

MIRANDA NEWS

Naturalists' Trust
November 2011 Issue 83



Chatham Island Shorebirds
Curlew Migration



November 2011 Issue 83

Upcoming Events - note the times!

Residential Field Course

January 21 to 27 2012

Perfect for any naturalist. Topics covered in past courses have included geology, botany, and entomology, but with a focus on birds, identification, catching, and the ecology of some of our shorebirds. For details of the 2012 course contact the Centre on 09 2322781 or shorebird@farmside.co.nz. Limited places still available.

Farewell to the Birds

March 11th

Hide Tide at 10:15 so birdwatching from 9am, speaker at 11am. See the arctic migrants in all their breeding plumage before they head north to breed.

June 10th 2012

Firth of Thames Census.

Tide at 12:00 so meet at 10am. Contact the Centre for further details.

Contact the Centre for details of these events. 09 232 2781 shorebird@farmside.co.nz

Front Cover: Chatham Island Snipe. Photo Ian Southey See article page 17.

Back Cover: Pied Stilts Chicks, 2 to 3 days old at Kaiaua. Photo Janie Vaughan

from the Editor

I'd like to apologise for the lateness of this issue. Between one thing and another it has taken some time to get this issue out. I'd like to thank my partner, Ian Southey for his contributions to getting this issue done. The news should be back on track from the next issue, February 2012.

Because this issue has come out late a few extra things have happened around the Centre, in particular the first weekend in December saw the construction of a new hide, pictures are available on the Miranda website, and will be in the next issue.

Each year the conservation fight seems to get a little bit harder. This is a request to please renew your membership of the MNT and support the work that is being done on shorebird conservation. Go one step further and get someone you know a gift membership for Christmas!

The deadline for the next issue of the news is 20th January. Please send in any stories, pictures, poems or articles to gillianv@actrix.co.nz by that date. I look forward to your submissions. 

From the Blackboard
01 November 2011

Arctic Migrants

Bar-tailed Godwit	4900
Red Knot	3800
Turnstone	16
Golden Plover	14
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	7
Marsh Sandpiper	1
Red-necked Stint	1

From Australia!

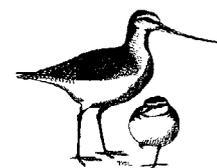
Gull-billed Terns	2
-------------------	---

New Zealand Species

Pied Oystercatcher	
Wrybill	100
NZ Dotterel	
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-billed Gull	
Red-billed Gull	
White-fronted Tern	
Caspian Tern	
Pied Stilt	
Royal Spoonbill	3
Banded Rail	

CONTENTS:

Chatham Island Shorebirds	3
Obituary Mark Barter	6
from the Manager	8
New Treasurer	9
Children's East Asia Wetland Camp	10
from the Chair	11
Curlew Migration	12



The Newsletter of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust is published four times a year to keep members in touch, and to bring news of events at the Miranda Shorebird Centre and along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. No part of this publication may be reproduced without permission.

Chatham Island Shorebirds

Ian Southey

In September last year I was able to visit the Chatham Islands to assist DoC staff with bird monitoring, mainly forest bird counts. It was a special opportunity to visit a part of New Zealand that is not quite like the rest with most of the native birds there being unique to the group. The best part was a brief week on Mangere Island where I did my best, between jobs, to become an



instant expert on a variety of new birds. There is so much going on there that I was doomed to fail. It is not always easy to know which way to look by night or by day but these are my impressions of the shorebirds I encountered.

Mangere Island is high and cliff-bound and there aren't many ways up although it is gentler on top. It is not until you get close that the broad rock platform in the landing bay becomes visible. It is deep water up to the edge so the fishing boats run their bows up to rock for their passengers to step off and the gear is handed off after them. If it sounds easy just add a bit of swell to the mix. On arrival there were a few Red-billed Gulls drifting about the rock platform where we landed but, for me, the real welcoming committee was a pair of Shore Plovers at the large rock at the foot of the track up to the hut. They were spectacular birds but hard to appreciate

in the way they deserve when you are sweating away in the chain gang dragging an endless procession of buckets full of gear up to the hut. Eventually we finished the bucket chain, de-quarantined the gear and packed it away, settled in to get appropriately briefed and organised. When we got a break I nipped down to rock and the plovers were there. Not surprising really for that was their place and they usually roosted and sometimes fed there.

Although basically brown and white they are a smart, especially the males with their black bandit face masks, a white ring around the top of the head and bright orange legs, bill and eye ring. Females have a lot of brown in the face mask while the first year birds had dull eye rings, males with some patchy black in the mask while the one female on the island was largely brown there. The most startling thing about them was their call. It is

fairly loud like a soft oystercatcher in tone but with a rattle approaching a Spur-winged Plover in quality. Ordinarily they gave single bleet notes but these ran together in noisy aggressive altercations. When on edge they bob like an ordinary dotterel.

One of my jobs was to count them and it was not hard as Shore Plover are as tame as they are rare. About 16 were usually counted on the rock platform. Usually 8-10 birds roosted on a boulder beach just north of the hut and these seemed to be paired as they sat in twos. Another smaller group of up to five was often found at the far northern end of the rock platform. There was perhaps a single pair amongst them but the only immature birds and obviously unpaired birds found were in that group. There was another pair seen on the back landing and that probably completed the island population. There was no indication that breeding had started but some aggression between two of the pairs suggested that it was not far away.



Brown Skua on the mudflats. Photo Ian Southey

Birds often fed reasonably close together when the tide was out but remained in their pairs and usually kept a small distance away from each other enforced by the odd skirmish when they got too close. The rock platform is more or less flat with small pot holes and larger pools. Some of it is covered by shallow water at high tide but a fairly large part was not. Here there were also rock pools fed by the surge from waves regularly breaking over the top and washing over the rocks over it regardless of the tide. The plovers seemed to prefer feed-



Top: Shore Plover on the rock platforms.

Middle Chatham Island Oystercatcher feeding on the rock platforms



Below: Chatham Island Snipe burrowing for food on the forest floor.



ing in the intertidal parts especially over coralline turf but were seen taking food from rocks above the shore especially where a freshwater seepage flowed down from the ice plant turf above.

Sharing the rock platform on Mangere with the Shore Plovers were four pairs of Chatham Island Oystercatchers. They look and sound more or less like other oystercatchers and are reminiscent of a stocky Variable Oystercatcher in shape with a short heavy bill and always pied with a white shoulder patch like a South Island Pied Oystercatcher. The wing bars have less white on them with the stripe not extending on to the primaries and it is often not apparent in the folded wing of birds at rest. They carry on like other oystercatchers over territory with similar displays and paired patrolling flights. They often tolerated my approach only so far but would run up to investigate me when I was still.

I saw more of these birds on Pitt Island where they are spread along the eastern coast, especially near the rock platforms. After a wet winter large areas of pasture were wet and cut up by cattle, often into a quagmire with just a few tufts of grass remaining. Near the coast the oystercatchers were grateful and some pairs were seen feeding there most times we passed but there was no indication of their leaving the shoreline entirely. At Glory Bay I saw a group of six birds feeding on pasture as a flock when we passed, perhaps they were non-breeders.

My main job on Mangere was to count forest birds but, strangely, this was where the shorebirds at the top of my wish-list lived. It took a tantalisingly long while before I saw my first Chatham Island Snipe, a chubby little brown bird paused on the forest floor before scuttling to cover. Snipe are a small, brown and round with short tails and wings. They have a big head and eyes, a

longish, fairly stout bill and big yellow feet.

Sitting up on the first evening I decided that the strange calls coming from the Hebe scrub above the hut had to be snipe by elimination rather than observation. I hadn't seen any there so it was quite a relief to see one scuttling under the Hebe by the track on my way back for dinner. Their common call was a loud *cherk cherk* most often heard earlier in the morning and again in the late afternoon especially at dusk. At dusk snipe called, often repeatedly, from particular places and at times seemed to be replying to each other. It was remarkably reminiscent of sitting up at night counting weka and might be just as good a way of monitoring them. Once their calls were known it became apparent that snipe were in reasonably good numbers, not just in the forest but in the low tight Hebe scrub as well. They did not appear to be common, if even present, in the grass and flax.

When startled in an awkward place they may rise quite abruptly and drop just a few metres away but more often they just run a few steps and stop quite still. After a few minutes they generally begin to feed again. Being so cryptically coloured this may well be a defence from visually oriented predators such as hawks and owls. Snipe were often seen in pairs working very close together, usually not more than a metre apart. The loud call was sometimes given much more quietly these when pairs were feeding. I didn't see much more of their social life although once I saw a third bird with a pair and wondered if it was genuinely tolerated by them or if my sudden appearance had interrupted something.

While we were counting birds in the mornings snipe were often seen feeding but less so towards midday. A couple of times I saw them sleeping on small rocks in the forest then. In, or just after, rain they seemed to

be keen to feed but when I disturbed them from rest they had been sensibly sheltering in dry holes and overhangs.

They were incredibly confiding letting me follow within a few metres as they fed. Under the forest the soil is quite soft with a rich organic layer loosened by insects and burrowing seabirds. If the numbers of weta and beetles seen at night are anything to go by there is probably abundant prey but each pair probably has just a small plot of ground to work. Snipe seemed to focus on leaf litter patches, sometimes scuttling quickly between them. They work slowly over the forest floor but their heads are moving fast; rapidly and intensively prodding the ground in front of them with their bills, sometimes probing deeper and reaching under small fallen branches and roots. At times they push quite hard and I sometimes saw their feet slipping with the effort to reach deeper prey. They must be hunting by touch as their bills are mostly closed but sometimes they can be seen to swallow food. As they fossicked they would sometimes skewer dead leaves on their bills, sometimes several, and these were an obvious source of irritation to be removed with a shake of the head or a quick swipe of their feet.

On Mangere there may be other birds but Brown Skuas rule without question. They have a commanding presence - large and sturdy with a body like a barrel, a huge gull-like beak with a wicked little hook on the end and surprisingly short but broad wings. They fly with ease soaring high above the island on the up draughts where the winds hit the cliffs and swooping low over the hills.

I have always regarded them as seabirds having seen them fairly frequently on pelagics off the New Zealand coast but here they were on the shore or the cliff edges where pairs were beginning to settle in on territory. The remainder were usually

found in a flock on a ledge mid-way along the wave platform. Fortunately the breeding season hadn't really started as one bird made a pass at me from behind and I knew nothing of it until I heard the loud swoosh of a near miss. They are big enough that you really don't them to connect. I did heraldic displays where they stand and call with upraised wings and also flight displays where a bird would glide with raised wings, presumably related to the claiming of territory.

These birds are predators leaving scatterings of petrel parts, mainly prion wings and round bolus pellets often with storm petrel legs sticking out like lollipop sticks, in particular places. Clearly they were hunting on land but there was almost no indication of them feeding on anything by day. On one of my nocturnal rambles I saw how they made their living. On a track through the dense Hebe scrub just above the hut I saw a skua dealing to two Broad-billed Prions that it had caught. They were eaten immediately but two prion corpses lay on the same track for several days prior to departure. This surplus killing seems to be for snacks as once I saw a skua on the beach in the daytime with a prion that must have been killed the night before. It caused great interest for the other skuas around as there was some chasing and the eventual consumption had a moderately large audience of other skuas.

The other birds on the coast were more familiar. There were usually a few Red-billed Gulls on the rock platform. Good friends to those with time to fish. Sometimes the Black-backed Gulls would make a pass overhead too but the White-fronted Terns stayed just off the coast fishing in small flocks of up to about 20 birds and often there were a few Pitt Island Shags working with them. On Pitt Island I saw three Banded Dotterels on pasture at Glory Bay and there was a scattering of Spur-winged Plovers on the farmland. 

Obituary

Mark Barter

by Adrian Riegen

Some members will remember Mark Barter from his visit to Miranda in 2000. Sadly Mark lost his battle with cancer on 21st November 2011 and with his passing we lost one of the Flyway's major players and a driving force of fieldwork studies, particularly in China. It is entirely due to Mark that the Miranda Naturalists' Trust has become so involved in the flyway. I knew Mark in the 1980s



at about the time we started banding waders again at Miranda. At that time he was writing numerous papers on aspects of wader ecology, often using Australian banding data and later our New Zealand data. One issue interesting him was the possible flight ranges of waders during migration, an area of study that continues to astound us today as more and more species are found to make single flights of 6,000 km or more.

In the 1990's with the opening up of China, Mark's attention turned to migration staging sites in China. Very little was known about where birds staged so Mark set out to search the entire coast from Shanghai to the North Korea border with help from staff at Wetlands International – China and others. In 1999 he and Jim Wilson reached Yalu Jiang for the first time and found huge numbers of waders including flagged godwits from New Zealand.

By then Mark had made me want to get the MNT involved in the flyway. He was looking at each area once but then moving on. What was needed was to look at one of the staging sites regularly and see how waders used it over several years, which was something I thought the Trust could do.

I spoke to Mark on the phone at length about Yalu Jiang and persuaded him to return to there in 2000 as part of his ongoing work but with me in tow. We showed that Yalu Jiang was indeed a very important site especially for godwits and in 2004 the Trust's involvement with Yalu Jiang began.

In 2002 I joined Mark again in China to survey a 100km stretch

of the Bohai coast that no one had looked for wader along before. The area was not a reserve so had no staff to show us where the birds were, no maps of the coast, just a satellite image (pre Google Earth days) of only moderate quality. Getting to the coast was challenging, local people generally



didn't know how to get beyond their local patch so weren't much help. However, Mark's persistence and relentless effort was extraordinary and we would usually get to a spot on the coast with waders roosting, count them, often in very difficult circumstances, (in the exhaust plume of a hydrochloric acid plant at one point) and then move on. On one occasion after spending most of a day in a maze of fish and salt ponds, and oil fields, trying to reach the coast at a significant looking spot on the satellite image we were forced to give up but the next day arranged for a small fishing boat to take us to the spot via the sea. This plan also failed as the boat went aground several km off shore even at high tide. We never did reach that spot but Mark's determination to succeed in often very trying situations was legendary.

All through this work he would be teaching Chinese reserve staff and students about wader biology, how to identify and count birds, habitat destruction etc. This earned him the title of "Teacher Mark". Up to this year he was working with students at Chinese universities.

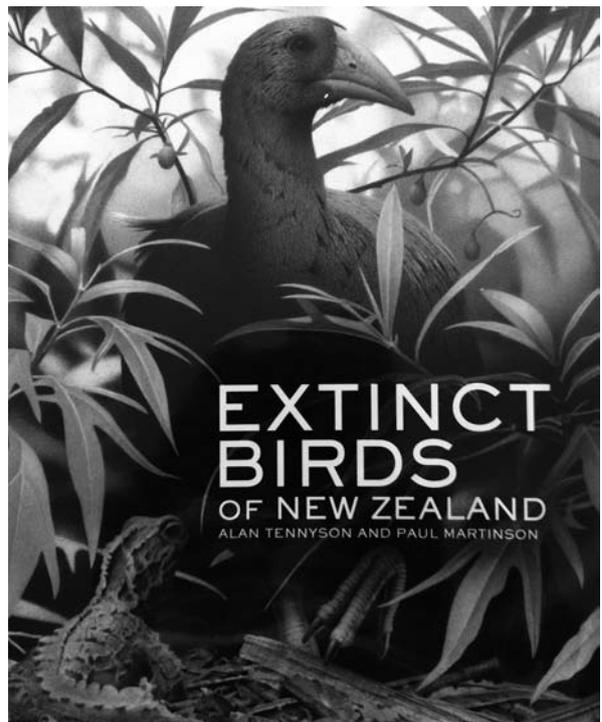
Shortly before his death a letter and citation were presented to him outlining some of the work he had done and this was endorsed by also 60 organisations from around the globe, which speaks volumes for a man so highly regarded by so many. All this was achieved as Mark's hobby and passion not as a paid job.

The flyway has lost a great conservationist, teacher, scientist, advocate and ambassador, and his wife Terry and family have lost a good loving family man, even if he was away from them for months at a time helping to save waders! He will be sadly missed. 

We have secured a limited number of this book from the publisher and are offering it at a special price until the stock is exhausted.

Extinct Birds of New Zealand by Alan Tennyson and Paul Martinson Te Papa Press 2006.

A richly illustrated view into the world of New Zealand's lost birds. In New Zealand's lush rainforests, isolated from the outside world for 80 million years, many extraordinary birds evolved. They included the giant moa, the beautiful huia, and the largest eagle the earth has ever seen. Within a few hundred years, human settlement extinguished 58 species – over a quarter of the species.



This book brings all these lost birds to life. In rich colour, celebrated painter Paul Martinson depicts birds in their original habitat, each plate a window on a vanished world. Some plates offer poignant comparisons by including a species that still exists alongside one that is long gone: for example a Fiordland Crested Penguin seen with a South Island Adzebill or a Crested Moa beside a Kea.

Te Papa palaeontologist Alan Tennyson provides detailed information on the birds as well as a compelling overview of their tragic extinction.

This book is essential reading for experts, students, and anyone interested in this country's natural history.

182 pages with 58 colour plates, 285 by 240 mm,

Price \$29.90 at the centre or \$35.00 including post and packaging within New Zealand. Original retail price \$64.90

Phone or email an order. 09 2322781, shorebird@farmside.co.nz 

from the Manager

Keith Woodley

If the stilt pair circling loudly as I cleared the mailbox were telegraphing news of considerable importance to them, the distinct splat on top of my recently washed hair merely confirmed it. The pond immediately opposite the gate had been home to a number of stilts over recent weeks, but now there was just these two. Braving



the prospect of further bombardment I ventured across the road to investigate further. There, busily foraging around the mangrove fringe of the pond were the three small grey and white shapes of young stilts. Several weeks later the adults were still loudly demonstrating each time I ventured down the drive, though their urgency and commitment had diminished somewhat.

These rites of spring were even more pronounced around the centre itself. Many visitors remark upon the prodigious bird activity around the building, the frenetic comings and goings, the prolonged scraps between competing males, the relentless cartage of nesting material to roof and gutter, or to the high-rise apartment tree beside the carpark. For overnight visitors there is also the loud clatter and din on and around the roof soon after first light. And the source of all this hubbub? *Passer domesticus* of course, House Sparrows. If anyone around the country is reporting a decline in their sparrow population, I could advance the thesis that they have all migrated to Miranda.

The last few months have seen some

notable visitors to the Miranda coast. Two Gull-billed Terns have taken up residence on the shell bank, and become a regular sight working the channel in front of the hide. They are a fairly cosmopolitan species, found across the temperate Northern hemisphere, west Africa, southern United States to northern Latin America, south and southeast Asia, as well as relatively common around parts of Australia. First recorded in Southland in 1955, they are a fairly regular straggler to New Zealand. But this year there have been a number of records from elsewhere in the country, suggesting something of a mini-irruption event. Also present off and on in recent months were two glossy ibis – another common Australian species. There were occasional sightings, mainly from the Stilt Ponds – although on one occasion an ibis settled briefly on the pond opposite our mailbox. Also of note was a Marsh Sandpiper that remained here through the winter.

As in some previous winters, when high tides and heavy rain combined to saturate the place, a bittern came calling. Twice over about a week in August I flushed it from beside the trail leading to the hide, and on

several occasions it was seen on the ponds opposite the centre. Meanwhile there has so far been no indication of Banded Rail activity around Widgery Lake, though they remain common in the mangrove fringes of the hide trail, and around the Lime-works gate area.

By early November the roll-call of tundra breeding species bore a familiar look about it. Along with the thousands of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots, there were Pacific Golden Plovers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, a Curlew Sandpiper and Turnstones. There were also reports of what appeared to be a Hudsonian Godwit. By mid-October the godwit flock contained a liberal sprinkling of juveniles. Reports from other sites, such as Foxton Beach and the Manukau, indicated good numbers of juveniles there as well. All of which suggests it may have been a very good breeding season for the *baueri* godwits of Alaska.

For some years now we have been aware of limitations in both the trail to the hide, and the hide itself. Both have served our purposes well but improvements are long overdue.



Photo Ian Southey

One problem has been the necessity of having an electric fence along the shoreline in front of the hide, which meant people walking the trail from the Centre were faced with crossing it to reach the hide. Another is that on particularly high tides, or after prolonged rainfall, several sections of the trail get waterlogged.

Work has begun on realigning the trail so that it remains entirely within the seaward fence line, a benefit of this being that it will then traverse higher ground for most of its length. We are grateful to Auckland Area Office DOC staff who are carrying out this work. So far, new gates and stiles have been installed at both ends of the paddock immediately north of the QE II covenanted block on which the current hide sits. Further work was scheduled for early November, including realigning the seaward fence along the QEII block, but these plans were interrupted as a result of the Rena grounding off Tauranga. Understandably, DOC staff were required to treat responses to that as the highest priority, although we remain confident that work can be resumed on the trail before the end of November.

Meanwhile plans are underway to erect a new hide on the shoreline. It will be considerably longer and more spacious than the existing one, and will be sited several hundred metres to the south of where the current one sits. It will be accessed by a trail directly out from the carpark. It is also proposed to move the old hide slightly to the north and turn it so it faces over the Stilt Ponds. Our intention is to have all this completed before Christmas.

The television-free status of the Shorebird Centre meant we remained something of an oasis away from a certain tournament unfolding

on the other side of the Hunua Ranges. Nevertheless it did manifest itself by way of a notable spike in overseas visitors through September and October. A steady stream of vehicles, a significant proportion of which were campervans, bearing the flags of many lands came through the gates. In most cases the team being supported was quite obvious, although on a few occasions, the signals were somewhat mixed. The couple that arrived the day England were playing Scotland for instance: both flags fluttered on their rental, for he was English but she was from north of the border. A significant number of people were clearly combining birding with rugby, particularly those from Britain and Ireland, and North America – all regions that traditionally feature regularly in our visitor books. But there was a marked in-

crease in French visitors as well, including the singular spectacle of a medium size campervan from which emerged six extremely burly French chaps, all built like lock forwards. Cosy quarters indeed.

If there were times through the year when the Centre Manager risked appearing on the recent sightings board as a rarity, this pattern diminished after early September. A large measure of my time away from the front desk was devoted to completing a book on New Zealand shorebirds, due for publication next spring. Speaking engagements at various places around the country accounted for other absences, be it Auckland, Ngatea, Thames or Tahuna, Gisborne, Motueka, Takaka or Christchurch. 

Charles Gao New Treasurer

My home town is Harbin, the capital city of Hei Long Jiang Province, the northern most Province of China. Harbin is close to Dan Dong City in Liao Ning Province, where the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve is located.

In Harbin I completed a diploma in Business at The Central Television and Broadcasting University, Harbin. I then worked for the Bei Fang, New World Hotel (Marriott Hotels Chain) in Harbin for almost 6 years. At the time I left I was captain of a Western food restaurant team of 15 people.

I came to New Zealand in 2003 as an International student and completed a Business Degree, majoring in Accountancy at the Mt Albert campus of Unitec. Since graduating I have been working as an Accoun-

tant for Simple As Refunds / Simple As Small Business Ltd. which is operated by a Chartered Accounting firm based on Tauranga.

I have completed requirements for provisional membership as Associate Chartered Accountant member of the NZ Institute of Chartered Accountants and have one further professional exam and further practical experience time to complete full membership of the College.

I have been involved as a Volunteer for MNT since 2007 helping out at the Centre several times a year. I also assisted with the Shop stock take in 2009 and 2010.

I enjoy the opportunity to travel around New Zealand and visit wilderness areas, and have developed my hobby of photography. 

Birkdale Intermediate School Students visit Junam Wetland Park, South Korea

Grace Tawhai, Alex Little and Ethan Groom

The Children's East Asia Wetland Camp for 2011 was an exciting and interesting experience. We learnt a lot, not only about the birds that visit Junam every year, but also the history and culture of South Korea. This raised our awareness of the importance of saving the wetlands so that our eco system will not fail in later years. We were glad to share this experience with other students from Japan, China, South Korea and Hong Kong.

The Junam Wetlands is a migratory bird habitat in South East Korea centered around Nakdong River. It was artificially made in the 1920s by farmers piling up the embankment to 9m high, to control the flood waters. It provides a resting place for up to 30,000 birds who nest there every winter. Some of these birds include the Spectacled Teal, White-tailed Eagle, Eurasian Spoonbill and the White-naped Crane.

The facilities at Junam Wetland Park include the Ramsar Cultural Center and the Eco-Learning Center. These centers were built for education and also teach about the local culture and plants. The Ramsar Center also aims to promote global awareness for preserving the wetlands ecosystem. 



This was the original invitation received by Birkdale Intermediate:

Changwon, the Environmental Capital of Korea, where the 10th COP of Ramsar Convention in 2008 was held, would like to invite you to the East-Asia Children Wetland Exchanges Camp from 16 Aug- 19 Aug 2011.

This camp is an extension of Ramsar Convention and the efforts to achieve the agendas that we covered is still going on. The main goal of this camp is to exchange the culture of each nation, learn the value of the environment (especially wetland ecosystems), and share methods of conserving nature. We are looking forward your participation and cooperation. All of you are welcome to join the camp!

Background of the Camp

- Environmental issues became number one subject around the world. Therefore we all need to find a solution for the problems
- Among environmental elements, wetlands are more closely related to human life than other environmental elements.
- Changwon city held the 10th COP of Ramsar Convention in October, 2008 and boosted the image of the city as an Environmental Capital.
- At the Ramsar Convention, our city invited children from around the world and held wetland events for them
- Through these experiences, our city decided to continue the events and show our commitment to environment and wetland conservation. The ultimate goal of these events is to produce future generations as environment-minded people.

from the Chair

Gillian Vaughan

Charles Gao, a regular attendee of the Shorebird Centre, was appointed by council to the position of Treasurer and I am pleased to have him as part of our team. Charles has provided a biography elsewhere in this issue of the magazine, and I would encourage members of the Trust to make him welcome in his new role.



The Trusts website has now been upgraded, the website is now much more user friendly, both for visitors and for those updating it. We have made a commitment to updating sightings and events regularly, as well as to provide regular updates on Shorebird Centre news or flyway happenings. Over the next few months we plan on upgrading the content, as well as adding a shop functionality to the site. Please visit us at www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz. Any comments are welcome, please email me, gillianv@actrix.co.nz

Centre News

Shorebird Guide

With the increasing number of visitors that come through the area the importance of having a presence at the shoreline over the summer is higher each year. I am therefore pleased to advise that funding for the Shorebird Guide position has again been secured from ASB Community Trust Environment Fund and Kristelle Wi has once again joined us for the summer. She will again be working at the Centre and shoreline over the summer. I would like to thank Alister Harlow for the work that he put into gaining this funding.

Hide upgrade

An upgrade of the hide and the tracks down at the shellbanks is planned, we are fortunate that the Department of Conservation is willing to be involved in the upgrade of the tracks and gates and we expect that before Christmas the walk from the Centre to the hide will be easier, with no electric fence crossing required. A new, larger hide will be set up slightly

south of the existing hide, better situated to see the birds particularly as they come in to roost, or on the lower tides. Once the hide upgrade has been completed new interpretation will be put in place.

Events

The Welcome to the Birds was held on October 31st. Our speakers were Miranda regulars David Lawrie, on the work of the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, Adrian Riegen with an update on shorebird research in the Flyway, and Keith Woodley and Tiny Habraken with an update on the status of Dotterels after the Rena stranding in the Bay of Plenty. Turnout for the event was lower than normal, emphasising the importance to council of advertising the speakers well in advance and we have taken this lesson on board.

If you are not receiving events reminders and would like to please email the Centre asking to be added to the reminders list shorebird@farmside.co.nz

Internationally

EAAFP

On the 18th of August the EAAFP advised us that New Zealand Government had applied to join the East Asian- Australasian Flyway Partnership. David Lawrie and Roger Jaensch had visited Wellington earlier this year to encourage Government to do this and it is encouraging to see this outcome.

East-Asia Children Wetland Exchanges Camp

The outcomes of events like the visit

of the Korean schoolchildren to the Shorebird Centre is always uncertain. What are the long term results of these one-off events? Well in this case that visit to the Shorebird Centre was not an isolated event, with three children from Birkdale Intermediate, who were all involved in that event, since attending the Children's East Asia Wetland Camp for 2011 at Juman Wetland Park in South Korea.

Yalu Jiang

I am happy to report that the reclamation of the main godwit roosting site at Yalu Jiang has been cancelled and staff at Yalu Jiang National Nature reserve have reported to us that the site (Site 2 or Erdougou for regular *MNT News* readers) has been preserved for the use of the birds. We are working on finding out more information about the exact preservation status of the area.

Mark Barter

Adrian has written an obituary for Mark Barter elsewhere in this issue. While not a regular at the Centre Mark Barter has had a pivotal role in the direction of the Trust over the last ten years. His work in the Yellow Sea led directly to the sister-site relationship between the MNT and YJNRR, with the recent preservation of Site 2 from reclamation it is not difficult to say that Mark's work was directly responsible for saving the race of Bar-tailed Godwit that comes to New Zealand. On a personal level he has influenced my life tremendously since 2004, when I made my first trip to Yalu Jiang. My thoughts, and those of many in the Trust go out to all those who loved him. 

Curlew Migration

Clive Minton & Ken Gosbell

Last Wednesday (October 12th) the VWSG recaptured three Eastern Curlew carrying geolocators at Anderson's Inlet, Inverloch. This was the successful culmination of five days recceing, initially by Dave Cropley in his hovercraft and then by local VWSG member Steve Johnson (plus Clive on one day). 23 geolocators had been put onto Curlew at Inverloch on 10th February, when 29 out

of a flock of 110 were caught. When Dave observed a flock of 92 on 4th October he could see at least 13 individuals carrying geolocators.

Three well camouflaged nets were set in a continuous line (total length 80 m) on a narrow beach at the top of mudflats/saltmarsh at 8am. The team was concealed in the hides by 10.15am and birds almost immediately started to collect on the adjacent mudflats. A brief twinkle by the hovercraft at 11.15am helped concentrate most of the Eastern Curlew on the estuary to near the netting area. A long wait (3 1/4 hours) ensued before a net was actually fired.

At least seven birds carrying geolocators could be seen in the flock of 70 Eastern Curlew which gradually collected. For over two hours these were in and around the catching area. However there was never more than one bird carrying a geolocator close enough to the net to be definitely catchable. At times there was a second bird 9 or 10 metres from the net, quite often also near the corner of the catching area. So we persevered (with Steve Johnson and Graeme Rowe in the firing hide regularly urging me to "have patience") in the hope of getting at least two birds certainly catchable. Finally, ten minutes after the tide had turned, Steve and I, gazing through telescopes, simultaneously saw an additional bird carrying a geolocator land only about 7 metres out from the middle net. We fired this net within a couple of seconds and were absolutely delighted to find that we'd caught three geolocator-carrying birds in a

total catch of seven! We didn't fire the other two nets, even though there was a handful of Eastern Curlew in each, because we knew there were no geolocator-carrying birds in them. The main team, who had been couped up in a camouflaged hide in a ditch only 40 m behind the net for over 3 hours, still managed to overcome their cramp and get to the net first.

Ken Gosbell, our technical expert on geolocators, was absolutely delighted to find that all three geolocators (BAS model 10S) downloaded perfectly and gave a full record of northward and southward migration and activities on the breeding grounds. A map showing the tracks of the birds is attached and a summary of what we have been able to derive from the stored data so far is given below.

The three Eastern Curlew (07,23 and 24) left Inverloch on northward migration on 4th, 10th and 14th March respectively. They each flew 8500 km non-stop in 7-8 days (average speeds of 44-51 km/hr) to the west coast of the Yellow Sea in China. They then stayed there for three or four weeks before flying the remaining relatively short distance to their breeding grounds on 2nd, 11th and 20th April respectively. Two of the breeding areas were in marshland close to the Amur River and the third was in a similar habitat on a major tributary (all at between 46-47 deg N and 120-133 deg E). All three were in the very northeast of China.

Subsequently all three birds showed clear signs of incubation, by the ap-

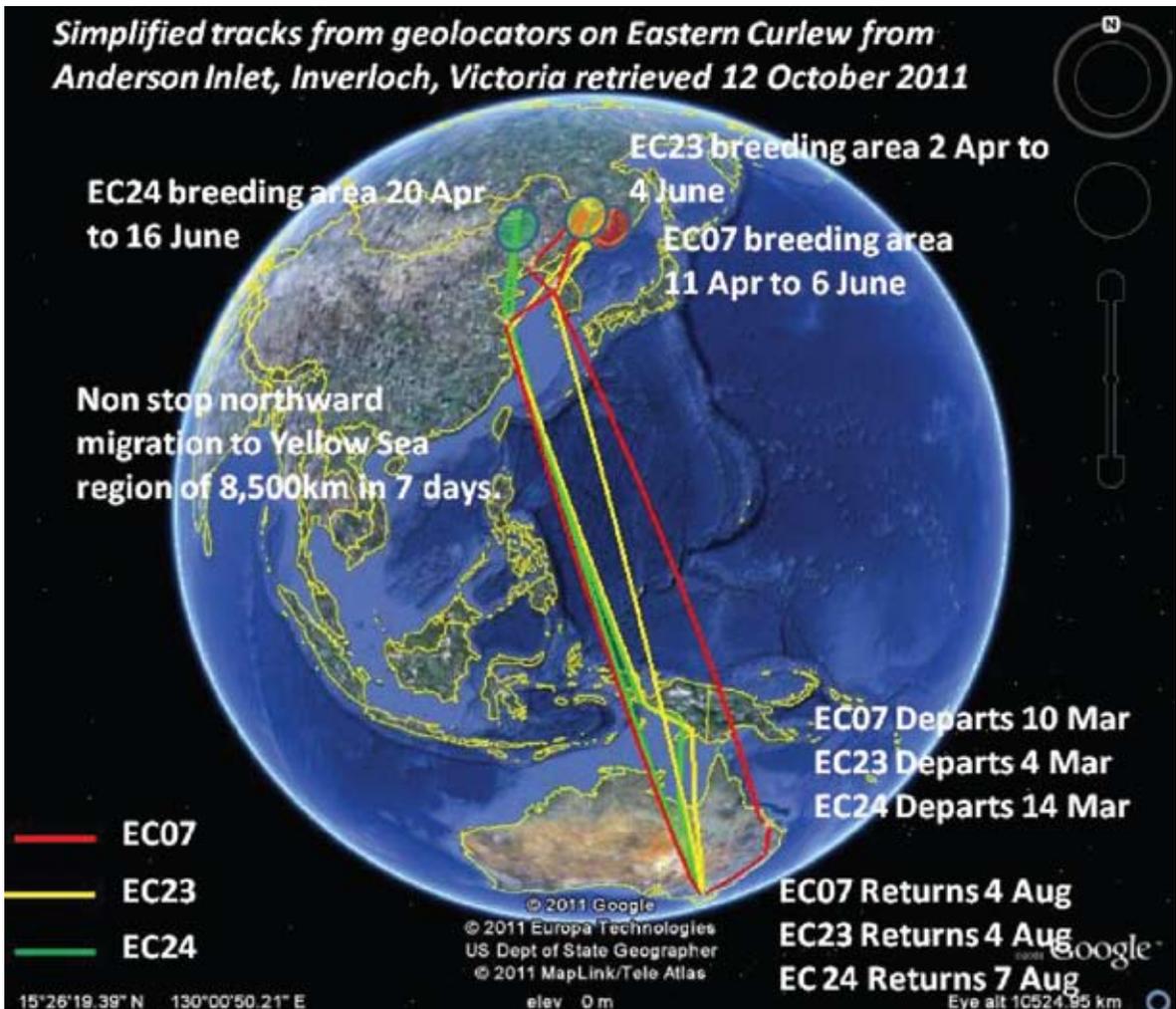
pearance of extended light and dark periods throughout the day. 07, which was a female (determined by bill/head/wing length), incubated from 23rd April to 13th May. This is equivalent to the incubation period (21 days) and suggests that she may have hatched eggs successfully. 23, which was a male, incubated from 20th April to only 5th May suggesting that this clutch may have been predated. There were further signs of incubation from 26th May, but for only five days, suggesting a second clutch may have been laid but that it had also been unsuccessful. 24, another male, didn't appear to start incubating until 9th May and this continued until 26th May. It is not therefore clear whether this breeding attempt failed or whether the male was not involved in the incubation for the whole period.

The three birds left the breeding grounds on 4th, 6th and 16th June. In the case of 07 and 24 this is at least three weeks after the last recorded date of incubation, which corresponds well with the widespread practice of waders leaving their chicks once these have become well feathered and are able to fend for themselves and before they actually fledge.

All three birds flew directly back from the breeding grounds to the same area on the west coast of the Yellow Sea in China which they had used on northward migration. After a prolonged stay they set off on their main southward migration on 14th, 30th and 31st July respectively. The first bird flew 6900 km in 7 days (av-



photo Brian Chudleigh



erage speed 41km/hour) to Rockhampton on the Queensland coast. It then trickled down the east coast and arrived back in Inverloch on 4th August. The second bird flew non-stop 5800 km to the Gulf of Carpentaria (at an average speed of 54 km/hour), touched down for just over one day, and then continued on overland to Inverloch. It also arrived there on 4th August having covered the last 2600 km of its journey at an average of 80 km/hour. The third bird made a similar southward migration, stopping off for just two days in southern Papua New Guinea, and then arriving back at Inverloch on 7th August. The first leg of its journey (5200 km) was covered at 48km/hr and the last leg (3200-4000 km) at 70-80 km/hr.

The retrieved geolocators incidentally were all in excellent condition. It seems as if Eastern Curlew do not give geolocators as hard a time as Ruddy Turnstones. All three geolocators were still perfectly attached to their leg flag, looking almost the same as when they were originally deployed in February. However one leg flag had become unglued on the bird and we were rather lucky that it had not fallen off.

In contrast to the revelations on the variety of migration routes obtained from our Ruddy Turnstone geolocators, the Eastern Curlew geolocators have very much confirmed the views on their migration strategy which we had formed from the relatively small number of recoveries and flag sightings accumulated over the last 25 years (see paper in *Stilt* 59 in April 2011). Eastern Curlew are the first

species to depart northward migration, and an earlier paper based on counts had suggested this started around 7th March. All previous indications also were that Eastern Curlew leaving Victoria generally made a very long non-stop flight to the Yellow Sea or southern Japan.

There were also one or two records indicating that birds reach their breeding grounds before the end of April but the arrival date of 11th April of one of these birds was earlier than expected, as was the commencement of incubation of two of the birds a week or more before the end of April.

Previous breeding season recoveries and flag sightings of Eastern Curlew have mostly been in the marshes along the Amur River, but all except one were in the Russian sections of the flood plain. This may be a consequence of greater hunting pressures and possible higher reporting rates in Russia.

Dispersal from the breeding grounds to the staging area in the Yellow Sea on southward migration conforms well with counts of large numbers of Eastern Curlew in that area before the end of June. The covering of most of the return journey from the Yellow Sea to Inverloch in a single long flight to the northern Australian coast also supports previous evidence. However only one of the three birds followed the "trickle down the east coast" strategy deduced from recoveries/flag sightings, with the other two completing a trans-continental crossing to Inverloch after only a very brief pause in northern Australia/south-

AWSG

To find out more about the Australian Wader Study Group visit www.awsg.org.au

You can join the AWSG and receive issues of the journal *Stilt* and the newsletter *the Tattler*.



ern PNG. The fact that all three arrived back in their non-breeding area in Inverloch in the first week of August is consistent with some returning adults being seen in each year in southern Victoria from 20th July onwards. On the face of it this seems to be an awfully early date for a bird to reach its non-breeding area at 38 deg S. But, as the migration strategy of these birds shows, it is compatible with the practical aspects of migration for a bird that nests relatively far south compared with the other waders which migrate from Australia to the northern hemisphere to breed.

Attempts will be made to retrieve further geolocators from Eastern Curlew at Inverloch as soon as suitable tides recur and receding shows birds to be roosting at a potentially catchable location.



Pukeko Patrol

Kristelle Wi

Gazing out the kitchen window the other day, I watched Diesel the cat take his daily stroll through the farm paddocks to do his daily 'business'. As he got out into the open he was spotted by the local Pukeko Whanau, that were nesting nearby. Four Pukes decided to take action and proceeded to follow Diesel in a train formation, flicking their white bottoms keeping just a tails length behind Diesel – who would look back every 10 paces to see if they were still following. They continued to follow Diesel around the paddock, in a perfect line, for around 10 minutes until he realized he wasn't going to get any privacy then returned home. 

Keep up-to-date with events
visit
www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz



MNT People:

Shorebird Centre Manager:

Keith Woodley,
shorebird@farmside.co.nz

Assistant Manager

Maria Stables-Page topcats@ihug.co.nz

The Shorebird Centre

283 East Coast Road
RD 3 Pokeno 2473
phone/fax (09) 232 2781

Chair: Gillian Vaughan

82 Red Hill Road Papakura
gillianv@actrix.co.nz ph 09 298 2500

Deputy Chair and Banding Convenor:

Adrian Riegen, 231 Forest Hill Road,
Auckland 8. phone/fax: (09) 814- 9741.
email riegen@xtra.co.nz

Secretary: Will Perry

34 Morrin St, Ellerslie, Auckland. Phone
(09) 525-2771 hm; (09) 526-1944 wk; (09)
526-1960 fax (wk)

Treasurer: Charles Gao

Phone 021 2674 919
email: yangao@xtra.co.nz

Editor: Gillian Vaughan

82 Redhill Road Papakura.
ph (09) 298 2500 Fax (wk) (09) 522- 5518
email: gillianv@actrix.co.nz

Council:

Gillian Vaughan (Chair)

Adrian Riegen (Deputy Chair)

William Perry (Secretary)

Charles Gao (Treasurer)

David Lawrie (Immediate Past Chair)

Eila Lawton

Emma Pearson

Len Taylor

Estella Lee

Phil Hammond

Alister Harlow

Wendy Hare

Keith Thompson

Bequests



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

Situated on the Firth of Thames between Kaiawa and the Miranda Hot Pools, the Miranda Shorebird Centre provides a base for birders right where the birds are. The best time to see the birds is two to three hours either side of high tide. The Miranda high tide is 30 minutes before the Auckland (Waitemata) tide. Drop in to investigate, or come and stay a night or two.

Accommodation

The Shorebird Centre has bunkrooms for hire and two self-contained units:

Per bed / night member \$ 20.00

Per bed / night non-member \$ 25.00

Hire of self-contained unit member \$ 65.00 Hire of unit non-member \$ 85.00

For further information contact the Shorebird Centre, RD3 Pokeno 2473

Phone /Fax (09) 232 2781 Email: shorebird@farmside.co.nz

Help support the Trust's efforts to educate and promote awareness.

Membership of the Trust entitles you to:

Four Miranda News issues per year.

A discount on overnight accommodation

Invitations to Trust Events

The right to attend the AGM

The right to vote for council members

Membership Rates :

Ordinary Member - \$ 40.00

Family Member - \$ 50.00

Overseas Member- \$ 50.00

Life Member, under 50 - \$ 1200

Life Member, 50 & over - \$ 600

Want to be involved?

Friends of Miranda

A volunteer group which helps look after the Shorebird Centre. If you'd like to help out contact Keith. Helping out can be anything from assisting with the shop, school groups or meeting people down at the shellbanks. Regular days for volunteer training are held, the next scheduled day is Saturday October 22, 2011. Contact Maria for details.

Long term Volunteers

Spend four weeks or more on the shoreline at Miranda. If you are interested in staffing the visitor centre, helping with school groups or talking to people on the shellbank for a few weeks contact Keith to discuss options. Free accommodation is available in one of the bunkrooms. Use of a bicycle will be available.

Firth of Thames Census

Run by OSNZ and held twice a year the Census days are a good chance to get involved with ongoing field work and research. If you can't make the Firth Census contact OSNZ for census days in your area.

Contribute to the Magazine

If you've got something you've written, a piece of research, a poem or a great photo send it in to MNT News. If you want to discuss your ideas contact Gillian Vaughan, gillianv@actrix.co.nz.

Help in the Miranda Garden

We can always use some spare hands in the Miranda Garden, be it a half hours weeding or more ambitious projects. While our formal gardening program has ceased if you do have some spare time while around the Centre please feel free to do any garden maintenance you can see needs doing! Ask at the desk for ideas, or adopt a patch and call it your own.

