



ARTWORK² auspiced
and co-ordinated the
New Zealand leg of the
Waderbirds project.

Waderbirds: Odyssey of the Wetlands

An Outdoor Epic

Each year numbers of eastern curlew fly from Siberia along the 13,000-kilometre East Asian flyway to New Zealand. The large, shy Eastern Curlew is the world's most threatened waderbird species and one of its New Zealand resting spots is the Manukau Harbour.

Waderbirds: Odyssey of the Wetlands, an international project that integrated arts, environment, education and science, began on the peaceful shores of the Manukau.

The project was managed by an international team, which included Australians Meme McDonald and Nell White, expat-Kiwi Kate Clere, Kiwi co-director, choreographer and dancer Stephen Bradshaw and local co-ordinators Joy Foote and Sandi Morrison. The team worked with the Manukau community on a series of arts and education activities that culminated in a night-time theatre spectacle.

Starting six months before the event, Joy and Sandi established a project reference group which included Iwi, community groups, funders, local schools, community centres and the local authority reps. This group met regularly to assist the co-ordinators to develop the project. Critical to the success of the project was the support of the Huakina Development Trust, tangata whenua guardians of the Manukau Harbour. The trust appointed Mahia Wilson as a kaiawhina for the project, who suggested the most appropriate site for the theatre spectacle.

A month out from the day of the big performance, the team of Australian and New Zealand artists assembled in their project headquarters, a hall provided rent free by Manukau City Council. An integral part of the work was an education outreach programme into three local schools and the local library. The education programme was designed to raise awareness of wetland issues and involve the



students in the performance as actors and the makers of their own costumes, masks and props. Much of the focus at this stage was on the creation of a huge paper Eastern Curlew that was to be carried and manipulated by a team of actors. This bamboo and paper bird was the star of the show, not only on the shores of the Manukau Harbour, but at all the other performances along the Far Eastern Flyway up to Japan.

After these months of preparation and activity, the performance started with a blessing from kaumatua of Makaurau Marae. A cast of hundreds and an audience of many more marched from Waderbirds headquarters down a hill to the harbour edge. On the way the Maori legend of Rata and the birds was danced as an integral part of the event. In the darkness by the water the story of the Eastern Curlew and the trials it faces

were acted out with the aid of spotlighting and recorded music. Out of the darkness stilt walkers on three-metre stilts crowded about the bird, representing the forces that threaten waderbirds and their wetland habitats. The finale was a group of children and mothers rushing forward to set the threatened curlew free.

Waderbirds was timed to coincide with the Eastern Curlew's actual migration timetable and with important relevant political events. After the Manukau performance the core team moved on to work with local people on similar but unique activities and performances in Melbourne, Broome (Australia), Hong Kong and Kushiro (Japan). The performance in Kushiro was held at the same time as international delegates gathered there to further discuss the Ramsar Convention on wetlands.



“To begin with I thought they might be just some arty weirdos. But I can see now it was a better way of getting people involved than standing on a hillside shouting [about conservation]. This had a really visual impact and everyone participated in it.”

Ray Clough, local resident and bird watcher



At the blessing before the performance a mauri stone crafted by artist Brett Graham had been presented by tangata whenua to the **Waderbirds** team. This mauri accompanied the project up the Eastern Flyway and was subsequently returned to the Manukau and to Ihumatao Marae.



In June 2002 the project entered a new phase with the release of *A Year on the Wing*, a multimedia documentary made for internet broadcast. Building on the **Waderbirds** performances, the documentary takes viewers on the astounding journey of the Eastern Curlew up and down the East Asia flyway. The story is told through the eyes of indigenous elders, artists and ornithologists and involves communities from Siberia, China, Japan, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand.



A Year on the Wing is one of the Australian Film Commissions first online interactive documentaries, which offers viewers opportunities to contribute their stories and information. It can be viewed at www.abc.net.au/docos

DESCRIPTORS

- a project that integrated arts, science, environmental and community objectives
 - an international project grounded in respect for the cultures of the places in which it happened
 - an interactive world-wide web project that stretches new media boundaries
 - care taken to inform, discuss and involve tangata whenua people at each place
 - professional New Zealand and international artists working with local communities
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