

BIRDS NEW ZEALAND YOUTH CAMP 2016



The second of the current series of youth camps was held at Pūkorokoro Miranda Shorebird Centre over the ANZAC weekend. Attending were eleven young people from many parts of the country. Generous support from Birds New Zealand sponsor Fuzio kept student costs to a very reasonable \$100. For many of the young folk conservation had become a core activity. There were two Zealandia ambassadors, a young lady active in campaigning for Maui's dolphin, two young men involved with the Pirongia Restoration Society and another who campaigned for the kokako to become F&B Bird of the Year. Most were active in their local branch of Birds New Zealand. It was very congenial group of young people who shared a real passion for birding.

The Shorebird Centre is adjacent to a major shorebird RAMSAR site on the Firth of Thames. Activities were based around this but not exclusively so. Close by are the Hunua Ranges where Kokako are to be found. An early morning start resulted in most students hearing kokako. Weka watching was at the other end of the day and required the students to forgo a cooked dinner for a packed one. They did return to a warm dessert.



The Centre is well supplied with scopes and binoculars. Instruction in scope use was an early part of the course and there were several trips to the shore to aid with bird ID. Bird identification skills by course end were good enough to attempt a census. Venturing onto the usually out of bounds shell-bank led to the discovery of four black-tailed godwit and some close encounters with other species, in particular the wrybill. Rare birds of the course were a Marsh Sandpiper and an Arctic Tern hidden amongst a flock of White-fronted Terns.



In one respect the shorebirds were uncooperative. All the usually suitable sites for cannon netting were bereft of birds. They preferred to roost either on the mudflats or in shallow water. In compensation there were more opportunities to mist net. Some students developed real expertise in net extraction and all had opportunity to handle and band birds. A good selection of passerines being netted in the grounds of the Centre, conveniently close to where breakfast was available for early rising mist-netters!



The course had an impressive list of tutors. Gillian Vaughan and Ian Southey took the lead in many activities. Danielle Sjihranda enthralled most of the students with her autopsy of a harrier and pied shag. Lots of bird anatomy was learned in this session. Paul Cuming, a previous attendant at a youth camp, took control of one set of mist nets and John Dowding the other. John provided a really useful and instructive exercise on band reading and recording. John also gave an introduction to the processes and reasons for threat ranking of NZ birds. The message was clear but not always encouraging.



Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalist's Trust has just initiated the Flock Project. This is a fun way of engaging with the public and involving them in the conservation of migratory and endemic shore birds. Our young birders contributed many new "birds" to the Flock. Somehow a kokako was added, plus some interesting hybrids like the bar-tailed stilt, or should that be, the kuaka poaka?

So, how do we judge the success or otherwise of this youth camp? Well the participants had the opportunity to make comment and these were almost universally positive. Another measure might be to ask how many would like to attend next year's camp? Again the results were very encouraging. We have a good nucleus for that camp in terms of both students and tutors. Yes, it was a very successful camp and the ground work has now been laid for this success to continue into the future.

Ray Buckmaster

Birds New Zealand would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those involved in this youth camp .Particular thanks goes to the team from Birds Waikato. The detailed long term planning by Andrew Styche and Ann Buckmaster delivered a near perfect course. Sharon Alderson was very much involved with them in the day to day running of the course. The good news is that Sharon will be taking all of this experience with her to the next youth course in 2017.