

## **BRaid AGM, Sept 7, 2015**

### **Chairman's Report**

Welcome.

BRaid was formed in 2006, so this would be our 9<sup>th</sup> AGM.

The past year has been one of continuing 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. With water being the new 'gold' and braided rivers being the major carrier in Canterbury, there continues to be a growing recognition that we need to look beyond the commercial opportunities and towards our goal of protecting and enhancing braided river ecosystems, particularly the birdlife. When I look back over the past year, there are a number of worthwhile activities to be mentioned.

**Manager.** Thanks to WWF, the Canterbury Community Trust and the Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust, sufficient funds were obtained last year to employ a Manager for the equivalent of around 2 days/week. This has made a huge difference to what we have been able to undertake. Jane Demeter was our first Manager and did an excellent job fronting for BRaid up until early this year. The higher, decision-making echelons quickly recognised her as our front-person, and one to be heard. Plus she was the one who organised our major 2014 coup - the organisation and chairing of a 1-day braided river workshop on May 28 last year. When Jane resigned as Manager, we advertised for a replacement and had four excellent applicants reaching the interviewing stage. From these we selected Sonny Whitelaw. Sonny lives in Oxford, and has a diverse background in adventure tourism, photojournalism and marketing. She has two Masters degrees, one in Climate Change and the second in Communications, plus a Post Graduate Diploma in Sustainable Management. Hence, Sonny brings a broad range of skills, knowledge and experience to our Manager's role.

**Website.** Sonny has spent most of her time to date working on our website. This is an area where she has great expertise, and the end result is the development of a 'shop-window' of which we can be very proud. I have had much positive feedback, and the site has so impressed DOC that they have chosen it to be the outlet for much of their braided river publicity material. In addition, Sonny is relatively new to the braided river bird scene, so working on our website has allowed her access to a lot of braided river information and people which would otherwise have remained hidden for longer.

**Training workshops.** In past years we have run three very successful 3-day courses on braided river bird management at the Glentui Centre near Oxford. Last year, we did not get the number of registrants to run a 4<sup>th</sup> such course. So, we decided to target our efforts on more specific groups attending shorter courses. This year, we have organised a half-day course aimed at Zone Committee members, and another full day course aimed at the general public. These will take place in early November (at the same time as DOC's Conservation Week), with John Dowding doing the tutoring. In addition, we are running two half-day predator trapping workshops on the weekends of Oct 17 and 31 – both using DOC facilities, one in Rangiora and one in Geraldine. Sonny is working on the promotion side, so you will hear more about these workshops in the near future. Next year it is planned to hold a full day workshop on braided river bird research and management – an update on the one Jane Demeter organised last year.

**Monitoring birds.** This is imperative if we want to know if we are succeeding in our long-term goal of enhancing braided river bird life. In 2012 and 2014 BRaid organised a 4-day bird survey of the upper Waimakariri – an important bird breeding river, which had not been properly surveyed since the 1990s. Jim Jolly co-ordinated these, and his 2014 report is available on the website. Meaningful results from such surveys require repeats, so a third survey is planned for the spring of 2016. In order to involve more 'outsiders' in monitoring and becoming more aware of their working environment, we have secured some funding from DOC to approach the likes of commercial jet-boat, canoeing/rafting and fishing operators.

We will encourage them to advise us of breeding bird locations, and to get involved in simple management, such as trapping and monitoring of breeding success. Looking further afield, right now we are working on a basic protocol to encourage the public to report breeding bird locations, and to undertake some simple monitoring of numbers and breeding outcomes. We NZ'ers are very good at recognizing conservation problems, and then initiating actions such as killing weeds and pests, but we are generally poor at monitoring outcomes. Hence, the importance of focusing more effort into monitoring.

**Promotion.** I am often surprised at how often I hear mention of BRaid as an important player in braided river resource management. Without doubt, our website has contributed to that. We get invitations to represent public braided river conservation interests by local authorities and the likes of DOC, plus we get requests for advice from the public and private individuals. In the N. Island, we are liaising with a group in the Wairarapa to help breeding black-billed gulls; on the Wairau river near Blenheim, we are assisting the re-emergence of a local rivercare group; and next month I am speaking on braided rivers to a Forest & Bird gathering in Makarora at the head of L. Wanaka. Over the summer, an American film crew is making a documentary on the Te Araroa trail – the walkway which runs from North Cape to Bluff. We have been selected to feature as one of five conservation projects operating alongside the trail. Filming will take place in the upper Rangitata sometime before Christmas.

**Submissions.** With the current high interest in irrigation and renewable energy sources, there is increasing pressure on the utilization of water flowing down braided rivers. Because of the large amounts of money involved, there is also pressure on local and central government agencies to regulate in favour of such water use – despite situations where the environmental outcomes are at best unclear. BRaid tries to keep abreast of these regulatory developments, and submit in defence of the river ecosystems. However, it is all too easy for amateurs such as ourselves to be worn down by the complicated and long drawn out legal process. Despite this, it is very important that we remain involved in the regulatory arena.

## **Thanks**

Finally, sincere thanks to the small band of keen people that represents BRaid. I always hesitate to name individuals as I am afraid of missing someone. However, our inaugural Manager, Jane Demeter and her successor, Sonny Whitelaw, deserve particular thanks for getting us up, running and recognised. Also, special thanks to Edith Smith and her husband, Peter, who have made sure that our finances are in sound shape. In addition of course, we could not operate without the support of staff from local Government departments, territorial authorities, their sub-committees and their contractors. The likes of DOC, ECan, Zone Committees and LINZ. 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

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