



Letter to AWSG Members

With the new world of COVID 19, the AWSG Committee has been observing the requirements set in place to deal with the virus but has engaged nevertheless with a number of activities in relation to migratory shorebirds. I have outlined these below.

The 2020 - 2022 AWSG Committee

We now have a new AWSG Committee that came into operation on 1 July. I have attached the Committee composition (at [Annex A](#)) including some brief information about the members of the Committee. The Committee will continue to meet quarterly but by Zoom in the current world of COVID 19.

AWSG Membership

The Treasurer Birgita Hansen and I have been reviewing the current membership of AWSG and we have found a large number of what appear to be lapsed members. This may be due to AWSG members renewing their membership in line with their membership of BirdLife Australia which may happen over the twelve months of the calendar year. I am checking the situation with the BirdLife Australia membership area and hopefully this is the case. We would be most concerned to lose such a large number of our members.

We would encourage any members who may have forgotten to renew their membership to do so as you are a valued part of our organisation. As a reminder, those members of AWSG, who are not members of BirdLife Australia, should renew their membership on 1 January of each year

AWSG NWA2020 Shorebird and Tern Expedition

The AWSG NWA2020 Shorebird and Tern Expedition, conducted in February 2020, was the first one conducted since 1981 without Dr Clive Minton who passed away on 6 November 2019. Clive had contributed his usual enthusiasm and organisational skills to the preparation of the 2020 Expedition and liaison with potential expedition members, local land holders and indigenous groups. From this groundwork the expedition leaders were able to pick up the threads and continue with the core research objectives. Satellite tracking was put on hold for this year as Clive was instrumental in obtaining funding for this project and there was insufficient time available to obtain the necessary funding to order the transmitters. Project objectives were met, and the expeditioners are thanked for taking initiative and 'stepping up' in Clive's absence to make the expedition a great success. Our thanks are also due to the Queensland Wader Studies Group and the WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions for their support for the Expedition. It was regrettable that the Chinese participants who were to take part in the Expedition were unable to do so due to COVID 19 and the travel restrictions imposed. A full report on the Expedition will be published in the next ***Stilt***.

Migrations of the Oriental Pratincole (by Grace Maglio and Amanda Lilleyman)

The Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*) is the most numerous migratory shorebird on the Australian non-breeding grounds. However, there is an almost complete lack of knowledge of this species, not only in terms of movements within Australia but also there was very limited information about migration routes and breeding sites. Over the last two years, the AWSG has led world-first research on the tracking of this species. The team have discovered the migration paths of the individuals, including one bird that crossed over from the East Asian-Australasian Flyway to the Central Asian Flyway.

From our tracking, we know that Oriental Pratincole spend less than 12 weeks in Australia for the non-breeding season. This differs from many other migratory shorebirds in the flyway and we are yet to understand the drivers that influence the movement of these birds. Where are the millions of pratincoles (there were 2.88 million counted in February 2004) that were once counted along Eighty-mile Beach?

We have many more questions about these birds that we would like to answer, but to do this, we need to track more individuals so we can confirm the migratory movements of this species. We are planning the next phase of the project to involve observational studies of nesting birds and a comparison of threats that birds face across the expansive breeding grounds where Oriental Pratincole are found.

The Oriental Pratincole project will receive funding of \$13,000 through a very generous donation from artists engaged in the Overwintering Project which aims to raise awareness for migratory shorebirds and their habitat through artistic works. The funds come from the sale of original prints by artists from all around Australia and some from New Zealand that have been sold at exhibitions in 2019. We are so grateful for the support that the artists have provided to the project by donating their works and to galleries for foregoing commissions to allow for the generous donation. Special thanks are due to Kate Gorringe-Smith who coordinated the Overwintering Project.

Shorebird Monitoring around Australia

The Shorebirds 2020 project (S2020) was a joint initiative of AWSG and Birds Australia established in 2007. In 1981 AWSG initiated counts of shorebirds at selected sites and has been a major driver for shorebird counting since then. The program has now come to an end and has been replaced by the National Shorebird Monitoring Program. We have a vast network of around 1600 volunteers who have played a crucial role in and contributed significantly to monitoring of shorebirds since inception of the project and their monitoring has been seamlessly transitioned into the National Shorebird Monitoring program. National Shorebird Monitoring continues to be a critical undertaking, providing unique nation-wide information on the state of Australia's shorebirds from 520 shorebird areas.

BirdLife and AWSG are aiming to (re)appoint state coordinators in all Australian states and territories in 2020 to install a decentralised network to coordinate count efforts, close survey gaps and to address the demographic problem of an aging counter population by increased recruitment efforts through events and workshops. Several key publications have been revised and reprinted, such as the Shorebird ID Booklet and a new Wetland Bird ID Booklet (refer to <http://birdlife.org.au/sb-monitoring> and download access to booklets here <http://birdlife.org.au/projects/shorebirds-2020/counter-resources>).

National Directory of Important Habitat for Migratory Shorebirds – The 1400-page Directory was reviewed by the Australian states and territories and completed in April 2020 by BirdLife Australia staff. The Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment is now proceeding to prepare publication of the Directory in file format as an online resource. It will constitute a key resource for researchers, conservation groups and decision-makers throughout Australia and the flyway, identifying nationally and internationally important migratory shorebird areas around the continent on the basis of the most up-to-date count data from the National Shorebird Monitoring and all other sources accessible. Once available you may like to browse the Directory to be informed about the nationally and internationally important migratory shorebird areas in your area(s).

Site Action Plans

Together with the relevant stakeholders, BirdLife Australia has finalised drafts of eleven Site Action Plans for priority internationally and nationally significant habitat areas for migratory shorebirds in South Australia. These action plans have been produced in collaboration with land managers, stakeholders and communities to identify threats and key management needs for migratory shorebirds at specific sites. Site Action Plans are now becoming a significant tool in BirdLife Australia's Migratory Shorebird Program portfolio to facilitate concrete change for migratory shorebirds at specific sites.

Update on the work of the Global Flyway Network

The Global Flyway Network had a highly successful 2019 spring/northward migration season in Bohai Bay and AWSG continued to support this collaborative arrangement with A\$5,000. A total of 38,644 re-sightings were recorded and of these 10,359 were from the AWSG work in NWA. 6,057 from the Victorian Wader Studies Group (VWSG) project with much smaller numbers from Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia and Northern Territory. The highest number from overseas projects was New Zealand with 5,248. Unsurprisingly GFN-Australia were not in Bohai in 2020.

Dry season catching coordinated by Chris Hassell continued in the collaborative project between GFN and AWSG. In addition to the data collection the project has a huge outreach introducing a few hundred people to shorebird research including many children who write wonderful accounts of their experiences. <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/latest-news/>

AWSG Scientific Committee

The AWSG Scientific Committee, chaired by Danny Rogers, maintained its scientific program in North-western Australia, with banding expeditions in February 2019 and 2020 and continuation of the ongoing collaboration with the Global Flyways Network on studies of survival of north-western Australian Shorebirds. The MYSMA (**M**onitoring **Y**ellow **S**ea **M**igrants in **A**ustralia) project continued the series of large-scale repeatable shorebird counts that have been carried out by the AWSG in two of Australia's premier shorebird sites (Roebuck Bay and Eighty Mile Beach) since 2004; MYSMA surveys were carried in June and December 2019. A major report on results from the MYSMA program was completed, reviewing trends in north-western Australia since 2004 and recommending future directions for the monitoring program. The report will be published later this year.

Collaborations with universities and other research organisations led to several publications making use of AWSG data. The Scientific Committee continued its basic work of overseeing

requests for AWSG data. A key activity of the Committee over the next few months is completing a review of the shorebird banding program in north-western Australia.

Banding and Leg-flagging Databases

With financial support from the Wettenhall Small Grants program awarded to the VWSG and logistic support from Deakin University, Aaron Spence and Marcel Klaassen have started transferring all VWSG and AWSG banding databases to a web-based platform. This move, including transferring both the metal-band and the flag-sighting databases, has enabled VWSG and AWSG to better interrogate and present over 40 years of data. Although there is still some flag-sighting data to be transferred and the functionality of the platform requires further development, already now various people have started working with the online data portal. This has been a major project run by Marcel and we are delighted that the invaluable data that have been collected over such a long time is now providing a valuable tool for many purposes.

This has for instance resulted in regular species summaries depicting recruitment and age profiles (e.g. https://vhost2009.hosted-sites.deakin.edu.au/r_reports/AWSGreport/AWSG-banding-data-presentation-20191029.html and https://vhost2009.hosted-sites.deakin.edu.au/r_reports/VWSGreport/VWSG-banding-data-presentation-20191029.html), and the whereabouts of flagged individuals (e.g. https://vhost2009.hosted-sites.deakin.edu.au/r_reports/PLFreports/PlainFlagsOverview.html). Also, the potential for other overviews to be generated and readily shared with the group and the wider public through the internet has now been improved dramatically.

AWSG Publications

The editor of ***Tattler*** Phil Straw on philstraw@avifaunaresearch.com is currently preparing the next edition of ***Tattler***. Phil would welcome any items that members consider would be appropriate to include in ***Tattler*** so please contact Phil with your ideas.

The 2019 issue of ***Stilt*** is in the last stages of finalisation and we are hoping it will be available in the next couple of months.

We would like to welcome Imogen Warren as the new AWSG ***Stilt*** Editor. Imogen lives in the Manawatu Ramsar site in New Zealand, has a keen interest in waders and also in photography (imogenwarrenphotography.net). She is involved with Birds NZ and comes to the AWSG with lots of experience in editing and proof reading. Her experience will bring a fresh approach to ***Stilt***, and the committee and ***Stilt*** editorial board are delighted that she has taken on the role. We look forward to a very productive working relationship with her.

We would also like to assure authors awaiting their PDF proofs for manuscripts submitted to ***Stilt*** last year that the issue is in its final production stages and should be available in the next few weeks. We apologise to those authors for the extended delay in receiving their published manuscripts.

Meeting of the Partners (MOP) of the EAAFP

The 11th Meeting of the Partners of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) is scheduled to be held in Brisbane from 14 to 19 March 2021, co-hosted by the Australian Government and BirdLife Australia. However, in view of the COVID19 restrictions on travels, the future timing of the Conference will be assessed later in the year

Australasian Shorebird Conference (ASC)

The next ASC, to be hosted by the QWSG and the AWSG, is also scheduled for March 2021 in Brisbane following the Meeting of the Partners of the EAAFP. A joint Committee formed to plan the ASC is progressing the arrangements for the Conference and its program and more information about the program, speakers and other arrangements for the Conference will be provided at a later date.

Finally, I encourage members to raise any issues or items that they would like the Committee to consider and you can do this by letting me know via my email address (alisonrf@iinet.net.au).

Alison Russell-French OAM
Chair, AWSG

8 July 2020

[Click here for Annex A](#) - AWSG committee in .pdf form