

# Pukorokoro Miranda News

Journal of the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust

August 2014 Issue 93

**Hides wrecked by storm**

**Rise of the spoonbills**

**The Trust makes waves in  
China and North Korea**



## From the Editor

# Exciting times for the Trust



No one could possibly accuse this organisation of being boring.

Since the previous issue of the magazine, a delegation has visited China for a highly successful launch of the report on 10 years of wader surveys at the crucial migration stopover at Yalu Jiang.

The team then went on to North Korea and signed an agreement with the Nature Conservation Union of Korea to develop a programme of shorebird surveys on their important, but little-known, coastline.

Then at the annual general meeting we changed our name to Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust. It's a bit of a mouthful but it restores the original name Ngati Paoa gave to the area, while preserving the global brand of Miranda.

Not long after the AGM a ferocious storm demolished the new hide and sent the old one rolling across the saltmarsh. A team of volunteers re-assembled the new hide and rolled the old one back into place . . . only for another storm to blow it away again.

The trust is in discussion with Hauraki District Council about the Shorebird Centre becoming an official stopping point on the Kopu to Kaiawa extension to the Hauraki Cycle Trail, on which work is scheduled to start early next year, and which is expected to attract an average of 2000 cyclists a month.

Members Gwenda Pulham and Helen Smith have been acknowledged by OSNZ as making the first officially recorded sighting of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

And . . . but that's enough to indicate that it has been an exciting few months and that this is an exciting issue of the newly renamed Pukorokoro Miranda News.

Jim Eagles



## Miranda Snippets

# 'Our hides are both munted'

The early morning text from Maria Staples-Page was blunt: 'Our hides are both munted.'

Manager Keith Woodley was initially a little sceptical. 'It had been a fairly severe storm overnight with some particularly strong wind gusts, but we have had extreme weather events here before.'

However, on checking he quickly had to revise that assessment. 'The landscape beyond the Stilt Ponds now looked rather different. Where there had been two hides the day before, there were now three distinct shapes protruding from the marsh.'

The old hide was lying on its front 10m from its original site. The new hide had been broken into two substantial sections lying 30m apart. 'Bizarrely,' Keith noted, 'the benches that had been inside the new hide remained in place on the shellbank. Clearly the hide had been lifted over them on its way to disintegration.'

The following Sunday a small

work party dismantled the sections of the new hide and stacked them to await reassembly. A more substantial working bee in early July saw the new hide reassembled and the old one rolled back to its original location.

Two days later high winds hit again but the new hide emerged unscathed; not so the old one which was back on its side almost where it had been left by the earlier storm.

Two weeks later a smaller working bee sealed the roof of the new hide, added two wings to deter visitors from wandering on to the shellbank and, with the help of some visiting birdwatchers, pushed the old hide roughly back into position. So, hopefully, next time you make a visit both hides will be there to provide shelter.

## Field Course

The Pukorokoro Miranda Field Course gets more popular every year. Next January's course was already full by mid-July. 'The previous re-



RE-ASSEMBLED; The new hide with its wings. Photo / Adrian Riegen

Front cover: Miranda

Back cover: Hide adventures

Watercolour / Peter Partington

Photos / Keith Woodley, Ann Buckmaster



**STORM DAMAGE;** The two hides as they were left by the ferocious winds. There are more photos on the back page. Photos / Keith Woodley

cord,' says Keith, 'was September.' If you're still keen the Centre has a waiting list in case anyone drops out.

### Hauraki Cycleway

Plans for a 56km extension to the Hauraki Cycleway, along the coast from Kopu via Waitakaruru and Pukorokoro-Miranda to Kaiaua, are proceeding apace.

Hauraki District Council is carrying out a community consultation exercise, has funding applications in place and seems confident the work will start early next year.

The first stage of the cycleway, the rail trail from Thames through Paeroa to Te Aroha, has been a huge success. Already there is a branch leading from Paeroa to Waikino with plans for it to continue as far as Waihi.

The branch to Kaiaua, or K2K, is expected to attract about 2000 cyclists a month. The District Council's plan is for it to run mainly along the top of the stopbanks on the seaward side of the road. In the Pukorokoro-Miranda area its idea was to use the pathway from the Centre to the hides.

However, the Council has acknowledged Trust concerns about the impact on roosting birds and come up with a compromise. This will see the cycle trail run from Kaiaua on the seaward side of the road, cross to the Centre, then cross back and follow our trail as far as the second stile. At that point there will be a pedestrian gate, so cyclists can walk to the hides if they wish, along with secure bike racks.

From there the cycle trail will follow the road track back to the highway and continue down the seaward

side as far as the paddock north of the stilt ponds. Then, to safeguard the roosting birds, it will cross to the landward side of the road, returning to the seaward side only at the southern end of the ponds where there is a reasonable mangrove screen.

This plan still needs to be formally signed off by the Trust, DOC, the Lanes and the QEII Trust.

### Bryde's Whales

Guest speaker at the AGM, Dr Rochelle Constantine of Auckland University's school of biological sciences,

had an inspiring story to tell of her work to learn about and protect the Hauraki Gulf's Bryde's whales.

Though not threatened internationally, the New Zealand population is listed as critically endangered, probably numbering under 200. About 50 are resident in the Gulf where they are a popular tourist attraction.

The whales are fairly easy to spot, she explained, because 'they do short dives, less than 10m mostly. and at night they are nearer the surface.' Unusually for whales they actually sleep at night, just below the surface.



**WHALE OF A TALE:** Dr Rochelle Constantine talks about her research into Bryde's Whales. Photos / David Lawrie, Stephanie Behrens



THE SHORTEST DAY (from left): This looks like a good place to roost in the sun... oh, where did that come from...

Unfortunately, the fact that their favourite hang-outs are the gulf's shipping lanes and they stay close to the surface means they are extremely vulnerable to being hit by cargo ships.

It's estimated that at least two a year, on average, are killed by ship-strike in the gulf. Their natural mortality is around 4 per cent, about eight a year, so losing at least two on top of that is quite significant.'

Happily, Dr Constantine's research has helped persuade Ports of

Auckland and the shipping companies to agree to a protocol asking ships to post whale lookouts in daylight hours, to slow down in areas where the whales gather, greatly improving their chance of surviving a collision, stick to recommended routes, steer 1km clear of sighted whales and report sightings to other ships.

The protocol is voluntary but indications are that ships will co-operate. As Dr Constantine says, "No one wants to kill whales."

### Wrybill netting

The shortest day of the year provided perfect conditions for netting Wrybills needed for research being carried out by Massey University student Rachel Withington who studies under Phil Battley.

The catchers were also hoping to net a few of the 200 Red Knots wintering at Pukorokoro but, as usual, they were too smart for that.

So, as Adrian Riegen put it, 'we went for a catch of Wrybills and managed to get the 40 Phil wanted and another 500-plus just in case he didn't like the look of some of them.' The final tally was 313 new birds and 254 retraps for a total of 567.

As always, the histories of the birds proved challenging, some having had up to six different metal bands, many of them worn and unreadable. Of the retraps, nine were rebanded, 15 were from the South Island and six were too worn to be read. Of those which could be read one was possibly banded for the first time in 1997, but most were banded from 2010 on, with 61 first banded earlier this year.

Adrian concluded 'It was a great day and we had several new people who were seen leaving with big smiles so I think they all enjoyed the experience.'

### Australasian Bird Fair

The 2014 Australasian Bird, to be held in Sydney's Olympic Park on 25-26 October this year, will be the first large-scale wildlife event of its kind in Australia and probably the largest in the Southern Hemisphere.

It is aimed at raising awareness of

## What's on at the Shorebird Centre

### 15-17 August, Nature Journalling

Tutor Sandra Morris shows how to draw for identification or just for pleasure from the natural world at Miranda. Contact the Shorebird Centre for further details.

### 23 August, Winter Pot Luck Dinner

4pm Tribute to Eila Lawton.

6pm Guest speakers John Stewart and Kay Milton on 'Black bags, plastic magpies and quail eggs: the ups and downs of life for terns on the Copeland Islands in Northern Ireland.' Working Bee 10am-2pm. Birdwatching 2-4pm.

### 2-4 September, NZ Dotterel Management Course

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

### 12 October, Return to Yalu Jiang

1pm Adrian Riegen will discuss this year's visit to Yalu Jiang, what was accomplished and what it means for wader conservation.

### 7-9 November, Bird Photography

Learn how to improve your photos of our wonderful shorebirds. Tutor Bruce Shanks. Contact the Centre for details.

### 9 November, OSNZ Firth of Thames, Wader Census

Contact the Centre for details

### 21-23 November, Wader Identification Workshop

Tutors Keith Woodley and Gillian Vaughan. Contact the Centre for details.



... a happy band of banders ... the shortest day proved a long day for some. Photos / Bartek Wypych, Ann Buckmaster

the plight of birds across the Australasian region and profits will go to endangered species programmes in the region. See [www.birdfair.com.au](http://www.birdfair.com.au)

### Predator trapping

Kristelle Wi's report on her fourth season of trapping notes more exciting increases in the numbers of birds nesting and raising chicks.

'In the first season of trapping,' she says, 'several pairs of NZ Dotterel and Variable Oystercatcher began to nest on the shell bank. They have continued to nest there over the last four seasons.'

'The shellbank is a nursery for a sizable Black-billed Gull colony who over years have raised hundreds of chicks. This season also saw a colony of approximately 3000 White-fronted Tern nest on the shellbank but unfortunately all 1500 nests were washed away with a king tide.'

Since the trapline was extended up to the Shorebird Centre at the end of last season, Kristelle adds, 'we are noticing more Banded Rail calls and Bittern sightings. The rare Shore-skink was discovered in the reserve a short while after trapping began.'

As the table below shows, numbers of ferrets and stoats caught have dropped since the first season but oth-

er target species have fluctuated. Kristelle says the feral cat population has increased this year 'but we are dealing with the situation using live cage traps on loan from DOC.'

### Change of name

The proposed name change to Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust was unanimously approved by the 50 members who attended the AGM and subsequent special general meeting.

After hearing the background to the request from Ngati Paoa to restore the original name of the area, the change was agreed with little discussion. Keith Woodley commented that over time the Miranda part of the name could well fade away but there was no particular push for that to happen.

The decision has been warmly welcomed by Ngati Paoa. Morehu Wilson, the iwi negotiator who formally made the request to the trust, said, 'The support shown by members of the Trust is admirable and has been acknowledged by Ngati Paoa. Pukorokoro is a beautiful name when pronounced eloquently and the return of this name to the district should be commemorated and celebrated.'

Morehu added that a formal geographic name change was being considered by the NZ Geographic Board and 'we are expecting that this will occur within the year.'

The iwi's treaty settlement negotiations with the Crown are also go-

ing well, he said, and it hopes to have a Deed of Settlement initialled before the General Election in September.

### Re-elected

The AGM saw all the present members of the Council re-elected. At its first meeting the Council then re-elected Gillian Vaughan as chair.

### Arctic Migrants

<i>Bar-tailed Godwit</i>	c500
<i>Black-tailed Godwit</i>	1
<i>Great Knot</i>	2
<i>Red Knot</i>	c400
<i>Ruddy Turnstone</i>	4
<i>Sharp-tailed Sandpiper</i>	2
<i>Marsh Sandpiper</i>	1
<i>Red-necked Stint</i>	3
<i>Pacific Golden Plover</i>	2
<i>Curlew Sandpiper</i>	5
<i>Eastern Curlew</i>	1

### New Zealand Species

<i>Wrybill</i>	c2000
<i>NZ Dotterel</i>	
<i>Banded Dotterel</i>	50
<i>SI Pied Oystercatcher</i>	c4000
<i>White-fronted Tern</i>	c3000
<i>Black-billed Gull</i>	
<i>Pied Stilt</i>	
<i>Royal Spoonbill</i>	30
<i>White Heron</i>	1
<i>Cattle Egret</i>	2
<i>Bittern</i>	

Season	S1	S2	Winter	S3	S4
Stoat	9	1	-	-	2
Ferret	8	2	-	-	1
Weasel	1	-	9	6	3
Hedgehog	22	7	-	23	24
Rat	22	10	16	40	19
Feral cat	1	3	1	1	3
Non target	8	6	8	1	3

# Artist finds paradise in the

Renowned English wildlife artist **Peter Partington** visited Miranda earlier this year and was so overwhelmed by its beauty that he recorded his impressions in pencil, water-colour and glowing words.



In January I stayed with my son and his family in Auckland for a month but I first heard of Miranda and its riches from naturalist friends at his old place on Waiheke Island. I escaped my Grandfatherly duties for a day or two and followed the road south in the battered but much loved Rav.

I felt I had arrived at exactly the right time in the season for a taste of the ultimate Miranda Reserve experience. The Fennel Forest stretching in a vast swathe along the path was a Van Gogh yellow vibrating against the pastel blue of the hills behind Thames on the other side of the estuary. The dense stretches of Mangroves spoke of the tropics and were heavy with darkness; under the summer sun the bleached shell beaches hurt the eye. The sinuous tidal pools were amethyst beneath the sky.

Beyond the hide out over the red mud on the far peninsular, the white spit was loaded with massed ranks of sleeping Pied Oystercatchers visible through binoculars against a jade sea with a few shags on the tip. They must have flown out to feed at some juncture, presumably at night, but I never saw them do it.

The thousands of Bar-tailed Godwits, by contrast, were forever moving in concert with the rise and fall of the tides. On the high king tides, occurring while I was there, they would rise, chattering, as one body, to drift down again forced by rising water to feed on the mud near to us, or obliged to remove themselves like groups of arrowheads in formation, to rest in the haven of brackish pools behind the hide. There were the silvery Wrybills, in similar numbers which gave sparkling displays of avian aerobatics when the tide ebbed, and Banded Dotterel and NZ Dotterel.

When the wet mud revealed itself they would disperse about it to feed. The yapping lines of stilts on their own mission would thread through them. With spoonbills, Banded Rails, Pukekos, Harriers, Kingfishers, Spurwings and White-faced Herons thrown into

the pot as well, this was surely, very near paradise!

For an English artist, this was more than I had ever imagined. The totality of colours, the wealth of birds, the luminosity of the landscape, all found in my favourite habitat, the sea estuary shared with the birds, was overwhelming. There was a looking glass aspect, too, in the familiar birds of Britain living their lives here: the myriad of trilling Skylarks, the Goldfinches feeding young when they should have been shivering at home.

Back in the centre I read of the vast migrations of the Bar-tails to Alaska with indrawn breath and deep awe. The 600-mile flight of our Black-tailed Godwits, from East Anglia to Iceland, demanding as it is, seemed more like a day's outing.

The Shorebird Centre was, in its mixture of comfort, learning and devotion to nature, familiar in the way that so many field study centres are. Its information panels, its informal furnishings, its natural history library, like so many, was where you could spend a month of reading and not exhaust its resources. There were the same collections of volumes, old and new, feathers, bird bands, shells on shelves, small trophies among the books and coffee cups, there were the scattered telescopes and binoculars on the tables.

I set up my watercolours, unremarked here as I often have done on Skokholm Island in west Wales or Flatford Mill in Suffolk in just such an ambience. The centre was pervaded with the same sense of universal welcome and calm and there was the same good conversation derived from the mutual interest in all things natural shared by the guests, professional ornithologists and others and, of course, our warden, Keith. The memory remains with me. I sincerely hope I can visit Miranda again...!

You can find out more about Peter Partington at his Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/PeterPartingtonWildlifeArtist](http://www.facebook.com/PeterPartingtonWildlifeArtist) 



# colours and birds of Miranda



Fond memories: Artist Peter Partington with his sketchpad (top left); on the cover and on these pages are some of the results.



LAUNCHED (from left): The Trust trio with NZ Ambassador Carl Worker; Estella interprets for Adrian; NZ delegation

# Yalu Jiang report presented to Chinese authorities

The long-awaited report on 10 years of wader surveys at the crucial migratory bird staging site at Yalu Jiang, including recommendations on how to safeguard its future, has been presented to the Chinese authorities at a highly successful launch in the city of Dandong, reports **Keith Woodley**

Our time at Yalu Jiang this year turned out to be quite different to previous visits. For one thing, we were unable to complete a full survey of the reserve, largely due to other commitments. However the nature of those commitments far outweighed the loss of count data for this season. Our main objective was to launch the Yalu Jiang survey report, the document on which Adrian Riegen and Gillian Vaughan had spent countless hours of toil.

Such is its importance - demonstrating the reserve to be the most significant staging site in East Asia during northward migration - that we wanted to make the launch as high profile an event as we could manage. In this we succeeded beyond our expectations.

Past visits to China were largely Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust (PMNT) affairs, mostly self-funded by the participants. However this year the expedition was jointly funded by

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Department of Conservation, with PMNT contributing toward costs of the launch event.

Joining our team of Adrian Riegen, Estella Lee and Keith Woodley, were two DOC staff members, Dr Carol West, manager terrestrial ecosystems, and Bruce McKinlay the flyway officer responsible for New Zealand's role in the East Asian-Australasia Flyway Partnership (EAAFP).

This direct government involvement represented a step change for us. It meant, for example, full support from the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing. More significantly it resulted in Carl Worker, the NZ Ambassador to China, flying to Dandong to assist with launching the report. The Ambassador's participation in the event meant more senior officials on the Chinese side were also present, including one of the department chiefs from Min-

istry of Environmental Protection in Beijing, and Pan Shuang, Vice-Mayor of Dandong.

Ambassador Worker was not familiar with shorebirds and confessed to knowing little about godwits. This quickly changed. Like so many others encountering it for the first time he became enthralled by the godwit story. He was also clearly impressed by PMNT and what we have achieved in our engagement with the flyway.

In preparation for the trip, we had prepared a briefing paper outlining the chronology of our involvement with the flyway. Commencing with early banding activities in 1979, it is an impressively long list, which did not go unnoticed among MFAT and embassy staff.

The Chinese did their part in raising the profile of the report launch, scheduling it to occur during a weeklong bird festival celebrating the shorebirds



leader Dr Carol West hands the report to deputy director-general of State Forestry Yan Xun. Photos / Keith Woodley

of Yalu Jiang. Several kilometres west of Site 2 on the new coast road a vast new complex has appeared since we were last here in 2010. The spacious interior suggests it could serve as a basketball stadium, but it is the Donggang Tourist Service Centre. This is where the Bird Festival is based, and the venue for an enormous photo exhibition. Most images appear to have been taken locally, and many feature the bird flocks of the region.

The building itself particularly caught the attention of the builder among us, for it is clad entirely in wood, highly unusual in this part of China. Vice-Mayor Pan, who was a member of the Dandong mayoral delegation that visited Miranda in 2005, explains that our wooden Shorebird Centre so impressed her that when the Tourist Centre was being planned she insisted on using wood.

Aquaculture ponds separate the complex from the seawall on which sit four double-storey bird hides. Here, and at another site several kilometres along the coast we encounter hundreds of people all drawn by the bird flocks on display. Our scopes were well used, and constant queues formed behind each of them. For many it was clearly a multi-generation family occasion, with frail and elderly people assisted by kinfolk towards the scopes.

Also prominent among the crowds were members of the Dandong Bird-watchers Club, some of their volunteers - immaculately clad in sky blue tracksuits and gold-fringed sashes - acting as guides for the public. Other members were noticeable for their camera gear for the club appears to be predominantly made up of photographers. This level of public interest was gratifying, for it suggests growing awareness of the shorebirds which may assist with helping secure their future.

Indeed there is evidence to suggest substantial change in China's policy towards the environment. There is certainly recognition that continued environmental degradation in pursuit of economic development is no longer the path to follow. Proceedings from the Third Plenary of the Communist Party last year contain numerous references to 'building ecological civilisations' and establishing 'ecological red lines,' and both were referred to by officials during our discussions in Beijing. The presence of the regional party secretary at a meeting in Donggang with Ambassador Worker, Vice-Mayor Pan and New Zealand delegation leader Carol West, is also seen as an indication of high-level interest in Beijing.

#### Slowing development?

There is an enormous amount of building activity on the fringes of Dong-

gang – both industrial and residential apartment blocks. However, there are also large numbers of new buildings, many of them factories, that appear to be unoccupied, or the construction of which has stalled. We notice this elsewhere, seeming evidence of either an economic downturn or capacity exceeding demand.

The ever-growing port at Donggang however, remains a problem. From any vantage point at the eastern end of the reserve, where some of the biggest bird concentrations occur, it dominates the backdrop: the medley of huge cranes and the enormous 7 km seawall jutting out from what used to be Site 1 on the reserve. The new wall has major hydrological implications, in that it will affect tide and current, and sediment deposition. However, the news is not all bad for shorebirds, at least not yet. While the new port area is under construction it offers vast open spaces suitable for high tide roosts, which birds have quickly discovered. Each day we watched vast flocks settling somewhere within the port.

This presents a tantalising notion: what if the port could be persuaded to set aside an area – a few hectares only would be required – as a permanent managed roost? This is something we raised in discussions with reserve management and staff, and also with

Vice-Mayor Pan. The response is positive and we are hopeful we can initiate talks with the Port Company.

#### Friendly faces in Beijing

A week in Beijing is largely spent meeting with various government officials, university staff and a longstanding friend of Miranda. This is Chen Kelin, Director of Wetlands International, China, who has been an essential contact for most of our activities in China. We also meet Professor Lei Guanchun, from Beijing State Forestry University, the Chinese Flyway Officer responsible for the EAAFP. Dining with him and some of his staff and research students is particularly enjoyable for some of these are shorebird people.

At the Ministry of Environmental Protection we meet a familiar face: Dr Zhang Wenguo, now a division director, was present at the launch of the Miranda-Yalu Jiang sister-site partnership in Dandong in 2004. We have further meetings at the State Forestry Administration and the Chinese Academy of Forestry.

Two key themes dominate all these discussions: ensuring continued protection for the shorebirds of Yalu Jiang, and exploring ways to establish a reserve at Nanpu, on the Luannan Coast, the most important flyway stopover site for the steeply declining flyway populations of Red Knot.

For most of our time in Beijing we are supported by the New Zealand Embassy. Political Counsellor Gabby Rush, who proudly hails from West Auckland, meets us for a briefing on what to expect during our visit. Having Estella Lee with us again proves immensely valuable, but for several meetings in Beijing Lea He from the embassy relieves her of the burden of being our interpreter.

#### Bohai Bay and Red Knots

Two and half hour drive east of Beijing we reach the first of the salt pans on the edge of Nanpu. It is a further 35 minutes drive to the seawall through a vast network of salt pans and, closer to the wall, sea cucumber ponds. In every direction, there are further signs of human activity: power stations, pylons, oil drilling rigs, apartment blocks and a correctional facility – all viewed through a murky haze.

This area on the Luannan Coast on northern Bohai Bay, is of intense interest to us for it is Red Knot country. Out on the seawall we meet up with Chris Hassell of the Global Flyway Network team. With Ady Boyle, Matt Slaymaker and Chinese colleagues, Chris has been monitoring birds up here since 2007. It is their work that has documented so vividly the importance of this site for red knots, and the steep decline in the population.

We only have a few hours here before we need to return to Beijing, but the whirlwind tour is sufficient to give us good overview of the place and the issues it faces. It is an area of rapid growth. Far off to the east, we can just make out some port cranes that mark the edge of the Caofeidan port development, an enormous project symbolising both the scale of economic growth in China and the intense pressure it places on shorebirds. During our tour we encounter two big new bridges standing in splendid isolation in the landscape waiting for a new four-lane highway to reach them. Chris points to a major oil facility, explaining that it sits directly on top of the site where they had the highest bird counts in 2009.

Efforts to establish a reserve on this coast assume even more importance. 



CELEBRATING SHOREBIRDS (from top): Security officers check out the birds; the wooden-clad Donggang Tourist Service Centre modelled on our own Shorebird Centre; a policewoman borrows Keith's scope to see what the fuss is about. Photos / Keith Woodley



**HISTORIC AGREEMENT:** Delegates at the Nature Conservation Union of Korea are (from left) Kim Sung Ho, (State Science Academy), Carol West, Bruce McKinlay, Jong Yong Nam, Vice-president (NCUK), Adrian Riegen, Pak Ung (NCUK), Keith Woodley and Jon Jong Hyok (NCUK).  
Photos / Keith Woodley

## Trust signs agreement to study migratory shorebirds inside a little-known land

Fresh from its success in China, Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust has signed an agreement with North Korea to develop a programme of shorebird surveys in its important but largely unknown stopover sites.

The signing ceremony is a brief one. In a small, narrow conference room in a Pyongyang hotel, Jong Yong Nam, Vice-president of the Nature Conservation Union of Korea (NCUK) and Adrian Riegen for Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust sign an agreement on exchange and cooperation.

The key objective of the partnership is to develop a multi-year program of shorebird surveys in North Korea, commencing in 2015.

The low-key nature of the ceremony belies its significance: for here is an opportunity to fill an enormous gap in our knowledge of shorebirds in the Yellow Sea. Since Mark Barter's pioneering work in the 1990s, key stopover sites in China and South Korea have become well known, but the west coast of North Korea largely remains a mystery to outsiders.

The draft work programme identifies four sites to be progressively surveyed and documented over four years. Year three offers a particularly tantalising prospect: surveys of Sin Do, the island, which lies just across the border from China. Immediately to the east of the Yalu Jiang reserve,

and beyond the port of Donggang, is the Yalu River. While it is outside the reserve, counts of shorebirds along the river were made whenever possible during the ten year survey period, turning up significant numbers. But it was not uncommon to also watch huge flocks disappearing over the border to roosts in North Korea. Inevitably there developed an intense interest in pursuing those flocks, and with this agreement there comes a very real possibility of doing just that. The ultimate

goal would be to conduct simultaneous surveys on either side of the border.

There is, however, one significant hurdle. The North Koreans lack the resources and it is up to us to find funding for this programme. We made it clear while negotiating the agreement that we would need to seek funding for each year and if we were unsuccessful the project would not proceed. At this stage we remain confident resources can be found.

**Keith Woodley**



**SIGNED UP:** Jong Yong Nam, vice-president of the Nature Conservation Union of Korea, and Adrian Riegen, on behalf of PMNT, sign the historic agreement.



HELLO STRANGER: The Kaipara Harbour Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

Photos / Ian Southey

# Gwenda and Helen's first accepted record of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper

Two veterans of the Shorebird Centre's Wader ID Courses, Gwenda Pulham and Helen Smith, have had their sighting on the Kaipara Harbour of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper accepted by Birds NZ (OSNZ) as the first official record of the bird in this country. **Gwenda Pulham** tells how it happened.

I have never felt so grateful for knowledge gained over the years from fellow wader watchers and Birds New Zealand as I did on 20 March this year.

In the 1980s I did a stint (or should that be a tern?) as secretary of what was then Miranda Naturalists' Trust, under the chairmanship of the late Brian Ellis. I remember well processing a membership application from a British bird-watcher who had arrived in New Zealand with his Kiwi wife. We didn't know at the time that this Brit, a chap called Adrian Riegen, would become a driving force in a thriving Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust, as we know it today.

I personally owe him a great deal. One of Adrian's favourite mantras has to do with becoming entirely conversant with all species regularly encountered, thereby being able to quickly recognise anything new or different. It's a mantra that worked for Helen Smith and I on 20 March.

We had just completed a high tide search for post-breeding flocks of Northern New Zealand Dotterel



at Papakanui Spit on the southern headland of the Kaipara Harbour entrance. Retracing our access route in Helen's 4x4 truck, and stopping to recount a small group of Banded Dotterel, Helen commented on the golden back of a roosting bird that was facing away from us.

Hoping at least for a Golden Plover, we honed the telescopes on this bird. It conveniently turned its head to one side to reveal a totally nondescript face: no eye-stripe, supercilium or ascertainable eye-ring, just an almost watercolour wash of buff everywhere.

This was no Golden Plover! (How about an exclamation mark here Jim?)

Realising that the bird was a new species for both of us we set about observing and noting its features. Keeping in mind another of the aforementioned Brit's mantras we did exactly that.

At the end of the day, when trundling back to base, we happily suspected that we had both just seen our first ever Ruff or Reeve. However, page 209 of *Hayman, Marchant and Prater's Shorebirds* (an identification guide to the waders of the world) revealed that the straight, shortish bill and richly yellow legs we had recorded could only belong to a Buff-breasted Sandpiper.

In past years both Helen and I have attended the Wader Identification and Wader Counting Courses held at the Shorebird Centre. We would thoroughly recommend them to all as a way of tapping into the wealth of knowledge and experience that exists within the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust. 

# The rise of the spoonbill



Mary Thompson, coordinator of the national Royal Spoonbill census, explains how these fascinating birds have spread around the country, including to Pukorokoro Miranda

Photo / Steve Attwood, [www.flickr.com/photos/stevex2/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/stevex2/)



Photos / Steve Attwood

Royal Spoonbills have recently added startlingly white accents to the scene from the hide at Miranda.

These large heron-like birds are often seen wading slowly, thigh-deep in the channels, sweeping the water in wide arcs with their characteristic black spoon-shaped bill, which they snap shut when they encounter prey of small fish or crustaceans.

If they are not in the bay, turn and look over the stilt ponds, across the paddocks to the lone dark green macrocarpa – it may be decorated with white dots; these are Royal Spoonbills at their favoured roost. In February this year I saw up to 21 roosting along with Black shags in this tree.

Royal Spoonbills (*Platalea regia*, Maori: kotuku ngutupapa) are members of family Threskiornithidae, which also includes ibises, that are characterised by their unusual bills and by flying with neck outstretched instead of tucked in as herons do.

There are six species of spoonbill; the Royal is most closely related to the Black-faced Spoonbill (*P. minor*) of eastern Asia. The Royal Spoonbills occur throughout the east and north of Australia and as vagrants in nearby New Guinea and Pacific islands. Since the 1950s we have witnessed the successful natural colonisation of New



SPOONBILL TREE AT MIRANDA.

Photo / Bartek Wypych

Zealand by Royal Spoonbills.

The Ornithological Society of NZ (Birds NZ) has been involved in studying this colonisation for several decades. The number of Royal Spoonbills in New Zealand has increased markedly in recent years. The latest census was in the winter of 2012; the numbers have rapidly increased from a low of 26 in 1979 to 2360 in 2012.

It is likely this growth in population is due to increased breeding in New Zealand as a parallel increase in the number of breeding colonies has also occurred during this time, although more influxes from Australian birds cannot be ruled out. A systematic, coordinated count of all colonies and nests was done over the 2013-2014 breeding season by Birds NZ members.

Since 1980 the number of colonies has increased from the original one on Waitangiroto River near Okarito alongside the White Heron colony to at least 20 colonies; 18 of these are in the South Island with 13 in Otago and Southland.

The total number of nests this last season was about 570; the largest colony, with 134 nests, is now at Lake Ellesmere. The colonies are in inaccessible locations near water, and the nests, usually made of a platform of sticks, can be in tree or shrub canopies, on branches of dead trees or on the ground in reed clumps or among driftwood.

Intriguing findings are emerging from a major banding study of Royal Spoonbills to determine seasonal movements and survival rates. 158 chicks were banded with unique colour band combinations over 10 breeding seasons from 1990 to 2005 at colonies on Green Island off the coast at Dunedin, and at Wairau lagoons near Blenheim.

I have been analysing the data that is now available from 20 years of resightings – 737 independent resightings in all. 80% of the banded birds have been resighted and 70% were resighted multiple times at a number of different locations. These are stunning records



for such studies. These data reveal that Royal Spoonbills undergo seasonal movements, north for the winter and south again in the summer, with adults repeatedly returning to the same wintering and breeding sites.

Both juvenile and adult birds move from breeding sites in the south to spend the winter (May through August) in northern locations – at least 80% of winter resightings are at Manakau, Whangarei, Rangaunu and Parengarenga. So spoonbills are undertaking between-island migrations of up to 1000 km.

Adults (2 years and older) move back to southern breeding sites for the summer (Nov to February). Many individual birds have been seen consecutively in northern locations in winter and in southern breeding areas the following summer, year after year, indicating that adult birds undertake repeated seasonal movements.

Juveniles and immatures (< 2 year old) do not return to the breeding colonies, but remain in the north, although some may make partial southward movements. Young birds first return to their natal area at 2 years of age and first breeding was observed at 3 years of age. Interestingly, a third of chicks banded at Wairau have been resighted as adults in the Otago area. This

southward extension of their summer range has probably contributed to the expansion of number of colonies in the south.

Spoonbills would be expected to stop off en route at estuaries in central locations such as Ellesmere, Nelson, and Manawatu. There were fewer resightings in these locations, and most of the resightings were in spring and autumn, which fits with these being transit sites. Mangere sewage pond area is also a major staging site in spring and autumn as well as a wintering site.

There were only a few resighting records from the Bay of Plenty and Firth of Thames region, which means either that this is not a major route or destination, or that fewer observers were out and about covering such a large region.

One bird (banded at Wairau) was seen as a juvenile at Miranda in the summer, then resighted in June at Kaituna and then in October at Taupo, so appears to have attempted a southward migration via an inland route; this bird was not seen again.

Another bird (banded at Green Island) was seen as an immature at Miranda in October and the following year in the winter, and several times the next winter, which suggests that

Miranda was its wintering location; this bird was seen in summer in Otago.

It would be very worthwhile to record the numbers of spoonbills seen around the Miranda area to determine fluctuations throughout the year. How many over-winter at Miranda? Are adult post-breeding birds and/or newly-fledged juvenile first year birds migrating via the Firth of Thames? It is likely that those spoonbills seen at Miranda in the summer are juvenile or immature birds that may have undertaken partial southward migration and settled in Miranda for the summer.

I positively identified 11 juveniles among those roosting in the macrocarpa tree in February. The juveniles can be distinguished by the black tips of the primary feathers, best seen in flight, black faces (absence of yellow eyebrow markings) and smooth bills.

Spoonbills are long-lived with an annual survival rate of 90% as calculated from the resightings of individual banded birds over the 20 years of our dataset. The oldest bird seen alive so far is 18 years and 84 days. Although banding ceased nine years ago, it is still important to scrutinize flocks of spoonbills for banded birds and record colour combinations. Please enter all records on New Zealand eBird [http://ebird.org/content/new\\_zealand/](http://ebird.org/content/new_zealand/) 

## Obituary

# Eila Lawton: a true naturalist and a woman of energy and passion

Miranda experienced a significant loss in May with the death of council member Eila Lawton.

In 1999, after living in the UK for several decades Eila returned to New Zealand with her English husband Ken. During one of several visits to Miranda they enrolled for the Miranda Field Course of 2001. We recall an amiable chap with a wide grin and an engineer's eye for how everything is put together, and a slender energetic woman fizzing with questions.

She demonstrated an active and enthusiastic interest in all aspects of the natural world - a naturalist in the true sense of that word. From this passion, and a background in environmental education in England, emerged skills as a teacher and communicator that proved to be of considerable benefit to the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust.

After the 2001 Field Course Bev Woolley retired as convenor and Eila took up the role – and retained it for the next nine years. During this time the basic course structure developed by Bev remained, but the content evolved and expanded.

The course also grew offshoots: wader identification and bird photography and a course on conservation management of New Zealand Dotterel continue to this day. Eila was active in developing all of them and we know from contact with people since that these courses made a significant difference to the lives of some of the participants.

In 2001 she also took up a role on the Trust council. During this time she constantly worked for the organisation to get more involved with others: other conservation groups, community groups, schools. She was clear that while the Trust had to keep its focus we would get more done by working together with the rest of the conservation community. She pushed to make sure that PMNT was involved with Birdlife International and Forest and Bird.

Before her untimely death, Eila had become a keen advocate for the habitat restoration and enhancement project proposed for the coastal strip, beginning with the QEII coastal block. In this she was joined by Peter Maddison and it was through their joint efforts that the Bioblitz occurred in February 2013.

On the day Eila was in her element making sure that people were moving around and seeing everything that was going on. We know a highlight for her was the web of life that was built with string and thumbtacks, in many ways it represents what she was aiming for with our organisation, connected, mutually supportive (possibly without the predation though).

She brought energy and passion to other roles with Forest and Bird, Birds New Zealand (OSNZ) and the Botanical Society. When organising something she could be



intense and focused, which was often manifest in her phone conversations. At the other end of a call from Eila, one was never under any illusions about whether the conversation had ended. While the phone was still to your ear, she was gone – no doubt already dialling the next call. But when relaxed she brought joy with her, sharing her enthusiasm with those around her, with many an afternoon or evening spent on the couch in the Sibson Room playing word games with Keith, Adrian and others.

At the March open day Gillian Vaughan and Keith Woodley made a small presentation to Eila, acknowledging the work she had done, in particular for the Field Course, which she had kept contributing to as a tutor until 2014. At that time we were not aware of the extent of her illness and we are grateful that we took the opportunity to recognise her work.

Our thoughts go out to all the people who counted Eila as family or friend. She will be missed on a personal level by many. She will also be missed by the conservation community of New Zealand who now have a responsibility to look after the connections she made us, and build new ones as she would have wanted us too. The Trust is looking at establishing a scholarship in her memory.

Gillian Vaughan and Keith Woodley

An event celebrating Eila's life will be held on Saturday 23 August at 4 pm prior to by the Pot-luck Dinner. 



A WELL-OILED MACHINE:  
Len and Pat Taylor get busy dispatching another issue of the magazine.

Photo / Jim Eagles

## Volunteers

# The magazine's super-efficient dispatch team

**Jim Eagles** meets the husband-and-wife team who get each issue of this magazine out to members.

When boxes of the latest issue of *Pukorokoro Miranda News* arrive at their home in Hillsborough, Len and Pat Taylor spring into action like a well-oiled machine.

They sit either side of the kitchen table with piles of magazines, pre-stamped envelopes, sheets of address labels, boxes for finished copies and, in this case, a pile of subscription reminders – all carefully positioned – and get busy.

There isn't much talking – “you've got to concentrate,” says Len, “or you make mistakes” – just the soft sound of names and addresses being stuck on reminders, reminders going into magazines, magazines going into envelopes, flaps being smoothed down, labels being slapped on the front and the finished article being dropped into a box.

The polished operation is probably not surprising when you discover that the Taylors have been doing it for 10 years. Initially they were assisted by other *Miranda* stalwarts but after a while they decided it was easier to do it themselves. “It meant,” says Pat, “that we could choose when to do it rather

than having to find a time that suited others.” “And,” adds Len, “there are fewer distractions.”

There's a quick illustration of that point when, while trying to answer a question, he realises he's put a reminder with one name on it inside an envelope with another name. “Yes, like I said, you do need to concentrate.”

Judging from the speed with which the work is done I suspect they also find it quicker to do it themselves. As it happens I had planned to come see the previous issue being dispatched but then got a call from Len to apologise that, “I was away for a day and when I got back my wife had done the lot.” Magazines certainly disappear into envelopes at a remarkable rate.

Efficient machines are Len's business really. When he retired in 2006 he had spent 36 years as an aircraft maintenance engineer with Air NZ, including two years when he and Pat lived in Seattle, working on the new Boeing 747-200s being built for the airline. Pat, meanwhile, worked at different branches of the BNZ for about 25 years. After retiring in 2000 she “fulfilled a lifetime ambition to go

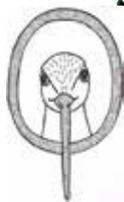
to Auckland University, a move that opened my world. I gained a BA in History and English Literature, then my Honours in Art History. Now I spend my art time learning patchwork and knitting for my grandchildren who are the joy of my life.”

The couple's involvement with *Miranda* began when Len had a stroke and, as part of the recovery process, started to enjoy the tranquillity and beauty of *Miranda*. “I got interested in the centre, got on the council and then, because I didn't really know much about the birds, looked for something I could do to help.”

At the time council secretary Will Perry was also membership secretary – which includes responsibility for distribution of *Miranda News* – and was feeling a bit over-burdened. Len took over that role and, 10 years on is still doing it though he has dropped off the council.

And, if this issue gets to you safely, it'll be because Len and Pat have once again put all those magazines into envelopes, slapped on the address labels and dropped them off to NZ Post. 

# GODWIT TIMES



It may not feel like it but spring is approaching in Pukorokoro-Miranda and that means it is nearly time for the birds and the bees to make baby birds and baby bees.

Godwits like myself have two springs – one in the northern hemisphere where I spend a frantic few months raising chicks, and another here in NZ where I get to sit back, relax and watch the birds that breed in NZ busily making nests, incubating eggs and trying to protect their chicks from harm.

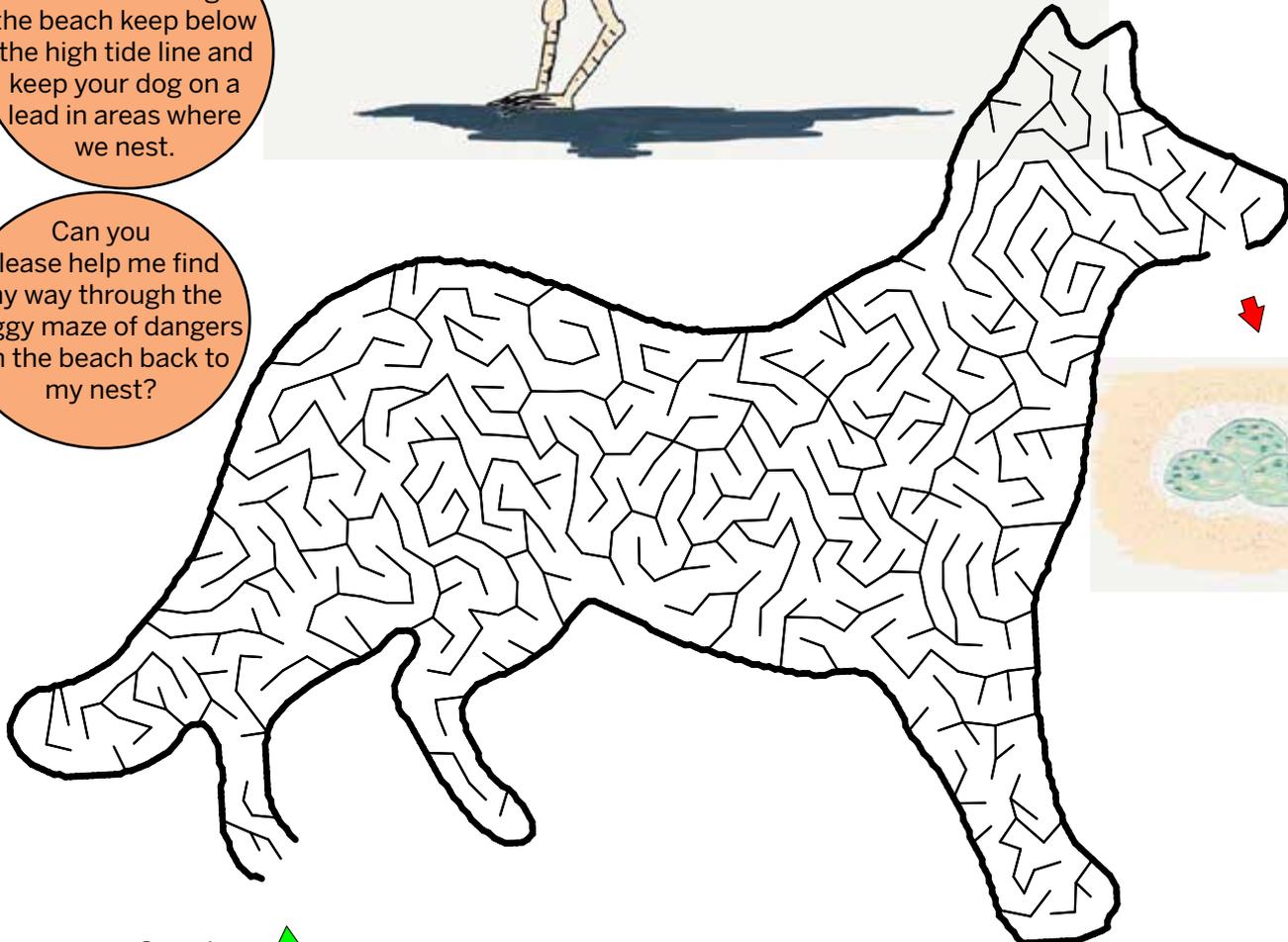
Raising a family can be a hazardous job for shorebirds like oystercatchers and dotterels. Their simple nests above the high tide line are little more than hollows in the sand. Eggs can get eaten by predators such as rats, cats, hedgehogs and stoats but they are also vulnerable to people. Every year eggs are crushed by vehicles driving along beaches and even the feet of unknowing people as they walk above the high tide line.



Because my speckled eggs are so well camouflaged they are easy to trample on without being seen.

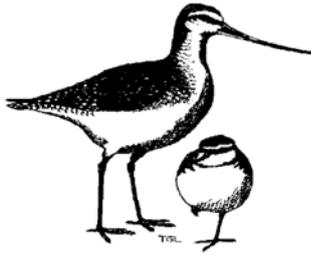
If you do go for a walk along the beach keep below the high tide line and keep your dog on a lead in areas where we nest.

Can you please help me find my way through the doggy maze of dangers on the beach back to my nest?



Start here 

# PUKOROKORO MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST



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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 Pukorokoro 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, especially around new and full moons. 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 \$70 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 PMNT News a year, discounts on accommodation, invitations to events and the opportunity to join in decisionmaking through the annual meeting.

## Bequests

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

## Want to be involved?

### Friends of Pukorokoro 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 Birds NZ (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 9. 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 photo send it in to *Pukorokoro Miranda News*. If you want to discuss your ideas contact Jim Eagles at eagles@clear.net.nz.

### Help in the Shorebird Centre 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.



## Hide and seek

Clockwise, from top left: Bits of of the new hide lie on the salt marsh; the old hide is almost intact after being blown off its foundations; the seats are untouched but where's the building?; sections of the new hide are stacked up; below a team of volunteers starts re-assembling the bits; the walls start rising again; back together again.

Photos / Keith Woodley and Ann Buckmaster

