

**Birds New Zealand**

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## *Otago Region Newsletter 6/2014 August 2014*



Birds coming into the high tide roost: Site 12 Yalu Jiang NNR

### **Five don't go bird-watching in China and North Korea**

In May this year Pukorokoro-Miranda Naturalists Trust (Adrian Riegen, Estella Lee & Keith Woodley) and DOC (Carol West and me) went to China. We went to talk to Chinese colleagues, undertake more field work at Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve, launch a report of ten years joint work and visit North Korea to set up a longer term programme for shorebird conservation. The back story to this trip is long and involves a

massive commitment by MNT over the years to visit Yalu Jiang and survey the migrating shorebirds that stop over there during the end of April until mid May and to support reserve managers in their work on the Reserve.

After travelling continuously from Dunedin to Dandong which is the very last city in Northern China the border with North Korea our local hosts felt the right thing to do was to take us out to a welcoming banquet with lots of rice wine. Rice wine or Pijou is a spirit, which gets consumed in not small enough shot glasses. During dinner it was revealed that the tides were early and we were to leave the hotel at 5:30 am...

So early Tuesday morning we all piled into Hiluxes and headed out into the Yalu jiang National Nature Reserve to get to the seawall before high tide. Even with a detour due to a broken track we made it out to the edge of seemingly endless fishponds on time and were able to get good counts of dunlin, red-necked stint, Kentish plovers, lesser sand plovers and others as the tide came in. The media visited and interviewed Adrian and Estella. As the tide dropped we made our way back onto town passing ponds with spotted redshanks and lesser sand plover. After another large lunch we went and visited the local High School. After Keith gave a talk we spent time just talking to the senior students. They were keen to talk English; what they make of a NZ accent is anybody's guess! Dinner was another large feast.

The next morning was much the same except a bit later. We completed a count at another part of the seawall along the front of the Reserve. The mornings were cool to mild and as the day progressed they became warm. The numbers of shorebirds were impressive.

As the week progressed it became clear that the Dandong International Bird Watching Festival would cut into the amount of time that we had to complete the overall reserve count. We were expecting something like this to happen. By the Thursday we were spending count time sharing our telescopes with crowds of visitors who were coming out on to the seawall to watch the birds get pushed up to close to the seawall, then take off in great clouds to a high tide roost on the adjacent half completed Port or on the nearby Yalu River. The Chinese people were most impressed when a

flock of waders would take off and wheel around and then land or move off. The oohs and aahs were loud when this happened.

The Sunday was the big day for the launch of the report. On the Saturday evening all the bigwigs started to arrive. We were re-located from our small hotel at Gushan about 60 km from Dandong to the Shenda Sea River Hotel a massive monument to Stalinist grandeur near the port in a city called Donggang. I ended up on the 19th floor with a view out over the Yalu River into North Korea. Everybody who was part of the Dandong bird watching festival and the student bird watching race was here including the NZ Ambassador Mr Carl Worker. That evening we were at another banquet, which was an upgrade in dignitaries and clearly importance of those present. I felt definitely out of my comfort zone and then had to deal with chopsticks and exotic fish.

The Sunday morning started with a visit to the Dandong Aviary, which was a massive structure with no soul and very little mention of birds. There was a photographic display of birds, which was very spectacular. One of our hosts Wen Xiao Fey proudly showed us some of his photos of shorebirds from Yalu Jiang Reserve. After the presentation of a certificate to Yalu Jiang for being the top stopover spot in the Yellow Sea we circulated with all the guests and dignitaries before heading out to the seawall to watch the shorebirds walk up to the seawall in front of the incoming tide. At the top of the tide the birds were pushed off the mudflats and took off overhead to roost amongst the fishponds behind.

We then went back to the Sendang River Hotel in Donggang where a series of formal presentations to launch the report on ten years of joint monitoring of shorebirds at Yalu Jiang by the reserve managers and Miranda Naturalists Trust. It was an excellent opportunity for Adrian Riegen to talk about the history of the project and the quality of the science, which underpinned the conclusions of the monitoring. Adrian's speech was complemented by a speech from the Ambassador. Also the Vice Mayor of Dandong Peoples City Government spoke of the City's commitment to maintaining the Reserve and the shorebirds that stopover there.

After lunch (yes another banquet) a group who were intending to head back to Beijing and us went into Dandong and got on to a river cruise on

the Yalu River. The Yalu River is the border between China and North Korea and as such is international waters. This means that ships from either country can use the river and travel as far across to the other side as they like. The first example of this was a ship with North Korean Flags sailing down the Yalu River within about 10 metres of our boat which was still tied up to a wharf on the Chinese side. So off we went past the broken bridge which was bombed by the USA in the Korean War and is still unrepaired. The effect is somewhat diluted as there is a bridge adjacent over which trains between China and N Korea travel each day. We cruised up and down the North Korean side of the water and saw lots of people working or sitting around on the riverbank. As well some very military looking concrete houses with slits for windows. After dropping the departing guests at the Dandong Airport we returned to the hotel.

The next day we started what was going to be the rest of the trip which was about meetings. Because of tides we did not undertake any further wader counts but as we had some time Jaa Na one of our hosts took us to a local hill, which was a heronry. The birds were beginning to nest and we got good views of white herons, little heron's and night herons. After this pleasant break we started off with a meeting with the Vice-Mayor of Dandong People's Government which was a chance for us to respond encouragingly to the speech the Vice Mayor gave the previous day. We were also able to open a conversation about providing for high tide roosts for shorebirds in the port development and elsewhere. Later we had a debrief with the Reserve Managers and her staff. We offered ongoing commitment to help Yalu Jiang remain an important shore bird stop over site in the Yellow Sea. That afternoon we checked in and headed back to Beijing.

This part of North China has long and intense winters. The fields were only just starting to be planted out with crops after intense preparation. The city of Dandong is about 1 million it is being marketed as a tourist destination for Chinese to come and see the remains of the wreckage from the Korean War. The port of Donggang is being promoted as the key gateway for exports from NE China to the world. It is half built and disappears into the haze it is so huge. The town where we first stayed Gushan was an average level town about the same configuration as say Hamilton. There are no signs in English, there are some poster of glamorous Europeans but very little else. People look twice at you in the

street. Without the support of our friend's from the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve (Yan Mei Feng, Jaa Na, Wen Xiao Fey and the others) we would not have been able to complete what we did. It was a very stimulating week and opened my eyes to the commitment that Pukorokoro Miranda have made over the years.



L to R: Adrian Riegen, BM, Estella Lee Keith Woodley, Carol West and NZ Ambassador Carl Worker. Yalu River 4 May 2014



Near high tide with the port behind.

**Bruce McKinlay**

## Loh at Sea



A very quiet bird day in winter with all the near shore time pre-dawn and after dark. A couple of features; three Grey Petrels together, but only one White-chinned Petrel at the end of the transect.

Just on dusk about 40km E of Taiaroa Head, there were three small feeding events; one mollymawk would find something and the other three species, including Southern Royals, would pile in and scrap over whatever was there. Too

dark to see but maybe a time of day for feeding.

Species seen: Northern Royal Albatross, Southern Royal Albatross, Buller's Mollymawk, Salvin's Mollymawk, Shy Mollymawk, Campbell Albatross, Northern Giant Petrel, Cape Pigeon, Grey Petrel, White-chinned Petrel, Fairy Prion, Black-backed Gull and White-fronted Tern as well as an unidentified procellarid petrel and a tern - photos below.



**Graeme Loh**

(Immature White-fronted Tern? ed.)

## **Older bird books at Dunedin Public Library**

I send annual lists of new bird books at Dunedin Public Libraries to this newsletter, but this time I would like to draw attention to the older books held in the City Library basement. A few of them are over 100 years old. Authors represented in the basement collection include New Zealanders such as T.H. Potts, H. Guthrie-Smith, L.E. Richdale, Edgar Stead, M.F. Soper and Ross McKenzie, while from overseas we have such names as Edmund Selous, Richard and Cherry Kearton, W.H. Hudson, Eric Hosking, James Fisher, Seton Gordon and David Lack. This note was suggested by a colleague who was admiring G.M. Henry's colourful illustrations in Salim Ali's "Indian Hill Birds". One of my own favourites is "Kapiti Diary" by Amy K. Wilkinson. The writing may strike some as overly sentimental, but it is a very pleasant read with many interesting observations. It was edited by Mrs Wilkinson's son-in-law, R.H.D. Stidolph, who also wrote an interesting book containing his own observations, "The Birds Around Us".

Although there is no public access to the basement, you can browse the books in the catalogue using the following process:

- 1) click on "advanced search"
- 2) in the box "all these words" type 598 (which is the classification number for birds)
- 3) in the box "this exact phrase" type DP\_NFLB (which is the collection code for Lower Basement books - you must include the underscore)
- 4) click on "advanced search".

This search will bring up a few irrelevant items, but most will be bird books.

We also hold copies of the RSPB's magazine "Birds" (now called "Nature's Home") dating back to 1979.

You will need to ask for these items at the Floor 1 desk, but do not hesitate to do so - the librarian will welcome a chance to leave the desk and get them for you.

**Alan Baker**

## Aurora Science Fair



Graeme Loh and Mary Thompson went along to the Science Fair in the museum to study the projects related to birds. There were only a few projects with birds as a theme. One was on whether bacteria in potting mix might contribute to YEP deaths; not likely to be the case - very comprehensive but focus

mainly on the microbiology. Another looked at effects of oil on the ability of feathers to shed water. There were two posters on counting birds and we chose to award out book prize to Thomas Kerr, Year 7 Kavanagh College, whose project aimed to check the repeatability of 1 hour bird counts. The main shortcoming of both the counting projects was not analysing the raw counts further, such as ranking by % sightings, or how the number of species seen increased with number of observations - in fact 90% of the species were seen after three observations. It would have been more interesting to have been able to talk to the students about their projects.

## Notices and Business

### **“Beyond Orokonui” Field Trip: Sunday morning, 31 August**

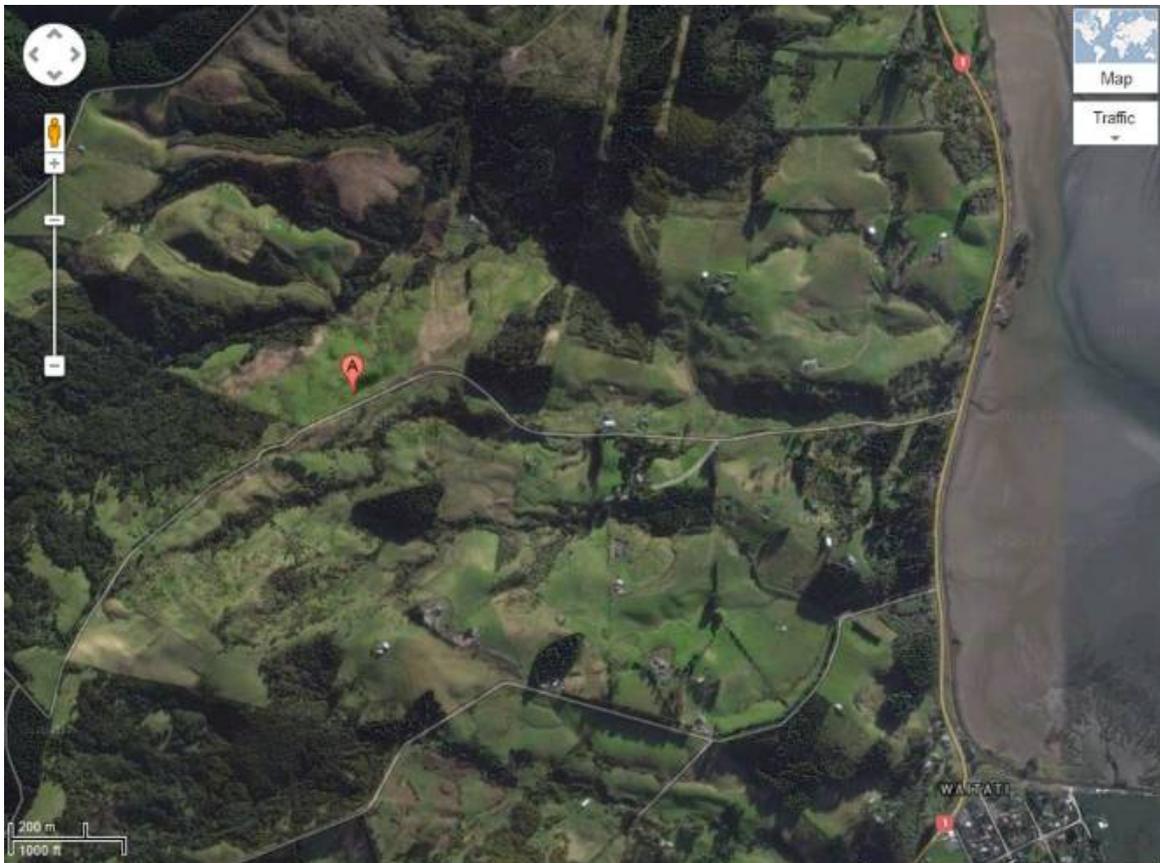
This field trip is going to take the form of a practice survey for our project to survey native bird distributions in east Otago habitats. It should give us a better idea of the sort of terrain we can manage and which survey methods are best suited for the study – transects and/or 5 minute bird counts. Derek will be giving us all a refresher on how to listen and look for, in particular, riflemen, brown creeper and tomtit.

About 20 people have already put their names forward as being able to be involved at various times with the survey, which will take place from September through December. More volunteers would be appreciated as this is an extensive survey and offers of help even for just a few of the surveys would be very helpful. Even if you are not sure if you are able to help with the actual survey, you are most welcome to come on this field trip to see what it is involved and do some birding in a new area.

This field trip on Sunday 31st August is to be held on Kelvin Lloyd's property in Manse Road off Blueskin Bay and we will attempt to survey a variety of habitats. Bring lunch and refreshments, warm clothes, wet-weather gear and strong shoes/boots – teams will be allocated to various areas according to participant's preferences and capabilities. Car-pooling from George Street, at Woodhaugh Gardens, meeting for leaving at 8.30 am.

Some may wish to drive directly to Manse Road to be there at 9 am. Here are the directions: Drive north on SH1, turn left on Manse Rd, which is the second road on the left past the Waitati Store. Drive up Manse Rd to 156 Manse Rd. Note the upper part of Manse Rd is not maintained by DCC, hence is a little rough, and any low-bodied cars should drive with a wheel on the centre ridge to avoid bumps underneath. There is room to park on the side of the road at 156.

Phone Mary 464 0787 for any further information. If weather on the day is not promising please phone Mary between 7.30 and 8.00 am on the Sunday to check for cancellation. Google Map shows rough location.



The “Beyond Orokonui” project has been commissioned by the Landscape Connections Trust with the aim of developing a biodiversity management plan for the East Otago region. This plan needs information on the distribution of forest birds and their habitat requirements in order to better understand the distribution of unevenly distributed forest species in terms of habitat requirements, identify dispersal corridors or areas where these might be best placed, identify areas where increasing the extent of habitat would favour persistence of species, and develop overall strategies that would promote ecological restoration and improve distribution and abundance of native species in the landscape. **Mary Thompson**

### **Little Shag Nesting Areas**

During the recent Wader Count Jill Hamel and Lala Frazer were amazed to count 414 Little shags roosting in trees and on boatsheds between Bayfield Inlet and Taiaroa Head. This is the largest number either of them have counted before. This was despite two trees that previously held a large number of Little shags now having been abandoned.

Linden Perriman reports that last season there were between 20 to 30 breeding pairs at Taiaroa Head and Gordon Douglas from Quarantine Island reports nesting there. Lala would like to hear of any other nesting areas in the Dunedin area. Email <lala.frazer@gmail.com>.

**Lala Frazer**

### **Help needed for running Otago Branch of OSNZ**

Mary would very much like to involve more members in organizing and running events.

#### **Indoor Meetings:**

A few people to help plan speakers and events for 2015. Someone to thank speaker and write summary of talk for Otago newsletters. (Roster of helpers to spread the job)

#### **Field trips:**

Trip leaders and suggestions for field trips or weekend away field trip.

#### **Publicity:**

Write Regional Roundup for Birds New Zealand; 4 issues per year (job can be shared).

Identify stories for Star newspaper; place ad in What’s On section?

**Mary Thompson**

## Programme 2014

Monthly Indoor Meetings will be held at 7.30pm in the Benham Seminar Room, Benham Building, Department of Zoology, 340 Great King Street.

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| Wed August 27    | Kalinka Rexer-Huber and Graeme Parker.<br>'Birds of the Falkland Islands and S.Georgia.'  |
| Sun August 31    | Field Trip- Beyond Orokonui. Carpooling from George St. at Woodhaugh Gardens, leaving at 8.30 am. Contact Mary 464 0787   |
| Wed September 24 | Jean Fleming. 'Learning to be a "birder" a report on Heritage Expedition's Birding the Pacific.'  |
| Wed October 22   | Derek Onley. The birds of Hawksbury Lagoon-results of 4 years of surveys.   |
| Sat October 18   | Seabird Trip We will join Forest and Bird. Deborah Bay to beyond Taiaroa Head. Meet Botany carpark (cnr Union and Great King St. SH1 North) 7.30am or Deborah Bay 8.00am. Cost \$100. Bookings essential. Contact Graeme Loh 487 6125 or gloh@doc.govt.nz |
| Sun November 16  | Summer Wader Count. HT 10.50am, 1.8m. Contact Peter Schweigman 4552790 peter.schweigman@xtra.co.nz  |
| Wed November 26  | Direct from the Galapagos .....<br>Franny Cunninghame   |

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Many thanks to all who contributed.

Final date for copy for next newsletter 18 September.