

2024 Birds New Zealand Youth Camp at Miranda

In the week before Christmas South Auckland ran a camp for young birders based at the Pukorokoro/Miranda Shorebird Centre. We had nine students of high school age, six boys and three girls, who came from as far afield as Christchurch and Japan [yes, really]. We aimed to encourage their interest in birds and give them a taste of the range of birding activities available to them. It turned out that the encouragement was unnecessary, the participation enthusiastic and some of it rubbed off on the old folks too.

First stop was the Robert Findlay Reserve for the rising tide and the magic of flocks of kuaka coming low overhead to roost on the ponds. We set up our scopes in front of thousands of shorebirds and started sorting through the flock. An Australian gull-billed tern was a special treat. Later visits focussed more on band recoveries, identification and counting.

An early start for mist netting and a good catch gave everyone a chance to band and process several birds under close supervision. The highlights were two kotare and a tui.

Next day we trekked to Kidd's shell-banks the highlights of which were an eastern curlew, four whimbrel and two grey plover. The day was not over when we got home. After an early dinner DOC ranger Ken Brown led us down to Kopuatai Wetland for an evening of matuku surveying and even before dusk they were booming.

It was a late night but we started before dawn the following morning for bush birds in the Hunua Ranges. Guided by ARC ranger Ruth Cordey we had some good views of kokako and were informed about the management program. A captivating bonus was a pipiwharau chick being fed by its riorio foster parents.

The field work was supported by a lot of classroom time covering the logistics and theory beforehand and a debrief afterward. The topics ranged from identification and ethical field craft through banding and band recoveries, counting, and most of all the value of recording information for the future.

It was a full week where we covered much of the best birding South Auckland has to offer and I was not the only one exhausted at the end of it. When the participants were asked what we should have left out the answer was "nothing".

Ian Southey, Convenor

