

Watch out for migrating Whimbrels!

It is migration time and our satellite-tagged Whimbrels have set off as well! Three of our Whimbrels departed Australia between 16-20 April and they are now in the northern hemisphere.

KS was the first bird to depart Broome on 16 April. The last signal transmitted from Broome was on 16 April at 1am. By the time the satellite transmitter switched on again to transmit data to the satellite on 18 April morning, KS has already flew nearly 2,00km to cross the equator. After 3 days, on 22 April, it decided to land on Xihcao wetland in Tainan County, Taiwan, a nature reserve set up for the protection of Black-faced Spoonbill and shorebirds. Habitats there include tidal mudflat, mangrove and saltpan. There has previously been a few resightings of NW Australia flagged Whimbrel in the west coast of Taiwan but not from this area.

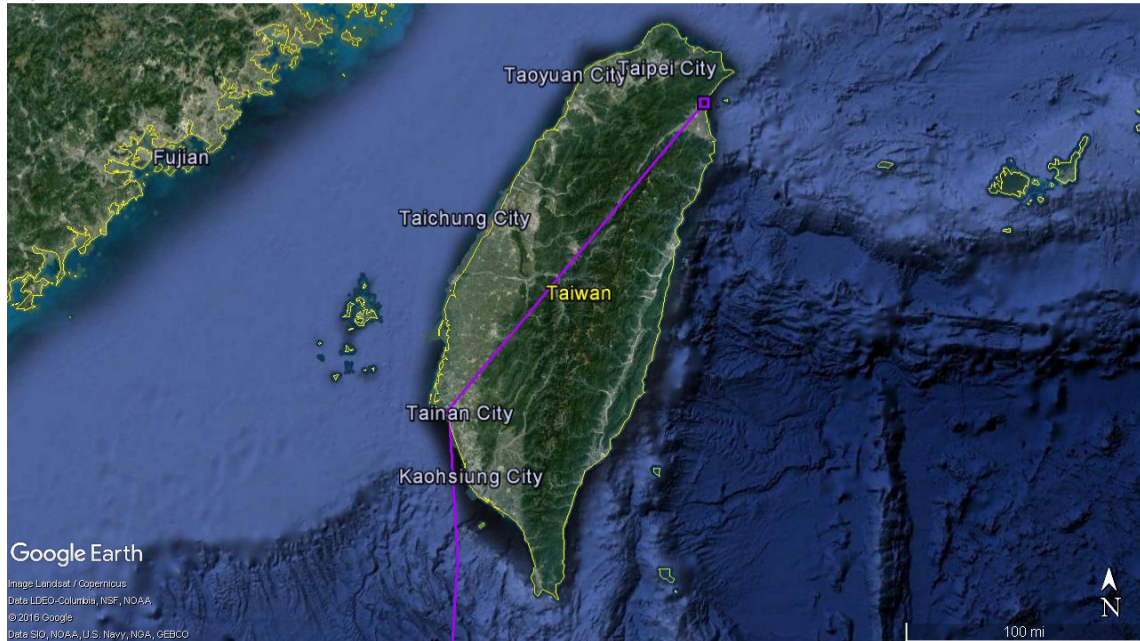
The real surprise comes 4 days later (26 April) when KS was resighted and photographed at the north-east coast of Taiwan in Yilan County, even before the satellite signals transmitted through to reveal its movement. KS was observed foraging with a flock of seven other Whimbrels in one of the river channel in Xiapo wetland, which is a popular farmland area for waterbird watching among local birdwatchers.

Excellent photos taken by Mr. LIN Jer An show KS with its satellite transmitter intact on its back. In AWSG's previous shorebird satellite tracking projects, we had faced problems with satellite transmitters ceasing to function when a bird was part way through migration. Knowing that both the bird and the transmitter are both in good condition two months after deployment and that they have made a long flight >4,500km is a REAL delight.

Photo 1. KS photographed in Yilan County, Taiwan on 26 April 2017 (Photo by LIN Jer An)

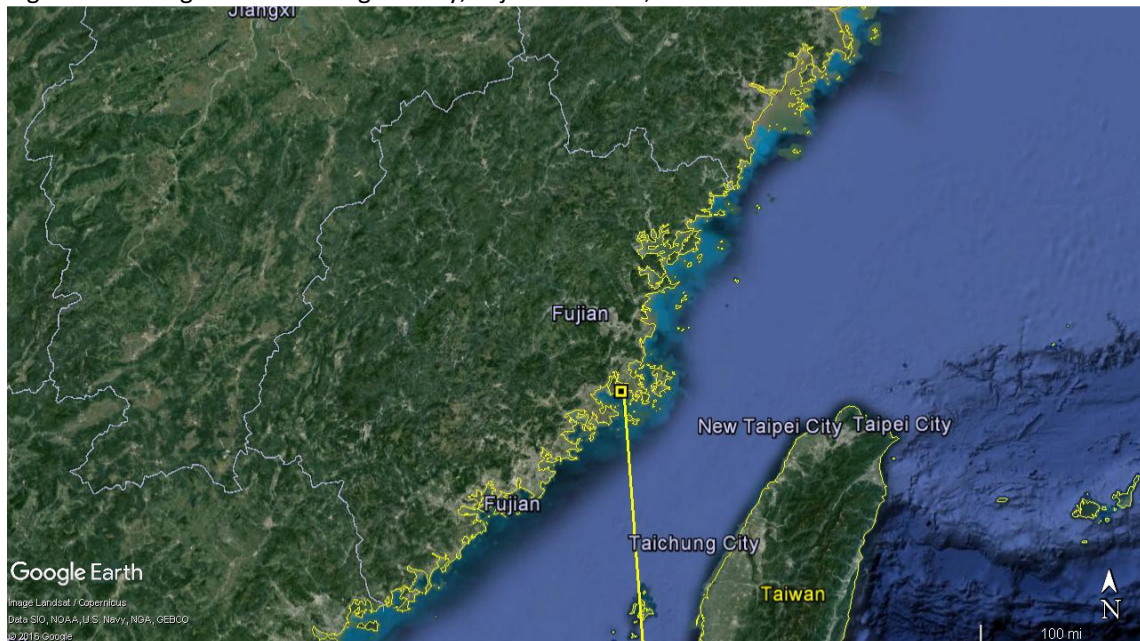


Fig 1. Movement of KS from west to east coast of Taiwan



KU was not too far behind KS and departed Broome just a day later on 17 April afternoon. Within a four-hour period, KU has made a 200km flight with average speed of 50km per hour. The long flight continued until 23 April when KU landed in coastal area in Xinghua Bay, Fujian Province, China, an extensive mudflat area with peak count of 16,000 waterbirds (China Coastal Waterbird Census, 2007) yet to receive any protection status.

Fig 2. KU landing location in Xinghua Bay, Fujian Province, China.

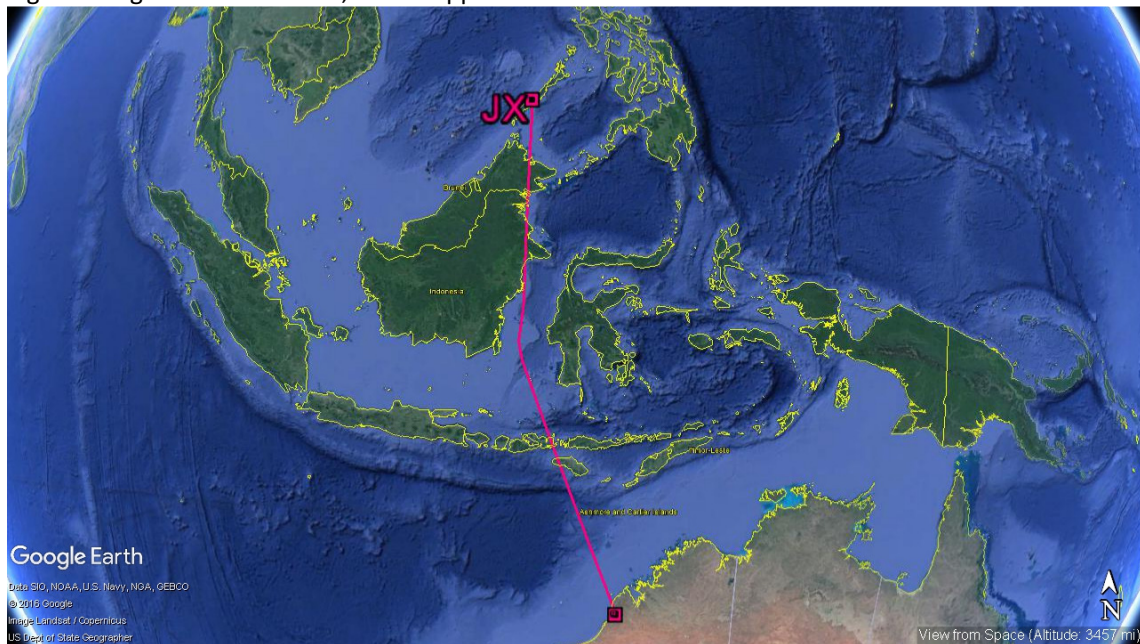


JX was our last bird to receive a satellite transmitter and is also the last bird to start migration, departing Broome on 20 April. In 4-day time, JX travelled over 3,000km with an average speed of 31km per hour and reached Malanut Bay in Palawan, the Philippines.

Photo 2. JX photographed in Roebuck Bay on 26 March 2017 (Photo by Jack Winterbottom)



Fig 3. JX migration to Palawan, the Philippines.



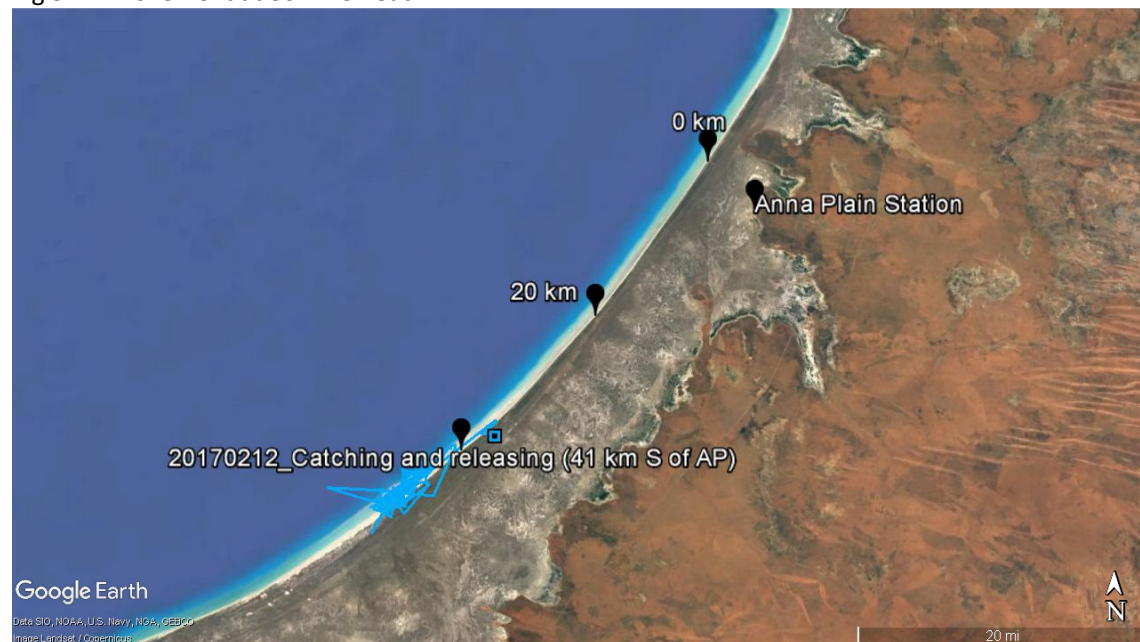
Looks like KS, KU and JX will all stay for a while in where they are for replenishing after their long flight, and will depart again for their next leg of migration hopefully in a few days time.

Table 1: Departure and “Landing” detail of KS, KU and JX.

Leg Flag	Transmitter ID and track colour	Date of departure from NW Australia	Date of landing in Northern hemisphere
KS	164798 (purple)	16 April	22 April (Taiwan)
KU	164800 (yellow)	17 April	23 April (Southern China)
JX	164802 (pink)	20 April	24 April (the Philippines)

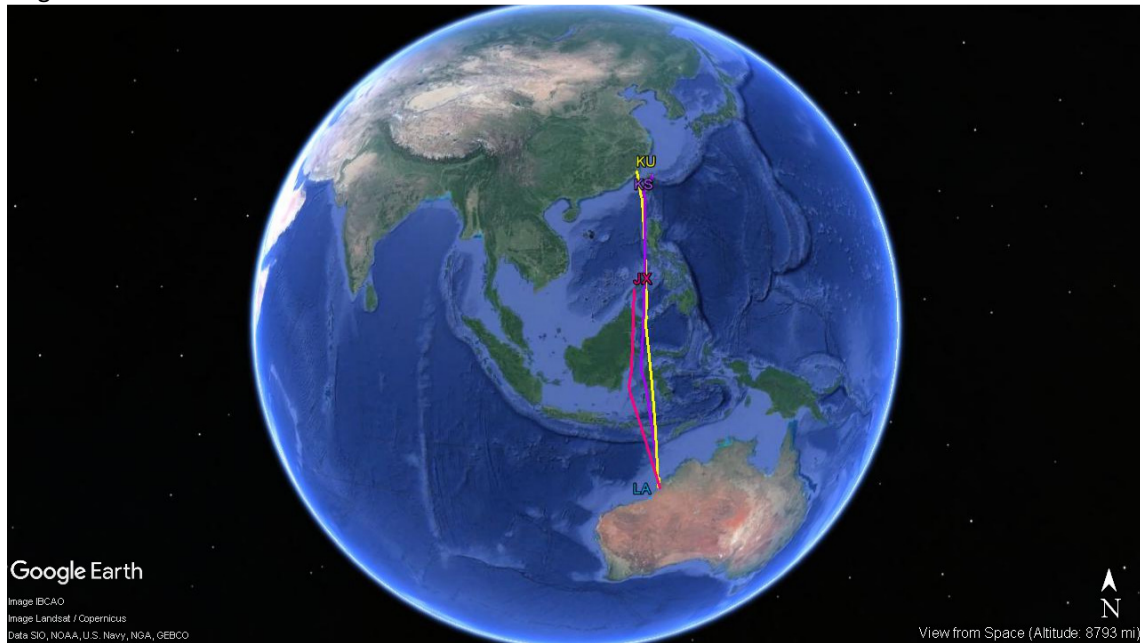
Last but not least, LA, our 2-year old Whimbrel, is still around 40-50km south of the Anna Plain beach entrance at Eighty Mile Beach. Now, we are almost certain that it will stay in Australia in its second year of life.

Fig 3. LA movement at 80 Mile Beach.



As of 1 May 2017:

Migration tracks of our Whimbrels:



Migration summary on our Whimbrels

Leg Flag (track colour)	No. of days since deployment	No. of days since migration started	Distance travelled
LA (blue)	80 days	0 days	0km
KS (purple)	68 days	15 days	4,802km
KU (yellow)	68 days	14 days	4,814km
JX (pink)	39 days	11 days	3,049km

Katherine Leung
1 May 2017