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## Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways

No 11: October 2008

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*Tattler* is the quarterly newsletter of the Australasian Wader Studies Group. Contributions are welcome and encouraged for all working with shorebirds and their habitats along the East Asian- Australasian Flyway. Please contact the editor for more information.

### Editorial

The time for the 10th meeting of the Ramsar contracting parties in the Republic of Korea is fast approaching. Take a look at the conference's website ([www.ramsar.org/](http://www.ramsar.org/)) and have a look at what each country is doing for the conservation of the world's wetlands.

The collaboration amongst countries, through meetings such as this and the bilateral agreements to which Australia is party, are absolutely vital to wetland conservation. And it is not just for the sharing or provision of financial or human resources. Sharing stories, sharing successes and sharing failures provides unique opportunities for participants to learn from each other, empowering them to achieve positive conservation outcomes worldwide.

Closer to home, there are a lot of surveying opportunities and projects of national significance that you can become involved in. And although you may not make it to Korea, the work that is achieved on the ground all across the flyway provides the information on which these conventions and conferences are based. So get out and get involved!

## Meet your committee

### Chair: Ken Gosbell

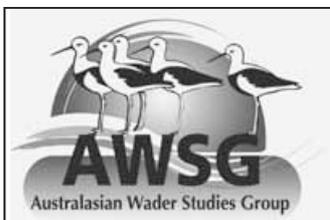
From an early age I was fascinated by the natural world with collections of insects, flowers and lists of birds. Even in those early days I was an avid collector and reader of books on wildlife – I was a fan of Crosbie Morrison (now that dates me!). However, as a student I studied Civil Engineering and spent the next 40 years following that profession being associated with many major projects both in Australia and overseas.

When I retired Rosemary Davidson suggested I meet this bird guru called Dr Clive Minton – my life has not been the same since the first day I went cannon netting with Clive. Those early days kindled my interest in the study and conservation of our amazing migratory shorebirds. My learning curve was steep but with mentors like Clive, Mark Barter and Jim Wilson I increased my understanding while

at the same time seeking answers to many more questions.

In recent years I have focused on population monitoring across the flyway; the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project (SSMP) being one of my key interests over the last 3 years. As a member of the VWSG I enjoy assisting in cannon netting activities in Victoria and SA, and have also contributed several papers to scientific journals on shorebirds. A member of the AWSG since 1996, I was Secretary/ Treasurer from 1998 and have been Chairman of the Group since 2006. In this role I would like to acknowledge the tremendous support and assistance provided by the other members of the Committee – we are so fortunate to have such expertise within our Group.

I am passionate about the underlying objective of the Group which is to ensure the conservation of



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shorebirds through research and conservation programs both in Australia and throughout the East Asian – Australasian flyway. In this role I have represented our Group as a Partner in the East Asian – Australian Flyway Partnership. I am currently Chairman of the Shorebird Working Group of this Partnership.

**Chair, Scientific Committee: Danny Rogers**

I've been a birdwatcher since very early childhood. The shorebird bug really started to bite when my family lived in Korea in 1979: an excursion to Incheon gave me my first view of a huge tidal flat system (which no longer exists; it was reclaimed in the 1990's), and brought me face to face with my first Great Knot, and perhaps fifteen thousand of its friends, in a spectacular flock which made a lasting impression. Twenty years later I wound up doing a PhD on Great Knots and their ecology in Roebuck Bay, mostly trying to work out how they decide where to feed and roost, and why they take so long to reach maturity.

Between those events, my family emigrated to Australia and spent several years as regulars with the VWSG banding team. I got heavily into bush birds but drifted increasingly back to shorebirds after getting a job with the Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. For a start I could finally afford a telescope of my own! The job also gave me lots of opportunity to do museum-based research on plumages, moult and geographical variation; a lot of travel; and a good grounding in the shorebird literature. I've also been making a living as a contract ecologist, mostly working on shorebirds.

I think I joined the AWSG as soon as the group started (I guess that's how I acquired a complete run of Stilt!), and somewhere along the line became chair of the scientific committee. In that role my main interests have been in Australian Painted Snipe, in helping to reinvigorate population monitoring of shorebirds, and in co-leading the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project (a partnership between the AWSG and Birds Korea).

**Editor, Stilt: Roz Jessop**

Dr Rosalind Jessop is currently the editor of the AWSG journal Stilt.

My main area of expertise is in wildlife conservation and I am currently employed by the Phillip Island Nature Park, Victoria, Australia as Senior Environment Co-ordinator. Major responsibilities are co-ordination of all aspects of environmental planning and co-ordinating animal rehabilitation – including oil spill response, environmental grant applications and their management and the implementation and monitoring of the PINP Management Plan 2006-11. Research activities at the Park include work on Little Penguins, Silver Gulls, Crested Terns, Pacific Gulls, shorebirds and rehabilitation of wildlife particularly oiled Little Penguins.

My interests outside PINP centre on shorebird and tern research in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. Particular interests - feeding and migration strategies and routes, recruitment, population structure, breeding strategies and impact of human disturbance. This interest has led me to participate in shorebird expeditions to the USA, Argentina, Brazil, Korea, New Zealand, Namibia and north-west Australia to undertake research activities and train local volunteers. I am also a long term member and vice-chair of the Victorian Wader Study Group and edit their journal the VWSG Bulletin. I also run a passerine research project investigating migration across Bass Strait.

**Committee Member: David Milton**

I first became involved in the wader conservation in 1992 when I joined the Queensland Wader Study Group (QWSG) and became a counter. I joined the AWSG in the mid-1990s but did not become active until I offered to take over as editor of Stilt in 1997. I joined the committee at that time and have been a member ever since. I took a break from editing Stilt in 2004 when Ken Rogers kindly took over. I am also currently on the QWSG committee after being chair for the last four years. As a professional biologist in my day job, I am used to working with numbers and trying to quantify trends and patterns. It colours my view of waders and I have a particular interest in counting, population trends and shifts in species spatial distribution.

**Committee Member: Clive Minton**

I was hatched in 1934 and have been intensely interested in birds throughout my life. My special interest since I was age 12 has been banding birds with particular emphasis on waders since 1951. I started wader banding (with clap net and walk-in traps) in the UK and started mist-netting waders in 1956, with nets from the first batch imported into the UK. I began using rocket nets for wader catching in 1959 and then designed my own cannon-nets which were first used on The Wash in 1967. I came to Australia in 1978 and have been actively banding waders here, especially in Victoria and north-west Australia, since then. Overall I've probably been involved in the catching of half a million waders over the last 57 years.

In the UK I served on the councils of the British Trust for Ornithology and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. In Australia I was Vice-President of Birds Australia for six years. I was the founding Chairman of the International Wader Study Group in 1970 and of the Australasian Wader Studies Group in 1980. I've been awarded various medals for my ornithological studies and also an Australian honour (AM).

Outside ornithology I have a Ph.D. in Metallurgy and worked in a variety of roles for a large international metals and engineering company for 23 years. It was the company which sent me to Australia in 1978 to run their operations here. I moved on when, after five years, they wanted me to return to

the UK! I then worked as Human Resources director with Myer Stores for three years, as Deputy Director of the Victorian Health Department for two years and as an executive search consultant for an

international firm of "headhunters" for four years before retiring in 1992.

Since then I've been even more full-time on birds.

## Ramsar CoP10 in Korea – What will it mean?

The 10<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Conference of Parties (CoP) to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar) will take place in Changwon, Republic of Korea from 28<sup>th</sup> October to 4 November. This is a meeting of governments who have signed on to this Convention whose broad aims are to halt the worldwide loss of wetlands and to conserve, through wise use and management, those that remain. This requires international cooperation, policy making, capacity building and technology transfer.

Australia was one of the first countries to sign the Ramsar Convention and currently has 65 Wetlands of International Importance listed under the Ramsar Convention covering approximately 7.5 million hectares. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) is the Administrative Authority for the Convention in Australia.

The CoP holds meetings every 3 years where the Parties consider and endorse items such as:

- new technical guidance on the wise use and management of wetlands,
- the strategic priorities for the Convention over the coming years and associated financial arrangements, and
- any amendments or additions to the obligations of Contracting Parties to the Convention.

Ramsar CoP10 will consider 31 Draft Resolutions that cover a diverse range of topics; the full text of these draft resolutions is available at: <http://www.ramsar.org/cop10/docs/index.e.htm#dr>.

So what will this CoP mean for migratory shorebirds given the enormous problems facing them in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway? One response lies in Draft Resolution 22: **Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of waterbird flyways.**

This Resolution seeks to strengthen the conservation of waterbird flyways through enhanced international cooperation and renewed commitment from Contracting Parties. Given the continuing impact on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway of land reclamation in the Yellow Sea region, it is essential that this Resolution is endorsed in a meaningful way. This theme will also be picked up at the Meeting of Partners in Korea which follows the Ramsar meeting. The CoP will also renew the mandate of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership as a Regional Initiative of the Ramsar

Convention.

In order to focus the attention of Contracting Parties on these problems, the President of Birds Australia, Alison Russell-French, and myself as Chair of the AWSG, have sent a letter to the Secretary General of Ramsar urging the Peoples Republic of China and the Republic of Korea to look more closely at protecting intertidal and coastal wetland sites that are known to be of international importance to shorebirds in the Yellow Sea. In addition Wetlands International will launch a book highlighting the beauty and importance of the region for not only migratory waders but also for the vast number of people who live around the coasts. The book "Invisible Connections – Why Migrating Shorebirds Need the Yellow Sea" is a wonderful photographic account by Jan van de Kam of the Yellow Sea and the key role it plays in the Flyway.

As readers of Tattler will be aware, the AWSG has been working for 3 years in partnership with Birds Korea to record the impact on migratory shorebirds of the Saemangeum reclamation in Korea. This study, the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project (SSMP) has involved around 100 people from many countries who have volunteered their time and expertise to undertake this study. The final Report is now being compiled and this will be presented in Korea in late October in order that it will be available to CoP delegates as a current and scientific commentary on the impact of this major reclamation and also highlight the need to take action to prevent this sort of habitat change occurring elsewhere in the Yellow Sea. This will be a valuable and compelling resource demonstrating what can be achieved by dedicated volunteers combined with a constructive international partnership.

Dr Danny Rogers and myself will be travelling to Korea for the Ramsar CoP; initially we will be presenting the SSMP Report in conjunction with Birds Korea, followed by attendance at many of the CoP activities where we will endeavour to ensure the future of our shorebirds is made more secure. We would welcome any input or discussion prior to this meeting.

Some relevant websites include <http://www.ramsar.org/>, <http://www.ramsar2008.go.kr>, [www.awsg.org.au](http://www.awsg.org.au) and <http://www.birdskorea.org/BK-Startpage.shtml>

Ken Gosbell

Chairman AWSG





## Report on the Bilateral Bird Agreement Meetings

The AWSG was invited to join the Australian Government delegation at the Bilateral Bird Agreement Meetings held in Brisbane 1-5 September. There were delegations from Japan (5), China (8), Korea (6) and Australia (5). This was a very useful and constructive experience; the following is a brief summary of the meetings and their outcomes.

The purpose of the meetings was to review the formal Agreements that Australia has with each of these countries and to explore options for building further collaborative relationships. These bilateral meetings together with the relatively recent East Asian—Australasian Flyway Partnership provide a platform to find cooperative solutions and plan practical actions. The Japan—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) and China—Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) have been in effect for 34 and 22 years respectively. A new Agreement was signed with the Republic of Korea (ROKAMBA) last year and this was the first opportunity to meet to discuss this agreement with the Republic of Korea.

The first two days were given over to plenary presentation sessions followed by two days of formal bilateral meetings. Some of the plenary presentations included:

### Australia:

- Shorebirds 2020
- Monitoring Yellow Sea Migrants in Australia (MYSMA)
- Australian bird banding and flagging scheme
- Shorebird conservation in Moreton Bay Marine Park

### Korea:

- Monitoring Endangered species in Korea
- National Wetland management project (UNDP/GEF project)
- Incentive measures for biodiversity for wintering birds
- Bird banding in Korea
- Surveys at Boyang Lake in winter
- Status of waterbirds around Gangwa tidal wetlands

### China:

- Update on Saunders Gull conservation management
- Bird Banding in China
- Update on Black-faced Spoonbill population monitoring in China
- Study of waterfowl composition on Qinhai-Tibetan Plateau

### Japan:

- Monitoring Sites 1000 Program
- Conservation events in Japan

- Crane Network activities in NE Asia
- Information on state of HPAI in wild birds in Japan
- Crested Ibis reintroduction program in Japan



Mr Ian Cresswell (leader, Australian delegation), Mr Lei Guangchun (China), Mr Zhang Dehui (China)

In addition, the Australian Government presented a proposal for 'The conservation of migratory shorebirds and sustainable use of tidal mudflats in the Yellow Sea'. This proposal evolved from a series of workshops held in Beijing and Seoul in June with a wide range of waterbird experts complemented by interviews with relevant stakeholders in Australia. Essentially this program is a response to the declines in Australian and flyway populations of migratory shorebirds and seeks to explore practical options for collaboration with China, Japan and Korea in the Yellow Sea. As the target outcomes for the proposal are linked closely with those of the EAAF Partnership, it was agreed that the proposal would be developed further at the 3rd Meeting of Partners proposed for 6/7 November in Seoul. This is an important step in focusing on the critical issues of the Yellow Sea and exploring ways to assist both China and Korea in finding some solutions to the complex problems faced. While this will not be an easy task, the AWSG has an important role to work within the Partnership, to help develop and facilitate practical and meaningful programs which will assist both people and birds that rely on the rich tidal areas of the Yellow Sea for survival.

The formal Bilateral meetings were constructive and highlighted several areas where information exchange and collaboration could be improved, such as banding and flagging, population monitoring, training and community awareness activities.

These meetings, combined with the Flyway Partnership and the upcoming important Ramsar CoP10 meeting (where we will present the outcomes of the SSMP project) are all focused on the aim of getting some tangible outcomes regarding conservation of the critical tidal habitats within the Yellow Sea.

Ken Gosbell

Chairman AWSG

## Letter to Ramsar Convention Secretariat

As a national Non Government Organisation dedicated to the conservation of birds, Birds Australia, through its expert group the Australian Wader Studies Group (AWSG), welcomes the opportunity it has had to be an active Partner in the Ramsar Regional Initiative for the East Asian - Australasian Flyway.

We are writing to express concern about the threats to migratory waders that use the East Asian - Australasian (EAA) Flyway. Of specific concern is the loss and degradation of tidal mudflats in the Yellow Sea. We note that the International Wader Study Group (IWSG) has also written to express its concern about the threats to migratory waders that rely on these Yellow Sea habitats.

The Yellow Sea is of enormous importance as a staging area for the migratory waders of the EAA Flyway. It is estimated that at least 2 million shorebirds use the intertidal mudflats and coastal wetlands of the Yellow Sea on northward migration (about 40% of the total EAA Flyway population), with perhaps 1 million during southward migration, and about 650,000 during the northern winter.

Recent research conducted by the US Geological Service Alaska Science Centre in New Zealand and Australia into the migration patterns of Bar-tailed Godwits using satellite tracking has demonstrated the critical importance of the Yellow Sea staging sites to this species. This research has shown conclusively that Bar-tailed Godwits fly the longest non-stop distances between breeding and non-breeding grounds and the Yellow Sea as their major staging area between these grounds and is critical to their survival.

The IWSG has indicated that the latest global assessment of the conservation status of shorebirds identifies 23 species as being threatened and 96 populations as being in decline. Of these, five species and nine populations occur in the EAA Flyway, a Flyway which extends from western Alaska and the Russian Far East, through East and Southeast Asia to Australasia.

During migration, the Yellow Sea supports 30% or more of the EAA Flyway breeding populations of 18 species, and for eight of these the region supports almost the whole Flyway population, including most, if not all, of the world populations of the now Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus* and the Endangered Nordmann's/Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*. The Yellow Sea also supports a high percentage of the EAA Flyway populations of six shorebird species during the non-breeding period, with, at times, almost two thirds of the estimated population of the Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus osculans* over-wintering at just one site – the Geum Estuary in the Republic of Korea."

Thirty nine sites in the Yellow Sea have been identified as being of international importance for one or more shorebird species, using Ramsar Convention criteria. Twenty-two of these sites are in People's Republic of China, one is in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and sixteen are in the Republic of Korea.

However, only four sites have been designated as Ramsar Sites. Many are threatened with reclamation, pollution, industrial development and ongoing significant degradation that not only impacts on migratory waders but also on the large numbers of people who live around the coastal areas of this region.

Large-scale reclamation of tidal mudflats in China and the Republic of Korea, in particular the reclamation of Saemangeum which until 2006 was considered the most important shorebird site in the Yellow Sea, are increasing pressure on both migratory waders and local people who rely on harvesting resources from the tidal mudflats for their livelihoods. The AWSG, in partnership with Birds Korea, has conducted a three year (2006-2008) shorebird monitoring program over the period of northward migration to monitor the shorebird populations in the Saemangeum area following the completion of this extensive reclamation project. The survey program has found major declines in shorebirds utilising the study area with the major impacts being detected on the numbers of Great Knot, a species that spends the non-breeding period on the coasts of Australia.

When the impacts of reclamation are combined with ongoing degradation from pollution and other uses of the tidal mudflats as well as the potential impacts of sea level rise from climate change, the threats to migratory waders are compounding and require urgent attention.

The Yellow Sea is a uniquely important region with high natural values. Accordingly, we request you to urge the Peoples Republic of China and the Republic of Korea to look more closely at protecting intertidal and coastal wetland sites that are known to be of international importance to shorebirds in the Yellow Sea. We also request you to encourage Contracting Parties elsewhere in the East Asian - Australasian Flyway to more actively engage in developing activities that will assist the Peoples Republic of China and the Republic of Korea to develop actions to conserve migratory waders and their habitats in the Yellow Sea. We fully support the IWSG's call to the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention to promote the wise use of wetlands bordering the Yellow Sea.

The beauty and importance of the region for not only migratory waders but also for the vast number of people who live around the coastline have been highlighted in the book "Invisible Connections - Why Migrating Shorebirds Need the Yellow Sea". This wonderful photographic account of the Yellow Sea is to be launched at the Ramsar Conference of the Parties in the Republic of Korea and we commend it to Contracting Parties of the East Asian Australasian Flyway.

*Alison Russell-French*  
President- Birds Australia

*Ken Gosbell*  
Chair- Australasian Wader Studies Group

21 August 2008





## The Godwits return 'home'

Please remember when reading the information below that this is not the 'final story', these are the initial findings and may change when the final analysis is done.

### Southward migration

C2 landed in Liaoning Bay, exactly where she stopped on northward migration. She took a leisurely journey southwards taking a break in the Philippines and then again in Flores. C2 possibly died during her southward migration on or over Flores and her status remains uncertain. Her PTT is still transmitting but her signal is coming from hilly country!

C3 staged approximately 95km north of Chongming Dongtan National Nature Reserve, the same site where she fueled up on northward migration and spent about 7 days in the southern area of North Korea, a site no other satellite tagged bird has used, on her way back there. She arrived back in Roebuck Bay on 30 August and first reported in from Bush point (the south west of Roebuck Bay) and then moved north to the rich mudflats in the north east of the Bay. She was spotted at 'The Boiler' on Saturday 6 September in the same flock as H9. She was transmitting when I saw her but her location had her 2.5km away. She was only 1km from her capture site.

C4 lost contact on northward migration as she was flying along the coast of China.

C6 stopped in the same region she used on her northward trip but 75km to the south. She arrived back in Roebuck Bay on 6 September and was found at a roost the following day within 200m of C7 and C3, and where H9 and C3 were the previous day. Her first re-sighting was 1km from her capture site. Her PTT is still transmitting.

C7 stopped in exactly the same area as on her northward journey, southern Bohai Wan. She travelled back via the Philippines and Sulawesi arriving in Roebuck Bay on 2 September. She was seen in a flock of some 13,000 knot and godwit very close to 'The Boiler' roost site while her transmitter was sending a signal to the satellite! The time and place match up exactly! Her first re-sighting was 1km from her capture site. Her PTT is still transmitting.

H3 arrived back at Yalu Jiang exactly in the same area as she used on northward migration. Although she had led the way throughout the migration she decided to take a break 880km north of the bay on Roti Island just, south and west of Timor. She landed back in Roebuck bay on 2 September and has not been seen since she arrived back. Her transmitter is still working and she has been out on the salt marsh north of Crab Creek, this location would match perfectly with what we know of night time roosting habits from previous radio tracking

work.

H7 unfortunately seems to have died around June 9 based on the readings from her temperature sensor.

H8, our only male carrying a transmitter, stopped at Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve. He took a rest on Palau Jamdena 1446km NE of Roebuck Bay and has now returned to the Bay. His PTT is still transmitting.

H9 went back to North Korea and roamed 40km between the 2 areas she used on her northward stopover. She probably arrived in the bay on Saturday 6 September and, a mere 8 hours later, was seen at 'The Boiler' roost site, 7km east of her capture site. She looked skinny but well and was preening vigorously and then she had a sleep, (understandably!). Her PTT is still transmitting.

A3 seems to have died or been killed on about June 9 based on readings from her temperature sensor.

A7's battery apparently ran out of power on July 18th.

A9 staged at Yalu Jiang on her southward migration some 850km NE of her site on northward migration and took a break in her journey on the coast in the far SW of Sulawesi. Her PTT is still transmitting.

The sightings of the returned godwits is a remarkable set of sightings when considering that, of the 3 birds that never left the Bay, there have only been 2 sightings of C0, 5 of H0 and zero sightings of H2 during the entire winter period.

Many thanks to all involved with the project and particularly to Lee Tibbitts for all her regular updates summaries and Google Earth grabs.

For those of you not yet following the tracks of the NZ and Broome birds I recommend you do! It is fascinating stuff (but I would say that wouldn't I?)

The best way to follow the project is to visit my Global Flyway Network (GFN) website [www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au](http://www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au) and click on 'Follow the Godwits Here' at the top of the page. The computers will need Google Earth installed.

The 2007 report of the worldwide shorebird studies going on under the banner of the GFN has been completed and can be found on my GFN website <http://www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au/ourwork-methods.html>

*Chris Hassell*  
[turnstone@wn.com.au](mailto:turnstone@wn.com.au)

*The first Victorian banded godwit seen on southward migration at Yalu Jiang was reported this season. This is only the second report of a 'Victorian' godwit on southward migration from anywhere in China!-Ed*

## Changes to Dunlin marking scheme

Changes in the dunlin marking scheme have been implemented in 2008. Given a recent surge in the number of people banding dunlin in Alaska, it is easier to give each group their own unique colour band to go with the dark green flag used by the banders in Alaska.

Changes are:

- Joe Liebezeit, Wildlife Conservation Society, will use a light blue band above the dark green flag on some portion (either above or below the knee) on either leg.
- Mihai Valcu, Max Planck Research Institute, will use a black band above the dark green flag on some portion (either above or below the knee) of either leg.
- Steve Kendall, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, USFWS, will use a dark (or medium) green band above a dark green flag on some portion (either above or below the knee) of either leg.
- Rick Lanctot will continue to use a yellow band **BELOW** the dark green flag on some portion (either above or below the knee) of either leg.

In addition to the colour band/dark green flag combinations described above, each group will also place 3 unique colour codes on the opposite leg to identify individuals. We hope to be able to move

the colour band/dark green flag combination to different leg positions over the next few years as this gives us many possible unique combinations.

Dunlins banded in Barrow this year will carry a yellow band with an engraved dark green flag and metal band only on the opposite leg. This is the first year that these dunlin will carry engraved flags and it is hoped that it may make individual identification in the field easier.

Thus all of us will continue to use a dark green flag on all Dunlin banded in Alaska as required by the East Asian-Australasian protocol, but each group will have a unique colour band to go with the dark green flag.

Sarah Jamieson has taken over responsibility for coordinating colour band combinations for Dunlin subspecies within the Western Hemisphere as part of the Pan American Shorebird Banding program. We have also coordinated colour codes with her related to this proposal.

Please notify us of any issues related to this proposal.

Thanks and Cheers,

*Richard Lanctot*  
Shorebird Coordinator, Alaska Region  
US Fish and Wildlife Service

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## Observations of the visible northward migration of shorebirds on south-west Kamchatka in May 2008

Counts of the waterfowl and shorebirds flying northward along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk were carried out in the mouth of Bolshaya River (southwest Kamchatka Peninsula; 52°30'N; 156°18'E) from April 20 to May 24. The periods of daily observation were 4 to 17 hours, and the total period of direct observation was 438 hours.

Migration of shorebirds took place from May 6 till the end of our works and obviously proceeded after it also.

In total we counted 31,326 shorebirds of 17 species. Most numerous were Dunlin with 24,273 individuals counted. We also counted 4,837 Red-necked Stints, 903 Whimbrels, 586 Red-necked Phalaropes, 443 Mongolian Plovers, 70 Great Knots, 66 Ruddy Turnstones, 56 Eastern Curlew, 16 Bar-tailed Godwits and a few Pacific Golden Plovers, Long-toed Stints, Sanderlings, Red Knots and Black-tailed Godwits.

Migration of Bar-tailed Godwits started on May 6; Eastern Curlew on May 9; Dunlin on May 14; Red-necked Stint on May 17; Red-necked Phalarope and

Ruddy Turnstone on May 18; Mongolian Plover and Black-tailed Godwit on May 22; and Whimbrel, Great Knot and Red Knot on May 23.

The first record for the west coast of Kamchatka of Grey Phalaropes (36 birds, individually and in small flocks were seen on May 22–23) and Baird's Sandpipers (2 birds stopped on the beach on May 18) was especially interesting for us.

The peak migration for Ruddy Turnstone was on May 20; for Dunlin, Whimbrel, Great Knot and Red-necked Phalarope on May 23; and for Red-necked Stint and Mongolian Plover on May 24. Unfortunately we had to finish our observation period and could not see the end of shorebird migration.

Apart from shorebirds, we also counted 572 thousand ducks and hundreds of thousands of other birds.

*Yuri Gerasimov, Rimma Bukhalova and Yulia Zavgarova*





## 7th Australasian Shorebird Conference Hobart, 4-6 September 2009

### An important date for your diary

The 7th AWSG-sponsored Australasian Shorebird Conference will be held in Hobart over the weekend of 4, 5 & 6 September 2009. These conferences are held every two years and provide an opportunity for everyone interested in all aspects of shorebird research, conservation and management to exchange information, discuss relevant issues and develop strategies for improving the status of these remarkable birds.

The theme of the 2009 Conference will be *Resident and Migratory Shorebirds – Managing Their Future...*

This will address several inter-related themes comprising:

- Future prospects for shorebirds in the East-Asian Australasian Flyway,
- Knowledge gaps for resident shorebirds,
- Beach-nesting birds and the implications from

sea level rise predictions, and

- Conservation status and threats to beach-nesting birds.

It is planned to arrange a number of post-conference trips (if there is sufficient demand) to visit some of the key wader (and other birds) spots in Tasmania.

The Conference convenor is Dr Eric Woehler. If you would like to be included in all further email announcements, Conference information and post-conference trip details etc. please send an email to: [awsq2009@gmail.com](mailto:awsq2009@gmail.com).

Please put the 7th Australasian Shorebird Conference in your 2009 diary now, and plan how you might contribute to the conference. A Call for Papers (including posters) will be made towards the end of the year.

*Ken Gosbell*

*Eric Woehler*

## Wetlands International central Queensland coast project

The Fitzroy Basin Association (an NRM organisation <http://www.fba.org.au/>) is investing in small to medium-scale activities that address recommendations from the landscape and biodiversity condition assessment of the Broad Sound coastal wetlands, which it sponsored in 2006-7 (see report at <http://www.fba.org.au/intranet/aboutannualreport>). One of these activities involves clarification of the status of significant sites for migratory shorebirds, which were discovered and first described by Wetlands International during aerial surveys in the 2006-7 assessment.

The focus is on shorebirds that breed in Asia and migrate to Australia in the non-breeding season where they feed in intertidal flats and shallow marshes. Essentially, the new project aims to determine the species composition and seasonal numbers of migratory shorebirds at several of the sites, particularly the high tide roosts (beaches, small bays), over at least three ground surveys. Results will inform planning for conservation and data will be made available to shorebird research organisations (QWSG, AWSG) and the Queensland EPA for incorporation into their databases.

Given the recent flurry of major mining and infrastructure developments along the central Queensland coast, we believe the work will be both timely and of strategic importance. One Broad Sound site has held globally significant numbers of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper and it is possible that at least one of the roosts (2000-

4000 shorebirds) will prove globally important in terms of numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit. Other roosts hold somewhat smaller numbers. There is a wide spread of other species.

A key aspect of the project will be engagement of local bird-watchers in survey work in order to build their interest and capacity for sustaining observations of shorebirds in Broad Sound and nearby central Queensland. Please let me know if you or others known to you may be interested in participating at some point in the project. Existing skills in shorebird identification are an advantage but not essential.

At present we do not know how accessible the sites will be, especially during the wetter months. Hence, the potential to successfully involve volunteers long-term and to incorporate the mid-summer survey in Birds Australia's *Shorebirds 2020* monitoring program, remains to be determined.

The first survey was in September with subsequent surveys in mid-summer and late March, possibly also mid November, weather permitting. Operational logistics and landholder concerns may require numbers of people in survey teams to be limited in some cases.

For more information please contact me at [roger.jaensch@wetlands-oceania.org](mailto:roger.jaensch@wetlands-oceania.org)

*Roger Jaensch*

## Shorebirds 2020 Summer 2008-09 Surveys

As many of you will know, over the last year the Shorebirds 2020 team have been developing a monitoring program for shorebirds in Australia that will allow us to detect national population trends, map important shorebird areas and put together a shorebird counters toolkit online.

Please check out all the materials, including the final version of the count forms, now available on the updated website: [www.shorebirds.org.au](http://www.shorebirds.org.au) (under "the toolkit" section).

The main recommendation to come out of this work is that we need to count shorebirds at more sites – around 150 – in order to be able to detect population trends at the national level for the majority of shorebird species. Shorebird areas with higher numbers of shorebirds are better with those than less, and *it is very important that counts are carried out in the same way at each site over the years, so that we can compare the data.*

We are going to need a lot of help if we are to try and cover 150 sites this summer. However, to the credit of all our shorebird counters, over 70 sites were surveyed last summer so we are already halfway there!!!

We have put a list of the 150 sites that we would like to survey this summer on the website. Please have a look and let us know if you can help out in one of these areas, or think we've missed any important areas.

For each site we would like to find a volunteer to act as the main contact to inform other interested counters on how to help out. For those of you who have done this job in the previous year, thank you again, and please let us know if you are still available to help out this summer.

We are recommending that a count be conducted in the *first two weeks of February* in all these areas as usual. The date for any count will be dependent on local conditions and is best selected by local experts. The 8<sup>th</sup> of Feb looks favourable for NSW and QLD, however refer to the summer spring tide chart on the website, or contact us for advice on when to conduct surveys.

We are learning that in order to determine population trends within a site, repeat surveys are needed to determine how best to reduce the variation from one count to the next. It also helps get an accurate count of the actual number of birds using an area (for example, if numbers are below normal in one count due to poor weather). For these reasons, it would be valuable to conduct (at least one) repeated surveys over the summer, in January and December and November (in order of importance).

Over the next year we also hope to travel around a bit to visit some of the shorebird areas and meet counters, conduct workshops on shorebird identification and counting, and also to assist regional coordinators and groups who would like to run their own local workshop. Please get in touch if you would like us to come and give workshop at your local shorebird area, or would like some help to organise your own.

Thank you for all that you do to help the conservation of shorebirds.

*The Shorebirds 2020 Team – Rob, Jo and Ash (who has recently come onboard since Angie left to pursue a career in research)*

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## New record for Oystercatcher movement

An exciting report has just been received of a Victorian banded Pied Oystercatcher being seen in Queensland. This is the first VWSG oystercatcher to be reported from Queensland and the 1407 km movement is a record for Australian oystercatchers.

The bird was originally banded as a juvenile on 10th February 1999 on North Spit, adjacent to Werribee Sewage Farm. It was recaptured there a month later and then on two further occasions over the next three years, once at Stockyard Point in Western Port and the other at Roussac's Farm in Corner Inlet.

It was first seen in Qld in December 2006, but was not reported at the time. The second sighting was in August this year.

The previous furthest movement of a VWSG Pied Oystercatcher was from Stockyard Point to Ballina in northern NSW (1269 km). This bird has remained

in that region and nested there in the last three summers, producing several fledged chicks which have also been flagged and one of which has recently been reported near Sydney. Presumably the bird near Southport in Qld is also now breeding somewhere in that region.

*Clive Minton*





## **Contract Bird Ringer (Bander) Field Veterinary Program (Cambodia)**

The WCS Field Veterinary Program is seeking a qualified bird ringer (bander) to assist in the wild bird Global Avian Influenza Network for Surveillance (GAINS), a USAID-funded program led by the Wildlife Conservation Society.

Primary responsibilities of this position will be to supervise a team of Cambodian field staff and will be required to provide leadership in the safe capture, handling, sampling and marking of wild birds from a variety of taxonomic orders, principally water birds.

### *Requirements and Qualifications:*

Minimum: Qualified as a bird ringer/bander (eg. holders of US Master bander permit, British 'C' permit or equivalent), ability to work well independently and as a team; good communication skills (fluency in English). Desired: strong interest and understanding of conservation, commitment to publication in peer-reviewed journals. Precedence will be given to appropriately qualified veterinarians.

### *Job Description:*

The primary job responsibility of the individual in this position is to provide field leadership in a

programme of wild bird surveillance for avian influenza in Cambodia. This position will require the candidate to:

- Lead a team of Cambodian nationals in the safe and ethical capture, handling and sampling of wild birds using multiple techniques;
- Observe standard personnel safety protocols during the capture and handling of wild birds (training will be provided in personnel safety protocols);
- Follow protocols in the collection, handling and preservation of biological samples from wild birds (training will be provided in sampling protocols);
- Train a team of Cambodian nationals in bird handling and identification;
- Maintain field data records and input into electronic format;

The proposed start date is November 2008 and a six month contract is preferred.

Contact Martin Gilbert for more information at [mgilbert@wcs.org](mailto:mgilbert@wcs.org)

## **Securing Penrhyn Estuary for Migratory Shorebirds**

The migratory shorebird habitat of Penrhyn Estuary, located within Botany Bay, is to undergo major rehabilitation as part of the Port Botany Expansion project by Sydney Ports Corporation.

Penrhyn Estuary was formed in the 1970s as a result of the construction of the existing Port Botany. The estuarine ecosystem that has developed over the years includes saltmarsh, mangroves and intertidal flats. The estuary is on the East Asian-Australasian flyway used by thousands of migratory birds, such as the bar-tailed godwit, which every year commute up to 11,000 kilometers non-stop each way between Botany Bay and the Arctic Circle. As the only viable shorebird habitat remaining on the northern side of Botany Bay it is a locally significant feeding and roosting area.

However, over recent years the suitability of the estuary as shorebird habitat has been under increasing pressures including mangrove encroachment, contaminated surface and ground waters and increased recreational usage of the area.

As part of the Port Botany Expansion, Sydney Ports will secure Penrhyn Estuary as a shorebird habitat for the long term and provide public viewing, educations and research opportunities.

The project will include:

- Prevention of access by recreational vessels, people, dogs and feral animals
- Removal of mangroves which have reduced the area of feeding habitat
- Creation of additional intertidal flats to increase the area of feeding habitat four-fold
- Construction of three islands to create secure roosting sites
- Planting of additional saltmarsh vegetation
- Provision of a boardwalk and public viewing platform with a bird hide and interpretive signage to enable viewing of the estuary without disturbing shorebirds using the site and to prevent public access to tidal flats

The project also includes a long term monitoring program which focuses on shorebird usage of Penrhyn Estuary and compares it to reference sites in other parts of Botany Bay, and the Parramatta and Hunter River estuaries prior to, during and following construction of the new berth facilities.

Visit [www.sydneyports.com.au](http://www.sydneyports.com.au) or Phone 02 9296 4999 for further information.

*Port Botany Expansion Project*

## Warming world 'drying wetlands'

More than 700 scientists are attending a major conference to draw up an action plan to protect the world's wetlands.

Organisers say a better understanding of how to manage the vital ecosystems is urgently needed.

Rising temperatures are not only accelerating evaporation rates, but also reducing rainfall levels and the volume of meltwater from glaciers. Although only covering 6% of the Earth's land surface, they store up to an estimated 20% of terrestrial carbon.

Co-organised by the UN University and Brazil's Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso, the five-day Intecol International Wetlands Conference in Cuiaba, Brazil, will examine the links between wetlands and climate change.

"Humanity in many parts of the world needs a wake-up call to fully appreciate the vital environmental, social and economic services wetlands provide," said conference co-chairman Paulo Teixeira.

These included absorbing and holding carbon, regulating water levels and supporting biodiversity, he added.

Konrad Osterwalder, rector of the UN University, said that people in the past had viewed the habitats as a problem, which led to many being drained. "Yet wetlands are essential to the planet's health," he explained. "With hindsight, the problems in reality have turned out to be the draining of wetlands and other 'solutions' we humans devised."

### Under pressure

Scientists warn that if the decline of the world's wetlands continued, it could result in vast amounts

of carbon being released into the atmosphere and "compound the global warming problem significantly".

It is estimated that drained tropical swamp forests release 40 tonnes of carbon per hectare each year, while drained peat bogs emit between 2.5 to 10 tonnes.

Data shows that about 60% of wetlands have been destroyed in the past century, primarily as a result of drainage for agriculture.

"Lessening the stress on wetlands caused by pollution and other human assaults will improve their resilience and represents an important climate change adaptation strategy," explained Wolfgang Junk from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology, Germany.

"Wetlands act as sponges and their role as sources, reservoirs and regulators of water is largely underappreciated," Professor Junk added.

"They also cleanse water of organic pollutants, prevent downstream flood inundations, protect river banks and seashores from erosion, recycle nutrients and capture sediment."

The conference organisers said the ecosystems, many of which have biodiversity that rivals rainforests and coral reefs, were in need of complex long-term management plans.

They hope the scientific meeting, which ends on Friday, will highlight the range of measures needed, such as agreements that covered the entire catchment areas of the wetlands.

Posted on 29 July, 2008 - 12:06pm. *Story from BBC NEWS 2008/07/22*

<http://www.haribon.org.ph/?q=node/view/602>

## Surveys of Important Wetlands

In October and November surveys of waterbirds at all 698 of Australia's important wetlands (see the directory of important wetlands at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/water/publications/environmental/wetlands/directory.html>) will be conducted.

This project will provide valuable information on the total Australian population estimates for waterbirds and provide critical information on the importance of wetlands. Due to the timing and the many remote areas being visited, it is expected that new wetlands will be found that are of large importance for waterbirds.

Most of the survey is being conducted through aerial surveys lead by John Porter and Richard Kingsford from the University of NSW. However, ground surveys would be especially helpful to supplement

their data. Ground surveys can confirm the species composition in an area, and give a means to compare counts. Importantly, the aerial surveys will not always correspond to optimal (high tide) conditions to survey for shorebirds, therefore in order to maximise the value of this "national population snapshot" it is important that ground surveys are conducted for shorebirds.

If you are able to survey at one of Australia's important wetlands, or if you want to suggest the addition of your favourite wetland, please let me know. Where possible I would recommend ground counts be done as close to the day when the aerial survey is being done. Feel free to contact me for more information.

*Rob Clemens*

[r.clemens@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:r.clemens@birdsaustralia.com.au)





## Broome Bird Observatory – Assistant Wardens for 2009



The Broome Bird Observatory (BBO) is currently seeking two outgoing, enthusiastic, and hard-working people to join us as Assistant Wardens for the 2009 season. One position is anticipated to extend from mid-March to the end of October,

and the second position may focus on the busiest period from April to September.

BBO is a not-for-profit organisation operating as part of Birds Australia, situated on the shores of Roebuck Bay, 25km from the town of Broome. It was established in 1988 as a centre to promote knowledge and conservation of the birds of Broome, with particular focus on Roebuck Bay, which is located on the East-Asian Australasian Flyway and is a site of global significance for migratory shorebirds.

In addition to its role as a base for research, conservation, and education activities, BBO provides several commercial services to the general public, including accommodation, camping, and guided bird

watching tours. The Assistant Wardens support the BBO Wardens in providing these commercial services and other needs associated with running the observatory. Duties include: conducting bird watching tours (training provided); assisting overnight guests and greeting day visitors; daily cleaning and facility maintenance; running the small shop and taking accommodation reservations & tour bookings; and assisting with ongoing research.

The role involves living at the Observatory and working in a small team environment. A stipend and food allowance are provided to cover expenses. It is essential that applicants hold a C class drivers licence (or equivalent) with no restrictions and be immediately eligible to apply for an F class endorsement (requires a minimum of four years licensed driving experience).

For more information, including a detailed project description, email the Wardens, Jon and Anne King, at [bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au) or phone (08) 9193 5600.

### Juvenile Curlew Sandpiper caught

The highlight of a recent catch by the VWSG on the 21st September was a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper in absolutely perfect juvenile plumage, with the characteristic white-fringed dark brown subterminal fringes on all the back feathers and wing coverts. It even had the orange blush on the breast typical of very young Curlew Sandpipers (and Red Knot). This bird would have only fledged about 7 weeks

previously in the high Arctic. Curlew Sandpiper breeding areas are 12-13,000 km from the Victorian coast. So this bird had already covered that distance in the first 7 weeks of its flying life! It is the earliest date on which we have ever caught a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper in Victoria (five on 30th September was the previous earliest date).

*Clive Minton*

### Join the next NWA Expedition in 2008

The next wader and tern banding expedition to north-west Australia will take place from 8th to 29th November 2008. Please register your interest NOW.

A full "Brochure" will be available to be sent to potential participants in the near future. This gives a

detailed itinerary and details of costs etc. 3-4000 waders and terns of at least 35 species are usually caught during these annual expeditions.

For more information please contact Clive Minton [mintons@ozemail.com.au](mailto:mintons@ozemail.com.au) or Roz Jessop [moonbird@waterfront.net.au](mailto:moonbird@waterfront.net.au)



## Australasian Wader Studies Group

Membership of the Australasian Wader Studies Group is open to anyone interested in the conservation and research of waders (shorebirds) in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Members receive the twice yearly journal *Stilt*, and a quarterly newsletter, *Tattler*. Visit [www.aws.org.au](http://www.aws.org.au) for more information.

Please direct all membership enquiries to:  
Membership Manager  
Birds Australia  
Suite 2-05, 60 Leicester St  
Carlton, VIC 3053, Australia.  
Ph: 1300 730 075  
E: [membership@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:membership@birdsaustralia.com.au)

Annual subscriptions:	
Australia	A\$35.00
New Zealand	A\$35.00
Overseas	A\$40.00
Institutions	A\$45.00