**BRaid AGM, Sept 8, 2017**

**Chairman’s Report**

BRaid was formed in 2006, so this would be our 12th AGM. The past year has been one of good progress – especially considering that we are only a small amateur group, with the majority of us only having spare time to contribute to BRaid.

When I look back over the past year, there are a number of worthwhile activities to be mentioned. They mainly involve spreading the word about braided river ecosystems, and getting alongside those most closely involved with braided rivers. These range from professional managers (such as DOC and ECan), commercial businesses (such as gravel extractors, irrigators, power generators and recreation providers) to the general public – usually represented by interest groups and local residents.

*Seminar*

To me, the highlight of the year was the braided river seminar we ran on June 29 at Lincoln. It was a full-day session, involving talks by 20 presenters, and proved to be a good mix of experienced presenters dealing with well-known problems, and younger researchers talking about new projects. The most pleasing aspect was the number attending – around 150, with an approximate 50-50 mix of salaried professionals and those with just a personal passion for braided rivers. This demonstrates the continuing high level of interest in braided rivers – driven of course by water being the new commercial ‘gold’.

*The Flock*

Running right alongside the seminar highlight was the success of The Flock – a new and innovative way to promote our braided river shorebirds. This grew like a mushroom, and ended up with hundreds of cut-out birds being displayed in dozens of sites throughout the S. Island. The Flock continues to grow and is now almost self-generating as it starts into its second year.

*Upper Waimakariri bird survey*

In October last year, we completed the third survey of this river (first two in 2012 and 2014). Surveying riverbed birds is fundamental to gauging whether our mission is being accomplished, and it is very satisfying to have contributed as we did. The survey showed that the upper Waimakariri supports a significant number and diversity of indigenous riverbed birds, and most importantly, that there was no evidence of a decline in numbers of the main threatened species over the last 30 years.

*Braided River Partnership Project.*

This project is now entering its third year. As Sonny acknowledges in her reports, developing partnerships with commercial users of braided rivers is proving more difficult than we imagined, mainly due to the cryptic nature of the core bird species, their limited seasonal presence, and the general lack of awareness. It continues to amaze me that the vast majority of Cantabrians remain unaware of the icon riverbed bird, the wrybill – the only bird out of 10,000 global species with a sideways bending bill, which only breeds in Canterbury. It is difficult to imagine how any bird could be more special than that. Hence, the Partnership project has to focused on increasing general awareness.

*Promotion*.

This has progressed particularly well, thanks to Sonny’s efforts. She makes great use of the social media, with our BRaid website now acknowledged as the nation’s leading public source of braided river information. She has used her considerable design skills to produce attractive brochures and fliers, outdoor awareness and interpretation panels, teaching material and the likes of accreditation certificates. Last year we awarded one Silver and two Bronze certificates recognizing significant efforts in the field, and I was impressed how this news was quickly taken up by the media and the recipients’ senior management personnel.

*Thanks*

Finally, sincere thanks to the small band of keen people that represents BRaid. There is little doubt that we punch well above our weight, leading outsiders to imagine us as having an impressive office in town, where Sonny sits behind a large desk with a PA hovering at her side – which of course is far from the case. Apart from Sonny, who deserves particular mention for being our front person, special thanks to Edith Smith, who is our Minute secretary, and her husband, Peter, who has made sure that our finances are in sound shape. On that score, we welcome Sue Mardon as our new treasurer, taking over from Edith / Peter. Lastly, we could not operate without our core funders, DIA and DOC, plus the support of staff from local Government departments, territorial authorities and their sub-committees. The likes of DOC, ECan and district Zone Committees. These people are professionals, who can put what I call ‘quality time’ into helping us to achieve our goal. We might be the body which makes passionate pleas on behalf of the public, but without their support it would be very hard to make meaningful progress.

Nick Ledgard, September 8, 2017