**Chair’s report. BRaid AGM, Sept 6, 2019.**

BRaid was formed in 2006, so this would be our 14th 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 them. These range from professional Govt-funded managers, commercial businesses (such as gravel extractors, irrigators, power generators and recreation providers) to the general public – usually represented by interest groups and local residents.

***Promotion*.**

Our website and social media are well established, thanks to Sonny’s efforts. She makes great use of both, with our BRaid site 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 signs and interpretation panels, teaching material and the likes of accreditation certificates, awarded for significant field efforts. We continue to award certificates to those who deserve them, and they are very well received. The Flock concept, which we initiated in the S. Island, has been widely recognised, and is now self-driven, particularly by schools. We are right behind promoting the wrybill as Bird of the Year in 2019, and on March 10 I spoke at the launch of this campaign held in the Miranda-Pukorokoro Trust centre in the Firth of Thames, south of Auckland.

***Representation / Submissions***

With the burgeoning interest in braided rivers as water sources, and the home of important biodiversity, the job of championing their conservation values remains all important. Hence our presence at Zone Committee meetings, and others dealing with science / research findings. We have also submitted to ECan’s report on gravel extraction strategy relative to minimising breeding bird disturbance, plus the strategy to control Southern Black-backed gulls. We have spent a lot of time on the BRIDGE project, which aims to determine what people value about braided rivers, in order to define their limits. The court case which rejected ECan’s definition of a braided river bed opens up the possibility of further encroachment by farmland. We are lucky to have Sonny closely involved and able to argue for the future security of braided rivers in such an informed way.

***Field operations***

The success of our three upper Waimakariri bird surveys encouraged us to look at another catchment– this time the Wilberforce, which we will investigate from Nov 3-8. Jim and I have already done a recce visit and booked accommodation. On a wider front, last season our intentions to monitor black-billed gull and black-fronted tern colonies over the full season were initiated. A well qualified member, Grant Davey, visited and wrote short reports on the Harper and Mason rivers, the Ashley-Okuku confluence and two Kowai rivers (Waimakariri tributary and Waipara). In addition, we facilitated Rangiora HS to start long-term studies of aquatic insect populations in the Ashley-Rakahuri river, and we need to encourage their on-going efforts.

***Workshops***

For most outsiders the highlight of the past year was undoubtedly the braided river seminar we held out at Lincoln University on June 26. It was attended by close to 150 people, who all agreed it was a most worthwhile event. Sincere thanks to the Rakaia Catchment Environmental Enhancement Society for funding the bulk of the seminar costs. Offers of sponsorship have already been received for another seminar in 2020, and Sonny has already started planning for that.

***Partnership Project***

Sonny will report on this. Although it has proved harder than expected to get the buy-in of the range of partners we initially targeted, this must remain a core goal. I am particularly keen to progress the link with LINZ, which via its weed control contracts, has operational links to nearly all braided rivers. There is enormous potential for their contractors to be made more aware of the special environments in which they work, particularly relative to assisting the indigenous bird species which breed in the riverbeds. Another group very much involved in river use is Fish and Game, with which we need to develop a closer relationship.

***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, largely thanks to our ability to employ a part-time manager, Sonny, who is able to put what I call ‘quality’ hours into implementing our mission. Our employment ability is due to the support we get from ECan and the Lotteries Environment and Heritage Fund. Major thanks also to our treasurer, Sue Mardon. These people are professionals. 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 6, 2019