had settled a few millimetres more than expected, so the height limit of the floating screen was not quite sufficient to prevent the incursion.

The result was prodigious numbers of mangrove seedlings established in the roost area. The Trust had agreed with the Council that we would assist where we could in managing the area, and a working bee in late July set out to do just that. Members of Youth Search and Rescue (YSAR) and a few Trust members spent a morning removing seedlings. To a chorus of yapping stilts and a flyover of several dozen Royal Spoonbills, great progress was made in clearing extensive areas, although there is still more to be done.

Our grateful thanks to Dirk DeJong and his YSAR team for their assistance.

Piako mangrove clearance CARSTEN NOPPER

Mangrove removal MIA LANGLOTZ

Mangrove removal MIA LANGLOTZ

## Flyway Site Network application for Manukau Harbour

Work is underway to address a glaring omission from an international list of important New Zealand shorebird sites. Despite the fact it has much of Auckland lining its shores as well as the international airport, the Manukau Harbour supports more shorebirds throughout the year than anywhere else. International recognition is long overdue.

One of the primary roles of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) is coordination of a network of important waterbird sites. There are currently 900 sites recognised as internationally important to migratory waterbirds along the flyway. PMNT Flyway Representative David Lawrie, is preparing a Network Site nomination form for the Manukau Harbour.

One or more of the following criteria need to be met for a site to be considered as internationally important for listing in the Flyway Site Network:

- it regularly supports > 20,000 migratory waterbirds: or,
- it regularly supports > 1 % of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of migratory waterbird: or,
- it supports appreciable numbers of an endangered or vulnerable population of migratory waterbird
- it is a "staging site" supporting > 5,000 waterbirds, or > 0.25% of a population stage at the site.

As indicated elsewhere in this issue of Pūkorokoro News, PMNT connection goes back a long way. We were present at the launch of the East Asian-Australian Shorebird Site Network, in Brisbane in 1996. This was the precursor to the current Flyway Partnership. At the Brisbane meeting two New Zealand sites – Firth of Thames and Farewell Spit – were accepted as network sites. Two further sites – Ihutai Avon-Heathcote and Awarua Bay/New River Estuary near Invercargill have since been added to the network.

# Bruce Keeley looks back on his experiences of Pūkorokoro

Bruce Keeley

Ross Mckenzie and Beth Brown and two pupils PMNT

**My life's worth of field notes first mentions Miranda in the mid-70s, exactly 50 years ago, when I settled in Auckland. I could, at last, visit this magical coastline which I'd read about since South Canterbury school days in early issues of *Notornis*.**

Those notes contain records from the late 1970s which offer sobering reminders of how things used to be: 165 Spotted Shags on the rocks at Matingarahi, 10 Far-eastern Curlews at the limeworks, 15-20 Little Terns at Taramaire, 19 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 22 Curlew Sandpipers, 19 Whimbrels, six Red-necked Stints, and one Terek Sandpiper. Pūkorokoro still annually hosts a few Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, one or two stints, and the occasional Far-eastern Curlew and Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper and Little Tern. As reported in *Pūkorokoro News* 133, Spotted Shags have since been determined to be a separate population genetically and seriously threatened. Where, in the late 1960s there were an estimated 2,000 pairs, there are now around 250.

And amongst the places and species meticulously recorded, birding companions are also mentioned: legendary names including Ross McKenzie, Sylvia Reed, Dick Sibson, and Beth Brown. All of them revered for their immense knowledge and experience, yet so ready to offer warmth and encouragement to the most recently fledged birder on the shell bank.

Those fifty years included, for me, a seven-year Pūkorokoro-free period while based in Hastings and Gisborne, but regular visits resumed after moving to Hamilton in 1984, and thence to Tāmaki Makaurau in 1992. Work demands have prevented my active involvement to the level I would have wanted, but there has been the occasional contribution to *Pūkorokoro News* and, more recently, a monthly guiding duty. What a privilege it is to welcome people of all ages, ethnicities and lens measurements, and to share their delight in the sheer mass of a pre-migratory roosting flock on a late summer day, or the amoeboid ballet of Wrybills in winter sunshine.

Things have changed through half a century - not least the length of the outermost shell bank. Access Bay was once the place to be – directly opposite the bank's endpoint, with a tidal bay right by an unofficial car park (near the present cycleway shelter). It was a hot spot for Terek Sandpipers, and on a rainy day in November 1984 I sat in my car, just a few metres from a vagrant plover – first thought to be a Ringed, but later judged a Semipalmated; whatever, it was cute and very close.

Along with the ever-extending progression of the shell bank, there has been the extending and broadening of what it means to be part of the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust. The name itself speaks of careful relationship-building and partnership with Mana whenua, and a willingness to get involved in the delicate business of seeking to right the wrongs of colonial history. Partnership-building way beyond our shores has been another wonderful achievement, with conservationists and governments along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, to ensure a more secure future for our trans equatorial migrants. And to enhance their future right on our doorstep there is the ongoing project of restoring the integrity of the saltmarsh, with much hard work and wonderful results.

Space doesn't permit to do justice to the flourishing of the Shorebird Centre as a place of hospitality, education and research, alongside the country's best natural history bookshop.

So much has been achieved in fifty years. The next fifty will be no less demanding of physical effort and visionary leadership if we are to meet the many environmental challenges we know about and, no doubt, some of which we are yet unaware.

**Bruce Keeley**

Far left: Far-eastern Curlews KEITH WOODLEY

Left: Red-necked Stints KEITH WOODLEY

# Miranda as I have known it

**Former Trust chair and editor Stuart Chambers played a pivotal role in establishing the Shorebird Centre.**

Dick Sibson at the opening of the Shorebird Centre. 1990. PMNT

**My first visit to Miranda was in a Road Services bus on an excursion organised by the Auckland branch of the Forest and Bird society. The bus was full, and the party was led by Richard (Dick) Sibson, an ornithologist and schoolteacher, who had recently arrived in New Zealand from the UK to join the staff at King's College in Auckland. The date of this excursion was November 12, 1949, and Sibson was dressed respectably for the occasion in a smart sports jacket and collar and tie. He had found Miranda on a bicycle excursion in 1940 and been a regular visitor to it thereafter. On this occasion he was helped by his Clevedon friends Ross and Hetty McKenzie, who travelled along behind the bus in an old post-World War One car, stopping now and then to point out important natural features. Ross was an all-round ecologist but with a decided interest in shorebirds.**

To get to Miranda we travelled through Clevedon and over very rough and gravelled roads through Kawakawa Bay with important stops to view birds such as godwits, Spotted Shags, a Banded Dotterel nest with 3 eggs near the foreshore at Ray's Rest and a Pied Stilt nest with four eggs at Taramaire River mouth. The final stopping spot for shorebird viewing was at the then Limeworks, which is where the Robert Findlay Reserve carpark is today. Here we sat on bags of lime while we had lunch and listened to a talk from the still tidily dressed Richard Sibson.

We then viewed the mustered shorebirds all quietly sitting on the nearby mudflats waiting for the tide to run. I was to learn more about godwits and knots and how they flew away for our winter to breed in the Arctic. There was only one pair of binoculars for the party and one long brass telescope owned by Ross McKenzie so we all took turns in viewing. These viewing instruments were not of the quality which we know today so bird identification was not easy.

This visit started my interest in the area and in the following years, as a member of the King's College Bird Club, I was to make several visits. As a rural farming area Miranda to Waitakaruru was, to me anyway, not impressive. Pastures seemed rank and wet, and the many drains were lined with pampas, the area being well known for McLean's Pampas, McLean being a local farmer and a pampas grower and seller. But its birdlife was encouraging.

For me the end-result of this 1949 excursion, was an interest in birdwatching generally and in Miranda's birds in particular. People subsequently began to take up the new hobby and Miranda started to become better known.

Later visits there often found roadside people studying the many ponds that had been left behind after the shell had been removed for lime making, as well as around the major high-tide roosts of the Limeworks buildings which always had something of interest to look at.

This new bird-watching interest was mostly accepted by the locals as unusual. Such viewers were seen as weird, strange, or in the language of the day "queer". Youths would slow down and name-call out of car windows or hold up beer bottles or some other distractions, or they would accelerate at speed sending clouds of dust from the shell roads over quietly watching birders.

These were also the days when things like discarded beer bottles and old car tyres were dumped in the mud or about the Pūkorokoro Stream. But nevertheless, these days led on to acceptance of birdwatching as a legitimate hobby. Slowly but steadily more people found birding at Miranda exciting, especially after the high tide roosts moved from the Limeworks up to an area called Access Bay where birds could be observed from a parked car and often without need for binoculars.

This newfound interest in birds, largely sparked by Sibson, eventually resulted in the formation of the Miranda Naturalists'Trust. It was set up by a small group of Auckland birders and included some well-known people in birding circles at the time such as Sylvia Reed, John and Beth Brown, Dick Veitch, Rod Hay, Bruce Chambers and importantly the well-known Welsh author Ronald Lockley, who had emigrated to New Zealand. Sibson became the driving force and early chairperson. By 1975 this small group had drawn up a constitution and members were invited to join. The object

Stuart Chambers, Alsion Chambers,Stella Rowe, John Rowe PMNT

of the organisation was to provide overnight accommodation so that two tides could be observed without returning to Auckland. It would also provide information about the birds and form a club for fee paying members.

Later as a farmer living nearby at Mangatarata, I was initially not interested in the Trust. I saw no personal need for it. However, in late 1975 Richard Sibson started writing a Miranda Trust newsletter which he produced annually and he contacted me to write an article on New Zealand cicadas which were my interest, Miranda having at least 14 different species. As I was not a Trust member he paid my $5 annual subscription fee.

At a later Trust open day at the Miranda Hall, where I provided a display of mounted cicadas, the then chairman, Brian Ellis invited me to come on to the Trust council. This meeting, attended by a large congregation which filled the hall, showed me that the Trust had become a popular organisation and that simple birding and birders had moved on from being jeered at by local youths travelling to the Kaiaua hotel or fish and chip shop.

At this time the Trust had just purchased a cottage at Kaiaua for accommodation for its members to use, so they might fully enjoy and study the Miranda scene over a longer time. As I was anticipating selling my Mangatarata farm sometime in the future I saw this as a handy place to stay to see the birds at some later date. I therefore agreed to become a council member.

In those days the Trust council met every two months at Brian Ellis's home at Howick. The first meeting I attended was comprised of about seven members and most of the meeting centred around getting a plaque made to commemorate the death of foundation member Sylvia Reed. This was to be erected on a wall in the Kaiaua cottage. There was a desire to get the wording right and this took up the whole meeting. {This plaque is now on the wall at the Centre.]

At this meeting there was no mention of the establishment of a larger centre near Pūkorokoro Stream as I had been led to believe. To a probing question Brian Ellis inferred that the Kaiaua cottage, later called The Roost, was an end in itself.

A few years later, when I was asked to become chairman, I agreed on the grounds that the Trust quickly centre itself at Miranda and not Kaiaua and that an interpretation and accommodation building become the main object of the Trust's work. Each member of the council agreed with this. This council included younger people who wanted things to happen and were prepared to do their bit. At my commencement the Trust-owned Kaiaua cottage was valued at around $30,000 and the Trust had a bit more than $3000 in the bank, so with assets of around $33,000, plus a promise from the QEII Trust of $10,000, we embarked on placing a bigger building somewhere between the Taramaire and Pūkorokoro Streams. According to our later architect, Paul Smits, this was expected to cost somewhere over $100,000.

And so, we embarked on a substantial fundraising drive. The Trust at the time had just over 200 members, not a great base to get funds from. But members did contribute, with some older members, including old King's College Bird Club ones, giving sizeable amounts. Some also ran fundraising events and gave talks to groups, proceeds from which went to the building funds. And the rest is history.

So, what have been the highs and lows of our Miranda experience since. Over the years before Keith Woodley's arrival to manage the centre, Alison and I kept the centre open over holidays and the Christmas New Year periods. These were great times as we enjoyed the constant visitors, many of whom we knew. We also enjoyed the summer birding with the full complement of godwits and knots and a good number of turnstones in attendance. Overall, we had a lot to show people.

We also enjoyed the New Year gatherings which attracted locals from the Hauraki Plains to Kaiaua. These, for a while, became an annual event. We also enjoyed the occasional birthday party, Alison's 50th and my 60th being two of them. There were other personal-type occasions, one being when

Michael Taylor organised a Gilbert White/Ronald Lockley discussion and introduced us to two notable English ornithologists of past times. Alison and I also entertained delegations from Kapiti Island, from Mt Bruce, from Tiri Island and from DOC when bird-watching tourism was discussed.

High tide swimming at Taramaire and at the Miranda Hot Pools also became part of the experience and this we shared with camper van people from the then very unkempt Ray's Rest. At this time, we also enjoyed meeting overseas birders, a new experience. However, some demands of overseas twitchers became excessive and left a bit to be desired.

Memorable birding from those early days included sorting a Ringed Plover from a Semipalmated Plover, and a wonderful experience with regular views of six Marsh Sandpipers regularly present on the Stilt Ponds. They brought many viewers with some saying they were Lesser Yellowlegs. These were basically birding challenges which attracted people in the evening light in search of close-up views. Their true identities initially may have gone unanswered, but these birds were enjoyed by many.

Our most enjoyable Miranda experience though was looking after the centre for three months when Keith Woodley was overseas. It was a time of constantly meeting people and old friends and neighbours while achieving something material by way of restoring the old Newbold house for Keith's return and constructing a new boundary fence which meant the Trust obtained a much larger carpark.

Of the amusing instances of those days, one was seeing Folkert Nieuwland coming into the clean and tidy centre with mud up to his neck after he had tried to cross a washout in the shell bank. We quickly encouraged him into the shower and recommended some clean clothes while someone cleaned up his telescope.

John Rowe's regular bursts of song, no matter where he was in the centre, also brought a smile until one visitor asked if we could turn the music off. It was disturbing him. After a quiet splutter of unheard profanities John was soon singing again.

Another bit of amusement was seeing Ashley Reid with more paint on him than on the walls of Keith's house; and we couldn't let Bryan Woolley near a ladder as they always seemed to collapse under him. Richard Sibson arrived one day when we were painting above the toilets in the ladies' toilet block. "Are you painting up where only God can see?" he offered.

Of the lows – the Trust in the early days did make inroads into our personal finances and those of other early members in many ways, but we all wrote it off as the expense of good birding, and in our case, of good summer holidays.

So, what of the Pūkorokoro Miranda Trust's future? The Trust centre, in my view, lacks a few things. The main one is there is no view from it to roosting high tide birds. When you are new to the centre you don't know where the birds are. It has no focal scene of what it is about. Some centres in New Zealand such as Mt Bruce/Pukaha near Eketahuna and the Royal Albatross Centre at Taiaroa Heads near Dunedin have got this right, as have numerous centres in Australia. At these places you know why you're there without leaving the building, and lunch and coffee is not far away.

Any such centre also needs a large video come educational room to explain the birds and the greater area. Also, a good library and storage place for archival material is essential, as is a proper functioning shop. A way to make money, a place to buy coffee and lunch food is important.

Places to site such an information centre in the Miranda district could be over-looking the Stilt Ponds or at the Taramaire Rivermouth, both high tide roosts of importance, or maybe Access Bay could be restored with the removal of mangroves. A combined venture with DOC and the Waikato Regional Council could bring this about leaving the current buildings exclusively for member accommodation, which was its first intention.

For all its shortcomings though, the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalist's Trust has managed to survive 50 years providing observation opportunities and accommo-dation for many of its members plus a very interesting quarterly magazine of much educational value. It must be applauded.

**Stuart Chambers**

*In his final report when he stepped down as Trust chairman, Stuart Chambers made some acknowledgments, a selection of which appear here.*

When I was nominated for the job of Chairman back in 1986, I accepted on the grounds that the direction of the Trust was to place a centre at Miranda. I could not see the Trust having any other role, and although it did own a property at Kaiaua, I viewed that as only a temporary resource. It is now clear to me that the direction I envisaged was the right one.

Before I go though, I must record the help given to me by Trust councillors over my seven years. In particular I must say a special thank you to our treasurer David Lawrie who, as well as being Treasurer has also been a person to lean on when in doubt. I must also thank our secretaries, Anthea Goodwin and Kay Haslett, and our building supervisor David Baker. These people have given exceptional time to the Trust at some cost to themselves by way of time and money. During my Chairmanship Adrian Riegen has also contributed in a large way with displays and furnishings while both David Walter and Folker Nieuwland, as well as contributing physically to the project, have allowed ideas to be bounced off them.

At this time I must also thank Alison, my wife. She has always been a total partner with me in this venture and has supported my aims and ambitions ahead of some of her own interests and often at some financial cost. She has also provided me with many a good idea which I alone would not have thought about and she has encouraged me to proceed when at times I was doubtful.

# David Baker

## When David Baker died in 2004, Stuart Chambers paid tribute to a man who was instrumental in creating the Shorebird Centre we know today.

**When I was elected to the Miranda Trust council in 1982, David Baker had been on it for a year. My first recollection of him was of a person who sat quietly, seldom spoke and never challenged the chairman or an idea. This acquiescence to higher authority seemed to be his manner, and later I came to wonder why he was on the Trust council at all. It was only when one day he chided me to try and get something happening about the building of a centre at Miranda, that I realised he *was* interested in the Trust. His silence was simply to do with him not being a meetings man. Instead, he was an action man and a doer. He said to me if I could make something happen, he would design the "lodge" as we called the centre in those days and supervise its construction.**

Eventually when I become chairman and did manage to get things happening, David swung into action and without even being asked soon had a series of hand drawn "lodge" plans in front of the Trust council. These were discussed but there were problems. Franklin County Council in those days had told the Trust that any building proposed for the area had to be one which blended with the environment and was not obtrusive. Then there were those on the Trust council who thought any such building should be of architectural merit. So, in the short-term David's initial plans were shelved while an architect, at some expense, was employed.

Although David may not have realised it at the time, the brief given to the architect embraced all the main ideas from his plans. The architect though had the new design sitting on a concrete floor with cobblestone pavers around it and in the courtyard, and walls made of concrete blocks to make it more resistant to vandalism. There was no manager envisaged in those days and Miranda was an isolated and lonely place. He had also added a few extra details like the polygonal apse windows at each end of the building, a giant fireplace, and a "perch" on top of the building for wider viewing. Some of these extras were never added but this overall plan the Trust council quickly approved.

At the meeting when the plan was approved David, as usual, said little. But in no time at all he had modified it to suit the Trust's budget and County Council's by-laws, which said the floors of new buildings had to be one metre above ground. Then even before the County Council had approved the plans, he had working drawings drawn up and was on the phone to me about finding a builder. In no time at all he had plans photo-copied and sent out to at least six building contractors and then shortly afterwards he had me in the car going to Katikati to interview the cheapest applicant. This was followed by visits to the suppliers of building materials, where with David's assistance we quietly managed to get prices pared to the bone.

David Baker, engineer by profession, draughtsman and birder by inclination, supervised construction of the Centre. STELLA ROWE

Once the building was underway David was regularly on the road to Miranda to supervise the builders, very often with a trailer load of building materials behind him. His assistance over this period was invaluable and as chairman at the time I don't know how I would have managed without him.

Then, when it came to stages two, three and four of the building construction, David quickly had plans drawn up ready for David Lawrie to present to the Franklin District Council. And with each of the subsequent stages he arranged for builders and supervised their work.

So, it is not hard to appreciate the work David did for the Trust over the years and the personal financial cost he must have undergone for it. Without him I often wonder whether we would have seen a Miranda Shorebird Centre sitting where it does today.

## EVENTS CALENDAR

| | |
|---|---|
| Saturday 16 August: | Working Bee from 9.30 a.m. and Potluck Dinner from 6 p.m. |
| Sunday 31 August | Members Lunch (fully subscribed) |
| Sunday 14 September | Shorebird Coast Fun Run 8.00 to 11.30 a.m. (Contact Centre for details) |
| Sunday 12 October | Welcome to the Birds Open Day 10.00 a.m. |
| | Guest Speaker: Alaskan shorebird biologist Dr Dan Ruthrauff |

This will be a familiar image to long-term members of PMNT. For many people Dick Sibson and Ross McKenzie were influential mentors, as mentioned in articles featured in this issue. Photographed by early Trust treasurer Russell Thomas, they are leaning against the old Limeworks foundations that can still be seen in the carpark today. RUSSELL THOMAS

# Birding with Uncle Ross

**Tim Lovegrove has had a long association with Pūkorokoro and the Trust. The original drawing of his design for the PMNT logo is on the wall at the Shorebird Centre.**

**In July 1941, Dick Sibson (Sib) and fellow schoolmaster Bill Ridland cycled south from Auckland to explore the Firth of Thames where they 'discovered' its shorebird riches. On a second foray by car a few weeks later, they invited Ross McKenzie, a keen botanist and new recruit to the fledgling Ornithological Society, to join them. Sib described how that excursion was a turning point in Ross's life and from then on watching birds became the core of his existence. Before long, Ross was organizing regular shorebird surveys in the southern Manukau and Firth of Thames. During my school days, Ross was a wonderful, kindly mentor. And just like me, many were drawn to share his passion for birds, especially shorebirds, through his enthusiasm and missionary zeal.**

Ross, a veteran of World War I, was badly injured on the Western Front shortly before the Battle of the Somme. He returned with a wooden leg, shell shocked and with other injuries. He cut a distinctive figure with a walking stick in one hand and a long lancewood pole in the other. In his younger years with these aids, he was surprisingly mobile, even making visits to Hauturu/Little Barrier and Kāpiti. Sib told me about an amusing incident on a visit with Ross to Kapiti. On returning to Paraparaumu, they had to wade ashore from the boat. Sib gave Ross a lift ashore, but stepping onto the beach, stumbled at the last moment – Ross went in one direction and his leg in the other, in front of some startled onlookers!

My first visit to Miranda was as a schoolboy with Sib in July 1969 to help Ross with his Firth of Thames winter census. Sib dropped me and several other members of our school Bird Club off where the coast road crosses the Karito Canal – Ross had allocated us the Karito to Waitakaruru stretch. In my notes, I wrote that … 'We had barely crossed the Karito Creek into our area when we saw a Welcome Swallow – a new bird for many of us … Soon flocks of Wrybill appeared and landed not far from us in one large group. We scanned the flock of 800-1,000 birds with binoculars but didn't find anything unusual among them … a few minutes later we spotted a White-winged Black Tern ... It flew along, low over the mangroves on the tideline for quite a while.' Later …'we focused our glasses onto two large, dark plumaged birds with a godwit in between them, flying away from us. They were also much larger than the godwit… we came to the conclusion that they could only have been curlew.'

Curlews featured on a Bird Club visit to the same Karito to Waitakaruru stretch in March 1970, and I wrote..'We were fortunate to see a good flock of curlew, which flew down and landed on the mud not far away…This flock numbered 20 and 3 more were seen

later.' How the numbers of some species have changed since then!

On the winter census in June 1970 Ross allocated the Piako stretch for the Bird Club to cover. Here we encountered one of the more challenging birding spots the Firth has to offer. Beyond the seawall and after crossing an open Sarcocornia flat, where large flocks of goldfinches were feeding, we entered the mangroves. Our objective was the Piako River. Bare-footed, we seemed to have been trudging through the mangroves for ages when we came across footprints in the mud … 'Crikey, there must be someone else in here we all thought…' They were our own tracks of course! For us back-country farm boys, finding our way in the bush was usually no problem, but a featureless mangrove forest on a cloudy day proved to be quite a different story. One of us shimmied up the nearest tall mangrove. A view of the distant Coromandel Range quickly showed which way to turn for home.

Ross's summer Firth of Thames census in December 1970 saw the Bird Club on the stretch between Taramaire and the Limeworks. We found four pairs of New Zealand Dotterels and we estimated that there were about 2,000 White-fronted Terns at the breeding colony on the shell spit. A Little Tern was seen nearby. When we reached the Limeworks, Ross and others were there, and 'Old Hawkeye' Ross had his big brass telescope trained on the Wrybill flock. It turned out to contain a feast of rarities. Amongst the Wrybill were 19 Curlew Sandpipers, two Broad-billed Sandpipers, two Red-necked Stints, a Greater Sand Plover, a Baird's Sandpiper and also, as identified at the time, a Ringed Plover, (although this was later rejected by the Rare Birds Committee and identified as a Semi-palmated Plover).

From early 1972 the Bird Club helped Ross survey Kōkako in the Hunua Ranges. After each foray into the bush, we called in to share our findings with Ross and Hetty at their Clevedon home 'Kiltarlity'. There was always a warm welcome, lively conversation, bird notes to share, plants to identify, numerous cups of tea and plenty of Hetty's hot scones. I often corresponded with Ross by mail and his letters were always signed, 'Uncle Ross.'

Like Ross, Clevedon was also my childhood home. We farmed there from 1955-1962 before we moved to a hill country sheep farm at Waiotira in Northland. Our Clevedon farm backed onto the Otau Bush, which might well have still supported Kōkako in the 1950s. My family connections to Clevedon date back to 1865 when my father's ancestors, the Rhinds, arrived from Scotland on the 'Viola'. Ross's forebears were on the same ship.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, Ross and Joe St Paul found a number of Kōkako nests in the Hunua Ranges, and at one of these, with the aid of local builder, Fraser Murray's ladders and tree-climbing skills, Bill Mead obtained the first-ever photos of nesting Kōkako. They also found signs of predation at nests and Ross strongly suspected that ship rats were responsible.

In the early 1970s we were Ross's runners in the Hunua bush, scouring the hills for Kōkako, but as Ross well knew, we were monitoring a long, slow decline. Our Kōkako survey routine included overnight camps on the Mine Road near the foot of the Kohukohunui Track. We were usually dropped off on a Saturday by one of our school masters and told – "OK boys, I'll see you here tomorrow afternoon." For us boarders, this meant a couple of days of freedom to go birding, exploring, and to do as we wished. Imagine the health and safety hoops a teacher would need to jump through these days to abandon a bunch of teenagers in the bush!

Ross published frequently in *Notornis* and our Bird Club observations formed part of his paper describing the decline of Kōkako in the Hunua Ranges, published in 1974. In my Bird Club days working with Ross, I never thought that from the mid-1990s I would be helping to recover 'his' Kōkako population in my role as a scientist with the Auckland Regional Council. Ross would be delighted to know that with over 500 birds it is now a source for translocations to other places.

Plans were already afoot to develop an observatory at Pūkorokoro Miranda several years before Ross died in 1981, but he never saw these come to fruition. He would be immensely proud to see what we have there today. The development of the Shorebird Centre and the international recognition that the Pūkorokoro coastline now enjoys, certainly owe a lot to him.

Wrybill flock MIA LANGLOTZ

Eila Lawton, Keith Woodley and Bev Woolley celebrating the 10th field course, 2008. PMNT

# He Tangata He Tangata He Tangata

**Wendy Hare has an association with PMNT of similar vintage to the Centre Manager.**

**As I reflect on my 30+ years associated with Pūkorokoro (a place of birds) I realise that for me, it has always been about people, so many people. Some now passed on, many still going strong. My first visit to Miranda coincided with Manager Keith Woodley's second visit – an Open Day in March 1993. We gravitated to each other as the youngest people present and commented that we lowered the average age in the room…by a lot! I chuckle now to remember – as we certainly don't do that anymore.**

Folkert Nieuwland and family and the cheery grin of John Gale loom large in my early memories. Raucous winter working bees with John and Stella Rowe, and Bev and Bryan Woolley - fixing the roof, scrubbing floors, dusting the stuffed birds and retrieving cobwebs from high ceilings. Our hard work was always followed by jovial shared evenings of good food, chatter and reminiscences. Bev Woolley initiated the annual week-long Field Course, subsequently adopted by Eila Lawton and raised to new heights. A course, I too enjoyed, and have many happy memories of. Many are the stalwart supporters of PMNT that have come into the fold via the Field Course, which is still the leading training of its kind available in New Zealand.

The Centre was (and is) a convenient hub to gather friends and family to catch up, celebrate occasions and introduce the next generation to nature and the birds on the doorstep. A place of connection with like-minded and longstanding friends Will and Holly Perry, and Andrew and Sherly Crowe, who also developed deep and long-lived ties with Pūkorokoro.

More intertwining grew when I worked for EcoQuest (EQ), Kaiaua in the first decade of the 2000s. We visited often with changing waves of American students to be regaled by Keith with stories of fledgling Wrybill flying, just so, into the Southern Alps to bend their bills just the right way. We tromped the shoreside mud for benthic creatures; we Tipp-Exed numbers onto the shells of your average garden snail and spent ages re-finding them in the long grass; we ran tracking cards for lizards and so much more. Most recently EcoQuest has been doing 24-hour surveys on the silt content of our pond outflow, so

Bruce Postill, Wendy Hare, Estella Lee and Nigel Millius at Yalu Jiang

Peter Maddison and field course participant Geoff de Lisle LU YONG

Cross border expedition team 2018 l-R back row Louisa Cleave (TVNZ) Wendy Hare, Nigel Millius, Wang Tao, Zhang Guoming (Yalu Jiang reserve), Mark Crysell, Martin Anderson (TVNZ) front; Bruce Postill, Adrian Riegen, Yan Meifang (Director Yalu Jiang reserve), Estella Lee, Keith Woodley

that relationship continues more than 20 years later. Dr Pete (Peter Maddison) was our premier bug man, both at EQ and Pūkorokoro, with his trademark long Santa Claus beard, wild hair and sandaled feet, as he hunted through the mud or the hills behind. Here at Pūkorokoro is where Dr Pete and Eila found each other, after they both lost their life partners. Together they made a strong team, passionate about natural history and restoration, both in their own neighbourhood (Katikati) and at Pūkorokoro. The 2013 Bioblitz (a 24-hour count of every living species) was just one of the results.

So many far-flung adventures on our flyway endeavours. The panic of realising our onward flight from China had been booked a month early by mistake (and had already flown!) and no-one noticed, either at the Chinese embassy or border before we entered China. Riding the bullet train to Dandong. Dodgy survey sites next to military installations in South Korea and even dodgier "sex" hotels for our budget accommodations. Ordering "Hamdo"- tinned peaches in a South Korean restaurant because we had no idea what anything was and expected the cheapest thing on the menu to be rice. The waitress clearly thought we were nuts. The challenge, undertaken with Estella Lee, Nigel Millius and Bruce Postill, of being in the right place at the right time to count birds along the Yalu River Estuary in China, so we could compare data with the team simultaneously counting the other side of the river in North Korea. Then having to wait until we returned to New Zealand to see if we had got it right. Mist net wrestling in North Korea with David Melville and Adrian Riegen, the whole team leaping off the bus (when it got a flat tyre) and scattering into the countryside looking for birds with our local minders hastily rounding us up before we disappeared over the nearby hillsides.

Happy mud crawls in front of the Godwit Hide with Gillian Vaughan and Ian Southey pulling those stubborn and far distant mangrove seedlings to ensure open spaces for our birds. Boy, did we smell afterwards! Nocturnal mist netting on the Stilt Ponds for those elusive Golden Plovers – a wide ranging and challenging project initiated and driven by "non-birder" Jim Eagles.

In more recent years, the power and energy of Ray and Ann Buckmaster (mentored to the Trust by Bev Woolley) hosting The Flock installations, making our large soft toy Wrybill and nodding Godwit donation box, and countless hours labouring to initiate restoration of the Robert Findlay Wildlife Reserve.

I have been on PMNT council over 20 years and have seen many changes and many ideas. Shooting for the stars, my ideal visions for our future at PMNT, not in any order of priority, are:

- A dedicated Membership Secretary
- A dedicated Volunteer Co-ordinator,
- A full time Education Officer to facilitate regular engagement especially with Kaiaua School and Wharekawa and Makomako maraes
- Permanent funding for our Kaitiaki/ Ranger role
- A dedicated web-tech person to support all our online endeavours
- A New Centre up and running, proofed against sea level rise, housing a dedicated auditorium with capacity for at least 150 people
- Refurbishment of the current centre for members and researchers to visit, stay and work

The people change with the passing of time, but the passion, purpose and land remain. We just need to ensure that Trust, the birds and the balanced natural realm does too.

Nigel and coast defences 2008 South Korea WENDY HARE

# Reflection on working with Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust in the Flyway.

**Recently retired after a long career with DOC and the NZ Wildlife Service, PMNT member Bruce McKinlay looks back on his time as New Zealand Flyway Officer 2013 -2025.**


Bruce McKinlay receiving Flyway Site certificate for Ihutai Avon-Heathcote from Partmership Chair Pete Probasco EAAFP

**As a result of internal processes in the department I was invited to become the DOC East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) representative in 2013. After getting off the phone I looked up the EAAFP and realised that I had just scored a trip to Alaska.**

Accompanied by Hugh Robertson (DOC), David Melville and David Lawrie we set off for Alaska. During a short layover in Los Angeles, we managed to step out of the airport and the first thing we saw was a House Sparrow followed by a Starling. Things improved with a Rufous Hummingbird and a Hooded Oriole.

That first Meeting of the Parties (or MOP in the jargon) was an overwhelming experience in many ways. Complete coastal development along the Yellow Sea coasts of China and Republic of Korea seemed inevitable, and the strategy was to attempt to identify areas of high values and develop a series of small, protected sites along the coast. There was the recent closure of the Saemangeum sea wall, with reports of collapses in Great Knot populations and other major ecological processes appearing in the science literature as a backdrop to the conversations. There were very sensitive discussions with Chinese partners as to what the EAAFP could expect from the Government.

Back in New Zealand we were fortunate to get Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade support to make a visit to China and North Korea in 2014, and so along with Carol West from DOC, Keith Woodley, Adrian Riegen and shepherded by Estella Lee, off we went. This would be PMNT's second visit to DPRK. It was also the opportunity to complete a major project in China with the launch of Yalu Jiang Estuary Shorebird Survey Report 1999-2010. Written by Adrian Riegen, Gillian Vaughan and Ken Rogers, this very elegant publication, presented in both English and Mandarin, documented the enormous importance of Yalu Jiang for migratory shorebirds.

As a result of efforts from colleagues in China particularly Chen Kelin of Wetlands International, the launch was a high-profile event and the organisers had done particularly well in arranging the attendance of Carl Worker, the New Zealand Ambassador to China. Carl made the comment in his speech that as a long-term presence in China, he felt he had a good overview of New Zealanders and their activities there but that the work of the Pūkorokoro Trust was completely new to him, and a completely new endeavour of bilateral cooperation.

At the same dinner Chen Kelin told a long story about the commitment of the Pūkorokoro people, all volunteers, travelling third class on the train between Beijing and Dandong to save the budget. I missed the details as he spoke in Mandarin, but the account was well received. Next up on the agenda was time in Beijing engaging with government departments. This work was facilitated by the NZ Embassy staff with detailed planning.

Carol West, Adrian Riegen, Bruce McKinlay, Keith Woodley Pyongyang May 2014 PMNT

The staff were highly engaged and said that the work was a pleasing diversion from forestry and food standards, and other trade related engagements.

The final stage of this trip was a groundbreaking visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This was a follow up to a visit in 2009 which was supported by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the time, Winston Peters. Even after all this time it remains a surreal, but enjoyable experience. Our hosts the Nature Conservation Union of Korea were looking for support in field surveying to identify priority sites along the Yellow Sea coast, known to them as the West Sea. They wanted to have a partnership to facilitate this and Pūkorokoro was the preferred partner. The Memorandum that was signed on 13 May 2014 led to five years of solid work along the coast.

This partnership and the field surveys were looked on with admiration by all Partners of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership. I was regularly asked how Pūkorokoro had managed to arrange this important work and was regularly complemented on the fact it was helping, and that it was completing one of the most important pieces of work in the Flyway.

Since the first MOP I attended there has been a considerable change in priorities within China and Republic of Korea with the announcement by the Chinese Government to strengthen environmental protection. In addition, there has been considerable progress in securing World Heritage listing for Yellow Sea sites.

As well as the excitement of advancing bilateral cooperation alongside colleagues from New Zealand, there was also working with Pūkorokoro at the MOPs where David Lawrie was always present. He didn't say much but when he did, he summarised the feelings of the NGO Partners in the room very well. As the New Zealand Government representative, I always appreciated this support from outside the dominant Government and International NGO voices. Although it's not measurable, I think the presence of Pūkorokoro on the ground and in those meeting rooms made a material difference to the work of the EAAFP. As a Partner it sits at the same table as USA, People's Republic of China and Australia: a presence of influence not to be underestimated

At home at Pūkorokoro the Trust at all times continued to deliver high quality interpretation for visitors and to be reaching out to schools and community groups. Additionally, Pūkorokoro could always be relied upon to run a creative event: whether it was the quick turnaround for a printed banner after winning 'Bird of the Year' for godwit in 2015, so that it was in place ahead of a visit next day by the Chinese ambassador to New Zealand, or supporting a visit by leaders from National Forestry and Grassland Administration (the Chinese Government equivalent of DOC), the gazebo was erected, the catering in place, and a full turn out of Trust members ensuring success.

It has been a pleasure to work with the Trust leadership, staff and volunteers over the last decade as part of the Pūkorokoro family. As I've chosen to move on from DOC, I'm looking forward to maintaining my relationship but also building a new relationship. At the same time, I'm looking forward to Pūkorokoro continuing to grow and to foster projects with care and to deliver them with professionalism and all with the same focus: To keep the birds coming.

**Bruce McKinlay**


David Lawrie seated between Australia and Russia EAAFP

# Personal reflections on Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust

## Will Perry looks back on his 35 year involvement with PMNT.

**Whenever my siblings or I had finished a job and stood back to admire the results of our labours, my father would appear, have a quick look at the completed project and comment, "Well, you've made a good start there."**

One day in late 1988 Jess Mason from Morrinsville and her daughter, Holly Mason from Auckland, visited a garden show in Hamilton. One of the exhibitors at the show was the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. Holly was intrigued by the exhibit because she was expecting a visitor in March 1989 and he had a special interest in birds, and the Trust was all about migratory shorebirds. She bought an A5 writing pad with a Godwit / Wrybill logo in the top right corner as a gift for her visitor. She probably hoped that he would be inspired to use the writing pad to send her more-frequent letters once he had returned to London after his four week visit to New Zealand.

Ronald Lockley back in Wales, 1990. JACK DONOVAN

Her visitor was a Welshman who had grown up in Pembrokeshire, home of the Puffin and the Manx Shearwater, and Ronald Lockley, author of "The Private Life of the Rabbit". He knew from his parents' naturalist friends that Lockley had moved to live in New Zealand and so he brought with him a note of Lockley's Auckland address and telephone number. 'Oh, you need to go to Miranda,' said Lockley when the fellow Welshman called him in early March, 'there are plenty of shorebirds there.'

So that is how Holly and I came to stop at Pūkorokoro in the hope of seeing some shorebirds on our way from Auckland to Morrinsville. That first visit was very disappointing. The tide was out. The only birds we saw were a couple of Pukeko. There was no information centre, no interpretative signs, no hides, no footpaths except the occasional farm track, nothing to indicate anything particularly special about the place. Little did I know that if I had waited around for high tide, there would be large flocks of waders flying in to roost after feeding on the mudflats in preparation for their long northward migration.

When I returned to New Zealand in March 1990, I had resigned from my position as Chief Scientist in the blood bank at Hammersmith Hospital in London with a view to spending six months in New Zealand. I would then return to the UK to re-apply for the Hammersmith job, or find another job if that vacancy was already filled. Thirty five years later I am now a New Zealand superannuitant, still married to Holly and living in the same city (Dunedin) as our son, Emlyn.

My bicycle arrived in Auckland from London with the rest of my stuff in May 1990, and I went for a ride to St. Heliers to have another yarn with Ronald Lockley. He must have encouraged me to return to Miranda on a high tide and the next visit was much more productive. The Shorebird Centre was completed by then, but there was nobody inside it and the doors were locked. Stuart Chambers (probably) informed me that the centre was available for overnight visitors and you had to go to the shop in Kaiaua to get the key. On our early subsequent visits we had the place pretty much to ourselves, sometimes with friends, and the Miranda Magic began to cast its spell on us, and I became a member of the Trust.

After a couple of false starts, I was elected to the Executive Council of Miranda Naturalists' Trust where I remained for 28 years including 19 years as Secretary and four years as Chair. It was a priviledge to be part of the governance structure of PMNT and it led to several opportunities that are not necessarily available to everybody. Two visits to the Yellow Sea, including Yalu Jiang, China in 2007 and DPRK (North Korea) in 2019 were special and memorable for me. We may think that the tide comes in quickly on the Firth of Thames but it changes even more rapidly in the Yellow Sea. This is such an important part of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway for our shorebirds. The godwits of Pūkorokoro stop there for about six weeks on their northward migration for refuelling, and other birds stop there also on their way south. PMNT has played a huge part in the survey work and advocacy performed across this region in the two Korean nations and in China.

One of the early opportunities for me in the 1990s was participation in cannon netting. This is a technique that uses a net, attached to projectiles fired from cannons over a roost of shorebirds in order to catch them. It is a technique that requires people with particular skills, knowledge and experience. I was selected, on perhaps my second involvement, to be a "twinkler". Twinkling is the process of encouraging the birds to move from wherever they are roosting into the "catching area" of the net

Tony Habraken twinkling Wrybill.

that has been placed on the ground at a shorebird roost well before high tide. On this occasion I was required to cross back over the creek that we had forded at low tide, and approach the bird roost via the same creek from the opposite side to encourage the birds away from the creek, and into the catching area on the seaward side of the net. The twinkling was successful and the cannons were fired and there was a good catch of birds. There was only one problem – I got stuck in the muddy creek – up to my shins in mud and up to my waist in water. It was already high tide and I was in no danger, so the team ignored me and got on with extracting the birds from the net, while I proceeded slowly to extricate myself. By the time I reached the net, muddy and wet, all the birds had been extracted and the team was beginning to process them.

Another memorable field excursion was a weekend in Māpāra to see the Kōkako. We visited as MNT Council members and spent the night in a wool shed for an early start on the Sunday morning. We managed to locate Kōkako with a bit of help and local knowledge from the DOC Ranger on that early dawn outing, but we were all a little jaded after the night before because we had been entertained by a Ruru Morepork feasting on the Puriri moths that were attracted to the light above our heads outside the door of our woolshed.

During my time on the Executive Council we changed our name from Miranda to Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust. This was not my idea but I am so proud that we did it. It is important for us as kaitiaki to engage with mana whenua, who embrace kaitiakitanga as part of their philosophy on life. Using the name of the British naval vessel HMS *Miranda* was inflammatory to the local iwi, whose people had been bombarded by missiles from that vessel at the beginning of the Waikato Wars, 23 years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. One day we shall probably change our name again, shed the name "Miranda", and become the Pūkorokoro Naturalists' Trust operating the Pūkorokoro Shorebird Centre. By the way, we have nothing against girls or women or anybody called Miranda – it is a lovely name.

One of the duties I inherited from Gillian Vaughan when succeeding her as Chair of PMNT Council was to represent PMNT as a member of Tiaki Repo ki Pūkorokoro Trust. TRkP was set up as a project of Living Water, a " Strategic Partnership" between Department of Conservation and Fonterra. A dairy giant in bed with a government department. The idea of Living Water was to create association between farming communities and eco-restoration projects at a local level for the benefit of the whenua. These local partnerships were funded initially by Living Water, but were expected to continue and become self-sufficient after Living Water reached the end of its limited (10-year) lifetime. When I arrived at my first meeting of TRkP, the Chairperson was a representative of Haua Partnerships, who had been recruited by Living Water to mediate in the development of shared values between the particpants of TRkP. When they had achieved this goal, Haua Partnerships moved on. Once the 10-year limited lifetime of Living Water came to an end in 2023, they too had to move on, leaving TRkP to find its own way. Nobody ever said that it would be easy but it has been fruitful.

Now, 50 years after we started, PMNT has a stake in four parcels of land close to the tidal mudflats that sustain our birds. We have a Visitor Centre and Manager's accommodation on one piece of land. We also have the Robert Findlay Reserve, and the 11-hectare Heritage block just to the south of the Shorebird Centre. We are also a trustee on the TRkP Trust. The challenges for the future will be to get as much we can from these bits of land to help the mudflats and the birds, and to encourage our international collaborators to do the same with their bits of land. It is all to keep the birds coming. We've made a good start.

Kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui.


Yalu Riverbank walk in Dandong. L_R Nigel Millius, Tony Habraken, Will Perry, Yalu Jiang Reserve Director Yan Meifang and assistant Jia Na. On the opposite bank is North Korea ADRIAN RIEGEN.

# Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust – 50 Years On

## The contributions to PMNT by Adrian Riegen over 40 years are incalculable.

Godwit central: a flock of mostly godwits at Yalu Jiang KEITH WOODLEY

**Each person on the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust council has, over the years found their niche, be it editing PM News, representing us on the flyway, talking to schools, running field courses, taking care of the buildings, restoring the Findlay Reserve and so on. Not just council of course but the unsung heroes of any organisation - the volunteers. It is the combination of these people with the common goal of believing in the Trust that have allowed PMNT to reach this half-century milestone. (Kilometrestone doesn't sound right, does it?).**

I was elected to the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Council in May 1985 and imagined I'd be involved for a couple of years. That didn't turn out well, did it? So here we are celebrating the 50th anniversary and my 40th anniversary of commitment to the Trust. My involvement has gone far beyond anything I could ever have imagined, due in part to the now Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust being open minded enough to pursue all causes that aligned with its philosophy of 'Keeping the Birds Coming'. A catchy phrase but one that strikes at the very heart of why the Trust exists. For without the shorebirds there would be very little to attract people's attention to Pūkorokoro Miranda. It is hard to imagine many organisations getting involved in shorebird conservation in the DPRK, but this Trust's council have always believed in doing what seems right at the time - well certainly for the forty years I've been involved. Being an independent organisation has helped considerably in my mind, as we are not tied to the policies of larger organisations, and long may it stay that way.

Back in 1985, bimonthly council meetings were held at the Papakura Croquet Club where Brian Ellis presided over often-tedious points of order. At the time Stuart Chambers was driving up from Hamilton on winter nights for meetings that appeared to achieve very little and was getting frustrated with the lack of action. Brian said he had been regularly talking with Allan Lane about the Findlay Reserve and the possibility of being gifted some land on which to build an observatory. He was short on detail and progress was mysteriously slow.

Things changed in 1986 when Brian stood down from council and Stuart Chambers was elected Chairman. Stuart, a man of action set about finding land to purchase and the following year land was found and soon after building commenced. The building was the big turning point because now we had a real presence on the Firth of Thames coast and could get stuck into what was to become a key role of the Trust: educating the general public about the amazing godwits, knots and other shorebirds, especially the Arctic breeding species, and pushing for their protection, noting that shorebirds are the second most threatened group of birds after albatrosses.

In 1986 Stephen Davies and I restarted the Miranda Banders that Dick Veitch had begun in 1979 and run until 1982. There was so little known about any of the shorebirds in New Zealand, particularly the Arctic breeding ones and so we started banding birds to try and answer some of the questions. Where do they breed? what migrations routes did they follow? where did they refuel? and many more. We thought a few years would be enough to answer these questions, but 40 years on there is still much we don't know about these birds, particularly Red Knots and Turnstones. Getting a handle on Red Knot migration and staging is an on-going mission. (See page 24) Bands and engraved flags have taught us a great deal, geolocators and satellite tags have filled in some of the gaps but by no means all, and so we will keep trying to answer these questions. Does it really matter whether we know all the details? Well yes, I believe so, because without this information it is much harder to protect them.

The sightings of our birds in Asia got me increasingly interested in the migration routes they were using. Back in the 1980s those routes didn't have a name. That would not come until a workshop held in Kushiro, Japan in December 1994. I was New Zealand's sole representative at the workshop, where representatives of governments and NGOs from twenty-one other countries and territories were present. The workshop agreed our flyway should be called the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Stephen Davies (in cap) and Adrian directing extraction of birds from the net BRIAN TYLER

Mark Barter and school kids 2004 ZHANG GUOMING

The thousands of shorebirds we had banded were starting to pay dividends as we gleaned little bits of information about them from rare recoveries or sightings, and by the mid-1990s Mark Barter, an Englishman turned Aussie was systematically searching the vast Yellow Sea coastline in China, looking for shorebird staging sites. Of course, he was mainly looking for Australian birds but recorded everything that he saw. Each year on his return to Melbourne we would chat on the phone for an hour or so talking about what he'd found that year. I had offered Mark an incentive to find some of our flagged birds, with the agreed market rate of one beer per flag. Several years went by without me needing to shout a round, but our 1999 phone call opened with Mark saying, "You owe me five beers". This was both exciting and concerning. Would I need to fly to Melbourne to buy the five beers? Mark continued with "I've found godwit central."

These words would be a profound turning point in my life. Mark had known of my desire to get the Trust involved in some sort of study in Asia but what, where and how had not been determined. Yalu Jiang was godwit central and as Mark pointed out, there was already a nature reserve there and access was, by comparison, much easier than most of the Yellow Sea coast. With so many New Zealand godwits staging at Yalu Jiang, it made perfect sense to visit that site on a regular basis to determine if what Mark had found in 1999 was indeed 'godwit central' or just a fluke. It turned out to be no fluke and was a major staging site for many species of shorebirds from all over the flyway.

Over ten years of surveys we determined that Yalu Jiang was the second most important shorebird staging site in East Asia after Saemangeum in South Korea, which with 400,000 birds was by far the most important site. But as Saemangeum was being discovered it was also being destroyed by a massive land claim, bigger than the Manukau Harbour. A team from Pūkorokoro Miranda helped an international team for three years to monitor the demise of Saemangeum. At a big Yalu Jiang birdwatching event on 23April 2006, I stood up in front of the crowd and said, "Two days ago Yalu Jiang was the second most important staging site for shorebirds in East Asia but today it is now the most important site, not because of what you have done but because Saemangeum has been destroyed with the closing of the seawall." I went on to say, "Please don't let Yalu Jiang slip back to second or third."

With the world now aware of how important Yalu Jiang was for migratory birds it was time to fill more of the knowledge gaps and in particular the complete lack of knowledge of shorebirds staging in DPRK. What better organisation to tackle this than the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust, a 'little club' at the bottom of the world with few enemies. That project finally got underway in 2009 and was going very well until Covid-19 arrived and put everything on hold. The Trust plays the long game, and we will endeavour to return there in 2026 to continue the survey and educational work.

Bitterly poignant occasion: 23 April, 2006, the day the Saemangeum seawall was completed. Adrian Riegen telling the audience why Yalu Jiang was about to become the most important site in the flyway. Within two years PMNT people working with colleagues from Birds Korea and the Australasian Wader Studies Group would help document the scale of the catastrophe. Just one example: a 22% decline in the world population of Great Knot. KEITH WOODLEY

NCUK agreement 2014 KEITH WOODLEY

And so, to the present time. While we may not be so active on the flyway there is plenty still to do in New Zealand and the last twelve months at Pūkorokoro have been a joy to be involved with. Now that retirement has knocked on my door and been accepted in, I can hopefully spend more time at Pūkorokoro with the wonderful team of Keith, Chelsea and Tansy who together, along with the volunteers of course, are looking after the Trust in wonderful new ways. Added to the 2024-25 team, was Peter Fryer who, with assistance from Tansy, put in a staggering effort to repaint the centre, fix rotten decks and steps, etc. Most exciting of all was finally fixing the leaking skylight in the women's bathroom – I hope!

With fifty years behind us we should be looking forward and while we all love the Trust's buildings, they have not been really fit for purpose since the first field course in 1999. Every time a school group visits for a talk or a course is run or events held, parts of the building are compromised, and day visitors can't enjoy the centre as we would like them to. When we hold talks on open days the room gets hot, is hard to darken and the screen is very distant for those at the back. Therefore, it is high time we did something about this, and plans are finally afoot to build an additional building, which will have a 150 seat auditorium, a much-extended education display area, a larger shop and office and a communal space for people to have lunch or hold small gatherings that will not affect the rest of the activities.

Of course, this is a big step for the Trust, but I believe it is an essential step forward and for my sins I'm prepared to see it happen. The existing building can then be modernised to cater for courses and other gatherings, meetings and accommodation. We are mindful of climate change issues and the floods of 1995 and 2018 are likely to become more frequent, but abandoning the coast permanently to higher sea levels is still many decades away, and the Trust has an important role to play in highlighting the coming crisis for humanity and shorebirds. While I doubt I'll be around to celebrate the Trust's 100th anniversary I sincerely hope the Trust does reach that milestone and helps ensure people and shorebirds still have a place in the Firth of Thames.

**Adrian Riegen**

Flyway Partnership CEO Jennifer George SUE TOWNSON

# Flyway Partnership CEO

**Also present during the Governor-General's visit to Pūkorokoro on 4 March, was a delegation from Beijing Forestry University. Their visit was facilitated by the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership and Massey University. Trust member and Partnership CEO Jennifer George was also here. This is from an interview with Jennifer by the Ramsar Bureau.**

Jennifer George's curiosity with emerging technology led her to an unlikely source of inspiration – the Bar-tailed Godwit, a small migratory bird that flies 30,000km nonstop across oceans. That journey sparked her deep commitment to conservation, guiding her to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, where she now serves as Chief Executive.

Bringing together 18 countries and 21 non-government partners, Jennifer works to strengthen the connections between wetlands, the birds that rely on them, and the people whose livelihoods are intertwined with these habitats. Through initiatives like the Flyway University Alliance, she fosters cross-cultural collaboration, mentoring the next generation of conservationists who will carry this mission forward.

Inspired by her mother's belief that even the smallest actions can make a difference, Jennifer navigates complex political landscapes with authenticity and persistence. Her vision is clear: a future where a seamless chain of protected wetlands allows both migratory birds and human communities to thrive in harmony with nature.

**Q What personal experience has shaped or inspired your journey?**

My interest in emerging technologies took me on the journey of a small migratory waterbird with a huge story. This is the story of the Bar-tailed Godwit who travels 30,000 kilometres each year from a small community in my own country of New Zealand to the northern slopes of Alaska to breed and then returns to precisely the same site they left.

I discovered everyone could follow these avian athletes online each day, due to satellite trackers attached to their small bodies as they flew across the Pacific Ocean for 8 -10 days non-stop – back home.

Being able to follow them was due to a small group of researchers and volunteers. I developed the utmost respect for how they were using technologies and presenting the data they gathered in an engaging and inspiring way. This drew me to join their mission and so I became a member of Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust (PMNT) to be part of their story.

I volunteered and took a bird identification course. When a role came up to develop good practice guidelines for the whole Flyway (not just the migration of the Bar-tailed Godwit) I was able to use all my diverse professional experience. Subsequently, I took up the role of Chief Executive of the Partnership.

So, my journey has been shaped by a very small community in a small country. In my role I now appreciate there are many other community initiatives taking place across East Asia through to the Russian Federation and Alaska each with their own inspiring story. Daily, I lead the Secretariat to enable greater connection between the wetland habitats our birds rely on for their journeys, and between those countries who are our Partners in the conservation of migratory waterbirds, their habitats and the people whose livelihoods depend on those habitats.

**Q Who is the influential figure who has inspired your actions, and what specifically about them has been motivating?**

Three women have deeply inspired me throughout my life. The first was my mother. When I reflect on her life, I am struck by how she faced each challenge with determination and resilience. She found ways to enrich our lives, often through small entrepreneurial ventures that made a meaningful difference to our family. She never gave up, always exploring new possibilities and embracing fresh challenges. She also instilled in me a deep respect for the natural world, showing me the importance of valuing and nurturing the earth. She showed me that people can do small things that are so important to the bigger vision. I remember how she would stop her car on the side of the road to pick up carrion killed by other motorists and remove them to the side of the road so the raptors could feast in safety. Small action, significant outcome.

The second woman who has inspired me is retired Judge Dame Carolyn Henwood, with whom I have had the privilege of working for nearly 20 years. Together, we have strived to create systemic change for young people within the justice system. Dame Carolyn was a trailblazer for women in the judiciary, and she used her insights to drive sustainable change in the arts, for young people, and in communities. I have learned so much from her – particularly the importance of looking beyond obstacles, seeking what lies beneath them, and finding solutions. She has taught me to dream big, to be persistent, and to embrace life with celebration and joy.

Lastly, though I have never met her in person, is Robin Wall Kimmerer whose book Braiding Sweetgrass has been a guiding light and companion over the last five years. The profound wisdom in her writing brings to life the intricate connections within our natural ecosystems, emphasizing that we are stewards and kin. Kimmerer's perspective on the world as a living being rather than a resource to be exploited resonates deeply with me and inspires me to continual growth in my own life. These women, each in their unique way, have shaped my understanding of resilience, strength, and the importance of living in joy and harmony with the world around us.

**Q In your conservation efforts for wetlands, what key challenges did you face and how has this experience fuelled your dedication to making a positive impact?**

The greatest challenge I have faced is finding ways to authentically connect the vastly different cultures and political approaches across our 18 partner countries and 21 non-government partners. There is unwavering goodwill to address wetland conservation issues across our Flyway, and my commitment to this work is to translate that goodwill into actions, inspiring people to connect and build a continuous chain of wetland habitats for our migratory waterbirds.

As I reflect on these challenges, I have come to realize that meaningful progress can only be achieved when we foster genuine connections between individuals and communities, transcending cultural differences. The ASEAN Flyway Network established under the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity has proven to be a successful model, uniting wetland habitat managers across borders. Another inspiring model is developing the migration route of individual waterbird species, linking wetland habitats and communities across multiple countries.

Working alongside Beijing Forestry University, I have played an instrumental role in establishing the Flyway University Alliance. This academic collaboration brings together universities and research institutes across our Flyway to conduct joint research and facilitate exchanges at every level. Through this alliance, we are nurturing a new generation of young professionals, researchers and academics who not only understand each other's culture but who collaborate across cultures to secure a shared future of our wetland environments, migratory waterbirds, and the communities that depend on them. These types of initiatives fuel my motivation to effect change for a sustainable future.

**Q As a woman who has made significant strides, where can you say investment is required to accelerate progress and empower women's actions for wetlands?**

We are stronger when we work on change together. To accelerate progress, investment should focus on uniting influential women, those with financial resources, and individuals with invaluable life experience so they may mentor and support women at every stage of life who are involved in wetlands. We must value and engage women who are already driving positive change in their communities. When recruiting for senior positions in government and international organisations related to the environment, we should recognize the value and wisdom of prior experience, not just academic qualifications.

Mentoring plays a pivotal role. By mentoring young women alongside young men, we create an environment where both genders can support each other's growth and contribute to a more inclusive and empowered future.

*https://www.ramsar.org/person/jennifer-george-new-zealand*

# Evolution of The Shorebird Centre and its Operations

**Keith Woodley has witnessed many changes at Pūkorokoro. Here he charts some of them.**

**In December 2024 the Shorebird Centre switched to a new point of sale system. This software allows us to operate the shop, manage and track sales and inventory, while also recording and reconciling data for accounting and auditing purposes. In an instant our old cash register became obsolescent. (In the mid-1990s that cash register had been a major innovation, an advance on the rudimentary cash drawer it replaced.) Gone too are many of the manual practices involved with running the shop, some of them engrained over decades. It was nothing less than a seachange. It all got me thinking of other changes over the span of PMNT history, of which there have been a great many.**

## The Shorebird Centre


First there was a piece of land carved off the neighbouring farm. Then the builders arrived and the Centre began to take shape. The original building included one bunk room. Stage two, completed in 1992 added two more bunkrooms and a self contained unit – subsequently named Sandpiper Suite. Stage three – a further unit named Whimbrel Wing, and the Wrybill Room was nearing completion when I arrived in 1993. Several years later the garage was built, and the deck in front of the building also appeared.

While a professional builder was engaged to construct the Centre, costs to the Trust were significantly offset by volunteer effort.

The large picture opposite shows The Centre before the front deck was added. It was also before the bird display cases were installed, when the window immediately left of the power pole was removed. Note the section behind the building is largely bare of plantings.





1. – 4. Beginnings of the Shorebird Centre. PMNT
5. Taking shape PMNT
6. lunch break PMNT
7. Stage one on Opening Day, September 1990. PMNT

The Centre in 1995 KEITH WOODLEY

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## The Cottage

In 1998 the Trust purchased the old farm cottage from our neighbouring farmer. While I wandered about overseas, a tremendous effort by a team of volunters including Stuart Chambers, John and Stella Rowe, Bev and Bryan Woolley, and Ashley Reid transformed it into suitable accommodation for my return. After five years occupying Whimbrel Wing I moved into a completely detached building. For the next 23 years I regarded it as quite acceptable quarters, even if it was starting to crumble. It was then deemed to be beyond its use by date so, in late 2021, following a remarkable fund raising effort by PMNT members, a new manager's residence arrived on the back of a truck.

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8. Stuart Chambers and cottage renovations 1998 PMNT
9. Cottage prior to demolition. The white posts mark the site of the current house. PMNT
10. Cottage demolition 2022 KEITH WOODLEY

## Widgery Lake

The new Centre stood in the former farm paddock, surrounded by tall grasses, echium and other exotics. Between the building and the road a lower lying area was excavated and became Widgery Lake, named for Monty and Desmond Widgery who had donated the cost of excavation. Foundation member Anthea Goodwin began planting the section, and soon had a regular team of volunteers, especially Norah Peachman and Esther Burgess, to help her. The legacy of those early efforts are the extensive shrubs, flaxes and cabbage trees which now dominate most of the Centre grounds.

Creating the lake was one thing, managing it quite another. Today that vegetation makes Widgery Lake look as if it has always been there. But it has taken some effort to get it to that stage - management by trial and error. Essentially the lake is rainwater, so levels fluctuate, often drying out completely most summers, which mimics the water table of the surrounding plains. Mats of algae on the lake surface became a regular occurence, and several working bees were held to clear it.

Several methods were trialled to remove the algal growth, including manual clearance. Bundles of barley straw were also used to try and inhibit it, but the absence of flow meant this had little effect. The lake bed was also subject to weed incursion, which, in one case, meant a digger was brought in to clear the lake bed and margins. However, this created a 'scorched earth' landscape, one effect of which was the disappearance of the Banded Rail pair frequenting the area. It would be several years before rails were once more seen around the lake. Since then the lake has been left to largely manage itself.


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Widgery Lake today HAMISH KENDALL

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1. Widgery Lake emerges PMNT
2. Anthea Goodwin and her venerable wheelbarrow 1994 PMNT
3. Widgery Lake c.1995 KEITH WOODLEY
4. Widgery Lake first clean up KEITH WOODLEY

5. Adrian Riegen happily at work KEITH WOODLEY
6. Widgery Lake late 1990s KEITH WOODLEY
7. Widgery Lake working bee KEITH WOODLEY


Interior early 1990s JIM HAGUE

## The Shop

From the time it opened, the Centre was to be an income generator for the Trust. Together with accommodation, this meant establishing a shop. In those early days, it was a rather minimal affair. The largely bare Sibson Room had a few sticks of furniture and a handful of shop items arrayed on a trestle table. There were Folkert Nieuwland's photo cards, the Stuart Chambers book *Birds of New Zealand Locality Guide,* some posters, and various souvenir items designed by Monty Widgery. The shop counter, a modest structure with a simple cash drawer above mirrored glass sides, had been inherited from a lingerie shop Alison and Stuart Chambers had once operated in Hamilton. From that trestle table at the north end of the Sibson Room there evolved a shop that is now a substantial retail operation. Most notable is the increase in book titles. We now stock, in store, the most extensive range of natural history titles of any outlet in the country

That evolution was greatly accelerated under John Gale as Trust Chairman. His elevation to that role, succeeding Stuart Chambers in 1994, was a significant change and reflects a pattern that has served the Trust well throughout its history. Each Chair emerged at the time best suited for their skills and qualities. Dick Sibson was an inspiring mentor and motivator; John Brown and Brian Ellis managed transitional periods; and the project-oriented Chambers pushed the building to completion.

1. Pam Agnew staffing an early version of the shop PMNT
2. Interior early 1990s PMNT

The shop in 2005 KEITH WOODLEY


The shop today MIA LANGLOTZ

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3. Early displays c. 1997 PMNT
4. Inaugural Centre assistant Jenni Hensley minding the shop DAVID LAWRIE
5. Clean sweep deck storage KEITH WOODLEY

Now it was Gale's turn to preside over a period of consolidation and expansion of the Trust's revenue base. Coming from a business background, he saw considerable potential for increasing income. One immediate result was the arrival of that cash register followed, in November 1996, by an EftPos terminal. These were the first ripples of a wave of technology I was to encounter. Next up was a fax and answer phone: how quaint when viewed from this highly wired age to remember just how novel that was for me back then.

Joining the new technology there came the gradual addition of shop furniture, meaning the trestle could be repurposed elsewhere in the building. Book racks and card stands first and, arriving one by one over several years, a set of custom-built display stands and storage areas. Shop space filled gradually and incrementally, barely noticed after a while.

In 2005 the shop experienced a further growth spurt with the arrival of Jenni Hensley as Centre Assistant. The assistant role included full management of the centre, including servicing accommodation, but the major focus was the shop. This continues to be a core part of the role today. She immediately began reorganising the shop and expanding the range of stock items, building a platform for further expansion to come. Her immediate successors, Maria Stables-Page, Louisa Chase, and Anne Gummer continued this process.

The arrival of Chelsea Ralls, however, was transformational. She has presided over massive changes in stock levels and storage, as well as organising the installation of that point-of-sale system. One of her especially important skills is finding display and storage space for an ever-expanding stock range.

## The Centre

Initially there were a few tables and chairs, a set of drawers containing a shell collection, and rudimentary display stands. Then more furniture arrived – a succession of comfy chairs, sofas etc. Then in 1996, surplus to requirements at Auckland Museum, we inherited two bird display cases. Their position in the room meant one of the window sections was removed. There followed, over the next few years, a series of display panels. In 2003 the wader wall display appeared. During this time the shop furntiure also expanded. All of this was gradual. The real extent of it all only became clear on the two occasions when the floor needed to be revarnished. This meant removing everything – a clean sweep fore and aft.


Clean sweep KEITH WOODLEY

## The Changing Coast

Pūkorokoro is a dynamic coast. The current shell beach and spit are but the latest in a long succession of beach ridges known as cheniers, built up over the last 4,500 years to form the chenier plain. Small boulders and pebbles eroded from the Hunua Ranges, and massive shellfish beds producing prodigious volumes of empty shells, together provide the raw ingredients. Long piles of sand and shell swept off the mud are gradually driven shoreward by tidal action and subsequent storms. The same forces help build up ridges of material resting on top of fine sediments.

Eventually a ridge attaches at its northern end to the existing shell beach. From here, it develops into a spit expanding southwards parallel to the coast. Successive tides gradually deposit sufficient sediment inside the embayment to raise it above all but the highest tides. Today this process is assisted by mangroves which colonise the area and help trap sediment. Eventually the area becomes new land attached to the plain. Meanwhile further beach ridges are forming outside the shell spit, and the process continues. So constant change is expected.


Access Bay c.1980 PMNT

**Aerial images show a changing coast between 1952 and 2021.**


Limeworks March 1952 LINZ


Pūkorokoro Coast November 1961 LINZ


Pūkorokoro coast 2021 BRUCE HAYWARD

Dramatic changes over seven decades. In the top image the Limeworks was still in operation, on the site of what is now the Findlay Reserve carpark.

Note the mangroves between Access Bay and the Wrybill Hide. In 1993 much of this area remained open and available as a high tide roost for up to 10,000 shorebirds. Now it is home to Banded Rail and a nighttime roost for thousands of birds such as finches, sparrows and swallows.

In the 1970s and 80s the beachfront just south of where the Centre sits today was aptly known as Access Bay. People could park their cars on the coastal edge and enjoy vast flocks of shorebirds gathered ahead of the tide. During the 1980s the most recent shell spit begun enclosing the bay, as it marched southwards. What began as a few mangrove seedlings is now an unbroken swathe of mangrove forest. Where thousands of godwits, knots, oystercatcher, and Wrybill roosted, is now home to a good population of Banded Rail, and a nighttime roost for masses of passerines – Starlings, finches, swallows and sparrows. Meanwhile, the open area of mudflat suited to roosting shorebirds, is over a kilometre further along the coast.

1. Access Bay cars c.1970s PMNT
2. Looking south at Access Bay mid-1980s BRIAN CHUDLEIGH
3. Looking down Access Bay from shell banks 1987 BRIAN CHUDLEIGH
4. Mangroves advancing down the embayment 2005 KEITH WOODLEY

Which is where the Wrybill and Godwit Hides currently sit, just the latest in a steady progression of different locations. But if the hides needed to be moved periodically to follow roost sites, they have also been subject to natural forces. Several times our hides have been damaged or demolished by storm events.

5. Building the first hide at the Limeworks c.1978 PMNT

6. The next hide was located near where the Wrybill Hide sits today LYN SCOTT

7. John Rowe investigates where the hide roof ended up, after the big storm on 14 July 1995 KEITH WOODLEY

8. Replacement hide arriving on site PMNT

9. But do you even need a hide? PMNT

10. Building Godwit Hide 2011 KEITH WOODLEY

11. Godwit Hide seats post storm. A storm removed the hide in pieces, but left the seats in place KEITH WOODLEY

12. The boardwalk was removed by the 2018 tidal surge KEITH WOODLEY

13. And was deposited 70m away KEITH WOODLEY

14. Rebuilt Godwit Hide today KEITH WOODLEY


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The view through the front door of the Centre on the morning of January 5, 2018.

## The Firth of Thames makes a house call

On Friday morning 5 January 2018, the Firth of Thames came to visit, the tideline reaching the bottom step in front of the Shorebird Centre. The tail end of a tropical cyclone coinciding with heavy rain and a king tide created a dramatic tidal surge. While it was an extreme event, it was also a glimpse into the future for low lying coastal areas.

The Godwit Hide survived this event largely unscathed, unlike the boardwalk which was lifted and moved over 70 metres.

The beach at Ray's Rest, just north of the Shorebird Centre is popular as an overnight site for campervans. It is an open, exposed piece of shoreline so ahead of storm events the number of vehicles tends to dwindle. But it is not just weather events that affect this piece of coast.

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1. The day the Firth of Thames came to visit CHELSEA RALLS
2. The road at Rays Rest BRIAN HARDGRAVE
3. Ray's Rest BRIAN HARDGRAVE
4. East Coast Road near the Shorebird Centre BRIAN HARDGRAVE
5. East Coast Road corner BRIAN HARDGRAVE
6. The number of vehicles diminish ahead of a storm BRIAN HARDGRAVE
7. Rays Rest during a Labour Weekend KEITH WOODLEY
8. Rays Rest during Lockdown Sept 2021 KEITH WOODLEY

# What Do We Know About Our Red Knots?

**In his talk at the Autumn Migration Day in March, Phil Battley gave us a comprehensive update on what we now know about godwits *(Pūkorokoro News 136)*. He then did the same for Red Knots.**

**It should be quicker to give you an overview of knots because as you will find out we don't know very much about them. In Oliver (1930) we have knots in East Asia and visiting Australia and New Zealand. 'Breeding in the Arctic regions of Europe, Asia and America and migrating thence in the northern winter to Africa, India, Australia, New Zealand and South America'. Not very informative, and by the 1955 edition of Oliver we have pretty much the same thing.**

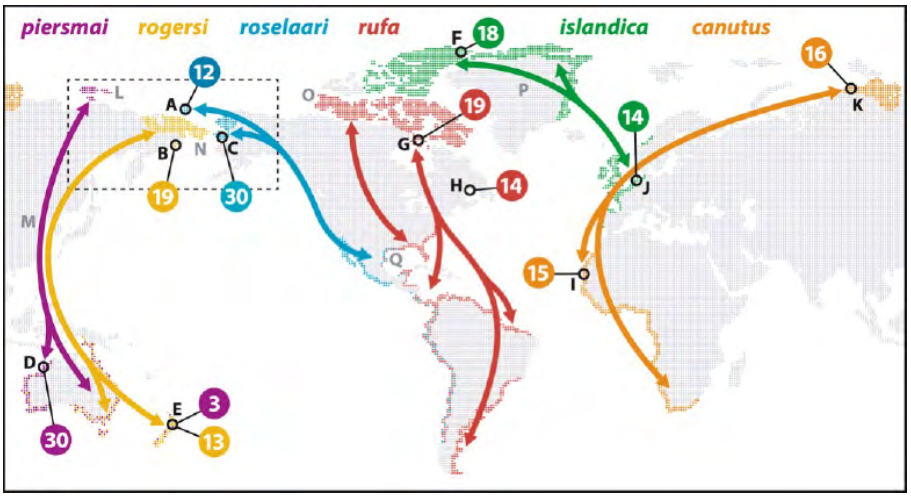
In Annotated Checklist to the Birds of New Zealand (1970) we have an incorrect species name *Calidris canutus canutus,* 'breeding high arctic and migrating south, reaching its southernmost limits in New Zealand.' So again, there is little resolution.

But in the 1970 edition of *Field Guide to the Birds of NZ* by Sibson, Falla and Turbott, we now have the correct name for knots *Calidris canutus rogersi*, 'breeding eastern Siberia and migrating south; the bulk of the population of the eastern race (*rogersi*) evidently coming to New Zealand.' So, they sort of knew where the birds breed – roughly. They sort of knew they came to New Zealand. But not much more.

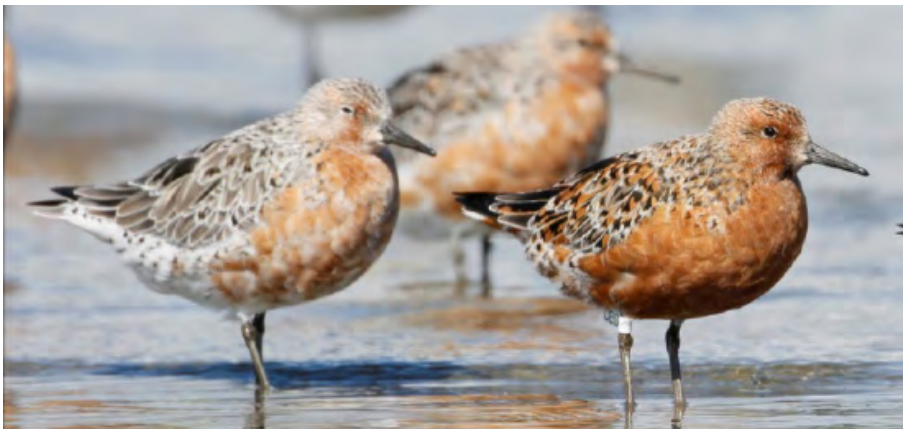
In 1985 Adrian Riegen and Simon Towle found seven knots shot on the Manukau Harbour, one of which had been banded in Australia the year before as a young bird. This was the first evidence of knots that do come to Australia and then come over to New Zealand. Adrian could only speculate but he figured they probably had not gone back up to the breeding ground and then back to NZ. And what you find is Adrian is quite good at making speculations that often turn out to be reasonable. Not always but often.

I think it is fair to say that knots languish by comparison. Despite our best efforts, they are difficult to catch, they have a strange distribution in New Zealand, they are certainly not as widely distributed here as godwits are, their numbers have demonstrably gone down, more so than godwits, and there are times when we can't really catch them up here or in other places.

One difference with godwits is we do have genetic confirmation of two different sub species coming to New Zealand: *Rogersi* breeds in Chukotka, and *Piersmai* on the New Siberian Islands in the Arctic Ocean. The first place where this was really noticed was here at Pūkorokoro with birds caught while Pavel Tomkovich was visiting. Based at the University Museum of Moscow, it was Pavel who had described and named this *Piersmai* population. He knew them and according to Adrian, he could say – yes this is Chukotka, or this is New Siberian Islands! So, in the hand he could tell them apart.




Knot populations PHIL BATTLEY



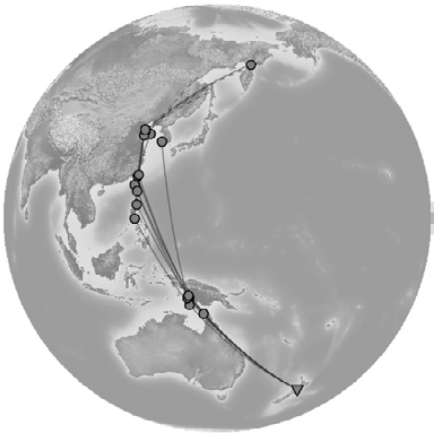
In good breeding plumage you can more easily distinguish them. The bird on the right is ***Piersmai*** and on the left ***Rogersi***, greyer sort of peachier PHIL BATTLEY

Two knot populations map PHIL BATTLEY

Here broadly is the pathway of these two subspecies – I say broadly, because we do not know a lot of detail. They probably split about 10-15,000 years ago and it is possible that *piersmai* is a hybrid between two other sub species – *rogersi* and *canutus*. It is quite recent speciation or sub speciation – and it is possible that during the Ice Age knots were separated into two populations around the world and then they have split out since then.

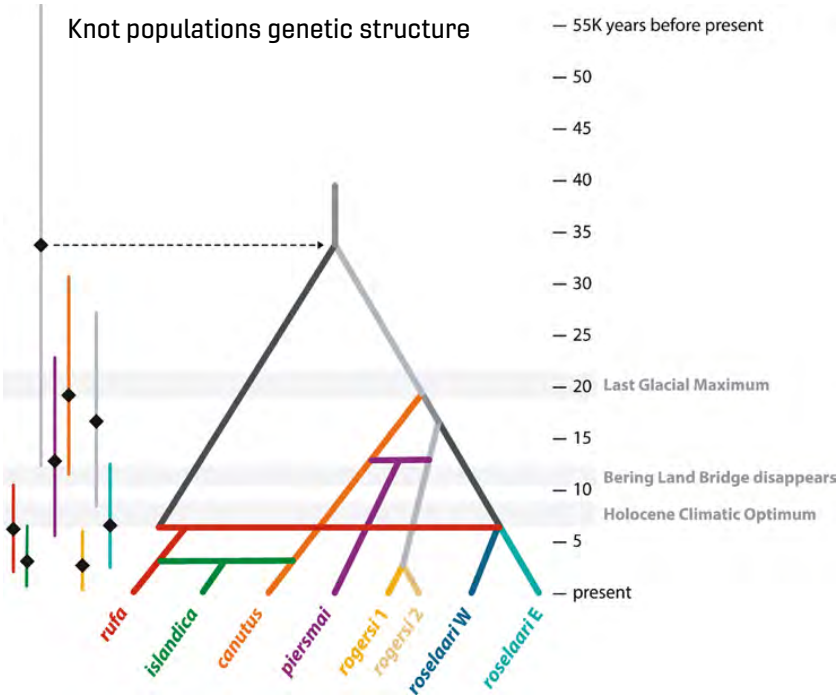
We then have a lot of assumptions based on where the two types go.


Knot tracks southbound PHIL BATTLEY


Knot tracks northbound PHIL BATTLEY

When compiling the evidence for movement in 1999 Adrian suggested there is probably a stop off in northern Australia and then up to China, and on to Russia, and probably the same or perhaps more stopovers on the way back including SE Australia. We had been getting all those flag records of movements between Australia and New Zealand. So, we put some geolocators on 25 knots at the Manawatu Estuary around 2010 and recaptured eight the next year to get the data. One thing I would stress is that these are imprecise. Another analysis method gave slightly different locations which meant we weren't entirely sure where they were going.

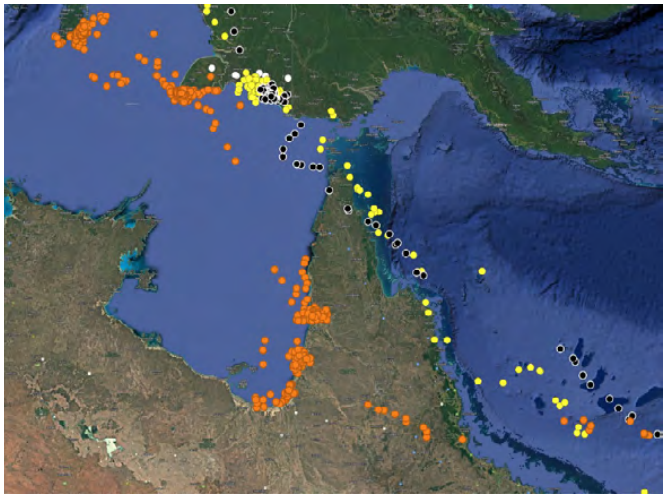
But this is what we got – a northbound flight path that has a stopover around the Gulf of Carpentaria or southern Papua New Guinea or West Papua – I say either or because the other method thought they were in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Then up to Taiwan, South Korea, China, and possibly the Philippines – a little bit unclear on that, but then certainly going up to the Yellow Sea, then on to Kamchatka, the Sea of Okhotsk, along that area up to the breeding grounds in Russia. On the way south we have something reasonably similar – stop offs in Kamchatka, Sea of Okhotsk, Sakhalin Island then down to the Yellow Sea where they use the Chinese coast at similar locations and then, more convincingly stops in PNG, West Papua, Gulf of Carpentaria, Cape York and then down the coast or even across the corner of the continent to SE Australia and then to New Zealand.




We have this pretty good broad picture, but it is a little inaccurate, so we tried to fill this in with satellite tracking. Lotek a Canadian company that now has a branch in New Zealand were developing very small 2 gm satellite tags, and they were able to give us some to test. It took several years to get some on - it was very difficult to catch birds on the Stilt Ponds – but we managed to answer some of our questions. Not all of them but we have had some success.

Heading northwards – at least the ones we tracked did indeed go up to northern Australia and West Papua. One bird used the west coast of Cape York Peninsula and other birds went up to West Papua. We identified a few hotspots that it would be worth looking at, particularly an area in West Papua just west of the PNG border, near Merauke. We have had three knots all go to this same region and stay there, so it is possible this could be an important staging site for our birds. Hopefully someone is going to get there this year to have a look.

It also matches fairly well with positions from the geolocators. We did have one stop for a week at the top of the Philippines, so we know birds can



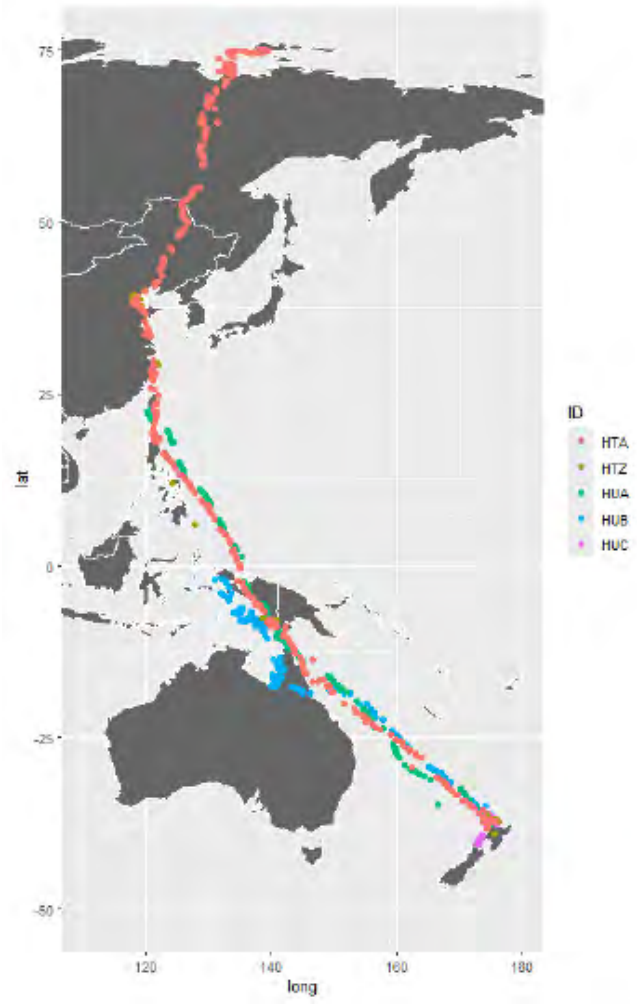
Knot tracks Gulf of Carpentaria and PNG PHIL BATTLEY

stop there, perhaps as an emergency contingency. We had a bird that arrived in Taiwan and dropped its transmitter. We knew that some of our knots do go to Taiwan as we have quite a number of records from there. We never knew if this bird died or dropped its transmitter until this summer when Tony Habraken saw the bird on the Manukau Harbour.

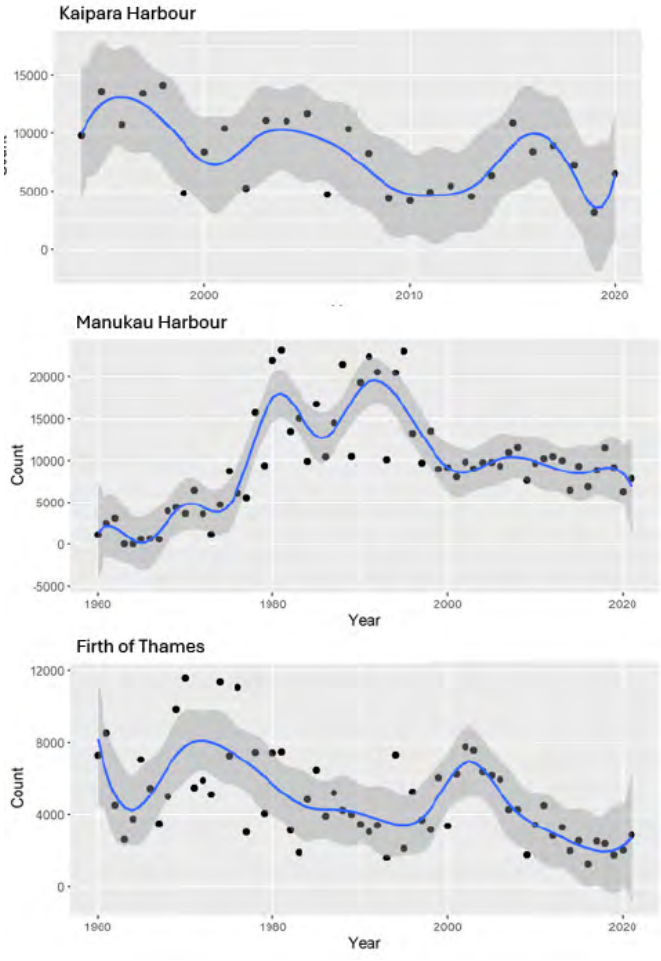
They then moved up the Chinese coast and used multiple sites there before making their way northwards. I should point out the one bird tracked all the way to the breeding grounds was from the *piersmai* subspecies which headed overland to the New Siberian Islands. We didn't get them going to our main population in Chukotka.

So yes, we have succeeded in tracking some birds, but it is a very small number. You can see from the godwits how much variation there can be. We don't really understand how knots are using the Yellow Sea. The NW part of the Yellow Sea is the hotspot that we know of, but a lot of our birds don't seem to go there. They are stopping short and not spending a lot of time there, so we don't really know how many of our birds don't go to Bohai Bay and if they are not going there where else are they stopping? And the other thing is we don't have high resolution information on any of the birds of eastern Russia, and 80 per cent of our birds are that sub species.

One thing we do know is our knot numbers are declining. Long term trends in the Firth of Thames show a bulge in the 1970s, and again in the early 2000's but otherwise the trends have been pretty much downwards: we used to have 10,000 birds and now you've got 800 at the moment. Manukau Harbour is slightly different – numbers went up quite well in the 1970s and 80s, and were somewhat more stable for 20 years, but still that total is half the number they had decades before. And there is a similar trend on the Kaipara – 10-15,000 in the 1990s, and 5-10,000 since. We know that knots move around New Zealand a lot ,which means numbers at each site can fluctuate. However, it is clear the overall knot population in New Zealand has been declining.




Knot tracks to New Siberian Islands PHIL BATTLEY




Knot population trends at three key sites LIAM MOWBRAY

# PMNT and Government

## Keith Woodley reports on PMNT's 50 years of engagement with government.

**Fifty years of being proudly independent. A charitable trust, an NGO, a community group – PMNT finds itself described as all of these. But when working in a space that touches on environment, conservation, international connections, and education, there inevitably comes involvement with government. It may be as minor as following due process when registering with the Charities Commission. Or it may be a joint approach to setting up a shorebird survey program with North Korea. Or anything in between.**

In 1975, the formation of PMNT seemed to be something of a novelty, as far as government was concerned. Speaking at an event marking the 30th anniversary of the Trust, David Lawrie reflected on just how ground-breaking it was. 'Even the establishment of the constitution at that time provided a major hurdle for the Trust as there were no examples and the solicitors had great difficulty in establishing wording that satisfied both the Registrar of Incorporated Societies and the Inland Revenue Department.' He observed that the Trust constitution had been the model for many organisations since.

There followed a connection to the guardians of our native fauna, the New Zealand Wildlife Service (NZWS). Dick Veitch a wildlife officer with the service, and an early member of the Trust, recognised potential synergies for both organisations. The Trust's presence on the Pūkorokoro Coast as observers of wildlife could be seen as beneficial to the agency. He made an offer on their behalf for the Trust to manage the land between Taramaire and Access Bay. He recognised the location of the proposed Shorebird Centre, directly opposite this land, offered strategic value. 'Council should,' he wrote, 'use the future management of this land to boost the values of the Trust constructing a building.

In 1987 Lands and Survey Department, Forest Service and the Wildlife Service were merged to create the Department of Conservation. The following year Veitch's proposal arrived on the desk of new Conservation Minister Helen Clark. In replying to an approach from local MP Warren Kydd, she said DOC 'was prepared to discuss with the Trust, a possible management agreement regarding the Taramaire Wildlife Reserve which is adjacent to the Trusts' proposed education centre. In this respect I have asked that an officer from the department's Auckland regional office liaise directly with the Trust.' However, nothing substantial came of it, partly because the Trust was not ready for that step. The primary focus was on completing and equipping the building. Moreover, at that time there was no one available with the vision, expertise, and energy to drive such a project.

Ironically this followed a period of not so positive interaction with government. Following its formation in 1975, the Trust set about trying to buy land at the Limeworks site for its proposed observatory. Landowner Alan Lane was initially amenable to selling to the Trust, but then complications arose around legal matters such as riparian margins. These subsequntly proved to be insurmountable, but in the meantime another more serious obstacle emerged. Those same guardians of the country's wildlife objected.

In October 1976, the Trust was advised that the Minister of Works, on advice from the Wildlife Service, had declined the application to build on the site: while the Ministry of Works and Development was sympathetic to the aims of the Trust, the proposed lodge was not considered appropriate for its surroundings. Director Gordon Williams made it clear the Wildlife Service was not unsympathetic to the Trust's objectives: 'I can assure you of our fullest support in your ornithological activities and interest.' He said the service would support construction of a suitably designed bird observatory but would not consent to a building that provided accommodation in that locality.

They had earlier requested Franklin District Council to designate the site as a reserve 'to give protection, and to bring about greater security from disturbance ... [which] is why consent by the WS is now needed to any proposal which may affect the area…. The Auckland Regional Authority's study of the area recommends that protection of the wildlife resource is necessary. To accept that the level of disturbance along the coastline is reason for allowing another influence which may introduce another disturbance factor [would undermine the necessity for protection].' He indicated that a revised proposal without provision for accommodation would receive the service's full support.'

The building delays, both regulatory and financial, turned out to have a positive aspect. In a 1981 column, Ronald Lockley reported that the funds originally intended for a 'watch-tower observatory on site have been sensibly diverted to purchase a cottage within the shelter and amenities of Kaiaua village itself'. He also revealed serious second thoughts on the part of the Trust, and a tacit admission that the Wildlife Service policy had been correct. 'With hindsight, we now believe it was fortunate that the local planning authority delayed decision on, and eventually turned down, the trust's application to build there . . . The truth is that developing such natural sanctuaries with even nicely landscaped buildings for the convenience of visiting naturalists almost inevitably leads to further building developments, which increasingly destroys the natural environment.'

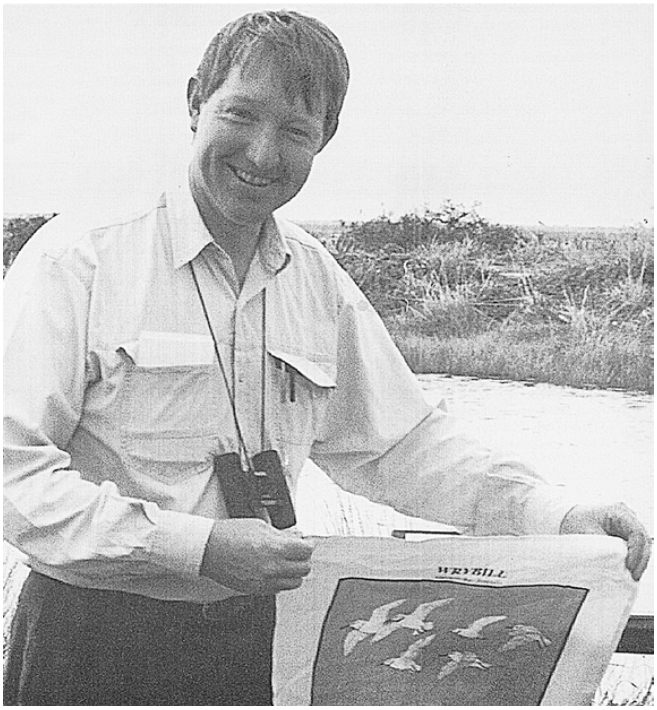
Once the Shorebird Centre was built there came different opportunities for making connections with official agencies. We became a venue for meetings and workshops: DOC managers and field staff, MPI Fisheries Inspectors, school science advisors, species recovery teams are some of the groups making use of the facility. Our location on the fringes of both Auckland and Waikato proved attractive as well. Auckland and Waikato concervancies of DOC held joint meetings, as did the Auckland and Waikato Conservation Boards. On several occasions Auckland area office staff came to stay the night, combining a social function with a coastal working bee, including maintenance tasks around the centre. For the Kiwi Recovery Team, it was a base for planning bird translocations in the region.

DOC staff and community Mistletoe host planting team KEITH WOODLEY

The Hauraki Gulf Forum, which links government agencies, councils and other stakeholders around the Gulf, has also met at the centre. Such events prove valuable to the Trust in developing relationships and connections with key people. They in turn recognise the Trust as a source of expertise and advice on shorebird ecology and coastal issues. A good example of this is our participation in the flood protection asset rationalisation project of Waikato Regional Council at Piako. (See *Pūkorokoro News* 134 and 135)

The Shorebird Centre was also a regular venue for DOC managers to work on department restructuring plans, events that seemed depressingly frequent over the years. One of the more recent ones however, has proved highly beneficial to us. Until then the Pūkorokoro coast fell within the Auckland conservancy, administered by staff based at North Head, Devonport. This meant staff had to travel for up to two hours, depending on Auckland traffic, to arrive on site, which limited their hours in the field. We are now within the jurisdiction of the Hauraki office based in Thames, which, given we can see the town across the bay, makes more sense. And our close working relationship with staff at the Hauraki office is of immense value to us.

It was as an NGO that the Trust first became involved with the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Until 2011, when the New Zealand government finally joined the Flyway Partnership, we were, with one exception, the only presence this country had in the Flyway. The Trust attended the meeting of governments, NGOs and researchers at Kushiro, Japan, 1994, convened in response to declining migratory bird populations in the flyway. The Department of Conservation official responsible for international affairs, had shown no interest in attending. However DOC representatives did attend the Shorebird Conference in Brisbane in 1996, at which the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Site Network was launched - the first major initiative stemming from Kushiro.



Conservation Minister Nick Smith at Pūkorokoro 1997 PMNT

One further outcome was Conservation Minister Nick Smith unveiling a plaque at Pūkorokoro in 1997, commemorating the Firth of Thames being listed as a Flyway Network site. He was one of a succession of conservation ministers who came to visit, including Dennis Marshall, Sandra Lee, Chris Carter, Maggie Barry, Nicky Wagner, and Eugenie Sage, who accompanied Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in 2019. During that visit, the Prime Minister undertook to raise migratory shorebirds in any bilateral talks with China.

Government engagement since 2011 meant we were no longer just a foreign NGO working in China. It meant that when, in 2014, we launched our report documenting ten years of shorebird surveys at Yalu Jiang, and wanted to raise the profile of the event, we could get the New Zealand Ambassador Carl Worker over to Dandong to help out. This however, also revealed that our lack of official connection in China was, unwittingly, partly down to us. In talking with embassy staff in Beijing we learned they had little awareness of the Trust or its activities. 'Why didn't you contact us?' they asked. It hadn't occurred to us to do so.


Launch of the PMNT -Yalu Jiang report, 2014.(L-R) Bruce McKinlay and Carol West (DOC), Keith Woodley, New Zealand Ambassador to China Carl Worker, Adrian Riegen, Estella Lee, and Spike Millington (CEO Flyway Partnership) WANG XIAO FEI

But things have moved on considerably since then, not the least being New Zealand embassy engagement with migratory shorebird sites. Carl Worker's successor as ambassador John McKinnon, visited both Yalu Jiang and the Bohai Bay site that is so important for our Red Knots. Then Clare Fearnley, ambassador from 2018-2023, became a fervent advocate for the flyway and its shorebirds. During her term, which included the Covid lockdown period, she mobilised diplomats from the Beijing embassies of other flyway countries into activities and outings raising awareness about the birds. Meanwhile, back at Pūkorokoro we twice hosted Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand Wang Lutong, and earlier this year one of his successors Wang Xiaolong. On another memorable occasion, the Centre was the location for the signing of an MOU between China and New Zealand to work towards protecting migratory shorebirds.

It became clear to us while working at Yalu Jiang between 2004-2010 that protecting the shorebirds and their habitats in China would mean talking to government agencies in Beijing. Local government in China did not have enough say in protecting these coastal regions, but how could we as a small NGO from New Zeaand possibly talk to these agencies? Once the NZ government joined the EAAFP in 2011 and appointed Bruce McKinlay as flyway officer for DOC, there was now a chance to hold meeting with central government agencies in Beijing. In 2014 Bruce, Adrian Riegen and I attended meeting with several environment agencies in Beijing, supported by NZ Embassy staff.

However, as is often the case in China, one can usually only meet with people of equal standing and so we only met with agency managers, who did not have enough clout for what we wanted. Bruce decided to try again in November 2015 with Lou Sanson, Director General of DOC. Again with NZ Embassy support, a four person delegation of Lou and Bruce representing the NZ government, Adrian Riegen for PMNT and Gary Thompson for Ngati Paoa, spent a week in meetings in Beijing. These were held at a higher level and were much more productive, leading to future agreements being signed.

Government involvement was also crucial in assisting us to achieve another significant goal: access into North Korea to count shorebirds. An approach to then Foreign Minister Winston Peters prior to his visit to Pyongyang in 2007, bore fruit two years later when a PMNT team was able to travel to North Korea. That visit to Mundok by David Lawrie, Adrian Riegen and Tony Habraken represented the first ever shore-bird survey in that isolated country. A second visit, in April 2014, was even more significant in that we were accompanied by two DOC staff on what was an official visit. The outcome was an agreement between the Nature Conservation Union of Korea and PMNT for a three year shorebird survey project, later extended to five years. On that occasion, our return to Beijing featured a meeting with New Zealand embassy staff for a debriefing.

So, government support has helped us achieve some remarkable outcomes. It has clearly helped raise the profile of migratory shorebirds in China. But facilitating our access to North Korea has had even more significant outcomes. Following our survey project, North Korea has joined the Flyway Partnership and also the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Furthermore, the Koreans are seeking World Heritage listing for Sindo Island where, in 2018, we found a flock of 13,000 Bar-tailed Godwits.

But being proudly independent as an NGO has one rather significant implication. All our work,– ten years of shorebird surveys at Yalu Jiang culminating in a report on that site's importance, our contribution to the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project in South Korea in 2006-08, and our work in North Korea, was as an NGO. For virtually all of it, everyone participating covered their own travel expenses.

Happy Day: China New Zealand Migratory Bird Agreement signed at the Shorebird Centre March 2016 DOC

# Join The Wry Force:
## Vote Wrybill for Bird of the Year

**The evening tide is almost full, the shell bank roosts a festival of chattering, preening, jostling birds, when the eruption occurs: a sudden deafening rustle of wings and vocal clamour. No obvious reason for the disturbance is apparent – no harrier hanging in the mauve and peach sky, no skua marauding over the bay. But then this is the nature of shorebirds outside the breeding season – drawn together in large sociable roosts, restlessly lifting off into wheeling manoeuvres, before settling once more. Perhaps it is merely a real-estate reshuffle - adjustment to roosting space dwindled by the tide.**

Gradually the skies empty as birds resettle; first down are the thousands of oystercatchers claiming the end of the spit as their own, sprinkled among them a few Caspian Terns and Black-billed Gulls. The wintering flock of godwit and the few dozen remaining knots alight on the middle reaches of the bank, some spilling down into the edge of the tide. Only the Wrybills remain airborne, over two thousand individuals meshed into a kinetic spiral directly above.

Spot the Wrybill Upper Rangitata KEITH WOODLEY

As I leave twenty minutes later, it is dusk, and they are still up there. It has been a fantastic display – frenetic twists and turns followed by languid loops as the flock tease apart then coalesce, flashing white underparts twisting to dark as they turn away. A string of birds peeling off and spiralling down like unravelled wool hung across the sky, before twisting and spooling upwards. Soon the sky is almost dark but still the Wrybills are aloft, the murmur of wings and soft voices drifting down. What is this all about? Why are these birds expending energy in this way?

I idly muse that it is, after all, Saturday night at Pūkorokoro and maybe that is what Wrybill do at this time. Such a notion of course would never pass muster with the biologist, most of whom seem highly suspicious of any notion that animals 'do recreation.' For them, every behaviour has a function. It is late June, so is this a social mechanism prior to migration and dispersal as scattered pairs over the vast breeding grounds? Whatever its purpose, it is a display which, no matter how often I have seen it, never stales; each time is fresh, new, fascinating. It has also enthralled countless visitors to Pūkorokoro, one of the endearing features of this singularly charismatic little bird.

From *Shorebirds of New Zealand: Sharing the margins (2012)*

# Help us make Wrybill Bird of the Year

**What is so special about Wrybills?**

- Unique among birds with that sideways turned bill
- Found only in New Zealand
- Breathtaking aerobatics that enthral all who see it
- Breed only on the vast gravel reaches of South Island braided rivers
- For much of the year Pūkorokoro coast supports nearly half the world population
- The braided rivers are under stress putting Wrybill habitat at risk

Wrybills are unknown to many New Zealanders. Even less known is the essential link they have with the great braided rivers of the South Island. The only places where Wrybills can breed, they are utterly dependent on those environments. Reduced natural flows through land use practices, enable weed encroachment that in turn stabilises gravel bars and beaches, thus inhibiting the dynamic movement of channels and islands. The invasive vegetation also provides habitat and cover for predators, especially mammalian pests. The ultimate outcome is modified riverbeds and degraded nesting habitat for Wrybill, and other species such as Tarapirohe/Black-fronted Tern, Kaki/Black Stilt, and Pohowera/Banded Dotterel.

A lot of great work by Environment Canterbury, DOC, Ashley-Rakihuri Rivercare Group among others, is being done to address these issues. Some of it – such as weed eradication and trapping, is happening at impressive scales. But this work, needed to secure a future for Wrybill and other birds, needs to be resourced and sustained and recognised nationally.

So nationwide publicity for these endearing creatures is what we are after. And for Wrybill to be firmly placed on the radar screen of Kiwis.

Voting opens on 15 September. Please enlist the support of family and friends, and your social networks here and overseas.

*shorebirds.org.nz/bird-of-the-year-wrybill*

# Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust

## The Shorebird Centre

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Centre Assistant: **Chelsea Ralls**
Kaitiaki Ranger: **Tansy Bliss**

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Deputy Chair and Banding Convenor: **Adrian Riegen**
riegen@xtra.co.nz
09 814 9741

Secretary: **Emma Salmon**
secretary@shorebirds.org.nz

027 527 6727

Treasurer: **Gillian Vaughan**
treasurer@shorebirds.org.nz

Council members: **Wendy Hare, Trudy Lane, David Lawrie, Bob Rigter, Olga Brochner and Jennifer Glenn**

## Magazine

Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust publishes Pūkorokoro Miranda News four times a year, in print and digital editions, to keep members in touch and provide news of events at the Shorebird Centre, the Hauraki Gulf and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. 

Acting Editor: **Keith Woodley**
keith@shorebirds.org.nz, 09 232 2781
Layout and production: **Bernie Cornford**

## See the birds

Situated on the Firth of Thames south of Kaiaua, the Pūkorokoro 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, especially around new and full moons.The Pūkorokoro high tide is 30 minutes before the Auckland (Waitematā) tide. Drop in to investigate, or come and stay a night or two.

## Budget accommodation

The Shorebird Centre has bunkrooms for hire and two self-contained units: Bunks cost $20 per night for members and $35 for non-members.

Self-contained units are $90 for members and $135 for non-members. For further information contact the Shorebird Centre.

## Become a member

Membership of the Trust costs $50 a year for individuals, $60 for families and $75 for those living overseas.

As well as supporting the work of the Trust, members get four issues of PMNT News a year, discounts on accommodation, invitations to events and the opportunity to join in decision making through the annual meeting.

You can join at the Centre, pay via our webpage (www.shorebirds.org.nz), by direct credit to bank account 02-0290-0056853-00 or call the Centre with your credit card details. Contact admin@shorebirds.org.nz for further information.

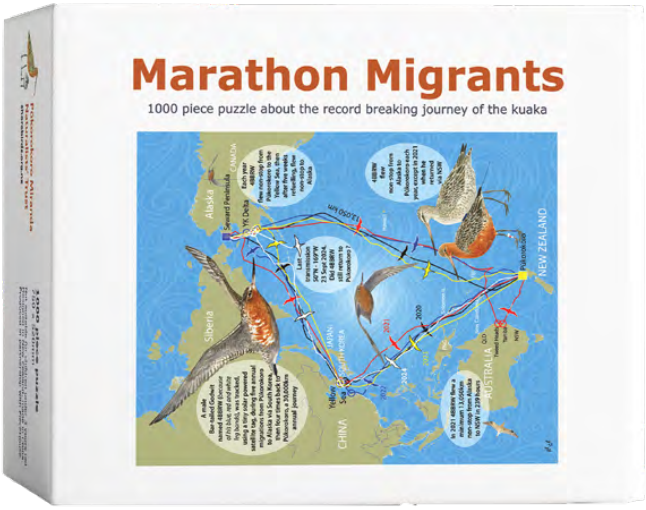
## Bequests

Remember the Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust in your will and assist its vital work for migratory shorebirds. For further information contact the Shorebird Centre.

## Become a Volunteer

There's always a need for volunteers to do a variety of jobs including helping in the shop, guiding school groups, meeting visitors at the hide, working in the Centre garden, joining in the restoration project at the Findlay Reserve, helping with the Shorebird Census and lots more. If you're interested chat with the team at the Centre to see what will best suit you.

# Gifts from the Shop




## Jigsaw Puzzle – Marathon Migrants – $50

*www.shop.shorebirds.org.nz/shop/jigsaw-puzzle-marathon-migrants-1000-pce*

## FIELD COURSE 2026

The 27th Field Course, 31 January – 6 February 2026, is open for enrolments.

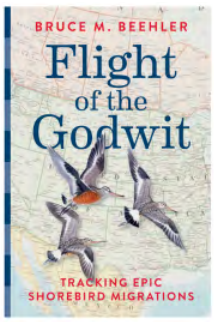
These dates, slightly later than usual, were determined by suitable tide times.


## 50 Birds T-shirts, Tea Towels and Bags

Men's & Women's T-shirts

*www.shop.shorebirds.org.nz/shop/mens-50-birds-t-shirt/*

# Newest Books from the Shorebird Centre Shop




**Flight of the Godwit**

*Bruce Beehler* – $60

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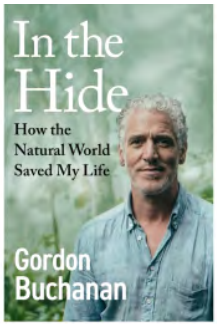


**In The Hide**

*Gordon Buchanan* – $55

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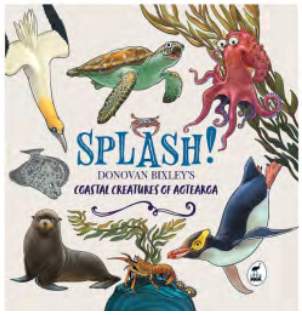


**Splash!**

*Donovan Bixley* – $25

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**The Living Tree**

*Dave Gunsonm* – $25

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**Whales**

*Kelsey Oseid* – $40

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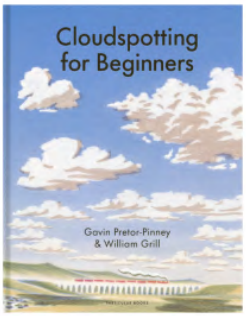


**Cloudspotting For Beginners**

*Gavin Pretor-Pinney* – $60

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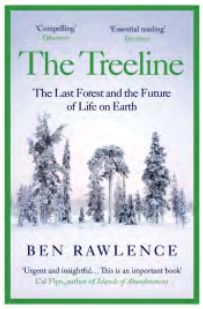


**The Treeline**

*Ben Rawlence* – $30

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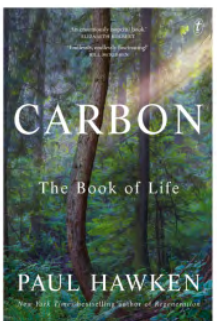


**Carbon The Book of Life**

*Paul Hawken* – $40

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Send an email to shop@shorebirds.org.nz. Ring 09 232 2781 and chat to the friendly team

**We'll be happy to help**

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