

# Tattler

Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways & Australian Shorebirds 2020 Project

No. 42 January 2017

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## Editorial

Declaration of a new Flyway Network Site in the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria is a significant contribution to raising awareness of important shorebird sites, and those responsible for its nomination are applauded.

Resightings of individually marked shorebirds, with colour bands or engraved leg flags, provide fascinating details about general migration routes, stopover sites and habitat preferences when they are observed and reported. Geolocators take this knowledge a step further, providing details of migration routes, breeding sites and incubation times, but only when the geolocators are retrieved from the birds and the data is downloaded and interpreted. And that depends on being able to recapture the birds with geolocators, which takes lots of patience, detailed observation of bird behaviour and targeted capture techniques. The results are rewarding – as described for a Ruddy Turnstone from South Australia. And then there are Platform Transmitter Terminals (PTTs) which transmit location details by satellite in real time, allowing targeted on-ground searches for particular birds, as described in the article on a Great Knot from Western Australia.

Hopefully these amazing technologies and the stories they generate will engage the general public in appreciating the wonders of shorebird migration and lead to better habitat protection.

**Liz Crawford, Editor**

Contributions are welcome and should be sent to: [tattler@awsg.org.au](mailto:tattler@awsg.org.au)



Black-tailed Godwits, Nijinda Durlga (Tarrant) coast, Gulf of Carpentaria. The 125th Flyway Site added to the Flyway Network – Photo by Roger Jaensch and Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation

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## Flyway Network Sites multiply in the Gulf of Carpentaria

One result of a prioritisation exercise commissioned by EAAFP ahead of its Meeting of Partners in Alaska, 2013, was identification of the South-East Gulf of Carpentaria as the most significant Australian site not yet included in its Flyway Site Network. This shortcoming has been addressed by the listing of two Flyway Network Sites in the Gulf over the past two years.

The latest, named 'South-East Gulf of Carpentaria: Nijinda Durlga (Tarrant)', is the 125<sup>th</sup> site in the Network. It is recognised as being internationally important for seven species<sup>1</sup> including Eastern Curlew and Great Knot (both are Threatened Species in Australia and on the IUCN Red List); Great Knot numbers exceed the 1% level in our Flyway. Black-tailed Godwits also are prominent and the Asian-breeding subspecies of Gull-billed Tern occurs.

The Nijinda Durlga (Tarrant) site is part of a wider 'shorebird area' along more than 300 km of mostly uninhabited and inaccessible coast. Situated 30 km north of Burketown, Queensland, the Tarrant site comprises extensive intertidal mud and sand flats backed by mangroves and by salt-marsh that includes bare saline flats. The south-eastern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria is unusual in Australia in having only one high tide on most days of the lunar cycle.



Part of the Nijinda Durlga (Tarrant) site  
Photo by Roger Jaensch and Carpentaria Land Council  
Aboriginal Corporation

Like its companion site — South-East Gulf of Carpentaria, Karumba-Smithburne (Delta Downs) section — it is owned and managed by Indigenous Australians. The Gangalidda People nominated this part of their country, over which they have legal tenure as the leaseholders under the Land Act 1994 (Qld) and as Traditional Owners with a determination of exclusive Native Title. The Nijinda Durlga area, with more sections farther to the west, also is recognised as an Indigenous Protected Area (informal status) under the National Reserve System.



Gangalidda People hope that recognition of the international importance of their coastal wetlands will raise awareness of migratory waterbirds and their requirements, within local communities and farther afield. Connections to other communities — including Indigenous people where possible — in far distant parts of the Flyway is anticipated.

Furthermore, designation of the Nijinda Durlga (Tarrant) site may enhance promotion of a developing eco-tourism program in the Burketown district, involving Indigenous rangers. The rangers are employed and equipped by the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (CLCAC) to manage natural resources (e.g. fire, weed and wildlife management), and more recently to undertake tourism ventures and visitor management in country of the Gangalidda & Garawa Peoples.

Foundational data for the nomination were obtained during past expeditions of the Queensland Wader Study Group. Recent capacity-building work funded by the Australian Government in connection with the Indigenous Protected Area, has enabled the CLCAC rangers to support and participate in follow-up surveys.

These recent designations of important sites for migratory waterbirds have generated much interest across the Gulf Plains. Both the Delta Downs site (part of a rangelands cattle-raising business) and the Tarrant site are not within legally-binding protected areas. The designations may encourage EAAFP Government Partners in Flyway countries to nominate additional wetlands that are not in government-managed protected areas, to the Flyway Site Network.

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## Resightings from the AWSG database – 2016 highlights

### Introduction

The past year has seen some very important changes to the AWSG leg-flag database. Anje Marten, with funding from Deakin University, together with Roger Standen spent the best part of a year to create a new database. Although the previous version served the AWSG well for many years, it had been apparent for some time that its functionality and user-friendliness were insufficient for the data volume coming in annually.

In July 2016 the new database was launched and it has been a joy to work with to date. We are currently working on a number of export functions which should make it easy to provide data to third parties. A number of other improvements are planned, particularly in relation to the database becoming a truly centralised platform for leg-flag sightings within Australia – in the near future we are hoping to integrate all local sightings from NW Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. This should go a way towards reducing the current data fragmentation across a number of different wader study groups across the country.

The timing of the launch also coincided with an equally big change – after three years of very hard work to keep the leg-flag database and communication network on the rails, Roger Standen decided to hand over the operator role. In those years Roger did an incredible job, maintaining the database, keeping up communication, solving a multitude of issues as well as managing to keep up people's enthusiasm across the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). The sole reason the whole system currently runs as well as it does is testament to his tenacity over time – a heartfelt thank you for that, Roger.

### Results

In many ways 2016 was a very good year in terms of resightings: although a final tally is not yet available it seems as if AWSG has never received as many observations as this past year. At the time of writing the total stood at 12,565 observations involving 15,406 birds across the flyway (largely excluding local sightings for most regions). **Table 1** provides an overview of the 15 most recorded flag combinations along the EAAF (note that Broome and Victoria include a number of local resightings).

A lot of effort is put into scanning for resightings in Australia and China (particularly Bohai Bay) each year (**Table 2**). Although generally few observations reach AWSG from Russia, a notable exception are the banding and scanning efforts

on Kamchatka (particularly Khairusovo), which is almost solely responsible for Russia landing in the top 3. A substantial number of 2016 resightings is still expected from various countries and thus the ranking is likely to still change somewhat.

**Table 1 - Top 15 flag combinations reported across the EAAF in 2016**

Flag combination	Number of resightings
Broome*	6,246
Victoria*	2,169
Chongming Dao, China	1,294
New Zealand	777
South Australia	318
Queensland	282
Bohai Bay	244
Darwin, Northern Territory	201
Gulf of Thailand	199
Tasmania	152
Kamchatka	113
Japan	105
Sakhalin	73
Yalu Jiang	58
Chukotka	57

\*denotes regions which include local sightings

**Table 2 - Countries with the highest number of resightings in 2016**

Country	Number of resightings
Australia	5702
People's Republic of China	4853
Russian Federation	814
New Zealand	464
Republic of Korea (South Korea)	426
Japan	76
Taiwan	73
Hong Kong (China)	71
Singapore	19
People's Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea)	19
Malaysia	13
Indonesia	8
Philippines	7
Thailand	7
Palau	7
India	3
Oman	2

## Resightings from the AWSG database – 2016 highlights cont.

### Selection of 2016 highlights

In April 2016, Glenn McKinlay recorded Great Knot (Green engraved leg flag (ELF) BEA), Greater Sandplover (Black/White ELF) and Lesser Sandplover (Black/Yellow) at Peleliu Lakes (sandflats) IBA on Palau, in Micronesia (see *Tattler* No.41 for an article on Palau). Further observations of Chongming Dao flagged Greater Sandpipers were made in October 2016.

On two separate occasions flagged Great Knots were seen at Barr al Hikman in Oman: in January 2016 a bird with Chongming Dao flags (Black/White) and in November 2016 a bird with Sakhalin flags (Yellow/White).

At Dahanu, Palghar, Maharashtra in India a Great Knot (Black/White) was seen in August 2016, while two Great Knots (Yellow/White and undetermined) were seen at Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh in December 2016.

Very encouraging is the increase in received resightings from Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Although the number of observations is still modest, several dedicated observers are starting to make a difference, with sightings of birds from e.g. Australia, Japan, Chongming Dao and Jiangsu. A Victorian orange-flagged Whiskered Tern was seen on two occasions on Java in mid-2016, the first-ever overseas observation for the species.

Three different Alaskan flagged Bar-tailed Godwits (Black ELF) were reported from the EAAF:

- 1Z was present on Aphae Island in South Korea for at least 10 days from late April 2016 (Andreas Kim);
- Y0 was recorded in the Gladstone area in Queensland, Australia in January 2016;
- Lastly, Male 6D was seen in Corner Inlet, Victoria, Australia in mid-November 2016 by Peter Crighton. Originally banded in July 2009 along the Colville River in Alaska, this bird was 11,936 km from its breeding grounds. Previously 6D was found on the Australian east coast in October 2011, in SE Australia in October 2012 and in Yalu Jiang in April 2013.

In late June 2016, a Victorian Red-necked Stint (plain orange) was seen in Tiksi, Russia (at 71 degrees N) by Alexander Hellquist. This is one of the most northerly flag observations for this species ever received, lying well within the Arctic Circle, 12,261 km from its banding location in SE Australia.

A huge thank you to all observers, banders, researchers and banding offices that make data collection of shorebird resightings possible at this scale. Data summaries for 2016 will be sent to the various banding programmes in early 2017.

**Joris Driessen**

AWSG Database Manager

## The story of Red Knot band number 052-65648



Red Knot in flight, Quarry Beach, Roebuck Bay, WA. Photo E. Tan

Among the most extreme cases of long distance flights are those performed by the shorebirds. Many of these breed in the high latitudes of the Arctic tundra of the northern hemisphere. The 24 hours of daylight and the abundant food supplies in this region are however short-lived and these

birds must soon depart the Arctic ahead of the severity of the winter. They fly southwards, thousands of kilometres and for many, their destination is Australia.

The Red Knot is one of the most colourful of our waders and it makes one of the longest yearly migrations of any bird, travelling 15,000 km from its Arctic breeding grounds to Australia and then for many, moving on to New Zealand. Most arrive in Australia in August-September and depart for the return journey back to their breeding grounds in April. Noteworthy is the fact that the adults depart the breeding quarters before their newly hatched juveniles who must find their own way to Australia!

On 4 March 2015, Grant Lodge of Kununurra found a recently dead shorebird on a beach near Broome. The bird had a number of bands and leg flags and, realising its possible importance

## **The story of Red Knot band number 052-65648 cont.**

to science, he froze the specimen and contacted Ron Johnstone, Curator of Ornithology at the Western Australian Museum. The specimen was sent to the museum, prepared into a research study skin (registered number A39016), and identified as Red Knot *Calidris canutus piersmai*, one of the world's long-distance migrants. It was a female, length 251 mm and weight 121 g with extensive body and subcutaneous fat (obviously ready to migrate back to its breeding quarters). This body fat is the 'fuel' shorebirds, such as this, 'burn' during their non-stop migration. The Red Knot has the ability to build up its body fat (up to 70% its body weight) in a few weeks, but to do so it requires abundant food supply. Its main food includes bivalves, also small marine worms, gastropods and crustaceans that abound on the intertidal mudflats and sandflats of Eighty Mile Beach in Western Australia and the shores of the Yellow Sea region in China and Korea.

Judging from its injuries, small puncture marks in the head and neck, this Red Knot had probably been killed by a bird of prey. Its recovery and preparation into a museum research specimen has provided us with a great deal of information on its body condition, its sex, age, plumage and its subspecific identity.

The story does not end there as information derived from banding, flagging and geolocation programs has enabled researchers to determine the region of origin of many of these birds and highlight the importance of global flight paths and stop-over areas that are of international significance for shorebirds. Details of the bands – alloy band number 052-65648 and three yellow bands on left leg and a red plastic band above a green band on the right leg – were sent to the Australian Bird and Bat Banding office in Canberra and the history of its migrations was revealed. Colour bands and leg flags help identify individual birds in the field using different colour combinations. This bird was not fitted with a geolocation device which has the ability to record the bird's location and the data can then be downloaded when it is re-captured.

This Red Knot was fitted with band number 052-65648 and distinctive colour bands at Eagles Roost, Roebuck Bay, Broome, Western Australia on 1 August 2010. It was observed on numerous occasions in Roebuck Bay between 18 February 2011 and 25 April 2011. By 30 May 2011, it was observed at Nan Pu, Bohai Bay, China and by 3 September that year it had returned to Roebuck Bay in north-western Australia. It was again observed on numerous occasions in Roebuck



Red Knot (Western Australian Museum registered specimen A39016)

Bay between September 2011 and 25 April 2012 and was then recorded back at Nan Pu, China, on 23 May 2012. By 14 September 2012 it was back at Roebuck Bay and remained there until the last sighting on 22 April 2014. On 17 May 2014, it was observed at North Beipu, Bohai Bay, China where it remained until 22 May, no doubt 're-fuelling' before flying further north to breed. The next observation was back at Roebuck Bay on 13 September 2014. There were several other observations at Roebuck Bay and Eighty Mile Beach in September, October and December 2014 and in February 2015 until its death in March 2015. In the five years since being caught and banded, this Red Knot had been observed on 60 occasions in north-western Australia and 6 times in China.

Shorebirds worldwide are declining and their habitats are under threat in many areas from industrial development and global climate change. Current researchers working for the Global Flyway Network are using the Red Knot as a flagship species. Observations of specimens such as 052-65648 will help provide information on migration and movements at sites of international importance in both Australia and overseas and will help to preserve shorebird numbers in a rapidly changing world. Red Knot 052-65648 also highlights the value and involvement of the general public in finding and reporting banded birds and the roles of the Western Australian Museum, the Global Flyway Network and the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme in research and conservation.

### **R.E. Johnstone and J.C. Darnell**

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## Ruddy Turnstone 4X/ATZ/VAZ – a remarkable traveller from SA

Ruddy Turnstone 4X/ATZ/VAZ is certainly doing more than his share for the Flyway.

He first volunteered on 4 March 2006, in the second season of our engraved flag project. He was given two flags: Orange engraved 4X above Yellow. At the time he was aged 1, and would have hatched in July 2005. Now he is 11 years old.

At the beginning of our project we had lots of problems with ink fading, and so the orange engraved 4X flag was replaced with orange engraved ATZ in March 2009. On 11 April 2013 he joined the geolocator project, wearing a geolocator donated by the students of Newbery Park Primary School (Millicent). The school children were in the field when the geolocator was put on, and then again when it was retrieved the following season.

And each season thereafter .....

ATZ was recaptured on 27 November 2016, and his 5th geolocator deployed. By now the ink on ATZ had faded to such an extent that it was unreadable in the field. And so ATZ is now wearing orange engraved VAZ.

Ken Gosbell has plotted all four northern and southern migrations. There is an amazing similarity in key dates and stopover locations on both northward and southward journeys. Also, this bird has probably successfully incubated eggs for four years running. (Bear in mind that these are preliminary results at this stage).

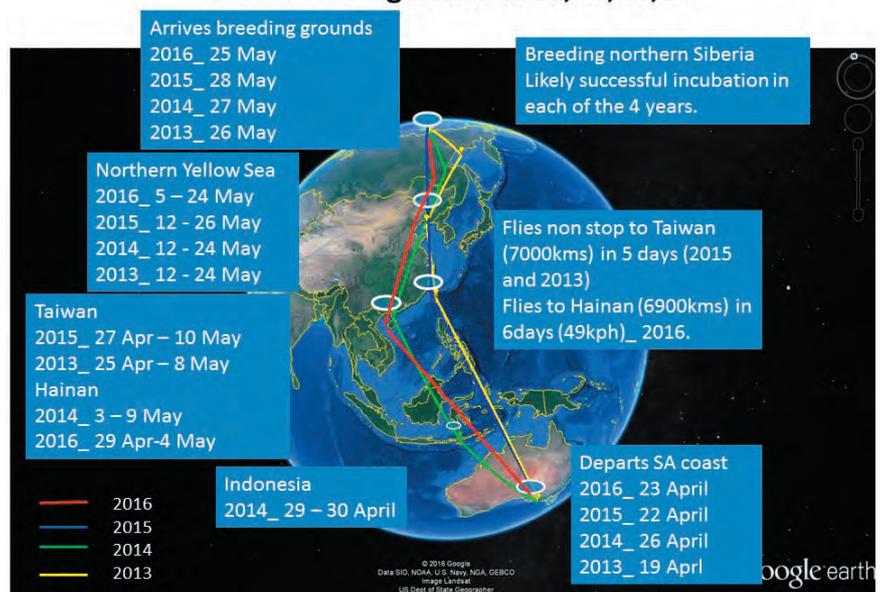
And this is only part of the story – 4X/ATZ/VAZ has been caught in the same general area a total of 11 times! He has also been observed in the field many times. On all but one occasion this was in the Nene Valley / Blackfellows Caves / Carpenter Rocks area of his non-breeding territory in South Australia.

Thankyou to all who have worked hard over many years to collect this data. And especially thankyou to ATZ!!!

**Maureen Christie**



### ATZ North migration 2013,14,15,16



### ATZ South migration 2013,14,15,16



## Tracking Red-necked Stints with geolocators from their breeding ground in Southern Chukotka

The Red-necked Stint is currently listed as Near Threatened in the IUCN Red List (V3.1, 2016), despite an estimated population of ~315,000, due to concerns about continuing population declines over the past decades. Although occurring regularly in large numbers at many stopover sites along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, the migration pattern and connectivity between breeding and nonbreeding sites of Red-necked Stints is less understood, potentially due to their smaller body size and the fact that no particular stopover site harbours a major proportion of the population. With recent advances in miniature tracking devices, we aimed to track the annual movement of Red-necked Stints to reveal the migration routes of the flyway's smallest *Calidris* sandpipers that depend on intertidal habitat.

Fieldwork was conducted during the boreal summer months of June to July 2016, at Meinypilgyno in Southern Chukotka, Russia. Red-necked Stints are not abundant breeders there, but a small grassy area (less than 1km<sup>2</sup>) called "Chaivaam" northwest of the village was found to be a good breeding location. At least 8 nests and 8 additional broods were found at the site by the end of the breeding season. In total, 9 geolocators were deployed, of which 5 (2F & 3M) were attached to tibia via expanded leg flag, and 4 (1F & 3M) were mounted on the birds' backs with pre-manufactured 8-shaped harnesses around their thighs. To minimize disturbance during incubation and maximize chances of retrieval, geolocators were deployed during the late incubation to brooding period. All individuals were checked after tagging to make sure they were not uncomfortable with geolocators attached.



Red-necked Stint fully fledged juveniles



Red-necked Stint with back-mounted geolocator

Each of the 9 individuals was assigned a unique ring/flag combination or an engraved light green (lime) flag. An additional 55 Red-necked Stints (10 adults and 45 juveniles) were lime flagged in a larger area around Meinypilgyno during the breeding season, with all adults and two juveniles bearing engraved flags. (5 more juveniles were flagged in August by Nikolay Yakushev during migration.) We are looking forward to hearing about resightings of any of these marked birds along the flyway. Any information should be sent to Joris Driessen at [flagging@awsg.org.au](mailto:flagging@awsg.org.au), who is kindly maintaining the flag resighting database. More geolocators will be deployed, and our fingers are crossed for the return of tagged birds this coming breeding season!

We would like to thank Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Egor Loktionov, Nikolay Yakushev, and Roland Digby for their kind help and support during fieldwork. Financial support of the fieldwork comes from High Meadows Foundation.

**Tong Mu** ([tmu@princeton.edu](mailto:tmu@princeton.edu)), **Pavel S. Tomkovich**, **David S. Wilcove**

## Flagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers on Jiangsu Coast

The head-starting project for the conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper has yielded a good number of flagged individuals in recent years, in addition to wild-caught adults and chicks. During southward migration, when the majority of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population gathers along the Jiangsu coast to fuel and undertake wing moult, we have very good chance to find colour-marked individuals here, since a high proportion of the total population of around 700 individuals (Clark *et al.* (2016) *Oryx*, pp.1–10. doi:10.1017/S0030605316000806) have been flagged. Some of them may be seen for several times during the whole staging period, providing us useful information on their stages of moult and duration of staging in Jiangsu.

Since there are some over-summering birds (*Tattler 40*), here we treat re-sightings from late July to November as records in southward migration. In total, 23 individually colour-marked birds (Lianyungang:1, Dongtai:21, Yangkou:1) were identified among at least 26 (**Table 1**) different colour-marked individuals, as no birds were recorded moving among sub-regions when moulting at Dongtai-Rudong.

Note that due to habitat changes, Yangkou, Rudong hasn't been good for searching for Spoon-billed Sandpiper for a while; but only from this autumn many birders and photographers

decided to abandon Yangkou and shifted their efforts towards Dongtai, which has been supporting a much larger population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper than Yangkou for years. Thus the number of re-sightings at Yangkou is much smaller than in previous years. We are not clear about the population trend at Yangkou. However, the increased number of re-sightings from Dongtai doesn't mean the population using this site is increasing; actually the count at Dongtai is similar to those in previous years. Dongling may also support a larger population than Yangkou in recent years but it's not a popular birding spot. Lianyungang is in the northern part of Jiangsu Province and is not known as a staging site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper; and it's not a popular birding site. Thus it is not surprising that only two birds were recorded at Dongling and only one juvenile was recorded at Lianyungang.

Interestingly, nine of the ten birds banded locally at Dongtai and Rudong in September 2015 were reported soon after banding, and five of them (Yellow 52, 53, 58, 59, 60) were recorded in the banding area again in this year's southward migration. In contrast, of the nine birds banded this year in the same banding area, only two were recorded (Yellow MT, CT). As most of the re-sightings are from birders and photographers who like to gather at certain parts of the mudflat, it's highly possible that many individuals were overlooked.

**Table 1 - Re-sightings of flagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers on Jiangsu Coast**

No. of individuals	Date 2016	Site	Engraving	Colour flag/ bands	Reported by	Total No. observed	Notes
1	21 Jul	Dongtai	V7	White flag	Qian Feng	20	
	5 Oct	Dongtai	V7	White flag	Mu Tong	45	
2	6 Aug	Dongtai	X7	White flag	Zhang Lin	8	
	10 Aug	Dongtai	X7	White flag	Li Dongming		
	24 Sep	Dongtai	X7	White flag	Sun Huajin	10	
	7 Oct	Dongtai	X7	White flag	Li Dongming	27	
3	6 Aug	Dongtai	X8	White flag	Zhang Lin	8	One leg lost (see <i>Tattler 40</i> )
	17 Sep	Dongtai	X8	White flag	Shi Xu	19	One leg lost
4	6 Aug	Dongtai	M6	White flag	Zhang Lin	8	
	7 Oct	Dongtai	M6	White flag	Li Dongming	27	One eye hurt
5	6 Aug	Dongtai	No flag	Left: /Pink band	Zhang Lin	8	Flag removed after banding
	14 Sep	Dongtai	No flag	Left: /Pink band	Tang Zhenghua	15	Flag removed after banding
6	25 Aug	Dongtai	34	Lime flag	Qian Cheng	4	

**Flagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers on Jiangsu Coast cont.**

No. of individuals	Date 2016	Site	Engraving	Colour flag/bands	Reported by	Total No. observed	Notes
7	2 Sep	Yangkou, Rudong	09	Lime flag	Li Dongming	4	
	27 Sep	Yangkou, Rudong	09	Lime flag	Mu Tong	11	
8	17 Sep	Lianyung -ang	U5	Lime flag	Jiao Haibing	1	Juv. which was recorded earlier in South Korea
9	18 Sep	Dongtai		Left: Metal/Light Blue flag Right: Blue band/White band	Li Dongming	28	Colour of Light Blue flag from Northern Chukotka is difficult to detect and often read as white or yellow. Thus several reports last year at the same site should refer to this same individual
	5 Oct	Dongtai		Left: Metal/Light Blue flag Right: Blue band/White band	Mu Tong	45	
	15 Oct	Dongtai		Left: Metal/Light Blue flag Right: Blue band/White band	Wang Aijun		
	19 Oct	Dongtai		Left: Metal/Light Blue flag Right: Blue band/White band	Li Dongming	12	
10	19 Sep	Dongling Rudong	No engraving	Right: Black flag/Yellow flag	Zhang Jun	6	
11	20 Sep	Dongtai	52	Yellow flag	Li Dongming	42	
	7 Oct	Dongtai	52	Yellow flag	Li Dongming	27	
12	24 Sep	Dongtai	33	Lime flag	Sun Huajin	10	
	19 Oct	Dongtai	33	Lime flag	Liu Jun	10	
13	3 Oct	Dongtai	60	Yellow flag	Jing Yuan		
14	3 Oct	Dongtai	29	Lime flag	Elaine Du		
	4 Oct	Dongtai	29	Lime flag	Zhenkepa <sup>1</sup>		
15	3 Oct	Dongtai	59	Yellow flag	Elaine Du		
	7 Oct	Dongtai	59	Yellow flag	Li Dongming	27	
16	4 Oct	Dongtai	53	Yellow flag	Yu Li		
	5 Oct	Dongtai	53	Yellow flag	Mu Tong	45	
	15 Oct	Dongtai	53	Yellow flag	Zhong Yuetao	85	
	17 Oct	Dongtai	53	Yellow flag	Tang Zhenghua		
17	4 Oct	Dongtai	58	Yellow flag	Zhenkepa <sup>1</sup>		
	14 Oct	Dongtai	58	Yellow flag	Xipierhuang <sup>1</sup>		
	15 Oct	Dongtai	58	Yellow flag	Zhong Yuetao	85	
18	5 Oct	Dongtai	39	Lime flag	Mu Tong	45	
19	5 Oct	Dongtai	MT	Yellow flag	Zhou Jiajun		Recently flagged at Dongtai
	15 Oct	Dongtai	MT	Yellow flag	Zhong Yuetao	85	
20	5 Oct	Dongtai	27	Lime flag	Zhou Jiajun		

## Flagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers on Jiangsu Coast cont.

No. of individuals	Date 2016	Site	Engraving	Colour flag/bands	Reported by	Total No. observed	Notes
21	5 Oct	Dongtai	35	Lime flag	Wang Xuefeng, Zhou Jiajun		
22	14 Oct	Dongling Rudong	Not read	Lime flag	Zhang Lin	6	
23	15 Oct	Dongtai	10	Lime flag	Zhong Yuetao	85	
24	15 Oct	Dongtai	24	Lime flag	Zhong Yuetao	85	
25	17 Oct	Dongtai	CT	Yellow flag	Liu Wei		Recently flagged at Dongtai with sat tag
26	17 Oct	Dongtai	No engraving	Right: Black flag/Yellow flag	Tang Zhenghua	10	
	18 Oct	Dongtai	No engraving	Right: Black flag/Yellow flag	Li Dongming	17	
	29 Oct	Dongtai		/White band	Qian Feng	3	Both legs not visible
	29 Oct	Dongtai	Not read	Lime flag	Qian Feng	3	*

<sup>1</sup> user name, not real name

\*There are more re-sightings of colour-marked birds not being able to be identified to certain individuals. This record shows the last one in this period.

### Acknowledgements

We thank all those birders and photographers listed above for their great effort in searching for colour-marked birds, and thank Qian Feng especially for browsing various birding forums and chat groups to collect many re-sightings!

We also thank Pavel Tomkovich and Rebecca Lee for their information and feedback on the colour-marked birds, and Alexei Dondua especially for resolving the Northern Chukotka bird! We are grateful to the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust for providing information from the SBS Re-sightings Database for this article.

Readers can contact Sayam Chowdhury (sayam\_uc@yahoo.com) at the SBS Task Force for more details of banding and re-sightings of birds.

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## Pacific Golden Plover – book released

Oscar “Wally” Johnson, a world expert on Pacific Golden Plovers, and Susan Scott, a popular-science writer, have combined their knowledge and enthusiasm to create a book for everyone who admires the exceptional birds known as Kōlea in Hawaiian. With easy-to-understand, yet scientifically accurate text and outstanding colour photographs, *Hawaii’s Kōlea: The Amazing Transpacific Life of the Pacific Golden-Plover* is a reliable source of information for both general readers and ornithology specialists. Although the Pacific Golden Plover is a member of the shorebird group, Kōlea spend most of their time inland,

favouring open space with short vegetation. This makes Hawaii’s cemeteries, golf courses, and backyard lawns prime real estate for the migratory birds, which have adapted remarkably well to life among humans. Each year Kōlea fly thousands of miles non-stop to Alaska and return to the same spot in the Islands, whether a condominium courtyard, a busy beach park, or strip of grass in down-town Honolulu. Urban plovers often grow tame around people, an endearing trait uncommon in other birds.

Published by the University of Hawaii Press.

## Tiny satellite tags on Spoonies

Three wild adult Spoon-billed Sandpiper – one of the world’s most endangered birds – have been fitted with satellite tags – brand new tiny tags that are the smallest of their type in the world. Our knowledge of where and when Spoon-billed Sandpipers move from and to along the east coast of Asia has always been limited. This has hampered our ability to identify and protect key areas for them, from their Arctic Russian breeding areas on the tundra, to their wintering grounds on the mudflats of south-east Asia. But these three amazing new tags are the first step in revealing more secrets of the Spoony.



One of the three Spoon-billed Sandpipers fitted with a satellite tag at Tiaozini, October 2016.

In 2015, Microwave Telemetry agreed to provide the first few of the world’s smallest satellite tags to a project where they would make a significant contribution to conservation efforts. The research into Spoon-billed Sandpipers was the chosen project. There then followed an extensive testing process to make sure the tags would work as intended, and be safe for the birds, when fitted to small waders. With less than 250 breeding pairs of Spoonies in the world, these were birds we had to be very, very careful with. Trials with captive Dunlin went very well though, and both tags and birds behaved normally for months. Independent experts were consulted and the project to use these tags on Spoonies was approved. Much effort went into securing all necessary permissions and authorisations for getting the tags to China, catching Spoonies and fitting tags to them.

### Rebecca Lee

Source: <http://www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com/2016/10/all/the-worlds-smallest-satellite-tag-helps-one-of-the-worlds-rarest-species/>

## Great Knot PTT 36 likes to be photographed

The idea with satellite transmitters (also called PTTs) is that once you have attached them to your study subject you don’t need to see the bird again as the PTT is tracking it on your behalf. When we put PTTs on birds in Roebuck Bay, northwest Western Australia, however, we expect to resight them as the bay is an excellent site for resighting work with large flocks easily observable from low cliffs and sand dunes. And indeed we do resight tagged birds often, and are able to assess the status of the birds and their PTTs.

But what we wouldn’t expect is to have one individual Great Knot carrying a PTT resighted and **photographed** at four different, widely separated, locations during its documented 18,569 km annual trip. And, if we can confirm it back in Roebuck Bay, a 24,269 km round trip. Another aspect of the trip we wouldn’t expect was for some of those images to be taken in Alaska! But this is indeed what happened with one Great Knot from the Global Flyway Network’s satellite tracking project.

Great Knot 6RRBR, PTT 36 was banded 11 October 2015 as an adult bird (3+, a minimum of three years old). The bird was seen regularly

for the next 6 months on the Roebuck Bay roosts and the PTT sent good signals.

The last sighting in Roebuck Bay was 21 March 2016 and the PTT tells us the bird left on migration at about 1600 hr on 26 March 2016.

A non-stop flight to Hong Kong of 4,570 km over about 4 days was its first leg of northward migration. The bird was actually seen and photographed on the Mai Po Marshes mud flats in Hong Kong.



In mudflats at Mai Po, Inner Deep Bay, Hong Kong. Image: Wa Tsai.

## ***Great Knot PTT 36 likes to be photographed cont.***

The bird left Hong Kong on 7 April 2016 and 'hopped' up the east coast of China in four short journeys of 690, 260, 760 and 740 km before settling on the tidal flats of Yingkou Liaoning Province. The bird arrived there on 22 April and stayed until 30 April 2016. Next was a very short hop east (and south!) to Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve, traditionally a site for tens of thousands of Great Knots. The Yalu Jiang mudflats were home for three weeks.

Next it was off to Kamchatka Peninsula. A 3000 km journey across NE China, SE Russia, Sakhalin Island and the Sea of Okhotsk. Just 3 days at a river estuary before a short trip of 590 km to NE Kamchatka. From here the last leg of the journey to reach its breeding site, a 1,210 km leg across Chukotka, Far East Russia and the Bering Sea.

The bird was at its breeding site for 35 days. This is enough time to complete the breeding cycle of pairing, mating, laying, and incubation, and depending on the sex of the bird, some chick rearing. Males usually do the chick rearing in the sandpiper family.

We were watching all this from the comfort of our offices via the satellite technology. We fully expected the bird to head back south after the breeding was over, but to our great surprise it instead proceeded due east a mere 140 km to the furthest east it could be in Russia. After a day on the Chukotka coast it continued across the Bering Strait to Seward Peninsula in Alaska! Not a regular route for Great Knots.



A distant image but it couldn't be another bird!  
Image: Bryce Robinson

We were able to contact some Alaskan colleagues working nearby and they promptly tracked down the bird in Safety Sound and photographed it for us. The bird was 'on holiday?' there for a week and then set off on its return towards Roebuck Bay.

This bird continued to be an 'explorer' and visited two new sites in Far East Chukotka that were different to the breeding site and others

that it had visited on northward migration. This included a day at one site before moving just 28 kms! Probably less than 30 minutes in the air.

Next was a flight of 1,670 km to the Khaiusovo River Estuary on the West Coast of Kamchatka (40 km north of the site used on northward migration). This site has been well documented in the last few years by Russian researcher Dmitry Dorofeev and is important for many species including Great Knot and Black-tailed Godwit from Roebuck Bay.

This year Dmitry had four AWSG researchers working with him and they took a photograph of the bird, of course!



On the mudflats of the Khaiusovo River Estuary.  
Image: Hazel Watson.

This site was used for 19 days and then the bird continued southwards. A trip of 1,050 km to the mid-East Coast of Sakhalin Island. And 6 days enjoying another remote coastal location and then off to North Korea. This flight was at least 2055 km and appeared to be broken up by a day at a river! Another very unusual thing for a Great Knot to do. The site in North Korea was in the Far South West Coast adjacent to the border between North and South Korea.

It is here that unfortunately there seems to have been a problem with the PTT. The signals to the satellite become intermittent. The next signal put the bird 690 km from the coast of North Korea and just 50 km from Rudong, a famous shorebird area on the Yellow Sea Coast.

And just to top off the remarkable story of this fantastic bird, a shorebird researcher in Rudong (Mr Zhang Lin) got an image of it! This was the fourth time it had been photographed since leaving Roebuck Bay. Unfortunately, the image showed that the PTT had slipped to the side of the bird, presumably because the harness had broken and this may explain the intermittent signals we

## Great Knot PTT 36 likes to be photographed cont.



were receiving. The last signal we received from this transmitter was on 17 October 2016 and indicated that the bird was flying south offshore of the Philippines. It remains to be seen if the broken harness will hinder its flight. However we hope to see the bird back in Roebuck Bay soon, so we know it has completed its journey safely.

This information has really opened our eyes to how many sites a Great Knot may use during one round trip migration from Roebuck Bay; in this case, 20 sites including Roebuck Bay and the breeding site. At some sites the bird was on the ground for only one day and at others... 21 days the longest at any one staging area and 35 days at the nest site. The bird was quite capable of flying 4,500 km but sometimes choose to fly 28 km! Whether this bird has a particularly explorative nature we don't know, but it bodes well for this individual in a rapidly changing world (loss of habitat) that it can be versatile and will now have prior knowledge of many and various sites. It was likely already aware of some or all of the sites it used this year.

NOTE. This 'story' is an interpretation of the data received from the PTT and has had no rigorous statistical analysis applied to it.

[Source:  
[globalflywaynetwork.com.au/latest-news/](http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/latest-news/) ]

The trip at a glance:

Site	Distance to (km)
Roebuck Bay, north west Australia	4,570
Mai Po, Hong Kong	686
Haitan Dao, Fujian, China	260
Wenzhou, Zhejiang, China	760
Binhai, Jiangsu, China	740
Yingkou, Liaoning, China	160
Yalu Jiang NNR, Liaoning, China	3,000
West Coast Kamchatka, Russia	590
North East Coast Kamchatka, Russia	1,210
Breeding Area, Far East Chukotka, Russia	145
Breeding Area, Far East Chukotka, Russia	290
Alaska Coast, USA	90
Safety Sound, Alaska, USA	575
Far East Chukotka, Russia (new site)	28
Far East Chukotka, Russia (another new site)	1,670
Khaiusovo River Mouth, West Coast Kamchatka, Russia	1,050
Mid-East Coast Sakhalin, Russia	2,055
South West Coast, North Korea	690
Rudong, Jiangsu, China	
?Roebuck Bay, north west Australia	

Thank you to the dedicated re-sighters from the EAAF.

**Chris Hassell, Lee Tibbetts, Ying Chi Chan and Theunis Piersma**

The PTT Team

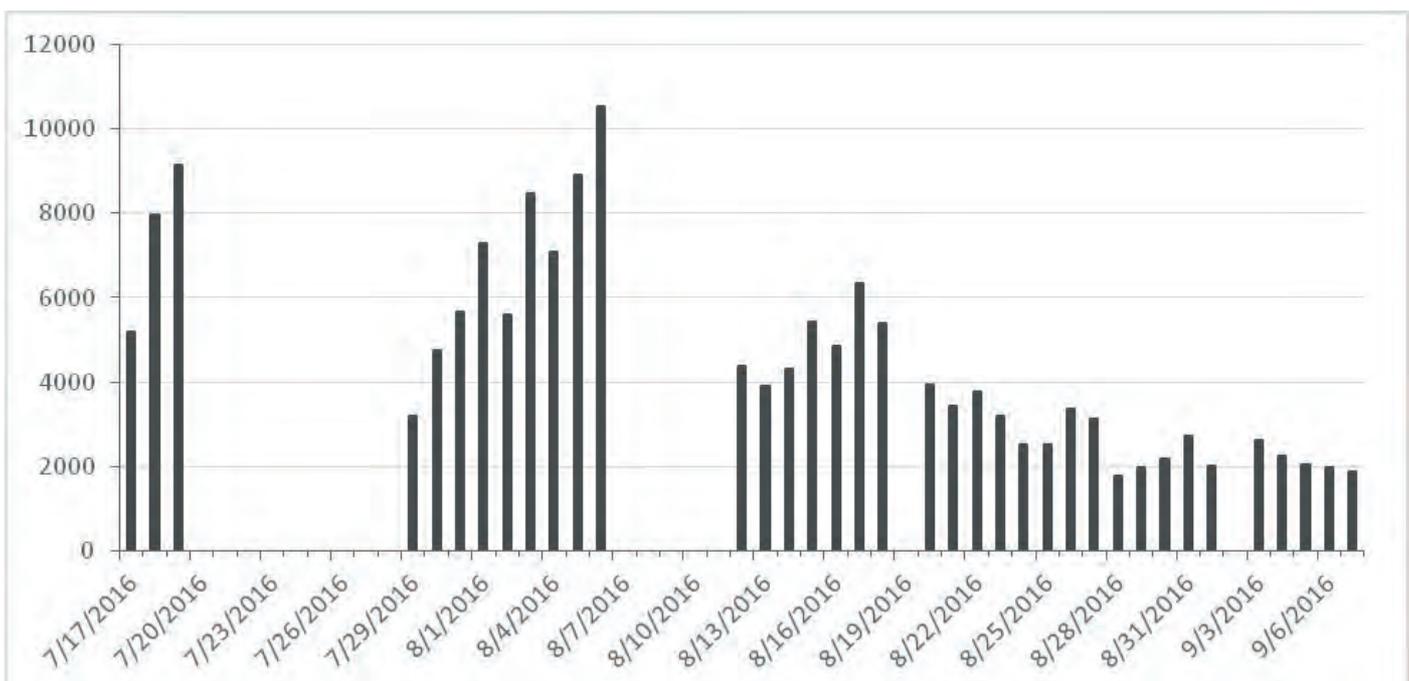
## Southward migration wader studies on West Kamchatka 2016

In July–September 2016 we continued our study of southward wader migration on the western coast of Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia with the support of BirdsRussia using RSPB financial support. These investigations were in the same area as the two previous years. Field work was carried out on Vorovskaya River Lagoon on 16–20 July, 28 July–7 August and 11 August–8 September. The lagoon is 40 km long and 1–1.5 km wide. We investigated only the southern part of the lagoon between Ustyevoe Village and the mouth of the river (54° 11' N, 155° 49' E). The length of this part is about 5 km.

As in the two previous years our work included daily counting of mudflats during low tide, observation of visible migration with counting of birds flying past, banding and flagging, and searching for flagged waders. 37 mudflat counts of waders during low tide were conducted and 36 species of waders were recorded in total. The maximum number of waders – 10.5 thousand individuals – was counted on 6 August 2016. The average count for 3 days in mid-July (migration of adults) was 7430 individuals; in the end of July – early August (end of migration of adults – start of migration of juveniles) the average count was 6830 individuals. During the third period of our work – in the second half of August and early September – the average count was only 3270 individuals (**Figure 1**). It was much lower than the previous two years. The reason was uncommon rainy and windy weather in the last three weeks of August. As a result, unexpected flooding happened on the river and during low tide the area of mudflats was reduced several times.

In 2016 the international significance of the study area has been confirmed for 6 wader species. The maximum count of Mongolian Plover was made on 19 July. It was 454 adult birds (3.5% of *Charadrius mongolus stegmanni* population). Juvenile migration was much smaller than last year's, maximum – 354 individuals (2.7%) were counted on 3 September. The number of Black-tailed Godwit was high during adult migration in the middle of July. Maximum – 1604 individuals or 1.2% of flyway population – was counted on 19 July. The number of juvenile birds was more than last year, but it is less than in 2014. Maximum number of Black-tailed Godwit feeding on mudflats was registered on 1 August. It was 639 individuals or 0.5% flyway population.

The maximum count of Red-necked Stint was made on 19 July when 3546 individuals or 1.1% of flyway population were feeding on mudflats. These were adult birds. Juvenile migration also was smaller than before and reached a maximum on 23 August – 2620 individuals. Maximum number of Whimbrel on mudflats was counted on 5 August and reached 467 individuals or 0.8% of flyway population. Additionally, on several days in the middle of August, we observed concentrations of Whimbrel on the adjacent tundra, up to 2–3 thousand individuals. Maximum number of Dunlin on mudflats was recorded on 6 August when we counted 7050 individuals or 1.4% of flyway populations of 3 subspecies together. Maximum number of Ruddy Turnstone was seen on 5 August and reached 168 individuals – 0.6 % of flyway population.



**Figure 1.** Daily count of waders (all species together) on mudflats in July–September 2016

## **Southward Migration Wader Studies on West Kamchatka 2016 cont.**

As in 2014, additional observation of passing migration was conducted with counting of species which mainly do not stop on the mudflats of the studied area. We noted active migration of Whimbrel and Long-toed Stint at night as usual. Also Terek Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank and Grey-Tailed Tattler were common in our observations of passing migration.

Uncommon rainy and windy weather was the reason for not very successful banding results in 2016. During August – early September, 703 waders were banded and flagged, including 599 Dunlin, 71 Red-necked Stint, 10 Mongolian Plover,

5 Western Sandpiper, 6 Common Sandpiper, 4 Great Knot and a few others.

As usual during our investigations special attention has been given to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. We could observe 1–3 Spoon-billed Sandpiper feeding on mudflats almost every day from 14 August till the end of work on 7 September. Only 1 Spoon-billed Sandpiper was caught during our mist-netting.

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## **Shorebird Roost Rehabilitation at Stockton Sandspit, NSW**

Stockton Sandspit is a small but vital component of the Hunter Wetlands National Park and is regarded as one of the premier day-time roosts for shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary at Newcastle, NSW. Shorebird roost rehabilitation at Stockton Sandspit is focussed on a variety of roost habitats favoured by the shorebirds. As an added bonus, these rehabilitated areas provide occasional feeding habitat for shorebirds as well as breeding opportunities for some ground-nesting birds.

Volunteers from Hunter Bird Observers Club have a long association with this site and over the last 16 years have held a strong site presence through the on-going restoration works. Volunteers from other organisations as well have contributed including Better Earth Teams (Conservation Volunteers Australia), International Student Volunteers, TAFE students, Wetland Care Australia, Koora Gang, and others. The additional help during that time from Green Corps and Green Army has been a useful bonus.

Since detailed records have been kept (16 April 2003) an aggregate of over 6,480 hours of volunteer work has accrued for this site. The value of this effort in terms of productive habitat for shorebirds is immeasurable of course, but when figured against contractor rates, it amounts to an in-kind value of almost \$260,000. This is not an insignificant sum.

Each year the volunteer effort focusses on maintaining high standard shorebird roost areas including saltmarsh and shelly sand areas, removal of mangrove seedlings over designated areas (under permit), plus the annual Clean Up Day activity. Whenever these challenges are completed, restoration of native vegetation on other non-roost areas is also targeted.

The variety of shorebirds roosting at Stockton Sandspit utilise a variety of roost habitats.



Stockton Sandspit is located beside a major bridge over the North Arm of the Hunter River at Newcastle

Maintaining the shallow waters of the lagoon and the areas of saltmarsh free from mangrove seedlings and weeds is relatively easy for volunteers these days and completely sustainable. A few timely sweeps for mangrove seedlings and *Juncus acutus* mostly accounts for the majority of the roost. The great winter effort of "creating" shelly sand takes up the most time each year and remains the greatest challenge.

Shelly sand is preferred by some shorebirds as a place to roost. An additional bonus with this work is that two species of resident shorebirds, Red-capped Plover and Pied Oystercatcher utilise the open sand areas for nesting.

The shelly sand work is best described as three separate tasks; clearing all vegetative matter from the area firstly before turning over the sandy soil with a rotary-hoe and finally raking clean the disturbed soil of as much stray vegetative material as possible.

The project continues to succeed because of the valuable input by many people; it is a partnership of people and organisations that provides the structure for it all to happen. Passionate people

## ***Shorebird Roost Rehabilitation at Stockton Sandspit, NSW cont.***

from National Parks & Wildlife Service, Kooragang Wetlands Rehabilitation Project (Hunter Local Land Services), Conservation Volunteers (Australia), and Hunter Bird Observers Club all contribute with knowledge, experience and in-kind works.

To everyone who has volunteered and left some part of themselves at this amazing site, your contributions have produced many good outcomes and the shorebirds continue to benefit from your care.

***Tom Clarke***



Volunteers prepare 'The Shelly', originally an area of bare shelly sand, where Red-necked Stints and various plover types prefer to roost



Final raking of the sand removes just that extra amount of vegetation



After weeding, a rotary hoe is used to turn over 'The Shelly' to expose bare shelly sand



TAFE students practising their native vegetation restoration techniques on the Big Island



Red-necked Avocet share the roost site at Stockton Sandspit with a variety of migratory shorebirds