

# Miranda News

Journal Of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust

August 2013 Issue 89

## Change of name?

MNT Council supports a Ngati Paoa request to adopt the area's traditional name of Pukorokoro

## Looking back

Keith Woodley on his 20 years at Miranda . . . and a few thoughts for the future



## Your chance to help run the Centre

It's fun, it's different, it's rewarding. You know you want to. The Trust relies on the help of volunteers to staff the Centre throughout the year. It's time for us to train a few more MNT members who are people people to do the job.

Yes, it helps to be a bird person too, but visitors to the Shorebird Centre expect friendly, helpful staff, not a lecture on bird psychology. So don't be put off sticking your hand up.

Pre-summer is a great time to learn how to manage the centre. Just ring 09 2322 781 and speak to Maria who will arrange a time for you to visit. Ideally you will watch her or Keith talk to a group so you really get the feel for the role. Don't be alarmed at having to do that yourself because the wonderful Nola Dyson from Thames specialises in talking to school groups.

We've covered fun, different and rewarding. Did you know that centre relievers get to stay for free? And of course, the longer you stay the better chance you have of going birding!

Then there is the total relaxation of staying at the centre without that infernal television that your partner just won't turn off.

Picture yourself at the end of the day relaxing on the deck overlooking the pond, drink in hand, the pink sky reflecting on the Coromandel Peninsula. A kingfisher makes a late dive as dusk descends. Aah, bliss.

Maria Stables-Page



This wonderful picture (which is even more striking in colour) comes from Pavel Tomkovich and was taken in Chukotsk Peninsula in north-east Siberia. It shows a Raven stealing an egg from the first clutch of Red Knot eggs laid in his study area. It was taken by an automatic nest camera on the tundra. We can possibly see the knot nest with other eggs in it between the Raven and the camera. Pavel also advises that he has a breeding adult with a lime flag (Chukotsk) and two metal bands. This seems likely to be a Red Knot chick he originally marked in July 2004 and which was recaptured (and given an Aussie metal band) in Corner Inlet in June 2005.

## What's on at the Shorebird Centre

### 17 August, Winter Potluck Dinner 6pm

Guest speaker is polar ornithologist and tour guide Nigel Milius. Working Bee 10am-2pm. Birdwatching 2-4 pm.

### 3-5 September, NZ Dotterel Management Course

Aimed at agencies, community groups and volunteers involved with monitoring and managing dotterels. Contact the centre for details.

### 18-20 October, Photographing Birds

Tutor Bruce Shanks. Contact the centre for further details.

### 26-27 November, Wader ID Weekend

Learn about wader identification and other interesting aspects of waders. Tutors Keith Woodley and Gillian Vaughan. Contact the centre for details.

### 13 October, Welcome To The Birds

10am Guest speakers Rick and Elis Simpson of WaderQuest will talk about their efforts to lift the international profile of wading birds and especially the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (at right). See [www.waderquest.org](http://www.waderquest.org) for more about their amazing exploits. Gardening afterwards if willing to stay for an hour or so. High Tide 2.30pm



Front cover: Keith Woodley at Miranda.  
Back cover: Red-necked Stint and NZ Dotterel.

Photo / Jim Eagles  
Photos / Allan and Wendy Fox

# Birdwatching at the museum

Walk into Auckland Museum's new free marine exhibition, *Moana: My Ocean*, and you could be forgiven for imagining you'd taken a wrong turn on the motorway.

After passing amazing pictures of phytoplankton, and an extraordinary satellite photo of a plankton bloom off Kaikoura, you suddenly find yourself in the hide at Miranda (top right). Oystercatchers are walking past the hide's windows and if you look through the binoculars provided for visitors you can watch godwits preening (bottom right).

Following a visit to Miranda, exhibition developer Victoria Travers fell in love with the hide and thought it would be the ideal introduction to the theme of the interconnectedness of the marine environment.

From Miranda the exhibition goes on a magnificent tour embracing the Hauraki Gulf, Leigh Marine



Reserve, the mysterious depths of the Kermadec Trench and finally the Kermadec Islands. It's a stunning evocation of the marine world which surrounds us, its beauty and fragility.

The exhibition runs until October 28 and at 2pm on Saturday August 21 Keith Woodley will give a talk at the museum on shorebirds and why they make their epic migration flights.



## Now in residence at Miranda

The wet winter has made the prolonged drought just a memory for all of us including, perhaps, the local Bitterns. I have seen one several times along the hide trail and, early in July, when opening the door to the front deck to encourage a Fantail to leave the room, flushed one from the edge of Widgery Lake.

Meanwhile small flocks of Spouth Island Pied Oystercatchers piping their departure southwards is a



Pacific Golden Plover in non-breeding plumage

Photo / Wikimedia

traditional mid-winter soundtrack at Miranda.

While SIPO numbers may be thinning out daily, the Wrybill flock remains at full strength. Joining them on the outer shellbank on most high tides are hundreds of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots.

Also taking part in the high-tide display, often spectacularly dominating the tip of the spit, is the Royal Spoonbill flock. Once only occasional visitors to New Zealand, these Australian migrants are now well established, and as many as 41 have been recorded at Miranda this winter.

Another spectacular winter visitor is a Pacific Golden Plover. These birds, which breed in the Arctic, are reasonably common summer visitors (last summer there were 42 at Miranda). But to find one here in winter is, as Adrian Riegen put it, "unusual but not unknown".

The Marsh Sandpiper has also been seen regularly along with, on occasions, a Greater Sand Plover and a Black-tailed Godwit, the latter - a small male - showing good breeding plumage.

Keith Woodley

### Arctic Migrants

<i>Bar-tailed Godwit</i>	570
<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	1
<i>Red Knot</i>	70
<i>Turnstone</i>	4
<i>Sharp-tailed Sandpiper</i>	
<i>Marsh Sandpiper</i>	1
<i>Pacific Golden Plover</i>	1
<i>Curlew Sandpiper</i>	
<i>Greater Sand Plover</i>	1

### New Zealand Species

<i>Wrybill</i>	2600
<i>NZ Dotterel</i>	
<i>Banded Dotterel</i>	16
<i>SI Pied Oystercatcher</i>	
<i>Variable Oystercatcher</i>	
<i>White-fronted Tern</i>	
<i>Caspian Tern</i>	
<i>Black-billed Gull</i>	
<i>Pied Stilt</i>	
<i>Royal Spoonbill</i>	41
<i>Banded Rail</i>	
<i>Bittern</i>	1
<i>White Heron</i>	1



COLOURFUL DISPLAY (clockwise from top left); wader flock, mainly Great Knots and Red Knots; Rainbow Bee-eater; Black-necked Stork or Jabiru; Red-capped Plover; Australian Bustard; Pink-eared Ducks and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers; Australian Pelicans and Pied Cormorant; Royal Spoonbills; Pied Herons, Whiskered Terns and White-winged Black Terns.  
Photos / Keith Woodley

# Checking up on birding migrants in the far north of Australia

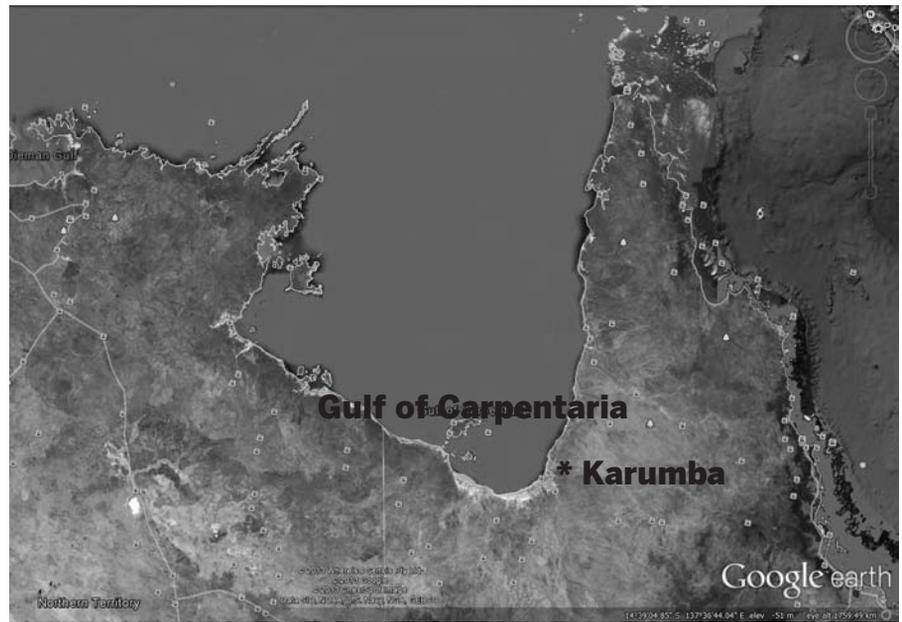
**Keith Woodley** reports on an expedition he and Kristelle Wi made to Karumba in the Gulf of Carpentaria in late March to assist with a joint Australian-New Zealand shorebird survey organised by Peter Driscoll and Adrian Riegen

The flat land tilts as the tiny microlight banks and circles the likely landing spot. Amidst the meandering channels and sparse melaleuca woodland, there are extensive open areas, bare clearings of red earth – each, to these untrained eyes, looking pretty much like another. But Peter Driscoll has been doing this for years: one low pass is sufficient to establish where he is going to put the plane. On closer approach the clearing is littered with pale lumps that look very much like rocks; but they are merely long-dried cowpats that crumble readily beneath our wheels. From this now quiet blue cocoon we emerge to another dimension, with its heat, its silent emptiness...and its flies.

A few km to the north is the mangrove-fringed coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria and our shorebird counting site. As Peter finishes securing the plane, we hear the distant thump of the helicopter coming in to whisk us there. This expedition is an exercise in logistics; how best to move people to far flung and remote counting sites quickly and efficiently. The answer lies in boats, helicopters and this Aeroprakt Foxbat STOL microlight. Once aboard it is just a few minutes before the chopper swings in behind a small tidal channel, where a dark slab of roosting waders can be seen, dropping us on an area of dry mudflat and salt marsh scattered with low shrubs, about 700 m behind the roost.

The brief transit in an air-conditioned machine is once again quickly a memory in the heat. We are soon into action, scrutinising the small flock of several hundred birds in front of us. They are but a tiny part of the rather large puzzle that is the Gulf. And a significant part of that puzzle from a New Zealand perspective concerns Red Knots.

We are based at Karumba a small town at the mouth of the Norman River, in the southeast corner of the Gulf. Shorebird distribution here is,



like their habitats, flung far and wide: from beach and tidal flats to vast clay pans, and mangrove-lined lagoons and channels to extensive freshwater habitat in the hinterland. During the wet season heavy rains flood the region followed by gradual drying out of the huge sub-coastal plains and clay pans. Alluvial sediment from the many streams and rivers furnish enormous mudflats, usually bordered by mangroves. The variety and extent of habitat and its location on the northern coast of the continent, helps explain its importance to migratory birds. While New Zealand banded and flagged birds have been recorded here, it remains unclear how many birds, if any, stop here during northward migration.

It is ten years since the last shorebird counts of this area. Previous efforts largely relied on aerial surveys that, while useful for giving an overall impression of bird numbers, are not without considerable difficulties: there are logistical and weather constraints on aircraft movements, access is seldom easy, extreme limitations are imposed by the Gulf's curious tidal regime (See Box), and highly variable habitat – massive seasonal fluctuations

in neighbouring freshwater habitat for one thing – mean birds can be highly mobile from one day to the next. There is also, of course, the challenge of identifying and counting birds from a moving aircraft. Still, with few roads in the region, flying and boating are the only options. Over the next few days all key roost sites within a hundred km each side of Karumba are visited, from Pompuraaw in the north to Bourketown in the west.

Relative difficulty of access is underlined at one site known as The Oaks: its straggle of taller trees a rare sight in this flat landscape. The coast here is a sand and shell ridge covered in low shrubs, with a narrow inlet running parallel to the beach to seaward of which is a sand bar fringed with mangroves. By helicopter it is just five minutes across the river from Karumba. There is a mass of birds along the inlet – several species of tern, with spoonbills and a few plovers, and two dense clusters of both Great and Red Knots fringed with several hundred godwits – mostly Black-tails with about 60 or so Bar-tails. Around the edges of the flock, spilling into the mangroves, are a few Grey Plover,



GETTING AROUND THE GULF (from left): Eyes open ready for the flight; eyes shut before takeoff.

Whimbrel and Eastern Curlew. Out in the bay float a squadron of Pelicans. Later in the survey I return to this site, this time by boat. Shallow water means the only access is several km further west of our count site, requiring a long walk along the beach. Now the absolute ease of life with a chopper is emphasised with each step in the searing heat.

In the course of the survey, over 380,000 shorebirds are counted, 260,000 of them during aerial counts. However many more birds are likely to have gone unnoticed given the vast expanses of available habitat. Moreover the majority of birds recorded from the air were unable to be identified to species level. In line with other aerial surveys these were recorded merely as small, medium or large waders.

Ground-based counts recorded 107,000 shorebirds, the majority of which were Great Knots (51,143),

Black-tailed Godwits (16,592), Red Knots (13,155) and Red-necked Stints (7,898).

Much of the inner coast here is quite shallow with extensive mud bars ready to inconvenience the unwary boatie. Two such bars extend for several km out from both sides of the Norman River mouth. When returning from a count site any temptation to head in a straight line towards the boat ramp is tempered by the appearance of a solitary Pelican, two km offshore. Closer scrutiny reveals it is not sitting on the water, but standing!

It is here, towards the end of the survey period in early April, that we find a flock of 8000 Red Knots. They are likely new arrivals in the Gulf, and close examination of this flock over two days reveals a number of banded or flagged birds – mostly from southern Australia, along with some from Chongming Dao in China. The

two New Zealand marked birds seen are ones that have not been recorded in New Zealand for several years. All available evidence now suggests New Zealand birds may not be using the Gulf during northern migration.

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Kristelle and I arrive in late March to join the expedition which began two weeks earlier. With four days to fill before the tides became suitable for stage 2 of the coastal shorebird survey, we are immediately employed assisting with ground counts on the Karumba Plains.

The road from Normanton to Karumba passes through vast tracts of open woodland until 20 km from Karumba where the plains begin. Predominantly grasslands interspersed with large ephemeral wetlands, it is an area swarming with birdlife.

Along this stretch there are five count sites from which 25-minute, 360° counts are made. At one site we count an estimated 5000 ducks mainly Grey Teal along with Pink-eared and Black Ducks. Occasionally small flocks of Little Curlew erupt from hidden roosts, while scores of small terns – Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns hawk over the grasslands.

Seeing a species for the first time is always a nice event, and for me Pied Heron is one of these. But as is often the case, that first sighting is subsequently replaced with an image of ubiquity, as they turn out to be one of the most common birds in the district. All around Karumba - outside our base, along the beach and riverfront, on playing fields and roadsides and out on the plains - they occur in the



HAPPY ANGLER: Kristelle Wi with her barramundi



On the water (from left): Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford, Peter Driscoll, Adrian Riegen. Keith Woodley

hundreds. Nevertheless I never tired of seeing these smart little creatures – with their dark slaty blue back and crown, white neck and belly and bright yellow legs.

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In some of its publicity material, Karumba describes itself as “a quaint drinking town with a fishing problem.” We arrive just before Easter and the start of the barramundi season.

As we do bird counts out on the Plains, the road behind us is busy with fishers heading in from all over Australia. Soon the exteriors of motels and hotels are lined with rows of SUVs and boat trailers.

Business is brisk at the local boat ramp, where newcomers are soon made aware of the unspoken but extremely strict etiquettes that apply: wait your turn to launch or land, be as quick as possible, do not idle on the ramp. With spotting scopes instead of fishing gear, we are curios. However, at least one of our team is revealed to be rather keen on fishing. Kristelle is observed looking longingly at neighbouring boats and their rods and tackle.

Eventually, towards the end of the survey there is an opportunity for her to follow up on this, the result being a rather large barra. Her happiness is mirrored by all of us as we dine very well over the next couple of days.

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One of the survey team is Jun Matsui, a tour guide based in Cairns. Before moving to Australia he worked at the Yatsu observatory in Tokyo Bay, one of the earliest Flyway Partnership sites. There he was involved in making wooden models of shorebirds

that were then distributed to schools elsewhere along the flyway.

As he explains this I suddenly recall receiving two such items at Miranda in 1995 that were subsequently presented to Kaiaua School.

Across the table Kristelle has been listening with growing interest. “I remember that. I was at the school then, and my mate still has the newspaper photo of her and two others with the model birds!” 

## Only one high tide a day

Tides generally play a major role in the activities of waders. In the Gulf of Carpentaria there is an unusual tidal regime which, although it is broadly predictable, is rather unique due to characteristics of water depth, shape, and the influence of a major convergence of ocean currents to the north of the Gulf.

Wind and barometric pressure also play a major role in determining actual tide height, apparently more so in the Gulf than in most other places. The study and understanding of wader movements in the region was made difficult not only by these unusual tides but also by the extensive supra-tidal claypans that often occur a long way back from the coast. At times of flooding, either by very high tides or heavy rain, the extent of wetland habitat would increase dramatically.

The tides also have a distinctive seasonal pattern which differs from the “normal” pattern in eastern Australia where the higher high tide occurs during the evening in winter and during the day in summer. In most places, there are two high tides and two low tides a day and at any time of the year a reasonable range of tide heights will occur during daylight hours over the usual two weekly period of a tide cycle. The Gulf waters are different, there normally being only one high and one low tide a day plus a few days of what are known locally as “double tides” every two weeks. During the period of double tides there is very little change in water height which stays at around the level of mid tide.

Also, the change in the time of the tide each day is somewhat abnormal and does not progress around the clock. After the occurrence of a set of double tides, the time of the tide is at an earlier time of the day (or night) than before the double tides. The result is that there is little change in the time of the tide throughout the day. However, there is a gradual seasonal change in when the high (or low) tide occurs.

The seasons therefore have characteristic patterns. Summer is a time of daytime low tides. Winter is the opposite, with low tides during the night and high tides during the day. Autumn characteristically has low tides in the morning and high tides in the evening and the reverse is true for the spring months.

From: P Driscoll. 2001. Gulf of Carpentaria Wader Surveys 1998-99



# Working for the shorebirds continues around the year

Freshly re-elected as chair of the MNT Council, **Gillian Vaughan** reports on three more months of conservation, education, politicking and submitting

On 24 May we were pleased to host a delegation from the State Forestry Association and several Chinese provinces. These groups are the equivalent of our Department of Conservation.

Coincidentally we were lucky to have Jimmy Choi, a PhD candidate from Massey who some members will remember from his talk last year, staying at the Centre that weekend, who was happy to help with translation.

With two people able to translate, and with Jimmy's background in shorebirds, we were able to cover wide ranging areas such as recruiting volunteers and shorebird habitat management, leading to one of the most productive short visits of a Chinese group to Miranda that I can remember. It was followed by a few excellent hours bird watching.

At the AGM two new Council members were elected, Ray and Ann Buckmaster, and I am delighted that they have chosen to join us. Phil Hammond has decided to step down and I would like to thank him for the effort he put into the MNT Council and continues to put into birding in New Zealand.

The guest speaker at the AGM was none other than Keith Woodley on 20 years at Miranda. It was quite the trip down memory lane and I know those present enjoyed the journey.

Since then the normal OSNZ (actually now Birds New Zealand) census took place at the end of June. As a participant I was delighted by the excellent weather as well as the display that the birds put on for us. The only downside was a further break in at the carpark. I remind members to either walk down from the Centre, or take your valuables with you when you leave the car.

The next event is a working bee followed by the potluck din-

ner and I encourage you all to join us for either one or both parts of the day.

## Staff and volunteers

We are often asked what staff members do at the Centre during the quiet winter months. There is no end to the work at the Centre, even when the public aren't arriving in droves. Recently, for instance:

Keith has been working on a report commissioned by DoC for the EAAF flyway partnership on the status of New Zealand shorebird sites, as well as finalising the text and layout for the planned signs along the walk to the hide.

Maria has been sending out packages to local schools, letting them know what we can offer, how to contact us if they wish to visit and basic information about shorebirds and migration.

With the aid of 16 new traps, Kris

(below) has been extending the current traplines up to Taramaire, further protecting the area where the bittern bred two years ago and the land where most of the shore skinks were found in the Bioblitz, as well as hopefully helping any NZ Dotterel that try to breed at Taramaire.

Combine all of this with the normal day to day running of the Centre, groups that still come and stay and the team is still kept busy in our "quiet" months.

## Manukau Harbour

There are several aspects of the Auckland Unitary Plan of potential concern to shorebirds. I was pleased to note the *Papakura Courier* reporting that the proposed harbour crossing from Karaka to Weymouth has been shelved (for now anyway).

This does not change the fact that there is a significant push to develop Auckland in ways that will affect the Manukau Harbour. The Manukau supports the largest number of shorebirds in the country, and any development must be approached carefully to ensure that shorebirds are not affected. David Lawrie has become involved in this and is working to ensure the Trust's concerns are made clear.

## Addition to Name

As you can read opposite, Council will be recommending to members that the name Pukorokoro be added to the name of the Trust. This would mean that the Trust would be called "Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust".

I would be very interested in feedback from members on this proposal, and encourage those with opinions on this to contact me directly by email [Gillianv@actrix.co.nz](mailto:Gillianv@actrix.co.nz) or phone 09 298 2500. Alternatively, as always, contact Keith at the Centre 



# Council backs change of name

The MNT Council is recommending to members that the name be changed to Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust. The proposal - which follows a request from local iwi Ngati Paoa - will be put to an extraordinary general meeting, probably following the annual meeting in May, where it would have to be carried by a two-thirds majority.

This issue had its origins last year when Council member Eila Lawton and manager Keith Woodley attended a meeting of the Hauraki Gulf Forum. At the meeting a representative of the Marutuahu confederation, which includes Ngati Paoa, reeled off the names of places associated with the tribes. But when he got to Miranda he - in Keith's words - "spat out 'and then there's that place named after a ship'." Both Eila and Keith got the message that the name Miranda was a source of deep discontent.

A few months later there was an article in the *NZ Herald* reporting on the anger felt by Hauraki Maori that the name comes from the warship *HMS Miranda* which left many dead when in 1863 it shelled the village of Pukorokoro - situated on the hills overlooking what is now the Findlay Reserve - providing an ongoing reminder of the tragedy.

This year, when chair Gillian Vaughan and Keith visited Kaiaua Marae, as part of the trust's efforts to have good relations with tangata whenua, it was made clear that they would very much like to see the trust acknowledge the

traditional name of Pukorokoro.

As the next step it was decided to run an article in *Miranda News* to tell members the background to the iwi's request. Editor Jim Eagles contacted Ngati Paoa and was put in touch with Morehu Wilson who, with Hauauru Rawiti, represents the iwi in Treaty of Waitangi negotiations with the Crown. The article below is the result.

Morehu and local kuia Amy Thompson also attended last month's Council meeting. As well as discussing the history, Morehu explained that as part of its Treaty negotiations the iwi had received a formal acknowledgement that the Crown acted unjustly when it attacked the village and the name Miranda was a cause of continuing anguish. But so far nothing had been done about it. With the 150th anniversary of the tragedy due this November the iwi was anxious to see the name of Pukorokoro restored.

Morehu also said the iwi's deed of settlement, likely to be signed in November, would see Ngati Paoa get a significant stake in the Firth of Thames, possibly including the Taramaire Reserve.

After considerable discussion the Council resolved unanimously to recommend to members that the name should be changed.

Chair Gillian Vaughan is keen to get feedback from members on the issue. See her comments opposite.

## 'Miranda' recalls a black day for iwi

Ngati Paoa representative **Morehu Wilson** explains why the iwi wishes to see the traditional name of Pukorokoro restored

Ngati Paoa seek the support of the Miranda Naturalist's Trust to change its current name to Pukorokoro Naturalist's Trust, in recognition of the village settlement that was situated near the entrance of the Pukorokoro River.

The Pukorokoro River, which runs into the Firth of Thames close to the trust's hides, has long been important to Ngati Paoa. It was a navigable river in olden times and provided much of the resources for the inhabitants of the area, as well as providing a safe haven for their waka.

This area was renamed as Miranda following the indiscriminate bombing of the Pukorokoro village by HMS *Miranda* in November 1863. This has long been a grievance for Ngati Paoa, and we have sought through the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process the reinstatement of the original name by the New Zealand Geographic Board. Their policy, however, is that a devel-



NGATI PAOA negotiators Morehu Wilson (left) and Hauauru Rawiri near the site of Pukorokoro Pa at the mouth of Pukorokoro Stream.

oped area with residents is not subject to a name change.

Notwithstanding their policy, we demand that they seriously reconsider our request due to its nature, and the anguish our people feel as the name is a constant reminder of the atrocity that occurred there.

This request has the support of the Marutuahu confederation representing Ngati Rongou, Ngati Tamatera, Ngati Whanaunga, Ngati Maru and Ngati Paoa - descended from the five sons of the ancestor Marutaahu - as well as from other Hauraki iwi.

As descendants of the early people



A Google Earth view of the remains of the Miranda Redoubt thought to have been built close to the site of Pukorokoro Village.

of the land we see the Naturalist's Trust as an educator and a guardian of the wonderful habitat along the western shore of Tikapa Moana. The trust holds the same values and aspirations that we as a tribe hold dear – the protection, preservation and enhancement of our natural environment, as well as the education and awareness of important sites and historical events.

Accordingly, we see it as fitting that the Naturalist's Trust adopt the name of Pukorokoro to help educate and inform everyone about the history of the area, as well as removing the painful stigma that the name Miranda holds for those descendants of the village and the wider area.

The name Pukorokoro refers to the "Long throated seine net" and accurately provides us with a physical description of the inlet, and the abundance of resources within the area. This inlet was strategically significant to the tribes of Hauraki and Waikato as it allowed access east and west through the interior waterways that joined the Waikato River.

The history behind the requested name change is explained in greater detail in the following excerpt from the document drawn up by Ngati Paoa to support the iwi's treaty claims to the Crown:

“When the Crown troops crossed the Mangatawhiri [River] in July 1863, Ngati Paoa were inevitably drawn into the conflict. They had since the 1840s been one of the tribes most engaged with the economic and political activities of the Crown, focusing their attention on the Auckland market, and engaging both commercially and agriculturally with government and with the settlers.

Present at the Kohimarama Conference in 1860 [called by Governor Thomas Gore Brown to discuss the attitude of local iwi to the Kingitanga movement] were Ngati Paoa rangatira Patara Pouroto and Te Karamu

Kahukoti.

Patara Pouroto, a signatory to Te Tiriti o Waitangi at Karaka Bay on 4 March 1840, confirmed Ngati Paoa's support for the Crown. Te Karamu Kahukoti, another signatory to Te Tiriti o Waitangi at Karaka Bay, also maintained his loyalty to the Crown.

Patene Puhata, a prominent Ngati Paoa chief, positioned himself and his section of Ngati Paoa at Pakihi Island [now also known as Sandspit Island] in order to both show support to the Crown and to discourage and prevent hostiles from advancing on Auckland.

Despite Ngati Paoa's continued loyalty, the plans that the Crown put in place for containing the Kingitanga and protecting Auckland from a feared invasion cut across Ngati Paoa's lands and its mana.

The Crown's objective was to create a buffer between Auckland and the tribes of the Waikato, and initially to establish a string of forts from Pukorokoro through to the Waikato River and out to the Waikato heads, to protect Auckland from invasion. The Crown also planned to establish a blockade of the Firth of Thames, ensuring that military supplies did not make their way into the Waikato. This also led to the discouragement and subsequent loss of trade between Ngati Paoa and the community of Auckland, Ngati Paoa's greatest trading partner.

These objectives left the Crown invading the lands of one its most loyal allies. Sorties were endorsed to flush out hostiles within the communities of Ngati Paoa living around the coastal region of Tamaki and Tikapa Moana. These invasive military acts still touch the descendants of those ancestors who were affected.

Following the invasion of the Waikato, many Ngati Paoa rangatira and hapu remained neutral, but others resisted the attack on their villages and the occupation of their lands. With other iwi from around east Wairoa

area, they engaged in a guerrilla war, in which a number of settler civilians in outlying farms were killed.

Crown actions against those judged to be in rebellion were also severe, most notably the shelling by HMS Miranda of the settlement at Pukorokoro in November 1863 where the Captains log reports: "Several of the pinnace's shells burst very well especially one which is supposed to have burst in a whare. 12 rockets fired in all. Practice very fair."

This incident left significantly deep scars in the memory of Ngati Paoa kaumatua, [as demonstrated by] Kaho Andrews, who in 1989 recounted: "HMS Miranda fired shells onto Pukorokoro Pa, killing men, women and children"

An attack by Crown forces on an encampment of Ngati Paoa and another iwi was described as "particularly murderous" and involved the indiscriminate shooting of women and children.

The resultant forced exodus of Ngati Paoa from their homes of Whakatiwai and Pukorokoro saw them living in wretched conditions around the swamp areas of Makomako and Waitakaruru.

The Crown imposed a blockade on the Firth of Thames policed by the Royal warships HMS Miranda, Sandfly and Esk, their respective captains tasked with communicating the terms of the blockade to the resident iwi.

The aim of the blockade was to prevent military and other supplies reaching the King's forces in the Waikato. Trade was not supposed to have been impeded, but in the tense atmosphere of the military campaign Ngati Paoa's trade was significantly disrupted.

The isolated but intense outbreaks of conflict behind the front line came to a close by the end of 1863, when the Crown passed the New Zealand Settlements Act to confiscate the lands of those who were determined to be in rebellion during the campaign. ”

## New track signs will be ready for spring

Interpretation signs should be installed along the hide trail from the Shorebird Centre, as well as in the hides, ready for the arrival of the Arctic migrants this Spring.

Designs for the panels are almost complete and topics covered include the area's geological origins, why Access Bay is no longer used as a roost, mangroves, why the hide keeps moving and the history of the Limeworks.

MNT has received a grant of \$5,175 from Waikato Regional Council towards this project and hopes to have the signs all in place before the end of September.



## New faces on MNT Council

Ray and Ann Buckmaster (above) are the only new faces on the Miranda Naturalists' Trust Council following the annual general meeting.

Ray and Ann, who live in Hamilton, are regular volunteers at the shorebird centre. They were the only nominees to fill two vacancies.

After seven years on Council Phil Hammond decided it was time to stand down and Tansy Bliss left last year when she got a job in the Chatham Islands.

Will Perry was re-elected as secretary and Charles Gao as treasurer.

The new Council later re-elected Gillian Vaughan as chair.

## Beware of thieves

Thieves are continuing to break into vehicles at the car park for the hides. During the recent OSNZ wader bird survey past-chairman David Lawrie had an iPad stolen from his car. Manager Kewith Woodley says several break-ins have been reported in the past few months.

# Fonterra aims to spend a slice of \$20 million clean-up fund at Miranda

New Zealand's largest company, Fonterra, is working on plans to include the Ramsar site at Miranda in its \$20 million Living Water programme aimed at improving water quality and restoring natural habitats over the next 10 years

Miranda has been chosen as the focus of one of five projects, to be funded by dairy giant Fonterra, aimed at improving water quality and restoring natural habitats.

As part of its efforts to combat bad publicity about dairy pollution, Fonterra has agreed to put \$2 million year for the next 10 years into a programme called Living Water.

The funding package of \$20 million will, the company says, "be held in trust and will be jointly allocated to communities for projects that care for the land and water for generations to come."

The projects will involve the company working in partnership with the Department of Conservation "to care for some of New Zealand's most sensitive waterways."

The initial focus, Fonterra says, "will be on five sensitive water catchments that were identified as needing immediate help. By focusing on a limited number of catchments across the country, we will be able to make greater investments that have a significant impact."

The selected areas are: Kaipara Harbour, Waikato Peat Lakes, Firth of Thames/Tikapapa Moana, Te Waihora/Lake Ellesmere and Awarua/Waituna Lagoon.

Explaining the choice of the Firth of Thames as one of the selected areas, Fonterra notes it is "an 8,500ha wetland of international significance. Sites of significance include floodplain, saline wetlands, the intertidal zone and active Chenier plain (shell banks) for which this site is one of the world's finest examples.

"Significant habitat exists for a range of threatened flora and fauna species. The Firth's marine envi-

ronment, especially in the Miranda-Kaiaua area is significant to the health of the region as a whole."

The initial focus in the Firth, it says, will be the Ramsar site at Miranda which "supports nine key shorebird species including Arctic migrants and New Zealand endemic shorebirds such as bar-tailed godwits, red knots and wrybill plover.

"In addition a number of threatened plants and animals can be found including wetland birds, lizards, fish and plants such as mistletoe and Maori musk."

Project planning started in March and will involve groups like regional councils, iwi, farmers and the local community.

MNT was represented at a local meeting by immediate past-chair David Lawrie, who said he had put forward some ideas about what might be done at Miranda but these needed to be discussed with local landowners before they could go any further.

"It's an exciting possibility," he said, "but at this stage it's still a bit early to say what will actually happen."

Fonterra envisages that projects will involve DoC working with local communities and farmers "in activities like enhancing riparian areas and wetlands, managing pests and weeds, and making sure that the right habitats are in place around farms to enhance biodiversity and encourage native fish and birds . . .

"Activities could include installing pest fish traps, testing new ways to plant in flood prone areas, creating sustainable drains and wildlife protection."

There's more information about the Living Water programme at [www.fonterralivingwater.com](http://www.fonterralivingwater.com)



# GODWIT

GIDDAY.

REMEMBER  
ME,  
GODFREY  
GODWIT?

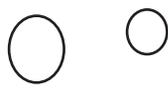
TODAY I  
WOULD LIKE TO  
INTRODUCE YOU  
TO A SPECIAL BIRD  
THAT IS ENDEMIC TO  
NEW ZEALAND, WHICH  
MEANS THAT IT IS  
FOUND NO WHERE ELSE  
IN THE WORLD: THE  
WRYBILL

UNLIKE THE OTHER  
BIRDS THAT WE HAVE  
TALKED ABOUT SO FAR,  
THE WRYBILL DOES NOT  
MIGRATE TO ANOTHER  
COUNTRY DURING THE  
WINTER. BUT IT DOES  
MIGRATE TO ANOTHER  
ISLAND.

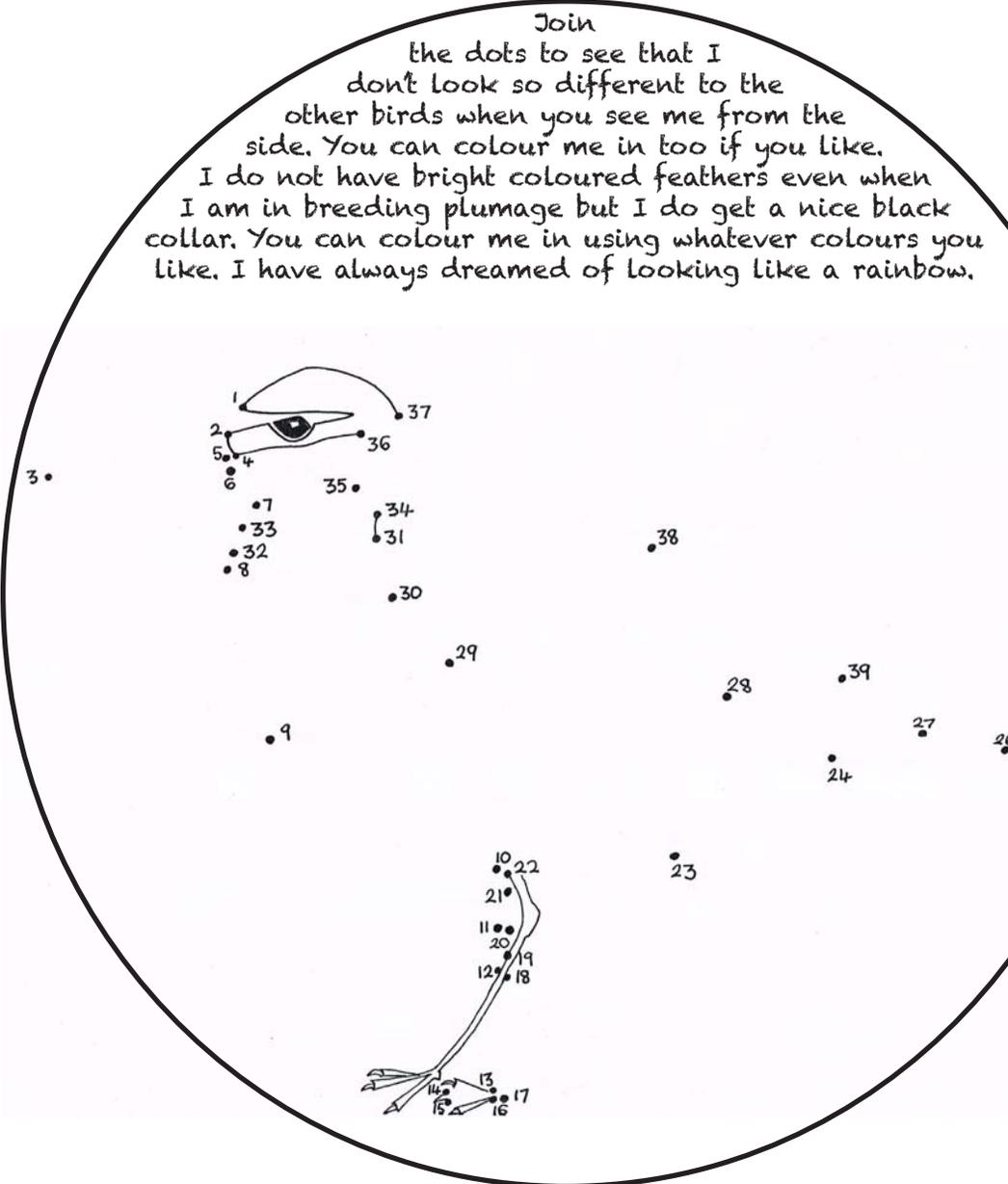
WRYBILLS SPEND THEIR  
SUMMERS RAISING  
CHICKS ON THE BRAIDED  
RIVERS IN CANTERBURY  
AND OTAGO IN THE  
SOUTH ISLAND.

THEN IN NOVEMBER  
THEY FLY ACROSS COOK  
STRAIT TO THE NORTH  
ISLAND TO SPEND THE  
WINTER ON THE TIDAL  
MUDEFLATS AT PLACES  
LIKE MIRANDA.

I WAS JUST TRYING  
TO COUNT HOW  
MANY WRYBILLS  
ARE HERE AT THE  
MOMENT. I GOT  
TO 2222 BUT  
THEN ONE OF  
THEM MOVED  
AND I LOST  
COUNT.



Hi there.  
My name is William Wrybill. I have the typical body shape of my cousins the dotterels plover's but my bill is quite unique. Looking at me from front you can see that the end of my beak curves to the top. The top part of my bill is a different size to the bottom part and they don't fit together properly so that there is a gap on the inside of the curve. This makes a good scoop for collecting food with.

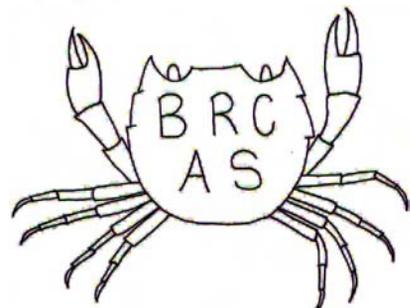
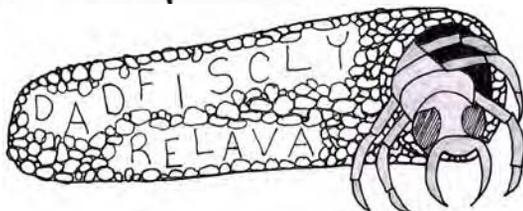
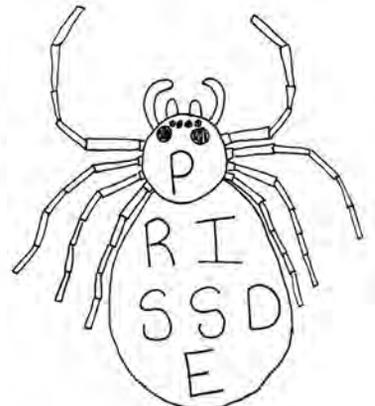
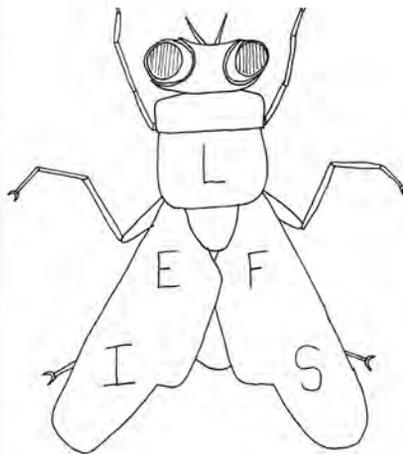
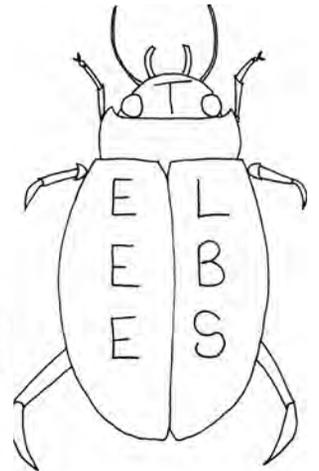
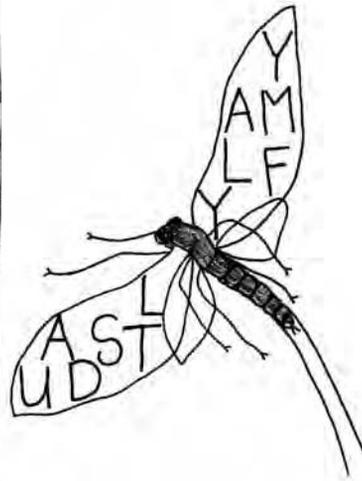
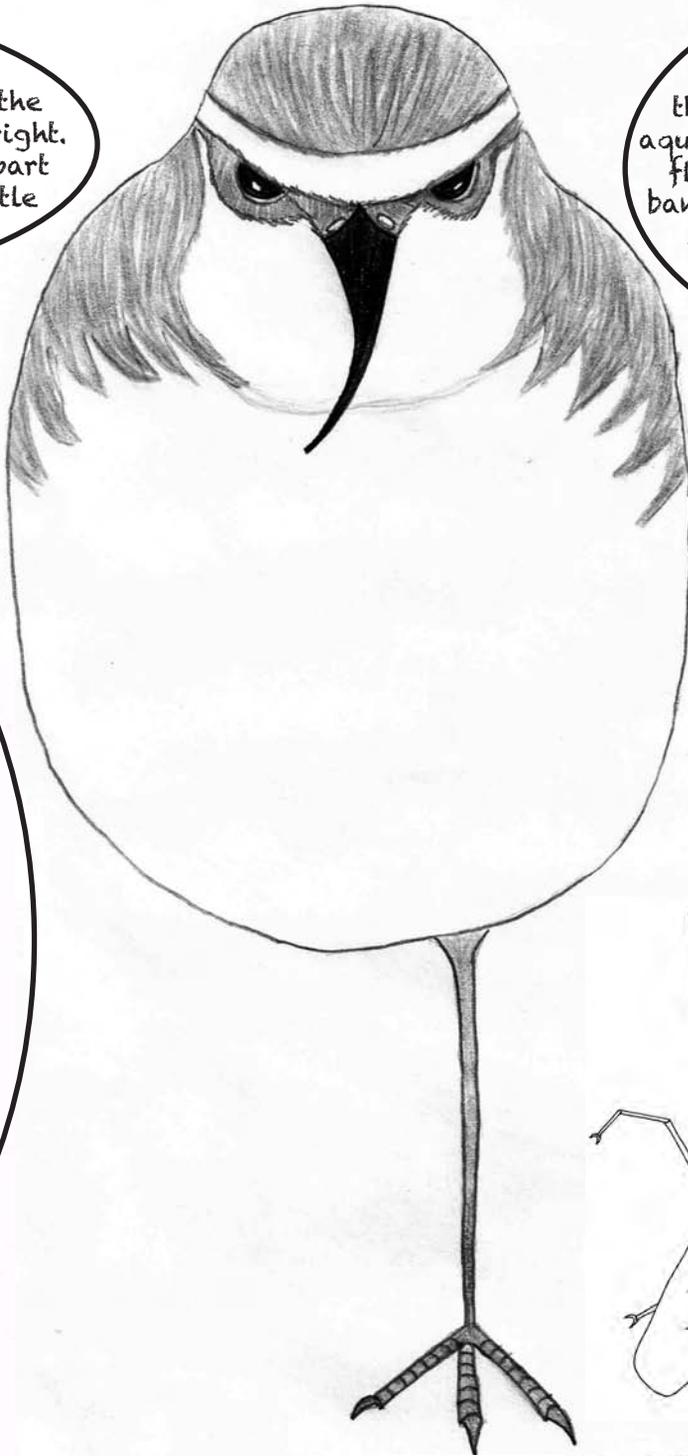


Join  
the dots to see that I  
don't look so different to the  
other birds when you see me from the  
side. You can colour me in too if you like.  
I do not have bright coloured feathers even when  
I am in breeding plumage but I do get a nice black  
collar. You can colour me in using whatever colours you  
like. I have always dreamed of looking like a rainbow.

# TIMES

s and  
e from the  
to the right.  
ottom part  
is a little  
great

The food that I eat changes depending on where I'm living. When I'm able to scoop my bill under the stones in the river I love to catch the aquatic insects that live there. When the rivers flood I have to feed on bugs that live on banks. When I'm on the mudflats of Miranda I eat small crustaceans. Unscramble the words to find out the names of some of the creatures I eat. The answers can be found on page 22



26 • 40  
41 • 25

# How a few months house-sitting

**Stuart Chambers**, chairman of Miranda Naturalists' Trust when Keith Woodley was appointed manager, discusses what his 20 years of work has meant to the organisation

Keith Woodley represents, in the eyes of the membership of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust, stability. As some will remember, before Keith, the Trust was little more than a handful of people with modest intentions of placing a rather large bird hide somewhere on the Miranda coastline and hopefully in view of the birds.

This grouping was held together by two cyclostyled newsletters a year, and occasionally a function at the old Miranda Hall. Otherwise life went on for the few Trust members, with Miranda being largely forgotten, except for ardent wader watchers who often were not much interested in the aims of the naturalists' trust anyway, but just the birds on the shoreline.

Then in 1989, somewhat miraculously, a building appeared in the Miranda district. It was unfortunately not on the shoreline but handy to it and this gave the Miranda Trust an immediate visible identity. But a building on its own, locked for much of its first three years, although opened occasionally by the Arnolds, the Chambers, the Hagues, the Dalbeths and Linda Underhill (nee Conyngham), could do little for the Trust's aims of enhancing the knowledge of birds and birders by providing handy accommodation to an accessible shorebird roosting area.

In 1992 John Gale, a future chairman of the Trust, gave 16 weeks of his time to live at the centre and keep it open almost continuously. After a spell in Britain he again kept the centre open in 1993 for a further 11 weeks. Unfortunately after this lengthy term, it once again had to close its doors.

What to do about making the place more accessible to its membership and the public was discussed at many a Council meeting. But there were no ready answers. Council members generally had neither time nor interest in keeping the place open themselves and so, except on special occasions, it stayed lonely and almost rejected.



But then came Keith. Folkert Nieuwland had met Keith at an OSNZ conference and after befriending him and discovering that he was now little interested in sorting mail for the Post Office in Wellington, enquired if house-sitting the Miranda Centre would appeal. Keith initially was non-committal. Mail-sorting obviously had its moments. There was, after all, a pay cheque at the end of the week.

Folkert, though, told the Council he had met a tall, lean and somewhat eccentric birder in the making, who was bordering on becoming jobless. This chap, he felt, might well suit the house-sitting position at the centre and keep it open for a month or two until the Trust found a way to employ a full-time manager.

It should be remembered at this time that the Trust had spent all its funds on the buildings and had no surplus to pay wages. Yet it could not get funds until it had someone permanently at the centre to generate those funds. It was a Catch 22 situation.

However, John Gale told the Council of a government programme called Task Force Green which had been set up to provide funding for environmental employment initiatives.

As chairman at the time I wrote to this organisation and when the reply was positive I contacted Keith.

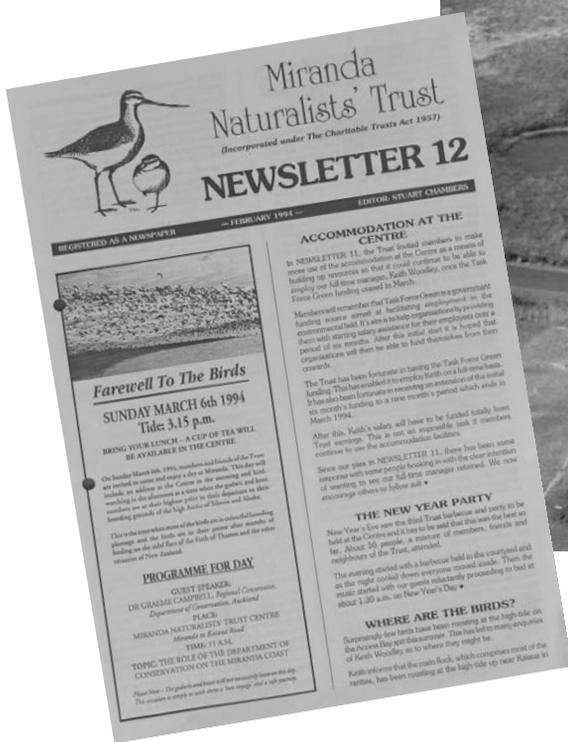
The deal, though, wasn't quite that easy. The Trust still had to find half of Keith's initial salary, so with some trepidation and a monetary guarantee from a couple of the Council members, we finally agreed to tell him he had a job for at least six months.

Keith's written reply was brief, somewhat scribbled, but accepting, causing jubilation at the next Council meeting. The meeting was relaxed that it had done the right thing; Keith would be a good person to fill the void until some permanent, probably husband and wife, team could be afforded.

Fortunately at the time of this acceptance, the second flat was nearing completion so a short time after Keith finally did arrive he was able to move into a new, partially furnished building.

On the day in May of Keith's arrival there was a Council meeting and as we had a children party visiting he got the job of talking to them. For Keith it was instant initiation. A few days later Alison and I were at the centre and, having just finished lunch, were pondering on what a lonely place

# expanded into 20 years service



EARLY DAYS, from left: Keith waiting for visitors with Chester Finlay (from Australia) and Stuart and Alison Chambers; the trust newsletters kept members in touch then as now; the newly-built centre and the lake sat in a desert of bare land.

Miranda could be in the early autumn, with not even a bird in sight or a duck on the recently formed Widgery Lake, when a truck turned in the gate. In the truck were copious boxes, a push bike, pieces of unfinished art work, boxes of paints and brushes and various items of furniture. I had expected Keith to arrive with a couple of suitcases in the back of a car but here he was with all his worldly possessions, obviously expecting to be at Miranda for the long haul. Immediately I began to wonder if I had told him his employment was for just the six months of the Task Force Green money.

We then set to work to unload the truck and open pertinent boxes and by evening I was slowing and Keith really was the manager. How Keith managed after our departure that evening I never found out, but a single person, with numerous cartons to unravel, with little apparent food and just a bike to get him to the shop which was 6 km away, did not seem to be a home-coming that many would aspire to.

From that moment onwards Miranda set a new course. Several further grants came the Trust's way, and donations started to build up, allowing Keith to stay on to become the permanent manager which he still is today.

Keith now has been at the centre for 20 years. Over that time the Trust has matured and found its way in the world of nature, birdlife and science and it has set its own traditions. When Keith first arrived the centre was simply an accommodation centre for members who could stay cheaply overnight. If no members were using the beds the public at large could rent them at a higher rate. There was a rudimentary shop selling polo shirts and stationery, and a few simple displays aimed at the travelling public, including mounted birds donated by Auckland Museum and Thames Acclimatisation Society.

But after Keith the doors were thrown wider open and the displays and the shop were greatly enhanced. The Trust moved into education via talks mostly given by Keith. Some Trust members went on to set up a Wader Study Group which undertook bird banding on a regular basis and has become a respected advocate worldwide for the preservation of the shorebirds' Flyway.

Today the Trust is a very different organisation from when Keith arrived there in 1993, but for all of this it still retains its ancient traditions of open days social functions and four newsletters a year, as set up by the early

committees. And over Keith's 20 years it has managed to pay its bills, retain its membership and keep a vigilant eye on the Miranda shoreline.

Over that time the Trust hasn't got some of the things I might have asked for – the Perch, ownership of coastal land, an observation tower, 4-star motel units, web cam technology – but it did get stability. But unlike some other organisations, it hasn't fallen by the way side, and remains the only privately funded naturalists' centre in the country. Those who worked hard for it in the early days can certainly thank Keith for that.

We can also be grateful for his dry (or is it wry?), satirical humour. During his time at the centre Keith has attracted a team of followers, many of whom only visit the centre to experience his wit.

Recently when I was at the centre a visitor arrived and Keith showed him into the end flat. A few moments later he was by Keith's side interjecting into our conversation. "It is a nice unit," he said. "But I can't find the milk for my tea."

"Oh," Keith said without a flicker. "We don't keep it in the unit. We keep it 6 kms down the road at the Kaiuia shop." 

# Keith Woodley's shotgun wedding to Miranda

**Keith Woodley** looks back on birds and people, overseas connections and school visits, storms and moving hides, big events and gradual changes . . . and all the other highlights of his time as manager of the Miranda Shorebird Centre

My arrival was accompanied by the sound of shotguns popping all around the district. This was merely coincidence, however, as 1 May 1993 was a Saturday and hence opening day of the duck-shooting season.

The Miranda Naturalists' Trust Visitor Centre at that time was very much a work in progress. Stage II, the two bunkrooms and the Sandpiper Suite, my new quarters, had been completed in 1991. Construction of stage III, what would become known as the Whimbrel Wing and Wrybill Room, was well advanced (I moved into Whimbrel Wing a few months later).

Once everyone departed at the end of that first weekend, Miranda was a most solitary place. It remained so for much of the next few weeks, broken only by the occasional visitor and even more occasional overnight guest. The mornings were often foggy, and passing traffic was extremely intermittent, the only regular event being the daily red splash of the mail van trundling by in the mist. However it was not entirely quiet. The piping of oystercatchers commuting low over the building quickly became familiar.

There was also, one morning a week or so after my arrival, the sound of a rather large truck braking to come in through the gate. Then chairman Stuart Chambers and his wife Alison had been visiting and were just about to leave. Stuart confessed some time later that when I arrived he thought I might last only a few weeks. I gather he was not alone in that. Then again, even I had no idea just how long I would be here. However, on seeing this rather large truck he asked: 'What is that?' 'That'll be my gear,' I replied.

The building was, in those early days, somewhat Spartan. The Sibson room had a few sticks of furniture and several shop items - posters, copies of Stuart's locality guide and a few of Folkert Nieuwland's handmade photo cards - laid out on a trestle table. One

wall was covered in mounted wader photos with captions. This was long before the display panels or the bird case. It was before the second fridge or the specific shop fittings. As those things arrived they quickly became part of the furniture, but on the two occa-



4 DAYS into the job and learning fast. Photo / Lyn Meadows

sions since when the room had to be cleared of everything so the floor could be revarnished, the memories returned.

At the end of 1994 I returned from my first overseas birding expedition - to North Queensland - with an idea borrowed from Kingfisher Lodge at Julatten for name plates on the accommodation areas and the Wrybill Room. In 1997 the garage and the front deck were completed, and structurally the centre has remained largely unchanged since. It did, however, undergo an initially unofficial but now well-established name change. In the late 1990's I began answering the phone with: "Miranda Shorebird Centre." Now "naturalist" is an excellent word and well suited to this organisation, but not only was "Miranda Naturalists' Trust Visitor Centre" quite a mouth-

ful, it also led to misunderstandings as to just what we were about. Name recognition is now immediate.

Other changes of course have been prodigious. I was quite unaware, for instance, of the tide of technology that would shortly follow me in through the gate. It now seems quaint to recall how novel I found the arrival of a fax and answerphone.

One of the key contributions of John Gale's legacy as chairman was a focus on the shop. Coming from a business background, John could see the potential to greatly increase revenue. This led to another technological leap with the arrival, in November 1996, of the EftPos terminal. Chris and Peter Thompson then faced the challenge of making me computer literate. Later collaboration with Adrian Riegen in putting together the display panels represented a further massive technological learning curve.

From a trestle bearing a handful of items, the shop has evolved hugely. The most notable feature is probably the increase in books, so that today we stock perhaps the best range of natural history titles in the country. The early evolution of the shop was gradual but received a boost when Jenni Hensley was assistant manager between 2005 and 2008. However, with the advent of Maria Stables-Page there came a further leap forward to the impressively diverse array of items on sale today. It is now a major focus for many visitors and produces an essential revenue stream for the Trust. In the process I have learnt a valuable lesson: that public taste is a broad church and a retailer should never let personal taste be the arbiter of items to be stocked!

The number of annual visitors to the centre is another enormous change. By the end of my second year a dramatic increase in day visitors was already evident. This was largely due to the centre now being open almost every day rather than only when



THE SHOP has changed dramatically over the years but school visits are much the same.

someone was available. We were also being actively promoted in schools; our brochures were in many visitor centres within the Auckland/Coromandel area; the centre was more widely known around the district; media coverage of threats to shorebirds from development at Auckland's sister city of Fukuoka in southern Japan raised our profile; our international profile was also expanding, so that most birders visiting the country knew about Miranda before arriving; a positive entry appeared in the traveller's guide Lonely Planet; and we were well served through word of mouth. All of it meant a day without visitors became a very rare phenomenon. In the first school term of 1995 alone, over 1400 school kids visited Miranda.

Over the years, with considerable inspiration from John Charteris, Warwick Sandler, Sue Reid and others, Miranda became a hotspot for class visits. We promoted this through workshops for teachers, circulars to schools and, in 2000, the development of an education resource kit. At times, particularly during the first and final terms, we often had at least one school every day of the week. I generally came to enjoy these visits, even if on occasions they proved challenging. In one memorable case a scheduling muddle resulted in me talking to a class of 34 ten-year-olds, as two contractors water blasted the roof above us, while high above the irritating aerobatics pilot loudly did his thing.

But such frequent school activity is now alas, a memory. Over the past three or four years school visits have dropped off markedly. There appear

to be a number of factors behind this trend: the cost of bus hire, health and safety requirements, difficulties getting enough parents and curriculum changes. It presents us with a challenge to find ways of reconnecting with schools and facilitating visits to Miranda.

#### THE TALK

On that first Saturday morning back in 1993 I was almost immediately in action, being called on to give a talk to a group of local Brownies who were staying the weekend. Given the nature of the centre and of MNT objectives, talking to visitors was always going to be part of my role.

However not being prepared for this contingency to arise quite so quickly, I merely asked for questions. The ease with which these enquiring young minds exhausted my modest knowledge of birds, botany and marine biology was staggering. Nevertheless this session represented the beginning of the talk and, two decades and hundreds of audiences later, it has developed somewhat. Indeed, if a recording of a talk given in late 1993 were available it would bear little resemblance to that given today. While the basic themes are still there - the significance of Miranda, and the nature of shorebird migration - much of the detail is new. It has been subject to numerous modifications, particularly as new information on migratory birds has come to hand. Indeed its very evolution has mirrored the unfolding migration story.

In 1993 for instance, the significance of the Yellow Sea region as a migratory staging site for New Zea-

land birds was only suspected. Our knowledge of the flyway itself was very patchy, largely based on only those few sites from which band recoveries had been received. There was evidence that some of our godwits may be from Alaska but the orthodox view remained firmly focused on Siberia. Yet the bird banding and flagging programme at Miranda and elsewhere was gradually adding to our knowledge. As more birds were banded so more and more band recoveries and flag sightings were received from along the flyway, helping to determine some of the key sites in the region. After 2003 the colour-banding scheme directed by Phil Battley led, in a very short time, to an astonishing expansion of our knowledge of godwit and knot movements, throughout the Asia Pacific region. But after September 2006 a hugely significant modification to what has become the central theme of the talk began.

Back in the 1990s, when discussing godwit migration I would say, "Some people believe they could be flying back to New Zealand from Alaska direct." Over the years that message evolved and "it is believed" became "the evidence strongly suggests", "it is highly likely" and then "we are all but certain" birds are returning here non-stop. Finally satellite tagging arrived and conclusively established the main migration routes and stopover strategies of individual birds. Since March 2007, when the satellite telemetry project hit the headlines with the stunning performance of E7, the public response has been huge. It was a story guaranteed to really capture peoples' imaginations, so if I am compliment-



MOMENTOUS MOMENTS, from left: debris from 1995 storm; the hide that fell off the back of a truck.

ed on a talk, I am quick to credit the quality of the story itself.

Our engagement with the Flyway, along with the critical importance of the Yellow Sea region, is now firmly part of the story. But our interests are also local – the nature of the Firth of Thames and the species breeding here, as well as national – the direct connection with the South Island by way of Pied Oystercatchers and Wrybill. Indeed, a key emphasis of the talks has always been Wrybill, their highly specialised dependence on the braided rivers, the threats they face and, of course, that singular bill.

### THE MOVING HIDE

One way of charting my time at Miranda is to follow the location of the hide. In 1993 it sat opposite the middle gate at the northern end of Stilt Ponds. Access was by walking from the centre along the high tide line across the former Access Bay, largely similar to the trail today, but you had to climb several fences. Then, at the top of Access Bay you could see over mangroves to the shell bank; now there is an unbroken green wall. Another access point was from the middle gate, following the boomerang-shaped tractor track to the hide. Here one was likely to encounter the genial Alan Lane tending to his Limousin cattle. Directly in front of the hide was a broad strip of open mud beyond which was the shell spit where it was not uncommon to find over 10,000 waders massed just metres from the hide.

Here I would frequently sit enjoying an endless pageant of shorebird spectacles in all weather and light conditions. For instance, on Monday 10 July 1995 on a late afternoon tide

with steel grey cloud lit by low sunlight, the shell bank was completely coated with oystercatchers, their white bodies gleaming against shell that was a dull grey in comparison. Little did I know that this would be the last occasion that I or anybody else would use this hide. On Friday a massive storm - 60 mm of rain fell between 5.30 and 7pm – together with a tidal surge inundated all the coastal paddocks, with waves breaking on the road immediately outside the front gate. The next morning the hide was nowhere to be seen. The shell bank had been breached in several places, and huge amounts of shell spilled up onto the pasture. Eventually the roof was found against the embankment at the Limeworks and other pieces could be seen among the mangroves south of Pukorokoro Stream.

This massive event was merely a dramatic symptom of an otherwise gradual process. The shell spit has steadily moved southwards, accompanied by the march of mangroves, so the hide has had to migrate as well. When a replacement hide was built in November 1995 it was erected slightly to the south of the original site. There it remained until tipped onto its back by Cyclone Drena in 2005. It was subsequently moved further south to where it sits today.

### THE FIELD COURSE

During my prolonged absence overseas in 1998 Stuart and Alison Chambers were the primary relievers. Stuart noted a marked drop off in visitors after the Farewell to the Birds, possibly due to the name leading people to think all the birds were gone, when in fact there are substantial numbers present

all year round. It was a valid point and we started referring to our events as Autumn Migration Day and Spring Migration Day. However, it also got us thinking about the lull in visitor activity between April and September and what we could do to address it. A series of events was mooted including an annual Potluck Dinner.

Then Bev Woolley suggested we should run training courses similar to the summer events held by OSNZ up to the end of the 1980s. She came up with the bones of a residential field course, the first of which was held in January 1999 and proved to be a truly momentous development for MNT.

Fifteen courses later it is well established as one of our flagships. Among other things it has been a phenomenally successful recruitment vehicle. Six of our current council members are graduates of the course as is our current chair. Membership secretary Len Taylor, Maria Stables-Page and Alister Harlow are further recruits. Many participants in the courses expressed a need for more time on shorebird identification so, as well as scheduling as many outdoor sessions as possible, we also began running separate weekend workshops on Wader ID. Bev's close involvement with monitoring New Zealand Dotterels was also instrumental in the first Dotterel Management Course in September 2003, another enduring event. Other courses have followed, such as Photography, Sketching and Nature Journaling.

### THE EVENTS

I look back on an extraordinary range of events and activities hosted at the centre. Memorable among our own events were the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary lun-



Taking the shorebird message from Miranda to the world; another successful field course.

cheon in 2005, the Field Course 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion and the World Wetlands Day commemoration in February 2003 at which we hosted 170 people for lunch. Then there was this year's BioBlitz, so far the biggest of all. The centre has been used for gatherings of MAF fisheries inspectors, Carter Holt forestry managers; Ngati Whaanaunga Trust Board, DoC staff; Conservation Boards, DoC botanists, students from Thames High, Girl Guide leaders, school science advisors, students of drug and alcohol counselling and CYPs social workers. We have hosted family reunions, Tai Chi retreats and a workshop on South American shamanism. There have been weddings and a funeral, and a number of birthday celebrations from 50<sup>th</sup>s to one 90<sup>th</sup>. We've had Scottish country dancers, macramé, crafts and machine knitting clubs, the Society of Recorder Players, tramping clubs, photography groups, cheese making workshops, the Turua Garden Circle, Pukekohe Vintage Tractor Club, and Rolls Royce and Bentley, Armstrong Siddely and Morgan car clubs. Other groups include Buenos Aires travel agents, Auckland and Manurewa Historical Societies, Auckland Officer's Club, and dozens of Probus and 60s-Up clubs.

One learns very quickly the importance of the centre's bookings diary. But even when the diary is correct, it is nevertheless advisable to expect at all times the unexpected. One day I expected a busload of 60s-Up from Paeroa followed 90 minutes later by a Whangarei travel club. The latter arrived on time, the former an hour late and in between a busload from Hamilton turned up quite unexpectedly. All three groups received a talk but left in

their wake a somewhat weary centre manager. On another occasion I was expecting a bus at 1.30pm and another at 3.00 pm. The latter arrived at 2.55 pm, the former at 3.05 pm. And it was raining outside! On another wet day during the September holidays in 1997 a bus carrying 60 kids from Papakura pulled in having been rained out of their holiday activity in the Hunua. Once they were established in the Sibson Room the teacher announced he was off to Kaiua to order their fish and chips for lunch. Before I knew it I was babysitting en masse.

#### THE FLYWAY

Midway through 1994 Council discussed an invitation to attend a workshop at Kushiro in Japan to discuss issues impacting migratory birds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The Trust finances were consolidating by then, but any significant expenditure still needed very careful consideration. Thus it was a major decision to pay for Adrian Riegen to attend, although as it happened we subsequently received some funding from Lotteries as well as a significant contribution by a Trust member. Looking back, I believe we were always going to be represented, and it is a decision that has had massive implications for MNT as it marked the beginning of our direct engagement with the Flyway. While we were still a small community group based on the Firth of Thames, we now had interests that were global in scale.

The first major outcome of Kushiro was the launch, at Brisbane in March 1996, of the Shorebird Site Network (now incorporated in the Flyway Partnership). With MNT the only New Zealand representative at Kushiro

(our Government did not join until 2011), it seemed a natural step that we should also be at Brisbane, and the Trust funded both Adrian and me to attend. This was only the second time I had received employer assistance with travel. Years earlier, when working on a report on road accidents involving children for the Health Department, I received assistance to investigate the separation of pedestrians and traffic in the new sub-division at Whitby: a return rail ticket Wellington to Porirua!

In the years since, of course, Trust members have been involved in activities throughout the Flyway - in Australia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Korea, Taiwan, China, Japan and Alaska - and given the scarcity of resources much of this has been self-funded. Since Brisbane in 1996 I have made four expeditions to Yalu Jiang; two to South Korea with the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project; a flyway symposium at Mokpo; site manager workshops at Philip Island and the Port of Brisbane; the inaugural Taipei Bird Fair and opening of Kuan Du National Park attended by people from Flyway sites in Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia; a Flyway Partnership meeting at Palembang, Indonesia; and, in 2008, the immense privilege of spending several months among breeding godwits on the tundra of western Alaska. All that has been most rewarding personally, and together with the experiences of other members it has given MNT a good understanding of the Flyway and issues directly impacting our birds. Our advocacy for these birds is thus well informed and credible. There have also been several significant moments, each a milestone in itself:

First was my introduction to the other end of the Flyway which happened without leaving home. In 1996, Pavel Tomkovich from the University Museum of Moscow, a leading authority on tundra-breeding shorebirds, gave several talks at Miranda, illustrated by stunning slides of the Siberian tundra and its nesting birds. It was extraordinary to hear from someone at the other end of the equation, who had observed the display flights and soaring song of some of “our” birds, and witnessed the first flight of chicks that, in a matter of weeks, could be setting off southward towards Australia and New Zealand. In 2004 I stood on the seawall at Erdagou, Yalu Jiang, watching huge flocks of shorebirds wheeling over the tidal flats. Of course I had seen this phenomenon many times before but nothing on this scale. There were perhaps 40-50,000 birds in front of me, and the fact that most of them were Bar-tailed Godwits – many of them our birds – added to the experience. These birds and I had both travelled many thousands of kilometres to be here and I quietly celebrated this sublime connection. Three years later at Saemangeum I witnessed at first hand the outcome of habitat destruction on a colossal scale. Standing on a site where, just 12 months earlier I had watched tens of thousands of Great Knots as they wheeled and twisted over the mudflats, now I could count barely 600. At Old Chevak, Alaska, I saw the nest changeover of a pair of godwits, confirming incubation had commenced. It was an enthralling moment. I had now seen godwits at all stages of their migratory cycle. Moreover, I had seen the nest of Kuaka. On Friday afternoon 7 September 2007 I was out on the mudflats beyond the end of the outer spit waiting for a TV3 News crew. They were coming in response to a stellar bird that, at that very moment, was heading south to Miranda. As I waited I received a phone call from Lee Tibbits in Anchorage to say, “She is currently 480km north of Miranda, just to the east of North Cape.” She, of course, was E7. My communication with Lee over 12,000km was instantaneous, yet it seemed less remarkable than the feat

of this bird that had taken just eight days to get here.

### THE EVOLVING ROLE

The MNT I joined was not a conservation group as such. Indeed there appeared to be a strong diffidence among key members about becoming too involved with conservation campaigns. This was due in part perhaps to the backgrounds of some of the early founders whose primary focus was on bird study and raising public awareness through education. Perhaps it was also due to the fact that, back then, people were far less likely to become involved in environment campaigns.

Over time, and due in large part to our international engagement, this began to change. We are well established as a source of expertise and information about migratory birds. Given pressures of coastal development and other issues, the Trust is increasingly approached for comment and consultation. Thus, whatever the original objectives of the trust may have been, we cannot avoid a role in conservation advocacy. We began to realise that not taking a stand, not speaking out on certain issues risked our credibility. The phrase “advocacy for shorebirds and their habitats” found itself placed alongside our original objectives.

There is now within MNT a deep body of knowledge of just what shorebirds require, of just how various issues are negatively affecting them. We can state strongly, based on solid science, what shorebirds need; how certain developments or activity can affect them; and, in some cases, what the likely consequences at a population level are likely to be. In view of this there is a clear case for MNT to play a more prominent role in addressing national issues impacting shorebird habitats. For example, with over 40 per cent of the total Wrybill population migrat-

ing to Miranda each year, we have a direct and compelling interest in land use practices and water management policies in the central South Island.

But looking ahead a significant new focus beckons, one that fits neatly with our core objective: to keep the birds coming. A number of factors, primarily land tenure and lack of resources have, in the past, precluded us from active habitat management. Ours has primarily been a passive role: providing visitor facilities and interpretation, assisting where possible with research projects. We now have the opportunity to actively manage the QEII covenanted block where the hides are located. There is potential for habitat enhancement and/or restoration projects that could eventually encompass more than the coastal block. This would represent a major new direction for us, albeit one that closely aligns with existing interests. For example, there is great potential for active research projects to run in conjunction with habitat management/restoration. The recent BioBlitz can be seen as laying a foundation stone for this.

### THE PEOPLE

The true strength of this place, beyond its location and its prodigious birdlife, are the people, the colossal voluntary efforts of so many of who remain its backbone. At the very beginning I resolved to not get involved with grounds maintenance. It was the right decision, despite the odd moment of discomfort as I sat inside and watched volunteer gardeners putting in long hours. The centre and its grounds are what they are today through such efforts.

But even more significant to our daily operations are two further groups: those who, ably coordinated by Maria, assist with staffing the centre in my absence; and those who serve on Council. I wish to acknowledge three Council members in particular who have been active throughout my entire time: secretary Will Perry, treasurer, chairman and much else, David Lawrie, and Adrian Riegen who, among many other things, is primarily responsible for our engagement with the Flyway. Then, for more than a decade, there has been the immense contribution of Gillian Vaughan, first as reliever, then magazine editor and currently Trust chair. 

### THE BIRDS

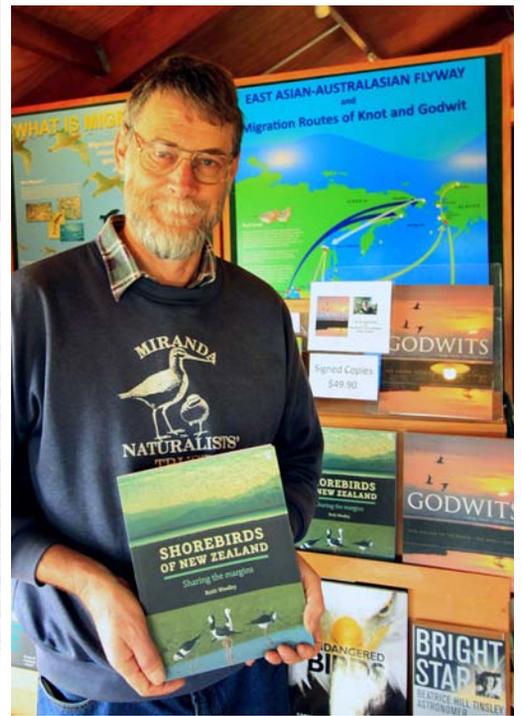
What has happened to the birds during the past 20 years? Figures from the annual Firth of Thames Census speak for themselves:

	1993	2011
Bar-tailed godwit	7955	5750
Red Knot	3043	2820
SIPO	22,666	10,780
Wrybill	2500	2200
Pied Stilt	6049	3744



HIGHLIGHTS from 20 years at Miranda (clockwise from top left): Kuaka nesting in the Arctic tundra; Kuaka eggs at Old Chevak, Alaska; proud author with his two books, *Godwits* (2009) and *Shorebirds of New Zealand* (2012); massed shorebirds at Yalu Jiang, China; E7 ready for her record-breaking flight.

Photos / mostly Keith Woodley



## Great gift ideas from the Shorebird Centre Shop



Godwit or Wrybill pottery by Linda Harris. Mugs \$25.90, Plates \$19.90

Native bird soft toys with authentic bird calls \$17.50



Miranda Shorebird Centre caps \$24.50. Beanies \$19.90



Kiteboarders in action. Fortunately on this occasion there were no shorebird roosts nearby. Photo / Chris Eagles

## Kiteboarders disrupt shorebird roosts

Local body politicians are being urged to protect shorebird roosts from the disturbance caused by enthusiastic Olympic kiteboard hopefuls

The Auckland Council has been asked to protect important shorebird roosts on the Manukau Harbour from the new Olympic sport of kiteboarding.

A submission on the draft Auckland Unitary Plan, presented on MNT's behalf by immediate-past-chairman David Lawrie, has urged the council to prohibit public access to roosting areas such as the Elletts Beach shellbanks and Clarks Bay.

The issue was raised at the MNT annual meeting by Gwenda Pulham who said since kiteboarding had become an Olympic sport it had increased in popularity and conflicts with shorebirds had increased. This was particularly noticeable on the Kaipara and Manukau Harbours with several important species, including the highly endangered fairy terns, being affected.

Retiring MNT Council member Phil Hammond agreed, saying he had seen Kidds No 3 shellbank covered in kitesurfer gear with the result that all the shorebirds that normally roosted there were chased away. When this was explained to the kiteboarders they couldn't see a problem.

Betty Seddon pointed out there were already areas zoned for water skiing and it seemed logical to do the same for kiteboarding.

David Lawrie told the meeting the draft Unitary Plan for Auckland did identify some roosts but contained no rules that would allow the Auckland Council to control kitesurfing. David

said he was working on a submission to the plan which would include both the issue of kiteboarding and the threat posed by urban development near shorebird feeding and roosting areas.

The meeting agreed MNT should investigate and, at the following Council meeting, chair Gillian Vaughan said she would contact the national body for kitesurfing to initiate discussions.

The submission David subsequently made on the plan pointed out that the Manukau Harbour was the most significant shorebird habitat in New Zealand because of the extensive mudflats containing high quality food. "However," he pointed out, "at high tide the number of secure roosts is very restricted and there are currently only three major roost sites still available around the harbour edge . . ."

The submission noted approvingly that the draft unitary plan had identified the the roosting site adjacent to Elletts Beach as "a significant ecological area". But, unfortunately, the equally significant shell banks off Clarks Bay had not been given similar recognition.

The MNT submission said increased protection of roosts was necessary because there was "a growing trend for increased human activity on these shell banks during the high tide period. This is the part of the tidal cycle where the birds are most at risk because if they are disturbed from the roost sites there is nowhere else for them to settle."

In particular, the submission noted, "a recent trend has been the use of the shell banks as a launching pad area for kiteboarders. This is a real problem with the shell banks adjacent to Elletts Beach where there is a kiteboarding school operating on most of the high tides through the summer period. This activity is totally inappropriate on such an important site and we feel very strongly that it should be prohibited.

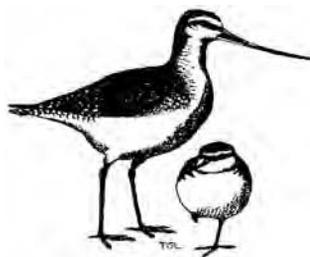
"It has been observed that the presence of kiteboarders in this area has already changed the usage pattern of the shellbanks, with birds generally preferring not to roost on that section of beach. On one day a breeding NZ dotterel (a nationally vulnerable species) was observed to abandon its nest after being kept away by kite boarders for over four hours."

Because of this, MNT urged the Council to provide a buffer around the coastline adjacent to shorebird roosts and to prohibit access to the actual coastline in the vicinity of Elletts Beach and Clarks Bay.

The MNT submission also expressed concern about proposals to rezone land to provide for increased urbanization around the shores of the Manukau Harbour. 

Godfrey Godwit's Word Scramble answers: Mayfly adults, caddisfly larvae, beetles, flies and spiders, crabs.

# MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST



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Lee, Wendy Hare, Eila Lawton,  
Emma Pearson, Phil Hammond,  
Trudy Lane, Ann and Ray  
Buckmaster

## Miranda News

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

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## See the birds

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

## Low cost accommodation

The Shorebird Centre has bunkrooms for hire and two self-contained units: Beds cost \$20 per night for members and \$25 for non-members. Self-contained units are \$70w for members and \$95 for non-members. For further information contact the Shorebird Centre

## Become a member

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

## Bequests

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

## Want to be involved?

### Friends of Miranda

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

### Long term Volunteers

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

### Firth of Thames Census

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

### Contribute to the Magazine

If you've got something you've written, a piece of research, a poem or a great photo send it in to *Miranda News*. If you want to discuss your ideas contact Jim Eagles at eagles@clear.net.nz.

### Help in the Miranda Garden

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



While visiting Little Waihi we noticed a New Zealand Dotterel having a bath in a pool of water and it was minus the toes on one foot. After finishing its toilet the dotterel flew over to the sand and settled next to a Red-necked Stint. We took about 50 photos of them from about 6m away so it was well worth the trip.

**Allan and Wendy Fox Omokoroa**

