**Background for the youth camp**

About Birds NZ

Birds New Zealand / Te Kāhui Mātai (www.birdsnz.org.nz) has been a national society of people interested in birds since 1939. Our mission statement is “to foster the study, knowledge and enjoyment of birds”. One strength of the society is the recording and collection of information from members recreational bird watching activities to provide an important source of information for the conservation of New Zealand’s birds. Another strength is the people that make up the society and the enduring friendships that span the country. Many of us have benefitted from similar camps and now we aim to return the favour, to pass on our expertise and, hopefully, to start building a birding community for the course participants.

About PMNT

The Pūkorokoro Miranda Naturalists’ Trust (www.shorebirds.org.nz) was founded in 1975 and they opened the Shorebird Centre in 1990. It is on the Firth of Thames which is an internationally renowned habitat for shorebirds and within walking distance of the most important roost where we will spend much of our time. Like Birds New Zealand, the trust emphasises research and education as well as enjoyment of the birds with a more direct approach to conservation locally and internationally in the areas our shorebirds visit on migration. They are also in the early stages of restoring saltmarsh habitat on the Robert Findlay Wildlife Reserve. The centre has accommodation for members and runs a number of live in courses so it has the facilities that make it ideal for us to stay and work there.

About the course

The tutors and supervisors for the youth camp are all experienced and skilled at the activities they will be teaching. There will be a mix of classroom and field activities. Before we go into the field there will be an introduction to what we will be trying to do and a discussion of any necessary logistic and safety issues. Afterwards there will be a debrief with a chance for questions to be asked and answered.

Our main subjects will be the shorebirds that Miranda is famous for, large flocks of more common migrants and some rare species too. An updated list of what has been recently seen there is available here <https://shorebirds.org.nz/archives/category/sightings>. Shorebirds are considered challenging to identify, but the skills learned will be transferrable to other species in other habitats. We will also spend a little time with bush birds in the Hunua Ranges and, with luck, this may include Kokako and Kaka but common countryside and garden species will not be ignored.

Identification and recording are key birding skills and will be the core of our program and we will go into them in depth. We will introduce e-bird as a method of adding your own casual bird sightings to a national database and also some simple methods for monitoring birds. We will show how the accumulation of data from shorebird census carried out over time by Birds New Zealand has given valuable insights into population trends for conservation.

We will also demonstrate mist netting to catch some common countryside bird species and teach the correct way to handle and band birds. Once caught, there is a responsibility to monitor banded birds and we will spend some time looking for marked birds on the coast.