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Tattler is the quarterly newsletter of the Australasian Wader Studies Group. Contributions are welcome and encouraged for all working with shorebirds and their habitats along the East Asian– Australasian Flyway. Please contact the editor for more information.

Editorial

Every call for the latest happenings on the Flyway for inclusion in *Tattler* seems to result in a bombardment of fascinating sightings and recoveries from exotic locations furthering, and sometimes confusing, our knowledge of shorebirds and their migration.

As we marvel at the huge numbers and rare sightings, we have to wonder if these observations are caused by a degrading environment with some species being 'winners', e.g. the stilts (pg 3), and others forced to travel long distances from usual migration or dispersal routes in order to survive.

This highlights the importance and significance that counts and field observations of bands/flags can make to our understanding of shorebird ecology and it is great to see these opportunities are available in many flyway countries. More importantly, this data can be used to inform environmental decision making, providing evidence supporting claims.

So get out there and get spotting as your observations and participation are critical to unlocking more of the secrets of migration and for promoting environmental conservation worldwide.

New AWSG Committee

The new AWSG Committee has been elected for the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2010. Representatives are:

Chair:	Ken Gosbell
Vice – Chair:	Phil Straw
Secretary:	Penny Johns
Treasurer:	Brian Speechley
Chair, Scientific Committee:	Danny Rogers
Editor, Stilt:	Roz Jessop
Conservation Officer:	Ann Lindsey
Committee Members:	Maureen Christie
	Peter Collins
	David Milton
	Chris Hassell
	Clive Minton

Adrian Riegen	Jennifer Spencer
Doug Watkins	Paul Wainwright

We sincerely thank all those leaving the Committee in June for their contribution over a number of years. We hope that you will remain actively involved with the AWSG. To the newly elected members, Paul and Jennifer, we say a warm welcome and look forward to your contribution over the next 2 years.

The next two years pose a number of challenges to the Group and I look forward to the new Committee working together to achieve the objectives we have set ourselves.

Ken Gosbell

AWSG Chair



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A Special interest Group of Birds Australia



National shorebird count wrap-up

A big THANK YOU to all of the dedicated volunteers who took to the mudflats, beaches and wetlands around Australia to make the summer 2008 national shorebird counts a great success! Over 70 sites were counted, some of which had not been counted for years. Also welcome to all the new counters who became involved this year. Helping out on a count once or twice a year can make a large difference to shorebird conservation and we hope that you will continue your involvement in the future.

This is the first year that the national counts have been coordinated by the Shorebirds 2020 Programme team, a project that is building on the AWSG's long-running national shorebird population monitoring program. Shorebird 2020 is a partnership between Birds Australia and the AWSG, with funding provided by WWF-Australia and the Australian Government.

Highlights from this year counts include the discovery of an estimated 250,000 Banded Stilts in the Coorong, South Australia – exceeding the previously estimated total Australian population! Internationally significant numbers of birds were reported for the first time at some inland lakes like Lake Linlithgow in Victoria where 5,000 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were spotted. Two summer counts were conducted in some areas, a first step toward informing us of the confidence in accuracy of numbers at these sites on any one count.

We also want to thank everyone for having a go at using the new data sheets – there was a lot to get your head around! The additional information that we ask for about threats and disturbance will help

to build on our understanding of what things impact shorebird populations and put that information into a format that is hard to dispute. We will be making some simplifications to the data sheets in the next couple of months so look forward to a more user-friendly version for the winter counts – these things always take time to get right and thank you to all of you who provided useful feedback.

While things do slow down for the winter months when the adult waders migrate to their breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere, there is still plenty to do! The Shorebirds 2020 team will be busy, amongst other things, collating and reporting on the results of the summer count (so keep sending that count data in!) and organising the winter national wader counts in June/July.

For more information & to register your availability for the winter count, contact your regional count-coordinator, Joanne Oldland (j.oldland@birdsaustralia.com.au) or Rob Clemens (r.clemens@birdsaustralia.com.au), Ph: (03) 9347 0757 at the Birds Australia National Office.

Check the NEW Birds Australia website <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au> and <http://shorebirds.org.au> (we will be revamping this site over the next couple of months to provide project updates, site information and maps and training resources). Make sure you join the 'Shorebirds Australia' Discussion Group at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Shorebirds_Australia to keep informed on the project and talk with other shorebird counters around the country.

Jo Oldland

Wader survey at Port Stephens

The Hunter Bird Observers Club and NSW NPWS undertook wader surveys at Port Stephens on the NSW north coast 10 February. The survey involved 6 teams going by boat at high tide to various sub-sectors of Port Stephens such that we could do an essentially simultaneous survey of the whole of Port Stephens.

We recorded a total of 1,695 shorebirds, as follows:

Bar-tailed Godwit	886
Whimbrel	261
Eastern Curlew	320
Common Greenshank	5
Terek Sandpiper	5

Grey-tailed Tattler	37
Ruddy Turnstone	5
Pied Oystercatcher	107
Sooty Oystercatcher	10
Red-capped Plover	10
Lesser Sand Plover	2
Masked Lapwing	46

It is the 5th such survey we have done for Port Stephens, and the totals have been similar in 4 of the 5 years (the survey in the 5th year was truncated due to weather and mechanical problems).

Alan Stuart

Long distance Tern movement

A Victorian flagged Caspian Tern was sighted at Townsville, north Queensland on 2 March 2008. This bird was banded as a chick at Corner Inlet, southeast Victoria, sometime in the last ten years.

This is the longest distance moved by one of our marked Caspian Terns and possibly the longest for

any Caspian Tern marked anywhere in Australia.

Victorian Caspian Terns mostly go to northern New South Wales and the very south-east part of Queensland for the winter, but we have had the occasional record up as far as Hervey Bay/Fraser Island.

Latest survey suggests further decline in wader abundance at the Coorong, South Australia.

The Coorong is a Ramsar listed wetland that has supported large numbers of waders (and a suite of other waterbirds) in its recent past. Historically estuarine, the wetland has been slowly modified into a marine influenced system since the installation of barrages in the 1940's. Fresh water flows ceased in 2004 and the wetland is now maintained by marine water which surges tidally through the Murray River mouth.

The AWSG has monitored wader numbers at the Coorong annually since 2000, and over that time have plotted a variable but generally downward projection in wader abundance. The 2008 assessment of 25,500 grey waders is clearly the smallest number of birds counted since monitoring began.

If grey wader numbers are indicative of current ecological production (or lack of), the carrying capacity of the Coorong seems to be further declining. Starved of fresh-water flows, ecological processes are becoming further simplified to the point of failure. Food availability, seemingly a basic requirement for a wader, is decreasing spatially and temporally. Benthic life, according to research undertaken by Flinders University is being compromised by salinity, turbidity and sedimentation. Unsurprisingly, benthic biomass is ten times lower than similar mud-flats in the EAAF.

This year some 35 volunteers, a mixture of new-blood and well-worn experience contributed to the February assessment. The survey group comprised a number of locals, members of Friends of the Shorebirds SE, and a contingent from Adelaide and Melbourne. A number of new-faces (commonly friends of old-faces) brought along their enthusiasm to the mud-flat. Watercraft were supplied, and capably steered, by a number of local fishers and DEH rangers. Thank you for your significant contribution!

The low overall number of grey waders is due principally to a 40% reduction in the number of Red-necked Stint. (20298 in 2007 compared with in 12288 in 2008). Annually these are most common small wader using the Coorong. In contrast, both Curlew Sandpiper and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper abundances increased close to 50% when compared with the 2007 survey. Red-capped Plover and Greenshank numbers remain fairly constant.

The Coorong's Southern Lagoon has been hyper-saline for a number of years. Too salty for fish, most macro-benthic invertebrates and plant-life, there is little value here for most waders. Notable exceptions are the salinity tolerant phytoplankton and the brine-shrimp that feed upon them. The largest observation of the 2008 survey was a flock of Banded Stilt estimated to be in the order of

250,000 individuals on the western side of the Coorong opposite Woods Well. The Stilt were first observed by Inka Veltheim on Saturday 2nd February and then re-assessed on Mon 4th Feb. The width (front-line) and depth (side-line) of the flock were carefully counted individual by individual by two observers who independently calculated figures of 230,000 and 270,000. Interestingly, a flock this size exceeds the known Australian population for Banded Stilt, estimated to be 206,000. (Geering *et. al.* 2006).



The Banded Stilt have been observed on a number of days feeding out on the water during the morning, visually consuming surface dwelling brine-shrimp. Around midday they begin to flock together in a raft or rafts (as observed on 21st Feb from the air) to roost. The photograph above shows one of four main rafts (50-60,000 individuals) identified from the air on 21st Feb. The Banded Stilt remain at the Coorong as of 20th March.

Thanks are extended to the Department for Environment and Heritage (SA) for funding the 2008 AWSG Wader Count. Further assistance with logistics, equipment and enthusiastic staff were warmly appreciated. The survey report is due to be published in April 2008.

Paul Wainwright

Go to http://www.pbase.com/evoimagery/coorong_bandedstilt to see some of Paul's photos. Also keep an eye out for an article in 'The Age'.





Wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers found in Myanmar

Sightings of 84 Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* at two coastal wetland sites in Myanmar have cast new light on the winter distribution of this highly endangered species, and confirmed that these wetlands are of international importance for their biodiversity.

The known global population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper has plunged alarmingly in the last few years to only 200-300 pairs.

"The number of breeding pairs in Chukotka, Siberia, fell by 50 percent between 2006 and 2007, and no birds have been seen this year at their traditional wintering sites in Bangladesh", says Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Vice President of the Russian Bird Conservation Union (BirdLife in Russia).

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team's analysis of satellite images, combined with the experience of previous surveys in India, Bangladesh and Thailand, and with historical records of the species in Myanmar, suggested that potentially suitable habitats existed in the south-western state of Arakan (Rakhine) in the Bay of Bengal, and Martaban (Mottama) Bay near the Thai border.

Thirty-five Spoon-billed Sandpipers were counted at one high-tide roost in Arakan, including one juvenile ringed at the breeding ground in Chukotka last summer. The team at Martaban found a total of 48 Spoon-billed Sandpiper, scattered over the huge

mudflats of the bay but included a flock of 39 birds.

"Our surveys have covered only a small section of the promising Arakan coast," Christoph Zöckler added. "Although small-scale reclamation of the mudflats for prawn ponds has been observed, the coastal zones are largely healthy ecosystems, which provide both crucial habitat for tens of thousands of arctic waders, and livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people."

"This is an important piece of the jigsaw," said Simba Chan, Senior Conservation Manager at BirdLife's Asia Division. "If present trends continue, Spoon-billed Sandpiper faces extinction in the next few years. If we are to save the species, we need to identify and conserve not only its breeding sites, but its migration stopover sites and wintering grounds too."

Simba Chan added: "The coast of Myanmar is still relatively intact, but most of the tidal area along the EAAF is under very heavy development pressure. This work provides further illustration of the global importance of Myanmar for biodiversity conservation."

Birdlife International press release 14-02-2008

http://birdstage.quinn.com/news/pr/2008/02/sbs_myanmar.html

New titleholder for Australia's oldest known wader

A really old Pied Oystercatcher has just been retrapped by the VWSG at Rhyll, Phillip Island, Victoria on 24/3/08.

It was originally banded at the same location as a 2 year old in March 1980 by the VWSG, in what was possibly the first ever cannon-net catch of Pied Oystercatchers. It had not been recaptured previously over this period. This makes the bird 29 1/2 years old and sets a new Australian record for the oldest known wader.

When retrapped, the stainless steel metal band was gaping open almost 0.5 cm and would soon have fallen off the bird. It had also lost the green plastic band which it was originally given in 1980.

A new metal band and an engraved yellow flag (B6 on its right tibia) was fitted and it was released to survive another year.

.....
Another record breaking bird, this time a Bar-tailed Godwit, was retrapped in Broome (NW Australia) last November by the Global Flyway Network team. This bird was found to have been banded in September 1981 making it 27 years and 3 months

old (having been age 2 at banding) and the oldest recorded Bar-tailed Godwit in Australia.

It was banded on the first ever expedition to Broome. Only four cannon net catches were made on that trip as counting and exploring this new-found (to ornithologists) region was priority.

.....
Overseas another Oystercatcher has also been breaking records and grabbing the attention of wader enthusiasts everywhere. A 37 year old Oystercatcher was recently recovered on the southern coast of Norway. Banded in 1969 by the Wash Wader Ringing Group, and our own Clive Minton, at The Wash, the main wintering area for Oystercatchers which breed in Norway, it had the misfortune to be taken 37 years later by a predatory bird near its breeding grounds.

At 37 years old, this is the oldest Oystercatcher yet recorded by the British Bird Ringing Scheme. Given that Oystercatchers normally start breeding when they are four years old this bird is likely to have migrated backwards and forwards across the North Sea some 33 times during its lifetime.

Interim results of % juvenile monitoring in SE Australia

We now have satisfactory samples of Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper to have good confidence in the level of juvenile birds in the population this summer.

The most pleasing result is the very high breeding success (32.2% juveniles; average 9.8%) of Curlew Sandpipers. This is the highest proportion of juveniles since the 1991/92 season and the second highest ever in the 29 years for which we have data on this species. It also tallies well with the high figure found in north-west Australia during the November 2007 AWSG Expedition. It is particularly pleasing that they have had such good breeding success given that they have experienced such a prolonged and extensive downturn in their population in Australia over the last 20 or more years.

Red-necked Stints (10.7% juveniles; average 13.8%) have again had a year of below average breeding success. This is now the fourth consecutive similar year for this species. It is noticeable that everywhere Red-necked Stint populations have declined to more normal long-term levels, after the huge peaks in the late 1990s and early 2000s when a run of ultra-good breeding seasons occurred.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers also had above average

breeding success (19.9% juveniles; average 11.1%). This is the fifth year out of the last six that they have done so. Their numbers are now well and truly established at much higher levels than were present in the decade up to the 2002/03 season.

The VWSG have also caught a reasonable sample of Bar-tailed Godwits and these are showing an exceptionally high proportion of juveniles (56.5% juveniles; average 15.4%). Whilst a part of this may be caused by sampling effects the result is certainly an indication that 2007 was a very good year for the *baueri* subspecies which breeds in Alaska and spends the non-breeding season in eastern Australia and New Zealand.

Unfortunately we've not yet managed to get anywhere near catching a useable sample of Red Knot and there is a danger we will miss out on data for this species this year.

Overall so far it seems that 2007 was a good, or above average, breeding year for most wader species that spend the non-breeding season in south-eastern Australia with only Red-necked Stint faring poorly.

Clive Minton

VWSG

More on Banded Stilts

It was always thought that the eastern and western Australian Banded Stilt populations were discrete. But a growing number of sightings of western birds in eastern Australia, and now vice versa, are being reported.

With 250,000 Banded Stilt in the Coorong, and reports of flocks up to 10,000 elsewhere, the chances of seeing any of the 333 Banded Stilt chicks flagged with South Australian (SA) colours (orange/yellow) in the Coorong in January 2006 would seem remote....but not so. On the 18th February, Danny Rogers saw one of 'our' chicks in 85% breeding plumage at the Avalon Saltworks in Victoria. It was in a flock of 2000. This follows on from a series of sightings (Jan, March & Dec 2007) at Cheetham Saltworks, Laverton.

And then recently, news of a sighting that I had hardly dared hope for – on 8th February a SA Banded Stilt was sighted at Yalgorup National Park, WA (about ½ way between Mandurah and Bunbury, on the coast). This is the first recorded movement of Banded Stilt from eastern Australia to western Australia.

Other sightings of interest have been of a Victorian flagged (151 were banded at Werribee in 2000) Banded Stilt seen in the Coorong in August 2007 and two seen in February 2005. We have had WA birds visiting us - several yellow flags were seen at



Image: Danny Rodgers

Lake Eyre in 2000, with one sighted at Lake George in April 2001. These were flagged at Lake Ballard after Cyclone Bobby in April 1995.

We are slowly building up a picture of Banded Stilt movements throughout Australia and it is exciting to be so closely involved with extending our knowledge of this beautiful but enigmatic species.

We are asking everyone who sees any Banded Stilt to not only make an estimate of how many there are, but to also check their legs! Check for flags but also note that the colour of their legs is important – pink means an adult, grey means a juvenile.

Maureen Christie

Friends of Shorebirds, SE: twinpeppers@icisp.net.au





Satellite-tagging Bar-tailed Godwits at Roebuck Bay, NW Australia February 18-23 2008.

After the success of the Pacific Shorebird Migration Project work during 2007 (think of the amazing story of 'E7' and the other 15 Bar-tailed Godwits, sub-species *baueri*, satellite tagged in New Zealand that were tracked to their breeding grounds, and in the case of 'E7' back again) consultations began to extend this work to the *menzbieri* sub-species that spends the non-breeding season in north-west Australia and breeds in the Yakutia region of Eastern Siberia. With the continued generous funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation the talk became action and a team of researchers gathered at the Broome Bird Observatory (BBO) to undertake the work between February 18 and 23 2008.

The birds to be implanted with transmitters were captured by cannon net amidst the humidity and rain. In total 15 *baueri* godwits were fitted with transmitters by veterinarians Dan Mulcahy of USGS and Brett Gartrell of Massey University, New Zealand. All birds were successfully released 2-3 hours after surgery. We even had a TV crew with us for one catch filming for the ABC's Stateline programme. They got some excellent footage and interviews; the segment went to air on the last night of our field work and was watched by us all with great interest.

Two of the birds carrying transmitters were retraps and are 13 and 5+ years of age as they set off with their precious cargo.



Image Adrian Boyle.

In mid-March 2008 the transmitters will automatically switch on their regular reporting schedule of 6 hours on and 36 hours off. This should allow the batteries to last at least until the birds arrive on their Arctic breeding grounds. Any additional data received after mid-June (i.e. after approximately 400 hours of transmission time) will be a bonus.

As of March 26 2008 all 15 transmitters are communicating effectively with the ARGOS satellites and providing data about the birds' whereabouts in NW Australia. During regular colour-band re-

sighting field work 7 of the birds have been seen in the field at roost sites looking strong and healthy. In addition to the thin aerial protruding from their feathers they can be identified by their large black flags engraved through to white with a single letter and a single digit.

You will be able to follow the migrations of the Roebuck Bay Bar-tailed Godwits by following the links from Chris Hassell's Global Flyway Network site <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>, Broome Bird Observatory <http://www.broomebirdobservatory.com/standard/index.html> or directly to the USGS Migration page http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg_updates.html

Acknowledgements

Projects such as this take an enormous amount of money and effort, not just in the field work stage but during all the meticulous planning. Please bear with me while I thank the many people involved. The considerable financial contributions from David and Lucile Packard Foundation, PRBO Conservation Science, USGS Alaska Science Centre, US Department of Interior are gratefully acknowledged. Microwave Telemetry Inc is thanked for the development and manufacturing of the transmitters used in this study. To BirdLife Netherlands, thanks for funding my permanent position. The team in the field did a great job, having my Broome team with me fills me with confidence so thanks to Adrian Boyle, Maurice O'Connor, Helen Macarthur, Andrea Spencer, Yindi Newman and Jan Lewis. Also Mavis Russell, Petra de Goeij, Grant Pearson and Theunis Piersma (all honorary Broome team members).

Bob Gill, Nils Warnock, Lee Tibbitts, Colleen Handel for field work and being instrumental in getting the project going here in Broome. To the highly skilled Vets Dan Mulcahy and Brett Gartrell. To John Curran for veterinary assistance and vital support with medication supplies. To Andrea Spencer, Maurice O'Connor and Helen Macarthur for wonderful food and plenty of it! The BBO wardens Pete Collins and Holly Sitters for hosting us and for field work. To Annie Tibbitts for field work. To Graeme Hamilton, Alison Russell-French and Rob Davis of Birds Australia for field work. To Jan Van de Kam for images of all the birds. To the AWSG committee for support of this initiative. And last but not least to Clive Minton for continuing his unfailing support of me over the past 12 years.

Chris Hassell

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And across the Tasman work with the NZ godwits continues

The tracking of nine Bar-tailed Godwits on northward migration from New Zealand has started (departures have been recorded for the past couple of weeks, see the USGS Migration page http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/barg_updates.html for updates). Birds could be arriving on a beach near you any time now.

While satellite tracking is great for the armchair birder, please remember that there are hundreds of individually colour banded/ringed Bar-tailed Godwits (and other species) out there waiting to be seen.

Make sure you look for other bands that the birds may have. Each bird in this project (including those

banded in NW Australia) has FOUR colour bands/rings and ONE flag.

The bands/rings may be RED, YELLOW, WHITE, PALE GREEN or BLUE while the flags are either WHITE or YELLOW.

When recording the bands/rings and flags it is VITAL to note the position of the FLAG (on the tibia, on the tarsus above the bands/rings, on the tarsus between the bands/rings).

For further details please see: <http://osnz.org.nz/nzwaderstudy.htm>

David Melville

Global Flyway Network 2007 Summary

Another successful year has finished for the GFN/AWSG collaborative NW Australia colour-banding project. Volunteer participation was high with both experienced local people contributing heavily and novices being introduced to the wonders of shorebird research, mostly via the Broome Bird Observatory's guests.

1901 shorebirds were caught in 8 successful cannon net catches of these 116 were Bar-tailed Godwit, 177 Great Knot and 153 Red Knot were individually colour-banded. In addition to the work done by the local Broome team 126 birds were colour-banded during the AWSG Shorebird and Tern banding expedition 2007 (62 Bar-tailed Godwit, 55 Great Knot and 9 Red Knot).

The capture of these birds brings the total number of birds with individual colour-band combinations to 873. These marked birds have now yielded a total, over two years, of 3086 re-sightings with the greatest number of sightings coming between July and October mostly at Roebuck Bay.

A particularly pleasing aspect of this years work was the number of Red Knot colour-banded. This species is relatively difficult to catch at Roebuck bay but this year we got 2 excellent catches during the southward migration period which will, and has already, yield useful information. The connection between Roebuck Bay and New Zealand in relation to the two Red knot populations occurring in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (*rogersi* and *piersma*) is still not well understood despite the amount of research done at both locations and in Victoria south east Australia.

Already during this project 4 Red Knot with NW Australia colour combinations have been seen in NZ, including one in the South Island which was an unusual record. During the GFN/AWSG catches in Broome we also caught a Red Knot previously banded at Miranda in the north island of NZ, the

first ever caught in Western Australia. This bird was presumably (but not definitely!) of the *rogersi* sub-species returning to NZ via Broome, not the regular route to our knowledge. Another first during my field work was the record of a Red Knot with an engraved flag from Miranda NZ sighted in May. Presumably (but not definitely!) a bird on its journey to the Arctic breeding grounds. As our knowledge accumulates on this fascinating species so do the questions!

During my trip to China in March and April 2007 I did not record any Red Knot from the project but just after I left one of my Chinese colleagues, Yan Hong Yen, saw one near Tianjin, Bohai Wan. Hopefully this region will yield more re-sightings this year although the inter-tidal mudflats there are under great pressure from reclamation, as I witnessed during my visit.

Further north in China at Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve on the border with North Korea 3 Bar-tailed Godwit and 2 Great Knot from the project were seen. This remarkably important area will surely yield many more records in the years to come.

I hope that the northward migration season in the Yellow Sea will yield more resightings this year as the project now has more birds marked and many of the birds that have previously been marked as first and second year birds will be undertaking their first migrations. I will spend three weeks in Korea during May 2008 to further relationships with researchers in the Yellow Sea region and to search for marked birds from both Broome and the GFN marked birds from NZ.

More information can be found at <http://www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au>

Chris Hassell

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Southward migration at Schastia Bay, Sea of Okhotsk, Russia: the work continues

Schastia Bay is known for its high concentrations of migrating shorebirds during northern summer and fall. Previous surveys in 2001-2003 provided data contributing to the international importance of the site for such species as Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked Stint, Black-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel. Fewer numbers of Dunlin and Great Knot were found, but the area had a high shorebird species diversity. Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Terek Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Lesser Sandplover occurred, and the region is part of the historical range of Nordmann's Greenshank although none were found.

The banding project has been conducted at Chkalov Island of Schastia Bay for two consecutive seasons since 2006 in order to expand our knowledge about shorebird migration. Each captured bird was fully processed for biometrics, samples for Avian Influenza virus prevalence were taken in 2006, and counts at standard routes were also carried out.

The shorebird studies were done during July 23 - August 8 in 2006 and July 25 - August 1 in 2007. The survey area consists of intertidal flats, inner lagoons and surrounding tundra plots, sand and pebble shores and small sludgy estuaries. The flock sizes exceeding more than a dozen individuals were estimated in tens. Catching of birds was done with mist nets and were more successful at the inner lagoons. Only loosely grouped feeding waders were caught in the mist nets.

In total, 7897 waders of 25 species (2006) and 2504 individuals of 17 species (2007) were counted. One hundred and seventy individuals of 18 species were caught in the first year, and 59 individuals of 10 species in the later period. Great Knot, Red-necked Stint, Dunlin, Whimbrel and Bar-tailed Godwit were most numerous in the counts of 2006. Great Knot, Red-necked Stint and Ruddy Turnstone had highest numbers in 2007. Red-necked Stint and Terek Sandpiper dominated the catch.

For most species we observed the migration of adults in late July, with the first waves of juveniles moving at the beginning of August. Migration of adults was relatively fast, with birds estimated to turnover in less than 2 days. Exceptions are Ruddy Turnstone, Terek Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler and local breeders such as Lesser Sandplover and Redshank.

We found a surprisingly high proportion of leg-flagged birds among Red-necked Stints (4 out of less than 400 adults) in 2007. Origins of bands were South Australia and Victoria as well as Shanghai vicinity, China. Great Knot was the other marked species detected (4 birds with yellow flags of NW Australia for the two seasons).

Relevant online data is coming forward from this project, for the first time, with publicly available digital and geo-referenced morphometric and bird migration information online. The databases follow international protocols and standardised metadata formats allowing connection to various web portals (e.g. Global Biodiversity Information Facility GBIF, National Institute of Health NIH, ORNIS) thereby providing information on the flyway to the wider international community.

The AI component of work is in progress and analysis is underway.

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The China 'recovery' in India

Two flocks of 40 Great Knots, one of them flagged in China, were recently spotted on Henry Island, near Bakkhali, India. City-based birder Sumit K. Sen, sighted the flocks on February 3 along with three others.

A month-long probe, involving exchange of emails among birders across the continents, revealed that the Great Knot was tagged in Chongming Dao, an island north of Shanghai, on April 22 last year.

The bird has since flown 3,500km, along the East Asian-Australasian flyway, to Siberia and Australia. On its way back to China, it landed on Henry Island, which falls on the fringes of the flyway. Most of the

migratory birds in India come from Kazakhstan, Tibet and Siberia. This is the first proof of an eastern bird coming to Bengal.

Great Knots were last spotted on Henry Island 3-4 years ago, and this sighting proves that Bengal is also a wintering spot for them.

The sighting of the flagged bird marked the first recorded instance of a Great Knot from China being "recovered" in India.

Adapted from an article by Romila Saha
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080314/jsp/calcutta/story_9016156.jsp

More news on southward migration

China News

Thirty records of flagged shorebirds from 7 species were resighted in mainland China by birdwatchers during the southward migration in 2007. The earliest record was a Bar-tailed Godwit with NW Australian leg flag reported on 14th July in Yalujiang, while the latest record was a Dunlin with Alaska leg flag reported on 31st October in Chongming Dongtan. August was the month with the most number of records, 20 records from 5 species were reported, equivalent to 67% of the total number of records.

In terms of species, Bar-tailed Godwit was resighted most often, with 9 records of NW Australian leg flag and 3 records of Chongming Dongtan leg flag.

Birds reported were banded in 5 different places with fifteen records of 5 species banded in NW Australia, which is more numerous in terms of both species number and abundance compared to other locations.

Best wishes to everybody!

Bai Qinggaun

Late southward migration from Kamchatka

Data regarding the late southward migration of waders was collected in Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia during October - November 2007. The main purpose of the expedition was to determine the timing of waders leaving on southward migration.

Observations were carried out on southeast coast near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky on October 18-20, 25-26 and November 6-7.

On the southeast coast flocks of 5 Sanderling were recorded on November 10. Pacific Golden Plovers continued to be rather common until this day after which we observed some small flocks and single birds. The latest observations of Pacific Golden Plover were made on November 14.

On the southwest of Kamchatka Peninsula in the mouth of the Bolshaya River, active migration of Dunlins took place at least until October 26 when we observed flocks up to 180 individuals leaving southward. On the same day we also saw Grey-tailed Tattlers, Grey Plovers, Pacific Golden Plovers, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Sanderlings.

The next time we were able to visit this location was not until November 6-7 after a long period of bad weather. Snow cover appeared in that area on November 1-3 and the day temperature was -1-3° C. We did not find any wader species remaining in these conditions.

Yuri Gerasimov, Rimma Buchalova and Yulia Zavgarova

New threat for shorebirds in Korea

In February this year, South Korea's new president took office. One of his main election pledges was to help rebuild the national economy through a series of infrastructure projects, including the construction of a series of new canals, labeled the Grand Canal Project. Despite the fact that final plans have not been drafted nor has an Environmental Impact Assessment been conducted (as required by law) President Lee pledges to complete the Canal during his 5 year term.

If completed as proposed, the project will link up all four of South Korea's major river systems (the Yeongsan, Geum, Nakdong and Han), and even link rivers in the North with those of the South. The project will require the dredging, deepening and widening of approximately 2000km of shallow river courses in South Korea (and apparently another 1000km in DPRK). This will cause major changes in the hydrology of much of the river systems, impacting numerous relict freshwater wetlands, including 8-10 of the nation's Important Birds Areas, as well as one of Korea's most well-known Ramsar sites, Upo Wetland. These rivers and wetlands provide vitally important habitats for 58 wildlife species specifically protected by Korea's own environmental legislation because of their rarity and

importance to the Korean nation. One of the canals will even run through the Saemangeum area, reducing further any opportunities there for mitigation of impacts on wildlife by that other massively-destructive project.

The Grand Canal will also likely increase disturbance and pollution enormously along these same river lengths, as its proposed end-use will be for shipping of goods as well as people.

For Korea's birds, this issue is clearly one of extreme importance and urgency.

Find out more information and sign our online petition against this development at http://www.birdskorea.org/Habitats/Grand_Canal/BK-HA-Grand-Canal.shtml

KFEM (the Korean Federation of Environmental Movements and Korean office of Friends of the Earth) also has a petition against the project. Visit

<http://www.foei.org/en/get-involved/take-action/great-korea-canal-project/>

Birds Korea, March 18, 2008

http://www.birdskorea.org/Habitats/Grand_Canal/BK-HA-Grand-Canal.shtml





WCS GAINS (Global Avian Influenza Network for Surveillance) in Sumatra and Java

WCS GAINS (Wildlife Conservation Society-Global Avian Influenza Network for Surveillance), coordinated by Dr. Darin Collins, DVM (Field Veterinarian, Indonesia), has begun surveillance sampling to monitor for the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus (HPAI) H5N1 and banding shorebirds in Cemara Beach and Wonorejo, Surabaya. The WCS GAINS Field Team is coordinated by Iwan Londo and Drh. Zulfi Arsan with four field assistants: Yuwana Peksa, Indra Purwanto, Agus Hadi Santoso and Fransisca Noni. This project is supported by three field staff members: Drh. Yenny Saraswati, from Bogor, West Java; Giyanto from Medan, North Sumatera; and Lambok Panjaitan from Jambi.



GAINS Field Team in Sumatra (top left to right: Indra Purwanto, Giyanto, Yuwana P H, Drh. Yenny S, Fransisca Noni, Drh. Zulfi Arsan. Bottom left to right : Iwan Londo, Herman, Agus Hadi)

The first HPAI surveillance sampling period occurred in October 2007 at Cemara Beach, Jambi. During November 2007, sampling occurred at Wonorejo, Surabaya. A third sampling period took place in December 2007 at Cemara beach, Jambi. The purpose of this project is to investigate HPAI in wild birds, as wild birds can serve as sentinels for the early detection of the avian influenza virus. The WCS GAINS Project is looking especially at migratory shorebirds because these species migrate into and through risk areas within Indonesia.

The activities in this projects are:

- Collecting samples from mouth/throat and cloaca for virus testing for HPAI H5N1
- Documenting migration counts of shorebirds (see opposite tables)
- Natural ecology studies by placing leg flags to shorebirds

Banding and flagging of shorebirds is an important part of field techniques that investigate the migration routes of shorebirds. For the first time for any group within Indonesia, WCS GAINS has flagged the shorebirds sampled in Sumatra.

Through the coordination set forth by the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) and Wetlands Oceania, Sumatra has been designated orange over black flag combination with Java black over orange.

Field Site Location

1. Cemara Beach, Jambi

Cemara Beach, Jambi is a beach near Berbak National Park in central Sumatra (1°05'–1°35'LS; 104°05'–104°30'BT). This beach consists of beach, pines forest, river and mangrove habitats. The length of this beach is approximately 3 km and is up to 1.5 km wide at the widest point. Extensive mudflats along the beach occur during low tide, creating very important feeding areas for shorebirds during their north and southward migration. Besides the shorebird species, Cemara Beach is also an important place for the black monkey (*Presbytis cristata*), wild pig (*Sus scrofa*), monitor lizard (*Varanus salvator*) and the crocodile (*Crocodilus porosus*).

2. Wonorejo, Surabaya

Wonorejo is a fish and shrimp pond site managed by traditional farmers from the area. This area occurs in east Surabaya (7° 18' 48.34" S; 112° 49' 51.54" E). Wonorejo is approximately 100 ha. Shorebirds come to this area during south and northward migrations. The long-tail monkey (*Macaca fascicularis*), monitor lizard (*Varanus salvator*) and mongoose (*Herpestes sp*) are also found in Wonorejo.

The shorebirds captured and given the leg flag of Sumatra (orange over black) were the Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Greater Sandplover, Mongolian Plover, Pacific Golden Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Asian Dowitcher, Kentish Plover and the Curlew Sandpiper. The shorebirds captured and given the leg flag of Java (black over orange) were Marsh Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Whimbrel, White-headed Stilt, Grey-tailed Tattler and the Terek Sandpiper.

The research work of WCS GAINS continues through 2008. The information gained about HPAI H5N1, shorebirds and their migration, as well as the community support in the Cemara District and educational programs developed for school children are all important conservation-based work. This project could not be possible without the support and cooperation received from the people of Cemara and the Head of the Cemara District.

Fransisca Noni / WCS GAINS Field Staff Assistant

Iwan Londo / WCS GAINS Indonesia

Results of Observed Migratory Shorebirds

Numbers of shorebirds counted in Cemara Beach on October 21 and December 9 2007

No	Common name	Scientific name	Numbers	
			October	December
1	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	1	3
2	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	30	30
3	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	3	4
4	Mongolian Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	2000	560
5	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	500	200
6	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	2000	1400
7	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	1500	1000
8	Asian Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>	200	100
9	Western Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	175	24
10	Far-eastern Curlew	<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	100	20
11	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius paeopus</i>	23	13
12	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	58	60
13	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	2	4
14	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	5	15
15	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	125	300
16	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	3	6
17	Common Sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypolecos</i>	6	17
18	Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	3	7
19	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	35	20
20	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	20	9
21	Great Knot	<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>	100	20
22	Nordmann's Greenshank	<i>Tringa guttifer</i>	0	7
Total			6889	3819

Numbers of shorebirds counted in Wonorejo, Surabaya on November, 18, 2007

No	Common Name	Scientific name	Numbers
1	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	5
2	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	4
3	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	200
4	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	10
5	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	10
6	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	100
7	Common Sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypolecos</i>	20
8	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	50
9	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	100
	Total		449





Quick bites

Banded Lapwing

The VWSG were amazed to find 146 Banded Lapwing together in a flock on a newly-ploughed field and adjacent grazed pasture at Egg Lagoon on King Island on 11th March. The book on the birds on King Island published in 1971 indicates that only small numbers are present and discussions with 86-year-old Max McGarvie, one of the authors of the book, indicated that the maximum sized flock he was ever aware of in his 60 years on the island was 20 to 30.

Reference to HANZAB indicates that large flocks of Banded Lapwings have very occasionally been seen in various states, with one record of approximately 200 together at a location on mainland Tasmania. Given the small number of pairs which breed on King Island it seems likely that some temporary immigration from elsewhere has occurred.

Have any other *Tattler* readers seen large flocks of Banded Lapwing?

King Island catching

13 people from the VWSG made the second visit to King Island, Tasmania, from 7-15 March, following an earlier visit in March 2007.

An initial census gave a count of 856 turnstones suggesting that the total population for the island is probably between 1,200 -1,500. This makes it probably the best location for this species in the flyway.

A total of 419 Ruddy Turnstone were caught compared to the 269 caught in 2007. In the very first catch made there was a turnstone banded in

Japan (nine years previously) and another from Taiwan (banded four years previously). Two originally marked by the VWSG in South Australia were also caught. A turnstone with white on the upper (North Island, NZ) was also sighted during the week.

The catch total of 419 caught in the week was probably the third largest ever turnstone banding event in the world. Only in Delaware Bay in the USA in May each year and on the shores of south-west Alaska in August in the mid-1960s have such large totals been accumulated over a short period.

Black-tailed Godwit found near breeding grounds

An Australian banded Black-tailed Godwit was recently recovered on the north-west shores of the Sea of Okhotsk, close to the northern limit of the species' breeding range. The bird was banded in

August 1998 in Broome, NW Australia.

This is the first record of an Australian banded Black-tailed Godwit near the breeding grounds and the first recovered in Russia. The bird was recovered in May 2007, suggesting that it was still on passage.

Join the next NWA Expedition in 2008

The next wader and tern banding expedition to north-west Australia will take place from 8th to 29th November 2008. Please register your interest NOW.

A full "Brochure" will be available to be sent to potential participants in the near future. This gives a

detailed itinerary and details of costs etc. 3-4000 waders and terns of at least 35 species are usually caught during these annual expeditions.

For more information please contact Clive Minton mintons@ozemail.com.au or Roz Jessop moonbird@waterfront.net.au



Australasian Wader Studies Group

Membership of the Australasian Wader Studies Group is open to anyone interested in the conservation and research of waders (shorebirds) in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Members receive the twice yearly journal *Stilt*, and a quarterly newsletter, *Tattler*.

Please direct all membership enquiries to:
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