

**Forthcoming talks:**

11/10/2016 Macclesfield RSPB local group. 19.45 Macclesfield Methodist Church, Westminster Road, Macclesfield, SK10 1BX

25/10/2016 Huddersfield Birdwatchers Club. 19.30 The Old Courtroom, Huddersfield Town Hall, Corporation Street, Huddersfield, HD1 2TA (Confessions of a Bird Guide)

06/12/2016 Wigan RSPB local group. 19.45 St. Anne's Parish Hall, Church Lane, Shevington, Wigan. WN6 8BD

14/12/2016 Watford RSPB local group 20.00 Stanborough Centre, 609 St. Albans Road, Watford, Herts. WD25 9JL

09/01/2017 Stockport RSPB local group 19.30 Stockport Masonic Guildhall 169-171 Wellington Road South, Stockport, SK1 3UA

11/01/2017 Worcester and Malvern RSPB local group. Powick Parish Hall, Powick, Worcester, Worcs. WR2 4RT (Plover Lover's World of Delights)

18/01/2017 Leeds RSPB local group. 19.30 Friends Meeting House, 188 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds, LS2 9DX

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## Welcome to the 10th edition of Wader Quest the newsletter — Editor

So here we are reaching double figures of the newsletter and we hope that you feel that it continues to be interesting and varied. Don't forget that if you have something you'd like to contribute, be it artwork, a photo or an article, feel free to get in touch.

We have some excellent articles again in this issue with Devin Griffiths writing about the Red Knots *Calidris canutus* and Piping Plovers *Charadrius melodus* in North America and their conservation from a personal perspective. Enjoy his delicious descriptive prose as well as the thought provoking sentiments which lay behind the words.

Andrew Whitelee writes a summary of the 2016 Norfolk Bird Race, from which our coffers benefitted to the tune of £1,664.10 which was quite something while I try to give a little of the flavour of what it was like taking part from a very personal point of view.

Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* have been much in the news of late, mostly for the wrong reasons, ie that their population is falling at an alarming rate. However Dan



Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Galveston, Texas, USA — Elis simpson

Brown here talks about what is being done in an attempt to halt the decline and perhaps reverse it in the future.

We have an update about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* situation outlining the latest from the captive breeding team in the UK, the headstarting team in Russia and from observations in the field.

Wader Quest has had a strong connection with Australia and New Zealand, and here we find out about the waders to be found on the third biggest Island of New Zealand, Stewart Island and its most distinguished

resident, the Southern New Zealand or Red-breasted Dotterel *Charadrius obscurus*.

We also bring you an update from Selena Flores of the Garden Route Shorebird Conservation Research project in South Africa keeping us up to date with the comings and goings of the White-fronted Plovers *Charadrius marginatus* along the Garden Route shoreline.

We introduce you too to Alicia Mottur, who tells us about one of her favourite wader spots in Belgium and illustrates the piece with some of her captivating wader artworks.

If you need more thought provoking stuff, then look no further than Sonny Whitelaw's account about what will happen to the estuaries as seas rise and development of these areas increases at the same time.

Poole Harbour is a well-established wader hotspot on the Dorset coast of England, here Neil Gartshore tells us all about it and its waders.

We finish as usual with the impressive display of photos in the Gallery with some mouth-watering species beautifully captured on camera by a number of photographers.



White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* Mauritz Bay, Western Cape, South Africa, USA — Elis simpson

## Where will estuaries be allowed to go? — Sonny Whitelaw

A threat to our estuaries and to the wading birds that depend upon them is looming. And yet, like the proverbial elephant in the room, it's an issue that everyone is trying very hard to avoid.

Like most countries, New Zealand has a fistful of environmental laws and policies regarding wildlife, biodiversity, freshwater (rivers, lakes and wetlands) and estuaries, the latter being covered under the New Zealand 2010 Coastal Policy Statement.

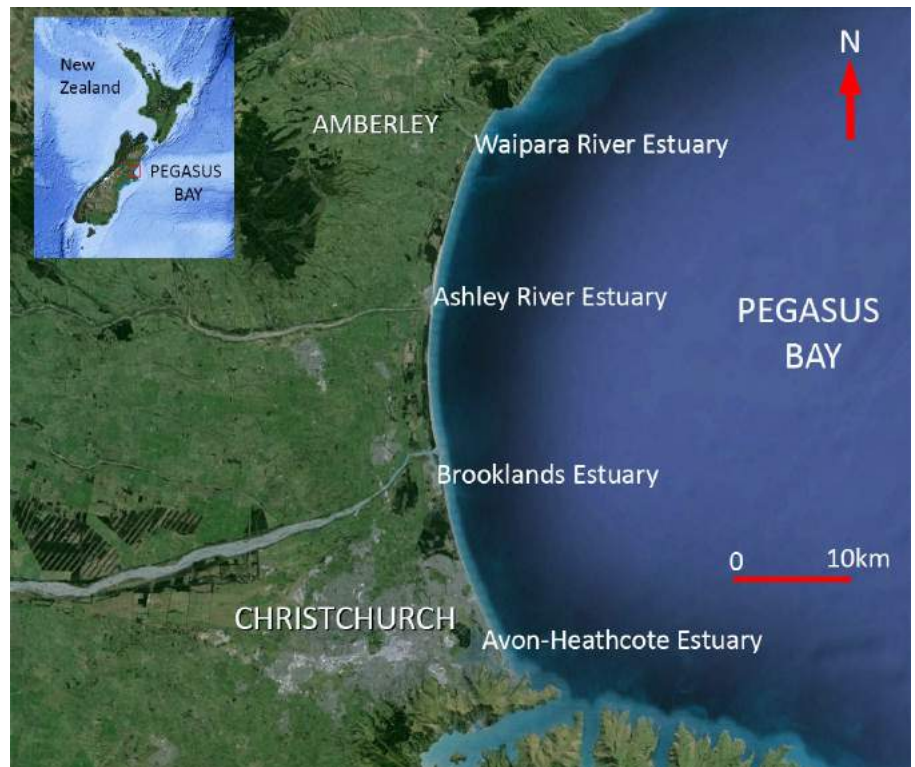
In 2008, the Ministry for the Environment issued policy statements requiring local and regional councils to prepare for the impacts of rising sea levels and guidelines to this effect. In 2014, one of my jobs as Biodiversity Adviser for a local council was to report on how rising sea levels would affect the biodiversity of the Waipara River Estuary in Pegasus Bay near Christchurch. (See map)

My report would be based in part on postgraduate research work I'd undertaken in 2011 on the coastal margins near the Ashley River estuary, just to the south. Both unmodified estuaries are important bird habitats, but for this discussion, I'll focus on the Ashley because the shorebird values of the Ashley are internationally recognised. In fact it's included in a list of wetland sites that meet criteria prescribed to be of international importance by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is host to over a hundred species of birds, including the Wrybill *Anarhynchus frontalis*, the only bird in the world with an asymmetrically bent bill; the Black-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus bulleri*, the most endangered gull in the world, and the critically endangered and extremely rare (just 60 known birds in the wild) Black Stilt *Himantopus novaeseelandiae*.

Migratory wading birds including Bar-



Wrybill — Elis Simpson



tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica*, Red Knots *Calidris canutus*, Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*. Native birds include Shags - Pied Shag *varius*, Little Shag *sulcirostris*, Black Shag (Great Cormorant) *carbo* and Spotted Shag *Stictocarbo punctatus*; large water birds - Australasian Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus*, Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia*, White Heron (Great Egret) *Ardea alba* and White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*; intermediate-sized waders - Spur-winged (Masked) Lapwing *Vanellus miles*, South Island Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus finschi* and Variable Oystercatcher *Haematopus unicolor* and oystercatcher hybrids *Haematopus finschi* X *unicolor*; waterfowl - Black Swan, *Cygnus atratus*, Grey Teal *Anas gracilis*, New Zealand Shoveler *Anas rhynchos*, Paradise Shelduck *Tadorna variegata*, New Zealand Scaup *Aythya novaeseelandiae* and Australian (Eurasian) Coot *Fulica atra*; terns - White-fronted *Sterna striata*, Caspian *Hydroprogne caspia*, and endangered Black-fronted *Chlidonias albostratus*; and other gulls - Red-billed *Larus scopulinus* and Southern Black-backed (Kelp) *Larus dominicanus*. Plus forest and riverbank birds - Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*, Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*, Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus*

*sanctus*, Grey Warbler *Gerygone igata*, Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*, and New Zealand Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*.

So how do estuaries normally deal with rising sea levels? Where coastlines are undeveloped, soft shore ecosystems including estuaries adjust naturally through spatial reconfiguration. Simply put, they migrate inland ahead of the rising seas, inundating and/or eroding the land (and everything on the land) as they go.

That may seem blindingly obvious, and probably acceptable (unless you're trying to protect rare, and about to be drowned, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems), until you realise that in New Zealand most estuaries are not on undeveloped coastlines. They're surrounded by a few remnant dune systems made largely unstable by exotic forestry. The rest of the land has been converted to agricultural and commercial use, with high value private and public properties and critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and wastewater treatment plants constructed and maintained through rates and taxes. I mention rates and taxes because in a moment, I'll be talking about economic drivers.

In some places in the world, like the eastern seaboard of the US, as sea levels rise and erode beaches and dunes, mobilised

## Where will estuaries be allowed to go? — cont'd

sediment enters estuaries, effectively elevating them. This allows them to keep pace with rising sea levels in situ, rather than migrating inland. However, given the most recent predictions for the speed and scale of sea level rise, this dynamic equilibrium will be a temporary truce at best.



New Zealand Shoveler – Elis Simpson

In any case, the estuaries in the Pegasus Bay are already overflowing into developed areas when storms coincide with high tides. They are trying to 'spacially reconfigure' by migrating inland. This is not just based on observations following a few recent storms. The National Institute of Water and Atmospheric (NIWA) scores coastal environments with a coastal sensitivity index (CSI) for inundation (from the sea) and erosion. The stretch of Pegasus Bay coastline where the Ashley estuary is located, is in the CSI inundation red zone—one of the most vulnerable in New Zealand. It's a 'soft shore' environment comprised of a few unstable remnant dunes planted with exotic forestry, agricultural lands and houses, and critical infrastructure including State Highway 1, the only road linking the north and south of the island. And between the Ashley and Waipara estuaries, sitting barely above sea level a few hundred metres from the beach, is the wastewater treatment plant for the nearby



Black Stilt juvenile – Elis Simpson

town of Amberley. The town and coastal settlements between the Waipara and Ashley estuaries have been rapidly growing since people fled from Christchurch following the 2011 earthquakes. Following a 2014 storm, low-lying properties around Ashley estuary were flooded, and State Highway 1 - critical infrastructure - was closed. Ratepayers criticised engineers for not ensuring that stormwater drains, which discharge into the ocean, were adequate. The drains were built decades before anyone had a clue that the sea levels were rising. As this stretch of the coastline was prograding until 1992, estuaries were indeed keeping pace with sea level rise during the twentieth century. Today, the drain outlets are barely above high tide. Soon, they'll be permanently submerged. Valves and pumps (presumably powered by generators mounted above floodwaters and inundation zones) might help, but there's an added wrinkle: the drains were never designed for the volume of rainwater that storms turbocharged by climate change are now delivering. So the



Bar-tailed Godwit – Elis Simpson

estuaries are flooding surrounding lands, 'spacially reconfiguring' as they begin their migration inland.

In New Zealand, when it comes to natural hazards, protecting critical infrastructure is a first priority. And any time public and private property is lost or damaged by natural hazards, our rates and insurance premiums hike up another notch. So one way or another, we're all affected by the economics of natural hazards.

By the Ministry for the Environment's definition, sea level rise is a natural coastal hazard. Policy 26 of The New Zealand 2010 Coastal Policy Statement, recognises the value of natural defences against coastal hazards, stating that it is necessary to: *'Provide where appropriate for the protection, restoration or enhancement of natural defences that protect coastal land*



New Zealand Scaup – Elis Simpson

*uses, or sites of significant biodiversity, cultural or historic heritage or geological value, from coastal hazards.'*

Since rising sea levels are the biggest hazard for coastal regions and estuaries respond by migrating inland, the only way to protect their extraordinary biodiversity is to allow, indeed assist this movement. Yet in every policy statement and plan, both national and regional, the focus is entirely on protecting property and infrastructure against flooding and inundation (from the sea). Even the most recent reports from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr. Jan Wright, explicitly excludes the impacts on the environment from sea level rise, and instead focus entirely on the impacts to property and infrastructure. Where the precautionary principal is applied to rising sea levels, the contradiction becomes self-evident. In the 2010 Coastal Policy Statement, Policy 3: Precautionary Approach 2 states that steps should be taken: *2(a), to ensure that, avoidable social and economic loss and harm to communities does not occur. 2(b), natural adjustments for coastal processes, natural defences, ecosystems, habitat and species are allowed to occur.*

When it comes to estuarine ecosystems and habitats and the species that depend upon them, you can either allow them to migrate inland, i.e., flood critical infrastructure and property, or stop them moving inland, leaving them to be inundated by rising sea level. We can't have it both ways. As to the birds and other species that inhabit them...well, you get the picture.

In the government's defence, it's hard to keep up to date or devise acceptable adaptation strategies when it comes to rising sea levels. Because of the staggering implications, peer-review research is being published at a breath-taking pace, with the latest paper published March 22 of this

## Where will estuaries be allowed to go? — cont'd

year by Hansen *et al*, making the IPCC AR4 'worst case' sea level rise scenarios that underpin both the Ministry's 2008 Guidance Manual and the 2010 Coastal Policy Statement seem wildly, even dangerously optimistic.



Spur-winged (Masked) Lapwing – Elis Simpson

So what does this all mean? For starters, my report to the district council on the impacts to biodiversity was hidden away. Not because of the effects on ecosystems and habitats, but because of the economic implications for coastal property values. This small district council had reason to be concerned. Subsequent engineering reports from Tonkin and Taylor, commissioned by

Christchurch City Council, include inundation maps that painted such a grim picture for 18,000 coastal properties that ratepayers rebelled and demanded the Council order a peer review of the 'uncertain science' used in the report. These property owners further demanded that the Council entirely remove the inundation/ flooding information attached to their property LIMS (Land and Information Report). This would protect current owners from the economic hit they would take when trying to sell off at-risk properties to future buyers kept ignorant of the risks. The Council agreed to some wording changes to LIMS, and is currently in negotiations with ratepayers. As for allowing estuaries to migrate, as McGlone *et al* point out:

'It is unlikely that people will readily allow new areas of dunes, marshland or estuary to form behind those now present. The most probable response to sea level rise will be to protect assets and infrastructure by erecting new hard barriers to prevent erosion, planting sand dunes to stabilise them, and infilling encroaching wetlands and installing new drainage. This scenario (often termed 'coastal squeeze' in the international literature), means that rising sea levels will

probably remove large areas of the rich biological habitat'.

If they're right, and angry ratepayers demand that the Precautionary Approach 2(a) 'avoidable social and economic costs' trumps Precautionary Approach 2(b) 'natural adjustments for coastal processes', can anyone explain to me where the estuaries, and the extraordinary bird life that currently inhabits them, will be allowed to go



Variable Oystercatcher — Elis Simpson

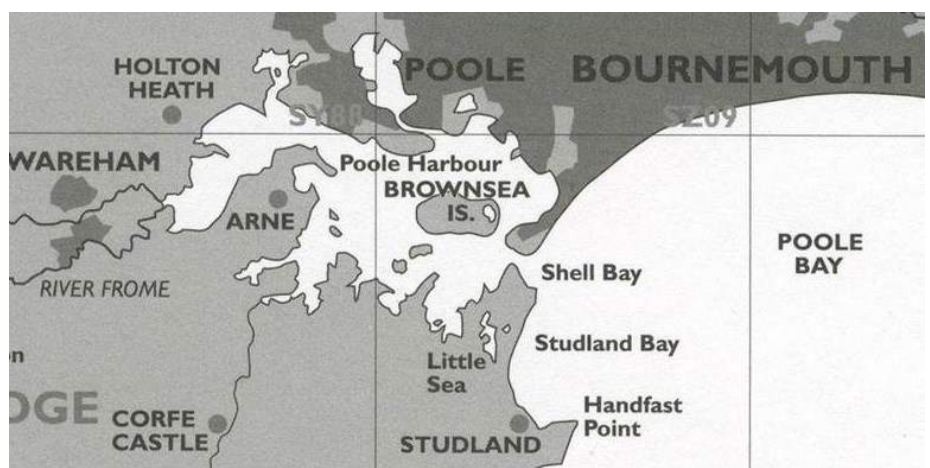
Sonny Whitelaw - Manager BRAID  
www.braid.org.nz

## Poole Harbour, Dorset: a South Coast Winter Wader Experience — Neil Gartshore

### An Overview

Often quoted as being the second largest natural harbour in the world (not strictly true), Poole Harbour covers ca.3600 hectares (on a high spring tide) and has a shoreline of 100km. The harbour is tidal as far up river as Wareham and consists of open water/mudflats, reed fringes, saltmarsh and five large islands (four inhabited). Adjacent to the harbour are extensive areas of internationally important heathland as well as reed beds, wet grassland, farmland, woodland, two freshwater lakes and the conurbation of Poole. This mosaic of habitats within the Poole Harbour recording area (defined by local birdwatchers) attracts a wide variety of species - this article will concentrate on the waders.

The harbour falls within important designations including RAMSAR, SPA, SAC, SSSI and AONB. Leisure activities in the



Map of Poole Harbour from *The Birds of Dorset* (Helm) by kind permission of the author George Green.

harbour include yachting, canoeing, wind/kite surfing, jet skiing, wildfowling and angling. Commercially there is a small working port, a small-scale fishery and a number of pleasure trip boat companies. There is also a Royal

Marine base. In with this mix is a natural resource with important national and international assemblages of waders and wildfowl (monitored by WeBS counts). Conflicts between users and wildlife

## Julian Bhalerao — Rick Simpson

At the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair, Elis and I were shocked and saddened to hear about the sudden illness of old friend Julian Bhalerao.

Julian suffered a stroke on May 12th while he was watching the European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* at Winterton, in Norfolk, UK.

The *Wader Quest* team wish Julian, a speedy and full recovery and to Sarah and the rest of the family much strength to get through this very tough time.

The good news is that the latest we heard is that Julian is doing well and recovering slowly, he was overjoyed I'm sure, to be able to resume eating normally recently. Apparently he celebrated with a burger and chips, not to mention chocolate buttons... and why not? Get well soon old friend.



Eurasian Woodcock on Cley beach - Julian Bhalerao

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### Wader Quest Trustee news.

Chair: Rick Simpson

Secretary: Rachel Walls

Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Elis Simpson

Board members: Allan Archer, Ian Dearing, Lee Dingain, Sue Healey (Events), Chris Lamsdell (Ringing), Oliver Simms and Andrew Whitelee.

Last meeting: 17 April 2016

Next Meeting: July 31st.



Email: [waderquest@gmail.com](mailto:waderquest@gmail.com)  
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