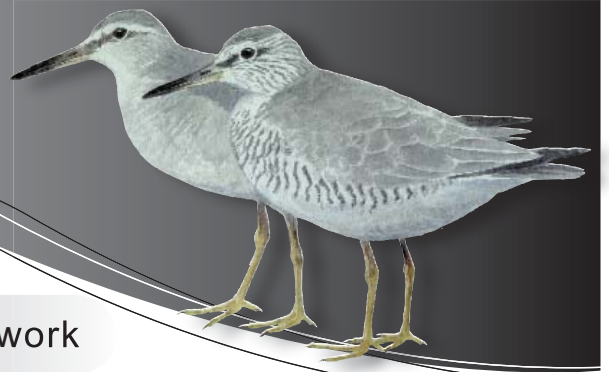


Tattler

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Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Shorebird Network

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Editorial

This edition of Tattler is much later than usual, in fact we have missed out on the September posting altogether. This is as the result of so many things happening, not due inactivity on the part of the editor. This included attending overseas meetings for wetlands and waterbird conservation the setting up of the Asia Pacific Shorebird Network (APSN) and its website (see page 2) has taken up a fair bit of time. Both of these activities have resulted in changes to the way we are likely to communicate in the shorebird world of the Asia Pacific region. It is because of the expansion of shorebird activities over such a wide area the APSN was formed. A website and News Alert system is probably the most efficient way to communicate quickly between hundreds (or thousands) of interested individuals as well and partner organisations.

One of the frustrating things about producing a quarterly newsletter is that much of the news that reaches the editor is out of date by the time the next edition is due for 'print'. I have long been an admirer of the BirdLife International's News Alert system. This provides a one or two line email with a link to the full story. If you are interested you simply click on the link, otherwise you can delete the email having only spent seconds reading it. Lengthy emails and cumbersome attachments tend to clutter our 'inboxes'. Despite all good intentions there is a tendency to put less urgent items aside

to read later, until they have disappeared in the archives of the email system never to be seen again. While those of you who receive a printed copy of Tattler can 'shelve it' for later reading the majority of readers receive electronic copies.

Now is the time for those of you who want to continue to receive Tattler to speak up, or forever hold your peace! In the mean time make sure you register to receive the APSN News Alerts by entering: http://www.shorebirdnetwork.org/news_alerts.html and decide which you prefer over the next month or two. Unless there is a big demand for Tattler the editor has suggested that the newsletter cease production in favour of the APSN News Alert which will link with news and updates from shorebird and conservation groups throughout the Asia Pacific as soon as they are received.

As editor I find it easier to write or forward news items as they appear rather than formatting a newsletter every three months.

The printed English edition of Tattler is produced by the Australasian Wader Studies Group. Members of the AWSG will have a particular interest as The Tattler has been a regular feature of membership of the AWSG for thirteen years. However, if Tattler ceases production all is not lost for it has been suggested that Stilt should include a news and views section relevant to the Australasian region (much like the Bulletin of the International Wader Study Group).

While on the subject of AWSG, members will notice a new logo, replacing the old 'stilts' image that has been a feature of the journal of that name for over 25 years. The new logo is easier to use in graphics as it incorporates the name and the acronym of the organisation.



Asia Pacific Shorebird Network

The Asia Pacific Shorebird Network (APSN) has been formed as a result of a need to provide an avenue of communication between shorebird specialists, wetlands managers and conservationists throughout the Asia Pacific Region. Although there are many national and international organisations involved with birds and/or conservation there has been no easy way for people concerned about the future of shorebirds across the region to work together and discuss their concerns or findings.

The APSN has grown from the activities of people dedicated to shorebirds and their conservation over the past 20 to 30 years. The driving force started with people in Australia (members of the Australasian Wader Studies Group) Malaysia (with the eventual formation of the Asian Wetland Bureau – now known as Wetlands International) and Japan (wader enthusiasts). Other groups have become involved from the USA (especially Alaska) and more recently China (Chongming Dao, Taiwan and Hong Kong) and Indonesia. However until now there has been no effort to link individuals and groups over the Asia Pacific region to work towards a common goal.

The Goal of the APSN:

Promote and assist individuals and organisations to collaborate on shorebird conservation in the Asia Pacific.

This will be achieved by:

- The development of a network of people interested in shorebird study and conservation to support shorebird related issues;
- The establishment of links between conservation and bird orientated groups in the region;
- Developing regional communications links via email websites and the production of a regular newsletter; and
- Promoting regional meetings and workshops to focus attention on global and local issues.

The Network includes:

- Shorebird/wetlands researchers
- Wetland managers (linked through Wetlands Link International – Asia and Wetlands International)
- Conservation and study groups such as:
 - National and regional shorebird groups
 - Wetlands International
 - BirdLife International
 - WWF
 - International, regional & local bird groups
- Any interested individuals

Membership:

Membership (or subscription) is free to individuals, national and international bird groups and other conservation groups, although there is a facility for supporting members and sponsors who may wish to support the network financially by subscribing regularly or by occasional sponsorship.

Operation:

The network aims to reach a large number of people through direct email communication and the newsletter Tattler, now produced in three languages; English, Chinese and Indonesian. We encourage assistance with the production of newsletters and web pages in other languages relevant to the Asia Pacific region.

The network will continue to expand and will conduct training workshops and regional meetings in association with 'member' groups and individuals.

The Network will facilitate information exchange on:

- Banding and reporting resighting/recoveries of colour-flagged and banded birds;
- production of shorebird Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) materials and programs;
- information exchange on shorebird management techniques;
- provide training courses on shorebird identification and survey techniques;
- support surveys to identify sites of importance for shorebirds in the Asia Pacific;
- lobby relevant governments for the conservation and sustainable use of important shorebird sites; and
- mentoring of shorebird workers.

Anyone interested in participating in the APSN should visit the APSN website at: <www.shorebirdnetwork.org> or direct link: <http://www.shorebirdnetwork.org/news_alerts.html> to subscribe. Comments may be sent direct to the APSN co-ordinator at <mail@shorebirdnetwork.org>. Some sections of the website are under construction i.e. Important Bird Areas, or have yet to be added i.e. Shorebird Research.



Ongoing Saemangeum monitoring needs volunteers

A second season of shorebird monitoring at Saemangeum is planned for April – May 2007

Saemangeum, on the west coast of South Korea, was until recently recognised as the single most important staging site for migratory shorebirds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. This may no longer be the case, as construction of the Saemangeum sea-wall was completed in late April 2006. The 33 km dam across the Mangyeung and Dongjin Estuaries is part of the largest "reclamation" in the world, and will convert about 400 km² of tidal flats for land use and as a freshwater reservoir. There is much to be learned about how shorebirds respond to large-scale habitat loss of this kind and their effects on shorebird populations, so it is extremely important that the effects of the reclamation, both at the local and at the Flyway-level, are measured and adequately documented. Last year the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) and Birds Korea formed a partnership to conduct the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project (SSMP). The objective of the project, a three-year program, is to document the effects of the Saemangeum reclamation on shorebirds, in Saemangeum itself and in adjacent estuarine systems (the Geum Estuary and Gomso Bay) which may receive displaced birds. Results of these studies will be disseminated widely to inform future conservation work in the East Asia-Australasian flyway.



*Dunlin and Great Knot feeding on dead & dying shellfish at Saemangeum.
Jan van de Kam photo*

A report on the surveys in April/ May 2006 was released at a series of workshops in Korea in September 2006. This, and other information, can be found on the websites of Birds Korea <<http://www.birdskorea.org/saemref.asp>> and Birds Australia <<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/articles/saemangeum.html>>. A technical write-up (to be published soon in volume 50 of *Stilt*) will also be uploaded to these sites in the next month or so. In brief, we counted a minimum of 198,031 shorebirds in Saemangeum, 15 of which (including the endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper) occurred in internationally significant numbers. Great Knot and probably many other species used the region as a final fuelling point for the flight to the breeding grounds. Local distribution of the shorebirds within the Saemangeum area changed after closure of the sea-wall caused a decline in tidal range (with dried out inner estuarine sites being abandoned by shorebirds) and a dramatic die-off

of benthic molluscs. Many shorebirds then fed on the dying molluscs and this temporary food source may have enabled them to feed and put on enough fat to continue their migration successfully. We had no clear evidence that birds abandoned Saemangeum on northwards migration in 2006. However, in brief surveys in September 2006, enormous areas of tidal flat in Saemangeum had already changed to dry saltmarsh, and the remaining tidal flat areas appeared to be less rich in benthos and shorebirds than in the past; the area and quality of suitable habitat for shorebirds in Saemangeum is likely to be greatly diminished by the next northwards migration. We also found a minimum of 82,990 shorebirds in the Geum Estuary on northwards migration, including internationally significant numbers of at least 13 species; these include perhaps the largest counts made at any single site of the globally endangered Nordmann's Greenshank. With the loss of Saemangeum to shorebirds, the Geum Estuary is now likely to be South Korea's premier shorebird site. Unfortunately, it too is threatened by a major land reclamation project, and we believe that the SSMP data will be vital in arguments calling for this internationally important site's conservation.

The next SSMP survey will be carried out through April and May, 2007. The objectives of this survey will be:

- (i) To document numbers of shorebirds occurring in Saemangeum, the Geum and Gomso Bay on northwards migration to enable comparison with baseline data gathered in 2006.
- (ii) To document the timing of shorebird migration through the region, this is a necessary step if the overall number of birds using it a staging area is to be estimated;
- (iii) To make resightings of colour-marked birds, so we can assess migratory origins of Saemangeum birds and predict where population declines caused by Saemangeum will be observed; and
- (iv) To document roost locations, local shorebird movements and short-term effects of construction of the Saemangeum sea-wall.

The survey will run from the start of April till late May 2007, and we are seeking further volunteers to assist in this essential fieldwork, particularly during the four key periods when spring tides will enable us to carry out major counts. These are 2 to 6 April, 15 to 21 April, 3 to 6 May and 15 to 21 May. Volunteers are welcome to come for one or more of these tide series – the more the

better. Some financial assistance in regard to accommodation and travel within Korea may be available. Last year we had a diverse group from 7 different countries and we encourage a similar group this year. While experience at shorebird counting is preferable we are seeking people with a range of skills. Participation in the program will provide an outstanding opportunity to see some excellent birds, while contributing significantly to one of the most important conservation initiatives in the region, one with direct relevance for the conservation of the Flyway's migratory shorebirds. If you would like further information or wish to discuss the project please contact Nial Moores (Birds Korea) <spoonbillkorea@yahoo.com> , or AWSG specialists Danny Rogers <drogers@melbpc.org.au> , Phil Battley <philbattley@quicksilver.net.nz> and Ken Gosbell <ken@gosbell.id.au>

Ken Gosbell, Danny Rogers, Nial Moores and Phil Battley

Bar-tailed Godwits complete marathon trans-Pacific flights

(Search launched for missing trans-Pacific godwits and curlews)

Buoyed by the success we had in 2005 in attaching satellite transmitters to nesting Bar-tailed Godwits (see January 2006 Tattler), we expanded the effort in 2006 to include both Bar-tailed Godwits and Bristle-thighed Curlews. Between early August and late September we followed the southward flights of 9 Bristle-thighed Curlews and 5 Bar-tailed Godwits as they departed their Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta staging grounds. Amazingly, all of the curlews were tracked to French Polynesia and the southern Line Islands. Bar-tailed Godwits were likewise followed across the Pacific along almost their entire flight, but continuing problems with battery failure prevented us from tracking birds to their final destination in either New Zealand or eastern Australia. For example, one godwit got within 1,500 km of New Zealand when its battery died. At the time it was well past Fiji and flying strongly at over 80 km/h. Another godwit was 2,500 km from Queensland and flying steadily at 50 km/h when its battery failed. Yet a third godwit had its battery die before it even departed on migration. Another bird spent 9.5 days!! in the air before it landed on an atoll east of New Caledonia. It got caught up in some pretty strong headwinds north of Hawaii and again past Fiji. The latter caused the bird to abruptly head west where it stopped on New Caledonia.



Bar-tailed Godwits - longest non-stop flight for a land bird? Phil Straw photo

This sub species of Bar-tailed Godwits that nest in Alaska must complete the longest known single flight for a land bird, 11,000 km, to Australia and New Zealand.

Among the Bristle-thighed Curlews, two birds reached French Polynesia but their transmitters stopped reporting before they settled on a specific non-breeding area. Both were within 1,000 km of the nearest atoll known to host Bristle-thighed Curlews when their transmitters last reported. Since the transmitters were on a 48-h reporting cycle birds easily could have reached land during the following two days and shed their transmitters before the next reporting cycle. [It is beyond the scope of this article to present other details of the study. These you'll

see shortly in the *Tattler* and other scientific journals.]

In the mean time, anyone with an interest in Bar-tailed Godwits and Bristle-thighed Curlews can provide invaluable help by observing one or more of the marked godwits and curlews whose radios stopped prematurely. Each bird carries a black flag inscribed with a two-digit alphanumeric code and an antenna should be clearly visible extending from the bird's lower back or from under its tail. For godwits in particular, observing one of the birds in question will demonstrate that it did indeed complete its migration (Bar-tailed Godwits with transmitters and engraved flags were observed in Australia and New Zealand last year). Please send information directly to David Melville < david.melville@xtra.co.nz>, Adrian Riegen <riegen@xtra.co.nz>, Phil Battley < philbattley@quicksilver.net.nz>, or me. Besides being profusely acknowledged in our writings about the birds, you will become an honorary member of the Alaska Shorebird Group and receive a handsome hat and patch.



Bristle-thighed Curlews overwinter in the Pacific Islands. Phil Hansbro photo

Tracking Godwits on their northward migration

Although the *baueri* sub species of Bar-tailed Godwit fly directly across the Pacific on their southern migration it is likely that these birds fly north via the Yellow Sea to their breeding grounds. How they reach to Alaska is unknown.

In early February 2007 a team of U.S. biologist will travel to New Zealand to work with colleagues in applying satellite transmitters to Bar-tailed Godwits. Bob Gill and veterinarian Dan Mulcahy of the U.S. Geological Survey in Alaska and Nils Warnock of PRBO Conservation Science in California with work with Phil Battley, David Melville, Rob Schuckard, and Adrian Riegen to capture birds at sites on both North and South Island and track them on their northward migration -- hopefully all the way to the breeding grounds. The aim of the project, however, is to learn specific stopover sites used during the northward flight.

Bob Gill
robert_gill@usgs.gov

Russian Far East Studies

Shorebird Migration Studies in the Russian Far East as part of the Avian Influenza Campaign 2006: An Overview

The Russian Far East presents us with a huge, but widely unstudied, bird migration scene connecting the Arctic, Asia, Alaska, Australia and even Africa and Europe. The vast water body of the Sea of Okhotsk offers coastal habitats and much 'hinterland'. Despite some very intense industrial activities on land and off-shore, a lot of unexplored wilderness can still be found in this study area.

Migratory birds from Asia and the Russian Far East are known to connect with Alaska. Recent concerns about the spread of Avian Influenza (AI) into Alaska allowed for the first time to investigate bird migration. Using identical measurement protocols, seven sites were sampled during August 2006 with opportunistic catching by local teams using mist nets in the Russian Far East, in Mongolia and in Northern Japan.

The Avian Influenza part of the study is part of a large international program and results will be available once all the samples were analyzed. Here we report for the first time on large-scale bird migration through the study area. Data were collected using standardized methods including the collection of morphometric data, carrying out bird banding, and the collection of a small number of feather and blood samples from representative species. Over 6000 birds were sampled in Kamchatka, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok and the Kurile Islands. All of these data will be available online and are described with FGDC NBII Metadata (an ISO standard). It will allow for the global community to use these data freely and learn more about the fascinating bird migration in the Sea of Okhotsk, and along EAA (East-Asian Australasian) flyways in particular. This will mean that these and similar data will be available for the research community for decades to come and in modern formats allowing for numerous analysis. This relatively new philosophy regarding the presentation of scientific and shorebird migration data is also part of a Data Information Service (DIS) promoted by the International Polar Year (IPY; www.ipy.org).

Data are still being analyzed, but the study found that shorebirds follow known migration patterns within the known set up of species for the regions. Numbers consisted mostly of juvenile birds; inland migration was weak and mostly occurred at night. Whereas the traditional shorebird migration hotspots showed strong numbers and the traditional migration waves, no significant shorebird numbers were found on the Kurile Islands. As would be expected, northern sites such as Kamchatka and Khabarovsk region saw an earlier migration than sites further south (Vladivostok and Hokkaido). No specific bird band returns are known to the author, yet, but interesting returns can be expected over time. Blood and feather samples are in the process to be submitted for stable isotope analysis, allowing us to contribute to the growing amount of information on how these fascinating birds travel across continents.

In the future, it is hoped that the sites surveyed will be

revisited, new ones added, and that existing shorebird work elsewhere along the flyway will be linked with compatible survey protocols.

The gains from such exercises are remarkable. They allow relevant people to handle a potential global disease outbreak (e.g. Alaska's migratory birds connect six continents), and for the first time enable us to assemble a more coherent picture of various aspects of bird migration.

Acknowledgements: This work was supported by the INBRE program, G. Happ and J. Runstadler at UAF. We are grateful to all collaborators in Russia, U.S. and elsewhere helping to achieve the project goals.

Falk Huettmann, Andrey Averin, Aleksey Antonov, Alexander Drouziaka, Yuri Gerasimov, Misha Markovets, Katarina Matsina, Vladimir Pronkevich, Keisuke Saito and Olga Valchuk

INBRE Russian Far East team- EWHALE lab, Biology and Wildlife Department, Institute of Arctic Biology, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, 99775

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Sakhalin Island Expedition - Volunteers

Aniva Bay is located on the southern section of Sakhalin Island just north of Japan. It offers a migration funnel for migratory birds from Ais northwards into the Arctic. An expedition is planned to the area between 9 and 23 May 2007. The goal of the expedition is to provide a quick biodiversity inventory (hence the title of the expedition - Shorebird BIOBLITZ) to provide data and peer-reviewed publications.

The Sea of Okhotsk is a major waterbody which still lacks detail surveys and inventories for the diversity of migratory shorebirds and their habitats.

The aims of the expedition are to document:

- i) general species composition on the mudflats,
- ii) leg flag sightings,
- iii) quantitative species abundance,
- iv) migration schedules,
- v) sub-species identification,
- vi) turnover rates,
- vii) mudflat/benthos biodiversity,
- viii) potential research projects (e.g. moult, stable isotope, DNA, DISTANCE Sampling,
- ix) and subsequent publication of findings.

For more details contact:

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East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership Launched

Efforts to conserve migratory waterbirds in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway moved into a new era on 6 November 2006 with the launch of the *Partnership for the Conservation of Migratory Waterbirds and the Sustainable Use of their Habitats in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway* in Bogor, Indonesia.

in the Asia Pacific region since 1996. The partnership is focused on the East Asian – Australasian Flyway with conservation action in the Central Asian Flyway being progressed under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species.

Under the partnership, the site networks for Cranes, Anatidae and Shorebirds have been combined into a single network to increase the focus on sustainable development of important habitat and give greater



Representatives from government, intergovernmental and non-government organisations from across the East Asian-Australasian Flyway

The launch and first meeting of partners were well attended by governments, intergovernmental and non-government organisations from across the flyway and were graciously hosted by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry. During the events, the Russian Federation, USA, Japan, Republic of Korea, The Philippines, Myanmar, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, the Ramsar Secretariat, the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species, the International Crane Foundation, BirdLife International, Wetlands International, WWF International, and the Australasian Wader Studies Group endorsed the partnership or signalled their intention to do so in the near future (representatives of these governments and organisations are pictured below). The World Conservation Union (IUCN) was unable to attend but provided a letter of endorsement. The partnership is seeking to involve all countries in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway and identified China as a high priority given the extent of important habitat for migratory waterbirds there.

The development of the partnership has been led by the Governments of Australia and Japan and Wetlands International as a partnership initiative of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The partnership succeeds the *Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy* and the action plans for Cranes, Anatidae and Shorebirds, which provided the framework for cooperation

opportunities for collaboration on issues such as capacity building and education.

The first meeting of partners elected Australia as the inaugural chair of the partnership with the Republic of Korea as vice-chair for a one-year term. The meeting made substantial progress on administrative arrangements for the partnership including finalising an implementation strategy, initiating development of a work plan for 2007 and establishing a group to develop a communications plan. The meeting also agreed to the addition of four families of seabirds that migrate with the East Asian – Australasian Flyway in the list of migratory waterbirds annexed to the partnership.

Further information on the partnership will soon be available on the migratory waterbirds page on the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage website: www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/migratory/waterbirds/index.html

Unique shorebird faces extinction

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, a charismatic shorebird with a remarkable, unique spatulate bill, has declined by more than 80% over the last 30 years, and experts are in a race to find out why before the species dwindles to extinction.

"Today we believe there are fewer than 400 breeding pairs of Spoon-billed Sandpipers left, and we urgently need to find out why they are disappearing" said Mike Crosby of BirdLife International.

Spoon-billed Sandpipers breed during June–July in a small strip of coastal Arctic tundra in Chuchotka, NE Russia. They migrate thousands of kilometres to winter along coasts in South and South-East Asia. Currently, they are classified as Endangered.

Experts from ten Asian countries along the Spoon-billed Sandpiper's flyways recently met in Samut Sakhon, Thailand, to figure out what needs to be done to save the species. They drew up an International Species Action Plan, under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

"The Plan recommends improved habitat protection and places an emphasis on encouraging governments to take necessary measures to protect the species and its threatened habitat," said Dr Christoph Zöckler of ArcCona Consulting Cambridge, UK, one of the organisers of the meeting.

Threats to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in its breeding areas include predation, human disturbance and the drying out of tundra habitat due to climate change.

"However, we believe the main reasons for the species's decline occur along migratory flyways, where large-scale drainage of tidal mudflats to 'reclaim' land for agriculture, urban expansion and industrial development have greatly reduced the species's feeding areas, especially at stop-over sites," said Dr Zöckler. "The problems caused by habitat loss are exacerbated by the hunting and trapping of shorebirds for food in some countries," he added.

The Inner Gulf of Thailand between Samut Sakhon and Phetchaburi is one of only three known regular wintering sites for the species worldwide.

"The Inner Gulf is a vital location for Spoon-billed Sandpipers," said Kritsana Kaewplong of the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST, BirdLife in Thailand), the local organiser of the workshop. "Around ten to 20 birds are seen in the area each winter, which represents a significant percentage of the global population."

In Thailand, Spoon-billed Sandpipers feed on salt pans, and a continuation of this and other sustainable uses by local people in the coastal zone may be important in maintaining the species's habitat. Before and after the workshop, a survey team led by the Japan Wetlands Action Network (JAWAN), Tokyo, was joined by local birdwatchers from the Khok Kham Conservation Club and BCST to survey sites in the Inner Gulf for Spoon-billed Sandpipers and found a total of 11 birds at four locations, one of them a previously unknown site for the species. BCST is currently developing a conservation project for the Inner Gulf and an Action Plan will be finalised and published in summer 2007.

"Regular surveys of Spoon-billed Sandpipers are vital for finding out whether the Action Plan is having the desired effect," explained Kaewplong.

The Action Plan workshop was hosted by the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, on the initiative of BirdLife International, BCST and ArcCona Consulting, and was financially supported by the Manfred Hermsen Foundation, Bremen, and the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK). Survey work in the Inner Gulf of Thailand was supported by the Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund, Tokyo.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper on the coast of Bangladesh

The coast of Bangladesh is known to be a very important wintering ground for the endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, with relatively frequent sightings according to an article by M. Monirul H. Khan in a recent issue of *Birding Asia*.

Surveys were carried out in India in early 2005 and Bangladesh in January 2006 headed by Dr Christoph Zöckler to find habitats used by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The survey in Bangladesh was organised jointly by Bangladesh Bird Club and Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh. Nine overseas ornithologists and nine from Bangladesh made up the survey team. A single bird was observed at Char Bariand and two birds at Nijhum Dwip in the Noakhali District. Then eight birds at the south-eastern end of the Bangladesh mainland at Teknaf Peninsula in Cox's Bazar District.

The Spoon-billed Sandpipers were observed feeding and resting with other shorebirds including Lesser Sand Plover, Red-necked Stint, Sanderling and Common Greenshank. However the Spoon-billed Sandpiper could easily be distinguished from the other shorebirds by its feeding behaviour. Repeated side to side movements of the bill were quite different from other shorebird species.

The author suggests that the nature of the mudflats in the areas where the birds were found might be the critical factor. The continually accreting mudflats provided fresh mud with little or no vegetation which suited the species. Once the mudflat ages over the period of a few years these birds no longer visited the area.

It is recommended that regular surveys should be organised in Bangladesh as well as in all other countries within the species range in order to monitor the population trend and the condition of the potential habitats, together with the incidence of disturbance and threats.

Sourced from M. Monirul H. Khan, *Birding Asia-Bulletin of the Oriental Bird Club*, December 2006

East Asian - Australasian Flyway Shorebird Action Plan

October 2006 – The Final Quarterly Update

This is the final news update of the Shorebird Action Plan for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. When the new Flyway Partnership is launched on 6th November 2006, the Shorebird Action Plan was finished, and the Shorebird Site Network will be merged into the new Flyway Site Network.

Development of the Network:

(Action 1) 4 new Shorebird Network Sites in China were noted on the 31st October: Nandagang, Hengshui Hu, Poyang Hu and Nanjishan. Wetlands International – China assisted the site managers and provincial Forestry Administration offices to nominate internationally important sites under their jurisdiction. Some of these sites also support internationally important numbers of migratory Anatidae, cranes or other migratory waterbirds.

(Action 3) Shorebird conservation priorities will be collated for input to the 2007 Workplan of the **new Flyway Partnership**. This will occur sometime after the 1st meeting of partners, which is set for 7th November 2006 in Indonesia. Building on the achievements of the 10year old Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy, the new Flyway Partnership will also link waterbird conservation more closely with sustainable development initiatives.

(Action 3) The Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund (AWCF) 2nd call for funding proposals closed on 31st October 2006. This fund was initiated by a generous contribution from Cathay Pacific to WWF Hong Kong, and other contributors are being sought to strengthen the fund. For more information on the AWCF fund, and to download application guidelines see: <<http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/maipo/awcf/>>

(Action 3) A Philippines national Waterbirds Workshop was held on 5,6th October in Manila to assess the status of waterbird conservation capacity in the Philippines, develop some targets for the near future, and explore actions and opportunities to help achieve the targets. The group of 36 participants, including government staff and NGOs, also listed some options for how the Philippines could engage in Flyway-scale programs to assist its own efforts in conserving migratory waterbirds. This event was hosted by the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau, and funded under the Shorebird Action Plan with Shorebird Action Plan funds provided from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust. This strategic priority setting work enables the Philippines to provide direct input to the implementation of plans for the new Flyway Partnership.

Appropriate Management of Network Sites:

(Action 4) The Shorebird Studies Manual is being translated to Thai language for distribution. The Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust contributions to the Shorebird Action Plan have enabled Wetlands International – Thailand to complete this translation.

(Action 5) The First Wetland Link International – Asia Symposium is set for 24-26th January 2007 at the Hong Kong Wetland Park, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region,

China. A dedicated website will soon be set up, though anyone interested can contact the Organising Committee by e-mail: info@wetlandpark.com or Fax: (+852) 3152 2668. Wetland Link International-Asia already includes several Shorebird Network Sites.

(Action 5) Four new shorebird migration posters were produced in China by Wetlands International – China Office. These are being distributed widely to key partners, shorebird sites, schools and universities in China. Development of these products was directly supported by the Shorebird Action Plan funds provided from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust.

(Action 5) An Environmental Education Symposium was held at Kumagawa Estuary, Japan, 21-22nd October, hosted by a planning committee for producing tidal-flat education materials, involving teachers, naturalists and the local government. The symposium also involved 4 Shorebird Network Sites, and Ms Nicole Wong from WWF Hong Kong delivered a keynote paper. WWF-Nikko Green Investors Fund helped to finance the event.

(Action 8) A Workshop on migratory shorebirds and coastal zone management at Tanghai, Bohai Sea, was held 26-28th September. Wetlands International – China convened a gathering of local experts and stakeholders to examine information on key shorebird habitats, local impacts and threats, and options for managing these areas within the coastal development planning frameworks at Tanghai. This has provided a new profile for waterbird and wetland conservation that hopes to attract involvement of development sector stakeholders at Tanghai. Funds for this workshop came from the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust through the Shorebird Action Plan.

(Action 8) Recommendations on conservation of migratory shorebirds and key habitats in the Yellow Sea have been submitted to the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Project (YSLME). Wetlands International is providing input to the project in regard to migratory shorebirds and through a biodiversity strategy for the Yellow Sea Ecoregion.

(Action 10) An Australian Avian Influenza Scientific Task Force workshop in Adelaide (5,6th September) was attended by the Shorebird Flyway Officer, to provide information on migratory waterbirds in relation to Avian Influenza. Dr Taej Mundkur (Strategy Coordination Officer) also continued to facilitate information exchange and networking to link migratory waterbird concerns into avian influenza programs. See further information at: <<http://www.wetlands.org/>>.

Improving the Information Base

(Actions 11, 14) The 2nd Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) National Coordinators Meeting was held on 8-10 October 2006 in Manila. The meeting was hosted by the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) of the government of the Philippines, and focussed on a strategy for 2007-2015 to strengthen quality and application of the AWC program. Contact David Li: AWC International Coordinator, Wetlands International, Tel: +60-3-78046770, Email: david@wetlands.org.my

Information Contacts:

The “Shorebird Site Network” E-mail Discussion Forum has assisted networking and information exchange among site managers, shorebird experts, education specialists and other partners concerned with shorebird conservation. The Shorebird Site Network will be merged into the new Flyway Site Network, however this e-mail discussion forum will continue until an alternative communication mechanism is agreed on for the Flyway Partnership.

Enquiries: Warren Lee Long: <warren.leelong@wetlands-oceania.org>.

Asian Waterbird Census Meeting

The second meeting of AWC national coordinators was held in Manila 8-10 October 2006, organised by Wetlands International and the Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau of the Philippines. The meeting was attended by 50 people from 20 countries to develop a strategy to move this important volunteer-based waterbird monitoring programme.

Overviews were provided for each of the regions and an overview of the implementation of the AWC Strategy 2004-2006 helped to identify priorities for the future development of the programme. The overviews further demonstrated the value of the AWC for building the interest and capacity of groups to undertake the census, generate awareness of the importance of waterbirds and wetlands, support to designation of new conservation areas and the collection of new and important information on the distribution and abundance of waterbirds at the national level. The presentations also helped to identify the key common issues and challenges for further development of the AWC into a strong volunteer based programme generating high quality information on waterbirds and wetlands. These challenges were mainly in the areas of local capacity and expertise, data quality control, coverage of important sites, communication and access to domestic funding for basic implementation of the AWC counts.

In addition to the valuable networking and understandings that developed between the delegates at the meeting, a Strategy Plan was developed for the implementation of the AWC for the period 2007 – 2015. Participants agreed on priorities to further enhance and maintain geographic and site coverage, strengthen local networks and improve data quality, enhance communication and public awareness, enhance capacity building, focus and strengthen fundraising efforts, increase support to local, national and international decision making processes and enhance the coordination mechanisms.

For more information visit Wetlands International website at <http://www.wetlands.org/articlemenu.aspx?id=fc834578-94ce-4684-b2d2-860749533d18> and download the report in pdf file with pictures.

Republic of Korea – Australia Migratory Bird Agreement Signed

Migratory birds and their habitat in Australia and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) will be protected under the *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Government of Australia on the Protection of Migratory Birds* which was signed on 6 December at Parliament House, Canberra.

The agreement, also known as the Republic of Korea – Australia Migratory Bird Agreement or ROKAMBA, was signed by the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Hon. Alexander Downer MP, and his Korean counterpart, Mr Song Min-Soon, during a visit to Australia by the President of the Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr Roh Moo-Hyun. President Roh and the Australian Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard MP, attended the signing ceremony.

The agreement complements Australia’s migratory bird agreements with Japan (the Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement or JAMBA) and China (the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement or CAMBA). Together these agreements provide for bilateral cooperation with the countries responsible for key staging areas for migratory shorebirds in the East Asian - Australasian Flyway. The agreements also give a strong foundation for the conservation efforts of the recently launched East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership.

The text of the ROKAMBA is similar to the JAMBA and CAMBA agreements, requiring protection of migratory birds from take or trade, exchange of research information and publications, formulation of joint awareness raising activities, and participation in flyway cooperative activities. It includes a list of migratory birds, all of which are also included in JAMBA and/or CAMBA.

The signing marks the end of a four year negotiation on the agreement. It will now go through the formal treaty-making process in the Australian Parliament. The treaty-making process in Korea is already completed. The ROKAMBA is expected to enter into force in mid 2007.

The text of the agreement and annex of migratory birds will soon be available on the migratory waterbirds page on the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage website: www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/migratory/waterbirds/index.html

Migratory Shorebirds in a Threatened Flyway

6-8 July 2007
Newcastle University
AUSTRALIA

Conference Program

(Session titles are tentative – other topics welcomed)

Friday, 6th July - Evening only

- 18:00 Registration and ice breaker
- 19:30 Evening presentation: Bar-tailed Godwits from Alaska to the Hunter – the world's longest flight. (free presentation for delegates and members of the public)

Saturday, 7th July

- 08.00 Registration
08.45 Welcome to the Conference
- 09.00 Keynote presentation
- 10.00 – 10.30 Morning tea
- 10.30 – 12.30 Session 1 Migration Studies in the Asia Pacific Flyways
- 12.30 – 13.30 Lunch
- 13.30 – 15.00 Session 2 Identifying critical habitats
- 15.00 – 15.30 Afternoon tea
- 15.30 – 16.30 Session 3 Inland wetlands – the great unknown
- 19.00 Conference Dinner

Sunday 8th July

- 08:00 - 08:30 Registration
- 09:00 – 10.30 Session 4 Managing shorebird sites
- 10.30 – 11.00 Morning Tea
- 11.00 – 12.30 Session 5 Threats to flyways at the southern end
- 12.30 to 13.30 Lunch
- 13.30 – 14.30 Session 6 Avian diseases – recognising the culprits
- 14.40 Depart for afternoon tea aboard a river cruise of the Hunter River estuary
- 18.00 End of conference functions

Migratory Shorebirds in a Threatened Flyway

6-8 July 2007
Newcastle University
AUSTRALIA

Registration

Name:

Address:

.....

Postcode:

Country:

Telephone:

Email:

I would like to submit a paper on:

I would like to submit a poster on:

I would like to chair a session on:

Registration Fees:

Full registration @ \$105.00
(\$95.00 if paid before 1 June) \$.....

Single day registration on
..... (day) @ \$60.00 \$.....

Conference Dinner @ \$35.00 \$.....

Donation to assist overseas participants
from Flyway countries \$.....

TOTAL (please pay in Australian
dollars by cheque) \$.....

or please charge to my Visa/Mastercard/Bankcard
(please indicate)

Credit card number

Card expiry date mm/yy / /

Name on card

Signature

Please return your registration form by email or post it to
the address below. **No refunds after 15 June 2007**

Email to: pjohns@optalert.com or post to:
Penny Johns, AWSG Conference Secretary, 2/4 The
Vaucluse, Richmond, VIC 3121, Australia

Positions available

1. WHSRN Conservation Specialist

The Conservation Specialist will contribute to the work of WHSRN with technical and biological information. S/he will work closely with staff at WHSRN's expanding number of sites (currently 64 in 8 countries) to evaluate the state, pressures and responses at the sites that affect shorebirds and their habitats, to manage the data that come from this process, and to assist in the design of conservation projects that reduce the threat levels. The Conservation Specialist will also collaborate with biologists and conservationists to develop and refine conservation plans for the species of shorebirds most at risk, the places crucial to the health and recovery of these species, and the strategies for their protection.

WHSRN Assistant Director

The Assistant Director strengthens the Network and implements its mission by working strategically with the Director, WHSRN Hemispheric Council, partners, and other stakeholders. The Assistant Director has responsibilities for management and oversight of projects undertaken with site and network partners, encouraging and supporting the current and potential WHSRN member sites. The Assistant Director must be skilled in building support for conservation goals through partnerships, in project development and in fundraising.

The successful candidate will have at least a master's degree in a relevant field of biology, science or conservation, or be able to demonstrate equivalent experience. S/he must understand the life history requirements of migratory and resident shorebirds in North and South America, as well as the ecological characteristics of the habitats found in these places. Fluency in English is requisite and fluency in Spanish and/or Portuguese is highly desirable. Travel, including internationally, may be required in pursuit of the Network's goals. The position is based at the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences in Manomet, Massachusetts. Reduced-cost housing on-site is an option.

For further information see: <http://www.whsrn.org/about/careers.html>

2. Assistant Wardens

The Broome Bird Observatory (BBO) is regarded as one of the best locations in Australia to view migratory shorebirds in high numbers and diversity, and is considered to be one of the top four sites for migratory shorebirds in the world. The BBO is situated in a bush environment and is located 10 km east of Broome in Western Australia, on the northern shores of Roebuck Bay.

The BBO is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to promote and facilitate ornithological research in order to ensure future conservation of shorebirds and other native birds and their habitats. The BBO has hosted a range of research projects since its inception; passerines and shorebirds are banded at and around the Observatory on a regular basis. To ensure that the BBO is financially viable it undertakes commercial activities without compromising the research,

conservation and education goals of the organisation. The principle commercial activities are the provision of accommodation, courses, tours and shop sales.

Birds Australia is seeking hard-working, enthusiastic people to work at the BBO between February and October in 2007. Duties include taking people on tours, working in the shop and office, liaison with guests, maintenance and cleaning. Accommodation is provided on site, together with a small salary. Applicants must have held a driving licence for at least 4 years, as assistant wardens are required to obtain an F class licence before they commence work.

Please note the BBO has recently been approved by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) as an approved Special Program and welcomes applications from individuals from other countries, especially from those in the East-Asian Australasian Flyway.

Contact bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au or (08) 9193 5600 for a position description and application form. Applications close 7 January 2007.

Increased links between Australian and NZ with Siberia

We are living in exciting times! This year's Russian/International expedition to Chukotka, the very north-east part of Siberia, made 22 sightings of colour flagged waders. Until three years ago there had only been two recoveries and no flag sightings linking the waders of this remote part of Siberia with the wader populations present in the non breeding season in Australia and New Zealand. 16 of the flag sightings relate to Red Knot. Six were birds from North Island New Zealand (white flagged) and four were from Victoria, Australia (orange flagged).

These are the known areas to which the *rogersi* sub-species of the Red Knot migrate. This has already been proved by a Russian banded Red Knot from Chukotka being caught in Victoria two years ago and then subsequent sightings of New Zealand and Victorian flagged Red Knots in Chukotka last year (the New Zealand flagged bird actually at a nest).

But this year's records include three sightings of yellow flagged Red Knot in Chukotka - at two different locations and with some time between each sighting, suggesting that three different birds may have been involved. This is the first time we have had incontrovertible evidence that the *rogersi* sub-species of the Red Knot occurs in north west Australia also. Previously we had thought that the population there was almost entirely *piersmai*, which breeds in the New Siberian Islands and northern Yakutia. These three yellow flag sightings suggest that it may be more than just a few stray *rogersi* which visit NWA.

There were also three sightings of Great Knot flagged in north west Australia and two sightings of Red-necked Stint (as well as one from Chongming Dao in China).

Bearing in mind that reports of any species of wader in the breeding areas are very few and far between, these reports in 2006 are a real bonanza.

Clive Minton

Record Number of Nordmann's Greenshank

The Nordmann's Greenshank is one of the world's most threatened migratory shorebirds with a population estimate of less than 1000 birds. It was therefore a surprise when a flock of up to 70 birds (possibly 10% of the world population) were observed in Malaysia during a survey on 3 February 2007 at 6pm at Sungai Nibong (3° 35' N, 101° 04' E).

The birds were recorded during a boat survey of shorebird high tide roosts sites as part of the annual Asian Waterbird Census counts in Malaysia by the AWC Coordinator, David Li. It was cloudy with light showers during the day, and the light for viewing was generally poor. The areas are believed to be the only exposed mudflats in this region of the coast during the peak tide of the month in an area, with soft mud more than 1m deep along the edge of the mangrove forests. Therefore there was no disturbance by people collecting shellfish. However, fortunately for the team, they were disturbed by boat passing by bringing the birds to their attention. The site also supported more than 1500+ Common Redshank, 2000+ sand plovers, 100+ Whimbrel and 500 whiskered terns, besides some small numbers of Terek Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint.

There was no way team members could walk on the mudflat and they could only find two locations to stand up to get a clear view to try to identify the birds with water up to my David's chest! "The flock of birds in flight attracted my attention and I saw the birds with slightly up-curved bills with legs not extending beyond the tail. However, with the poor light condition, I could not see the colour of their legs and bill".

"Luckily, I found a large piece of wood on the mud and I could stand on it and use the scope within 50 m of the birds. I got very excited when I found all the birds with clear yellow legs. I couldn't believe my eyes, discovering such a large flock of Nordmann's Greenshank (I believe this is the largest population recorded in the last 20 years, besides was a 60 individuals in the inner gulf of Thailand in Dec 2005 by the Thai birdwatchers)!"

"However, the birds flew to a much further point before I could get an accurate count. Anyhow, I could relocate the birds at about 100 meter distance and count them carefully, as well as taking some photographs in slightly improved light condition before dark! To my surprise I found one or two of the pictures were good enough for identification purposes".

With the finding of these birds, we can obviously confirm that the West Peninsular Malaysia coast supports a crucial population of the species, with up to 38 recorded on the Penang coast (Butterworth), 12-14 at Sungai Burung high tide roost (about 25km north of Sungai Nibong) and 15-19 at Kapar power station Ash Pond in central Selangor coast in the last two years.

It is believed that the recent increase in counts of this species in Malaysia, Thailand and Myanmar is a result of the increasing number of birdwatchers, bird surveys and improved birding equipment, rather than a growth in the population of the species. This assumption is supported by the lack of previous surveys at Sungai Nibong and Sungai Burung High tide roost sites.

Source, David Li, International Coordinator Asia Waterbird Census.

NORTH-WEST AUSTRALIA EXPEDITIONS

The 2006 wader expedition to north-west Australia took place from the 4th-25th November. A team of 32 people participated, with half of them, as usual, being from outside Australia. This included four people from Thailand (learning to cannon net in order to catch waders and other waterbirds for avian influenza sampling), one from Chongming Dongtan (China), one from Japan and three from New Zealand.

A total of 4000 birds were caught - 1000 more than usual - including 3795 waders (of 31 species) and 182 terns (of 9 species). It was also particularly pleasing to catch eight waders previously banded in China and two from Japan, as well as seeing many overseas-flagged waders. Surprisingly, two of the Greenshanks (one from Chongming Dongtan and one from Japan) were in the same catch of 70 birds. There have been no recoveries of this species in the past and only very few flag sightings. The highest counts totals caught were 1,121 Great Knot, 609 Bar-tailed Godwit, 386 Greater Sand Plover and 361 Red-Necked Stint. A Swinhoe's snipe, mist netted, was the most unusual catch.

The nine main study species were all caught in sufficient numbers for a reasonable estimate to be made of their breeding success in 2006, based on the proportion of juveniles in catches. Grey-tailed Tattler appears to have had a good breeding season with the percentage of juveniles being almost twice the long term average. Most other species had a percentage juvenile count close to, but marginally below, the long term average, indicating that the 2006 breeding season was moderate to poor for most species. Curlew Sandpiper, Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone appeared to be the worst performing species, with a figure some 30-40% below the average.

Several hundred waders and terns of a wide variety of species were tested for avian influenza and other viruses by a veterinary team from the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. Results will be available early in 2007.

The next expedition to north-west Australia will be 10th November-1st December 2007. We are already recruiting as we want another strong team for maximum operating efficiency in the hot climate of north west of Australia at that time of year. If you are potentially interested, please make contact with Clive Minton (mintonsoz@ozemail.com.au) as soon as possible.