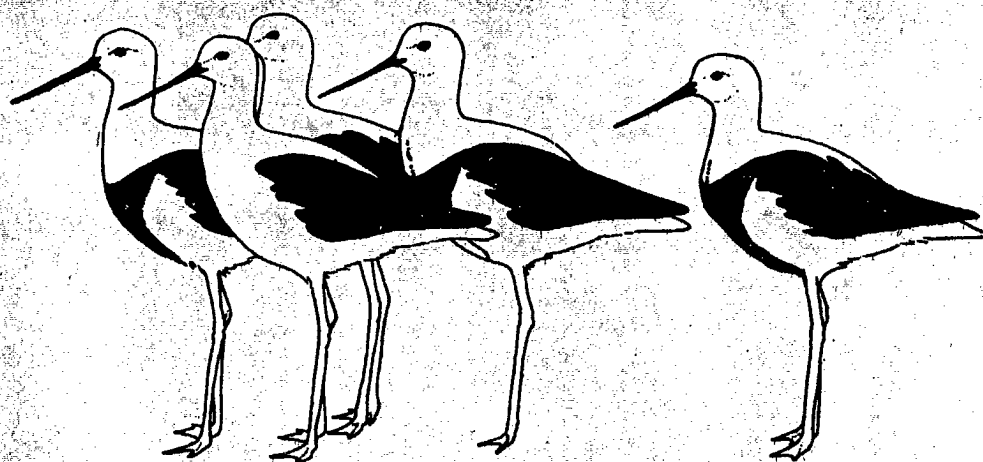


The Stilt



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**BULLETIN OF THE AUSTRALASIAN WADER STUDIES GROUP
OF THE
ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN ORNITHOLOGISTS UNION**

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EDITORIAL

Peter Dann has kindly and courageously agreed to edit this compendium of scolopacine camaraderie, from the next number. Peter can be located among the Phillip Island penguins by his longer legs and mellower voice. His address is to be found inside the back cover. We hope that by periodically moving the editorial centre of THE STILT, the geographical bias of its contents will shift from state-to-state. In this way, those of you not lucky enough to live in Western Australia shouldn't feel too left out all the time . *

I must apologise for the continued publication of THE STILT behind the schedule we had hoped to keep. This has been disguised to some extent by calling this edition Spring 1983 when it's actually only number 4!

To receive number 5, due late this year, you must renew your subscription to AWSG by sending the sum of \$3.00, yes, three measly little dollars you won't notice going away, to our Treasurer, David Henderson. Really, what else can you get for \$3.00 a year? Why not send \$6.00 and nominate a new member?

Finally, sincere thanks to Ellen Pole and Ann Moseley, who have patiently put up with the curious little scribbles with which your manuscripts have been defaced, in order to type up the finished articles so beautifully.

PETER CURRY

* How's that for parochialism? (ED.)

what can

YOU

write up

for

STILT 5 ?

THE ASIAN DOWITCHER IN NORTH-WESTERN AUSTRALIA

by Roger P. Jaensch

Abstract: Recent observations of the Asian Dowitcher Limnodromus semipalmatus in north-western Australia have radically altered its known status in Australia : this region may be of world significance to this rare species. Notes on field characters and behaviour of the Asian Dowitcher are presented, to assist separation from the godwits.

Distribution and Recorded Status

The Asian Dowitcher Limnodromus semipalmatus breeds in scattered colonies across Western Siberia, Transbaikalia, Mongolia and Manchuria and winters in Indo-China, the Malay Peninsula, eastern India and Australia (Melville & Round in prep.; Serventy & Whittell 1976). The species was given "rare" status by I.U.C.N. (Johnsgard, 1981) and is apparently still poorly known (Melville & Round, in prep.).

In Australia, the Asian Dowitcher has been recorded from Darwin (Crawford 1972), Port Phillip Bay (several records : e.g., Smith, 1974a & 1974b; Klapste 1975), Moreton Bay (Gardner & Gardner 1976), and the Port Hedland district (Serventy & Whittell 1976 ; also four reports between 1975-80 (R.E. Johnstone & L.A. Smith, in litt.)). These records have mostly been of single birds, with "parties of up to six individuals" at the Port Hedland saltworks (Serventy & Whittell 1976); Johnstone & Smith found similar numbers there.

Recent Observations

While studying waders at Leslie Saltworks, 33km ENE of Port Hedland, Western Australia on 4 April 1982, my attention was drawn to several godwit-sized waders which were clearly neither Black-nor Bar-tailed Godwits. I was aware that the Asian Dowitcher had been previously recorded at this locality and although I had no previous experience with this species, I initially suspected that these birds were dowitchers

I was able to confirm this identification on the basis of the following characters noted on these birds (compared at the time with Prater et al. 1977) :

1. straight, deep, all black bill, gently tapered and swollen at the tip (distinguishing from godwits which have fine-tipped bi-coloured bills) ;
2. pale secondaries in otherwise fairly uniform grey-brown upperwings (distinguishing from Black-tailed Godwit which has a white wing bar and Bar-tailed Godwit which has no conspicuous contrast on upperwing).

A more thorough count in the inflow channel and inflow section of the first pond in the Leslie Saltworks revealed a maximum of 130 dowitchers. Between one-half and two-thirds of these birds showed some trace of red summer (breeding) plumage and about one-fifth appeared to be in advanced or near-complete summer plumage.

To confirm the identity of the birds as Limnodromus semipalmatus, a bird in winter (non-breeding) plumage and a partly coloured bird were collected (W.A. Museum reg. nos. A17394 & A17395). Later that day, single birds in similar plumages were trapped in mistnets, examined and released by D.G. Watkins and myself. Measurements confirmed that all four were Asian Dowitchers Limnodromus semipalmatus. Wing, bill and tarsus lengths are each greater in this species than in the related Short-billed Dowitcher L. griseus of the Nearctic and the Long-billed Dowitcher L. scolopaceus of Nearctic and NE Palaearctic regions. Table 1 compares biometrics for these species and the four Port Hedland dowitchers examined in the hand in April 1982.

Returning to this locality on 29 - 31 August 1982, I again located dowitchers in the inflow area, where C. Francis, J. Martindale and I counted some 35 to 40 birds. At least five of these dowitchers showed traces of red summer plumage on their chests. Francis, who was familiar with the Nearctic dowitchers, suggested that proportions (especially leg length), again favoured L. semipalmatus.

On 6 September 1982, dowitchers were found at another north-western locality, this time at a high-tide roost at Bush Point, which lies at the southern end of Roebuck Bay. Fifty-seven dowitcher heads were counted at close range amongst a dense pack of thousands of Bar-tailed Godwits and Great Knots, but we felt that on the basis of the small sample of waders studied in detail, more than a hundred dowitchers could have been present.

Subsequent surveys by a small AWSG party located 20 dowitchers at Leslie Saltworks on 19 November 1982 and six, which were away from any godwit flock, on the Eighty Mile Beach (15 km. S of Anna Plains homestead) on 17 November, 1982.

Identification

My observations support the comments of Smith (1974a) and others in suggesting that the Asian Dowitcher most resembles the Bar-tailed Godwit. The discussions and literature report in Smith's excellent first paper, include several references to the snipe-like character of the Asian Dowitcher, principally in reference to its bill. I feel that this is best applied to the bill 'in isolation'. Table 1 shows that Asian Dowitcher tarsus lengths may fall within the range of tarsus lengths of the Bar-tailed Godwit (although clearly shorter than the range of the Black-tailed Godwit). All Asian Dowitchers that I have seen in the field have exhibited longish legs of godwit-like (rather than snipe-like) proportions. This is further supported by the 'jizz' of the bird as illustrated on page 115 of Smith's first article (1974a).

The Asian Dowitcher is readily separated from the Black-tailed Godwit by wing pattern and from the other dowitchers by its larger size (Prater et.al. 1977) and lack of clear white on the lower back (Smith 1974a). In my experience, the Asian Dowitcher is best told from the Bar-tailed Godwit by the following :

1. bill (as described above)
2. secondaries, greater coverts and inner primaries have white outer edges and grey-brown barring similar to that on the adjacent rump, uppertail coverts and sides of tail ;
3. distinctive head shape and markings : a long forehead rising to a high, rounded crown (unlike the gently rounded godwit head) more prominently dark crown (to the bill) and loreal stripe.
4. deeper-toned and more extensive red colouring in advanced summer (breeding) plumage.

Behaviour

Several aspects of behaviour observed at Port Hedland might further assist in separating the Asian Dowitcher from Bar-and Black-tailed Godwits :

1. The dowitchers tended to feed by a nearly continuous vertical bill-plunging in a mechanical 'sewing machine' action, whereas godwits hooked food forwards and upwards before swallowing.
2. The dowitchers at Port Hedland fed mainly in knee-deep or belly-deep water ; godwits were equally at ease feeding on exposed mud;

3. The dowitchers at Port Hedland generally kept together in tight flocks during feeding and when in flight, even after disturbances, they would return to small preferred feeding sites.
4. Flight calls and contact calls (when feeding) were distinct yelps : 'chep - chep' or 'chowp'; godwits were mainly silent.

Discussion

Medway and Wells (1976), in their account of Asian Dowitchers on the Malay Peninsula state : 'usually solitary or in small groups, but 27 were counted together on the mudflats at Tanjong Belanak (Perak) on 25 September 1965'. Melville and Round (in prep.) saw a flock of eight birds 40 km. SW of Bangkok on 20 March 1981. They also discuss collections from Thailand of 50 and 30 Asian Dowitchers taken between 1910 and 1927, another collection (held in Copenhagen?) of 34 birds (a maximum of 14 birds from the one site and date), and 11 taken in November 1923 (held in the British Museum).

These indications of the numbers of wintering Asian Dowitchers in South-East Asia suggest that the groups of 130 and 57 or more birds recorded in north-western Australia in 1982 may be of world significance. Counts of Bar-tailed Godwits between Broome and Port Hedland have amounted to more than 60,000 birds (1982 AWSG survey). On the basis of my experience at Bush Point in September 1982, I believe that a considerable number of Asian Dowitchers could be hidden within these often inaccessible and jumpy godwit masses. Careful scrutiny at Bush Point and other accessible high tide roosts on the north-west coast may confirm this.

D.S. Melville (pers. comm. to C.D.T. Minton in 1982) is not aware of any flocks of Asian Dowitchers in South-East Asia that are larger than those detailed here in north-western Australia. It would seem quite likely that this region could be the main wintering area for the Asian Dowitcher, as it almost certainly is for the Great Knot.

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TABLE 1

DOWITCHER AND GODWIT BIOMETRICS

Ranges given in Prater et. al. (1977)
 Note : Extreme cases have been selected
 from male, female and juvenile data.

	<u>Wing</u>	<u>Bill</u>	<u>Tarsus</u>
A. <u>Limnodromus</u> (small samples only)			
<u>L. griseus</u> Short-billed	139 - 156	51 - 67	31 - 39
<u>L. scolopaceus</u> Long-billed	140 - 159	54 - 78	34 - 45
<u>L. semipalmatus</u> Asian	174 - 188	75 - 87	46 - 54
B. <u>Limosa</u>			
<u>L. limosa melanuroides</u> Black-tailed (E. Asia)	168 - 210	67 - 93	62 - 73
<u>L. lapponica baueri</u> Bar-tailed (E USSR)	199 - 240	72 - 116	50 - 61
C. <u>Limnodromus semipalmatus</u> (from Port Hedland 4 April 1982)			
A 17394 (1st year; non-breeding plumage)	174	88	53
A 17395 (ad., partial breeding plumage)	187	83	54
<u>Banded and Released</u>			
071-53602 (ad? partial breeding plumage, weight 203g)	172	78	48
071-53603 (1st year, non-breeding plumage, weight 159g)	170	77	50

FIRST RECORDS OF LITTLE STINT, WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER, BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER
AND LITTLE RINGED PLOVER FROM SOUTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

By Peter J. Curry, Roger P. Jaensch, Peter Congreve
and Stephen D. Keeling.

Increasing interest in the identification of Holarctic waders in Australia has led to the recent recognition of about ten species that were unknown here in 1970. First Australian occurrences of such additions to the known fauna have invariably been reported from either coastal Northern Territory or the south-eastern seaboard. Three of these species (Little Stint Calidris minuta, White-rumped Sandpiper Calidris fuscicollis and Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius) were recognised in south-western W.A. during 1981-82. Details of these occurrences are given below, together with a brief account of the first Western Australian record of the rare Buff-breasted Sandpiper Tryngites subruficollis.

We discuss the field characters of near-nuptially plumaged Little Stints at some length for two reasons: their notorious similarity to Red-necked Stints C. ruficollis and other small calidrids (see Wallace 1974, Sinclair & Nicholls 1976, Cramp & Simmons 1982) and the absence of published descriptions for the few C. minuta claimed from elsewhere in Australia (R.A.O.U. Checklist Amendment Committee 1978, cites Bird Observer 544:21, as the only reference).

LITTLE STINT C. minuta

On 9 April 1982, Stephen and Diana Keeling and PJC were watching a flock of Red-necked Stints with two Long-toed Stints at Lake Forrestdale (32° 09'S, 115° 56'E), when PJC's attention was drawn to one particular bird on account of its unusual facial appearance. The stint in question showed a well-marked rusty brown crown and face, curiously complex pale supercilia, a darkly-streaked brown breastband and a bill that would have been unusually slender for a Red-necked Stint.

Between 1055 and 1230 hours we were able to watch this bird under virtually perfect conditions, using tripod-mounted telescopes and binoculars. The stint's identification as a Little Stint in virtually full breeding dress became impossible to avoid and was a surprisingly convincing conclusion to reach. The bird was almost as conspicuous as a full-plumaged Long-toed Stint is when seen among many 'coloured' and 'uncoloured' Red-necked Stints. Soon after the bird had been tentatively identified, RPJ arrived and was likewise impressed. It was agreed that he and PJC would compile independent sketches and notes on the spot, with the bird in view. Some of the more useful entries in our notes are reproduced in figures 1 and 2.

We returned to the lake on 12 April and relocated what was evidently the same individual (bird A) among about 1500 Red-necked Stints and 300 Red-capped Plovers. During these subsequent observations, RPJ located a second similar bird in another part of the flock. We were able to watch this second smaller and somewhat less well-marked Little Stint (bird B) for about 15 minutes before the flock became airborne and it was lost. Extracts and quotes from our field notes on both birds are included in the description that follows.

Despite careful searches, neither bird was seen again by us, even though the size of the stint flock rose to about 2500 by 18 April.

DESCRIPTION

Habitat The birds foraged across freshwater mudflats and in shallow water. Bird A was seen to join a roost on a higher, dry site.

Behaviour Both behaved as flock members, but tended to fly alone from one feeding place to the next and were invariably towards (or at) the edge of feeding flocks or mass aerial manoeuvres. Both lunged aggressively at Red-necked Stints (RenSs) whenever their immediate foraging areas were encroached upon. Both foraged very actively, B 'more active than RenSs' (RPJ) and A 'often moving along more rapidly than accompanying RenSs' (PJC). Both fed by 'rapid shallow probes' and 'pecking in fine jabs on wet mud and into water. Bird A walked and ran 'like a Red-necked rather than a Long-toed'. Both scratched their faces directly with their right foot (A: 2 obs, B: 1 obs), preened and appeared in excellent general vitality.

Calls: When bird A was once alone on the ground, PJC deliberately approached to flush it. As it rose, it called 'TIT-TIT-OO', not loudly and rather differently from the usual range of calls given by RenSs.

Size, shape and proportions Bird A was 'in same order as RenSs' (direct comparison at all times) but with a more rotund, hump-backed body shape than c.50 (RenSs) compared directly (PJC); 'fatter ... than RenSs' (RPJ). 'Legs slightly longer, bill slightly longer and noticeably less expanded at base and tip, than RenSs' (PJC); 'longer upper leg ... bill finer ... different shape ... than RenSs' (RPJ); 'legs and toes obviously shorter than in Long-toed' (PJC). Head size was 'slightly smaller than RenSs' close by' (RPJ) and length of bill 'about two-thirds length of smallish head' (PJC), so the bill looked longer than on any of the accompanying RenSs, even if its actual length was within the top end of the range for that species.

Bird B was 'regular shape' (i.e. as RenS) but 'smaller overall than RenSs or ... (bird A)' (RPJ); 'smaller than any Red-necks with which it appeared alongside, with proportions very similar (to RenSs) save for slightly longer legs (both tarsus and tibia)' (PJC). Its bill was 'about the same as the longest and slenderest of the Red-necked range' (PJC), 'longish-straight with slight trace of decurve at tip, narrow at base and tip' (RPJ).

Plumage

Bird A: The centre of the crown was light brown with conspicuous dark umber streaks, which extended down the nape, enlarging into longitudinal rows of blackish oval-shaped striations with rufous edges over the upper mantle. A narrow pale buff band around the base of the upper mandible joined the conspicuously forked, creamy-white discontinuous supercilia. Above the dark-smudged lores, the upper prong of the forked supercilium broadened and was more conspicuous than the lower section, which became narrower and bisected above and behind the eye, by a line of darker feathering. Behind the eye, the supercilium was very pale buff, fairly short and upturned at its rear end. It abutted on a fan-shaped pattern of dark brown on the ear coverts. The cheeks were lightly streaked warm brown and the lores were dark from the eye to the bill. The eye had a very narrow white orbital ring that was less conspicuous than the ring shown by RenSs nearby.

The throat was white and not clearly marked off from the breast markings. A breast-band of diffuse blackish striations on light brown (rather like that on a well-marked Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*), was slightly divided mid-ventrally and not abruptly demarcated from the white lower breast. The underparts were otherwise pure white.

The centre of the back was almost black, contrasting with a broad white 'V' edging the scapulars. The point of the 'V' was fully joined mid-dorsally and tended to project above the rest of the back feathering. Below the 'V' was a row of large median coverts with broad black centres, narrow rufous edges and white tips. Below them was a row of greyer-edged coverts, again with white tips. The greater coverts were brownish grey with white edges and tips that formed an incomplete second white 'V' on the bird viewed from the rear. The tertials were brightly marked with black centres and foxy red edges (less broad than those of Long-toed Stints in April) and small but clear white tips that were easy to see through a telescope. Primary projections were very dark and clean-looking. Tail feathers not seen well, but thought to be rufous-tipped (seen on the ground by RPJ) or brown-tipped (seen at take-off by PJC).

Bird B: Generally similarly marked and coloured, but less brightly and less clearly coloured, with the white 'V's of Bird A reduced to creamy-grey stripes. Its head pattern was identical though less contrasting in tones (RPJ) and its breast band had less brown and was more greyish in colour but had similar streaking throughout. The colour and pattern of the coverts and tertials was much the same as Bird A.

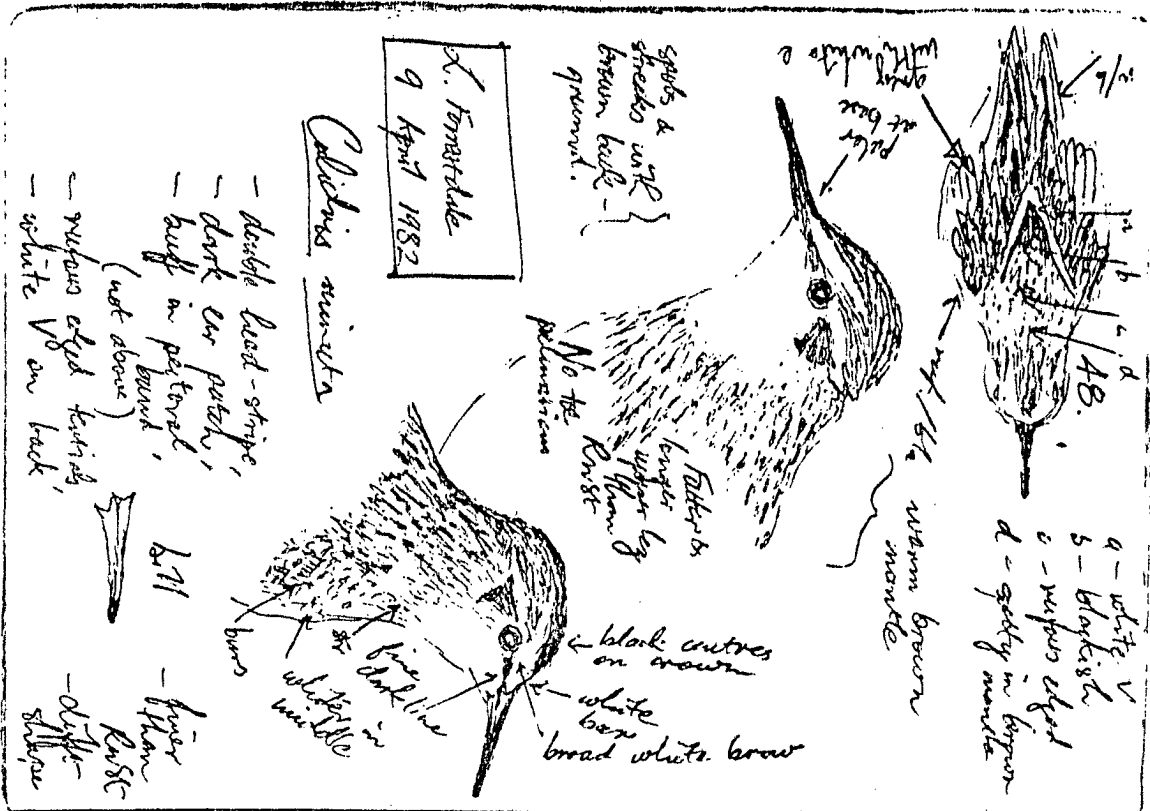
Flight Pattern Very similar to RenS; narrow white wing-bars were 'fairly conspicuous against dark wings' (PJC) 'conspicuous' (RPJ). The whole of the back and centre of the rump showed blackish, with white sides. The toes did not project beyond the tip of the tail.

Soft parts The bills, legs and toes of both appeared wholly black, except for 'a lighter greyish base' noted for the bill of bird A (PJC). When walking away the dry feet 'lacked any club-footed appearance' (PJC), 'showed no toe palmation' (RPJ) as viewed at close range by 25x in perfect illumination.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER Calidris fuscicollis

At 0845 hrs. On 8 February 1981, PJC was counting small waders at Lake Forrestdale. The depth of water was 0.17m at the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife's gauge; extensive wet mudflats were exposed. Among a small flock of Curlew Sandpipers C. ferruginea standing in a shallow pool was a single smaller wader that was not readily identifiable. Facing the observer from about 40m, in size and shape it appeared curiously intermediate between Curlew Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint of which there were many of both nearby. Watched through a mounted telescope as it preened, it showed a bill that was noted as 'obviously longer than RenS, slightly decurved and fine-tipped'. There was a narrow dark area in the centre of the crown, prominent white supercilia to the bill base, greyish streaks on the sides of the neck and upper breast and the underparts were very white. PJC could not identify it, so began to write notes. Without warning all the waders flew off and the bird was lost to the flying flock.

A few minutes later it reappeared among Curlew Sandpipers close to its former position. Again it stood inactively, facing PJC. First impressions were reinforced, and details added to the description were 'a weight-forwards, horizontal stance', the back feathering looked fairly plain greyish brown but the wings and the flanks went unseen. The legs were dark in tone and shorter than those of any of the Curlew Sandpipers (compared directly). Its facial pattern was similar to that species but the bill was not only much shorter, but lacked any perceptible basal widening, either in depth or breadth. This eliminated any possibility of it being a Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus, the distinctive head pattern of which it also lacked.



A. Forrestdale
9 April 1982

Calidris minuta

- double head-stripe,
- dark ear patch,
- buff in periorbital,
- (not above)
- rufous edged tending,
- white V on back



No. 11
- finer
- Ruff
- darker
- white
- white

Figures 1 & 2. Photocopies of parts of Roger Jaensch's (above) and Peter Curry's field notes on a Little Stint *Calidris minuta* at Lake Forrestdale, 9 April, 1982.

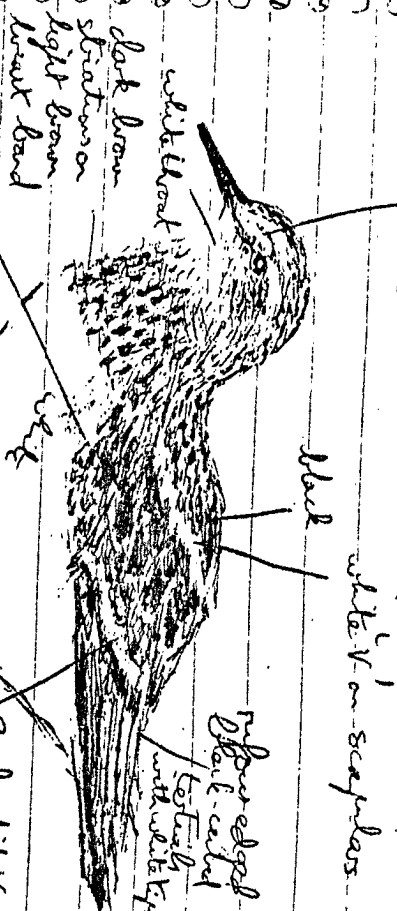
Seen again to 1982.
Basically pecking in fine jets
at water's edge but also
into mud. At one stage
now to dry area & rested
in hole with 2 Ruff & 2 Ruff
in depression brown-headed dark-
backed stint with fine bill & black
legs.
Wings - conspicuous white bar.



but illustration of
head markings & bill
of *Calidris minuta*.

* upward curvature
on second eye-
stripe of head is
(in field at least)
partly reminiscent
of Brown-headed
Honeyeater (acquired
by ground head-
colorant).

Smallish domed head forked
with conspicuous
white supercilium above
dark smudged lores



roof dark
in front of
with white tips

black legs
slightly longer than RS
fan-shaped brown streak
behind eye



Flight call soft
"t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t-t"

lighter greyish brown
black-brown
streaks on brown
cap



black bill slightly
longer and less expanded
than RS range

bird with red-necked S's but tailed
to look at edge of throat and to fly
at ~~end~~ end of the aerial phase.
In flight, resembled dark Red-necked.
Feel very peevish rapidly as it walked, in
wet mud and on shallow pools.
Crossed any overhanging Red-neck as it
walked and ran along

For a second time, all the waders took off unexpectedly, but this time PJC followed the intriguing bird with binoculars. It flew in a low, twisting zig-zag path and quickly departed from the main flock. In the air it appeared rather dark, with very pointed and backswept wings. Above, it was noticeably darker than RenSs and Curlew Sandpipers. It showed only slight white wing-bars along the bases of the secondaries and inner primaries. Below, the inner underwing areas looked white but the under primary area was obviously dark, unlike a Curlew Sandpiper. But the most conspicuous feature on the flying bird was 'a narrow white rump patch, like half moon, above all dark upper tail'. As rapidly as the wader's identity as a White-rumped Sandpiper C. fuscicollis had become clear, it disappeared from view behind the main flock. PJC was still looking for it when the Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius, described below, made its first appearance and vied for attention.

The White-rumped Sandpiper was seen briefly by G.J. Roberts on the following day, but it was again mercurial amid an unsettled wader flock. GJR could not add much to the description, other than to note that the warm-toned dorsal feathering somewhat resembled that on a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Again, no calls or other behavioural items were noted.

It was not seen again.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER Charadrius dubius

On 8 February 1981, PJC found an adult Little Ringed Plover (bird A) with a mixed flock of small waders at Lake Forrestdale. It was subsequently watched there by several observers over a period of about four weeks, during which the lakebed lost its remaining shallows by evaporation. The plover was last seen (and poorly photographed) on 2 March, by which time the last free water had dried up.

A second individual (bird B) was recorded at the same locality on 18 December 1982, when it was seen by PJC, SRK and several other observers. It was watched for several hours on the following two days and was last seen on 24 December. In both instances, identification proved easy. This is the world's only species of small sandplover that shows one complete breast-band and a yellow eye-ring when on the ground and plain wings (without any noticeable white wing-stripes) when airborne. The flight-note was very distinct from those of Red-capped Plovers.

DESCRIPTION

Habitat Freshwater mudflats, in the first instance very late in the lake's summer drying, much earlier in the second. Bird B frequented muddy banks near to the rush zone (mainly Typha spp.) that fringes much of the lake.

Behaviour. Bird A was loosely associated with flocks of mixed small waders, mainly Red-capped Plovers and Red-necked Stints, both on the ground and in flight. Bird B often joined a group of Black-fronted Plovers when resting on dry mud, but otherwise was mostly alone. Both individuals fed by pecking at food objects on the surface of moist ground, ran in short bursts, stopped abruptly, frequently (but not always) bobbed their heads upwards when alert and fanned their wings and tail-feathers when inactive. One flight-call was heard from bird A: a piping 'TEE-OO'.

Size, shape and proportions Bird A stood slightly taller than accompanying Red-capped Plovers and was considerably longer in the wing and tail. Bird B was slightly smaller than Black-fronted Plovers, and much closer to that species in shape, stance and flight actions, differing mainly in its shorter legs and smaller bill.

Plumage. Bird A had attained breeding dress by early March. The main features were : a broad black bar across the forehead, from eye-ring to eye-ring, flanked by white broadly in front and narrowly behind. A cold brown crown cap was not joined to the dark 'mask' or the neck ring, which was blackish and broadened in front of the carpal and continued narrower but unbroken across the breast. The mantle, back and wing-coverts were brown, darker and plainer than adult Red-capped Plovers. The underparts were wholly white.

Bird B differed in having less sharply defined brownish-black markings and greyer-brown wing-coverts with paler buffish margins. It was originally thought to be an adult in non-breeding plumage, but referral to Cramp *et al.* (1982) indicated that the combination of strong but diffuse breast markings and pale fringes on the wing-coverts are more typical of first-winter birds.

Soft parts Bird A showed clear 'deep yellow-orange' orbital rings, a short and narrow dark bill that was wholly blackish. Its legs were variously noted as 'brilliant deep orange', 'salmon-pink' (=pinkish orange) on 15 February and 'orange' on 2 March. Bird B showed 'yellow' orbital rings, 'yellow legs, orange tinged from behind, black claws and a dark bill'. (SDK); see Jaensch (1982) on leg colour.

Flight pattern The upperwings of Bird A were plain dark brown with no wing-bar except for 'white tips to inner secondary coverts forming short, very narrow and inconspicuous bars across the inner secondaries'. The rump and tail were dark, with broad white sides and white tips to all but the central tail-feathers. Bird B was not seen well in flight, but it showed similar patterns on the stretched wings and tail during preening.

BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER Tryngites subruficollis

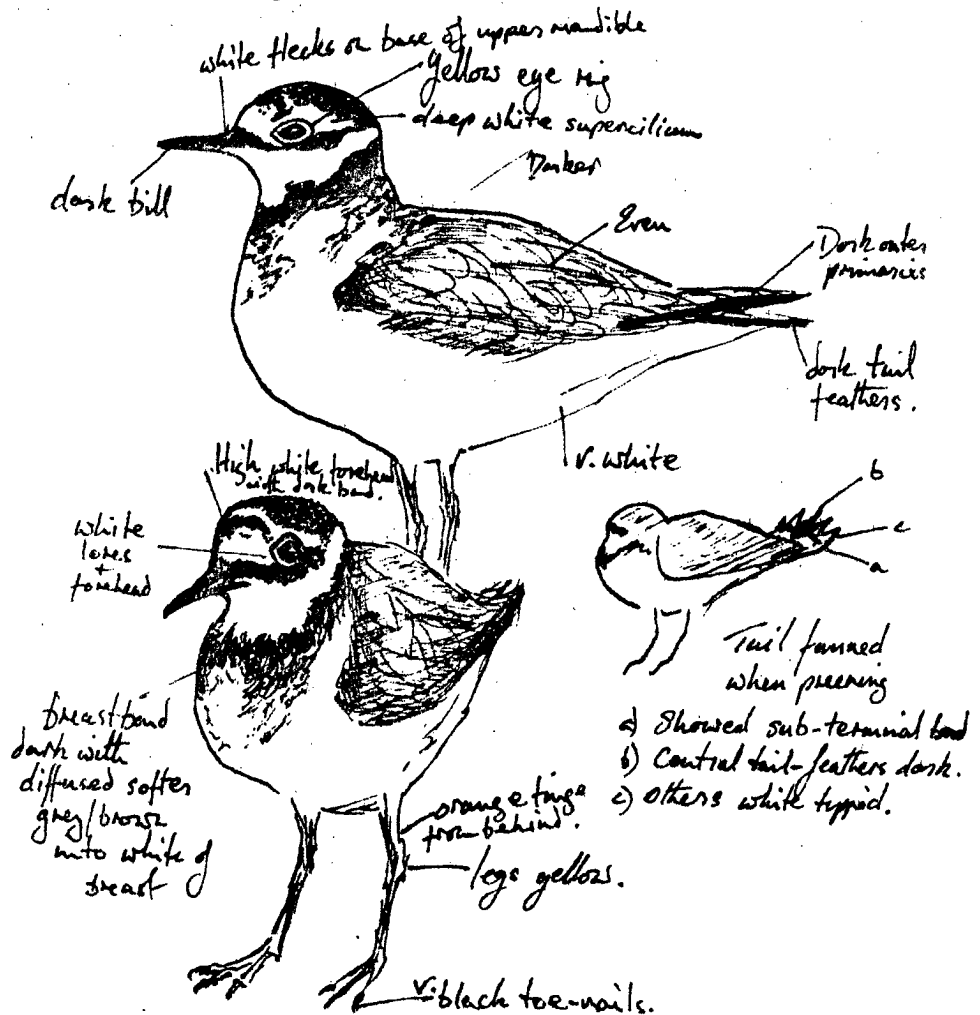
On 15 November 1982, Peter and Diana Congreve and Christopher Balmford were patrolling Kanidal Beach (32° 15' S, 126° 18' E) near Eyre Bird Observatory, when they came upon an unfamiliar sandpiper-like wader, which was foraging along a belt of dry seaweed just above the high-tide mark. It allowed the observers to approach closely (10m or less) and was watched through x 8 and tripod-mounted x 20 binoculars for over 4 hours during 15, 16 and 18 November. Soon after its discovery, DC tentatively identified the bird as a Buff-breasted Sandpiper and PC took detailed notes from which the description below is taken. At the observatory, references from N. America, Europe and Australia were duly consulted and all were consistent with the identification. On the morning of 16th, the bird was successfully photographed on colour transparency film, using a 200 mm lens. Several people have since examined the slides and all have supported the identification, including Michael Dyer who knows the species well from his experience in its breeding areas in North America. While adult Buff-breasted Sandpipers exhibit very little seasonal change in their plumage, the bird at Eyre was undoubtedly a juvenile by its lack of buff on the belly (Cramp *et al.* 1982)

DESCRIPTION

Habitat Lines of dry seaweed on a sandy, windswept ocean beach.

Figure 3. Sketches and notes on a Little Ringed Plover at Lake Forrestdale, December 1982. (Stephen Keeling)

A small wader - R. & St. size legs strong + forewings leaning posture. Long yellow with orange tinge above + behind T. joint. Longish Tail + Rump. White forehead. V. yellow eye-ring. Wing coverts grey/bronze with faint buff emargination.



Behaviour Moved mostly in short runs, pausing stretched upright. The bird crouched frequently when feeding and perhaps to avoid detection. It fed by probing sections of weed thoroughly with a jabbing motion 'sometimes in a crouched position at about 30° leaning forward'. It flew only when pressed and quickly landed once again. It foraged alongside Red-necked Stints and a Sanderling. No calls were heard.

Size, shape and Proportions. 'About that of a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, but when standing, its longer legs and short straight bill give a plover-like semblance'.

The bill shape was narrow and not plover-like, nor did the eye appear large.

Plumage Head streaked a rich brown over the crown, the streaking narrowing to the centre of the nape to meet the mantle. Cheeks, ear coverts and sides of nape buff, the nape appearing a deeper, rather reddish buff when the head was tucked in. A pale ring (of feathering) was visible around the eye. The chin, throat, and the whole of the underparts were buff, the colour paling on the belly and undertail coverts. Through high power binoculars, a pale edging between breast and upper belly feathering was apparent. Sparse dark streaks were on the lower neck and upper breast, broadening into brownish red spots on the sides of the breast in good light, suggesting widely broken breast patches. The feathers of the mantle and back were very rounded in shape and dark brown narrowly edged with buff. Primaries dark with whitish leading edges to the wings.

In flight, no wing bar or prominent tail pattern from above, but the underwing was very distinctive, appearing very white with 'narrow black leading and trailing edges'.

Soft Parts The bill was black or olive-black, at very close range the eyes were dark and the legs bright yellow.

DISCUSSION

Well-documented observations overseas (Sinclair and Nicholls 1976; Wallace 1974, 1979; Cramp and Simmons 1982) leave little doubt about the difficulties that surround the field separation of 'winter' plumaged Red-necked Stints, Little Stints and Semipalmated Sandpipers *C. pusilla*. This is particularly so when identification with a high degree of certainty is required, of single birds among flocks of one of the other two and beyond their usual ranges. Birds in juvenile plumage are more distinctively marked while those acquiring breeding dress have still more to offer the patient observer.

The point we wish to make about the identification of two Little Stints in April in Western Australia, is that they were brightly coloured, distinctively marked and reasonably conspicuous among a flock of Red-necked Stints. While the small size of one and the hump-backed shape of another would have been unusual for Red-necked Stints, such features do not seem to be consistent indicators of the identity of Little Stints.

The most useful characteristics of vagrant Little Stints, presumably of far eastern origin, coming into breeding plumage in Australia might be:

1. Plumage lacks the unstreaked pinkish orange suffusion of Red-necked.
2. Complex and distinctive facial pattern.

3. Brown breast band darkly streaked throughout.
4. Bill longer and slenderer than at least most Red-necked.
5. Legs slightly longer than Red-necked even on a smaller individual.
6. Lower mantle is the darkest area on the upperparts rather than the lightest.
7. Some have a broad, white or creamy 'V' marking on scapulars.
8. Wing-coverts and tertials have blacker centres, more rufous edges and whiter tips.
9. Faster foraging rates.
10. Behaviour less socially integrated, more aggressive in the flock.
11. Simpler, cleaner calls.

We can offer nothing new to assist in the detection of non-breeding Little Stints in Australia. Rather, we recommend the careful scrutiny of stints flocks from late summer onwards, when coloured birds would be much more easily found.

On geographical grounds, Little Stints could be expected to be less rare in Western Australia than further east. However, two autumn seasons of more enlightened searching have brought us just two among several thousand more or less 'coloured' stints scrutinised on Perth's freshwater lakes.

To put these Little Stint records into some perspective, a previous occurrence was suspected by Greg Roberts, who briefly saw a brightly coloured stint he suspected to be C. minuta, on Rottnest Island on 16 March, 1980. From the east, Fred T.H. Smith informs us that he and others have taken notes on ten or more occurrences of 'coloured' birds in Victoria since 1969. Otherwise two specimens have been lodged with the South Australian Museum, both collected from Port Gawler by J.B. Cox on 11 March, 1979: (B 32136: female in breeding dress) and 7 December, 1979 (B 32522: first year male). One of us (RPJ) was able to observe both of these birds in the field prior to their being collected and also witnessed a third individual in autumn 1980 at the same locality. At least seven of the distinctive characteristics listed above (bar 4, 7 and 11) were noted by RPJ on these South Australian birds.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Shane Parker for supplying details of specimens of C. minuta in the South Australian Museum and to Fred T.H. Smith for information on sightings of this species in Victoria.

WADERS AT USELESS LOOP, SHARK BAY, IN SEPTEMBER, 1981

by Michael J. Bamford

From September 21 to September 29, 1981, the author, with Duncan Parish and Desley Britten, undertook to band waders at artificial salt lakes near Useless Loop, Shark Bay. The lakes were created in Useless Inlet by Shark Bay Salt Joint Venture, from whom permission was received to carry out this work. The inlet is now divided into a chain of lakes of increasing salinity, the most saline being where salt is harvested.

By far the majority of waders occurred on the third lake in the chain, P16, the water of which was about one and a half times the concentration of sea water. Mist-netting with eight 60' nets was carried out at night at the northern end of this lake, where drifts of algae were blown by the almost constant and often strong southerly winds and where there were large areas of shallow water over a sandy bottom. Other lakes provided limited habitat for waders and some were so saline that they were virtually sterile.

RESULTS AND COMMENTSNumbers Present

The figures indicated in Table 1 are only approximate because of the difficulty of our reaching some areas of the lakes and the often dispersed distribution of the birds. Banded Stilts were particularly widely scattered over the more saline lakes, swimming and apparently feeding on brine shrimps. Most other waders we saw were at the northern end of P16 but there may have been flocks elsewhere at less accessible parts of the lake. Also present in low numbers were Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Grey Plover, Large Sand Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and Long-toed Stint. Many of the smaller waders roosted and appeared to feed on mats of floating algae. Numbers present at the northern end of P16 varied little during the study period, but it is not known if they were stable populations or if the region was being used as a stop-over by birds migrating further south.

Banding and in the Hand

More birds were caught than we had bands for. However, all of the birds, whether banded or not, were measured and weighed, and notes were made on their age, primary moult and other plumage characteristics. Of 90 Banded Stilts, the majority were either in primary moult or had all new primaries. Only 8 had no trace of a breast band but were in or had just completed primary moult. Birds with breast bands ranged from those with only a few coloured feathers to those with almost complete bands. I suggest that most were adults or year-old birds, but the plumages and moults of this species are poorly understood.

Of the other indigenous waders, the Black-winged Stilts and Red-necked avocets were all adults completing or having completed their primary moult. One of the 12 Red-capped Plovers caught appeared to be a juvenile, two of them had completed their primary moult, five were moulting and the remainder, including the juvenile, were not in moult.

Among the migratory waders, the majority of birds were adults. One Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and one Curlew Sandpiper still retained traces of breeding plumage. The only definite juvenile birds among the migratory waders were a Curlew Sandpiper and the Red Knot, both of which had such pronounced juvenile plumage that we were uncertain of our identification. So far, none of the birds banded at Useless Loop have been retrapped elsewhere.

TABLE 1ESTIMATES OF WADERS AT SHARK BAY SALT, SEPTEMBER 1981

Species	Approx. no. present at northern end of P16	Approx. no. present on other lakes.
Red-capped Plover	200	-
Black-winged Stilt	50	-
Banded Stilt	500	4 000
Red-necked Avocet	100	400
Red Knot	30	-
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	50	-
Red-necked Stint	600	-
Curlew Sandpiper	200	-

TABLE 2NUMBERS OF WADERS CAUGHT AND BANDED AT THE NORTHERN
END OF P16

Species	No. Caught	No. Banded
Red-capped Plover	12	10
Black-winged Stilt	3	0
Banded Stilt	90	59
Red-necked Avocet	4	2
Red Knot	1	0
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	4	4
Red-necked Stint	62	59
Long-toed Stint	1	1
Curlew Sandpiper	7	6
Large Sand Plover	1	1
Black-tailed Godwit	1	0
	186	142

REPORT ON THE FIFTH AERIAL SURVEY OF MIGRATORY WADING BIRDS BETWEEN WEIPA
AND MILINGIMBI, 9-13 FEBRUARY, 1983

by Stephen Garnett, Qld.

In terms of both thoroughness and numbers, the survey in February 1983 was the most successful so far. The survey was timed to coincide with the A.W.S.G. national wader survey and correspond exactly with the survey conducted at the same time in 1982.

The results were as follows :

<u>Section of Coast</u>	<u>Date Counted</u>	<u>No. of Waders</u>	<u>Waders/km</u>
Weipa-Nassau R.	10.11.83	21 596	56.1
-Gilbert R.	"	11 918	152.8
-Fitzmaurice R.	"	45 333	539.7
-Karumba	"	20 842	651.3
Total West Coast of Cape York		99 689	154.4
Karumba-Disaster Inlet	9.11.83	41 673	378.8
-Pt. Parker	"	34 032	272.3
-Bailey Pt.	11.11.83	3 932	218.4
-NT Border	9.11.83	6 142	54.8
-Pelican Pt.	"	229	2.1
-Roper R.	13.11.83	21 957	146.4
Wellesley Islands	11.11.83	4 048	57.8
Sir Edward Pellew Islands	13.11.83	530	16.6
Total South Coast of Gulf		112 543	154.8
Roper R. - Cape Barrow	13.11.83	5 785	38.6
Blue Mud Bay	"	7 482	55.5
Cape Shield-Gove	"	81	0.4
Total West Coast of Gulf		13 348	31.6
Total Gulf of Carpentaria (Weipa-Gove)		225 580	129.9
Gove-Milingimbi	12.11.83	60 459	90.1
(Buckingham Bay)	"	30 767	1 709.3
(Glyde Inlet)	"	13 705	571.0
(Cadell Strait)	"	14 000	933.3
Total for Survey		286 039	
Average density Waders/km			118.9

Nearly 300 000 waders were seen over almost two and a half thousand kilometres of coastline. The relative importance of each stretch of coast was remarkably similar to the estimates made at the same time last year, although many more birds were seen at each place. The overall density increased by a factor of 2.5. There can be few parts of the world where a density of 120 waders per kilometre is sustained over such a distance.

The majority of the birds were Black-tailed Godwits. It is thought that another abundant species with a pale rump and secondaries and dark primaries was the Grey Plover. Occasionally this identification was confirmed when the black auxillaries were sighted. For both species the Gulf may prove one of the most important overwintering sites in the world. One roost contained at least 15 000 Black-tailed Godwits. So great was their density that the warm brown that characterises their plumage was apparent for several kilometres before they flushed. The Gulf may also be a site of world significance for Whimbrel, Curlew and Greenshank. Many thousands of each could be identified from the air although none formed dense flocks like godwits or plovers. In addition to waders seen from the air, a flock containing several thousand Little Curlew occupied the flood plains behind Karumba.

The increase in numbers seen over last year may relate to the failure of the wet season. Although the tide had inundated the salt flats that spread behind the mangroves along some sections of the coast, the habitat available was certainly greatly reduced. The flocks of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers that might stop to refuel at the Gulf on their way north had not yet arrived. There would be little of their usual habitat available if they did.

From the five aerial surveys now completed, both the scope and the limitations of aerial surveillance are becoming apparent. The surveys have revealed the importance of the Gulf as a habitat for waders throughout the year. Furthermore, it has been possible to locate some of the more important feeding and roosting areas. However, because the tide, light, amount of water inland, and terrain varies with each section of coast and each flight, not only are many birds inevitably not seen but the errors cannot be consistent. Variation in the error is particularly likely with use of the coastal surveillance planes which must often investigate coastal phenomena other than birds. A thorough search of potentially important areas is, therefore not always possible. Many of the problems are peculiar to the Gulf where waders can be spread over many hectares of mud, whatever the state of the tide, and probably do not apply to the more strictly coastal habitats of north-western Australia. An example of birds missed from the air on this trip were the Little Curlews seen from the ground behind Karumba.

Because of the problem with surveillance it is unlikely that any but the most gross seasonal changes could be detected. Whether there are really more birds than at the same time last year, is a question that cannot presently be answered.

Nevertheless, the five surveillance flights so far conducted, combined with others flown by Clive Minton and John Martindale in September 1981 and Brett Lane and Jo Wieneke in December 1982, are now producing results from which an overall pattern can be detected. Only a few more surveys

between Weipa and Milingimbi are now needed. More are necessary around the tip of Cape York, where only the one flight by Roger Guard has been done, while beyond Milingimbi there should be another few hundred thousand waders beside Bocaut Bay and along the shores of Van Diemen Gulf. The main priority for the Gulf of Carpentaria is a ground and water-based expedition to the best areas located by the aerial surveys.

I wish to thank once again the ever patient and cooperative pilots and observers of H.C. Sleight, Australian Coastal Surveillance and the Bird Hazard Unit of the Department of Transport for making this survey possible. I am also greatly indebted to John Woodburn of Normanton and the O'Neills of Nhulunbuy for their hospitality and interest in the project.

VISIBLE WADER MIGRATION INTO NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

by Mike Carter, Vic.

I spent from 1 November to 15 December 1980 observing birds at sea from the Fisheries Research Vessel "Soela" travelling north and east from Fremantle, W.A. to Cairns, Qld. Details of the waders observed are given in the table. Unfortunately, many could not be specifically identified but where possible in such cases, the most likely species is indicated thus[].

The smaller waders were always observed flying low over the sea but the larger species often flew rather higher, up to 50 metres above the sea.

Two features of these observations seem worth noting.

1. Waders were still coming into Australia from the north in December.
2. Several observed migrants were flying across the Gulf of Carpentaria rather than using the "land bridges" situated to the east and west. This could mean a flight of over 500 nautical miles (perhaps 12 hours or more flying time). Although this is not a great distance for a migrating wader to fly, such a hop could be significant in terms of the fat reserves required for an effectively lengthened overseas flight.

It occurred to me that there could be some advantage for birds passing down the Gulf rather than a little over 100 nautical miles further east down the Cape York Peninsula. The former route offers perhaps more stable weather conditions at this season, because December is the start of the wet season. Mornings on the Gulf tended to commence cloudy, but as the day progressed, the cloud would clear towards the land giving clear skies and less wind in the afternoon. Conversely, over the land, thunder clouds would collect in the afternoon to produce unstable conditions into the night. Distant lightning was visible from the ship. In these conditions migration over sea would offer a more stable environment for travel.

DATE	TIME	SPECIES	No. and DIRECTION	LOCATION				DESCRIPTION	WEATHER		
				Degree	Block	Minute	Coords.		Wind Force	Direction	Cloud Cover
10.xi.80	1030	SP ?	2 → ?	13	125	?	?	Timor Sea (50 miles off Cape Bougainville)	1	315°	4/8
20.xi.80	1750	[STINTS SP?]	3 → S	8	135	?	?	Arafura Sea (180 miles from Arnhem Land)	4	135°	2/8
22.xi.80	1500	[STINTS SP?]	3 → S	11	136	?	?	Arafura Sea (20 miles from Wessel Island)	2	80°	2/8
26.xi.80	0640	WHIMBREL	1 → N	10	137	50	06	Arafura Sea (24 miles off Cape Wessel)	1	50°	3/8
27.xi.80	0940	GREY PLOVER	1 → S	10	137	36	59	Gulf of Carpentaria (Western)	3	60°	4/8
3.xii.80	1350	CURLEW SAND- PIPER	1 → S	10	139	?	?	Arafura Sea (Eastern)	3	90°	4/8
4.xii.80	1020	[LESSER GOLD- EN PLOVER]	10 → S	11	139	30	58	Gulf of Carpentaria (Northern)	2	-	1/8
4.xii.80	1320	BLACK-TAILED GODWIT	29 → S	11	139	56	59	Gulf of Carpentaria (105 miles West of Cape York)	1	-	5/8
11.xii.80	1500	SP ?	10 → S.W	9	143	?	?	Torres Strait (N.E. of Dove Is.)	4	90°	3/8

OPEN NOTEBOOK

The appeal for contributions of short notes about any aspect of wader study probably sent dozens of knowledgeable observers flicking through their notebooks and a score or so such notes must have been written. The trouble was that you all forgot to send them in to THE STILT ! So let me see, what might I have for this particular slotah, yes, October 1977.....
Red-necked Stints passing over a dry lakebed in central W.A.

Late in the afternoon on 13 October 1977, I was walking across the cracked and crusted dry bed of Lake Violet (26° 39'S, 120° 10'E) near Wiluna, when I recognised the call of a Red-necked Stint somewhere nearby. On looking up I saw two stints flying low over the lakebed. They quickly passed out of sight in a south-easterly direction.

The weather was warm, calm and cloudless, and the lake had been dry for several months. It was unvegetated and appeared quite unsuitable as a possible feeding area for waders 'stopping over' in the area, which they do at other times after rainstorms (see Curry 1979; W.A. Nat. 14:109-113).

Were the stints revisiting a site at which they had previously spent a 'refuelling visit' en route across Australia?

Peter Curry, Kelmscott, W.A.

AN OCCASIONAL STINT

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AWSG RESEARCH... PROGRESS REPORT

by Brett Lane

The Australasian Wader Studies Group, through the RAOU has obtained funding from the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service for its research programme. This three year programme aims to determine the distribution and population level of Australia's waders through census studies such as the National Wader Counts and the Expeditions. As well, banding studies are being undertaken by various groups and individuals on a voluntary basis which will yield information on movements and migration strategies of waders in Australasia.

Already, over 22,000 waders have been caught in the last two years, and results of counts and expeditions show that there are at least 1,586,000 waders in Australia (see Table 1). A number of particularly important areas of habitat have been located so far (see Figure 1). As yet a number of regions of Australia remain unexplored. Much remains to be done, and the projects outlined below are planned in the coming twelve months.

Help is always needed on these projects, so if you would like to help, please contact the AWSG Co-ordinator at RAOU Headquarters.

July, 1983 to July, 1984; Regular Count Programme, involving monthly or more frequent counts of discrete areas of habitat to determine changes in numbers due to migration and seasonal changes in habitat. Help needed.

July, 1983; Winter 1983, National Wader Count, to co-incide with a survey of the Double-banded Plover in New Zealand.

September - November, 1983; Northern Australia Wader Studies Programme, involving the following:

Late September; Expedition into the south-east corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria to conduct ground based censuses of waders in this most important area.

September to November; Northern Australia flight, involving aerial counts of waders between Cairns, N.Qld. and Carnarvon, W.A. from coastal surveillance and private charter planes. This will involve complete coverage of the coast, filling a number of gaps in our knowledge.

21st October to 12th November, 1983; North-west Australia Wader Studies Expedition. A repeat version of the highly successful expeditions held in the Broome-Port Hedland area in past years. A comprehensive programme of banding and censusing work will be undertaken. More people are needed, particularly anyone willing to bring a 4WD vehicle for transporting gear and people during the expedition (all expenses paid).

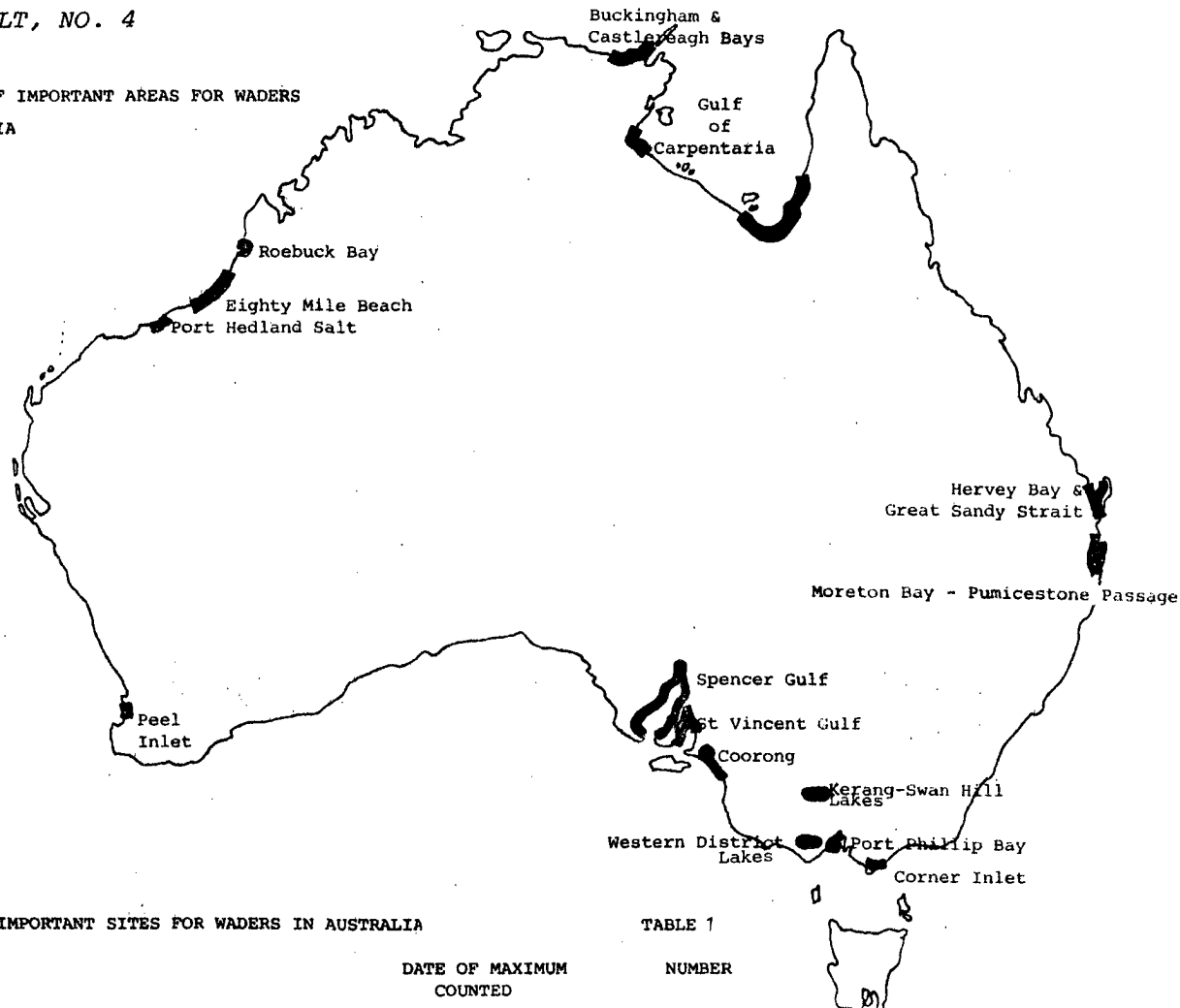
10th-18th December, 1983; Lower Darling wetlands exploration. A one week trip to the wetlands of the lower Darling, Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and Macquarie Rivers in western New South Wales to determine the numbers of waders using this region. Help needed, particularly 4WD vehicles.

February, 1984; Summer, 1984 National Wader Count. Date to be decided when tide times are available, but will be in the first half of the month.

To facilitate the smooth running of the research programme of the AWSG, the speedy analysis of data and better feedback to project participants, Ms Angela Jessop has been appointed to the position of Scientific Assistant on the Wader Studies Programme. Angela has had a long involvement with wader studies and undertook an Honours degree at La Trobe University, Melbourne, studying the feeding ecology of waders, ducks and other wetland birds for her thesis.

FIGURE 1

LOCATION OF IMPORTANT AREAS FOR WADERS
IN AUSTRALIA



LIST OF IMPORTANT SITES FOR WADERS IN AUSTRALIA

TABLE 1

LOCATION	DATE OF MAXIMUM COUNTED	NUMBER
Eighty Mile Beach, W.A.	Nov. 1982	336,000
South-east corner, Gulf of Carpentaria, Qld.	Dec. 1981	226,000
The Coorong & Murray Mouth Lakes, S.A.	Feb. 1982	214,000
Roebuck Bay, W.A.	Nov. 1982	106,000
St Vincent Gulf, S.A.	Feb. 1981	67,000
Port Hedland Saltworks, W.A.	Nov. 1982	66,000
Port Phillip Bay, Vic.	Feb. 1981	65,000
Buckingham & Castlereagh Bays, N.E. Arnhem Land, N.T.	Feb. 1983	58,000
Corner Inlet, Vic.	Feb. 1983	46,000
Spencer Gulf, S.A.	Feb. 1983	34,000
South-west corner, Gulf of Carpentaria, Qld.	Feb. 1983	22,000
Peel Inlet, W.A.	Feb. 1982	19,000
Moreton Bay - Pumicestone Passage, Qld.	Feb. 1983	18,000
Western District Lakes, Vic.	Feb. 1983	17,000
Hervey Bay - Great Sandy Strait, Qld.	Feb. 1983	14,000
Kerang - Swan Hill Lakes, Vic.	Feb. 1982	13,000
SUB TOTAL		1,321,000

TOTALS FOR STATES, EXCLUDING THE ABOVE AREAS

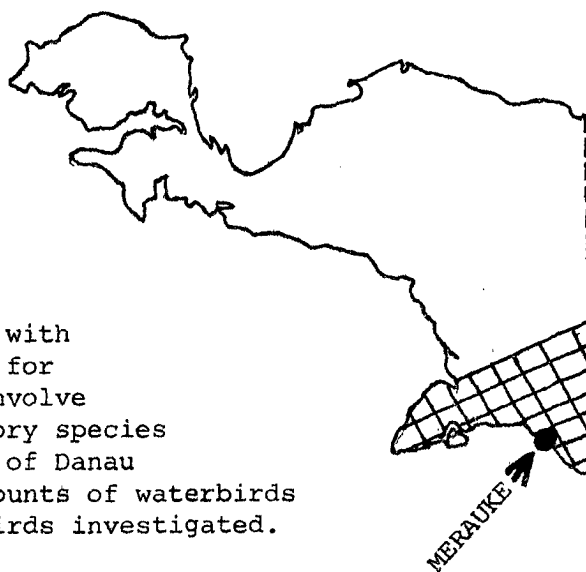
Western Australia	Various	91,000
Northern Territory	Feb. 1983	38,000
South Australia	Feb. 1982	36,000
Victoria	Feb. 1983	30,000
New South Wales	Feb. 1983	27,000
Queensland	Feb. 1983	22,000
Tasmania	Feb. 1983	21,000
SUB TOTAL		265,000

GRAND TOTAL

1,586,000

SURVEYS OF THREATENED WETLANDS INIRIAN JAYA

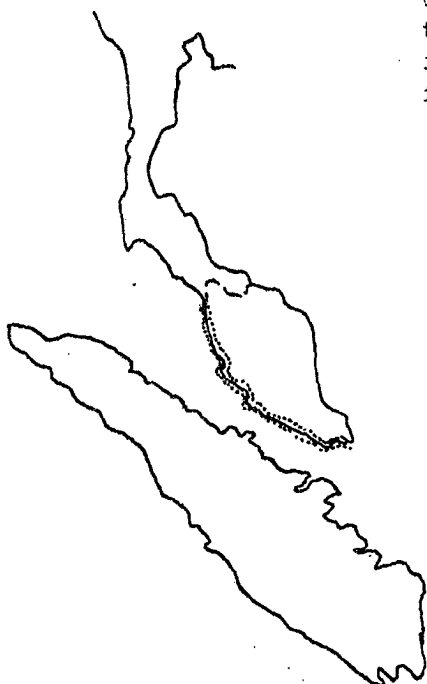
Between September, 1983 and January, 1984, the International Council for Bird Preservation endorsed and supported by World Wildlife Fund - Indonesian Programme, proposes to survey wetlands in south-eastern Irian Jaya, near Merauke. The Indonesian government transmigration authority is surveying parts of this region with a view to it becoming a settlement locality for people moved from Java. The project will involve censuses of waterbirds, particularly migratory species in the Palau Dolok area and in the wetlands of Danau Bian north of Merauke. Replicated census counts of waterbirds will be undertaken and the status of shorebirds investigated. The investigator will be Mr David Bishop.

INTER - WADER '83INTERNATIONAL SOUTH-EAST ASIA WADER STUDY PROJECT

The shorebirds of the west coast of the Malay Peninsula have at present been little studied. It is known from scattered observations that thousands of migrating waders can be found at certain times of the year along the coast. Between August and October, 1983 an international team co-ordinated by Mr Duncan Parish from Perth proposes to carry out the first systematic wader survey of the area. The information gathered will be vital to any measures to preserve the wader population of the whole of East Asia and Australia.

The project aims to:

- 1) Document the wader population along the west coast of the Malay Peninsula.
- 2) Catch, band and colour-dye (blue) waders and collect morphometric data. This will be used to ascertain the importance of the area as a feeding ground for waders on migration to Australia.
- 3) To collect samples where practical for the study of the role of waders as vectors for human and poultry diseases.
- 4) To further international scientific relations with south-east Asia.



THE ASIAN DOWITCHER IN NORTH-WESTERN AUSTRALIA

by Roger P. Jaensch

Abstract: Recent observations of the Asian Dowitcher Limnodromus semipalmatus in north-western Australia have radically altered its known status in Australia : this region may be of world significance to this rare species. Notes on field characters and behaviour of the Asian Dowitcher are presented, to assist separation from the godwits.

Distribution and Recorded Status

The Asian Dowitcher Limnodromus semipalmatus breeds in scattered colonies across Western Siberia, Transbaikalia, Mongolia and Manchuria and winters in Indo-China, the Malay Peninsula, eastern India and Australia (Melville & Round in prep.; Serventy & Whittell 1976). The species was given "rare" status by I.U.C.N. (Johnsgard, 1981) and is apparently still poorly known (Melville & Round, in prep.).

In Australia, the Asian Dowitcher has been recorded from Darwin (Crawford 1972), Port Phillip Bay (several records : e.g., Smith, 1974a & 1974b; Klapste 1975), Moreton Bay (Gardner & Gardner 1976), and the Port Hedland district (Serventy & Whittell 1976 ; also four reports between 1975-80 (R.E. Johnstone & L.A. Smith, in litt.). These records have mostly been of single birds, with "parties of up to six individuals" at the Port Hedland saltworks (Serventy & Whittell 1976); Johnstone & Smith found similar numbers there.

Recent Observations

While studying waders at Leslie Saltworks, 33km ENE of Port Hedland, Western Australia on 4 April 1982, my attention was drawn to several godwit-sized waders which were clearly neither Black-nor Bar-tailed Godwits. I was aware that the Asian Dowitcher had been previously recorded at this locality and although I had no previous experience with this species, I initially suspected that these birds were dowitchers

I was able to confirm this identification on the basis of the following characters noted on these birds (compared at the time with Prater et al. 1977) :

1. straight, deep, all black bill, gently tapered and swollen at the tip (distinguishing from godwits which have fine-tipped bi-coloured bills) ;
2. pale secondaries in otherwise fairly uniform grey-brown upperwings (distinguishing from Black-tailed Godwit which has a white wing bar and Bar-tailed Godwit which has no conspicuous contrast on upperwing).

A more thorough count in the inflow channel and inflow section of the first pond in the Leslie Saltworks revealed a maximum of 130 dowitchers. Between one-half and two-thirds of these birds showed some trace of red summer (breeding) plumage and about one-fifth appeared to be in advanced or near-complete summer plumage.

To confirm the identity of the birds as Limnodromus semipalmatus, a bird in winter (non-breeding) plumage and a partly coloured bird were collected (W.A. Museum reg. nos. A17394 & A17395). Later that day, single birds in similar plumages were trapped in mistnets, examined and released by D.G. Watkins and myself. Measurements confirmed that all four were Asian Dowitchers Limnodromus semipalmatus. Wing, bill and tarsus lengths are each greater in this species than in the related Short-billed Dowitcher L. griseus of the Nearctic and the Long-billed Dowitcher L. scolopaceus of Nearctic and NE Palaearctic regions. Table 1 compares biometrics for these species and the four Port Hedland dowitchers examined in the hand in April 1982.

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