

# Tattler

Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways  
& Australian Shorebirds Monitoring

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## Editorial

This edition comes to you after a big gap since the May 2021 Tattler! As always, this edition is about birds and people, lives inextricably entwined. It is about the remarkable people who facilitate change in attitudes towards migratory shorebirds; about remarkable birds who continue to survive and break records in non-stop migration; and about organisations that are raising awareness and making remarkable changes to protect shorebirds.

We are deeply saddened by the recent death of Evgeny Syroechkovsky, a researcher and conservationist working on birds in the challenging environment of Arctic Siberia. Evgeny's disarming smile, deep knowledge and ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles endeared him to all who met and interacted with him. Three tributes to Evgeny provide some insight into this man's contributions, particularly to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP).

ANSTO is one of Australia's premier scientific research organisations committed to environmental research into the health of ecosystems and to community education. Located at Lucas Heights in the Sutherland Shire,

ANSTO introduced its first Shorebirds Competition for primary school students in 2018. This competition aimed to raise awareness of the plight of shorebirds in Botany Bay and local habitats that are important for shorebirds and other organisms. It supported Sutherland Shire Council's promotion of shorebirds along their recently-constructed shared pathway and purpose-built shorebird roosting island in Woolooware Bay, on the southern shore of Botany Bay.

The schools competition has grown each year, and now covers all of Australia. Despite widespread interruptions to learning caused by the pandemic, nearly 1200 students and 29 schools participated in 2021. Over 70 shorebird habitats were highlighted, including many RAMSAR-listed wetlands and a large range of shorebird species found across Australia. It is planned to hold the competition again in 2022.

The recent expansion of World Heritage areas around the Yellow Sea, both in China and the Republic of Korea, covers the largest intertidal mudflats used by migratory shorebirds in the world. This is welcome news after the intertidal mudflats in this region have shrunk by over 65% in past decades, with recent studies in countries outside the Yellow Sea region showing rapid declines in migratory shorebird numbers strongly related to the loss of feeding habitats in the Yellow Sea. It is crucial to protect these essential staging habitats, as the Yellow Sea is one of the world's most important bottlenecks for migratory shorebirds.

We applaud another welcome move by the New Zealand Ambassador to China who held the inaugural 'Friends of the Flyway' to celebrate the migratory birds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. This meeting brought together: ambassadors and senior diplomats from the 22 countries that make up the EAAFP; the secretariat of the EAAFP; senior Chinese government officials, including the Deputy Administrator of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Mayor of Dandong (stewards of Yalu Jiang, dubbed a "five-star" service station on the shorebird expressway); academics; and 'friends'.

The Latham's Snipe Project had its humble beginnings in 2014, after a legal case resulted in

a housing development at a significant snipe site in Port Fairy, south-west Victoria. Pilot surveys conducted there in 2014-2015 found snipe mostly using urban wetlands despite a roughly equal number of urban and non-urban survey sites. Through the efforts of many volunteers, the monitoring program has expanded in subsequent years to around 300 monitoring sites across all the six eastern Australian states and territories. Surveys are conducted three times a year over the non-breeding season (September, November and January) and are ongoing.

Around the same time as the Latham's Snipe Project started, the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ) initiated a research and survey program on Latham's Snipe in Hokkaido, northern Japan. The focus of their work has been surveys during the breeding season to obtain a census of the population size. The WBSJ have also focused on satellite tracking to determine migration routes between Japan and Australia.

Over the years researchers and volunteers have put in a huge effort catching and marking many thousands of migratory shorebirds in countries along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) from the Arctic regions of far eastern Russia, and the Arctic tundra of Alaska where they breed, through eastern Asia, to as far south as Australia and New Zealand, where they may spend six to seven months of the year between breeding seasons. However, without the effort of the many observers throughout the EAAF reporting flag and band sightings, movements of these birds would not have been recorded.

In a huge step forward the BirdMark online portal was initiated and brought to realisation by Marcel Klaassen and Aaron Spence from Deakin University (but mostly in the capacity of volunteer VWSG and AWSG members). This is resulting in a much larger collection of flag-sightings which will add to our knowledge of shorebird movements in real time across the EAAF and beyond.

Satellite tracking of a Bar-tailed Godwit revealed the longest non-stop flight of a non-seabird, once again raising our awe at the long-distance endurance these remarkable birds.

Maureen Christie's ongoing community work for shorebirds in South Australia has been recognised and applauded.

After several years of trying, the Little Tern breeding colony at Karagi Point on the NSW Central Coast has successfully raised many chicks, thanks to the increased input from the local Council and community, including early fencing of the nesting area, wardens and community education.

Management Guidelines for High-Tide Roost Sites have been prepared for distribution to managers of shorebird habitat along the EAAF.

As birdwatchers know, roost sites are just as important as foraging sites for the well-being of shorebirds.

We hope with the lessening of the intensity of the Coronavirus we will return to our normal quarterly editions of Tattler.

Philip Straw, Editor

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

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# BirdMark

Tagging · Tracking · Reporting

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***Ever wondered about the coloured-flagged shorebird you saw at a wetland/mudflat near you? Well, you can easily find out from the easy-to-use BirdMark website portal***

***[www.birdmark.net](http://www.birdmark.net)***

The BirdMark portal is specially designed to accept submissions of your sightings of colour-marked waders/shorebirds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). It supports multiple different languages and allows volunteers and researchers to enter and submit observations either interactively or as a file.

Videos on the various ways you can do this are included in our [Help Guides](#). Feedback on your observations, including a history of the bird(s) that you have observed, will be returned to you within a couple of days of submitting your data.

With the launch of this site, we hope to further boost the reporting of marked shorebirds, which is crucial for ongoing conservation and scientific research.

These observations provide information on the bird's population dynamics, movements, and site use. We would love to hear your feedback. If you have any enquiries, suggestions or queries

regarding this portal, feel free to contact [aws@iinet.net.au](mailto:aws@iinet.net.au) instead of using the portal link [www.birdmark.net](http://www.birdmark.net) which will be processed automatically.

Over the years, researchers and volunteers have put in a huge effort catching and marking many thousands of migratory shorebirds in countries along the EAAF, from their breeding grounds in the Arctic regions of far eastern Russia and the Arctic tundra of Alaska, through eastern Asia to Australia and New Zealand, where they may spend six to seven months of the year between



*Red-necked Stint flagged at Bohai Bay, China observed at Long Reef NSW ©Edwin Vella*



(Far) Eastern Curlew flagged in Jiang Su, China recorded at Port Hacking, NSW ©Julie Keating

breeding seasons. Without reports of marked birds from many observers throughout the EAAF, detailed movements of these birds and the importance of hundreds of sites would not have been recorded.

Many shorebirds return to the same stretch of coastline every year where observers are excited to welcome back known birds passing through or stopping at their favourite birding spot. Three examples are illustrated below. A Far-eastern Curlew from Jiang-su province in China recorded in Port Hacking; a Red-necked Stint observed at Long Reef, NSW that was caught and flagged at Bohai Bay, China. A Ruddy Turnstone with an engraved orange flag on the right leg and geolocator on the left leg put on by the Victorian Wader Study Group. When you observe a marked bird, make careful note of the position of the band or flag, its colour, and any engraving as well as the species – all necessary for entering your data.



Ruddy Turnstone: Caught and fitted with an orange flag ANB right leg, and geolocator tag left leg by the VWSG ©Ken Gosbell

This project was initiated and realised by Marcel Klaassen and Aaron Spence from Deakin University (but mostly in their capacity as volunteer VWSG and AWSG members).

Others involved in simulating and testing were Jeff Campbell, Joris Driessen, Katherine Leung, Maureen Christie, Roger Standen and Roz Jessop.

Phil Straw, East Asian Australasian Flyway Liaison Officer, Australasian Wader Studies Group

## New Zealand Ambassador to China hosts “Friends of the Flyway”

It's easy to get caught up in the doom and gloom that seems to be prevalent right now. But every now and then, something happens that provides a shot in the arm. An event or moment that inspires and provides hope.

16 September 2021 at the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing was one of those moments. Clare Fearnley, the brilliant New Zealand Ambassador to China, hosted the inaugural ‘Friends of the Flyway’ to celebrate the migratory birds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, bringing together ambassadors and senior diplomats from the 22 countries that make up the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, the secretariat of the EAAFP, senior Chinese government officials, including the Deputy Administrator of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Deputy Mayor of Dandong (stewards of Yalu Jiang, dubbed a “five-star” service station on the shorebird expressway), academics and ‘friends’.

Not only did the event provide an opportunity to celebrate and raise awareness of the flyway among ambassadors and senior diplomats, elevating migratory birds as a foreign policy issue, but it also stimulated ideas and discussions, resulting in a few potential new initiatives, such as managing embassy grounds as ‘wildlife areas’ with embassies signing up to commitments to monitor birds and other wildlife, and to make changes to management practices to improve the habitat for resident and migratory birds. A birding trip to the coast next May, for Ambassadors to experience the spring migration, is on the cards,



and 'bird-friendly' glass, painted with ultraviolet patterns, was showcased by local artists as part of the solution to bird collisions (thought to cause the deaths of up to a billion birds in North America annually, with a new research project now starting in China to assess the scale of the issue here).

In her opening, Clare told the story of the 'Kuaka', the Māori name for the Bar-tailed Godwit, that has such a special place in their culture. The Kuaka is considered to be the link between the northern and southern hemispheres, a carrier of knowledge and the bringer of positive messages. For Māoris they were birds of mystery, ('Kua kite te kohanga kuaka? Who has seen the nest of the kuaka?').

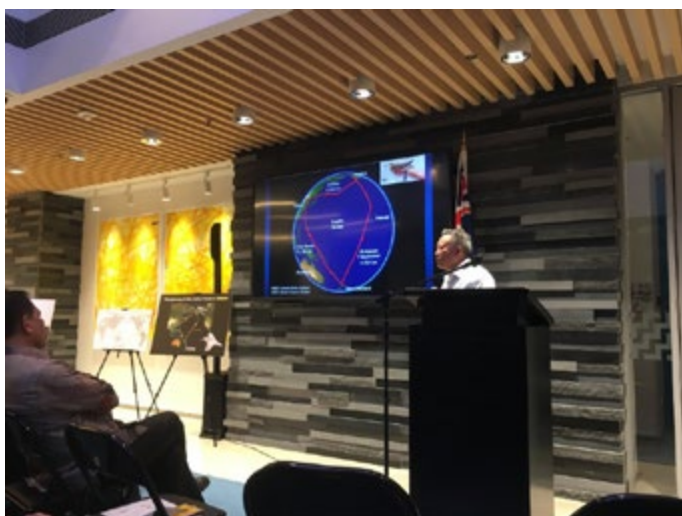
Nearly all New Zealand Bar-tailed Godwits are from the *baueri* subspecies and breed in western Alaska. Their incredible migration forms a triangle. Following the breeding season, these birds make an almost incomprehensible non-stop eight- or nine-day flight of more than 11,000km to New Zealand, only recently discovered through the tracking of "E7" in 2007. After spending the non-breeding season in New Zealand, they begin their northern migration from early March, heading for refuelling sites around the Yellow Sea, many to the Yalu Jiang in Dandong, where they fatten up at this five-star service station for the last leg of the journey to Alaska.



*Clare Fearnley, New Zealand Ambassador to China, welcoming Tan Guangming, Deputy Director of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.*



*Clare Fearnley giving her welcome remarks to the "Friends of the Flyway" on 16 September.*



*Professor Lei Guangchun of Beijing Forestry University tells the story of "E7", the Bar-tailed Godwit that flew non-stop from Alaska to New Zealand revealing the incredible migration of this species for the first time.*



*Tan Guangming, Deputy Director of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, delivering his remarks at the "Friends of the Flyway" event on 16 September.*



*Official photos with (left) and without (right) passing Grey-faced Buzzard*

Migratory birds do not respect international borders, and, over a calendar year, many will visit multiple countries as they move from breeding grounds to non-breeding grounds via stopover sites. It follows, therefore, that no single country can secure the future of these birds on its own. With shared natural heritage comes a shared responsibility and, as we are in the midst of one of the greatest extinction events on Earth, and the first to be driven by humans, it is vital that the international response must go beyond national actions to protect key habitats and species, important though these actions are, to involve sustained and coordinated international cooperation.

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway is a bird 'superhighway' for more than 50 million waterbirds, including 35 globally threatened species, many of which commute between

breeding grounds in the far north, some inside the Arctic Circle, and non-breeding grounds in the southern hemisphere. Many travel as far as Australia and New Zealand. However, it is not only the 'ends of the flyway' – the breeding grounds in Arctic Russia and the non-breeding grounds in Australia and New Zealand that are important. The commute relies on stopover sites, particularly those in the Yellow Sea.

That is why this initiative – bringing together ambassadors from flyway countries with senior Chinese government officials – was so important. It is now hoped (expected?) that ambassadors from other Flyway countries will host similar events, celebrating particular aspects of the Flyway or specific species and sites, whilst helping to nurture and strengthen international cooperation along this important route for migratory birds.



*Chris presents a gift to Ambassador Clare Fearnley.*



*Professors Zhang and Piersma with one of the fishermen they see every day.*



Huge kudos to Clare and her team, especially Svar Barrington and Hayley Anderson, for initiating this event and for the New Zealand embassy's ongoing leadership in putting biodiversity high up on the agenda for foreign policy and diplomacy.

### **Clare Fearnley joins the GFN team in the field!**

We are never short of visitors during our Global Flyway Network studies here at Luannan, China. On 6 May 2019 we were pleased to host the New Zealand Ambassador to China, Clare Fearnley. This was the second year running that New Zealand have shown very clearly their commitment to the conservation of the Luannan Coast and the Red Knots that flood through here in the northward migration season, with an ambassadorial visit. Remember that nearly the entire Red Knot population of the EAAF pass through for a portion of their staging time in China. This includes both the rogersi and piersmai subspecies, tens of thousands that spend the non-breeding season in New Zealand.

The common theme with the ambassadorial visits appears to be strong windy conditions. Two years ago, the wind was strong enough to have us holding firmly to tripods to prevent scopes blowing over and various hats ending up in the ponds. This year wasn't quite as strong, but hair would not stay in place for official photographs! (This didn't include Chris).

The ambassador was with us for some hours and met a number of students. This gave us time to give information on the site, the birds, and the issues pertinent to their conservation. It also allowed time for a 'Wellington picnic'. That is a coffee tucked behind the van to stay out of the gale! I learnt this phrase from Wen and Michael Powles who accompanied the Ambassador. Michael is a previous Ambassador to China and Wen works as the Political Counsellor at the New Zealand Embassy in Beijing. Wen was formally Consul-General in Shanghai.

I presented a book written by Theunis Piersma to the Ambassador on Theunis' behalf as he had left the day before.

My favourite image from the visit shows what happens when a Grey-faced Buzzard flies past a group of birders even if they are supposed

to be having an official photograph with a VIP. GFN extends a heartfelt thank you to the NZ delegation for their time and interest and political efforts. We hope to host them again next year – come prepared for a windy day.

Talking of visitors, Kath Leung joined us for her fourth visit and added a great skill set to our scanning efforts. Professor Zhang, various, PHD students and volunteers from Beijing Normal University were and are here. Zhang has been a great financial and scientific collaborator of our studies here. The inspiration for the creation of GFN and its scientific leader, Theunis Piersma, was with us for an all too brief period. Theunis joins us in all our fieldwork and then we bombard him with questions whenever we are (k)not scanning. It is a very busy and productive time. The Bohai field team would like to take this opportunity to thank Theunis for the huge amount of fund raising he does to keep the Bohai work going and all his continually positive encouragement to us.

Chris Hassell

### **The loss of legendary Evgeny Evgenyevich Syroechkovsky Jr. 18 May 1968 – 25 January 2022**

Evgeny Syroechkovsky has touched friends and colleagues around the world. His smiling face and friendly demeanour will be missed at international meetings involved in waterbird conservation and wherever he went.

The following are just two messages covering his academic life as well as extensive fieldwork and bridging many gaps between governments, international conservation organisations and local peoples to great effect. Including his work with the Arctic Council Working Group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF). As you will see Evgeny has also been heavily involved with the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP).

\*However, I couldn't ignore a personal obituary from his close friend Dr Christoph Zöckler, East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force Coordinator.



Russian ornithology and conservation, and all those involved in these activities, have suffered a huge loss. Following a serious illness, the prominent scientist, and a world-famous specialist in biodiversity protection, Evgeny E. Syroechkovsky has passed away. Evgeny was at the centre of all those interested in nature conservation, not only in the Russian Federation but along the birds' migratory flyways, and his many friends and colleagues will be shocked by this tragic news. Evgeny graduated from the Geographical Faculty of Lomonosov Moscow State University with a Candidate of Geographical Sciences degree. From the very beginning of his work, he combined scientific research with active conservation of rare and endangered species, involving all those interested in supporting this activity.

During his long and eminent career, Evgeny worked at the Laboratory of Biodiversity Conservation and Use of Biological Resources of the Severtsov Institute of Ecology and Evolution, Russian Academy of Sciences (IPEE RAS). Since 2010 he continued his scientific and environmental activities at the VNIIEcology (former VNIIEprirody), where he held the position of Deputy Director, and then adviser on the conservation of Arctic biodiversity. The study of Arctic flora and fauna was the most important of his tasks, into which Evgeny put his heart and soul. He undertook numerous complex expeditions to study the tundra's wildlife, and wrote wonderful articles about it, along with many scientific papers. Equally important, he made a huge contribution to the preservation of Arctic nature through international cooperation, in his roles as a permanent member of the Russian

delegation of the Arctic Council Working Group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), as a representative of the Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia in the Partnership of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Program (EAAFP), and as coordinator of the Working Group on Geese of Northern Eurasia (RGG).

Great international authority and excellent organizational skills allowed Evgeny Syroechkovsky to develop and undertake, together with other outstanding Russian scientists and scientists from the UK, a project to preserve the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This is a unique project that was able to stop the extinction of the species and start restoring its numbers. The name of Evgeny Syroechkovsky will undoubtedly be forever associated with this outstanding history of the revival of this species. He also pioneered and supported studies of migratory goose and swan populations, including publishing a key paper on the distribution and population estimates for swans in the Siberian arctic which remains an important reference to this day.

Evgeny was a wonderful negotiator; thanks to his openness, ability to find common ground, and simply - his deep humanity - he managed the impossible. A large number of our successful results in international negotiations with Asian countries were largely born thanks to the diplomatic tact and charm of Evgeny Syroechkovskiy. None could resist his disarming sincere smile and the iron irrefutable logic of a scientist. And who, if not Evgeny, could find a common language and a basis for negotiations with hunters, officials, and nature lovers?

This remarkable ability allowed Evgeny to become a leader in another area of environmental protection – he was the permanent director of the Russian Society for the Conservation and Study of Birds (ROSIP).

We have lost one of the most outstanding and charismatic leaders of nature conservation. It is difficult to imagine how to cope with this loss. The name of Evgeny Syroechkovsky Jr., as well as his outstanding father, Evgeny Syroechkovsky Sr., is forever inscribed in the golden row of Russian scientists and nature conservationists.



## **CAFF (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna) mourns the passing of Dr. Evgeny Syroechkovsky**

It is with heavy hearts that CAFF mourns the passing of Dr. Evgeny Syroechkovskiy.

Dr. Evgeny Syroechkovskiy was a long-standing and essential fixture in Arctic science, Russian ornithology and migratory bird flyway conservation. He was a world authority on bird conservation, and the world relied on him. He was instrumental in countless conservation successes in the Arctic and beyond.

Dr. Syroechkovskiy first became involved in CAFF over 10 years ago via its Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Programme. He served as CAFF Chair during the 2011–2013 Russian Federation chairmanship, the conclusion of which was marked by the successful release of CAFF's Arctic Biodiversity Assessment, a seminal publication to which he also contributed his extensive knowledge. He spearheaded the development of CAFF's Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI), encouraging the Arctic Council to address the conservation of declining populations of Arctic-breeding birds. He knew the Arctic Council was in a unique position to bring together diverse actors with a common goal to protect species that connect us all.

"Evgeny had great passion, energy and perseverance in the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, and the skills, knowledge and networks needed to succeed," said Mia Rönkä, CAFF Chair. "Evgeny's presence and character made an unforgettable impression. He will be missed and remembered in CAFF, in the Arctic and beyond. His work lives on in Arctic biodiversity conservation, and we will continue his work."

His contributions to CAFF built on his life's work. Dr. Syroechkovskiy frequented the Russian Arctic, studying migratory birds and their breeding grounds for over 35 years, carrying on his family's legacy of Arctic nature conservation. The rapid population decline in several species concerned him greatly. His passion, in particular, revolved around the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Spoonies). In the early 2000s, he and colleagues sounded the alarm on its dramatic population decline; over 90 percent



gone in 40 years. He initiated field work in Chukotka to further investigate this small bird with the charismatic bill. The precious Spoonie would most likely be extinct if not for his efforts, not least to: help develop and then chair the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force under the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership; secure the species as a flagship for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway; and help develop the "headstarting" program, where scientists keep careful watch over new generations of Spoonies to protect against the elements and predators. He helped build an international network of researchers and conservationists passionate about this species, with enthusiasts dotting the globe.

Dr. Syroechkovskiy was a giant in Russian ornithology and nature conservation. He was director general of BirdsRussia, deputy director of the All-Russian Research Institute of Environmental Protection, and advisor to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation. He implemented bilateral agreements between Russia and several Asian nations. Dr. Syroechkovskiy's reach was truly global. CAFF Secretariat staff would catch up with him across time zones and countries, following his dispatches from across the world, as he worked across cultures and languages to rally scientists and politicians towards conservation.

"Evgeny was such a strong character, a great friend and a pleasure to know and work with. He had a huge presence, with enormous energy, commitment and passion for conservation, especially his beloved Spoon-billed Sandpipers," said Tom Barry, CAFF Executive Secretary.

“Evgeny was a force. Watching him work and listening to him talk, you knew this man was doing exactly what he should be doing. He was passionate,” said Courtney Price, AMBI Global Coordinator. “I will miss him. He was a lot of fun to be around. I know I will look back with gratitude at the time I was lucky enough to spend with Evgeny.”

It is an immense loss to many at CAFF. Dr. Syroechkovskiy had boundless energy, a wonderful sense of humour, a big personality, and such passion for his work. In meetings and collaborations he was driven, ready with encouragement, knowledge and strategy to shape projects and their deliverables. Afterwards, he regaled with entertaining stories, heartfelt speeches, the occasional song, and always shared celebratory libations. His passing is a great loss to us all and we will all miss our dear friend and essential colleague.

We send our deepest condolences to his wife and scientific partner Elena Lappo, daughter Anna Syroechkovskaya, and his wide network of friends and family.

### **A personal obituary to Evgeny from Dr Christoph Zöckler, EAAFP SBS Task Force Coordinator**

My first expedition with Evgeny led me into the Yano-Indigirka floodplain in Northern Yakutia in 1996. He had invited foreigners to accompany him on his Arctic Expeditions to explore previously uncharted territories. And what an exciting expedition this was. He demonstrated a complete command of his huge country and impossible situations and awkward encounters were addressed calmly and with an experience that was astonishing for a 28-year-old scientist. As the expedition progressed so the situations, he faced became more impossible. He mastered all with bravura and intelligence. I joined his expeditions 17 times over the past 26 years, and we became very good friends, working together on several joint conservation agendas in the Arctic and on waterbirds. I learned a lot from him and established my own expeditions, starting in 2005 to India and later to Bangladesh and Myanmar in search of our common conservation concern: the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which of course he and his wife Lena Lappo also joined. In total we visited

18 different countries together on expeditions and at conferences and started many conservation projects across the Arctic and its flyways.

Evgeny knew how his country Russia works, what can be achieved in conservation and what was not quite possible yet. He was founder and director of Birds Russia, and he also held a position at the Arctic Institute at the Ministry of Natural Resources. He represented Russia in the Arctic Council working group, CAFF, and chaired the group in 2014-15 and initiated the Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative (AMBI).

His heart was really beating for large waterfowl like geese, birds that you can also eat in certain circumstances! For many years he chaired the Geese Study Group of Eastern Europe and Northern Asia and edited the journal *Kasarka*. However, he was instrumental in mitigating many hunting-related issues, such as spring hunting in Russia and along the flyway. He only reluctantly started the Spoon-billed Sandpiper project as it's not a goose. But in 2004, we both established the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Group together, which merged to the EAAFP Task Force in 2010, and has been chaired by Evgeny ever since. His vision and enthusiasm for conservation of waterbirds was infectious and his diplomatic skills building bridges between institutions, cultures and nations made him many friends. In many ways he was a role model for me, and I learned many important skills in international and flyway conservation.

In 2020 Evgeny contracted Covid and developed long Covid later on, and only relatively recently he was being treated for a rare cancer which progressed faster than anyone anticipated.

Let's take on his baton and carry on our common vision of flyway conservation. I lost a very good friend far too early.



## ANSTO Shorebirds Competition for school students highlights shorebirds and wetlands across Australia

### Background

ANSTO is one of Australia's premiere scientific research organisations committed to environmental research to understand the health of ecosystems and community education. In 2018 ANSTO held its first Shorebirds Competition for primary school students in Years 3 to 6.

The competition aimed to raise awareness of the plight of shorebirds in Botany Bay and local habitats that are important for shorebirds and other organisms.

It supported the initiative taken by the Sutherland Shire Council in promoting shorebirds along their recently constructed shared pathway and well needed purpose-built shorebird roosting island in Woolooware Bay, on the southern shore of Botany Bay.

The competition also supported and coincided with an exhibition by 8 local artists at Hazelhurst Arts Centre entitled "The Overwintering Project: Bound for Botany Bay" that ran from 8 to 18 September.

Phil Straw, vice chair of the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) was invited to open this event with a presentation on migratory shorebirds in the East Asian Australasian Flyway. He spoke about the threats to these birds during their arduous migration between the Arctic tundra of Siberia and Alaska breeding grounds, and Australia and New Zealand, where the birds spend up to seven months of the year during their non-breeding season.

Due to the highly favourable response received from the community and schools in 2018, the Shorebirds Competition was run again in 2019, and expanded that year to include greater Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan areas.

### Shorebirds Competition 2020

The Shorebirds Competition 2020 expanded again. Students from all regions across Australia are now invited to participate. In addition, students

can now participate from home at a time when many schools may be closed in the months ahead during the coronavirus pandemic.

Students are required to learn about shorebirds and the threats to their habitats and then create a public awareness poster for a threatened shorebird in Australia. They may choose either a migratory or resident species.

With shorebirds as the focus, the competition highlights contemporary environmental issues and interconnections across different geographical scales. It provides an opportunity for learning in different subject areas: science, environmental sustainability, geography, literacy and visual art.

For teachers, the activity can be incorporated into class lessons to provide valuable learning outcomes that link to the Australian Curriculum, and sample lesson plans are provided for this.

There are great prizes to the value of more than \$4000, that include education resources for winning schools and gift cards for winning students.

The Education Team at ANSTO is keen to connect with many children and communities across Australia and help spread awareness of threatened shorebirds. For expressions of interest or further information, please contact [competition@ansto.gov](mailto:competition@ansto.gov)

In the fourth annual Shorebirds Competition, hosted by scientific research organisation ANSTO, primary students in Years 3 to 6 were invited to create an ecotourism poster featuring a shorebird in a local wetland or coastal area.

Students could enter with their school or as individuals, and educational resources on shorebirds and their wetland habitats were provided to assist teachers and students, including online webinars for students on shorebirds and their migration story. The aim was to raise awareness of the issues faced by shorebirds and the need to protect not just the birds but their equally important overwintering locations in Australia.

Despite widespread interruptions to learning caused by the pandemic, nearly 1200 students and 29 schools participated. Entries were received from across Australia: as far North as





Above: 2019 winning entries.

Right: 2020 - "Create a public awareness poster for a threatened shorebird in Australia. In 2020 local prizes were awarded to Bethany for her Black-fronted Dotterel entry and Willow for her Curlew Sandpiper entry. Congratulations to Willow for receiving a "Commended Entry" Certificate in the national competition.

Groote Eylandt and Darwin in the north, to Hobart in the south, as far east as Mullumbimby and the Gold Coast, to Perth and Broome in the west. Over 70 shorebird habitats were highlighted, including many RAMSAR listed wetlands and a large range of shorebird species found across Australia.

Students were engaged in structured lessons over several weeks around the themes of shorebirds and their wetland habitats. These lessons were well received with recent feedback from a participating teacher indicative of the success of the competition in educating and engaging students about shorebirds: We did a whole term's work on wetlands and shorebirds, went on an

excursion, and invited birdwatching enthusiasts as guest speakers so the children had a wonderful learning opportunity. Individual participants also engaged with their local environment: We had a wonderful time on a windy and wet winter school holiday day searching for shorebirds on our favourite beach.

All participating students (and schools) are congratulated for their excellent efforts. It is hoped that the children who participated will share their new awareness about shorebirds and their habitats and the need to protect these with their families and communities. It is planned to hold the competition again in 2022.

We thank all our participating students and schools and give special thanks to the many dedicated parents and teachers who created a conversation around this topic and inspired children to learn and achieve.

We gratefully acknowledge The Overwintering Project, a project for adult artists, as the source of inspiration for this competition and for their continued support. This important project raises awareness of our migratory shorebirds and their habitats across Australia.

We also gratefully acknowledge Greater Sydney Local Land Services and the Swan Estuary Reserves Action Group Inc. for sponsoring local area prizes for Botany Bay, NSW, and the Swan River Estuary, WA, respectively.

The 2021 winning posters can be seen here: <https://www.ansto.gov.au/education/primary/competitions/shorebirds-competition-2021/results>

### **ANSTO Poster Competition – celebrating the shorebirds of Roebuck Bay**

Through my work as the Science on the Broome Coast (SOBC) coordinator on behalf of the Roebuck Bay Working Group and Yawuru Land and Sea Unit, there is always room for a shorebird event or two as part of the series.

Shorebirds are an integral part of life in Broome. From the phenomenal 40 years of continuous

research conducted by the Australasian Wader Study Group in Roebuck Bay and Eighty Mile Beach to the Flock Oz themed public engagement events – a special collaboration between several local community organisations - and of course the important shorebird tours and annual courses conducted by the Broome Bird Observatory, educating visitors from all parts of the world.

In 2020 and 2021 SOBC has facilitated activities encouraging local school children to enter the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) Shorebird Poster Competition. The Roebuck Bay Working Group and Yawuru Land and Sea Unit joined forces with Inspiring Australia, Birdlife Australia, Broome Bird Observatory, Yane Sotirsoki Photography and Parks and Wildlife Service – Kimberley, offering students the chance to win local prizes as well as being part of the national competition. Students from various Broome primary schools participated in the national competition submitting over 30 posters.

A very special thank you to Hannah Carnegie, Kimberley Regional Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) Coordinator/ Teacher and her wonderful students.

Grace Maglio – member of the Roebuck Bay Working Group management committee and Australasian Wader Study Group Committee.



2021: "Create an ecotourism poster for a local wetland or coastal area that provides an important habitat for shorebirds and other animals. Local Prizes awarded for the above posters. National competition judging is currently underway.



## Long-distance flight breaks record

### Bar-tailed Godwit makes longest non-stop flight by a non-seabird

When an exhausted Bar-tailed Godwit landed on the sand near the mouth of the Tweed River, at the north-eastern border between Queensland and NSW recently, it unwittingly broke the record for the longest continuous flight by a non-seabird.

The bird, which was fitted with a solar-powered location tracking device, was seen and photographed by BirdLife Australia member Geoff White, who immediately notified the Pūkoro Mirinda Shorebird Centre in New Zealand. The tracker which the bird was wearing allowed the godwit — known as 4BBRW — to be tracked on its long-haul migration from its breeding grounds on the Seward Peninsula in Alaskan tundra to the Southern Hemisphere.

#### Comments from Adrian Riegen, Pūkoro Mirinda Shorebird Centre in New Zealand:

I seem to remember Mark Barter writing in 1989-90 that godwits could theoretically fly more than 11,000 km and possibly as much as 13,000km. To many people at the time, this seemed far-fetched.

Well, this one has done it Mark!

Our best calculations are that 4BBRW flew non-stop from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta in Alaska to close to the Gold Coast Airport at Coolangatta, before moving a few km to Kingscliff and then a further 12km south to Hastings Point where the photo was taken. 4BBRW has flown into the record books with the longest non-stop flight by a land bird ever recorded. A flight that lasted 239 hours and covered a minimum 13,050km, averaging 55kph land speed for the entire flight.

I'll leave you to get your heads around this extraordinary feat, at least in our minds it is extraordinary. For the godwits it is just what they are so beautifully equipped to do. It is up to us to ensure they can continue to do this well into the future by ensuring the estuaries and harbours are safe, clean, and full of food for them.

Adrian





## Coastal high-tide shorebird habitat management guidelines

Guidelines for managing coastal high-tide shorebird habitat in the EAAF were produced as part of the 2020 East Asian Australasian Flyway Shorebird Science Meeting, held as a virtual event due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

It is now well-accepted that if we are to halt the population declines observed in migratory shorebirds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) it is critical to conserve remaining tidal flats, and there have been significant recent policy advances to support this aim. However, the importance of securing adequate high-tide habitat is less well-appreciated, and the technical expertise for doing so is limited. To help address this gap, we combined evidence from scientific literature and technical documents with the experience of practitioners and researchers from multiple countries to produce a set of guidelines for managing coastal high-tide shorebird habitat. The guidelines are aimed at site managers in the EAAF. In this document, which is accompanied by a list of relevant reference materials, we explore the ecological concept of roosting, explain important biophysical roost-site features, and provide guidance about how high-tide roost sites can be managed to benefit shorebirds. We also discuss the widespread use of artificial habitats by shorebirds in the EAAF at high tide, and integrate management advice tailored to production landscapes. To develop these guidelines we brought together input from participants who attended a workshop at the 2020 East Asian-Australasian Flyway Shorebird Science Meeting, and were supported by 19 international collaborators who contributed to the final written document. Additional collaborators undertook translation of the guidelines from English into five additional languages, and funding support for layout and translation was provided by the Australasian Wader Studies Group.

The full text of the guidelines, and appendices, are available in six languages at the AWSG website: <https://awsg.org.au/publications/coastal-high-tide-shorebird-habitat-management-guidelines/>

## Site Management leads to Little Terns Breeding Success

The Little Tern, recognised as an Endangered Species in NSW, arrives in Australia from South-east Asia each Spring to breed on our beaches and estuaries. The nesting season along the NSW coast extends from October to February.

Little Terns have historically nested at the mouth of Tuggerah Lakes, The Entrance, especially favouring Karagi Point, with varying degrees of success. In 2020, Little Terns were first observed at The Entrance Channel in late September and numbers grew throughout October before undertaking their breeding season that produced record-breaking outcomes.

The positive breeding results largely stem from the Central Coast Council's commitment to protect the nesting area throughout the breeding period. Because Karagi Point and surrounding areas are popular sites for recreational activities including fishing, boating, beachgoers, swimming, surfing, picnicking, dog and beach walking, the Little Tern colony is particularly vulnerable to disturbance. Threats include trampling and physical disturbance to eggs and chicks, discarded fishing line and rubbish, avian predators and dogs, inundation of nest sites and even vandalism. Elsewhere, fox predation is an added issue.

By recognising the potential threats to the colony, Central Coast Council implemented best practice management actions to afford every opportunity for breeding success, including: installation of secure conservation fencing (excluding people and dogs); development of high visibility interpretive signage; regular litter collection (to reduce the threat of entanglement and avian predation); a strong on-ground Council presence; and undertaking an effective communication and public engagement strategy along with a staff monitoring program in collaboration with National Parks and the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. Previously, this aspect had only been conducted informally by volunteers.

Fencing was installed early in the breeding season but, to undertake this important management action, the preferred breeding area had to be identified through site monitoring (identifying birds that were site prospecting, in courtship, nest-scape observations etc). Once

confirmed, the positioning and scale of fencing (an 'undisturbed' area of almost half a hectare) was erected quickly and with minimal disturbance. Interpretive and regulatory signage went up soon after and the site was then easily identifiable to the public.

As summer (and the Christmas Holidays) approached, increased human activity resulted in significant amounts of rubbish and food waste being left near the breeding area. This was of concern as it led to an increase in avian predators (gulls, ravens, etc) attracted to the site and possibly causing predation of Little Tern eggs and chicks. To mitigate this, Council undertook daily rubbish collection and Ranger patrols to address compliance issues. On average 120L of rubbish, food scraps and fishing tackle were removed from the site most mornings (significantly more following a weekend), thus reducing potential predator levels. The more robust fencing served its purpose too with only occasional nesting area access occurring by the public, including one incident that led to the trampling of a nest (3 eggs). Weekly nest monitoring resulted in encouragingly positive early counts.

Council also worked hard to promote the site through media releases, social media, face-to-face public contact and other forms of community

engagement/education. Many thousands of people were reached.

As the season drew to a close and Little Terns began to disperse to pre-migration staging areas the site continued to receive regular monitoring and reactive management as conditions, circumstances and impacts changed. Aside from the challenges mentioned, some signage was vandalised; placement of artificial shelters was necessary as vegetation died off leaving chicks more exposed; partial inundation on one occasion nearly claimed a few nests; some fencing was compromised due to high tides, water movement and sand loss; and mobile chicks (runners) placed themselves in vulnerable situations and increased the difficulty of monitoring counts. To mitigate the threat posed by walkers and dogs to wandering chicks a series of additional "barrier fences" were erected adjacent to identified chick / runner congregation areas.

Once monitoring efforts concluded in early February and data collection was reviewed, the following summations were made:

- The most successful Little Tern breeding season on record at Karagi Point.
- A high count of over 300 adult Little Terns being observed, comprising approximately 150 breeding adults and 150 non-breeding birds.
- An estimated 72 breeding pairs, the most for any site in NSW throughout 2020/21.
- An estimated 97 nests, 236 eggs produced (approx. 2.4 eggs per nest) and 152 chicks.
- A total of 51 chicks confirmed as having successfully fledged (the real measure of success), although the number fledged is suspected to be significantly higher.

Along with Lake Conjola and Lake Wollumboola, Karagi Point was considered one of the most important (top performing) nesting sites in NSW for the 2020/21 breeding season.

An estimated 350 chicks are thought to have successfully fledged throughout the same period in NSW, meaning that approx. one seventh of population recruitment for the 2020/21 breeding season can be attributed to Karagi Point.



*Photos taken by Andrew Robinson while undertaking monitoring for council.*

What triggered this 'breeding event' can only be speculated, however a combination of environmental conditions and human-related factors are thought to have aided the subsequent outcomes. Food availability for the terns was seemingly abundant in the adjacent Tuggerah Lake and Karagi Point appears to have been rendered more suitable as nesting habitat following significant recent sand deposition, extensive areas of exposed shell-grit, well positioned woody debris and the presence of vegetation that began to establish a few weeks prior to prospecting.

From the outset Council recognised the many considerations and constraints involved with managing a conservation project such as this. Planning, consultation and securing funding occurred early, ensuring that all potential stakeholders were aware of the project and proposed management actions. The robust and extensive temporary fencing along with a regular Council presence certainly helped to achieve desirable breeding outcomes as was establishing the likely extent of the breeding colony early in the season to minimise disturbance to the terns. This in turn helped identify sensitive areas to the local community and the public more broadly and ensured there was community engagement and ownership for the project. Indeed, many community members informally assisted Council with site monitoring. Another lesson learnt was the need to remain flexible and reactive to the many threats and impacts to be addressed and in responding to the dynamic nature of the environment. These factors (along with a range of environmental influences that are often poorly understood) are all thought to have led to the season's success at Karagi Point.

Given that the Little Tern continues to decline by approx. 3% annually in NSW, these results are very encouraging and highlight the importance of sites like Karagi Point for the species' long-term survival and the need for strong commitment levels by all involved. Hopefully, increased awareness of the importance of sites like Karagi Point for Little Terns amongst the community, will encourage more residents and visitors towards stewardship and greater ownership of the local environment and its importance, along with the role they can play in its management and protection.

## Editor's note

Beach nesting bird protection in Australia has been the responsibility of countless volunteers involved in the Beach Nesting Birds project of BirdLife Australia, other bird groups and local councils. This invariably involves round-the-clock, 7-days-a-week, monitoring by volunteers who must watch out for any disturbance by beach-using members of the public, off-leash dogs and at times deliberate vandalism of nesting colonies.

A quiet word to unsuspecting members of the public, including dog owners, will often do the trick and is appreciated by those whose attention is drawn to the plight of eggs and chicks (very hard to see by the casual observer) as well as the distressed adult birds trying to protect their nests and young. However aggressive responses from some members of the public can be unpleasant and distressing for volunteers.

In the case of the 2020 Karagi Point Little Tern nesting event a substantial fence erected by the local council and clear, informative, signage were undoubtedly factors in the protection of the nesting birds and their nests. This included the statement that the Little Tern in NSW is protected under the NSW Biodiversity and Conservation Act with potential heavy penalties for people disturbing or harming threatened beach-nesting species such as the Little Tern.

The 2020-21 Little Tern nesting at Karangi Point is a detailed report prepared by Andrew Robinson and Nick Carson. This is an excellent and positive example of the Central Coast Council's efforts to protect a threatened species.





## Steps to remove threats to the World's Largest Intertidal Mudflats

The West/Yellow Sea, lies at the heart of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, a migratory route for 50 million migratory waterbirds traverse on an annual basis which stretches from Russia Far East and Alaska, U.S.A. south to Australia and New Zealand covering 22 countries. This region is surrounded by three countries: The People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPR Korea) and the Republic of Korea (RO Korea). The wetland habitats in this region, especially the intertidal mudflat in this area serve as fuelling, staging stations for two million shorebirds, or 40% of total birds in the Flyway, annually.

However, the intertidal mudflat in this region has shrunk by over 65% in past decades, but recent studies in countries outside the Yellow Sea region showing rapid declines of migratory shorebirds strongly related to the loss of the birds' habitats in the West/Yellow Sea. This illustrates the sites in different countries along the Flyway are highly interconnected due to the migratory waterbirds, and it is crucial to protect, as it is one of the world's most important migratory bottlenecks for waterbirds.

### **New addition to World Heritage listing – enormous step forward to secure critical habitats for millions of migratory shorebirds in the Yellow Sea**

On 26th July, 2021, the 44th Session of the World Heritage Committee endorsed the inscription of the Republic of Korea's tidal flats on the UNESCO World Natural Heritage List, marking an enormous step forward to secure the critical habitats of the Yellow Sea for millions of migratory waterbirds that depend on this area as a vital stopover on their migratory journeys from as far away as Australia and New Zealand to breeding grounds in Arctic Russia and Alaska.

The inscription of the "Getbol", the Korean name for tidal flats, was announced during the World Heritage Committee meeting held in Fuzhou City, China and follows over 10 years of intensive preparation by the Korean authorities. The four sites included in the Phase I inscription of Seocheon Getbol, Gochang Getbol,

Shinan Getbol and Boseong-Suncheon Getbol, collectively cover over 128,000 hectares of coastal wetlands in the Southwestern part of the country. Additional areas will be added as part of a Phase II nomination.

The shallow waters in the Yellow Sea region jointly shared by China, DPR Korea and RO Korea hold some of the largest and most spectacular intertidal wetlands in the world. These sites support exceptionally rich biodiversity but are best known for some of the largest congregations of migratory waterbirds in eastern Asia, many of which are globally threatened by habitat loss along their migratory pathways, collectively known as the East Asian – Australasian Flyway. Up to 100,000 shorebirds use the mudflats around Yubu island in the Seocheon Getbol during migration, including the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the Endangered Far Eastern Curlew. Other species, such as Vulnerable Saunders's Gull and Endangered Black-faced Spoonbill stay to nest in the coastal wetlands of the Yellow Sea.

"The inscription of the Getbol in the World Heritage List will mark a great shift of paradigm for Getbol tidal flats protection and management policy, as well as the increasing public awareness. The Getbol's World Heritage inscription means that the tidal flats managed by locals become a shared global property for the next generation of all humanity. All stakeholders involved with the Getbol will make the best effort to complete its Phase II extension and even further in the future." said Dr. Kyong-O Moon, the Secretary-General of the Korea Getbol World Heritage Promotion Team.

"The Korean Getbol inscription complements the "The Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China (Phase I)" World Heritage Site listed in 2019 (see Tattler December 2019 Ed.). It will strengthen international collaboration, particularly in the vision of transboundary joint efforts with China and DPR Korea, to conserve the wetlands of the Yellow Sea region, the irreplaceable migration hub for migratory waterbirds shared by the 22 countries in the Flyway," said Mr. Doug Watkins, Chief Executive of EAAFP, an international partnership to conserve migratory waterbirds along the Flyway.

“The UNESCO World Heritage Convention offers an exceptionally powerful framework to secure the future of globally important biodiversity. The BirdLife International Partnership look forward to working closely with the EAAFP and IUCN to secure the same status for the remaining such areas of the Yellow Sea, and to support the authorities to ensure all receive the best possible management for birds and people.” said Dr. Ding Li Yong, BirdLife International (Asia Division) Flyways Coordinator.

### Maureen Christie celebrated for her tireless shorebird work

AWSG Committee Member Maureen Christie has been honoured three times for her shorebird work since the last issue of Tattler.

On 3 June 2021, during a function in Adelaide, Maureen was named as one of the Finalists for Conservation SA's Unsung Hero Award 2021. This award is a category of the South Australian Environment Awards, which are hosted by the Conservation Council of South Australia. The award recognises South Australians who have a long-standing record and commitment to protecting the environment.

Maureen has been volunteering full time for the environment and in community education for almost 27 years – since her early retirement in 1994. She became involved in shorebird work in 1995 during a visit of the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) to South Australia. By 2001, shorebird conservation, community education and research had become the centre of Maureen's activities. Maureen has been active in the AWSG and the VWSG, and in 2005, she initiated the founding of Friends of Shorebirds SE (FoSSE), which is based in the Southeast of South Australia. Maureen's sustained efforts have raised public awareness of shorebirds and have achieved tangible results for shorebird conservation through research, on-ground management actions, and shaping of policy.

One of Maureen's significant achievements is FoSSE's beach-wrack campaign 2014–2016. Maureen was the driving force behind this campaign, which ultimately succeeded at Administrative Appeals Tribunal level.



*From left to right: Minister for Human Services Michelle Lensink MLC, Maureen Christie, Governor Frances Adamson AC during the 2021 SA Women's Honour Roll ceremony on 17/11/2021 (photo: Petra Hanke)*

FoSSE, based on long-term data collected by the VWSG and the AWSG, and with advice of colleagues from both groups, achieved a consent agreement that has ensured adequate protection in the South Australian fisheries policy for the shorebird species that would otherwise have been negatively impacted by the collection of beach-cast marine algae.

On 28 August 2021, during the AGM of the VWSG, conducted via Zoom, Maureen was awarded the VWSG Clive Minton Medallion 2021. This prize had been established in 2019 to honour Clive Minton's tremendous input into the group and is awarded annually to a member for their outstanding contributions. Maureen is the third recipient of the Medallion, after Roz Jessop (2019) and Ken Gosbell (2020).

On 17 November 2021, Maureen was included in the 2021 South Australian Women's Honour Roll in a ceremony at Government House as one of 19 awardees. Maureen was acknowledged for her work as an environmental champion and community educator.

Congratulations, Maureen!

Petra Hanke

## Mown Down (4WD on Brownlow Beach)

A band of weary travellers resting on the beach is run down by a vehicle speeding along the sand. Twenty of them were killed. It's not a plot-line for the next Mad Max movie – it really happened, on Brownlow Beach on Kangaroo Island. The travellers were Red-necked Stints, resting up before their imminent migration back to their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere. According to BirdLife Australia, they were conserving valuable energy in preparation for their long-haul flight.

"It's certainly not illegal to drive vehicles along many South Australian beaches, but there are strict rules surrounding the activity and encounters with wildlife," said Dr Grainne Maguire, BirdLife Australia's Coastal Birds Program Leader. "However, the incident occurred in an area where vehicles are prohibited, but where signage is inadequate."

"The regulations are meaningless unless drivers are made aware of them through clear and obvious signage, and they are properly enforced."

The dead birds were Red-necked Stints, one of about 35 species of migratory shorebirds that occur in Australia each summer.

"These tiny birds fly up to 10,000 kilometres from Australia to return to their breeding grounds in Siberia, and they expend an enormous amount of energy to get there," Dr Maguire said. "To be mown down like this, just as they were ready to go, is a real tragedy."

Unfortunately, it's a scenario that is regularly played out on beaches along South Australia's coastline, where many of Australia's migratory shorebirds occur over the summer months. Even if birds on the beach are not run down like the stints were, the levels of disturbance they experience have dire consequences for their survival. If these birds fall short of the energy required to fly tens of thousands of kilometres to the Northern hemisphere, they won't breed that year, or worse – die en route.

"Drivers need better awareness of the impacts of beach driving to make informed decisions. Flushing a bird may seem minor, but how many times has that bird already been flushed when trying to feed? Will it make the critical weight for

its migration? It's really a matter of life and death for these birds living on the beach."

"And it's not just migratory shorebirds that experience this disruption," Dr Maguire continued. "There are resident shorebirds such as Hooded Plovers, oystercatchers, Fairy Terns and Red-capped Plovers – which live on our beaches year-round and also need to breed there. Their highly camouflaged eggs and chicks are even more vulnerable to being driven over, as they cannot fly from harm's way."

Disturbance on the beach is the number one reason several of South Australia's coastal birds are classified as threatened species.

Although the situation with the stints on Brownlow Beach can't be undone, BirdLife Australia believes better education and enforcement of the regulations would make it less likely to happen again. After all, beaches are not merely our playground but are unique and invaluable habitats for some of Australia's most threatened birds.

## New Zealand National Partnership Meeting report

As part of the recent 2021 New Zealand Bird Conference held in Thames the opportunity was taken to have a short informal National Partnership meeting. Present were Bruce McKinlay (Government representative), William Perry, David Lawrie, Keith Woodley, and Gillian Vaughan (Pūkoro Miramira Naturalists' Trust), David Melville (EAAFP Technical subcommittee) and Phil Battley (Massey University).

As part of the conference and side conversations, we discussed ongoing engagement between Pūkoro Miramira Naturalists' Trust (PMNT) and colleagues in DPR Korea. There is a general frustration in New Zealand about the current difficulties of engaging with colleagues in East Asia and this was discussed in the meeting. It is recognized that maintaining face-to-face engagement to protect wetlands in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway is very important but with current travel restrictions almost impossible.

Adrian Riegen presented an overview the story of DPR Korea engagement by PMNT at the Conference. The Meeting discussed the future of





*(From left) Phil Battley, Gillian Vaughan, Keith Woodley, Bruce McKinlay, William Perry, Adrian Riegen, David Melville David Lawrie – Participants in the New Zealand National Partnership Meeting held in June 2021. Photo Courtesy: Michael Szabo.*

this work and how to promote engagement with the Government of DPR Korea.

As part of the Conference, Phil Battley updated the Partnership meeting on the recent tracking projects of Bar-tailed Godwits from New Zealand to East Asia. His analysis has shown the complexity of decisions made by godwits in determining when and how they migrate. Phil's comment was that what we might interpret as an impact of global change could equally be driven by weather events. The current research will be ongoing in New Zealand for a number of years. Coordination of observations is required. If you wish to read further [here] is a copy of the abstracts for these and other talks at the conference.

The Partnership also discussed progress on the World Heritage nominations being led by the Government of the Republic of Korea. The recent tracking results highlight the use of and importance of the Yellow Sea coast of the Republic of Korea for migratory waterbirds.

The meeting was also an opportunity to catch up on the NZ National Wader Count project and confirm the intention to maintain this into the

future and look for options to expand coverage. A major analysis of the data from this project was completed and published in January. 'Distribution and numbers of waders in New Zealand, 2005-2019 and Numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica bauri*) in New Zealand and Australia during the austral summer of 2019-2020.

Colleagues from PMNT reported on their ongoing research into the movement of Pacific Golden Plover (also known in New Zealand as Kuriri). During 2020 they were able to track a second Kuriri, 'Ra', north via Japan to Alaska, and south via Hawaii and the Solomon Islands as far as Vanuatu before the battery ran out. But in the summer just gone, difficult conditions and tricky birds meant we didn't catch anymore.

Partners were appreciative of the opportunity to catch up and check on progress with our various projects. At other times of the year, we are spread widely across the country and so organizing such a meeting is a lot more difficult.

Article prepared by Bruce McKinlay, New Zealand Representative to EAAFP

## Insights into migration and distribution of Latham's Snipe

Latham's Snipe is one of three *Gallinago* species that occur in Australia. Latham's Snipe differs from the other two species in having a global distribution entirely confined to the eastern Australian – Japanese – eastern Russian region.

While on the breeding grounds in Japan and Russia, Latham's Snipe are very visible and are well known for their loud and spectacular displays flights and tail “drumming”. However, in Australia, Latham's Snipe are quiet and retiring, hiding in thickly vegetated wetlands during the day and emerging at night to forage in open muddy and wet areas.

This behavioural characteristic of Latham's Snipe in Australia makes monitoring challenging. As a consequence, much less is known about them than many of the other migratory waders visiting Australia.

The Latham's Snipe Project had its humble beginnings in 2014, after a legal case resulted in a housing development at a significant snipe site in Port Fairy, south-west Victoria. Pilot surveys conducted there in 2014-2015 found snipe mostly using urban wetlands despite a roughly equal number of urban and non-urban survey sites. Through the efforts of many volunteers, the monitoring program has expanded in subsequent years to around 300 monitoring sites across all the six eastern Australian states and territories. Surveys are conducted three times a year over the non-breeding season (September, November and January) and are ongoing.



*A group of snipe at the Venus Bay national survey site on the Victorian coast, where one of the Japanese tagged snipe stopped in September 2021. Photo credit: Ryan Barnaby Twitter: @barnsbirds*

Around the same time as the Latham's Snipe Project started, the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ) initiated a research and survey program on Latham's Snipe in Hokkaido, northern Japan. The focus of their work has been surveys during the breeding season to obtain a census of the population size. The WBSJ have also focused on satellite tracking to determine migration routes between Japan and Australia.

The first attempts at obtaining migration data from Australian tagged snipe were in Port Fairy. Between 2015 and 2016, 39 geolocators were deployed, but only two were successfully retrieved (and only one had data representing a full migration track). Nevertheless, that one migration track provided unexpected and valuable information showing the fast, over-ocean flight of the snipe T0 direct from northern Japan to Queensland (Hansen et al. 2016). A further 15 geolocators were deployed in Canberra, resulting in one retrieval, adding to the intriguing findings from T0. Both the Port Fairy bird and the Canberra bird staged for nearly 2 months on northward migration, somewhere in south-east Queensland. The Canberra bird travelled via the main Japanese island of Honshu on northward and southward migration.

Given the low retrieval rates of geolocators, the Latham's Snipe Project team decided to focus on satellite tracking. A trial using solar Platform Transmitter Terminals was undertaken in 2017, which did not produce much information except for an unexpected stopover record in Gwydir wetlands, Northern NSW. A subsequent trial with GPS devices in 2019 and 2020 was more revealing even though no full migration tracks were obtained. One bird staged in Gwydir wetlands and then two birds were tracked as far as Papua New Guinea where they staged in the highlands.

In 2021, the WBSJ conducted their own satellite tracking and in a satellite tracking first, obtained full southward migration tracks from three snipe tagged in Hokkaido. At the time of writing, two of those snipe were in New South Wales (one south of Armidale and the other in Sydney) and the third snipe was in the ACT alpine area. All three snipe flew direct over the Pacific Ocean to Papua New Guinea and Australia.

While the migration story is still emerging, we are fortunate to have obtained some good insights from the data collected so far. We have learned the location of stopover sites (many of which are in agricultural areas) and the distribution of staging areas (Figure 1). We also have clear evidence of direct migration flights over the Pacific Ocean between Australia and Japan.

The national snipe surveys in Australia have provided equally interesting insights into the distribution and abundance of Latham's Snipe, particularly in the southern states where the monitoring effort has been greatest (Figure 2). Although anecdotal reports from hunters during the 20th century suggest population sizes of snipe in their hundreds to thousands, the typical "large" population in current times is around 50-150 snipe. There are thirteen sites with at least

one record of 80+ snipe, and there are 60 sites with one or more records  $\geq 18$  snipe. The number 18 reflects sites that are nationally significant under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

With increasing survey effort over time there has, perhaps not surprisingly, been larger numbers of snipe recorded (Figure 3). As of January 2021, there have been 233 sites surveyed more than once and 160 of these were in urban areas. Snipe are more frequently recorded in urban wetlands than non-urban wetlands, and 68% of sites supporting nationally important numbers of snipe are in urban areas. Disturbingly, only eight of these "nationally important" sites have any formal protection, and 92% of all snipe recorded over the whole monitoring period were in unprotected wetlands. This is a cause for concern as

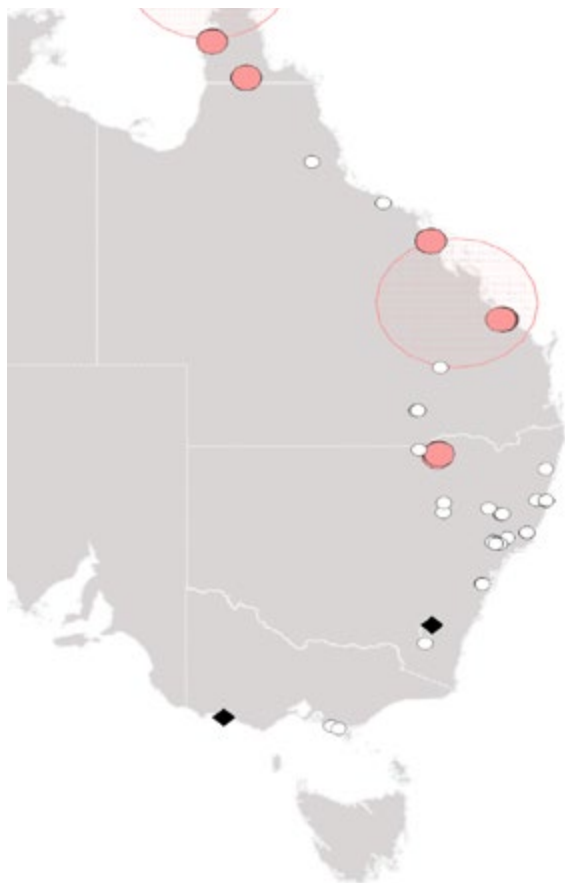


Figure 1. Latham's Snipe stopover and staging locations obtained from migration tracking using satellite transmitters and light-level geolocators. Large pink dots are staging locations (2+ weeks), white dots are stopover locations (usually <1 week) and black diamonds are catching / terminus locations. The large pink stippled circles indicate regions where staging has been detected using geolocator data (up to 2 months). Map compiled based on Wild Bird Society of Japan and Latham's Snipe Project tracking data.



Figure 2. Location of Latham's Snipe national monitoring sites in eastern Australia. Large red triangles are sites with one or more records over 18 snipe, medium pink triangles are sites with 1 to 17 snipe, and small white triangles are sites where no snipe have been recorded.



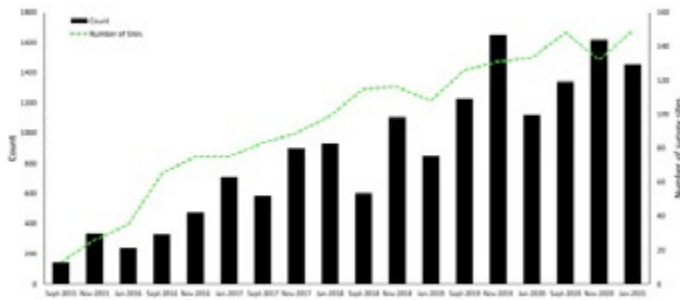


Figure 3. Total seasonal count of Latham's Snipe from September 2015 onwards, obtained during the national (Australian) snipe surveys.

unprotected urban sites are at a high risk of loss and / or degradation through land development.

The conservation of Latham's Snipe is likely to continue to prove challenging even as our knowledge about the species increases through the dedicated monitoring programs and satellite tracking studies. This is because of the tendency for snipe to use areas where humans wish to build housing or change their land management practices. The current shorebird area network in Australia incorporates very few significant populations of Latham's Snipe, and the Ramsar estate supports none. Therefore, we are likely to witness increasing conflicts between protection of snipe habitat and land use change in the future. The key solutions to this problem are awareness raising in land owners, and changes to local planning schemes and national legislation.

You can find out more about the Latham's Snipe Project at <https://lathamssnipeproject.wordpress.com/>

Birgita Hansen, URA Tatsuya, TAJIRI Hironobu

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## Shorebird enthusiast wins Sutherland Shire's Australia Day Award

### Environmental Citizen of the Year award winner for supporting shorebirds in Port Hacking

A Port Hacking shorebird enthusiast, Julie Keating, has studied shorebirds in the area for the past decade. She spends most of her time outdoors, monitoring the sands and mudflats at Port Hacking every day.

Through her captivating photography and videos, she has raised awareness of the shorebirds among residents, visitors, and advocates for protection of their habitat. Using social media, she is actively encouraging Sutherland Shire's interest in shorebirds. She also leads walking tours and is building a growing team of volunteers, helping them learn about the birds, and how to monitor numbers, movements, and behaviour.

She has contributed significant information to helping inform government research on development in shorebird habitat areas.

The person who nominated her said her "leadership in public information, education and advocacy is crucial to ensure that these incredible shorebirds find a safe and welcoming homes in Sutherland Shire".

The Critically Endangered Eastern Curlew is of particular concern. We know this, the largest migratory shorebird in the world, travels from the east coast of Australia to the Yellow Sea, between China and the Korean peninsula in a single flight of 10,000km taking more than a week of non-stop flying, after putting on more than half it's body weight in fat to achieve this feat before leaving Port Hacking. It will spend five or six weeks recovering on the tidal flats of the Yellow Sea and replenishing its body weight before flying to its Arctic breeding grounds.

The Eastern Curlew occurs only in our flyway, and about 75 per cent of the world's Eastern Curlews winter in Australia, so we have a particular responsibility to protect coastal wetlands. It is rarely seen inland. It breeds in Russia and north-eastern China. On passage, they are commonly seen in Japan, Korea and Borneo. Small numbers visit New Zealand.