



NEW ZEALAND WADER STUDY GROUP

in association with

Miranda Naturalists' Trust

Newsletter No 4

-December 1994-

Compiled by Adrian Riegen

COMMENT - From Adrian Riegen

One of the New Zealand Wader Study Group's (NZWSG) concerns has been that not enough information on what is happening to waders and their habitats along the East Asian-Australasian flyway (flyway = migration route) is being published in New Zealand. This is an area where the NZWSG can be productive and with this in mind the NZWSG newsletters will devote some space in the coming issues to work taking place along the flyway.

We have no plans to publish scientific papers. Instead we wish to encourage the flow of interesting information on all wader matters relevant to the flyway. Copies of the newsletter are sent to wader study groups in Australia and to other interested parties along the flyway as well as being sent to all Miranda Naturalists' Trust members. The newsletter is also made available for the Ornithological Society of New Zealand news, to publish items it feels are of interest to its readers.

For those who travel to countries around the flyway and to Pacific Islands, we are very interested to hear about any wader sighting you make, particularly of species that occur in New Zealand. Even little bits of information can help in the overall understanding of migration routes, so please send them to the editor or leave them at the Miranda Centre.

The Miranda Naturalists' Trust newsletter will continue to publish matters concerning major current issues along the flyway, such as the development in Hakata Bay, Fukuoka, Japan.

The association of the NZWSG with the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is proving to be very valuable as data gathered by the group and other wader study groups along the flyway can be readily used for displays in the Centre at Miranda, which attracts large numbers of visitors annually. Many of the visitors are not bird-watchers, but more importantly perhaps, have a general interest in the environment. Some of these people are so moved by what they learn about waders at Miranda

and the feats of Arctic migrant waders in particular, that they are becoming interested, and this is surely a healthy sign for the future.

MEETING WITH THE QUEENSLAND WADER STUDY GROUP

On a recent visit to Queensland I was able to meet up with Peter Driscoll, chairman of the Queensland Wader Study Group. Although he did not personally show me any of the waders in the area due to time constraints, in some ways he went better by finding me two Marbled (plumed) Frogmouths near his home at Mt Glorious, close to Brisbane.

I spoke about New Zealand waders and our banding programme at the Queensland Wader Study Group, Annual General Meeting. This was also a great opportunity to talk about common objectives in wader studies. The recent movements of knot and turnstone between Moreton Bay and Auckland have been very encouraging. I was also able to sympathise with them when told of week-ends during which they had failed to catch any birds. We know the feeling all too well.

I was able to look at a few of the roost sites around Moreton Bay and I was alarmed at the residential development around the Bay which is leaving very few good wader roosting sites. Other sites are suffering from too many four wheel drive vehicles disturbing the roosts.

The Queensland Wader Study Group is working hard to have artificial roost sites created in areas that are being developed, in particular a canal development at Raby Bay, an area known to hold up to 10% of Moreton Bay's roosting waders. This is not any easy task but Moreton Bay is obviously an important wader site and one that banding has shown to be important to some of "our" migratory waders. We hope they are able to provide for the waders and NZWSG fully supports their tremendous efforts.

WRYBILL CENSUS

Due to a misunderstanding between two computers, Table 1 below, did not make it into the last newsletter. The two computers in question have since settled their differences and are now talking to each other.

The result is this table that shows the totals from all the sites checked that held birds during the census. The percentage of the total population for each site is indicated. The right hand column shows figures from

the National Wader Census winter counts held one month later in June. The difference is considerable.

This has highlighted areas of concern on winter census counts and next year better coverage will be attempted. Two of the counts N°1 and N°4 were made with the aid of photos taken at the time of the field counts. Four counts were not on 29 May. However it is unlikely that any of these were previously counted birds.

WRYBILL CENSUS - 29.5.94

ONLY SITES WITH BIRDS

			Wrybill Census	% of totals	Winter Census
			29.5.94	29.5.94	26.6.94
1	Firth of Thames	Neil's Beach (photo)	2091	40.88	2700
2	Firth of Thames	Taramaire	560	10.95	1
3	Manukau Harbour	Mangere Ponds	533	10.42	300
4	Waitemata Harbour	Pollen Island (photo)	314	6.14	-
5	Manukau Harbour	Westfield	285	5.57	0
6	Manukau Harbour	Kidd's (Karaka)	266	5.2	170
7	Manukau Harbour	Seagrove	223	4.36	0
8	Manukau Harbour	Airport	219	4.28	450
9	Kaipara Harbour	Tapora (Sand Is)	110	2.15	83
10	Northland	Skull Ck	98	1.9	125
11	Far North	Parengarenga 30/6/94	82	1.64	82
12	Manukau Harbour	Pollock Spit	76	1.48	156
13	Hawke's Bay	Porangahau	65	1.27	66
14	Kaipara Harbour	Papakanui Spit	31	0.6	30
15	Tauranga	Sulphar Point	26	0.5	38
16	Kaipara Harbour	Webbers, Matakoho	23	0.44	-
17	Manawatu	Manawatu Estuary	20	0.39	21
18	Whangarei Harbour	Port	17	0.33	0
19	Kaipara Harbour	Jordan's	10	0.19	9
20	Tamaki Estuary	Tahuna Torea	9	0.17	-
21	Manukau Harbour	Puhinui	8	0.17	14
22	South Auckland	Port Waikato (27/S/94)	9	0.17	-
23	Nelson	Motueka Sandspit	8	0.15	0
24	Canterbury	Ashley Estuary	7	0.13	6
25	North Auckland	Mangawhai 26/6/94	5	0.1	5
26	Northland	Ruakaka	4	0.08	3
27	Canterbury	L Ellesmere	4	0.08	3
28	Kaipara Harbour	Tapora (Waikiri Ck)	3	0.06	16
29	Waitemata Harbour	Shoal Bay	3	0.06	-
30	Far North	Herekino	1	0.02	-
31	Coromandel	Whangapoua (26/5/94)	1	0.02	-
32	Far North	Houhora Harbour	0	0	1
33	Firth of Thames	Access Bay	0	0	1
34	Nelson	Waimea Estuary	0	0	41
35	Gisborne	Muriwai Lagoon	0	0	15
Grand Totals			5111		4278

RADIO TRACKING GRANT

The Queensland Wader Study Group has been awarded nearly AS\$10,000 by the Department of Environment and Heritage to do radio tracking of Eastern Curlew in Moreton Bay. Peter Driscoll is listed as primary investigator of the project. With this money it is anticipated that it will be able to buy 12 VHF transmitters and harnesses. Remaining money will be spent on a receiver, aerials, and limited hire of a light aircraft for tracking purposes. The aims of the project are

- to devise appropriate methods of attaching radio and satellite transmitters to Eastern Curlew.
- to track local movement of Eastern Curlew in Moreton Bay during summer.
- to establish key feeding and roosting sites used by Eastern Curlew in Moreton Bay.

If this project is successful, then it may be able to upgrade to satellite tracking. Satellite tracking of waders has not been done before.

Abridged from "Queensland Wader" No 10.
(Newsletter of Queensland Wader Study Group).

NORTH-WEST AUSTRALIA WADER EXPEDITION - MARCH-APRIL 1994

Travellers to Australia brought back tales of tens of thousands of waders along the beaches of north-west Australia. They spoke of several species of eagle, beautiful parrots, brolgas and bustards, not forgetting a plethora of passerine species. This was too much for an ardent birdwatcher.

As the AWSG was organising an expedition to northwest Australia during March and April 1994 I applied to participate and was accepted. This was the 15th trip by the Australasian Wader Study Group (AWSG).

I arrived in Broome in early April and stayed with the expedition until the end.

The base for the expedition was the RAOU Broome Bird Observatory. The leader was Clive Minton from Melbourne. Clive is known as a hard task master, with enthusiasm and drive, plus an obvious care for the welfare of the birds, so was an obvious choice as leader. Ros Jessop was his deputy and together they made an excellent team.

The main objective was the banding and flagging of migratory waders at selected sites. These were Roebuck Bay, Roebuck Plains, 80 Mile Beach, Anna Plains and Port Hedland Saltworks.

The birds were caught in the usual way using cannon nets and to a lesser extent mist nets. Once the nets were set, "twinkling" (the art of moving birds into the catching area), commenced. At Roebuck Bay this was done on foot but at 80 Mile Beach this was carried out by motor vehicle. Vehicles working from north and south of the net moved the birds towards the catching area. A great deal of patience was required, it being a job that could not be rushed. The vehicles moved forward, sometimes a foot at a time and slowly the flocks were herded to the catching area.

White-breasted sea eagles, hawks or even pelicans might have disturbed the flock. Had this been so it would have been back to point one to start all over again. Once the call came that firing was imminent and one heard "three, two, one, fire", everybody's adrenalin reached maximum level. There was then frenzied activity as the caught birds were covered with hessian to calm them and protect them from the blazing sun and temperatures of 35 - 43°C. They were then extracted as quickly as possible.

The processing that followed took hours and one was constantly urged to drink or to participate in consuming watermelon, yet rarely was a pit stop required.

Anna Plains Station, is a 600,000 hectare cattle station. Here, stock units are measured by so many hectares to a cattle breast and water for the stock is provided by large bores which produce enormous quantities of hot water 24 hours a day. This excess water forms shallow lakes, an excellent habitat for all types birdlife from brolgas to passerines. Passerines are mist netted at these sites and a total of 764 birds of 44 species were banded. Waders were also mist netted at these locations at night.

At one bore we caught 29 Red-necked Avocets by cannon net. This is a delicate and beautiful wader with a slender up curved bill and cinnamon coloured head. At Lake Eda 60 km east of Broome, large flocks of Magpie Geese were present and some nests were found.

General observations were made at many locations. At Bush Point 60 km south of Broome, we caught Pied Oystercatchers and observed a flock of 350 Eastern Curlew. At my regular wader count location in New Zealand at Farewell Spit, I am lucky to see curlews at all, although a few are present at most times.

Also present at Bush Point were 800 Little Terns. Other unusual species for me were Pin-tailed Snipe and Oriental and Australian Praticoles. Two Curlew Sandpipers from Hong Kong were caught at Broome and one at Port Hedland. An orange flagged Red-

necked Stint from Victoria was caught at Broome and two were caught at Anna Plains.

Henk Heinekamp

Following the large migration of Great Knot between 21-24 March 1994, three birds were seen with yellow leg-flags in Hong Kong on 26-27 March. Two yellow flagged Bar-tailed Godwits were seen in South Korea on 26 April.

The highlights for me were to hold a curlew in my arms and to see flocks of thousands of waders which I had not seen before. I also enjoyed the company of pleasant enthusiastic birders which made the expedition a success. Even the bites (stings?) of a centipede, which is rather painful, was just a minor problem.

(Henk was the only New Zealander on this year's expedition. I am quite sure he would recommend it to any birder interested in waders, and if you are interested there is another expedition planned for March-April 1996. Not only are Broome and 80 Mile Beach wonderful places for birding in general, but by joining the expedition you will be able to help in a very real way, in the gathering of data which will lead to a better understanding of these remarkable birds. More details can be obtained from - *Adrian Riegen, 231 Forest Hill Road, Auckland8N*)

WADERS CAUGHT DURING THE NORTH-WEST AUSTRALIA WADER EXPEDITION MARCH -APRIL 1994

	1	Bar-tailed Godwit	1134	62	1196	
	2	Great Knot	921	48	969	
	3	Large Sand Dotterel	642	80	722	
	4	Curlew Sandpiper	517	69	586	
	5	Red-necked Stint	447	58	505	
	6	Terek Sandpiper	433	34	467	
	7	Grey-tailed Tattler	342	78	420	
	8	Turnstone	170	51	221	
	9	Red Knot	173	17	190	
	10	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	178	2	180	
	11	Red-capped Dotterel	138	12	150	
	12	Broad-billed Sandpiper	93	9	102	
	13	Mongolian Dotterel	5 ³)	12	65	
	14	Pied Stilt	48	0	48	
	15	Red-kneed Dotterel	39	6	45	
	16	Pied Oystercatcher	35	2	37	
	17	Grey Plover	30	1	31	
	18	Red-necked Avocet	29	0	29	
	19	Greenshank	19	0	19	
	20	Black-fronted Dotterel	16	1	17	
	21	Marsh Sandpiper	17	0	17	
	22	Whimbrel	13	0	13	
	23	Asian Dowitcher	10	3	13	
	24	Black-tailed Godwit	12	0	12	
	25	Long-toed Stint	11	1	12	
	26	Eastern Curlew	10	1	11	
	27	Masked Lapwing	10	0	10	
	28	Sanderling	4	0	4	
	29	Australian Pratincole	4	0	4	
	30	Oriental Pratincole	3	0	3	
	31	Oriental Plover	2	0	2	
	32	Sooty Oystercatcher	1	0	1	
	33	Pacific Golden Plover	1	0	1	
	34	Wood Sandpiper	1	0	1	
	35	Redshank	1	0	1	
	36	Pintail Snipe	1	0	1	
		Totals	5,558	547	6,105	

BANDING WADERS AT MIRANDA 23.10.94

The NZWSG had its first catch of the summer season on 23 Oct, 94 at Miranda. The aim was to catch knots and godwits with hopefully some recently arrived birds amongst them.

As the birds arrived to roost they landed and settled very quickly but unfortunately some 30 metres from the catching area. One person twinkling only succeeded in moving them all to one side of the nets where they promptly went back to sleep. They were surprisingly settled in spite of the twinkling.

More twinklers were moved in, from different directions, but still no luck, until William Perry offered to wade out into the mud. This had the desired effect, at least to some extent and eventually about 100 birds were in the catching area and well settled.

We fired the net which went out extremely quickly and well with a tail wind, and in no time the birds were covered, and extracting was underway. It was only when all the birds were extracted and safely in the new much improved keeping cages, courtesy of Pam Agnew, that we realised William Perry was still out in the mud, making very slow progress towards the shore, through the thigh deep mud. Words of encouragement drifted out to him on the breeze as well as comments about the lengths people will go to, to avoid extracting birds from the net, or being a runner. He did eventually extricate himself from the mud and joined the processing team.

Typeset Stuart Chambers

The Contents of this magazine may be used in other Publications with the acknowledgement of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

At the end of the day we had banded 97 Bar-tailed Godwit, and gathered a good deal of biometric data. We had also retrapped a Bar-tailed Godwit banded at Miranda in Dec 1993 and another that carried an Australian band. At this stage we do not know from which part of Australia it had come. Apart from the godwit, we also caught and banded 13 Lesser Knots and 13 South Island Pied Oystercatchers. All the birds were flagged (white), so there is another chance for field observations of these birds.

WHAT BIRD IS THIS?

We published a photo of a mystery bird in NEWSLETTER 14. Most thought this to be a trick question as it seemed fairly obvious according to Keith Woodley. For those who didn't recognise it, it was a Wrybill.

\$500 Donation

An anonymous donor has sent \$500 to the Trust to help sponsor the Adrian Riegen's visit to Japan in late November. Grateful thanks are extended from the Trust Council.