Tattler

Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways & Australian Shorebirds Monitoring

No. 53 July 2024

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Editor's note:

This is yet another delayed edition of Tattler, for a variety of reasons.

The production of a document suitable for printing using the standard Adobe InDesign software has been a challenge faced by previous editors in the past couple of years, requiring specialist assistance, and more recently myself including this issue. Now I am taking charge. Once I have full control, I will be able to return to quarterly production plus any special editions when the occasion crops up.

Some welcome breaking news is the announcement of the first EAAFP Flyway Science Symposium, scheduled to take place in Beijing, China from 17 to 18 October 2024. Under the theme "Bridging Flyway Science Across the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF)", the symposium will bring together members of the Technical Sub-committee (TSc), Working Groups, and Task Forces of the EAAFP, alongside invited scientists, researchers and experts from various regions and disciplines to share pioneering studies and foster a comprehensive understanding of existing and emerging conservation threats and needs across the flyway that advancements in science and technology could address. Participants are expected to explore ways to strengthen and promote flyway-wide conservation efforts for migratory waterbirds and wetland habitats through research and technological solutions.

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www.awsg.org.au

A Special Interest Group of BirdLife Australia

Editorial

The article *Supporting recovery and management of migratory shorebirds in Australia:*

Some exiting research and analysis has produced some remarkable results about shorebird population trends by researchers from the University of Queensland and Deakin University. Focusing on 15 migratory shorebird taxa whose conservation status is currently being reassessed they analysed 28 years of monitoring data and were able to estimate the population trend for 14 of the 15 species with some remarkable results. What excites me most is that when summerised into a series of guidelines for managers so they can befit from experience of others. The shorebird management handbook will help give managers access to the information they need to achieve conservation throughout the East Asian Australasian Flyway with production scheduled for 2026. See the link to a report in the article.
The second article is a report of the World Coastal Forum Conference held in China in September 2023. With over 1,000 participants from government departments, local governments and relevant international organisations, academic institutions, business and youth representatives from 34 countries from around the world.
Key outcomes include the WCF Coastal Call to Action and updates on progress in development of the WCF's two flagship knowledge products, the State of the World's Coastal Ecosystems Report and the World Coastal Ecosystem Conservation Toolkit. Given the threats to wetlands internationally the WCF is a welcome approach.

Given that the October edition of *Tattler* will be the 30th anniversary of *The Tattler,* (known as *Tattler* since 2006), I am hoping to produce regular issues of *Tattler* now that I am finally able to format it in the required format whether is professionally printed or online versions.

Supporting recovery and management of migratory shorebirds in Australia

Readers of *Tattler* will be well aware of the rapid declines of shorebirds in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. Last year, a full reanalysis of the national population trends for 15 species undertaken by Tatsuya Amano and Andrew Rogers showed that these declines were continuing for some, but starting to slow down for others. For example, the Eastern Curlew had been rapidly declining for decades, but has stabilized within the last 10 years, showing no further significant decline. A report from this project, which was funded by the Australian Government through the National Environmental Science Program's Marine and Coastal hub, is available at https://www.nespmarinecoastal.edu.au/publication/australias-migratory-shorebirds-trends-and-prospects/. It must be noted that while the declines appear to have stabilized for some species, we detected no evidence of recovery for any species.

In response to these results, the Australian Government funded a follow-up project to try to find out why some species have stopped declining, and to understand which kinds of conservation actions have proven most useful for shorebirds in our flyway. Researchers from the University of Queensland and Deakin University have teamed up to work together on this. The results might help us identify what type of management works best in promoting shorebird recovery. The new project will determine survival rates and reproductive output for several shorebird populations, enabling an understanding of which factors might be important for their further recovery. We will analyse more than one million shorebird banding and sighting records to reproductive output and survival for key shorebird populations. Check out <http://www.birdmark.net> for frequently updated information. This will help us understand what factors are leading to declines or stabilization in different shorebird species.

The project will also analyse which conservation actions for shorebirds have been particularly effective. For example, when managers have tried an action, such as limiting off-leash dog access, creating artificial roosting sites, or controlling weeds threatening to choke a roost site, how often has that management been successful? How much did it cost? And what were the difficulties encountered along the way? We will summarise all of this conservation evidence into a series of guidelines for managers, so they can benefit from the experiences of others. This shorebird management handbook will help give managers access to the information they need to achieve conservation throughout the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. Production of the handbook is scheduled for 2026.

We would love to hear from any managers of shorebird habitats keen to participate in this process and to share their knowledge on which actions have worked well (and which ones have not!). We will be holding a series of workshops in late 2024 and early 2025 and we are really keen to start building a network of interested folks. For any further information on the project, or to reach out with ideas or to let us know you are keen to contribute, please email Richard Fuller on r.fuller@uq.edu.au

Project staff: Tatsuya Amano and Richard Fuller (University of Queensland); Marcel Klaassen, Toby Ross, Sara Ryding, Kay Critchell and Aaron Spence (Deakin University). Report of the 2023 World Coastal Forum Conference, September 2023

Report of the 2023 World Coastal Forum Conference

The first global event of the newly established World Coastal Forum was held in Yancheng City, Jiangsu Province in China between 25 and 27 September 2023, with the theme “Our Coasts: Harmony between People and Nature”. Over 1,000 participants from government departments, local governments, UN-related agencies, relevant international organizations, academic institutions, business and youth representatives from 34 countries from around the world participated, mainly in person.

The Conference was jointly hosted by the People’s Government of Jiangsu Province, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) of China, and the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA) of China and was supported by the World Coastal Forum Coordination Group facilitated by Eco Foundation Global and BirdLife International, including representatives from government agencies, international conventions, non-government organisations and advisors.

The World Coastal Forum Partnership Initiative was launched, with 21 organizations becoming partners. This initiative is intended to engage like-minded stakeholders to develop and initiate priority actions in line with the WCF’s mission and the vision. The People’s Government of Jiangsu Province, the MNR, and the NFGA signed a “Cooperation Framework Agreement for Hosting the World Coastal Forum” to enhance coastal ecosystem conservation and sustainable development between government agencies and local stakeholders.

The Conference released key outcomes, including the WCF **Coastal Call to Action** and updates on progress in development of the WCF’s two flagship knowledge products, the State of the World’s Coastal Ecosystems Report and the World Coastal Ecosystem Conservation Toolkit.

Furthermore, the event was used to launch an English version of the “Blue Book of China’s Ecological Protection Red Line (2023)” and the publication “International Applications of Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction in Coastal Areas”.

During the Conference, four thematic plenaries and more than ten parallel workshops were held under themes such as addressing challenges in coastal wetland conservation and protection; promoting coastal conservation knowledge and best practices; ensuring sustainable development in coastal regions; and raising awareness and engaging coastal communities, decision-makers, business leaders and other key stakeholders in coastal ecosystem conservation. These discussions focused on developing a vision and strategies for collaborative management in coastal regions.

The Conference also provided a perfect opportunity for multiple parallel meetings including a 2023 WCF Youth Forum, Global Coastal Wetland Cities Alliance Round Table, Judicial Protection of Coastal Wetlands in China, Biodiversity-friendly friendly urban development and Coastal Low-carbon Territory Space Optimization and Sustainable Development that brought together multiple stakeholders from China and abroad.

Our local host **Yancheng City** invited research topics for international cooperation projects and demonstration actions to promote international cooperation and exchanges on coastal wetland conservation and address the practical challenges and urgent needs of coastal wetland conservation and management.

The World Coastal Forum International Advisory Meeting held on 26 September 2023 to promote international cooperation and collaboration to address the challenges facing coastal ecosystems, emphasized the importance of science and evidence-based action in coastal resource management.

Additionally, special exhibitions were organized during the Conference, including the Yellow Sea Wetland Museum, bird-watching equipment exhibits, and cultural and creative displays, as well as awards for nature notes and paintings to future coastal leaders, all aimed at raising public awareness of ecological conservation.

The Conference participants expressed their appreciation and gratitude for the work of the hosts and organisers. They recognised this opportunity to further explore and lead the way for coastal ecosystem protection, sustainable management and restoration, also as a contribution to the harmonious coexistence of people and nature in coastal regions around the world.

A personal contribution at the WCF by Terry Townsend, representing the Paulson Institute at the World Coastal Forum in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province:

"I was honoured to be invited to participate in a panel discussion at a side meeting of Prosecutors from all of China's coastal provinces. One of the prosecutors asked, 'what is the single thing we can do to support migratory birds?' My answer? 'Please control the sale of mist nets; a small action that could save the lives of millions of migratory birds every year'. I've been invited to submit a short background paper and, although I'll be surprised if this is acted on immediately, hopefully it will at least begin a conversation and, ideally, the commissioning of a research paper on the scale of the issue and the potential to introduce some kind of licensing system to limit the sale of these almost invisible indiscriminate killers for scientific purposes only".

WCF: A personal perspective from the editor:

From my perspective this was the most important conference since the 'Project Mar Conference' held in the south of France in 1962 under the leadership of Luc Hoffmann, which was ratified as the 'Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat' in the town of Ramsar in Iran.
I was present at the Mar Conference (as a member of the support staff), but unfortunately not the WCF!

How can we further advance migratory shorebird conservation through international agreements?

By: Ed Gallo-Cajiao (Colorado State University, e.gallocajiao@colostate.edu), Tiffany H. Morrison (James Cook University and The University of Melbourne), Richard A. Fuller (The University of Queensland)

International agreements are a well-known fixture of migratory shorebird conservation in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF), so a look at them may provide clues to inform ways to advance their conservation. There are now 28 such international agreements in the EAAF (Gallo-Cajiao et al. 2019). The first was the US-Japan Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Birds, signed all the way back in 1972. Following this landmark agreement, 10 bilateral agreements have been developed in the EAAF, of which Australia has signed three, involving Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea. Other agreements include the Convention on Migratory Species, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFFP), to name but a few.

Against this backdrop, a key question relevant to conservation is whether this set of agreements covers the full life cycle of migratory shorebirds within the flyway relative to their threats. With two pressing and imminent threats to migratory shorebirds in the EAAF, namely habitat loss and hunting, we studied what such agreements cover, how they enable coordination, as well as how well they protect the flyway by country and shorebirds' migratory cycle (Gallo-Cajiao et al. 2024).

Encouragingly, we found that agreements for addressing habitat loss and hunting cover the entire flyway, albeit with some variation. First, there are more agreements for habitat conservation than for hunting management. Second, agreements for habitat conservation include a variety of members, such as national governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations, whereas members were restricted to national governments in the case of agreements for hunting management. Third, the agreements around habitat conservation were built into a strong web of connections among members, but those for hunting management were much sparser. The EAAFP emerged as the most central agreement in the flyway, and notably there was no agreement in place allowing for flyway-wide coordination of hunting management. Lastly, agreements for habitat conservation covered more thoroughly the

migratory cycle of shorebirds than those focused on hunting management.

Many of the agreements have emerged as a response to conservation pressures, such as coastal reclamation. Consequently, it may perhaps be no coincidence that some of those agreements have converged around the Yellow Sea in recent times. However, it is important to acknowledge that each new agreement draws personal energy, political attention, and financial resources for negotiation. So, we should ask if any additional agreements are worthwhile, considering there are already 19 agreements for habitat conservation and 16 for hunting management within this flyway.

We recommend, based on these results, that the issue of habitat conservation requires no further agreements, but does need a much stronger focus on implementation. Specifically, the EAAFP and associated 'Flyway Site Network' could be further expanded and implemented by focusing on ways to improve the management of each site that has been designated with the support of additional habitat conservation agreements, such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. In the case of hunting management, a central coordinating agreement is still lacking, which is a significant problem. Hunting management needs to account for flyway-wide mortality and quota allocations per country, and there is no mechanism as yet for achieving this in the EAAF. The two task forces on hunting currently in operation under the Convention on Migratory Species and the EAAFP are an important step towards filling this notable gap.

In short, a focus on additional site designation and improving site management for addressing habitat loss with the EAAFP as a centerpiece is recommended, while further advancing flyway-wide coordination for hunting management through the existing task forces would help address this threat more effectively.

Severe threat to Australian Ramsar site halted

BirdLife Australia are celebrating the news that an immensely irresponsible real-estate proposal which threatened critical habitat for migratory birds has been officially withdrawn after a decade of resistance from the Australian community and environmental organisations. The site of the proposal was Toondah Harbour near Brisbane, part of the internationally significant Moreton Bay wetland Ramsar area, a critical habitat for wildlife, including the Eastern Curlew.

The formal withdrawal follows the announcement from Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek that she intended to reject the proposal made by Walker Corporation, one of Australia's wealthiest real estate developers, citing unacceptable impacts to wildlife like the Critically Endangered Eastern Curlew and the internationally significant of the wetlands.

"This is a win for nature and a win for the community", said BirdLife Australia CEO, Kate Millar. "We are celebrating, but we are not resting. We've won this battle because of the sustained pressure and opposition from everyday Australians, led by a dedicated group of local nature lovers. This is a battle that should never have needed to be fought."

The impacts of the proposal were known in 2017 when former Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg rejected the advice from his own department that the proposal was "clearly unacceptable" and allowed it to proceed to the next stage of approval. Ms Millar said this kind of ministerial power is why our nature laws are broken. "It's currently far too easy for ministers to override Australia's nature laws, and that is simply seen as an invitation for some big businesses to undermine them."

The Albanese Government is currently reviewing Australia's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. Earlier this week, Minister Plibersek announced the establishment of an independent Environment Protection Agency (EPA), claiming the new body will have strong new powers to better protect nature. But environmental organisations, including BirdLife Australia are yet to be convinced.

"Australia's broken nature laws still need to be fixed, then properly enforced. Otherwise, the new EPA is being set up to fail," said Millar. "10 years of fighting for Toondah Harbour has shown us that the current Ministerial powers enable a way around the law. Allowing exemptions will not stop extinctions."

For now, members of the local community and environmental organisations, including BirdLife Australia, who've campaigned against Walker Corporation's proposal for a decade are breathing a sigh of relief. "We're thrilled," said Ms Millar. "We want to thank everyone who's worked so hard to get to this outcome. It's because of them that Toondah's wetlands and the birds they sustain will now remain protected."

Bohai Bay 2024 Update
Chris Hassell, Global Flyway Network

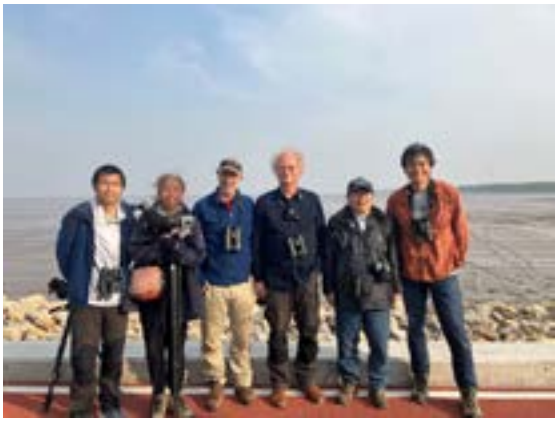
Well, that's a nice title to write after 5 years. I am back on the Luannan Coast with our work once again centered on the mudflats of Nanpu. Of course, we have had our colleague Katherine Leung keeping everything going in 2020, 21, and 23. And our excellent drivers and scanners Liu Jianfeng and Liu Yang who managed the work alone in 2022. The field team this year for the scanning is Katherine, The Lius and me. But the Nanpu mudflat and adjacent salt ponds have many visiting and regular Beijing Normal University (BNU) students studying various aspects of its ecology throughout the spring season. Katherine also had assistance from Fion Cheung for a few days at the start of the field work. Fion is from WWF- Hong Kong and they were involved in the set-up of the Luannan Zuidong Nanpu Provincial Wetland Park.

A thank you here too to the many and varied supporters who enables the work to continue during those years.

This year we are indebted, once again, to Professor Zhang Zhengwang of BNU for the funds to get Katherine and me to Nanpu and to cover our costs while we are here. Katherine and I are volunteering our time. Due to our fascination with the place and the hope for future studies to continue here.

It goes without saying that we thank Theunis Piersma for still giving his time to Nanpu and the EAAF more widely when he is stretched, pulled, and has requested falling on him constantly. Theunis too, I know, loves Nanpu.

Katherine arrived on the Nanpu seawall on April 29 and I joined on May 6 along with Professor Zhang, Theunis, Zhu Bingrun and Lei Weipan from BNU (below). We did an extensive exploration of the coast of Hangu the first day. My first few minutes on the receding tide found me counting 1,351 Asian Dowitchers, a very nice introduction.



The following 2 days were visits to the Zuidong and Nanpu seawall, and the new visitor centre of the Wetland Park. Then Theunis and BNU left for Beijing and Theunis back to The Netherlands.

Katherine, Liu Yang and I are now into the routine of early morning scanning on outgoing tides. Alarms going off at 03:30 isn't the greatest but once on the seawall, as the sunrises and the birds come back to the mud from their pond roosts it is magical, and the early morning light helps our work as we scan vigorously for marked birds from throughout the flyway.

The seawall is relatively quiet compared to last year. A few trucks rumbling by (of course) as a new platform for an oil derrick is constructed just behind the seawall. Not an ideal time to be building it during peak migration season but once the derricks are built, they are benign and don't disturb the birds at all.

This is just a brief introduction to the Global Flyway Network's 17th year (2007 to 2024 minus 2008) on the Nanpu Seawall. We will give more information on the Red Knots (spoiler – low but not the lowest ever numbers) in the next Update.

We wish you all in the north a productive spring and summer season and those in the south maybe enjoy a slight rest.

Few places on earth stay the same.

The images above are within 500 m of each other.

But sometimes change can be positive with carefully planned intervention. Spartina eradication has been a success.

Images below: 28 05 2018 vs 12 05 2024

And the Nanpu mudflats 'core area' looks as it ever did!

As all our regular readers will know we are here to focus on Red Knots. No bird, carrying a mark, passes our telescopes without being recorded but undoubtedly Red Knots remain our focus.

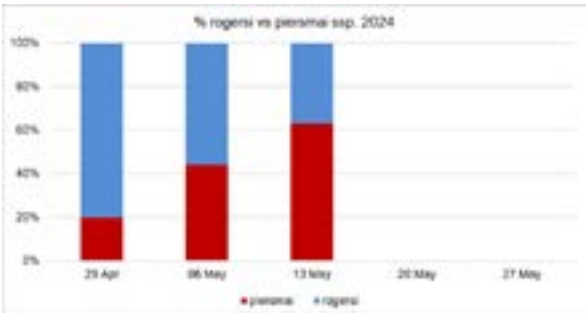
Three subspecies occur in the EAAF but one of them, *roselaari* only occurs as a breeding bird on the Wrangel Islands. *Roselaari*'s main non-breeding area is the Pacific coast of California and Mexico. Its migratory route does not pass through the Yellow Sea so, we don't encounter that subspecies here. The two subspecies that we see are *rogersi* and *piersmai*. *Rogersi* breeds in Chukotka in far north-east Russia and predominately spends the non-breeding season in New Zealand and south-east Australia. *Piersmai* breeds on the New Siberian Islands, Russia and its main non-breeding area is northern Australia with some birds in South-East Asia. Both subspecies can be found in each other's main non-breeding area.

When in full and fresh breeding plumage the two subspecies can be told apart if good views are obtained.

A 'typical' *rogersi*

A 'typical' *piersmai*
© Adrian Boyle

Rogersi's breeding grounds are snow-free and available to the birds before those of piersmai and this is reflected in their migratory schedules. We conduct daily assessments of the proportions of the two subspecies and this difference in timing is apparent from the simple graph shown below.



The x axis is 'week beginning'

Counting Red Knot here on the Luannan Coast is tricky (counting is tricky everywhere actually). We don't have the resources to do full counts of the area. So, we do an estimate every day when we are working at the core area of Nanpu. And, when we have time, we do more careful and structured counts. The numbers this year for the same date range as 2023 (the year with the lowest number 2010–2023) are considerably higher as shown below. This is still way below the peak numbers we recorded of 48,000 in 2018 and 2019. But the highest since 2020.

	2023	2024	estimate/count
13-May	1150	7000	estimate
14-May	1288	10000	estimate
15-May	1370	10000	estimate
16-May	1400	11830	count
17-May	900	_	no estimate or count
18-May	1800	11000	estimate
19-May	1300	11810	count

All numbers mentioned are point counts or day counts and don't have any statistical work done to them. If turnover analysis was done the total numbers using Nanpu during the full spring migratory season would of course be much higher.

The dramatically lower numbers between the years aren't associated with a corresponding drop in the Red Knot population throughout the EAAF. The Monitoring Yellow Sea Migrants in Australia (MYSMA) count programme that has been running for 20 years shows 'no significant change' in the north-west Australia Red Knot population. We think the fluctuating numbers are associated with the local food source here at Nanpu. The Red Knots feed predominately on Potamocorbula laevis (pots) and the numbers of this small mollusc fluctuate wildly. This year the density of pots is 'good' and considerably higher than in the previous 4 years (Hebo Peng pers. comm.) This matches with Red Knot counts mentioned above.

Additional data that we collect to help inform this story is abdominal profiles (AP). This is a visual assessment of the fat stores a bird has. We are not catching birds so we can't get their mass from weighing. AP is scored from 1 (very thin) to 5 (very fat). We take the AP score on all individually marked Red Knots if we obtain a suitable view. This year we are seeing more birds at AP 4 and 5 than during the same date range as last year, presumably a direct reflection of the more abundant pots in the mudflats.

The intriguing question to us is, how do the Red Knots know about the numbers, density, and availability of pots here in Nanpu year on year? And how do they 'decide' if there are enough pots for the numbers of birds present to allow them, as an individual, to gain enough weight for successful migration? And then logically they would need to decide to either stay at Nanpu or to move on to ensure the necessary weight gain? Birds are not on 'auto-pilot' driven by instinct

alone. They must make decisions throughout the year and some of these are critical to get correct.

All the figures and graphs in this update will be finalized in the Bohai 2024 final report but are presented here to give you all a feel for the Red Knot situation at present.

Chris Hassell, Katherine Leung, Liu Yang.
May 19 2024

Last update, June 2024

And before you know it it's all over. I am back in Broome; Kath is on her way to Chongming Dao today and the Liu's have jobs and kids/grandkids to keep them busy! So, we have said our goodbyes to the Nanpu seawall and the birds for 2024. We wish them well on the rest of their journey to breed and back to their non-breeding grounds where we hope to encounter them again.

The fieldwork was, as it always is, mixed. We had a terrible run of tides where birds were way out on the mud at first light when we arrived on the seawall. And then the day the birds were reasonably close the light was awful, and the mud looked like a pool of molten silver or mercury. Beautiful. But impossible to read flags or colour bands. We persisted with early morning starts and an afternoon trip to Hangu for very little data for 6 days. So, when finally, the tides and the light turned in our favour we were very pleased. And then we were getting up to 25 GFN colour bands per day on the mud. And when the birds were roosting in late afternoon light, and we could scan in the salt pond roost we got up to 33 with new colour band individuals still arriving every day. Plus of course all the other flags from throughout the EAAF and CAF that we record.

We also had with us for the whole time we were at Nanpu a receiver to try and download data from the Bluetooth tags on Great and Red Knots from the work in Roebuck Bay in October 2023. Some of the time we tied the receiver to a permanent sign on the seawall and sometimes carried it with us. Also, Tong Mu and Rainy Cai were scanning with us at Nanpu and at other sites in the Bohai Sea. We didn't pick up any of the Great Knots at Nanpu, but we got a few of the Red Knots.

This seems to be reflected in the results of the subspecies comparisons that we make. Usually by late May the *piersmai* subspecies dominates. Not so this year. It is difficult to give a definitive reason at short notice but either *rogersi* are leaving late for their breeding grounds or the *piersmai* haven't arrived yet, or perhaps won't arrive, and will go directly to the New Siberian Islands breeding grounds from sites further south. The final report will expand on this, but it is certainly not a 'traditional' season regarding the subspecies timing through Nanpu.

Thanks, as ever, to a range of people who were highlighted at the start of Update 1. And once more particular thanks to Professor Zhang and the Liu family.

Katherine and Chris, 5 June 2024

Report on the EAAFP SWG Webinar on Shorebird Monitoring
6 June 2024, GMT 6-9am

On 6 June 2024, the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Shorebird Working Group (SWG) hosted a webinar dedicated to discussing current methodologies and future plans for shorebird monitoring across the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF). This session brought together experts who presented their research and findings to an audience of experts and stakeholders interested in shorebird monitoring practices. The presentations were followed by breakout sessions that were divided by regions in the EAAF to discuss shorebird monitoring in each specific region. This report will follow the key highlights of the webinar.

Presentations

Speaker 1
Prof. Richard Fuller, University of Queensland
"Towards Comprehensive Shorebird Monitoring in the EAAF"

Prof. Fuller opened the session with a presentation on the efforts currently being made in shorebird monitoring across the EAAF. He highlighted the significant increase in monitoring efforts across the flyway. He also raised the need for more data platforms that allow data to be more accessible and shareable, along with allowing for more scientific analysis. Key challenges discussed included the lack of a shared database, data interoperability, the limited flow of data between different stakeholders, and issues surrounding data ownership. Prof. Fuller proposed enhancing data interoperability without compromising ownership, continuous data validation, strategic gap filling in survey coverage, as wells as more top-down planning as potential

solutions. The audience also offered their insights by suggesting that there should be guidelines and policies to tackle data-related challenges, along with there being a comprehensive shared data platform that encompasses the entire flyway.

Speaker 2
Dr. Taej Mundkur, Wetlands International associate expert
"The Asian Waterbird Census Framework for Shorebird Monitoring in the EAAF"

Next, Dr. Mundkur spoke about the Asian Waterbird Census Framework, aligning with Objective 3 of the EAAFP's Strategic Plan to enhance flyway research and monitoring. He also detailed the bottom-up approach of the census, which begins with volunteer counters and progresses through state, national, and finally regional coordinators, helping in the collection and analysis of data on waterbirds and their habitats. Dr. Mundkur also stressed the need for a standardised methodology and guidelines to ensure high-quality data collection. Furthermore, he highlighted that shorebird populations that have no size or trend estimates should be prioritised in censuses. The audience also tapped in to suggest that common data collection methodology should be developed to ensure that minimum data standards are at least met. They also suggested garnering more institutional support and social movement to improve the quality of and ease the flow of data across stakeholders in the flyway.

Speaker 3
Mr. Takehiko Shimizu, PhD student at Hokkaido University
"Monitoring in Japan: Findings and Future Outlook"

Thirdly, Mr Shimizu conveyed troubling trends in shorebird populations in Japan, noting declines in both diversity and numbers, especially among larger shorebirds, species dependent on specific habitats such as rice fields and species that use the Yellow Sea to migrate. He discussed the implications of habitat changes and the historical effects that continue to impact current populations. The presentation also covered the challenges in maintaining volunteer engagement and enhancing the resolution and specificity of monitoring data. Mr Shimizu also pushes for unified monitoring across the entire flyway, especially to detect site-specific effects in the whole flyway considering that migration happens across sites and countries. Audience feedback included the suggestion to build a prospectus to advocate for the benefits of flyway-wide monitoring.

Speakers 4
Mr. Chris Hassell and Ms. Katherine Leung, Global Flyway Network
"Basics on Monitoring of Marked Shorebirds in the EAAF"

Lastly, Mr Hassell and Ms Leung ended the presentation session with their sharing on the monitoring of marked shorebirds. They addressed the technical aspects of banding and the importance of resighting data. Challenges such as data biases arising from observational limitations and the critical importance of public outreach and education in shorebird conservation were highlighted. The speakers advocated for more rigorous and widespread public engagement strategies to bolster conservation efforts.

Breakout Sessions

Following the presentations, breakout sessions that were divided by regions in the EAAF were held to give participants the opportunity to discuss deeper about region-specific matters.

Northeast Asia
Participants discussed significant challenges such as data sharing, synchronisation of governmental and community data, and the engagement of younger people in shorebird conservation. Solutions proposed included fostering government partnerships through bilateral agreements and promoting interesting findings from tracking studies to attract more community-level involvement.

Southeast Asia
Participants in the Southeast Asia breakout room discussed the extensive and diverse terrains that pose significant logistical challenges to monitoring efforts. The group emphasised the need for standardized monitoring protocols to improve data accuracy and facilitate better regional data sharing.

Australasia
In this breakout room, discussions centred on the challenges of data collection in extensive wetland areas. The need for protocol standardisation was highlighted, alongside strategies to enhance data collection methodologies and community engagement in monitoring activities.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group webinar outlined both the achievements and ongoing challenges in shorebird monitoring within the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. With over a hundred participants from various backgrounds being present, the event highlighted the need for continued innovation in data management and community engagement to effectively conserve shorebird populations across the flyway.

Ed: Additional notes from the Australasia discussion breakout session were:

- Input from data user groups is needed to inform the flyway monitoring protocol – data uses include trends, population estimates, survival estimates, communications, etc. These could be a series of workshops where the user groups provide succinct practical advice that is turned into a 1-2 page guidance document.
- Revitalisation of the EAAFP task force on monitoring is important – workshops like the above could be coordinated by them.

Message from the Chair of AWSG

I will end my term as Chair of AWSG at the end of June after 29 years involvement with Birds Australia, AWSG and BirdLife Australia. It has been a time that has seen much progress in the efforts of both AWSG and BirdLife Australia to conserve and protect Australia birds and their habitat. It has been a privilege to be part of these efforts.

The new AWSG Committee will start operation on 1 July and Robert Bush will take over as Chair. The new committee will comprise:
Chair – Robert Bush
Vice Chair and Secretary – Dr Birgita Hansen
Treasurer – position to be filled
Chair Scientific Committee – Dr Danny Rogers
Editor *Stilt* – Inka Veltheim
Editor *Tattler* – Phil Straw
Conservation Officer – Doug Watkins
Committee Members – Dr Roz Jessop, Chris Hassell, Tegan Douglas, Grace Maglio

BirdLife Australia representatives – Laura Rhodes and Dr Jeremy Ringma
NZ Representative – Adrian Riegen

In a brief retrospective of my years as Chair of AWSG, it has been both a challenging but productive and in many cases a rewarding time. Like many organisations, AWSG was significantly impacted by the COVID pandemic which put on hold a number of important activities. However, post COVID, AWSG has resumed many of its deferred activities with renewed commitment. One of our major activities, the NW Western Australia Shorebird and Tern Expedition, has now returned to its annual February program of 2–3 weeks leg flagging, banding and attaching satellite transmitters on migratory shorebirds. Robert Bush, Roz Jessop, Prue Wright and Tegan Douglas are the AWSG leaders of the expedition and a report of the 2023 Expedition will be made available through *Stilt*. AWSG and BirdLIfe Australia also collaborated in 2023 on a new shorebird project at Exmouth Gulf in WA to monitor and assess shorebird populations and species in this area.

Work has continued on the Monitoring Yellow Sea Migrants in Australia (MYSMA) in NW Western Australia as this is one of the long term survey counts of migratory shorebirds in their most important non-breeding area in the Flyway. As part of the National Shorebird Monitoring Program, AWSG and BirdLife Australia have conducted regular shorebird counts nationally and the data from these counts is included in the AWSG database. This is one of the really important monitoring programs that provides vital information about shorebird populations and trends.

AWSG has been active internationally in the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership. As one of the founding Partners we have attended all Meetings of the Partners and have engaged as a member of both the Management Committee and Finance Committee of the Partnership. AWSG has also supported the Global Flyway Network through Chris Hassell and his work with the GEF. We were very fortunate to receive significant funding from Kate Gorringe-Smith's "Overwintering Art" project that enabled an AWSG project using 5 satellite transmitters to track the migration of Oriental Pratincole on their return migration from NW WA.

Dr Birgita Hansen is the National Coordinator of the Latham's Snipe project that is determining population sizes and trends together with important staging sites, key migration routes and habitats in Australia. A PhD student has also been conducting research into the migratory pathways of Latham's Snipe as part of the project.

Another long-standing project is the geolocator program conducted by AWSG and VWSG over 13 years in SE Australia, especially King Island. Ruddy Turnstone are the targeted species with over 900 loggers deployed on them. The outcomes of the program have provided a more detailed understanding of migration timing and routes, breeding locations and the impacts of climate change and habitat changes.

As part of its shorebird advocacy role, AWSG worked with BirdLife Australia and the QWSG to represent to the Commonwealth Government the importance of not allowing the development at Toondah Wetlands, part of the Moreton Bay Ramsar site of international importance. Toondah wetlands are used by the critically endangered Far Eastern Curlew and other shorebird species. The efforts by all were successful in preventing the development proceeding.

The establishment of Birdmark by Professor Marcel Klaassen of Deakin University has been a great achievement in bringing together years long shorebird data held by AWSG, VWSG and QWSG. Birdmark has been designed to record resightings of colour-marked waders in the Flyway and provides an enormously valuable resource of information on shorebirds. It will assist in advancing management and reporting on leg flag sightings and supports multiple different languages. We are very grateful to Professor Klaassen and Deakin University for this major achievement.

We have encountered a number of problems this year in the production of our journal *Stilt* and newsletter *Tattler* which provide valuable information about migratory waders. We are working on resolving these issues as we appreciate the loss of communication to members on shorebird research and activities that these both provide. We are also working with Birdlife Australia to improve our communication with AWSG members to enable much greater and more regular communication.

My particular thanks go to the AWSG Committee for its support over the years and for its ongoing contribution to the work of AWSG and the conservation of shorebirds. I wish the new committee all the best in its ongoing and new work,

Alison Russell-French OAM
Chair