

Pukorokoro Miranda News

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Prime Minister joins The Flock



New shore guide gets to show visitors around her childhood playground

Wendi Lane, a member of the family that cared for the Robert Findlay Wildlife Reserve over so many years, will be this season's summer shore guide . . . and a few days after starting she was still fizzing with excitement.

Partly that's because being at the hides brings back happy memories of 'an amazing childhood running around outdoors in Miranda . . . a fantastic playground, with waterfalls, swamps, creeks and mudflats to explore.'

When she left school Wendi worked in a bank in Pukekohe and then spent 17 years using the UK as a base to explore the world. But she retained 'an interest in the natural world, stemming from Mum and Dad's stories and the National Geographic magazines that I loved reading' so when the time came to return to New Zealand she was keen to get involved in conservation.

An opportunity to do that came when she saw an article 'about a guy on the banks of the Whanganui River combining farming, tourism and conservation all in one operation. It sounded like the place for me, so I got in touch, went down for a visit, fell in love with the place, handed in my CV, said "pick me!" . . . and he did!'

Wendi worked at Blue Duck Station at Whakahoro for seven years, during which time it grew from an operation where she was the only staff member to one with five full time members of staff and eight volunteers over the summer months.'

During that time she looked after the lodges – there are now five – ran the conservation side with its over 500 traps, drove guests over the station and told them about the farm, local Maori and European history and the conservation project.

Since deciding it was time to move on Wendi has been to the Chatham Islands, graded kiwifruit, house sat, bought her first home – a caravan – and now started work with PMNT.

'I am very excited about being the shore guide for the summer and reconnecting with my childhood stomping ground and learning as much as I can,' she says. 'I've seen godwits, knots,



GOOD CATCH: Wendi Lane celebrates the demise of another predator.

stints, turnstones, Caspian Terns, a Little Tern, a bossy sandpiper, golden plover and all of the other usual suspects. I especially took to the Wrybills scurrying around like cute little crabs.

'I can hardly wait to share my new-found knowledge with all the people who turn up at the hide and centre as well as learn things from them. I also look forward to meeting PMNT members who have contributed so much over the years and continue to do so.'

Progress in China

The Governor of Hebei Province has used an address to the 2016 Beidaihe Coastal Wetlands and Waterfowl Seminar to announce that the Luannan Coast in Bohai Bay, a crucial stopover site for our Red Knots, will be formally protected. The Governor also said he was considering protection for other important wader sites in Hebei.

Annual accounts

Treasurer Charles Gao was unable to present audited annual accounts to the AGM because of the complexity of the new legal requirements. However, the accounts have now been signed off by the Trust's auditors and are available for inspection at <http://www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz/archives/3258>.

Building bridges

The annual working bee at the Centre – traditionally held prior to the mid-winter pot luck dinner – was a great success.

As well as giving the Centre a much-needed pre-spring clean, the big team of volunteers also did major jobs like replacing the two bridges over wetlands running into Widgery Lake, digging a trench for an overflow pipe from the water storage system and taking advantage of Keith's absence



WORKING BEE (top) cleaning out the garage; (bottom) replacing one of the bridges.
Photos / Jim Eagles

overseas to give the garage and storage shed a huge clean-out which saw piles of material taken to the tip.

Land update

Since purchase of the Robert Findlay Wildlife Reserve was finalised in June the Trust has started work on drafting a management plan. The first priority is to improve flow to and from the Stilt Ponds. At present the ponds are holding too much water for too long which is good for the growing number of Black Swans seen there this year, but not for shorebirds.

In association with Living Water, a hydrology report was commissioned and land surveying carried out to establish levels. Preliminary results present several options. The first and immediate step is to repair the flap gate and ensure the culvert under the track into the carpark is clear. The next stage will be to investigate options for improving flow from this area to the Pukorokoro Stream.

The Trust is also considering creating an additional outflow channel through to the tidal creek north of the old hide. The ultimate aim is to be able to control water levels in the Stilt Ponds, keeping them low enough for roosting shorebirds while also being

able to flush them periodically and control weed growth.

Elsewhere on the block, particularly between the Stilt Ponds and the tidal channel to the east, is a large area of weeds, particularly *Carex divisa* and fennel. Several management options for this area are being considered.

Generally it is intended to avoid grazing if possible, but it may be necessary to use it for a brief period to reduce existing growth. Periodic rough mowing is a possible longer term option.

Recent sightings at Pukorokoro

Arctic Migrants

c4000	Bar-tailed Godwit
4	Black-tailed Godwit
1	Hudsonian Godwit
c1000	Red Knot
2	Pacific Golden Plover
9	Turnstone
2	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
2	Marsh Sandpiper
4	Red-necked Stint

New Zealand species

200	Wrybill
c.350	SI Pied Oystercatcher
4	New Zealand Dotterel
2	Banded Dotterel
68	Royal Spoonbill
3	White Heron
500+	Black-billed Gull nesting!
	Caspian Tern
	White Fronted Tern
	Pied Stilt
	Hybrid Black Stilt
	Variable Oystercatcher

What's on at the Shorebird Centre

6 November, OSNZ Firth of Thames Wader Census

Contact Tony Habraken (09 238 5284) for details.

18-28 November, Devonport Flock

2500 handpainted shorebirds on Windsor Reserve in Devonport. Official opening 1pm on the 18th. Shorebird Film Festival 2pm on the 20th in the historic Victoria Cinema.

3-4 December, Wader Identification Course

The best way to learn what all those fascinating birds out on the mudflats actually are. Further information from the Shorebird Centre.

5 March, Farewell to the Birds

10am Researcher Rachel Withington Wrybill reveals what Wrybills eat when they're visiting the Forth of Thames.

14 May, Annual general meeting

Your chance to have a say in the running of the Trust.

Lower lying areas provide potential for expanding the salt marsh zone, so manipulating water levels wherever possible will be used with this in mind. North of the existing hide it is proposed to establish a new hide facing west across the Stilt Ponds.

Mangrove removal

There was an amazing turnout for a special working bee to remove the thick band of mangroves which had sprung up along the foreshore in front of the hides over winter and were threatening both to ruin bird viewing and to block the important sightlines of the waders.

Armed with a mangrove removal permit from Waikato Regional Council – granted just in time for the work to be done before the first migrants arrived – dozens of people turned out to crawl through the mud and pull out plants.

Tim Brandenburg, North Island project manager for Living Water, the partnership between DOC and Fonterra which has invested significant sums in PMNT's work in recent times, took the opportunity to get involved in the dirty side of the work and was one of the last to leave the mud.

Afterwards, organiser Adrian Riegen described it as 'a brilliant effort.

I have never seen so many people to be happily bum deep in mud. Tens of thousands of seedling mangroves were cleared in a few hours.'

Thanks to the work, he said, 'the bay in front of the hide is now mangrove-free and perfect for waders'.

Unfortunately, the bay was also 'perfect for mangroves to flourish so it will be an ongoing battle and we'll have to do it all over again next year.'

Taking a break



Len Taylor is stepping down after 13 years as membership secretary and, together with wife Pat, organising the distribution of the quarterly magazine.



An aircraft maintenance engineer by profession, Len ran the operation with the same precision he lavished on Air NZ aircraft. But now, he says, age and health mean it's time for him to take it easy.

When Len announced his decision the PMNT Council paid tribute to his huge contribution in doing a complex and important job so well for so long.

Membership records will in future be maintained at the Shorebird Centre and the magazines will be put in envelopes and labelled at the home of Kevin Barker and Olga Brochner in Auckland.

Pay Noddy



A recent arrival in the Shorebird Centre is Noddy, a beautifully painted shorebird who gratefully accepts coins and drops them into a donation box. Noddy is the result of a suggestion by Wendy Hare, transformed into reality through the skills of Ray and Ann Buckmaster, and he is proving hugely popular. During the latest holiday programme at the Centre he raised \$24 and has since continued to attract donations. By popular demand Noddy will be visiting the Devonport Flock event 18-28 November. 🐦



MUDLARKS: (clockwise from top right) mangrove infestation before; and after; Louisa Chase; Trudy Lane; Wendi and Florence Lane; Living Water project manager Tim Brandenburg. Photos / Sietske de Jong, Ray Buckmaster.



ABOUT THE BIRDS: Prime Minister John Key takes a break from painting a godwit to ask Adrian Riegen about The Flock project while Conservation Minister Maggie Barry talks to Jim Eagles about the knot she's decorating.

The Flock

National leaders join the shorebird project

Four brightly coloured plywood shorebirds painted by Prime Minister John Key and Conservation Minister Maggie Barry will be among the 2500 which will roost on Windsor Reserve in Devonport from 18-28 November.

The Devonport Flock will represent the biggest gathering of PMNT's The Flock project which has been hugely successful in spreading understanding of the amazing stories of our shorebirds and the threats to their future.

All 10 schools on the Devonport Peninsula, plus community groups like Devonport Community House, U3A, 60s Up, Community Workshop, Rotary, Holy Trinity Church and Devonport Peninsula Trust have got behind the campaign by painting birds and listening to talks about shorebirds.

Key and Barry added their support during a visit to Devonport Naval Museum where Barry, as MP for North Shore, had arranged for the birds to be decorated.

The Prime Minister particularly asked to paint a Bar-tailed Godwit but, not wishing to overlook our endemic shorebirds, he also signed a nice blue South Island Pied Oystercatcher.

Barry painted two birds particularly relevant to her work as Conservation



Minister: the nationally vulnerable Red Knot, which should benefit from the agreement signed earlier this year between New Zealand and China to protect shorebird habitat; and the Wrybill, which could be greatly helped by the Government's recently announced Predator Free NZ 2050 policy.

The ministerial painting session arose because Barry originally agreed to open the Devonport Flock but due to a hiccup over dates with Auckland Council found she would be overseas on the big day. Event organiser Jim Eagles suggested she might instead like to paint a bird for The Flock and perhaps to ask the PM to do so as well.

Jim was thrilled when that idea was taken up but a bit strung out by the fact that when Barry's office got in touch to arrange the painting he was Kokako monitoring on Tiritiri Matangi Island with ferries cancelled due to bad weather.

However, he got home in time by

water taxi and the family got busy. Twelve-year-old grandson Jamie put a gold undercoat on the plywood godwit the PM wanted, wife Chris prepared a purple knot for Barry and Jim did the SIPO and Wrybill.

For a few bucks Chris got a couple of brushes from Ike's Emporium and, laden with birds, half-a-dozen Resene test pots, a blue ice cream container, a marmalade jar and an old tea towel, they headed for the museum.

Joined by chair Gillian Vaughan and deputy-chair Adrian Riegen – unfortunately Ray and Ann Buckmaster who have been the driving forces in The Flock were sick – the team set up their painting station in the museum's Hall of Memories and waited.

As is usually the case with such events, messages came in saying the PM was running late and the time for bird painting would have to be cut from 15 minutes to under 10.

But suddenly Key was striding through the door where, spying young Jamie, he stuck out his hand and said, 'Hello, what's your name?' Jamie explained that he was there with his grandparents and that he had painted the PM's godwit.

To make the most of the time Jim

**HAPPY
ARTISTS:**
John
Key and
Maggie
Barry
proudly
display
their
birds.



Council members Trudy Lane and Wendy Hare, helped by young relations 12-year-old Florence and 4-year-old Everett, made lots of birds to put on display. Then Trudy planted them in clumps around the hides.

Meanwhile, Ray and Ann produced some brilliantly colourful birds which they fastened to the gate at the Centre to give visitors a warm welcome.

Film festival

Part of the Devonport Flock event will be a Shorebird Film Festival in the local Victoria Cinema.

At 2pm on Sunday 20 November the cinema will be screening four videos on migratory birds from the world-famous Cornell Ornithological Lab and one from Migration Productions, accompanied by expert comments from Keith Woodley and Adrian Riegen. In addition three screenings have been organised for local schools.

None of these videos has been shown on the big screen in New Zealand before and this is a one-off screening so bookings are advisable. See the theatre website www.thevic.co.nz for details.

quickly ushered them to the painting table, handed out birds, brushes and marker pens and they got busy painting while Adrian chatted to Key about The Flock and answered questions about the birds.

Meanwhile Barry, who was bubbling with enthusiasm, quizzed Jim about the Wrybill and how it would benefit from wiping out predators.

The two ministers got so involved in their birds that 10 minutes went by, then 15, but they kept going. When the painting was finished the PM insisted on being photographed with the PMNT team, then wanted his picture taken with Jamie and finally he and Barry posed proudly with their artwork.

Afterwards Key posted several photos of his bird painting on Twitter with the comment: 'Putting our artistic talents to good use for the The Flock - a creative project to highlight the threats to shorebirds.' Barry also posted a photo and tweeted 'With the artistic PM raising awareness about protecting our Shorebirds at Devonport's excellent naval museum.'

In addition she issued a brief statement saying: 'I commend the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust on their work for shorebirds. I have visited the outstanding Shorebird Centre on the Firth of Thames on several occasions, including with the Chinese Ambassador Wang Lutong, who is also very supportive of these remarkable long distance migrants that we share. Late last year we signed a Memorandum of Agreement between New Zealand and China to ensure the protection of their habitats in both our

countries.'

Speaking for PMNT, Gillian said the gesture of support from the Government was extremely valuable. 'It will certainly help our Flock campaign with its advocacy for shorebirds and coastal ecology in New Zealand,' she said, 'but just as importantly it will give a huge boost to our work to protect those vital shorebird stopover sites around the Yellow Sea.'

'To be able to present a photo of the Prime Minister getting involved in our activities is just incredibly helpful. In the work we do overseas, to have a visible connection with the Prime Minister will give a huge boost to our prestige and make it much easier to get our message taken notice of.'

Shorebirds everywhere

Visitors to the Shorebird Centre and the hides can now be assured of seeing plenty of fascinating birds whatever the state of the tide.



**WHAT
BIRD IS
THAT?**
Trudy
Lane
plants a
small flock
of birds
near the
hides.
Photo /
Jim Eagles



UNDER THREAT: This banner developed by Ray Buckmaster and Trudy Lane will play a key role at Flock gatherings.

and Wendi, plus shop manager Louisa Chase and educator Krystal Glen, set off early in cars laden down with birds, banners, tarpaulins and tables ready for fun.

Alas, they arrived not to a bustle of eager workers setting up go-karts, woodchopping, sheep dog trials and horse carts but a soggy ghost town sagging under torrential rain and high winds. Nevertheless the team got stuck into the work of setting up a display and Louisa, in full wet weather gear, planted the birds in the damp grass.

Unfortunately the weather then got worse and, Trudy recalls sadly, it became obvious that the day was a washout. 'We informed the organizers of our impending departure, repacked the cars as best we could, and by 9am had exited the grounds. Maybe better luck next year?'

Plenty of converts

As The Flock has gathered momentum there has been a constant stream of groups and schools hearing of the idea - mostly from social media - and wanting to join in.

Among the recent converts are: Waitakere Kiwi Conservation Club ordered 12 birds so they could paint them and set up a local display; Paparimu Primary School in Hunua and Peninsula Primary School in Te Atatu are making their own flocks; the Avon-Heathcote Estuary Ihutai Trust in Christchurch has five schools helping build a flock for the annual Farewell to the Godwits in February; years 3 and 4 from Te Puke Primary School took 76 birds and some shorebird signs

to plant at Newdick's Beach on World Shorebird Day; Karangahake School held a Flock Day to display birds made by the pupils and listen to a talk from educator Krystal Glen.

Island welcome

A planned Welcome to the Birds on Waiheke Island's Piritahi Marae went ahead despite the death a few days beforehand of Christopher Wragge, the husband of event organiser Ping Lee-Wragge, who felt sure he would have wanted it to continue.

The welcome was inspired by a Keith Woodley talk on 'Godwit Diplomacy' earlier in the year and by social media news of The Flock. Fifty extra-large godwits - sleeping, standing, preparing to fly and taking off - were cut out and painted by members of the Hauraki Classroom adult education group at Waiheke Library with help from the Waiheke Community Shed.

Four of the birds were presented

to Trudy Lane to join our main Flock. The rest were taken to roost around a pohutukawa at the entrance to the marae with 12 real godwits looking on from the nearby Blackpool Beach. The welcome also included a powhiri, a pop-up workshop from the library and a celebration of godwits.

Southern front

The South Island wing of The Flock, organised by the Braided Rivers Aid group, has been doing amazing work. Flash Flocks have been set up in places like the Environment Canterbury headquarters in Christchurch, Rakaia Salmon Café, a park in Amberley, Waimakariri Regional Park, Kaikoura Memorial Centre, Musterer's Hut Café in Twizel, Ashley Gorge, Methven i-Site, Oxford Farmers' Market, Waimakariri District Council offices, Rangiora Vet Centre and even Christchurch International Airport. Along the way the birds have attracted plenty



BIG BIRDS: The Hauraki Classroom's birds wait to be called on to Piritahi Marae for Waiheke Island's Welcome to the Birds.

of attention and media publicity for the message that our shorebirds need help.

Off to church

The Flock has even gone to church. On the feast day of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals, Jim was asked to address two services at Devonport's Holy Trinity Church on the subject of shorebirds. Afterwards church members decorated about 120 birds for the Devonport Flock. The vicar, Charmaine Braatvedt, said there had been a hugely enthusiastic response. 'We could have done with extra birds because everyone wanted to paint one and some wanted two.'

Works of art

When Miranda Farm Gallery held an exhibition of artwork painted by Derek Onley for the 2015 revised edition of *Field Guide to the Birds of NZ*, proprietor Annie Wilson thought The Flock would be the perfect accompaniment. As a result visitors to the gallery were greeted by a cluster of beautifully painted birds including several of those produced by Oropi School. That provided a special thrill for Liam Tully who called into the gallery with his family, and found the bird he made on display outside.

Flocking to the Chathams

The Flock looks like making an appearance in one of the New Zealand's most isolated outposts. German student Hendrik Schultz, who visits the Chathams to study skuas, has been in touch to find out how to make birds for local children to decorate.

South Korea doubles up

There may now be two little flocks in South Korea. A while ago David Lawrie sent a small parcel of cut out birds

ON SHOW:
Flock team
members
(from left)
Ray and Ann
Buckmaster,
Louisa
Chase and
Jim Eagles
with the
Kaiaua
Flock.

Photo /
Wendy Hare



BRIGHT
AND
BEAUTIFUL:
Charmaine
Braatvedt
and
members
of her
team with
some of
their birds
roosting
outside
Holy Trinity
Church.
Photo / Jim
Eagles

to Tomoko Ichikawa of the EAAFP Secretariat in Incheon. The folk there were thrilled to get their parcel and sent back photos of them making their Flock. More recently researcher Andreas Kim sent word that an eco-class in the Muan Mongtan Middle School was also making a flock of birds.

Flock Oz

The Flock continues to expand across the ditch. In South Australia local woodwork groups, the South Oz Scrollers and Western Woodies, are getting behind the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board to help create a flock for the second Adelaide Shorebirds Festival at St Kilda. In addition, Grace Maglio, who learned about the project at the Australasian Shorebird Conference, has been in touch about setting up a wing in Broome in Western Australia.

Flash Flocks

The first in a planned tactic of Flash Flock appearances was organised outside Kaiaua School as an acknowledge-

ment that it was the first to become involved in The Flock programme.

Ray and his team arrived and set up Kaiaua's own birds, plus a selection from other schools, at the entrance.

'As we worked, first the principal arrived and then, shortly after, a rush of teachers, parents and children.

'What a buzz! The children were busy running through the Flock to find their birds and then checking out the work of children from other schools.'

Flocking to Kaiaua

The biggest gathering of The Flock to date - 518 beautiful birds - was held on the foreshore at Kaiaua on the day before the Welcome to the Birds at the Shorebird Centre.

Members of The Flock team planted the birds made by the three local schools - Kaiaua, Mangatangi and Waitakaruru - and then added other birds from all round the country to create a stunning display.

The gathering attracted a steady stream of passersby stopping to see what it was all about. Several of the local children who made the birds brought admiring families along to see their artwork. A busload of Chinese visitors being taken to the Centre by Estella Lee pulled up and got their photos taken with the colourful gathering.

The Flock even attracted their ultimate compliment when several South Island Pied Oystercatchers and a few Bar-tailed Godwits landed on a nearby shellbank to admire their more brightly-coloured relations.

Further updates

You can get more updates on the fast-growing world of The Flock at <http://theflocknz.blogspot.co.nz/>.



STANDING GUARD: Philip Moll with some of the new interpretative signage at Shoal Bay. Photo / Jim Eagles

Discover Auckland City's 'new Miranda'

If all you know of the Devonport Peninsula is the sandy beaches to which visitors flock it might seem a strange place to hold a shorebird event. But when Jim Eagles went for a walk on the mudflats of the less popular other side of the peninsula with the area's self-appointed guardian Philip Moll he found . . . shorebirds galore.

Philip Moll's love affair with Shoal Bay and Ngataranga Bay, which run along the western side of the Devonport Peninsula, began about five years ago with a highly enjoyable birding trip to the chenier plains of Miranda.

After returning to his home at Hauraki Corner he wandered down to Shoal Bay, looked at the mudflats and shellbanks, and thought, 'What's different about them? They look the same as Miranda.'

So he looked the subject up on the internet and on the Landcare website he found an article about chenier plains. 'It said,' he recalls, 'they are a very rare feature on a global scale and Miranda is the only place where they are continuing to accumulate shells. But they are also found at, yes, you guessed it, Shoal Bay. They are also found at other places like Stillwater and Pollen Island. But we have them right here not far from my house. And I thought, well, if they're important for birds at Miranda why wouldn't they be important here?'

Another of what Philip calls his eureka moments about Shoal Bay came when he was on one of its shellbanks

and a flock of birds flew over him. 'I didn't have a clue what they were, but then they landed down quite near to me, and they were Wrybill. And I muttered under my breath, Shoal Bay . . . the new Miranda.'

This inspired him to do more internet research about Shoal Bay which initially found nothing about the birds there. 'Little Shoal Bay, yes. Shoal Bay, nothing. Except hidden away on the Council website was the fact that it was a site of significant wildlife interest.

'That notice also stated that it was the habitat of several at risk birds including the Banded Rail, New Zealand Dotterel, Reef Heron, Banded Dotter-

el, Caspian Tern and Wrybill. And it said more common birds that could be found there in large numbers included South Island Pied Oystercatcher and Pied Stilt.'

Not long after, by one of those glorious coincidences with which Philip's life seems to be dotted, while he was doing volunteer work on Motuora Island he bumped into Department of Conservation entomologist Chris Green. They got talking about Shoal Bay and it turned out that Chris had actually written that 'site of significant wildlife interest' designation in 1987 and it was officially adopted a few years later. 'So that's 25 years ago and



UP NORTH: Wrybill in Shoal Bay. Photo / Philip Moll



SHOAL BAY; (clockwise, from top left) Royal Spoonbill; Bar-tailed Godwits; Caspian Tern; South Island Pied and Variable Oystercatchers. Photos / Philip Moll



those birds were at risk then and most of them still are so nothing much has changed.'

Since then Philip has been doing his best to see that things do change by learning more about what birds are found in what he calls Great Shoal Bay, photographing them to help convince sceptics about the importance of the area and working with groups like the North Shore branch of Forest & Bird and Auckland Council to give it greater protection.

The number of species he has sighted there continues to grow. 'The other day,' he tells me, 'I got a call saying there was a Royal Spoonbill down in Ngataranga Bay. I went and had a look and, sure enough, there it was. So that's another species.'

From the birds he's identified Philip has compiled – reflecting his childhood reading of Enid Blyton – a Famous Five and a Secretive Sixth of birds. 'I haven't managed to get a Secret Seven yet.' These are the birds that earned Shoal Bay that DOC designation as a site of significant wildlife interest.

Top of the Famous Five list is the New Zealand Dotterel, not least because with 10 breeding pairs and a total of 35 birds, Shoal Bay supports more than 1% of the species, making

it a site of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. That significance is underlined by the fact that the only known photo of North Island and South Island Dotterel together (at far right) was taken by dotterel researcher John Dowding in Shoal Bay.

One of the dotterel Philip photographed on the shell banks in the bay had YGOW bands and, as he later discovered when he met John Dowding at a conference, it is a research bird banded by John himself in November 2003. At the time this bird had a nest at Warehouse Way – a road at the head of the bay which leads, of course, to the headquarters of The Warehouse – and, he notes, 'it hasn't moved very far since.'

Warehouse Way is a very popular roosting site for dotterel – Philip has a photo of 18 New Zealand and eight Banded Dotterel in the office car park there – 'because it is almost predator free and has great sightlines'.

In fact, like many shorebirds, the dotterel prefer the motorway side of Shoal Bay as a nesting area, partly because of the presence of half-a-dozen artificial shellbanks created as part of the project to add a busway to the Auckland's Northern motorway, but

also because the motorway makes a great barrier to predators.

But last year Philip came across a pair of New Zealand Dotterel showing signs of nesting on a shellbank on the other side of the bay, not far from his home, and persuaded Auckland Council to put up a taped fence with signs warning people, and especially dog-walkers, to stay away. 'This made a huge difference. We got what are possibly our first eggs away from the motorway side. Two eggs disappeared and possibly could have hatched. A third egg seemed to go past the incubation period so the birds may have been disturbed.' That, he believes, showed that 'if we put up those fences and signs and talk to the people who live near the spits or go walking there, we can get more chicks. And the New Zealand Dotterel will be a bit less threatened.'

The others in his Famous Five are:

Banded Dotterel, which 'also like Warehouse Way, usually hang around the car park at high tide and move out on to the lawn when the car park fills up with cars. Then they head to the shell banks in the bay and feed at low tide on the tidal mud flats.'

Wrybill, which 'come up north around April after breeding and moulting. I've seen flocks of over 100. They

feed at low tide in the estuary.'

Caspian Terns, 'a beautiful bird. I have seen as many as five roosting and flying over Ngataranga and Shoal Bays. But as far as I know there's only one breeding pair and they nest down the motorway side'. The Reef Heron, 'possibly my favourite bird with that wonderful stealth bomber pose. I had real trouble finding them. In May this year I saw a Reef Heron from the motorway overbridge but that's the only one I've seen in three years.'

The secret sixth, of course, is the shy Banded Rail that 'loves mangroves . . . if you get rid of the mangroves you'll lose the rail' and has been seen in Shoal Bay, Upper Shoal Bay and the adjacent Tuff Crater.

Other birds Philip has recorded in Shoal Bay include White-faced Herons, Variable Oystercatchers, which successfully breed there, South Island Pied Oystercatchers (he has a photo of 200 on a shellbank in Ngataranga Bay), Black-backed Gulls, 'which may seem a nuisance but do a good job of cleaning up the rubbish', the 'elegant' pied stilt, Bar-tailed Godwits (another photo shows 118 godwits on a shellbank) but to date no Red Knots. Pied Shags, Little Pied Shags, Little Black Shags, Great Cormorant, Kingfishers and now the spoonbill. All in all there are over 12 threatened or at risk species of birds that are either resident or visit the estuary to feed rest or breed. When his crusade to protect Shoal Bay started, he recalls, one problem was 'there was no signage telling you anything about this wonderful area and there was also no signage saying where you can and cannot take your dogs'.

After a bit of gentle persuasion Auckland Council put up a couple of signs at strategic spots explaining the importance of Shoal Bay to shorebirds and listing some of the species found there and more recently it has added a few more.

The Council has also broadened its bylaws to restrict people from walking dogs in nesting areas of the shell banks and the day I went for my walk with Philip it had just erected new signs explaining those rules. 'That's marvellous,' he said. 'It's not that I'm out to bag dogs. It's just that if you have dogs running through areas where, say, dotterel are trying to raise chicks it's not hard to imagine what will happen. And it's important that it's clear where




HAPPY HOME: (above) A shellbank protected by signs and (below) a North Island NZ Dotterel (at left) meets its darker South Island cousin at Shoal Bay. Photos / Jim Eagles, John Dowding.



dogs can go and where they can't. If there's no signage saying what the rules are you can hardly blame dog owners if they go where they aren't supposed to.'

Another recent step forward has been the establishment of bait stations around much of Shoal Bay and Ngataranga Bay thanks to a campaign involving the Council and local volunteers. 'That's really taking off,' Philip

says, 'and we're hoping to spread it right round the Devonport Peninsula.'

That's all very encouraging but, he asks himself, does all that make Auckland 'the most liveable city in the world for our birds? Well, they don't really require much at all. Just a bit of understanding. I think we're starting to achieve that. And there is room for plenty more birds.' 

Shorebirds – and others – in the heart of Auckland

Philip Moll, who lives near Shoal Bay, and Ngaire Mules, who overlooks Ngataranga Bay, have compiled the following bird list for the area.

Bar- tailed	Pied Shag	Swamp Harrier	Welcome
Godwit	Great Cormorant	Pukeko	Swallow
Red-necked Stint	White-faced Heron	Paradise Shelduck	Blackbird
Wrybill	Reef Heron	Kingfisher	Song Thrush
SI Pied	Red-billed Gull	Fantail	House Sparrow
Oystercatcher	Caspian Tern	Silvereye	Chaffinch
Variable	White-fronted Tern	Grey Warbler	Goldfinch
Oystercatcher	Australasian	Tui	Yellowhammer
NZ Dotterel	Gannet	Grey Teal	Starling
Banded Dotterel	Pied Stilt	Spur-winged Plover	Myna
Little Black Shag	Royal Spoonbill	Mallard	Eastern Rosella
Little Pied Shag	Banded Rail	Black Swan	Barbary Dove

Mysterious booming bitterns' threat status upgraded to 'nationally critical'

Bitterns have been an exciting part of the Pukorokoro landscape in recent years and researcher **Emma Williams** told the mid-winter potluck dinner what an increasingly rare experience that now is.

There was bad news – but possibly also a silver lining - from Australasian Bittern researcher Emma Williams when she addressed the mid-winter potluck dinner: bitterns, she told members, were about to be upgraded from 'nationally endangered' to 'nationally critical'.

That is the highest threat ranking, and reflects the parlous position of this mysterious, secretive and fascinating bird, but hopefully it may lead to more resources being put into learning how best to safeguard its future.

Emma said the Australasian Bittern was found only in New Caledonia, Australia and New Zealand. 'A decade ago there were thought to be less than 1000 adult bitterns each in New Zealand and Australia, and fewer than 50 in New Caledonia.

'However, recently Australia has lost large numbers of its population, and the New Caledonian population is thought to have vanished. New Zealand is therefore an important place for the survival of the species.'

The New Zealand population is almost certainly declining, too, but precisely because the birds are so mysterious we don't know much about them . . . a situation Emma has spent the past few years trying to rectify.

Originally from England, she started researching bitterns in 2009 under a Department of Conservation contract which subsequently expanded into work for an MSc and now a PhD at Massey University.

In that time she has focussed mainly on developing methods of monitoring cryptic species like bitterns, in particular how best to catch them in order to fit transmitters.

These days she is based at Lake Whatuma, near Waipukurau, in Hawkes Bay, where in the 2014 season she caught six males – which because of their amazing booming they were



A FINE ROMANCE: Researcher Emma Williams with one of the bitterns who have stolen her heart.
Photo / Emma Williams

given the names of human crooners like Bing Crosby and Prince Tui Teke – and as a result was able to track their seasonal movements. The most remarkable finding was that when the lake dried up in summer all the males left and one travelled 15km down a watercourse looking for food.

Bitterns are, it seems, prepared to go a long way in search of something to eat. One female released at the Waimakariri Estuary was found 100km away and, sadly, it was dead from starvation.

Indeed, lack of food is clearly a major reason for the species' decline. Emma reported that many of the sick

bitterns brought into care by members of the public were starving and those that survived long enough to be released seemed to have trouble finding food through the winter and died of starvation around June.

That should come as no great surprise because 90% of the wetlands, where bitterns live, breed and feed, have been drained, with disastrous consequences for all the species that used to live there. 'Bitterns favourite food,' Emma points out, 'is eels which are also considered to be under threat.'

Fortunately, bitterns are opportunistic feeders happy to snack on the likes of small fish, insects and



HARD TO FIND: Bitterns are difficult to research because they are masters of disguise. Photos / Emma Williams

frogs. However, their ability to catch their prey is severely affected by poor water clarity when wetlands become degraded, and also by water depth when landowners dig deep drains or use wetlands as holding ponds, creating a situation where bitterns have, as Emma puts it, 'the same chance of catching their prey as a drunk man has of catching a teddy bear in the pub with a crane claw machine.'

Unfortunately bitterns also have characteristics that suggest they may be highly vulnerable to wetland predators. They have small clutch sizes, they only lay once a year, only the female incubates and she is much smaller than the male, the female also has to leave the nest to feed which leaves her eggs/chicks very vulnerable . . . and, unlike their secretive parents, the chicks are very smelly and noisy.'

It all sounds rather depressing and one member asked Emma if trying to save our bitterns was a waste of time. No, she replied, it was not a waste of time. Certainly there were challenges. But there were also reasons for optimism.


The key to the bittern's survival lay in providing suitable wetlands for

them to live and feed in and there were opportunities for this to happen.

For instance, one of the main sponsors of her research work is Ducks Unlimited which, although it is primarily aimed at creating wetland habitat for ducks, was also interested in making the wetlands suitable for bitterns. 'Duck hunters are very happy to provide an environment that is good for bitterns so long as it is still good for ducks.' As a result, part of her research is now focussed on finding

out what bitterns need habitat-wise 'so we can make this information publicly available so that anyone who's interested in creating, managing or restoring a wetland can do so with bitterns in mind.'

That's a very interesting point when you consider that PMNT now owns a wetland in an area where bitterns have bred successfully in recent years.

You can find out more about Emma Williams' work at <https://facebook.com/swampbird.research> 



CAUGHT: A bittern caught in a cage trap has to put up with the attentions of the paparazzi. Photo / Emma Williams



OLDTIMER: ZPE is the oldest known Bar-tailed Godwit seen in New Zealand.

Photo / Andreas Kim

The fascinating godwit stories behind those engraved leg flags

One of the most exciting experiences in birdwatching is to spot a flag, send the letters to **Adrian Riegen** and then get back from him the story of all the bird's sightings around New Zealand and the world. And, as Adrian explains, such sightings also provide researchers with valuable information.

What do Bar-tailed Godwits with engraved white flags on their leg at Pukorokoro Miranda and elsewhere tell us about the birds? Quite a lot actually, as will become evident as we proceed. Each and every sighting is important so please keep sending them in, even if it is only one bird.

For instance, has anyone seen the godwit with flag ZPE since it was last sighted on 11 March 2016? Because if you have then you have been looking at the oldest known Bar-tailed Godwit in New Zealand. We first banded it in 1993 as an adult bird. Meaning it hatched no later than 1990 (the flag was added in 2012) and so at the time of writing that bird, if it is still alive, is at least 26 years old.

By 30 June 2016 we had received 11,749 sightings of 893 individual birds from the 941 we have flagged, which is an impressive 95% resighting

rate. Some sightings turn out to be incorrect, although just how many is difficult to determine.

Approximately one in 50 sightings received is of a combination of letters that we have not used, so perhaps the same amount are incorrectly read, which is easily done with combinations like AVW or AWV, especially in windy and heat shimmery conditions.

There are also several thousand partially read sightings but we will ignore them for now. To avoid confusion with other letters or numbers, there are five letters we don't use, F, G, I, O and Q.

But even if two sightings in 50 are incorrect there are more than enough good sightings to give us a good understanding of the movements of godwits around New Zealand and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

More statistics. Of the 11,749

sightings, 8,986 of these came from just five observers, who spent long lonely hours with eyes straining through their scopes to read three tiny letters on distant white flags. Several of these it must be said were in the employ of Phil Battley who was trying to determine departure dates of individual birds. However, the five observers shall remain anonymous lest they be thought of disparagingly, but their contributions have been enormous.

The remaining sightings have come from 152 other observers and their sightings are no less valuable. One day an observer recorded a flag combination at Miranda but thought, as it was banded at Miranda it would not be of real interest. How wrong can one be? That bird was seen for several days at a site in NSW but six days earlier had disappeared. We now know



WELL-TRAVELLED: BNM was first banded in Victoria and has since been recorded 46 times in either Miranda or Apheado in South Korea.
Photo / Andreas Kim

where it had disappeared to.

Pukorokoro Miranda has produced the most sightings with 9,251 and of those 9,212 are of birds banded at Miranda. Foxton has produced 857 sightings that I know about, and the Manukau Harbour only 238, but few birds have been banded there.

It is wonderful that so many people have contributed sightings and long may it continue, as each sighting strengthens our understanding of the godwit's annual movements or lack of movements, for the stay-at-homes. This article only covers white engraved flags but there are also over 1,000 sightings of other coloured engraved flags, mostly from Australia, to be dealt with in another issue of *PM News*.

The vast majority of the white engraved flags, 867 were flagged at Miranda, with a further 48 at Foxton in the Manawatu, 15 at Karaka on the Manukau Harbour, 10 at the mouth of Catlins Lake in Otago and one at Whitford in East Auckland.

Three of those banded at Miranda were first banded in Victoria where a plain orange flag was used. These birds were upgraded to 'NZ citizens' with a white engraved flag replacing the orange one.

BNM is one of these, banded in

Victoria on 27 February 1999 aged as a first year bird. The engraved flag was added at Miranda on 14 February 2009. It has now been seen 46 times at either Miranda or Apheado in South Korea each year since 2012.

We have been able to add a flag to eight birds banded with metal bands and a plain white flag some years earlier, ZPE being a good example. It was banded at Taramaire on 17 October 1993 and remained undetected until 26 January 2012 when it was caught again at Miranda and the flag was added. Since then it has been seen 15 times at Miranda and once at Apheado, near Mokpo in South Korea, by Andreas Kim, who spoke at Miranda earlier in the year.

Overseas sightings are of course particularly interesting and allow us to engage with many people in other countries. The advent of emails has helped immensely in sharing information quickly.

Godwit ZBN is a fine example of this. Flagged on 22 January 2015 as an adult it was seen once by Ian Southey at Miranda on 6 March 2015. It was then seen by some researchers on Atka, one of Alaska's Aleutian Islands on 6 May 2015, where it had stopped briefly on its way from Asia to the breeding

grounds of Alaska.

The researchers were curious to know from whence it came, and a few emails later the news of this sighting reached me. Within a few hours I was able to inform them of ABN's short history.

Then on 29 November 2015 it was back at Miranda and I informed the Alaskans the same day. 'Wow!' was the response, 'their' bird had successfully completed another 30,000km round trip migration. I'm sure those Alaskans will look twice at any godwits they see in the future.

By far the most overseas sightings have come from Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve in China, the site the PMNT has been working at since 2004. Along with Bohai Bay, Yalu Jiang is the most closely watched site in East Asia during northward migration.

Yalu Jiang is godwit central on northward migration with the vast majority of the New Zealand population staging there. Several Chinese university students are undertaking a variety of studies at Yalu Jiang and record many flagged birds.

The Global Flyway Network with Chris Hassell from Broome has a long-term project to monitor marked birds in Bohai Bay, particularly those banded



PERSISTENCE PAYS: After 15 years Adrian Riegen finally spotted a flag at Pauanui.

Photo / Adrian Riegen

in Northwest Australia and using Bohai Bay on northward migration. The Bohai is the key staging site for Red Knot but is not a regular site for Bar-tailed Godwit and just one of our birds has been sighted there. Of the 208 individual birds seen overseas, 147 (71%) were at Yalu Jiang. One godwit ANP has also been seen in Taiwan.

What about godwit movements in New Zealand? Adults are generally very site faithful and of the 893 individuals seen, 595 (63%) have only been seen at the banding site. Another 155, for a total of 750 (79%) have been seen only at the banding site and overseas.

Just 41 (4.4%) have been seen away from the banding site and most of those were still in the Auckland region where they were caught. A further 14 were seen away from capture sites and overseas and another 30 seen away from banding site and then back again. Very few actually move to a different non-breeding site permanently.

That accounts for the adults but the story of juveniles is somewhat different. We have attached engraved flags to 80 juvenile godwits, 51 at Foxton, 27 at Miranda and two at Karaka. Sixty-six of these have been seen but only 26 (40%) have been seen

at the banding site, compared to the 63% of overall stay-at-homes.

From colour bands and engraved flags we know juvenile godwits move around the country and many juveniles banded in Victoria move to New Zealand. Most of them will spend their first three years of life in New Zealand before returning to breed in Alaska. They appear to use this time to check out the country before settling on a spot which often will become their preferred site for years to come.

Around 200 godwits live in the Tairua Harbour on the Coromandel's east coast and regularly roost on the beach at Pauanui, making it very easy to look for bands and flags as they are used to people and allow quite close approach. This site is only 50km from Miranda as a godwit could fly, and on my regular visits to Pauanui I make a point of looking through the flock for flags. After 15 years of no flags my luck changed on 1 January 2011 when I saw godwit AJL, so persistence pays off eventually.

This was not from Miranda but from Foxton, where it was flagged as a juvenile on 30 October 2008. By 2011 it was close to being an adult and when I looked for it in June 2011 there was no sign of it, so I assumed it had

migrated north. It was back at Pauanui again in January 2012 and was last seen there in February 2015. It could well have made Tairua its permanent New Zealand home.

One of the more interesting juveniles is ANP. Banded at Foxton on 30 October 2008 it has been seen at Miranda, Ohiwa Harbour, Taporā on the Kaipara Harbour and at Yalu Jiang. Another, ANZ, banded the same day at Foxton was seen there on 12 November 2008 then at Blueskin Bay, Otago on 13 January 2009. Back at Foxton on 4 March 2010 and exactly one year later on 4 March 2011 it was back at Blueskin Bay. It was seen exactly four years later on 4 March 2015 at Miranda.

Some birds banded at the same site are hardly ever seen while others are; it seems on constant parade in front of scopes. BED was banded at Foxton on 19 November 2013 but has not been seen there since. However, it has been seen twice on the South Manukau Harbour and 26 times at Miranda.

And finally in this roundup of engraved flag sightings, an adult godwit flagged AJD at Foxton on 30 October 2008 has been reported 63 times, although I suspect it has been seen many more times, at either Foxton




FAITHFUL: AJD was flagged at Foxton and continues to visit there and Whanganui Estuary. Photo / Paul Gibson

or its favoured summer retreat just up the coast at Whanganui Estuary, where Paul Gibson keeps an eye on it each summer and takes some wonderful photos as its plumage changes.

Other people at sites with small numbers of godwits also monitor their local sites and produce excellent sets of sightings.

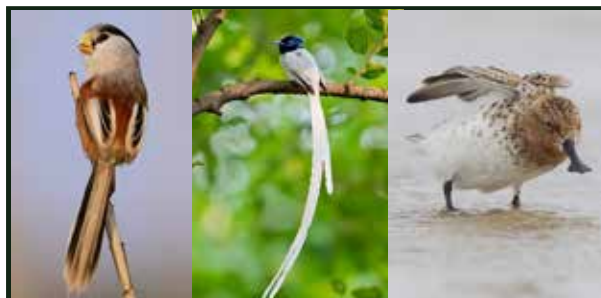
A question often asked is ‘How long do godwits live?’ The engraved flags help determine longevity but survival rates is another matter as one must take into account other factors such as birds moving to other sites and not being seen.

E7 was a great example as she spent most of her time unseen at Piako near Thames and perhaps only came across to Miranda on big spring tides such as occurred on the day she was caught. She was rarely seen until she went into retirement at Maketu in the Bay of Plenty.

From the engraved flags we know that 439 of the birds involved reached at least 5 years old. Of those at least 389 continued to at least 6 years old, and 334 reached at least 7 years of age and so on up to the oldest, which was at least 25 when last seen. So keep an eye out for ZPE and maybe that record can be extended. 

Number	Years of age
266	8
222	9
146	10
44	11
26	12
24	13
21	14
18	15
17	16
14	17
11	19
10	20
9	21
8	22
7	24
1	25

A GOOD AGE:
The table above shows the number of Bar-tailed Godwits recorded as reaching different estimated ages.



A chance to see – and help – birds in China

China Coastal Waterbird Census Team, a small NGO on the Yellow Sea coast, is offering bird tours of the area to raise funds for its work and raise the profile of the amazing bird life.

The first tour, on 11-21 April, will cost US\$3000 for all accommodation, travel and guiding.

It will visit the Jiangsu Coast where possible sightings include Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Norman’s Greenshank, Asian Dowitcher, Great Knot, Red Knot, Saunders’s Gull, Black-faced Spoonbill and Reed Parrotbill. There will also be a trip to Wuyuan and Nanjing hills in search of birds like Blue-crowned Laughing Thrush, Masked Laughing Thrush, Grey-sided Scimitar Babbler, Dusky Fulvetta, and Chinese Bamboo Partridge.

Shorebird Centre manager Keith Woodley says the tour is ‘a great initiative’ offering some highly desirable species at a relatively modest price and will also assist the group’s excellent work in the area. Inquiries should go to info@sbsinchina.com.



UNDER THREAT: John Dowding with one of the few remaining Southern New Zealand Dotterel.

Southern Dotterel may be extinct in four years

John Dowding, keynote speaker at the Australasian Shorebird Conference in Auckland, delivered a grim message to the assembled birders when he warned that without significant intervention the Southern New Zealand Dotterel could be extinct within four years. **Keith Woodley** reports.

A unique New Zealand shorebird population could be extinct within four years. Southern New Zealand Dotterel numbers have been plummeting since 2010. This alarming situation was outlined by John Dowding during his keynote address to the Australasian Shorebird Conference.

It is not the first time the population has declined, but the difference this time is that it is happening more quickly and the reasons for it are uncertain.

Once distributed through much of the country, dotterels disappeared from the South Island following European settlement, with the last mainland nesting record in 1881. Stewart Island became the last bastion but even there birds were not safe as predators – rats and particularly cats – took their toll. By the early 1990s there were just 25 breeding pairs.

Once management – primarily predator control – started numbers began to increase and by 2010 there were nearly 300 birds. But since then the population has been in free fall.

Many readers will be familiar with Northern New Zealand Dotterels and the largely successful efforts to manage



DARKER: Southern dotterel in breeding plumage. Photo / Ian Southey

them in places like the Coromandel and coastal sites north east of Auckland. But the southern birds which now breed only on Stewart Island will be less well known.

Southern birds tend to be darker and slightly larger than the northern birds. Plumage on the upperparts is a darker brown compared with the more mid-grey brown tones of northern

birds (there is a photo of the two together on page 11). In breeding plumage the flanks and bellies of southern birds tend to be a darker brick red than the more orange red of northern birds. Southern downy chicks are also noticeably darker.


But the most dramatic difference between the populations is where they nest. The northern birds are coastal and for them a simple scrape on a piece of sandy beach or shell bank is suitable real estate. Southern birds breed inland above 300m. Their nests are lined with much more material than is found in northern nests, perhaps a strategy to raise it above damp ground. Dotterel eggs on Stewart Island are also significantly larger and darker on average than those of northern birds.

Not only are habits of the southern birds quite different, their breeding range is separated from the northern birds by 1100 km, with no overlap in non-breeding range.

Buller described dotterels as ‘nowhere very plentiful, [but] dispersed along the whole of our shores, frequenting the ocean beaches and sand flats at the mouths of all our tidal rivers. It moreover inhabits the interior, and appears to affect very high altitudes.’

One hypothesis is that the ancestral New Zealand Dotterel population was a typical mountain plover, and northern birds are atypical, having taken to breeding on beaches as the population expanded northward because they found no un-forested tops inland. Selection then favoured paler birds and chicks nesting on paler substrates such as sand and shell.

All of these differences in measurements, plumage, habitat and behaviour, along with separated breeding ranges, led to recognition of two subspecies. As the species was first named from a specimen collected at Dusky Sound in 1773, according to taxonomic procedure that makes the southern birds the nominate species, with the northern population a subspecies, given the name *aquilonius* from the Latin for northern. The southern birds are now *Charadrius obscurus obscurus*.

Southern dotterels represent a very important taxa in our coastal avifauna which we cannot afford to lose. We have written to the Minister of Conservation requesting information on what steps are being taken to prevent this imminent extinction. 



FAMILIAR FACES: The green shirted team of conference helpers.

Fascinating array of speakers at wader study conference

Every two years the Australasian Wader Studies Groups holds a conference known as the Australasian Shorebird Conference. It is usually held in different Australian state capitals and run by a local group of shorebird people. In 2005 it was held in New Zealand for the first time, in Nelson, and this year PMNT hosted the conference in Auckland on 1-2 October.

Thanks to the wonderful support of Unitec Institute of Technology we were able to hold it at their Carrington Campus. This worked very well with an excellent theatre and two other rooms available to us. Just over 90 people registered for the conference.

We had a great team of people to organise the conference and field trips, with everyone working on different aspects of the event, so a big thank you to all of them for making the conference very successful, in spite of the copious amounts of rain that reminded just why New Zealand is a green and pleasant waterlogged land.

There were 29 lectures over the two days covering a diverse range of subjects. John Dowding opened with an excellent keynote address about the status of New Zealand's endemic waders. His address highlighted the issues of habitat loss and the devastating toll the four-legged predators have on our ground-nesting waders.

Peng He who is a PhD student at Fudan University in Shanghai, came to the conference as the Mark Barter Awardee. Mark was a pioneer in the flyway, searching almost the entire Chinese coast of the Yellow Sea from the early 1990's. He worked with Chinese students, encouraging and guiding them, and was known to many as 'Teacher Mark.' After his death in 2011 the AWSG set up a fund to support a student, preferably from Asia to attend these conferences. Peng has been studying the feeding behaviour of shorebirds at Yalu Jiang and talked on this subject.

Phil Battley put together the program of speakers and a fascinating range of subjects were covered.

Of particular interest were the talks on studies involving light sensitive geolocators, small devices that record light and dark, making it possible to determine approximately where a bird was on any given day. The drawback is that the bird must be caught again to retrieve the geolocators, something most godwits are not keen to experience twice and so there are still plenty of them walking around with geolocators still on their legs.

We also heard about the satellite tracking of the Grey Plovers from Australia to Siberia, with some going all the way to Wrangel Island, off the north coast of Siberia. Phil Battley



ENTHUSIASTIC: Delegates to the Australasian Shorebird Conference in Auckland. Photos / Adrian Riegen

talked about the challenges of using geolocators to determine where Red Knot's stage on their migration north from New Zealand. Travelling north as they do around the equinox makes it very difficult to determine their latitude, as day length is almost equal at all latitudes during this period. We need small enough satellite trackers to sort this out.

We heard about the impact a massive LNG project in Queensland is having on the habitat and shorebirds.

Ben Paris talked about New Zealand Dotterels and how management by local communities is helping them.

Pip Wallace discussed human disturbance and said the laws supposed to protect wildlife are either not powerful enough or more likely not being enforced. It seems that most people with 4WDs, kite surfers, dog owners, etc. think they have a right to do whatever they want, wherever they want often to the detriment of wildlife. We should all be putting pressure on local authorities to enforce laws to protect wildlife.

Doug Watkins talked about collaboration within the Flyway Partnership and needless to say PMNT featured strongly as we have been involved with work along the Flyway since well before it was called that and were on the ground floor in 1994 when the concept of a network of sites was agreed to. PMNT should be very proud of this record and the way it has tackled big issues. Perhaps it is our small size, independence and the presence of a group of open-minded people prepared to try anything that has driven this success.

Birgita Hansen gave an update on shorebird population estimates which is long overdue, as many species are in decline and we have been quoting

figures, sometimes decades old.


Maureen Christie from South Australia gave a passionate talk about how her group took on the seaweed harvesting industry and not only won but were instrumental in getting new guidelines and standards for that industry for the whole of South Australia.

Janelle Ward spoke about leg cramp that affects some birds when caught. We now have a much better understanding of the problem and are constantly improving the way we catch and handle birds so that this is much less of a problem now.

Finally perhaps the most inspirational talk was by the quietly spoken artist, Amelia Formby from Western Australia, who one day had a sudden thought that she would fly a plane along the same route that the Red-necked Stint travels from Victoria to

the north coast of Siberia, where it breeds. She had not flown before, so started taking flying lessons, and decided that as the Red-necked Stint is the smallest wader she should fly the smallest plane, a tiny open microlight.

There is much to do and she plans to start in 2019. The journey will be done in stages with an aim to finish the whole trip in 2022. The feeling we got was that she will achieve this, so determined is she. A documentary will be made and where possible feeds to social media will be a major part of the venture, which should inspire a whole generation of people not usually tuned into nature. We wish her every success.

If you did not attend this conference but wish you had, or did, and would like to attend the next one, then Hobart in 2018 will be the place to be, probably in September. 



OFF TO SIBERIA: Amelia Formby plans to follow the Red-necked Stint.



From the Chair

Our work matters and it is not done

Chair **Gillian Vaughan** has some sobering reminders of how much conservation work has been done, how much there is still to do, how much it matters and how, in conservation as much else, many hands make the work lighter.

The recent Australasian Wader Studies Group Conference was inspiring on many levels. John Dowding opened the conference with a summary of the status of New Zealand shorebirds. It was a sobering talk, particularly the details about the Southern New Zealand Dotterel, and as such reminded us all why we were all there. For all the positives and all the hard work that happens, John reminded us – the work we are doing is not finished.

The next morning Doug Watkins opened the day with a summary of the work that has been done in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway: 20 years of work in Australia, New Zealand, China, Korea, Japan and more by various NGOs and governments. For instance, PMNT's work in North Korea, a captive breeding programme for Spoon-billed Sandpipers, satellites track birds up and down the flyway. Yet for all that much remains to be done, Doug reminded us how far we've come – the work we are doing is not impossible.

And then there were the young people: PhD students doing amazing research, a new NGO in China, a plan to fly a microlight to the breeding grounds of the Red-necked Stint. It was clear that the vision of maintaining a viable flyway is long term, so many young people are involved at community as well as academic levels that it was clear no one individual is irreplaceable – the work we are doing will continue.

Videos of tattlers jumping around the mudflats chasing shrimp, pictures of a bedraggled Banded Dotterel on the nest in the rain, the spectacle of tens of thousands of birds, the sheer lunacy of migration. The pictures and the maps and the field trips remind us – the work we are doing is worthwhile.

Conservation work can be difficult. Whether it's battling predators in a forest or trying to save mudflats in Asia it can sometimes seem like the battle is endless. The battle can sometimes become the cause. For me




WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT: Go down to the hides and see all those wonderful birds and remember that our work matters. Photo / Keith Woodley

the conference was a chance to take the opportunity to look up, to remind myself why I value the natural world around me, how cool it really is. It's a reminder to look at the birds and the saltmarsh and the crabs and the shells and the amazing people we work with – the work we are doing really matters.

So visit the Centre, go down to the hides and see those wonderful birds; be part of The Flock as it threads its way around the country; come and join us at the Shorebird Film Festival and the Devonport Flock event; register for the next Miranda Field Course in January; wander the shores

of Ambury Park on the bird walks; come to the Farewell to the Birds Day in March and chat with all the experts who will be there – be part of the joy of conservation as well as the work.

And don't forget census work and reporting in any bands or flags you see, send us your wader counts and sightings from around the country, enter your bird records into eBird, be part of the garden bird survey and the Kereru count, talk to the people you know about why shorebirds and coastal ecosystems are so important, be part of the work as well as the joy – because the work matters and it is not done. 

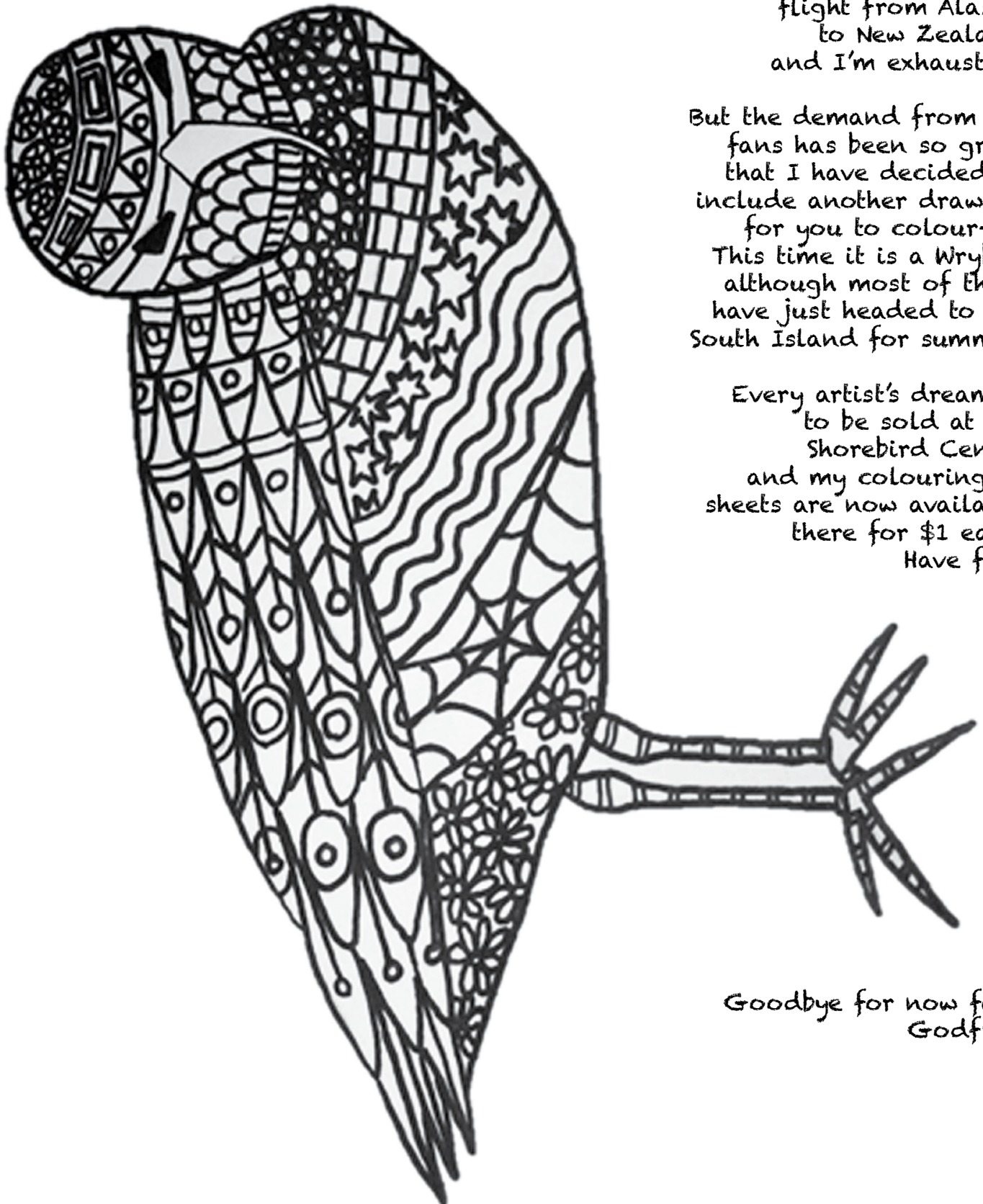
GODWIT TIMES

After the resounding success of my colouring-in self-portrait, which appeared in the last issue of Godwit Times, I am thinking of giving up my day job as the longest non-stop flier in the world and being a fulltime artist.

I've just finished another flight from Alaska to New Zealand and I'm exhausted!

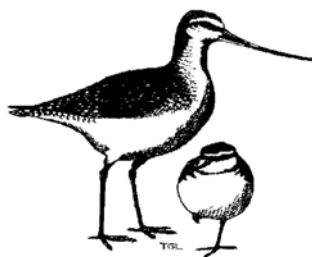
But the demand from my fans has been so great that I have decided to include another drawing for you to colour-in. This time it is a Wrybill although most of them have just headed to the South Island for summer.

Every artist's dream is to be sold at the Shorebird Centre and my colouring-in sheets are now available there for \$1 each. Have fun!



Goodbye for now fans
Godfrey.

PUKOROKORO MIRANDA NATURALISTS' TRUST



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(Immediate Past Chair), Estella
Lee, Wendy Hare, Bruce Postill,
Trudy Lane, Cynthia Carter, Ann
and Ray Buckmaster, Jim Eagles.

Magazine

Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust publishes *Pukorokoro 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 \$50 a year for individuals, \$60 for families and \$65 for those living overseas. Life memberships are \$1500 for those under 50 and \$850 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. You can join at the Centre or by going to our webpage (www.miranda-shorebird.org.nz) and pay a subscription via Paypal, by direct credit or by posting a cheque.

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 Louisa Chase at the Centre 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 field work and research. This year's are on June 12 and November 6. Ask at the centre for details.

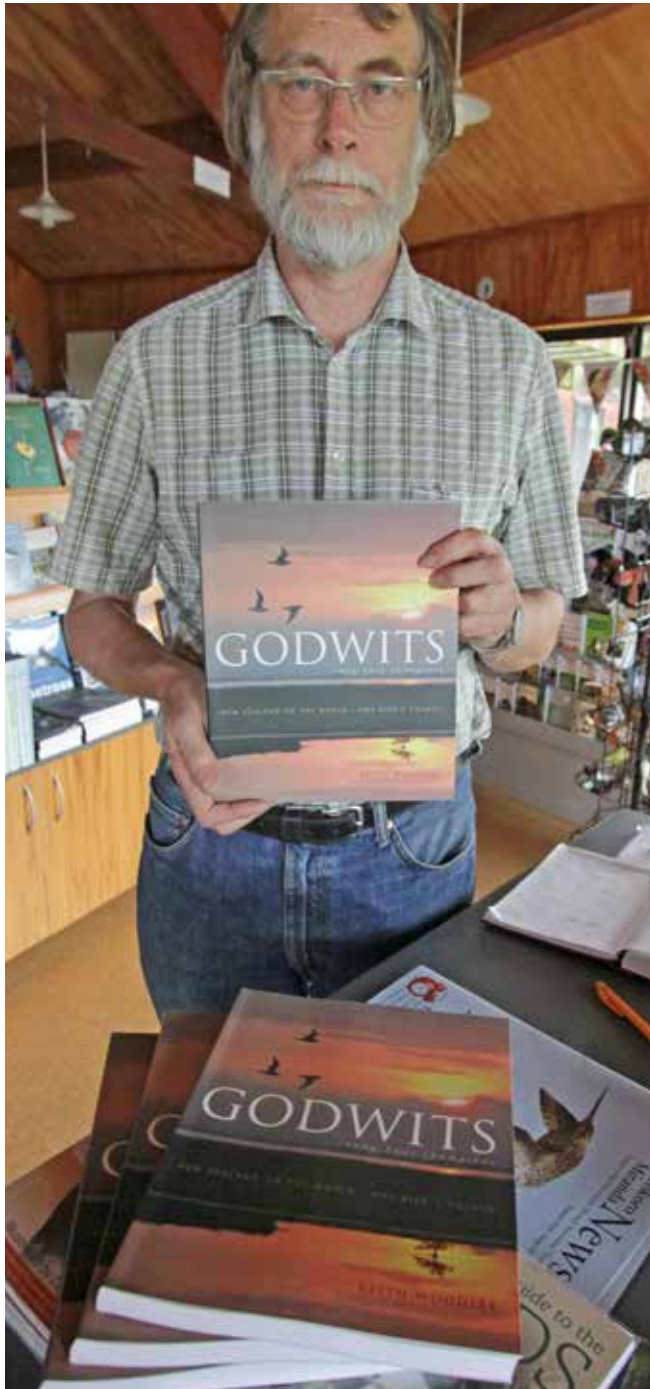
Contribute to the Magazine

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

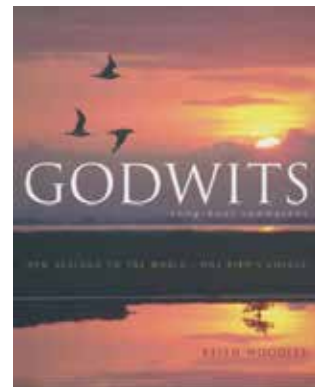
We can always use extra hands in the Miranda Garden, be it a half hours weeding or more ambitious projects. If you do have some spare time please ask at the centre for ideas, adopt a patch or feel free to take up any garden maintenance you can see needs doing.

Back by popular demand



The first edition of Keith Woodley's classic shorebird book, *Godwits: long-haul champions*, quickly sold out. Now PMNT has managed to get it republished.

Don't miss the chance to add this very special book about a very special bird to your library.



On sale now at the Shorebird Centre shop for just \$49.90

If you can't get to the Centre you can buy the book from our online shop at shop.miranda-shorebird.org.nz/ or by ringing the Centre on 09 232 2781. We'll even include free postage. And if you ask nicely Keith might just sign a copy for you.

Of course our shop doesn't just sell books about birds - though it does have the finest selection of them in the land - it also has a delightful collection of eco-bird products that make ideal Christmas gifts. The latest arrivals include:



Shorebird Centre bags
Black and white
(at left) \$16.90
Coloured godwits
(at right) \$29.90



Bird decorations
\$14.90

