

# Miranda News

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## Ray of hope

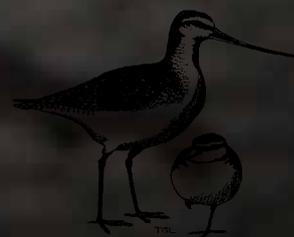
A record number of chicks raises hopes for the survival of the kaki

## Saving our birds' southern home

Restoring Canterbury's crucial braided rivers

## Signs of change

New interpretative signs tell the story of Miranda





# Let's go grockleslopping

A great new sport that helps the shorebirds

Welcome to the new sport of grockleslopping. It has yet to be chosen as an Olympic event – surely only a matter of time – but growing numbers are enjoying its unique thrill.

Essentially the sport consists of finding a large area of deep, soft mud, walking out into it and seeing how many young mangroves you can pull out.

A recent grockleslopping event at Miranda saw seven eager competitors, presided over by chair Gillian Vaughan from the shellbank, where she pulled out weeds.

Former champion Tony Habraken set the pace by zooming out from the shore on his hands and knees – “don’t try to walk,” he shouted to the beginners, “or you’ll just sink in” – and thereafter could be seen in the distance gliding effortlessly across the mudflats.

Unfortunately Keith Woodley did not take this advice and quickly became stuck in a particularly deep area of mud. It took some time to extricate him by which time he was exhausted.

Newcomers Ray and Ann Buckmaster had brought a couple of planks with ropes attached but these quickly proved useless as supports (though one

was helpful in rescuing Keith). Anne developed her own technique which involved falling over and laughing.

Another newcomer, Jim Eagles, strode boldly out until one of his shoes came off a metre down in the mud.

Thereafter he went barefoot and crawled on his knees.

Old hand Adrian Riegen came equipped with a machete and a small board with a handle which, until it broke, proved very effective in supporting his weight on the mud.

But the star of the day was Ian Southey who wore a special pair of mud boots – “they’re a bit like snowshoes except they have fins which open out when you put your feet down

and fold up when you lift them up” – which allowed him to stroll across the mud while everyone else . . . slogged.

Despite the mishaps, participants did manage to clear mangroves from an impressively large strip of mudflat in front of both hides, vital to preserve the area as a roost for shorebirds.

The sport’s name was devised by Adrian. “I think I suggested grockleslopping from grockle ( a slow driver who just wanders around) and slopping (from slopping around in mud).”



Front cover: Kaki chick.

Back cover: New Zealand dotterel at Hot Water Beach

Photo / Liz Brown

Photos / Michael Horton

# The return to Miranda of the long-distance migrants is always a thrill

## Keith Woodley honoured for his work on behalf of shorebirds

Witnessing the return of long-distance migrants each year never grows stale – especially when the birds in view are juvenile godwits.

Their spangled plumage sets them apart as does, immediately after arrival, their drooping wings.

Then, when you consider the birds in front of you were, just four months ago, still inside eggs somewhere on the Alaskan tundra, it is never less than an enthralling encounter. There are some of these juveniles scattered through the flock of several thousand birds now back in residence at Miranda. Among them is



a scrawny Black-tailed Godwit (which doesn't yet resemble the handsome adult in the photo from Wikimedia) and a couple of Curlew Sandpipers. The Shore Plover that spent last summer here has returned.

Several Pukeko are in residence around Widgery Lake, along with at least two Mallard families and a White Heron has become an occasional visitor to the Centre grounds. There have been no recent reports of the Taramaire Creek Dabchick. But the bittern has been seen around what is now known as the Bittern Pool.

Keith Woodley

MNT manager Keith Woodley has been named as one of three inaugural winners of the Jim Holdaway Environmental Leadership Awards presented by the Hauraki Gulf Forum.

Keith received his award, in the form of a tokotoko or carved walking stick, for raising awareness of the shorebirds of the Firth of Thames and the environment they depend on.

At the same forum meeting awards were also presented to Dr Rochelle Constantine (who will be guest speaker at next year's agm) for her advocacy of the Hauraki Gulf's Brydes whale population and Chris Gaskin for his advocacy for seabirds and, most notably, a recent research project that confirmed the breeding place of the New Zealand storm petrel.

### Arctic Migrants

Bar-tailed Godwit	c3500
Black-tailed Godwit	1
Red Knot	c1900
Turnstone	6
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	3
Red-necked Stint	2
Pacific Golden Plover	9
Curlew Sandpiper	2
Greater Sand Plover	

### New Zealand Species

Wrybill	
NZ Dotterel	
Banded Dotterel	
SI Pied Oystercatcher	
Variable Oystercatcher	
Black-fronted Tern	1
Caspian Tern	
Black-billed Gull	c260
Shore Plover	1
Royal Spoonbill	41
Banded Rail	
Bittern	1
White Heron	1

## What's on at the Shorebird Centre

### 26-27 November, Wader ID Weekend

Learn about wader identification and other interesting aspects of waders. Tutors Keith Woodley, Adrian Riegen and Gillian Vaughan For details contact Keith.

### 30 November, population trends among migratory waders

9am-1pm, Dr Richard Fuller of the University of Queensland reports on a groundbreaking analysis of New Zealand and Australian wader counts. If you would like to attend contact the Centre to register your interest.

### 14-20 January, the Miranda Field Course

Now in its 15th year the Miranda Field Course is perfect for any naturalist. It embraces geology, botany, and entomology, but with a focus on birds, identification and catching, plus the ecology of some of our shorebirds. Limited spaces left. For details contact the Centre.

### 9 March, Autumn Migration Day

11am, Adrian Riegen on Waders in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Birdwatching afterwards (2.30pm high tide).

### 25 May, Annual General Meeting

11am Have your say on the future of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust. Guest speaker Dr Rochelle Constantine talking on Whales in the Hauraki Gulf. Birding from 2pm (high tide at 4.30pm).

### 22 June, OSNZ Firth of Thames Wader Survey

Phone Tony Habraken (09 2385284) for details.

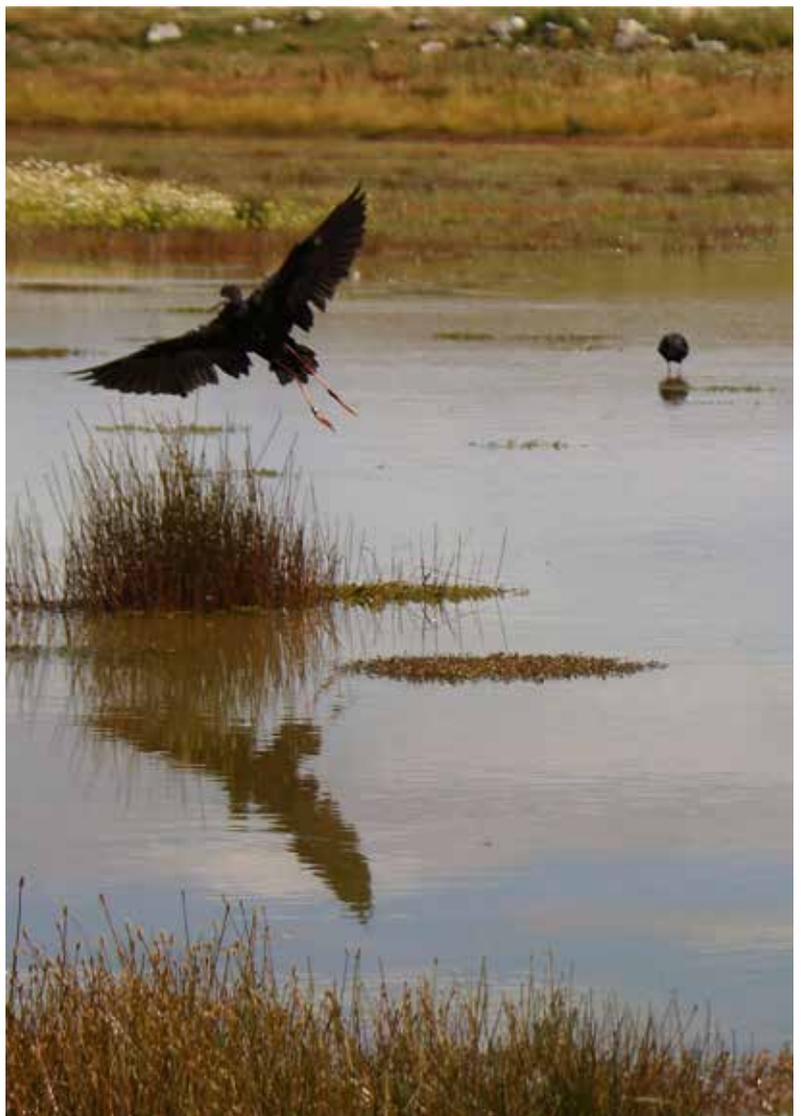
### 23 August, Mid-Winter Pot Luck Dinner

10am-2pm working bee. 6pm Guest speakers John Stewart and Kay Milton: Black bin bags, plastic magpies and quail eggs – the ups and downs of life for terns on the Copeland Islands in Northern Ireland.



SURVIVING (anti-clockwise from top): A rare sight of a flock of black stilts in flight; a nest amid the puddles of a high country tarn on Braemar Station; a cute chick thriving in the captive rearing centre at Twizel; an adult takes flight.

Photos / Phil Guilford, Liz Brown, Cody Thyne



# Black stilts brought back from the brink of extinction

A record breeding season has confirmed that New Zealand's rarest shorebird, the kaki or black stilt, has been brought back from the brink of extinction. But, as **Jim Eagles** reports, there's still a long way to go before the bird's future is assured.

A record breeding season has boosted hopes of saving the critically endangered kaki.

When the kaki management programme began in 1981, numbers had declined to just 23 known birds.

But as of the end of February this year the Department of Conservation says there were at least 61 adults, 55 sub-adults and 18 juveniles in the wild. In addition, 31 juveniles were released in January and around 90 juveniles raised in captivity over winter were released a few weeks ago. So there could now be as many as 200 kaki.

That's great news but, as DOC's Kaki Recovery Team warns, "Kaki recovery has still a long way to go. Management to date has halted the decline and is maintaining the current population. But without ongoing management kaki would be functionally extinct within six years."

The main thrust of the programme is the collection of kaki eggs in the wild for safe incubation at the Captive Rearing Centre in Twizel – along with the eggs produced by five pairs in an aviary – for subsequent release.

In August last year, for instance, 68 sub-adults and one adult kaki produced through the programme were liberated in two releases at Mailbox Inlet near the Cass River.

Twenty-five sub-adults from the first release were provided with supplementary food for 10 weeks with 24 birds feeding regularly at the release site. All but one of these was alive at the end of the feeding period.

Forty-three sub-adults and one adult from the second release were provided with supplementary food for seven weeks with 40 birds feeding regularly. Thirty-seven of these were sighted at the end of the feeding period.

Six months later, at the end of February, 44 of the 68 sub-adults were known to be still alive, a success rate



LOOKING GOOD: An adult black stilt, or kaki, in prime condition.  
Photo / Emily Sancha

of at least 65 per cent.

That's a good year for the kaki. But last spring, when it came time to find nests in the normal riverbed and wetland sites, DOC rangers couldn't find many. Had the population collapsed? Fortunately not. A particularly rainy start to the season had led to wet areas and ponds forming on private land which made attractive nesting sites for the kaki.

"We put the word out that we needed help to locate adult breeding pairs and got a fantastic response," says biodiversity ranger Simone Cleland. "We had one farmer who rang up to say he had found four eggs and he'd wait until we picked them up before moving his sheep into the paddock."

"Another farmer spotted a likely nest from the seat of his tractor. He called up straight away so that we could rescue the eggs and he could carry on working!"

It wasn't only farmers that responded to DOC's request for help. Sam Staley, the caretaker stationed at Lake Tekapo Military Camp, rang up on several occasions during the season to report the location of juvenile kaki.

Thanks to the assistance from the high country farmers of the Waitaki and Mackenzie Basins a record 23 productive kaki breeding pairs were located, and eggs were taken from 18, while five pairs were left unmanaged. Another three pairs were observed copulating and nest-site selecting. Between 122 and 136 eggs were laid by the 23 pairs and 112 of these were artificially incubated. Of the 112 eggs, 88 hatched and 84 fledged in captivity. In addition, it is known that four clutches of at least one egg, one clutch of at least two eggs and another clutch of four eggs were produced by the pairs not being managed.

On top of that, the five captive pairs



Out into the world: Juvenile kaki are released at Lake Tekapo.

Photo / Dean Nelson

(three in Twizel and two at Peacock Springs in Christchurch) produced a total of 60 eggs.

With 172 eggs all up it was a hectic time for aviculturist Liz Brown and her team at the captive rearing centre. “We managed to successfully incubate and hatch 134 chicks, of which 125 survived to fledge – well up on our previous best of 111.”

So many chicks were produced, in fact, that they exceeded the capacity of the aviaries.

As a result, 31 juveniles - along with two adults - were released at the Tekapo Scientific Reserve back in January. Supplementary food was provided for seven weeks with 25 birds feeding regularly at the release site for the first 12 days and 16 remaining until the end of the feeding period.

Two of the juveniles were later sighted on the Ashley River north of Christchurch. Another five were recently seen on the Ahuriri River delta.

Both adults stayed at the release site for the first two days. One was sighted at the aviaries four days post-release and was last seen with a pied stilt in mid-February at Lake Poaka.

A bit over a month later, at the end of February, of the birds released at Tekapo, 18 juveniles (58%) and one adult (50%) were known to be alive.

The remaining 90-odd kaki juveniles, which were raised in captivity over winter, were released last month on the Tasman River and at Mailbox

Inlet. It’s still too early to know how well they’ve done but early indications are that there have been issues with falcons on the Tasman while the Mailbox kaki have done well. And the crucial issue is, of course, how many will survive to breed.

As recovery programme head Dean Nelson says, “We’ve got to the point where we are regularly producing over 100 chicks a year. . . Some years they have good survival rates and sometimes they don’t. There’s no pattern to it.”

Work on improving the survival rate continues. Two new aviaries have been constructed at Peacock Springs in Christchurch by the Isaac’s Wildlife

and Conservation Trust, both dedicated to kaki, with the ability to hold five breeding pairs in the future.

The Kaki Recovery Team is also investigating other sites that may be suitable for kaki. The Mackenzie Basin is a harsh environment and there are thoughts that kaki may in fact do better in a less hostile environment given the chance. But, for now, maximising egg/chick production and increasing adult survival in the Mackenzie remains the focus.

Regular updates on the Kaki Recovery Programme are posted on its facebook page at [www.facebook.com/pages/Kaki-Recovery-Programme/145994298749770](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kaki-Recovery-Programme/145994298749770) 



HANGING OUT: Juvenile kaki.

Photo / Phil Guilford



FRIENDS FROM THE SOUTH (FROM LEFT): Black-billed gull, South Island pied oystercatcher, banded dotterel and wrybill.

# Restoring Canterbury's braided rivers to save Miranda's birds

The future of regular visitors to the Firth of Thames, like the black-billed gull, South Island pied oystercatcher, banded dotterel, wrybill and black-fronted tern is closely linked to efforts to preserve Canterbury's braided rivers. In this article Environment Canterbury's **Mimouk Hannan** gives a progress report. In a following article early Miranda birdwatcher **Nick Ledgard** describes the specific work being done by the Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group and BRaid.

New Zealand is blessed with an abundance of braided rivers, which are scarce on a worldwide scale. These naturally rare ecosystems are prominent features on the Canterbury landscape which contains nearly two-thirds of all of New Zealand's braided rivers. The region has been shaped by tectonic uplift, creating the Southern Alps and foothills and resulting in a landscape of highly folded and shattered greywacke rock. Flood events transport this gravel down braided rivers from the mountains to the Canterbury Plains creating a complex network of shingle bars, berms and braids.

Braided rivers have gravel beds composed of accumulations of different sediment sizes, from sand to boulders, and this variation produces a variety of habitats containing unique ecosystems, which support a wide range of species with their different lifecycle stages. Riffles can be highly productive and important feeding habitats for fish and birds, as well as helping to maintain good water quality by aerating the water and controlling temperature.

Outside of the channel, the braided

river environment is suited to many species of birds and provides important habitat for invertebrates. Gravel that reaches a river mouth and is not discharged to the sea is stored in gravel barriers adjacent to, and across, river mouths creating lagoons and hapua – further important areas for birds and biodiversity generally.

The significance of these habitats and the specialised species that use them makes braided rivers important both nationally and internationally. Canterbury's braided rivers contain virtually all the breeding habitat for the threatened wrybill. They also provide an abundant supply of food and critical nesting habitat for black-fronted tern, black stilt, banded dotterel, black-billed gull and Southern pied oystercatcher. Many of these species are highly adapted to the unusual and ever changing characteristics of braided rivers, which altogether provide habitat for 26 species of native birds – 80 species if associated wetlands and estuaries are included.

The majority of the key braided river species are classified as threatened and face increased pressures due

to predation, invasion of habitat by introduced weeds, human disturbance and the growing demand on water for power generation, irrigation and recreation.

Probably the greatest threat is predatory animals (eg stoats, weasels, cats and hedgehogs), which prey on eggs, chicks and adults. Riverbeds are very susceptible to a wide range of weeds, particularly hard-seeded legumes, with some of the more serious weeds being lupin, gorse, broom, blackberry and crack willow.

Humans use riverbeds for recreation (ie swimming/trail biking/4WD-ing/fishing) which can damage plant communities, destroy nests and disturb nesting birds. Other human impacts (ie deforestation, dams, stop banks, willow plantings) have changed the magnitude of flooding, sediment loads, and fire frequency. Abstraction of water for agriculture is an increasingly looming threat to the flow dynamics of braided rivers, as is gravel extraction, both of which change natural patterns, creating deep single straight channels and reducing river flows which then allow weeds to flourish.



LIFE IN THE UPPER RANGITATA (from left): Reflective wrybill; South Island pied oystercatcher;

Under the Resource Management Act and Soil Conservation and Rivers Control Act, Environment Canterbury (ECan) has responsibility for many aspects of Canterbury's braided river management, including water quantity and quality monitoring, biosecurity, managing flood risks and gravel demand. ECan also manages the Ashley/Rakahuri and Waimakariri Regional Parks and undertakes or assists with braided river bird monitoring and surveys, funds projects to protect and restore braided river ecosystems, and supports community groups.

Much of ECan's work is done under the Canterbury Water Management Strategy (CWMS) which came into being in 2010. Under this programme, ten zone committees and a regional committee have been set up to guide water management in the region. The CWMS explicitly recognises the importance of braided rivers to the region's biodiversity, economy and social and cultural well-being. It is a long-term strategy, setting out targets for water management over the next 30 years, with one of its goals being to 'maintain the natural character, processes and ecological health of braided rivers'.

The CWMS contains the following targets relating to braided river birds:

- Restore the braided nature of the river and braided river function.

- Increased information on the current numbers and distributions of key breeding river bird species.

- Steady or increasing breeding populations in upper catchments.

- Increased breeding habitat for river bird species.

As part of the CWMS, a Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Programme has been established to protect and restore freshwater biodiversity and terrestrial biodiversity which may be affected by water use in Canterbury. The programme has two main streams – planning matters and on-the-ground projects. To implement the on-the-ground projects over five million dollars worth of new funding over five years has been made available via a programme known as Immediate Steps. To date, about \$1.55 million has been allocated to over 100 projects.

Funding from Immediate Steps and the Environment Canterbury Biodiversity Fund have contributed to projects such as weed control in the lower Conway to improve braided river bird habitat; predator trapping along sections of the Ashburton and Ashley Rivers; a bird survey on the upper Waimakariri River; the Braided River Flagship Project on the Upper Rakaia and Upper Rangitata, and a training course on braided river bird management. This course is organised by BRAid Inc, a community group

formed to bring together various parties involved in braided river management and conservation, with its aim being to "protect, enhance and restore braided river ecosystems".

Immediate Steps funding has also contributed to the Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group's work for the last two years. The dedicated and passionate work of the group over the past 10 years has meant that they have averaged over 4000 traps night per season and decreased catches per 100 trap nights from 1.5 in 2004-05 to 0.78 in 2011-12. The group keeps good records on birds present on the Ashley-Rakahuri river through an annual survey which is showing that the key braided river bird species on the river are at the very least holding their own - in contrast to many other rivers which are showing declines. This is a great example of how the CWMS funding can support community group initiatives to achieve biodiversity gains.

The Braided River Regional Flagship project has been allocated \$540,000 over five years by the CWMS Regional Committee for work in the upper reaches of the Rakaia and Rangitata rivers. This complements existing work being done in the catchments, and focuses on weed control and protection of wetlands and spring fed streams. The work is done in collaboration with a number of



banded dotterel; wrybill chick.

Photos / Keith Woodley

other stakeholders including landcare groups, Fish and Game, Forest and Bird, Runanga, crown landowners, local landowners, local authorities, and power companies.

The importance of the upper Rakaia and Rangitata Rivers is due to their high degree of naturalness and large area of river bed, which covers over 50,000 hectares combined. These upper catchments, along with the Ashburton Lakes wetlands (<10,000 hectares) form part of the largest habitat for aquatic birdlife in New Zealand.

It supports all the water and wading bird species representative of New Zealand's braided rivers and wetlands (over 80 species), plus one bat, four lizard species and more than 20 threatened plant species with forms especially adapted to braided rivers. In excess of 80% of the wrybill's breeding population breed in these catchments. Another endemic species breeding in the same area is the black-fronted tern, which recent research has shown to be threatened over much of their range, with a predicted decline in low flow rivers of 50% over the next 30 years.

DOC has also been heavily involved through its braided river bird survey programme and its O Tu Wharekai Wetland Restoration Project, which is a major initiative covering the Ash-

burton Lakes and upper Rangitata. A part of O Tu Wharekai is to monitor wrybill breeding survival on the upper Rangitata River. After three years of this work by DOC, Contact Wind Ltd has taken over the monitoring as part of mitigation for a wind farm, and it will be undertaking predator control in future to boost the breeding success of both wrybill and South Island Pied Oystercatcher.

Beginning in the 2011-2012 season DOC has shifted its efforts into the upper Rakaia and is currently monitoring wrybill abundance, distribution and productivity, as well as local populations of Southern black-backed gull and harrier hawk. This baseline monitoring will continue until the 2013 breeding season and will be followed by a control programme of aerial predators if monitoring indicates this is the correct course of action.

In addition to the above, other actions underway in the Upper Rakaia and Upper Rangitata include weed surveys and control in riverbeds, predator trapping, vehicle management, a wilding tree control programme and stream fencing. This work involves ECan, F&G, LINZ, DOC, community groups and private individuals.

Project River Recovery in the Upper Waitaki Basin was established in 1990, to compensate for the impacts

of hydroelectric developments on braided rivers and wetlands. It is funded through a compensatory funding agreement between DOC and Meridian Energy Limited. The prime goal is to maintain and restore braided river and wetland habitat in the Upper Waitaki Basin for the benefit of its native plants and animals, some of which are only found in or breed in this region. The works undertaken include intensive weed and predator control, construction of wetlands, and research and monitoring programmes.

Exotic weeds are being controlled over 33,000 ha of riverbed in the upper Waitaki, with Russell lupin, broom, gorse, wilding conifers and crack willow being the key weed species targeted. Highest priority is given to preventing weed invasion of the near pristine upper rivers above the Basin's uppermost hydro lakes. Research to improve how weeds are managed in braided rivers is also being undertaken, as is an eradication programme for yellow tree lupin and buddleia, plus a surveillance programme to spot any new invasive weeds.

A five-year video camera study to determine the causes of nest failure for three braided river bird species (banded dotterel/turiwhatu, black stilt/kaki and black-fronted tern/tarapirohe) has confirmed that introduced



**BRAIDED HABITAT:** An aerial view of the lower Ashley-Rakahuri river - a core breeding area for wrybills - as it passes through Rangiora.  
Photo / Nick Ledgard

predators – particularly feral cats, ferrets and hedgehogs – are the main cause of nest failures. As a result, Project River Recovery and the Kaki Recovery Group are working together to test a catchment-wide predator trapping regime in the Tasman River. The breeding success of wrybill/ngutu pare, banded dotterel/turiwhatu and black-fronted tern/tarapirohe is being monitored over five years to assess whether this level of predator control is effective. On a more localised front in the Ohau river, Project River Recovery is also working on developing an effective predator trapping regime to protect black-fronted tern/tarapirohe colonies. If successful, this regime will be tested on riverbed colonies elsewhere. A survey of plant, invertebrates and native fish communities in braided riverbeds in the upper Waitaki Basin has also been undertaken. In the Lower Waitaki black-fronted tern numbers appear to be stable but other native species appear to be declining in numbers similar to the national trends.

While all this may indicate that there is plenty of work being undertaken on braided river ecosystems and biodiversity in Canterbury, it is important to remember that the area of concern is over 140,000 hectares and the issues are complex with multiple factors, agencies and landowners involved. What has been done to date is a mere drop in the river, so to speak and if gains are to be made this work must keep momentum. In the meantime we can take heart from the development of plans such as the CWMS within which a high priority goal is "maintaining the natural character, processes and ecological health of braided rivers". If this goal can be met, we will be ensuring the sustainable future of our unique braided rivers, birds and their threatened ecosystems. 

# Caring for wrybills down south

**Nick Ledgard**, who learned about birdwatching from Dick Sibson, outlines the work of the Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group and BRaid, both of which he chairs.

Back in my Auckland schooldays during the late 1960s and early 1970s I was fortunate to have Dick (Sibi) Sibson as a mentor and teacher. He led us on many memorable trips – beach combing for storm-wrecked birds on the west coast, banding petrels and shearwaters on the islands of the Hauraki Gulf, and observing shorebirds at places such as Karaka and Puketutu on the Manukau Harbour and Miranda on the Firth of Thames.

I vividly recall watching the flying ribbons of wrybill down at Miranda as they manoeuvred through the air before finding roosts on the gleaming white shellbanks.

We tried installing a hide on these banks, in the form of a buried water tank with a 44-gallon drum welded on the top as an observation conning tower. Once installed, some of us watched from the shore as the water raced in across the mudflats and birds started to settle at a cautionary distance. However, much to our amusement, before our two colleagues inside could get any close-up views, the increasing water pressure popped the tank out of the shellbank like a mature splinter from squeezed skin.

In the early 1970s, I moved to Rangiora in the South Island to pursue a career in forest research. Commitments to work, a life-style block of land and a growing family left little time for recreational activities, and most of the spare time I had was spent hunting, fishing and canoeing. However, my ornithological background was such that I always kept a watch-out for birds (remaining a member of the OSNZ), and I was very aware that the nearby Ashley River was the breeding place for a good population of shorebirds, including the wrybill.

On excursions down the river to canoe, fish and hunt rabbits in the spring, one could not help but attract attention from the frequent nesting colonies of black-billed gulls and black-fronted terns. A work colleague, Lindsay Rowe, accompanied by his father, banded thousands of these two species



Nick Ledgard

in the 1970s. However, it was not until 20 years later that I started to take a more active interest in the birds which annually bred on the river.

In 1998, local concern about the rapidly declining numbers of birds on the river led to a community meeting which attracted 80 participants, including representatives of over 20 different agencies, groups and commercial and recreational users, all of which had histories of utilising the river. The outcome of this meeting was the formation of the Ashley-Rakahuri Rivercare Group (ARRG), with the mission of “protecting birds and their habitat in the Ashley-Rakahuri, while recognizing essential river control works and sympathetic recreational uses.”

The focus of attention is on the lower river, over a 20 km section stretching from the Okuku river junction down to the SHI bridge, which is just 3km from the coast. This is where most of the breeding takes place.

The main reasons for the decline in bird populations are predation by wild cats, stoats and hedgehogs, weed invasion by lupins, broom and gorse, and disturbance by people who use the river for shingle and water extraction and recreation - walking (often exercising dogs), fishing, hunting, and driving trail bikes, ATVs and 4WDs. Survey information since the 1960s shows

that the gulls and terns have declined most – from a number of breeding colonies down to just a few or none. Since 2004, only four colonies of black-billed gulls have been recorded in the lower river, and most seasons see only a few dozen black-fronted terns attempting to breed in small colonies of scattered individuals.

In contrast, wrybill numbers, although considerably smaller, seem to have been relatively stable over recent decades. Observers in the 1960s recall just a handful of pairs, and since 2004, breeding pairs have numbered between two and eight. For a long time, the Ashley-Rakahuri was considered their northern-most breeding river in the country, until four pairs were discovered on the Waiau river (90km further north) in 2009. They had probably been there all the time, but no-one had ever looked specifically for them.

The ARRG focuses its bird protection efforts on predator control, public awareness and bird monitoring during the breeding season. The wrybill is its icon bird and with its bent bill (“the only bird in the world with a bill which turns sideways”) and well camouflaged plumage, nest and chicks, it is a much easier species to sell to the public than the black-billed gull and black-fronted tern, which look very similar to their more common coastal cousins, the red-billed gull and white-fronted tern.

The Group employs a professional ornithologist (John Dowding) to colour band wrybills, so that birds can be specifically identified. Wrybills have strong breeding-site fidelity (return to breed at the same locations where they were fledged), so banding allows us to follow individuals over a number of years, and to get a better understanding of population trends and the life-histories of individuals.

The best known bird on the river currently is BO-YO (now B-O, as she has lost two colour bands over the years). BO-YO is a female bird, who was first banded as an adult in 2003, and ever since has earned a reputation of being secretive and elusive. She



**COMMUNITY ACTION** (from left): Nick Ledgard addresses a school group on the work of the rivercare group; members of the group erect a sign on the Ashley-Rakahuri riverbed warning of a wrybill nesting area. Photos / Lynley Cook

returned with a mate (WO-RW) in 2004, and they fledged one chick at the Racecourse site. Their nest was found at the same location in 2005, and by the end of November they had fledged two chicks.

WO-RW has not been seen since, but BO-YO was back with an unbanded (UB) mate in 2006 to nest at a new site (Aerodrome) and raise two chicks. Once again, she may have lost her mate, as the following year, she paired with OW-RW slightly further down the river. Their first nest was lost in a big flood, but they re-nested and were seen with two young chicks in early December. Unfortunately neither of these survived to the flying stage (the only season when she has failed to fledge chicks).

In 2008, BO-YO changed both territory and mate, and nested with RO-M at the Railway site. After only one egg had been laid, RO-M disappeared (presumably died), and BO-YO abandoned the nest and moved upriver to the Aerodrome site where she mated with a UB male, and fledged one chick. In that season's report, Dowding wrote, "Several attempts to catch and band the chick were unsuccessful, with BO-YO warning it constantly."

In 2009, she moved further upriver (Groyne 2) and paired with OW-RW (mate from 2007) to fledge one chick. Dowding reported that, "These birds have become increasingly secretive

and difficult to monitor, particularly the female . . . repeated searches failed to find the nest." This pair nested at the same site for the following two seasons, but their nests could not be found. One chick was fledged in both years. BO-YO was back at Groyne 2 with a UB mate in early September, 2012, and seen acting in 'chick defensive' mode in early November, but neither she nor a chick has been seen since. So since her banding in 2003 (nine seasons ago), BO-YO is known to have fledged nine chicks, for a productivity success of 1.0. Since 2004, the average productivity of all breeding pairs is 0.85.

Such productivity is reasonable and raises the question as to why the numbers of wrybill pairs breeding on the Ashley-Rakahuri river have not risen more. There were six pairs recorded in 2004 and even though the figure has dropped as low as two pairs, only seven to eight pairs have been present for the last two years, and the average over the last nine years is 5.4 pairs. The implication from this and the disappearance over the years of a number of colour-banded birds is that adult mortality is higher than it should be.

The immediate suspicion is predators, but I personally do not think that predators are the main reason for the Ashley-Rakahuri adult wrybill survival problems (but then again I could be described as biased when it comes to

our river).

The group maintains a network of traps around breeding sites. The number of trap-nights (around 4000 annually) has varied relatively little over the past seven seasons, and the overall number of predators trapped continues to decline, although this is primarily due to a drop in hedgehog captures. The total number of other captures (cats, mustelids and rodents) is smaller and has fluctuated, but shows no significant trend up or down. Although we have discussed this frequently, no other reasons for enhanced adult mortality have come to the fore – perhaps with one exception.

Unlike the larger braided rivers (such as the Waimakariri and Rakaia) the Ashley-Rakahuri is a small river which is readily crossed by powerlines. There are three pylon-supported transmission lines and four pole-supported lines (lower and thinner) crossing the river between the upper breeding sites and the coast. It is thought that wrybills regularly fly down river from their breeding sites to the Ashley-Saltwater creek estuary, which is a major feeding ground for shorebirds. They generally fly faster than the other species, and presumably can do so at night. From my early birding days around Auckland, I know that one of the best places to find dead birds is under powerlines – I used to have two wrybill skulls collected from under the

lines running alongside the causeway out to Puketutu Island near Mangere. Unfortunately, there is not a lot we can do to remove this suspected cause of adult bird loss.

Even if we are losing too many adults from our Ashley-Rakahuri breeding grounds, our monitoring indicates that bird numbers (not just wrybills) have at least held their own over recent years – and hopefully, we can claim some credit for this. We are on a small river at the northern extremes of wrybill breeding grounds, so how do our efforts relate to protection operations elsewhere? Apart from small populations (which breed largely unassisted) on the Waiau, the Ashburton (occasionally assisted) and the rivers draining into lakes Wakatipu and Wanaka, the main breeding grounds are on the major braided rivers – the Waimakariri, Rakaia, Rangitata and the upper Waitaki catchment.

DOC's Project River Recovery on the upper Waitaki, funded by Meridian Energy, is by far the oldest and largest shorebird assistance project. It started in 1990, and millions of dollars have been spent on riverbed weed and pest control and bird monitoring. Damming for hydro-electric power generation has led to the loss of suitable braided river habitat in the middle and lower reaches of the Waitaki and with that has gone all wrybill breeding. Further north, DOC has overseen a wrybill monitoring programme in a section of the upper Rangitata since 2008, but the amount of predator control has been small.

In the river's lower reaches (across the plains), shorebird numbers have been surveyed fairly regularly over recent years, but no habitat management and little predator control has been undertaken. It is the same in the lower half of the Rakaia river. In the upper Rakaia, a comprehensive river rehabilitation project (Braided River Flagship Programme) has been recently initiated as part of the Canterbury Water Management Strategy, but this is in its early days and has yet to undertake a comprehensive predator control programme, let alone obtain meaningful bird population data. On the northern-most of the large braided rivers, the Waimakariri, bird surveys have been carried out on the lower parts, and recently a community rivercare group

(Waimakariri Rivercare Users Group) was formed. The intention is to carry out regular predator control and monitoring, but the group is still largely in the process of finding its feet. The upper Waimakariri (above the gorge) was surveyed in November, 2012, the first census since 1995. Considering the length of riverbed covered (35kms) wrybills numbers were disappointing. Thirty-eight birds were seen, which is slightly down on the figure of 45 birds seen 17 years previously (these numbers need verifying as the 2012 survey is still being written up).

After almost two centuries of mining (for water, hydro power, gravel and recreation) the attention given to braided rivers and their eco-systems (notably the birds), particularly by

DOC and Environment Canterbury, has increased significantly over recent years. Most effort has gone into surveys aimed at determining bird populations. With the exception of Project River Recovery in the upper Waitaki, relatively little has been spent on management projects aimed at improving habitat and breeding success.

As on the Ashley-Rakahuri river, the wrybill population appears to have declined much less than have numbers of other braided river specialists, such as the black-fronted tern and black-billed gull. To end on a positive note, perhaps that means that New Zealand's wrybill population will be easier to maintain into the future - especially with the rising interest in this unique species. 



**FAMILY AFFAIR:** (top) BW-BW, a male wrybill banded by John Dowding in 2010, always returns to the Ashley-Rakahuri; (left) nest of BW-BW and mate; (below) Dowding bands their chick. Photos / Lynley Cook





From the manager

# An ever-changing birdscape

**Keith Woodley** reports on some of the delightful – and occasionally unexpected – birding experiences which have enlivened the past few months at Miranda

A dark ripple is pushed by the moderate nor' easterly across the lake. Above it, darting and swooping, twisting and dipping, dozens of swallows forage busily. They flash metallic blue, or rich brown-orange, or there are splashes of white from the tail, depending on where the afternoon sunlight strikes them.

Beyond the narrow channel, against the towering wall of ribbonwood and bright green coprosma opposite the kitchen windows there is further movement. Though it is quite different the intent is much the same. Against the energetic speed of the swallows is contrasted the flutter of a shuttlecock – a fantail also pursuing airborne prey. Where the swallows cover half the lake with each ragged circuit, the fantail works just one cubic metre of airspace. It seems a curious juxtaposition, yet it is probably a common enough scene anywhere in the country where these two species overlap. Totally different in origins and structure, one a long-established native the other a comparative newcomer, they are both extremely successful – widespread and abundant in the much modified landscape of these islands.

The swallows have been much in evidence for the last few weeks, with at times up to 40 birds in action. Fantails too have been a prominent fixture for most of the year. One step ahead of the Working Bee in August, a pair became regular visitors to the Sibson Room, busying themselves with the contents of spider webs high in the ceiling. One bird even vociferously attended the AGM in May, seemingly oblivious to the dozens of people seated below.

Much of the changing bird-scape at Miranda is tuned to an annual cycle, with birds coming and going predictably according to their breeding schedules. Occasionally however, a bird finds itself out of sync with the world – in terms of where it should be, and what it should be doing. Like the male Black-tailed Godwit for instance,



White heron on the lawn at the Shorebird Centre.  
Photo / Keith Woodley

resident here through the winter and currently in full breeding plumage. While there are, in the wader kingdom, a number of candidates for most beautiful breeding plumage this gorgeous creature is surely a top contender.

Other changes, on a wider time scale, are not so predictable. For instance, during my time here black swans have generally been few and far between. They could be seen regularly on the quarry lakes north of Kaiaua, but were seldom seen down this way. Over the last two years that has changed. Last year nine birds took up residence on the Stilt Ponds for at least six months. In recent weeks this has increased to 16, with three more residing on the Bittern Ponds opposite our southern boundary.

Another long-term change is the steadily increasing number of spoonbills at Miranda: this year there was a record 41. They are not always present at once, as some birds seem to wander to and fro across the southern end of the Firth. But when they are all over this side, working the incoming tidal edge, or massed together on the shell bank, it is a spectacular scene. Many of them still seem to favour roosting on the solitary macrocarpa opposite the middle gate, but more often in

recent weeks they have roosted in the paddock below, usually on the edge of the drain that runs beside the tree. Here too the roost is a vivid spectacle: before a backdrop of lush dairy pasture, a massed congregation of hunched and angular objects, pure white above black legs.

For a few weeks in August another extremely rare visitor in the Miranda area took up residence on the lower reaches of the Taramaire Stream. Our only endemic member of the grebe family, the dabchick could often be seen from the road bridge. Locally common in some parts of the North Island, this species remains, I suspect, little known to many New Zealanders.

Another species, though present in the country in only small numbers, is somewhat more prominent. The following conversation occurred at the end of September: 'Your white heron looks very good.' 'Oh yes,' I replied neutrally. 'Yes we got a good view of it from our unit (Sandpiper Suite) this morning.' 'Very good,' said I. 'Yes it was sitting on the water tank!' A new species for our 'water tanks list'. But by this time it had moved slightly and was standing preening on the lawn immediately outside the main kitchen window. 



From the chair

# Summer guide back again

The approval of funding to allow Kristelle Wi to be on hand to advise visitors to the hides this summer has been one of the highlights of the past three months, reports **Gillian Vaughan**

I am delighted to report that ASB Community Trust has once again agreed to provide the funding for our Shorebird Guide summer position.

As a result Kristelle Wi (shown in the photo) will be in her usual spot over the summer, showing people the birds that we all know and love, as well as continuing the trapping programme.

Kristelle and Keith are also looking at developing a short guided walk programme over the summer. Contact Keith if you have any questions.

Sincere thanks must go to both to the ASB Community Trust, and to Alister Harlow for his efforts in putting together this application.

## Events

It isn't often you want "average" weather at Miranda, however if the aim is to get the inside of the Centre spic and span the last thing you want on a working bee day is a lovely sunny winter day; everyone simply disappears out to the garden.

This year was about perfect, wintery enough to keep people inside, and not so wintery that people stayed away.

We had a good turnout for this years working bee and got a lot accomplished, as well as having the time for a good catch up with people. (The garden did also get some attention) Thanks to all who showed up and helped.

The potluck dinner that followed showcased the skills of some of our cooks, and the ability to cut cheese

and put it on crackers of some of the others (like myself). Some 60 people came to enjoy dinner this year, flowed by a great talk from former council member Nigel Milius on his experiences as a guide in Spitsbergen,



great stories set off with excellent photos. I always enjoy the potluck and encourage members to attend.

The Speaker at the open day this year was Rick Simpson, talking about some of the moments, and birds, that have made up "Wader Quest", their journey to help raise funds for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper captive breeding programme.

## Manukau Harbour

After the latest round of consultations the Auckland Plan has been released for comment.

The plan does acknowledge the need to protect our special coastal areas, and suggests that water recreational activities, such as kiteboarding, will need to be balanced with the need to protect those areas.

What this means in detail will need a closer reading, and David Lawrie and I will be looking at this in

the upcoming months.

## Addition to Name

Elsewhere in this issue some of the feedback we have received around the name of the Trust has been outlined.

I have been really pleased by the overwhelmingly positive feedback I have received on the name change.

Council is still planning to recommend the change to the name Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust. The "Miranda brand" is still considered important to us so keeping that in our name is considered necessary. We also feel in adding the Maori name it is important that it is given first place.

If you have further feedback on this issue please feel free to contact Keith, me or any other council member

## People

I have recently heard the sad news of the passing of Kay Haslett. Many of the readers of the magazine will remember Kay Haslett, secretary of the Trust for many years. Kay's quiet efficiency around the council table kept the council moving forward and I know that she will be missed by many members of the Trust.

Long term readers of MNT News will recall David Medway who for many years was a regular contributor, both as president of OSNZ, and as a dedicated naturalist. David made a significant contribution to the study of birds in New Zealand, and recently passed away suddenly.

My thoughts, and I am sure those of members of the Trust go out to the families of both David and Kay. 

# Feedback favours a name change

Members of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust mostly seem to favour putting Pukorokoro in front of the name and some want to go further.

Feedback on the proposal to change the trust's name to Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust has generally been favourable.

A few members have opposed the change or suggested that it should be Miranda Pukorokoro, some wishing to retain the link with a well-loved place, others to ensure the trust is easily located by internet searches.

On the other side of the coin, some members have proposed going all the way to Pukorokoro Naturalists' Trust or, in order to retain the Miranda connection for the time being, Pukorokoro Naturalists' Trust, Miranda.

Others have also suggested taking the opportunity of doing away with the risk of confusion with naturists, by changing the name to Nature Trust, or emphasising its principal role, by calling it a Shorebird Trust.

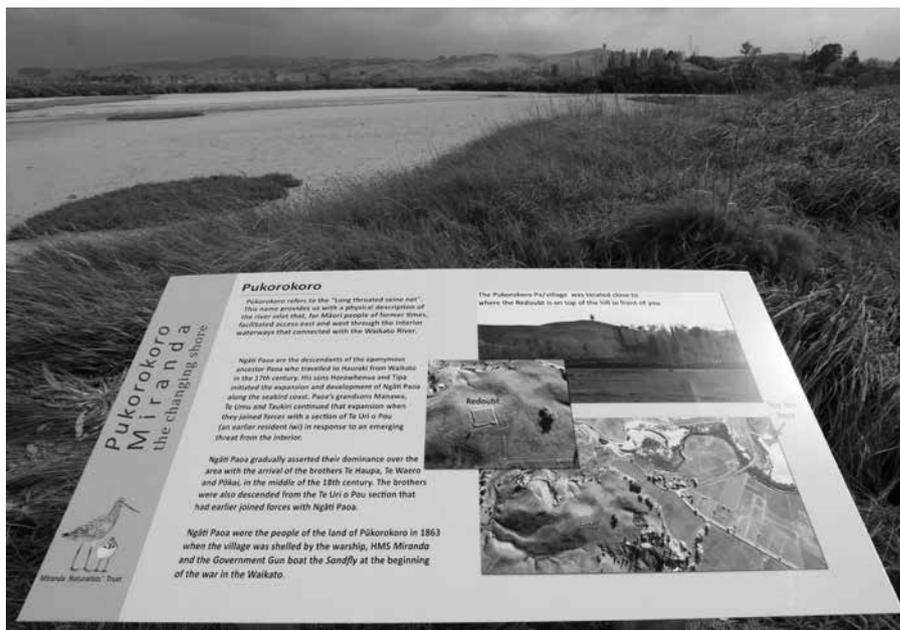
Most of the feedback, to chair Gillian Vaughan or manager Keith Woodley, has been made verbally and almost all has supported the proposed change.

But those who sent email messages nearly all sought some variation to the council recommendation – which will be considered at the annual meeting on May 25 – to change the name to Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

Former chair Stuart Chambers, for instance, said he did “find that Pukorokoro doesn't roll off the Pakeha tongue that well but on the other hand I have heard that name quite liberally over the years and do like it.

“As for a name change,” he added, “why not start afresh, scrub naturalists, and just go for Pukorokoro Shorebird Trust.”

Similarly, Andrew Crowe said that, having learned the background to the names he felt “use of the name Miranda is surely out of place in islands whose inhabitants claim them to be



**HISTORY:** The story of Pukorokoro is told by one of the information panels recently installed at the limeworks.

founded on equitable dealings between two cultures.”

But, he added, there was now “an opportunity to take a slightly bolder step, namely: Why not re-name MNT as Pukorokoro Shorebird Trust? If the Trust is to indeed be a leader in education along the Flyway, why not concurrently jettison the naturists association in favour of a stronger association with the birds?”

Another member said, “While I will not scream from the rooftops if the name becomes Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust I do think it is a poor choice. This leaves us with a long name, still containing the confusion of the past. That confusion was between Naturalist and Naturist. Why not take this opportunity to improve. Consider Pukorokoro Nature Trust.”

Others, however, were concerned that the name change might hamper the trust's work. One noted: “As MNT is an internationally recognised area of chenier planes and has been known as such for many years any search of the internet would naturally have Miranda as top search. Has any thought been given to the name Miranda Pukorokoro Naturalists Trust.”

Another member observed, “My opinion would be to agree to the change of the name of the area, if this would please the iwi, but definitely not to change the name of the Miranda Trust, which has been established for approximately 50 years, and is

now known and appreciated by many naturalists throughout the world. . . A new name for the Trust (and its pronunciation) could cause unnecessary difficulties.”

Yet another said, “I have no objection to the inclusion of Pukorokoro in the title however I would be unhappy if reference to Miranda was completely removed.

“For myself I can understand and respect why the Ngati Paoa have made the request. . . [But] Miranda means many things to its members, birds the environment and happy times, [and] long may it continue this way.”

Council members considered the feedback at its October meeting and members agreed they would be reluctant to lose “naturalist” from the title, because of the indication of a broader area of interest than shorebirds, and for the time being at least would wish to retain “Miranda”, because of its global brand awareness.

Meanwhile Ngati Paoa has warmly welcomed the recommendation for a name change. Iwi representative Morehu Wilson said, “Ngati Paoa are pleased that the Miranda Naturalists' Trust council recognises the former name of Puorokoro for the Miranda area. Ngati Paoa take great heart in the council's recommendation to support the change in name for the Trust and fervently hope that in time, the name of Pukorokoro is recognised by all in a more formal manner.” 



**STOP THIEF:** Paul Godolphin reckons leaving a card like this in your car will deter break-ins at the hide car park.

## Miranda snippets

# How to deter those car park thieves

Police are investigating ways of deterring the thieves from breaking into vehicles at the hide car park. David Lawrie raised his recent break-in with the area's MP, Dr Paul Hutchinson, who took it up with Pukekohe Police.

Inspector Michael Woods replied that over the past three years an average of 0.8 offences a month had been reported in the wider Miranda area. "Previous offending has shown that some theft ex-car offences are linked to offenders from Papakura and Mangatangi which would suggest that offenders are travelling to isolated locations at random times to commit these offences."

Because of the remote location it was not possible to have police on duty at the car park 24 hours a day, he said, but efforts would be made to have increased random patrolling. In addition, Constable Robbie Smith from Tuakau was looking at crime prevention work using signage, surveillance cameras, etc. "He is currently liaising with Hauraki Council to seek their assistance in funding surveillance cameras."

Meanwhile birding enthusiast Paul Godolphin has his own tip for avoiding break-ins. Paul recommends having "Don't Bother" cards (like the one above) "printed in bright red and yellow for use when parked in spots vulnerable to burglary. "When used in conjunction with other simple measures I have found it to be highly effective in deterring vehicle break-ins especially in places like the Miranda Limeworks car park."

But, Paul adds, for the card to work it's also essential that all property be removed from inside the car and placed

out of sight in the boot. "Criminals will smash their way into your car if they see a coat or newspaper on the seat, just in case you might have hidden a camera or wallet under it (maybe you haven't, but you'll still get your windows smashed)."

### New-old council member

Bruce Postill has been appointed a member of the MNT council. Bruce was previously an ex-officio member representing the Department of Conservation. During the recent restructuring of DOC he ended up still having a job but one in which it was no longer appropriate for him to represent the department on MNT. The council decided to retain Bruce's knowledge and enthusiasm by appointing him a member in his own right.

### Popular exhibition

Auckland Museum's marine exhibition, *Moana: My Ocean*, which featured a replica of the hide at Miranda, proved hugely popular. Well over 100,000 visitors experienced its remarkable depiction of the ocean world, stretching from birds parading on the shellbank at Miranda to the extraordinary sea life in the depths of the Kermadec Trench, making it the museum's most popular exhibition in over a decade.

### Obituaries

As mentioned in the chairperson's report, two long-serving stalwarts of MNT, Kay Haslett and David Medway, died recently.

Kay was secretary from 1988 to 1995 and so was a key figure during the crucial period when the Shorebird Centre was built.

David, a notable ornithologist

and author of many books on New Zealand birds, held many important positions, including being president of the Ornithological Society. He was probably best known to MNT members as the author of regular informative articles in *Miranda News*.

### Disaster relief

The Shorebird Centre has been put to many uses since it was built but a disaster was something new.

Last month the centre was used by the Adventist Church's Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) as the base for a disaster relief exercise helping the Kaiaua area recover from a cyclone. ADRA has an Emergency Response Team that consists of skilled staff and volunteers from Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Australia and New Zealand who are able to deploy quickly if there is a major disaster anywhere in the Pacific Region. The exercise was part of their regular training.

### New novel

Assistant manager Maria Stables-Page has just e-published her third digital book, *Seaton's War*, a romantic mystery set in a place remarkably like Thames. You can find out more about her books, written under the nom-de-plume Lily Ennis, on her own website, [lilyennis.wordpress.com](http://lilyennis.wordpress.com).

Copies are on sale for US\$2.99 at the Amazon and Smashwords websites.



Miranda volunteer

# The smiling queen of the bird hides

A few years ago we took two of our grandsons to Miranda to see the birds. They were reasonably interested but a bit inclined to be distracted until, at the old hide, we met a smiling woman with a spotter scope who asked if they'd like to see the birds close-up.

They did like, and were fascinated by what they saw and heard, and may well have developed a lasting interest in shorebirds as a result.

The smiling woman was Joy Gough who for about five years now has regularly travelled down from Auckland with her scope to introduce visitors to the marvels of the birdlife found on the Firth of Thames.

"I just love showing the birds to people. I don't really know a lot about them. But I can recognise most of the species," she says. "I know enough to be able to tell their amazing stories. And when I don't know the answer to some question then – as Keith advised me once – I just wing it. "It's so rewarding. Many times I've had people say, 'We just dropped in while we were passing through and we're so glad we did. You've brought the birds to life for us. Thank you so much. We'll definitely be coming again.' And

WINGING IT; Joy Gough at the bird hides.



that makes it all worthwhile."

Joy's passion for Miranda is the result of two tragedies. First was the death, within 10 months, of both her parents. "I needed somewhere tranquil to grieve and a friend suggested Miranda. I didn't know about the Shorebird Centre in those days so I stayed at the camping ground. And it was perfect. There was the peace and quiet I needed and I also discovered the wonders of the birds."

The second tragedy came when an illness robbed her of the energy to continue a long time involvement

in the summer nature programme at Tongariro National Park. "I looked around for a less energetic way to be involved with nature and meet people and I suddenly thought: Miranda! And I've been coming here ever since."

Recently Joy has acquired a cat so she's not at the hides as often as she used to be. But, if you visit Miranda on a weekend over summer, there's still a reasonable chance you'll be greeted by a smiling woman with a spotter scope who'll ask if you'd like to see the birds close up. Take her up on it.

Jim Eagles

## Book Review

### A superb new photographic guide to New Zealand birds

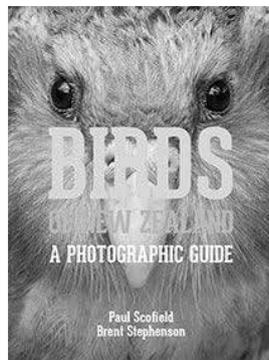
BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND: a photographic guide, by Paul Scofield and Brent Stephenson.

Auckland University Press, \$59.99. Reviewed by Jim Eagles (with advice from Keith Woodley)

It's almost a tradition for birders to complain about their field guides: a particular variation of plumage isn't shown; a rare bird is missing; or, alternatively, the book is so full of birds you never see that there isn't enough about the ones you do; and so on.

Over the years Paul Scofield and Brent Stephenson, two of New Zealand's leading birders, have been among the complainers and now, with the help of Auckland University Press, they've done their best to provide the perfect guide.

Their book is lavishly illustrated with photos showing stages of the plumage cycle; there are generous descriptions of appearance, calls and behaviour, tips on how to differentiate between similar species and, as a delightful bonus, notes on the origins



of Maori, English and scientific names. Rare vagrants have a brief special section. The result is a superb guide to our birds and, unlike some, as strong on seabirds as on those of the forest. If you're interested in our birdlife, either identifying what you see or finding out about them, this would be a wonderful book to have in your home.

But is it better than the *Field Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*? For me, yes. *Birds of NZ* is more interesting to

browse, carries more information and some will prefer the fact that it uses photos instead of drawings (though it's also a bit more expensive). But there's apparently a new edition of the Field Guide about to come out which might change that verdict.

Of course serious birders need a guide they can take into the wild and *Birds of NZ* is even heavier than the Field Guide. Fortunately, the authors of the Field Guide have recognised this and produced the compact version, *Hand Guide to the Birds of New Zealand*. So, if you want the best of both worlds, have the new *Birds of NZ* at home and the *Hand Guide* in your backpack.

• *Birds of NZ* is on sale at the Shorebird Centre and the on-line shop at <https://shop.miranda-shorebird.org.nz/>

# Chinese investigate protection for Bohai Bay

**David Lawrie** reports on the latest East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership meeting at which the big news was of a possible protected area on the shores of Bohai Bay (and it later emerged that the Chinese are also seeking RAMSAR listing for Yalu Jiang).

A Chinese Government initiative to investigate the establishment of a protected area on the shores of Bohai Gulf was the most encouraging news from the seventh meeting of partners to the EAAFP held recently in Alaska.

Bohai, on the inner Yellow Sea, is a critical feeding stop for Red Knot from Australia and New Zealand on their northward migration to the breeding grounds and anything which might protect that coast from further development is hugely welcome.

Otherwise the news from the Yellow Sea was grim. At the Shorebird Working Group discussions, for instance, David Melville reported on behalf of MNT on research he had just completed in the region proving that a high level of reclamation continues to occur. The images he showed were of major concern and resulted in a recommendation to the Yellow Sea Taskforce for urgent action.

I was at the Yellow Sea meeting when Ken Gosbell presented the recommendations of the shorebird working group. The issues around the Yellow Sea are very complex with a difficult political structure and huge population pressures. However the representatives from Governments bordering the Yellow Sea agreed to continue to raise awareness of the issue at national level. Government partners were also urged to apply political pressure to the Chinese and Korean Governments.

The EAAFP works to conserve migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent on those habitats. It consists of 30 partners, including 15 national governments, four intergovernment organisations, 10 international non-government organisations and one from the international business community. The New Zealand Gov-



**COLD COMFORT:** EAAFP delegates on a field trip in Alaska.

ernment was represented by Bruce McKinlay and Hugh Robertson.

At the beginning of the meeting a ceremony was held to mark the addition of three new partners: the Government of Malaysia, the organisation called Conservation of Arctic Fauna & Flora and the Wildlife Conservation Society. In addition, five new sites were added to the flyway network: Arao-Higata (Japan), Bako Buntal Bay (Malaysia), 80 Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay (Australia) and Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (USA). This brings the number of sites in the network to 118, although it is noted that approximately 1000 sites would meet the criteria for inclusion.

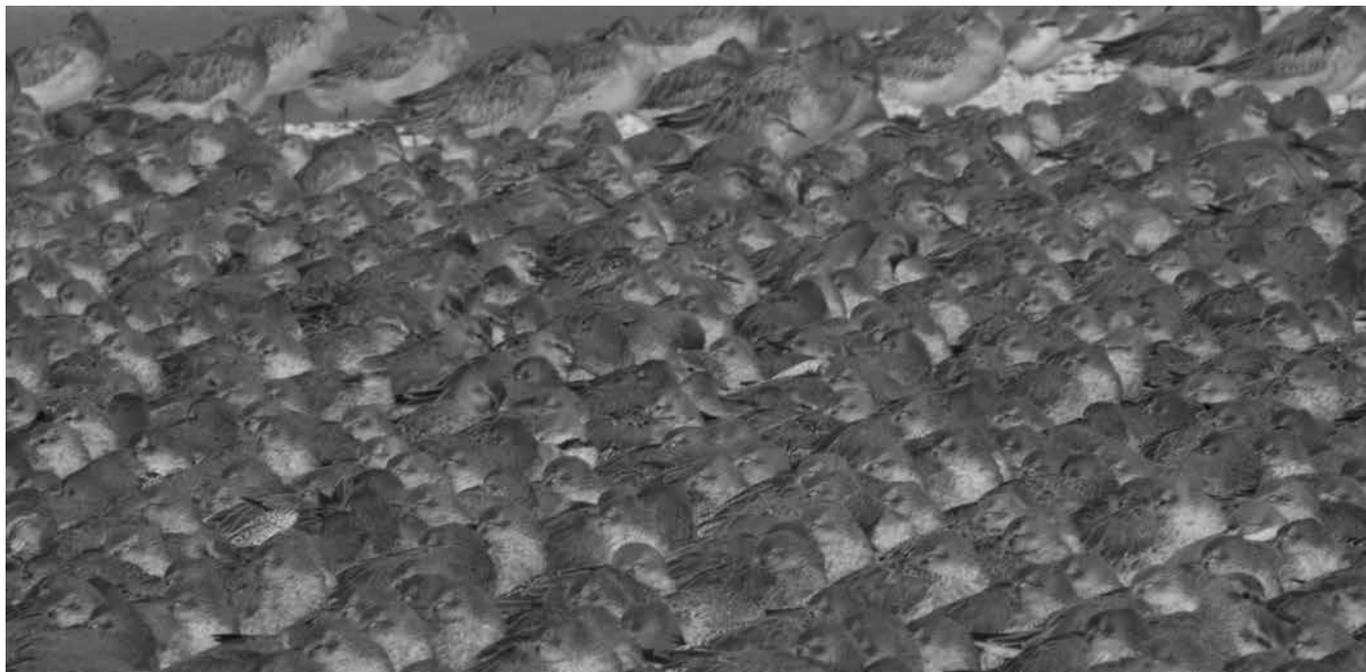
The meeting received a report, prepared by Roger Jaensch on behalf of the secretariat, which prioritised internationally important sites. It also provided guidance on the nomination of sites to the flyway site network. One of the major priorities for the partnership is to encourage government partners to designate more sites to improve the coverage of protected areas. At the same time the report identified weaknesses in the present system and, in particular, the need to better identify site boundaries and improve count data. Much of the data is based on historical information which is now clearly out of date, especially when bird populations are generally trending downwards.

Another important project reported on was the work being done

by WWF (Hong Kong) to develop a flyway wide conservation plan for shorebirds. This project has reached the stage where they are considering regional prioritisation of the status of shorebirds species using the EAAF and are looking for input from the affected countries. I have since provided them with data from the bi-annual OSNZ census. This project will be further developed in the coming months through a series of workshops and data exchanges (incidentally, I am on the project committee).

The scientific needs of the flyway were discussed at a workshop led by Dr Richard Fuller, University of Queensland, assisted by Dr Judit Szabo, Science Officer of the Partnership. This commenced with brief presentations of the early findings of the Queensland University project looking at population collapse in migratory shorebirds in Australia, methods of assessment of the tidal flat losses in the Yellow Sea and understanding migration routes through the use of geo-locators. The discussion rather underlined how little we really know about the populations of shorebirds in the flyway and the routes followed by many of the species.

Clearly, with such a diverse group involved in the flyway, communication and information sharing is a major issue. The flyway website is one of the key tools and it is constantly updated. I would urge people to check the site: [www.eaaflyway.net/](http://www.eaaflyway.net/) 



Thousands of knots roost at Kidd's Beach on the Manukau Harbour.

Photo / ian Southey

## Discharge pipe a threat to harbour habitat

Miranda Naturalists' Trust wants more research into the environmental effects of an \$800 million tunnel carrying wastewater to the Manukau Harbour

Miranda Naturalists' Trust has called for plans for a new \$800 million tunnel, to take Auckland's sewage and stormwater to the Mangere Waste Water Treatment Plant, to be revised to take greater account of the needs of endangered shorebirds.

In a submission written by David Lawrie and presented to an Auckland Council hearing by chair Gillian Vaughan, MNT pointed out that the Manukau Harbour is the most significant shorebird habitat in New Zealand. "In the harbour the birds feed on the extensive mudflats at low tide which contain high quality food. It is essential therefore that the health of the harbour and the mudflats themselves are maintained and that the natural balance is not destroyed."

MNT said the proposed tunnel – known as the Central Interceptor – would impact on shorebirds in two ways. First, there was the risk of disturbance to roost sites, mainly during construction. "Birds need safe and secure high tide roosts and the design of the project should be undertaken in such a way that direct construction is directed away from the known roost sites as far as possible."

Second, and even more significant, there was the potential effect on the ecology of the harbour. MNT noted

that according to the evidence from Watercare, in support of the project, the interceptor would increase flows into the harbour by approximately 2 percent.

"While that is a relatively small percentage we are concerned that the ecology of the harbour is very delicate and even small changes in salinity would have a major impact. This is even more relevant where the discharge is taking place in one corner of the harbour and there is a relatively long period which the treated waste water takes to disperse to the open ocean.

"The receiving environment is so important for the feeding of these migratory shorebirds that we believe that risks cannot be taken even for these so-called minor changes."

MNT told the hearing that research should be carried out into ways of reducing the discharge into the harbour. One option which should be looked at was to extend the discharge point further towards the open ocean to reduce the impacts that increased fresh water would have on the benthic fauna within the harbour.

The other option requiring serious consideration was for the treated water to be recycled to reduce the actual discharge into the harbour. This should be incorporated into the de-

sign outcomes of this project.

MNT also noted with concern that the plans included provision for an emergency discharge facility from the new pipeline is in the vicinity of the Mangere Waste Treatment Plant. "Any large discharge that may occur in that area would have the potential to contaminate the mudflats and that is acknowledged in the environment impact reports attached to that evidence. . .

"That area is of prime importance to the feeding of an endemic shorebird called the Wrybill Plover which occurs at this area in substantial numbers. There are regular flocks of approximately 1000 birds, which is 20 percent of the world population, in this vicinity.-

"If this emergency discharge occurs during a low tide period then there is a distinct possibility of direct contamination of the mudflats and hence a direct impact on this bird species which is listed under the New Zealand threat category as threatened (vulnerable).

"While we accept that the threat of this emergency discharge is very low the consequences of a discharge at that point could be very serious for a substantial portion of this threatened bird's population." 

# Signs tell the story of the landscape



The longterm dream of placing interpretative signs along the coastal strip to the hides has finally become a reality.

Thanks to financial support from Waikato Regional Council, eight signs were erected last month (a ninth will follow shortly).

They cover the origins of the Firth of Thames, the history of Pukorokoro village, human modification of the landscape (mainly through farming, human activities on the site (notably the limeworks), the advance of mangroves (shown above), the chenier plain, the stilt ponds, the movement of the hides and the changing shape of the coastline.

The artwork and design was done by Keith Woodley while Adrian Riegen converted it into a computer format.



Photos / Jim Eagles

# GODWIT TIMES

Hello. It's your old mate Godfrey Godwit here. I've just arrived back at Miranda for the summer after flying 11,000km from Alaska.

I got godwit bumps when I once again saw the familiar muddy waters of the Firth of Thames lying, like the head of a sleeping giant, between the rugged hills of the Coromandel Peninsular and the green pastures of the Waikato.

But as I circled down to land on the shell bank at Miranda, my home for the next few months, I saw a strange sight. At first I wondered if my weary eyes were deceiving me. It looked as though a fluffy white cloud had fallen from the sky.

Then I saw a familiar looking beak, like a large black spoon, protruding from the side of the cloud. Suddenly I recognised my old friend Sammy Spoonbill, or His Royal Highness Samuel Spoonbill the 23rd, to be absolutely correct.

"Hi, Sammy," I called out to him as I put my air brakes on and touched down on the shells.

He looked up in surprise. "Oh, hi, Godfrey. I haven't seen you for a while."

"No, I've just got back from raising a godwit chick in Alaska," I replied.

"How did it go?" he asked politely.

"The wife and I had a lovely little girl," I told him. "Did you over-winter in Miranda?"

"Yes."

"I don't remember so many of your family here before?" I said, flicking my beak towards the other 40 spoonbills behind us.

"My wife told the in-laws that Miranda was a great place to roost and the relatives all flocked here," Sammy replied, glancing around at all the spoonbills nearby.

"Birds of a feather flock together," I agreed nodding at the growing number of godwits gathering on the other end of the sand bank. "So what have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, you know the usual – sifting shrimp and crabs from the mud with my built-in spoon," Sammy waved his long spoon-shaped bill around. "Actually, you only just caught me. I am just off to find a nice tall tree to build a nest in. This might be the end of your breeding season but it is only

the beginning of mine."

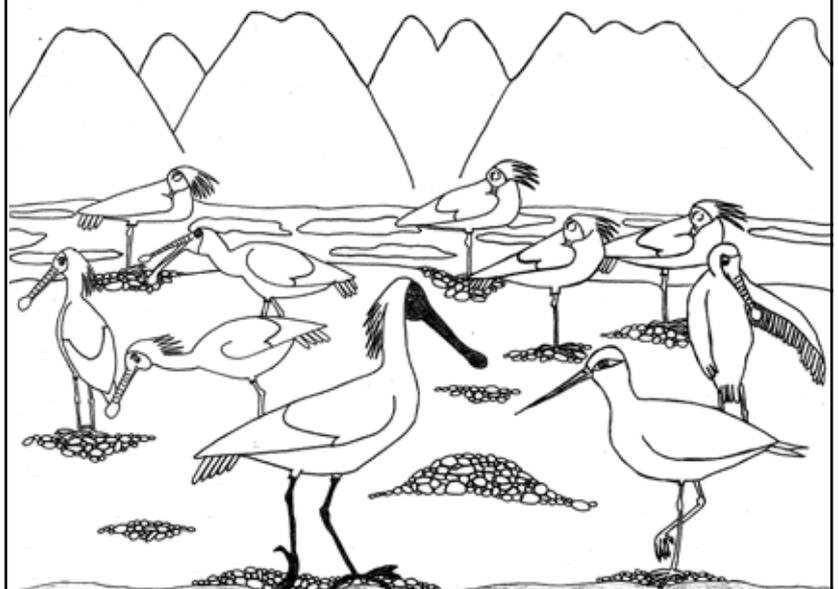
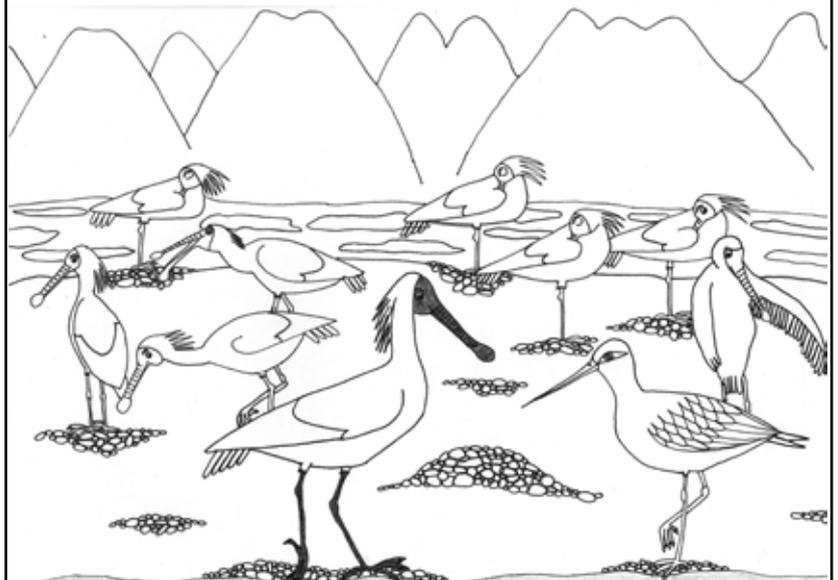
As if in agreement with Sammy's words several spoonbills began flapping their wings in pre-flight preparation.

"Well it looks like now is the hour. See you next autumn, Godfrey."

"Yes, all the best," I said watching as Sammy and his rellies spread their beautiful white wings and flew into the sky.

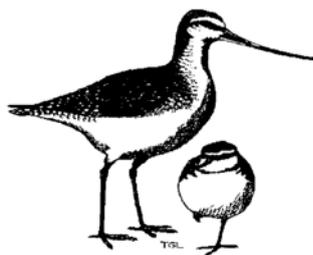
## Spot the differences

Have a look at the pictures of me with the spoonbills below. Can you see 10 differences between them? You might like to colour the pictures in as I have only done Samuel's bill and legs.



(Answers are on the page opposite.)

# MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST



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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 *Miranda 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?

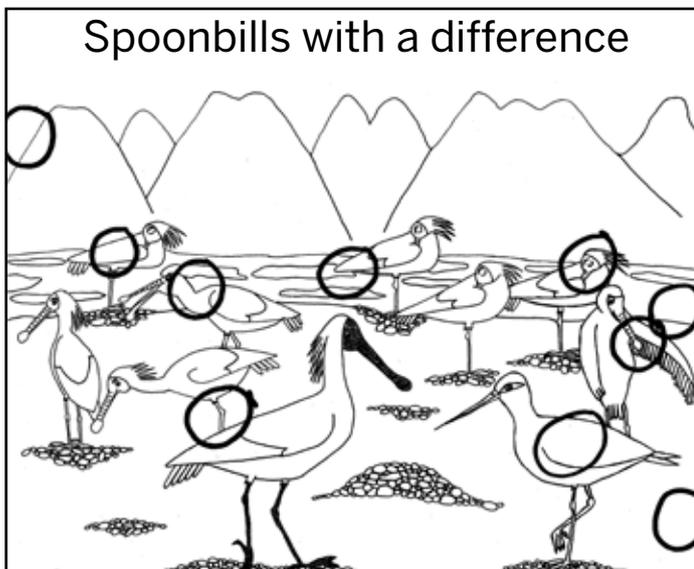
### Friends of Miranda

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.

## Spoonbills with a difference



# Dotterels thrive on Hot Water

A couple of issues ago I appealed to members to help liven up *Miranda News* by sending in their photos and stories.

There wasn't much response until last month when life member Michael Horton sent in the photo (at right) of a New Zealand Dotterel at Hot Water Beach.

When I asked if he could tell me more, Michael sent the three photos below and explained: "Usually we raise one chick on Front Beach, despite residents insisting on exercising unleashed dogs contrary to the signage, but once the chicks get to January they usually survive the madding crowds, being nearly invisible with their colouring."

That's great. Just the sort of thing I was hoping for. Now how about some other members out there following suit.

Jim Eagles

