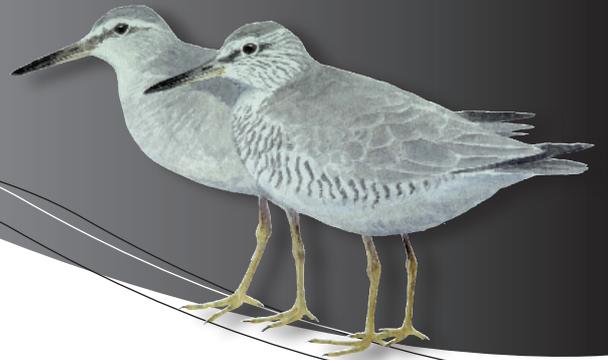


# Tattler



## Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways

Editor: Liz Crawford • Email: [tattler@awsg.org.au](mailto:tattler@awsg.org.au)

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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

So many of nature's cycles are up and down, boom and bust, population increases and catastrophic declines - this issue of *Tattler* reflects such natural variation, with positive reports about successful geolocator studies on Eastern Curlews and initial success with the innovative Spoon-billed Sandpiper captive breeding programme, contrasting with a devastating report of migrating Whimbrel shot in the Caribbean. There were uplifting talks at the Australasian Ornithological Conference and good news about successful grant applications for the Shorebirds 2020 Project, contrasting with the urgent need to lobby political leaders to preserve shorebird habitat in the Yellow Sea, and the possibility that "green" renewable energy projects proposed for South Korea may further decimate remaining tidal flats.

Although people and their inevitable developments pose the greatest threats to shorebirds and their sites in the EAAF, they also offer the greatest hope for habitat protection and preservation. It is humbling and inspiring to read of the leadership, mentoring and communication abilities of Mark Barter who achieved so much in the EAAF network in three decades.

### **Minutes to Midnight - time is running out for our migratory shorebirds**

*"The area around the Yellow Sea is home to over 600 million people and is the site of huge infrastructure developments, new ports and intense industrial activity ... With such high population density, finding room for industrial expansion is a challenge and enormous areas of intertidal mud flats have been converted to industrial land.*

*"Sadly, it is these tidal flats that are the prime feeding habitat for hundreds of thousands of shorebirds ... (and) the key staging site on shorebirds' annual migration from Australasia to their Arctic breeding grounds. On northward migration this coastline, bounded by China and North and South Korea, supports more than 30 per cent of our Flyway's population for 25 shorebird species and carries almost the entire Flyway population for another 15. The loss of these crucial habitats has seen a dramatic decline in shorebird numbers across the Flyway."*

So began a sobering article in *Wingspan* **21** (1) published in autumn 2011. It ended with a plea to write letters on behalf of our shorebirds to Mr Tony Burke, Minister for the Environment; Mr Greg Hunt, Shadow Minister for the Environment; Dr Geoff Raby, Australian Ambassador to China; Mr Sam Gerovich, Australian Ambassador to the Republic of Korea; and the Ambassadors to Australia from China and the Republic of Korea. It also offered suggestions on possible content of the letters.

Letters written mid-2011 in response to this article did have a positive effect on Australian government attitudes and willingness to raise these difficult issues at a diplomatic level. It is now time to follow-up with more letters to show that the urgency for preservation of the remaining tidal flats in the Yellow Sea has not faded away but shorebirds will unless we all take action now. [See full article at: [www.awsg.org.au/pdfs/minutes-to-midnight.pdf](http://www.awsg.org.au/pdfs/minutes-to-midnight.pdf)]

**Compiled and published by the Australasian Wader Studies Group**

A Special Interest Group of Birds Australia

[www.awsg.org.au](http://www.awsg.org.au)

## ***Shorebird Sessions at the 2011 Australasian Ornithological Conference***

The Australasian Ornithological Conference held this year from 28 September to 1 October on the campus of James Cook University north of Cairns was fantastic. The sunbird nests hanging from the rafters along the walkways, or the odd Emerald Dove walking on the grass between the classrooms were welcome reminders of the remarkable setting of James Cook University, but the talks were by far the highlight. The shorebird sessions were great at highlighting how incredible migratory shorebirds are, the large scale of the growing threats they are facing, and how strikingly powerful 30 years of monitoring data collected by volunteers can be in highlighting declines in shorebird populations.

Presentations on shorebird tracking highlighted the awe-inspiring migrations of these relatively non-aerodynamic birds. These included the documented long distance non-stop direct flights of Bar-tailed Godwit from Alaska to New Zealand, a distance of over 11,000km straight across the Pacific, as well as Ruddy Turnstone non-stop flights of over 7,000km. Talks on movement of migratory shorebirds also pointed out how much we have learned regarding where these birds go when they leave Australia, yet it was clear that there remain many unanswered questions regarding how the various shorebird species move throughout the Flyway. Interestingly, new analysis techniques were presented which allow scientists to make broad inferences about behaviour of migrants using telemetry data. The incredible physiological adaptations of migratory shorebirds were also highlighted by the speed in which they can moult in time for their long migrations. We heard additional reports of how some species such as Little Curlew, Pratincole or Latham's Snipe are poorly understood, under-represented in networks of important habitat, and have not been monitored well to date.

Most of the remaining talks had a remarkably sobering theme, with large long-term population declines in many species of migratory shorebird of 20 – 70% being reported across Victoria, in New South Wales, and at Queensland's Moreton Bay. Further evidence indicated that a loss of habitat in some areas such as the Yellow Sea can have proportionally greater impacts on some shorebird populations than habitat lost in other locations, and the massive scale of habitat loss apparent in the Yellow Sea was staggering. These results, while depressing, mark a remarkable improvement over what was known five years ago.

Presentations also noted the increasing evidence that these declines are similar in magnitude across large spatial scales, with only a few species showing differences in population trajectories from one location to another. This improved level of understanding is leading to a much improved species-specific understanding of large-scale population declines in migratory shorebirds, and further work planned by a team at the University of Queensland will bring together the more than 30 years of available national

monitoring data to uncover a much more complete understanding of which species are being impacted, by how much, and by what.

If we assume that it is desirable to maintain shorebird populations so that our children might appreciate the same diversity and abundance of birds that can fill the sky and our coastal habitats, then we need to get some of those remarkable places in the Yellow Sea protected, while further increasing our understanding of which areas of habitat need to be protected, and what other factors might be impacting migratory shorebird populations. Evidence highlights the clear need to protect some habitats immediately, such as those found in the Bohai Sea, Yalu Jiang, and other areas which support incredible numbers of shorebirds. For example, the Bohai Sea is just one relatively small location used by over 40% of the East Asian Australasian Flyway population of Red Knot, yet like Saemangeum in South Korea this vital staging area looks likely to be lost unless efforts are made to move some of the planned development to alternative areas that are less critical for shorebirds.

Many in the wider shorebird community are keen to encourage those who might be able to sit down with Hu Jintao and other decision makers in the regions of China and Korea to protect some of these disappearing habitats. The need for the kinds of protection being called for is clear. However, it is looking increasingly likely that shorebird populations are not just being impacted in the Yellow Sea, with a host of factors that may be impacting different species. Improving monitoring efforts, and fully analysing the data that is currently available will further help to correctly identify and address problems.

I hope all will consider contacting decision makers to encourage further international cooperation to protect some of the irreplaceable shorebird habitat found especially along the Chinese and Korean coasts. Certainly now is the time to encourage some strong conservation actions. At the same time there is a need to increase our understanding of how and where those actions are needed through research. Indeed when large population declines of internationally agreed important birds are indicated, it would seem wise to invest in learning more to maximise the effectiveness of conservation actions.

It is true that without conservation action now we will likely simply continue to document declines of these incredible world travellers, yet without sufficient research it is also likely that additional required conservation actions will be missed, and potentially unhelpful actions will be taken.

*Rob Clemens  
School of Biological Sciences  
University of Queensland  
(r.clemens@uq.edu.au)*

## **Eastern Curlew Geolocators 2011**

On 12 October 2011, the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) recaptured three Eastern Curlew carrying geolocators at Anderson's Inlet, Inverloch, Victoria. This was the successful culmination of five days recceing, initially by Dave Cropley in his hovercraft and then by local VWSG member Steve Johnson (plus Clive on one day). 23 geolocators had been put onto Curlew at Inverloch on 10 February 2011, when 29 out of a flock of 110 were caught. When Dave observed a flock of 92 on 4 October 2011 he could see at least 13 individuals carrying geolocators.

Three well camouflaged nets were set in a continuous line (total length 80 m) on a narrow beach at the top of mudflats/saltmarsh at 8am. The team was concealed in the hides by 10.15am and birds almost immediately started to collect on the adjacent mudflats. A brief twinkle by the hovercraft at 11.15am helped concentrate most of the Eastern Curlew on the estuary to near the netting area. A long wait (3 1/4 hours) ensued before a net was actually fired.

At least seven birds carrying geolocators could be seen in the flock of 70 Eastern Curlew which gradually collected. For over two hours these were in and around the catching area. However there was never more than one bird carrying a geocator close enough to the net to be definitely catchable. At times there was a second bird 9 or 10 metres from the net, quite often also near the corner of the catching area. So we persevered (with Steve Johnson and Graeme Rowe in the firing hide regularly urging me to "have patience") in the hope of getting at least two birds certainly catchable. Finally, ten minutes after the tide had turned, Steve and I, gazing through telescopes, simultaneously saw an additional bird carrying a geocator land only about 7 metres out from the middle net. We fired this net within a couple of seconds and were absolutely delighted to find that we'd caught three geocator-carrying birds in a total catch of seven! We didn't fire the other two nets, even though there was a handful of Eastern Curlew in each, because we knew there were no geocator-carrying birds in them. The main team, who had been couped up in a camouflaged hide in a ditch only 40 m behind the net for over 3 hours, still managed to overcome their cramp and get to the net first.

Ken Gosbell, our technical expert on geolocators, was absolutely delighted to find that all three geolocators (BAS model 10S) downloaded perfectly and gave a full record of northward and southward migration and activities on the breeding grounds. A map showing the tracks of the birds is attached and a summary of what we have been able to derive from the stored data so far is given below.

The three Eastern Curlew (07, 23 and 24) left Inverloch on northward migration on 4th, 10th and 14th March respectively. They each flew 8500 km non-stop in 7-8 days (average speeds of 44-51 km/hr) to the west coast of the Yellow Sea in China. They then stayed there for three or four weeks before

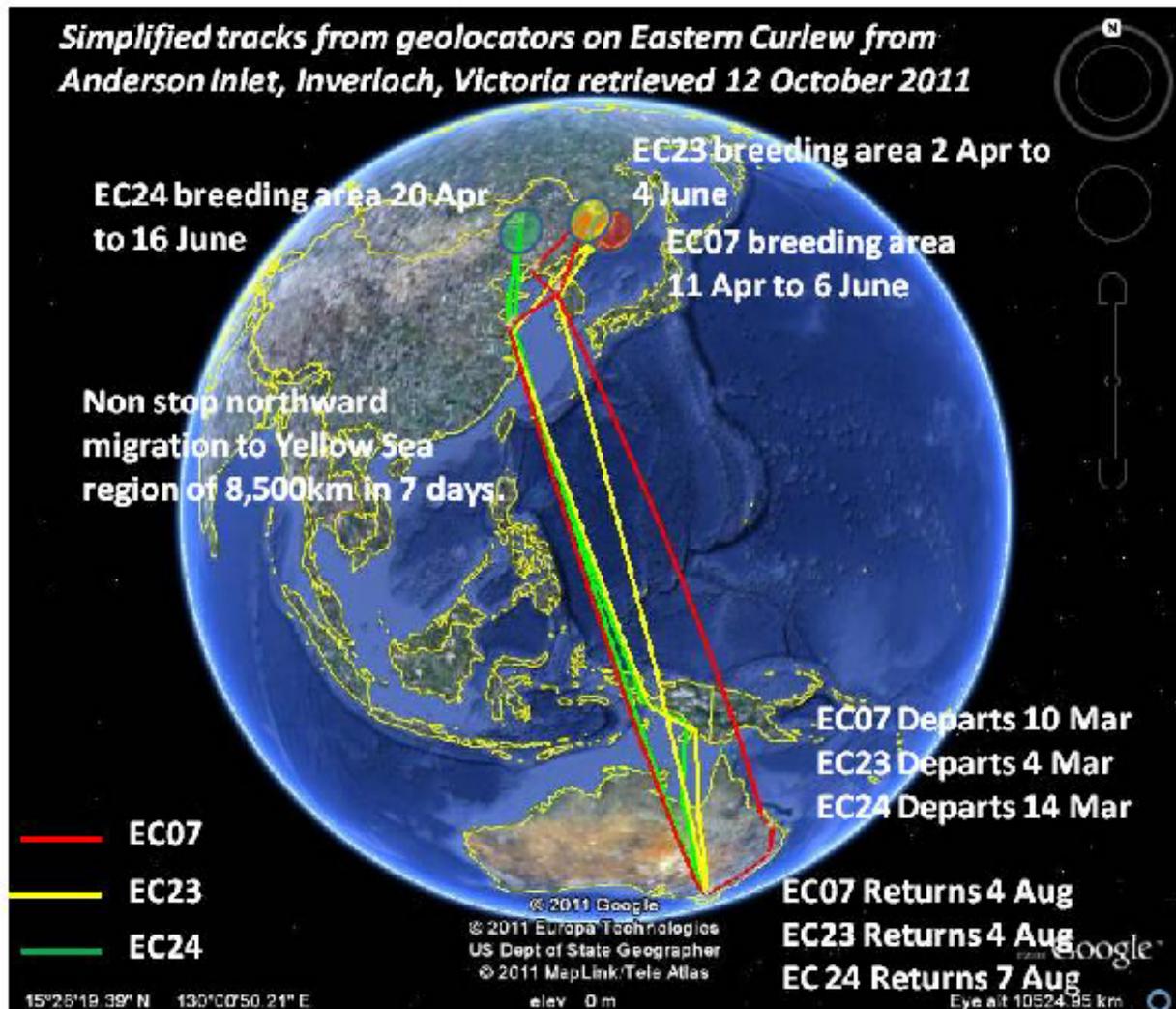
flying the remaining relatively short distance to their breeding grounds on 2nd, 11th and 20th April respectively. Two of the breeding areas were in marshland close to the Amur River and the third was in a similar habitat on a major tributary (all at between 46-47 deg N and 120-133 deg E). All three were in the very northeast of China.

Subsequently all three birds showed clear signs of incubation, by the appearance of extended light and dark periods throughout the day. 07, which was a female (determined by bill/head/wing length), incubated from 23rd April to 13th May. This is equivalent to the incubation period (21 days) and suggests that she may have hatched eggs successfully. 23, which was a male, incubated from 20th April to only 5th May suggesting that this clutch may have been predated. There were further signs of incubation from 26th May, but for only five days, suggesting a second clutch may have been laid but that it had also been unsuccessful. 24, another male, didn't appear to start incubating until 9th May and this continued until 26th May. It is not therefore clear whether this breeding attempt failed or whether the male was not involved in the incubation for the whole period.

The three birds left the breeding grounds on 4th, 6th and 16th June. In the case of 07 and 24 this is at least three weeks after the last recorded date of incubation, which corresponds well with the widespread practice of waders leaving their chicks once these have become well feathered and are able to fend for themselves and before they actually fledge.

All three birds flew directly back from the breeding grounds to the same area on the west coast of the Yellow Sea in China which they had used on northward migration. After a prolonged stay they set off on their main southward migration on 14th, 30th and 31st July respectively. The first bird flew 6900 km in 7 days (average speed 41km/hour) to Rockhampton on the Queensland coast. It then trickled down the east coast and arrived back in Inverloch on 4th August. The second bird flew non-stop 5800 km to the Gulf of Carpentaria (at an average speed of 54 km/hour), touched down for just over one day, and then continued on overland to Inverloch. It also arrived there on 4th August having covered the last 2600 km of its journey at an average of 80 km/hour. The third bird made a similar southward migration, stopping off for just two days in southern Papua New Guinea, and then arriving back at Inverloch on 7th August. The first leg of its journey (5200 km) was covered at 48 km/hr and the last leg (3200-4000 km) at 70-80 km/hr.

The retrieved geolocators incidentally were all in excellent condition. It seems as if Eastern Curlew do not give geolocators as hard a time as Ruddy Turnstones. All three geolocators were still perfectly attached to their leg flag, looking almost the same as when they were originally deployed in February. However one leg flag had become unglued on the



bird and we were rather lucky that it had not fallen off.

In contrast to the revelations on the variety of migration routes obtained from our Ruddy Turnstone geolocators, the Eastern Curlew geolocators have very much confirmed the views on their migration strategy which we had formed from the relatively small number of recoveries and flag sightings accumulated over the last 25 years (see paper in *Stilt* **59** in April 2011). Eastern Curlew are the first species to depart northward migration, and an earlier paper based on counts had suggested this started around 7th March. All previous indications also were that Eastern Curlew leaving Victoria generally made a very long non-stop flight to the Yellow Sea or southern Japan. There were also one or two records indicating that birds reach their breeding grounds before the end of April but the arrival date of 11<sup>th</sup> April of one of these birds was earlier than expected, as was the commencement of incubation of two of the birds a week or more before the end of April.

Previous breeding season recoveries and flag sightings of Eastern Curlew have mostly been in the marshes along the Amur River, but all except one were in the Russian sections of the flood plain. This may be a consequence of greater hunting pressures and possible higher reporting rates in Russia.

Dispersal from the breeding grounds to the staging area in the Yellow Sea on southward migration conforms well with counts of large numbers of Eastern Curlew in that area before the end of June. The covering of most of the return journey from the Yellow Sea to Inverloch in a single long flight to the northern Australian coast also supports previous evidence. However only one of the three birds followed the "trickle down the east coast" strategy deduced from recoveries/flag sightings, with the other two completing a trans-continental crossing to Inverloch after only a very brief pause in northern Australia/southern PNG. The fact that all three arrived back in their non-breeding area in Inverloch in the first week of August is consistent with some returning adults being seen in each year in southern Victoria from 20th July onwards. On the face of it this seems to be an awfully early date for a bird to reach its non-breeding area at 38 deg S. But, as the migration strategy of these birds shows, it is compatible with the practical aspects of migration for a bird that nests relatively far south compared with the other waders which migrate from Australia to the northern hemisphere to breed.

Attempts will be made to retrieve further geolocators from Eastern Curlew at Inverloch as soon as suitable tides recur and recceing shows birds to be roosting at a potentially catchable location.

*Clive Minton & Ken Gosbell*

## Whimbrels Shot in Caribbean during Migration

Two Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* tracked by scientists from a US university were shot by hunters on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, highlighting the continuing lack of protection for migratory shorebirds in this important part of their flyway. Scientists at the Centre for Conservation Biology at Virginia Commonwealth University were using satellite technology to follow the Whimbrels, known as Machi and Goshen. The birds were not migrating together, but both stopped on the island on the morning of 12 September 2011, after encountering different storm systems.

Machi had just flown through Tropical Storm Maria and made landfall on Montserrat before flying to Guadeloupe. Machi had been tracked for over 44,000 km back and forth between breeding grounds in the Hudson Bay Lowlands of Canada to wintering grounds on the coast of Brazil.



One of the Whimbrel being tagged (Bart Paxton, Centre for Conservation Biology)

Goshen flew through the east side of Hurricane Irene, landed on Montserrat, spent a week on Antigua and then flew to Guadeloupe. The two birds were the first of the 17 Whimbrels followed by the four-year tracking study to stop on Guadeloupe, and both were lost within hours of arriving, suggesting that hunting pressure on this island is extremely high.

Guadeloupe has several isolated mangrove swamps that serve to concentrate the shorebirds for shooting. An estimated 3,000 hunters participate in the shorebird hunt annually. Currently, shooting parties on the island are not regulated, and no information is available on the number of shorebirds taken. Without such information it is not possible to assess the potential relationship between hunting and ongoing population declines. The number of Whimbrels migrating along the western Atlantic coast has fallen by 50% since the mid-1990s.



Most of the migratory shorebird species breeding in eastern North America and the Arctic pass over the Caribbean region during late August, September. When they encounter severe storms, the birds use the islands as refuges before moving on to their final destinations. Hunting clubs take advantage of these events to shoot large numbers of the birds. Having weathered Tropical Storm Maria, Machi made a brief landfall on Montserrat (UK) before flying on to Guadeloupe (France), where he landed in a 'shooting marsh' operated by hunters.

"The shooting of Machi in Guadeloupe highlights the urgent need for updated hunting regulations in the French West Indies and Barbados", said Lisa Sorenson, President of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB). "These Lesser Antilles islands are particularly important because they serve as refuges from tropical storms and hurricanes that birds encounter during migration along this Atlantic flyway."

"Hunting is a huge issue for migratory shorebirds in the Americas, with tens of thousands shot each year in Guadeloupe (France), Martinique (France), Barbados and then Suriname", confirmed David Wege, BirdLife's Caribbean Programme Director. "BirdLife, in conjunction with Canadian Wildlife Service, has been working with the hunters in Barbados for a number of years, to help them avoid shooting species of conservation concern, and to move towards sustainability by setting bag limits. We have established a 'no shooting' refuge, the Woodbourne Shorebird Refuge, in Barbados, and would like to establish other such reserves to provide safe havens for resident and migratory waterbirds alike."

*Martin Fowlie*

Downloaded from

<http://www.birdlife.org/community/2011/09/shooting-of-whimbrels-sparks-calls-for-regulation-of-shorebird-hunting-in-the-caribbean/> on 25 November 2011

## **Eisenmann Medal 2012 awarded to Clive Minton**

Clive Minton has been awarded the 2012 Eisenmann Medal by the Linnean Society of New York. The award was established in 1983, in memory of Eugene Eisenmann, himself an "amateur" ornithologist. Ornithology is one of the few biological sciences where "amateurs", those not formally trained in biology or without an advanced degree in science, have made significant contributions to the advancement of the field. Gene Eisenmann retired early from his law practice and devoted the rest of his life to the study of birds, particularly Neotropical birds. He became a Research Associate in the Ornithology Department at the American Museum of Natural History, where he served as resident expert and consultant on the birds of Middle America. He published in scientific journals and served as editor of *The Auk*. He had a world-wide reputation in ornithology. Highly esteemed as a scientist, Gene was also known for his willingness to spend countless hours advising students, amateur birders, and really all people who came to him with bird questions.

The Eisenmann Medal is given to people who have achieved in Ornithology as evidenced by publications, but who, in addition, have helped and worked with amateurs or students to interest them in Ornithology. This work must be a personal effort and not part of a job. For example, a teacher/professor deals with many students and probably publishes, but would not necessarily qualify for the medal unless they had made an extra personal effort to work on projects with students.

Clive has accepted an invitation to speak at the Linnean Society's annual dinner on 13 March 2012 in New York. Clive would like to pass on the following thoughts regarding his nomination:

*It especially pleases me that this award is for volunteer activities in the ornithological field, particularly those of organising and encouraging volunteers to take part in fieldwork. This has been my way of operating throughout my life. The first major formal organisation I set up was The Wash Wader Ringing Group in the UK in 1959 and this is still one of the most active wader banding groups in the world 52 years later. In the wader field other activities/organisations which I was involved in initiating, and through which I have carried out much fieldwork, include the International Wader Study Group, the Australasian Wader Studies Group and the Victorian Wader Study Group. The VWSG wader banding programme and, separately, the AWSG wader banding activities in north-west Australia are the two largest wader banding activities in the world at present, and have been so over a prolonged period.*

*Everything I've achieved in the ornithological field has been the result of involvement of large teams of people in fieldwork. Without their huge effort and commitment I'd have been able to do much less. I take this award as being shared by all those who have been involved with me in such ornithological work throughout the world over more than 60 years.*

## **Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Breeding Programme**

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* is one of the most threatened birds on the planet. It breeds on the Chukotsk and Kamchatka peninsulas in the Russian Far East, migrates through Russia, Japan, North Korea, South Korea and China to winter in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, 8,000km from its breeding grounds.

Its IUCN threat status was upgraded from Vulnerable to Endangered in 2004 and to Critically Endangered in 2008. The species has declined from an estimated 2,000-2,800 breeding pairs in the 1970s to 1,000 pairs in 2000 to less than 100 pairs in 2011, and in recent years the population has been declining at 26% per year. If this trend continues, the population could be extinct in 5-10 years. Studies on the breeding grounds have shown that adult survival (76% p.a.) and productivity (about 0.6 young fledge per pair annually) are within the bounds of what would be expected for a small arctic-breeding wader species, but the proportion of fledged birds that return to breed is very low (0.05 birds recruited per adult per year). That is, the current population decline seems to be driven by very high mortality of young birds.

While the species long-term decline is thought to have been caused mainly by reclamation of inter-tidal staging sites in the Yellow Sea, trapping on the

wintering grounds may be a key reason for the recent acceleration in the rate of decline. Young birds remain on their non-breeding grounds for their first two years, and are therefore likely to be more susceptible to trapping.

Good progress is being made to address this trapping mortality, by providing alternative livelihoods to bird trappers who, in return, sign agreements to cease hunting. However, population modelling work has shown that *if* the cause of the recent decline has been correctly identified and is indeed winter trapping, *and* this can be addressed rapidly and effectively (with a halving of winter mortality every five years from 2011) the population will still be at an extremely low level and highly vulnerable to extinction from stochastic effects for more than a decade. As there are no Spoon-billed Sandpipers in captivity, there is no safety net against extinction in the wild.

A conservation breeding programme is urgently needed, either to augment the wild population with captive-reared juveniles to 'buy time' for conservation action to take effect before the wild population is lost or, if the worst happens and the wild population is lost, to provide birds for reintroduction. Population modelling using the estimated population size and information available on adult survival, productivity

## ***Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Breeding Programme cont.***

and recruitment indicated that taking eggs for conservation breeding would have a negligible effect on the wild population.

Since 2010, WWT has been working with Birds Russia, Moscow Zoo, RSPB, BTO, BirdLife International, the Birdlife Asian Partnership, ArcCona, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership and the Convention on Migratory Species to plan such a conservation breeding programme.

### **THE 2011 CONSERVATION BREEDING EXPEDITION TO CHUKOTKA**

The 2011 expedition to Chukotka, which aimed to establish a captive breeding population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at WWT Slimbridge, was organised and conducted by WWT and Birds Russia. After determining that the expedition was logistically and financially possible in January 2011, there followed an incredible amount of work to plan the expedition, employ staff, arrange contracts, apply for work permits and state and national Russian Government permits for egg extraction and bird export, purchase and ship equipment and staff to Moscow, Anadyr, and ultimately to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper breeding site at Meinypilgyno.



### **Location of Anadyr and Meinypilgyno, Chukotka.**

The UK team flew to Moscow on 14 May and, with Russian colleagues, arrived in Anadyr on 16 May. After two weeks in Anadyr waiting for equipment to arrive and for suitable conditions for the helicopter to fly, they arrived in Meinypilgyno with a tonne of equipment on 27 May. The team established their base camp in a rented cottage then spent two days cleaning, disinfecting and setting up equipment before the search for birds began.

The search area was about 100 square miles – with nine team members walking about 10 miles each day. The first bird - a singing male - was heard and seen on 2 June. Over the next few days, more males were located on territories. After a male was located the nest searching team backed off and re-visited two days later to check whether males were paired. Usually they were and copulation was even observed.

Early hopes were dashed when meltwater flooded out the earliest territories, and on 16 June, the team again started looking for nests in locations where paired birds had been observed. However the first nest they came across had been predated, along with the nesting female.

However, fortunes changed when the first eggs were collected on 19 June and the last on 3 July giving a total of 20, ranging from 0-1 days to 18 days incubated.

## Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Breeding Programme cont.



### The first clutch of Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs.

Eggs were collected from the field and artificially incubated. The first clutch hatched on 5 July and the second two days later.



### The first ever Spoon-billed Sandpiper to be hatched in captivity.

The team were transported from Meinypilgyno to Anadyr on the *Spirit of Enderby* courtesy of the Heritage Expeditions tour company. The eight chicks and 12 eggs were moved onto the boat on 7 July to travel to Anadyr where the chicks would be reared before being flown to Moscow. On the journey a further nine eggs hatched.



### Spoon-billed Sandpiper chick aboard the *Spirit of Enderby*.

The 17 chicks and three eggs arrived in Anadyr on 10 July where they were reared in a bedsit by WWT's Roland Digby and Liz Brown, a wader breeding expert from the New Zealand Department of Conservation.

One egg failed to hatch and two chicks died without feeding. At 5-10 days old the 17 chicks were transferred to a rearing facility on the tundra next to an ex-army base.

Unfortunately one full grown chick died on 9 August and the remaining 16 chicks were transported to Moscow Zoo on 18 August where they underwent a period of quarantine. Two chicks died in quarantine. The remaining 14 chicks were flown to the UK on 13 October.

### WINTER ACCOMMODATION AT SLIMBRIDGE

After a further period of quarantine, the Spoon-billed Sandpipers will be moved into new, purpose-built winter accommodation at Slimbridge.

### FUTURE PLANS

Another expedition will be mounted to Chukotka in 2012 to collect eggs and export chicks to the UK to complete the captive breeding population. In summer 2012, outdoor breeding aviaries will be constructed in time to settle the birds into them before they are first due to breed in summer 2013.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS :

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding programme is a collaboration between WWT, Birds Russia, Moscow Zoo and the RSPB working with colleagues from the BTO, BirdLife International, ArcCona and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force. The project is funded by WWT and RSPB, with additional financial contributions and support from BirdLife International, the East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, the Convention on Migratory Species, Heritage Expeditions, the Australasian Wader Study Group of Birds Australia, the BBC Wildlife Fund, the Mileage Company and many generous individuals. Downloaded from [http://www.cms.int/bodies/ScC/17th\\_scientific\\_council/Inf\\_15\\_WWT\\_Report\\_Spoon\\_billed\\_Sandpiper\\_Only.pdf](http://www.cms.int/bodies/ScC/17th_scientific_council/Inf_15_WWT_Report_Spoon_billed_Sandpiper_Only.pdf)

## **BirdLife Team helps Convention on Migratory Species**

BirdLife Team helps the Convention on Migratory Species take significant steps forward for the conservation of migratory birds.

29 November 2011

The 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) made a number of decisions that should lead to significant improvements in the conservation status of the world's migratory birds. Issues relevant to the EAAF included:

- A new policy framework for streamlining of conservation work across the world's flyways.

- Resolution 10.10, on Guidance on Global Flyway Conservation and Options for Policy Arrangements, provided a proposed overarching framework for all work under CMS on migratory birds. This resolution was developed by the CMS Flyway Working Group of which BirdLife was a member.

- The globally Vulnerable Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, was added to Appendix 1 (migratory species in danger of extinction).

- BirdLife and its Partners hosted and co-hosted a number of side events on topics including Global Waterbird Flyway Conservation best practice, with a focus on East Asian intertidal habitats and the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Euryrhynchus pygmeus*.

Adapted from a post written by *Nick Langley* on the BirdLife International website:

<http://www.birdlife.org/community/2011/11/birdlife-team-secures-adoption-of-resolutions-for-conservation-of-migratory-landbirds/>

## **Thai Shorebirds (and Shorebirders) avoid Floodwaters**

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good!" When rising floodwaters in Bangkok forced Kasetsart University veterinarian Dr Kaset Sutasha to move his family to drier accommodation outside the city, in nearby Phetchaburi Province, he took the opportunity to count and watch shorebirds, recording a number of leg-flagged birds and generating useful count data.

In the south-west corner of the Inner Gulf of Thailand, Phetchaburi holds some internationally important flyway sites, especially Ban Pak Thale and Laem Phak Bia, supporting globally threatened species such as Nordmann's Greenshank and Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and internationally important concentrations of many other shorebirds. Besides a count of 1185 Eurasian Curlews (Thailand's largest-ever concentration), three Eastern Curlews, and over 1000 Great Knots, Kaset

found several Chinese-flagged birds, with black over white flags, including three Great Knots (2 November), Red-necked Stints on 29 October and 15 November, and Broad-billed Sandpiper on 24 November. He also found Thailand's first ever Sakhalin-ringed Red-necked Stint (yellow over white) on 29 October 2011.

Kaset has been an active birder for over ten years and is a committee member of the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST), the Thai partner of BirdLife International.

At time of writing (last week of November), Kaset is still on the coast and still counting. Floodwaters in his office and his house have now receded to less than one metre (from a 1.5 m maximum), and he faces the prospect of returning home soon to begin the big clean-up.

## **Caring for Country Grant for Shorebirds 2020**

An Australian Government Caring for Country grant of more than \$750,000 has been awarded to the Shorebirds 2020 Program run by the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union for Community-based Monitoring and Conservation of Shorebirds

The public awareness and monitoring activities of the successful Shorebirds 2020 program will be expanded to include the third largest shorebird aggregation in Australia, located in the Gulf of Carpentaria, by training local Indigenous communities in shorebird monitoring.

## **AWSG Fees for 2012**

Please note the Australasian Wader Studies Group Fees have been raised from \$35 to \$40 for 2012.

## Vale Mark Barter, 9 June 1940 - 21 November 2011

"Do not be saddened because I have gone, rather rejoice that I have been"

The ornithological world was saddened to hear of the passing of Mark Barter on 21 November after a battle with cancer. His many friends and colleagues who became acquainted with him during his 30-year immersion in the migratory flyways of the world will miss him.

Mark Barter arrived in Australia in 1965 having driven from the UK across Asia to India as an adventure with a group of other young people. He then got a ride on a cargo vessel bound for Brisbane, finally making his way to Sydney. On his second day in Sydney he met his future wife Terry. Several academic degrees and a masters degree later Mark travelled the migratory flyways, taking advantage of his work through Asia for a minerals company; always taking the opportunity to take time off to network with ornithological researchers and conservationists wherever he went.

In 1981 Mark became involved in the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) and the local shorebird (wader) group in Tasmania before moving to Victoria. He quickly saw the need for accurate and detailed research and monitoring of migratory and non-migratory shorebirds. Mark became one of the main driving forces behind the AWSG and was elected as the chair of the group from 1987 to 1997. He was largely responsible for the analyses and publishing of the data emerging from shorebird studies by AWSG. Without his efforts extensive data on most of the species of migratory shorebird occurring in Australia would not have been published; data ranging from biometric and moult analysis to movement data and population information. He promulgated strongly the need for data analysis and publication.



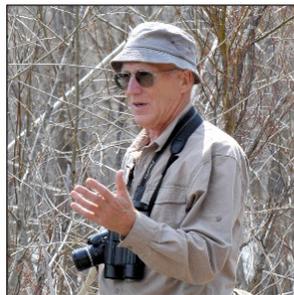
Always looking for the road least travelled!  
(China east coast 2005).

Mark recognized the need to work with shorebird researchers and conservationists throughout the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and the need to promote population monitoring throughout the region. He was a key instigator of shorebird research and conservation activities in China and played a very large part in the monitoring of shorebird populations on the coast of the Yellow Sea. He was also greatly involved in the education of people in shorebird identification and counting and made the first attempts to impress upon people in China and elsewhere the need for

conservation actions in critical locations. This work culminated in the publication of *Shorebirds of the Yellow Sea; importance, threats and conservation status* (2002) detailing the results of shorebird population monitoring over the whole of the Yellow Sea and forming the basis of conservation strategies since that time.

As chairman of the Asia-Pacific Shorebird Working Group he took a major role in the production of the Shorebird Action Plan. This involved building capacity at Nature Reserves around the coasts of the Yellow Sea in China and, at the same time, conducting a series of surveys of the entire coast. The Yellow Sea training and surveys involved two periods of field work each year from 1996 to 2002.

In 2004 and 2005 Mark was instrumental in organising the WWF waterbird surveys of the Middle and Lower Yangtze River Floodplain. As a mentor, Mark made great contributions by developing survey methods, training survey staff and compiling reports. During this work, Mark made two comprehensive surveys of the wetlands in Anhui province. Based on this foundation, Mark developed a robust program of support and research activities with the University of Science and Technology of China in Hefei (USTC) and in recognition of his major contribution he was awarded a Visiting Professorship. From 2005 to 2007 Mark led USTC teams conducting wintering waterbird surveys of the Huai River Floodplain and coastal areas from Shandong to Fujian province. This extensive fieldwork resulted in over 10 papers and reports, presenting new population estimates and distribution information for Anatidae, shorebirds and globally threatened species. These publications confirmed that the Yangtze River Floodplain is the most important area for non-breeding Anatidae in the whole of China, but documented large population declines and range contractions.



Mark Barter at the Scaly-sided Merganser Workshop in Russia (May 2010) © Chang-yong Choi

Mark made a major contribution by establishing the first ongoing site-monitoring program for waterbirds in China in 2008 (a systematic program of waterbird monitoring at Shengjin Lake). Up until his death Mark continued to be instrumental in applying this model to other lakes and key sites in the Yangtze River Floodplain with the USTC group. Based on his rigorous approach to integrated monitoring, dramatic changes in the distribution and abundance of key species have been detected since 2004 and 2005.

### **Vale Mark Barter, 9 June 1940 - 21 November 2011 cont.**

With encouragement and assistance from Mark, a waterbirds and wetland research group was established at USTC to focus on understanding the causes of wetland degradation and their impact on Anatidae in the Yangtze River Floodplain.

Mark has conducted waterbird ecology, identification and counting training courses for National Nature Reserve staff and members from NGOs as well as undergraduate and graduate students from universities. His friendly and engaging manner and ability to communicate with all ages made him a well-loved and inspiring teacher and mentor and his work has crafted a sound educational base for further research and conservation.

Mark was not only active but also highly focused in facilitating information exchange and collaborative research between scientists in Europe (e.g. from Aarhus University, Denmark and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, UK) and scientists developing ecological research programs in China (including students and the next generation of ecologists!).

Fundamental in his encouragement was the integration of rigorous monitoring programs to determine "pattern" with ecological studies to understand underlying "process", a construction that has combined efforts of ecologists from Europe, North America and Australia to bring best experience to bear on the problems of these globally important Chinese wetland systems. In particular, his drive and determination led to multi-national fieldwork being undertaken in China and, in due course, to numerous papers (many of which

he was co-author) being published in scientific peer-reviewed journals. This East-West communication and exchange of knowledge engendered by Mark, and the comparative research programs resulting from this communication, have been, and continue to be, crucial for understanding variation in the trends, distribution and site-use by birds migrating along different flyways.

Although not an ornithologist by profession, it is his ornithological exploits for which he will be most remembered by so many conservationists and researchers from throughout Australia, the Asia Pacific and further afield. This is reflected in the number of votes of thanks from across the world he received just before he died. Typically busy until the last moment (my last email from him was on 7<sup>th</sup> November on matters of the Flyway, Mark encouraging me to redouble my networking efforts to carry on the work!).

It was Mark who first introduced me to China and he was the one who encouraged me to learn the Chinese language, although he didn't speak it himself. Consequently my first presentation at a wetlands management conference in Taipei was in English and Chinese, such was Mark's influence. I remember working with Mark during the lead up to the formation of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership in 2006. Once he got Ken Gosbell and me involved in the Partnership we lost sight of him as he took on other roles mentioned above.

谢谢马克，安息吧！ Phil Straw



Mark Barter in northern Bohai Wan (China) – waterbird surveys and training (14 May 2005)

## Broome Bird Observatory Courses

The Broome Bird Observatory is taking bookings for their popular 5-day courses in 2012. Courses cost \$1290 all inclusive. Places are limited to 10 per course. To book contact the Wardens on [bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:bbo@birdsaustralia.com.au) or phone 08 9193 5600.

Go to [www.broomebirdobservatory.com](http://www.broomebirdobservatory.com) for further information

### Wave the Waders Goodbye

19 – 24 March 2012

3 – 8 April 2012

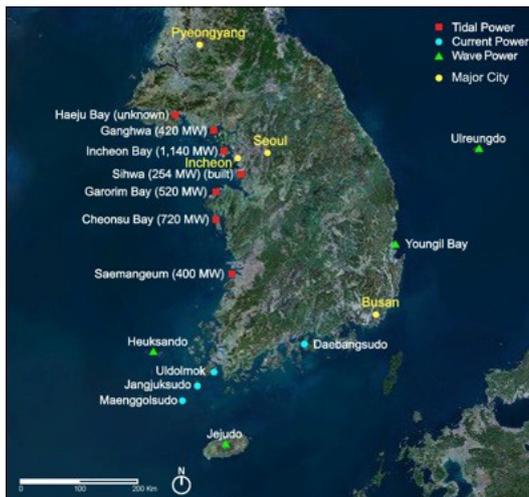
### Birds of the Broome Region

27 September – 2 October 2012

12 – 17 October 2012

## South Korea's Plans for Tidal Power

Six tidal power plants, utilizing large tides in the Yellow Sea, are proposed along the western coast of South Korea (plus a seventh one in North Korean territory) (**Figure 1**) to assist in the generation of energy from renewable resources (about 2 per cent (1,474 MW) by 2012 and 8 percent (6,648 MW) by 2020). Most of these plants would operate as "tidal barrages": shallow coastal expanses of the sea would be isolated with gated sea walls; after the rising tide flows in, the gates would be closed; the tide outside the wall would ebb and create a differential in water levels, and then water would be released through turbines at controlled outlets to generate electricity.



**Figure 1**

South Korea's plans for ocean energy generation, showing capacities of tidal power plants. (Haeju Bay Tidal Power Plant would be located in North Korean territory; its capacity is not available.) © Ko, Schubert, and Hester

The only tidal power plant built so far is Sihwa Tidal Power Plant (TPP), located about 20km south of Incheon and opened in August 2011. With a capacity of 254 MW, Sihwa is the smallest of the six proposed but nevertheless the highest-capacity tidal power plant in the world now, having surpassed the previous record-holder, the 240-MW Rance Tidal Power Station, in northwest France, which opened in 1966. The Sihwa station is registered as a Clean Development Mechanism project under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It features a sea wall that stores water at high tide, but it generates power only from incoming tides, while outgoing tides flow without driving the turbines.

Northwest of the existing Sihwa plant, two other tidal

power plants of unprecedented size are proposed in Gyeonggi Bay: Incheon Bay TPP (1,320 MW) and Ganghwa TPP (420MW). Their development would threaten tidal-flat wetlands that support unique ecosystems and host tens of thousands of migratory birds. In spite of this huge scale of tidal-power development, the environmental impact assessments of these projects have not considered the cumulative impact of three mega-projects to be located within 60 km of each other.

Besides the issue of scale, the proposed locations of these two tidal power plants also threaten ecologically important wetlands that are protected under Korean law. The current plan for Incheon Bay TPP would encroach onto 24.7 km<sup>2</sup> of the Jangbongdo Wetland Preservation Area, which was designated in 2003 (at 68.4 km<sup>2</sup>, the largest of Korea's Wetland Preservation Areas). Ganghwa TPP is proposed to be built right next to "Ganghwa Tidal Flat and the Black-Faced Spoonbill Habitat," which is South Korea's largest Natural Heritage Site (370 km<sup>2</sup> in area) (no. 419), designated as such in 2000. Ganghwa Tidal Flat, along with the Han River estuary and other tidal flats near Incheon, hosts tens of thousands of migratory birds that travel along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, including the Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*), a species that is listed as an endangered wildlife species of the Ministry of Environment, is classified as "endangered" by the IUCN, and is itself Natural Heritage no. 205.

Although tidal power would reduce carbon emissions, it threatens to damage coastal ecosystems and adversely affect endangered species. As technology advances it would seem prudent for South Korea to rethink the large-scale tidal barrage. The United Kingdom's rejection of the Severn Barrage shows that today's technologies do not necessarily minimize environmental impacts and produce an economically viable project, even with a benefit as great as obtaining five percent of the nation's energy from a single renewable source. New technologies for ocean energy—tidal power, wave power, and current power—are being researched around the world, and as technologies develop, perhaps a different technology or scale for tidal power could meet South Korea's demands in the future.

Adapted from Yekang Ko and Derek K. Schubert's article "South Korea's Plans for Tidal Power: When a "Green" Solution Creates More Problems" (2011) available from: [http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/ROK\\_Tidal\\_Power\\_Ko\\_Schubert](http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/ROK_Tidal_Power_Ko_Schubert)