

Birds New Zealand Banding Youth Camp - Miranda 2017

Over Labour weekend, Birds NZ held a youth banding camp at Miranda. I was one of eleven teens lucky enough to attend.

Once most of us had arrived on Friday afternoon, we headed up to the orchard, where we would be doing the majority of our mist netting. While we weren't going to catch any birds just yet, we set up all the nets so that they would be ready for us the next morning.

We all banded at the orchard on Saturday and Sunday morning, and some of us did some extra banding on Sunday afternoon too. As well as actually banding the birds, we took measurements like the weight, the wing length, bill or combined head and bill length, and tarsus length. We also recorded details like the age, sex, moult and fat score. Extracting birds from the net is an art in itself, so we all took turns going around the nets with Adrian to help extract the birds. We ended up catching 106 birds of ten species at the orchard: Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, House Sparrow, Silvereye, Starling, Blackbird, Thrush, Fantail, and Kingfisher. I got to band my first ever Fantail, which was exciting since they are notoriously hard to catch – we only caught two the entire camp. Silvereyes were by far the most numerous species. At one point a flock struck the net all together and it got really busy for a while as we tried to extract and process them as quickly as we could.

On Sunday night, we were able to go mist netting somewhere a little different – the Stilt Ponds. This can't be done when it is light as the birds can see the nets, so although we set up while there was still some light, all the banding was done in the dark with the aid of torches and headlamps. We also got to go and check the nets with Adrian, but since it was dark we could only watch him extract them and then transport the birds back to be banded. In total we caught 20 birds of four species: Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Pied Stilt and Wrybill. We took mostly the same measurements as we did for the passerines, but on the knots, stilt and godwits we attached a flag as well as the metal band. I banded a godwit, as well as my first Wrybill. By the time we finished banding, it was around midnight, and we still had to pack up and head back to camp. By the time we got to bed, it must have been near 1:30!

While banding birds is definitely fun, the whole reason you do it is to gather information – and you only get information if people report sightings of banded birds. So on Saturday afternoon, we all went down the hide with scopes and binoculars to look for flagged or banded waders and do a general wader watch. The light was just starting to fade and we were getting ready to leave when all of a sudden George spotted a Shore Plover! This was a very welcome surprise, and definitely not what I expected on a dedicated banding camp.

Disappointingly our last banding session on Monday morning had to be cancelled due to rain. Still, it gave us a chance to catch up on lost sleep and get our banding logs signed off before heading home to the jarring realities of school and work. Thanks heaps to everyone who made the camp possible, especially to the Level Three banders who were patient enough to supervise us, and to Ian for organising it!

Eleanor Gunby

