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Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways

No 10: July 2008

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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

Meet your committee! Each of your 16 member committee will be introduced over the next two editions of *Tattler*.

This edition continues to report on the declines of wader populations staging at Saemangeum. Banding activities in many countries are still in their infancy and we are still only beginning to be able to prove how important the Yellow Sea really is on the EAAF. There are keystone species, could the Yellow Sea be a keystone site?

There is also a report on the draining of lakes and wetlands in north-western China where water is being diverted for mining operations. But before you voice your objections to development in China and the environmental destruction that ensues, take the time to read the recent findings by Silke Nebel and colleagues concerning the impacts of river regulation and freshwater extraction in some of Australia's most important inland wetlands. This is a warning that the situation at home may be no better.

On a brighter note, aren't the movements of the godwits fascinating! Have a look at their travels on Google Earth (link page 7) and compare the migration routes of the *menzbieri* and *baueri* subspecies. Will we see another E7 who was tracked for her full migration last season? Southern migration starts soon so happy wader watching!

Meet your committee

Eight of your committee members will be profiled in this edition with the remainder in the next edition of *Tattler*.

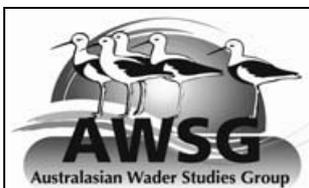
Vice-Chair: Phil Straw

As a school boy I took a keen interest in birds, working as a volunteer and professionally with birds across the United Kingdom and also in France in my early life. I left France for the Oxford University with the idea of a degree in ornithology, and perhaps a PhD. But after a year was heading for Australia (don't ask me why!), but not before working constructing habitat for nesting and migratory shorebirds (excavating the now famous 'Scrape' with the equally legendary Bert Axel) at Minsmere Nature Reserve, Suffolk, and a stint as Warden at Skokholm Island BO, south Wales.

Dissatisfied with the situation with the RAOU when

living in Brisbane, I was instrumental in calling a meeting of ornithologists to form the Queensland Ornithological Society in 1967. I left Qld University in 1971 for new frontiers in NSW and took on a variety of jobs including Fisheries Research Scientist, set up my own Scuba Diving business and Cross Country Ski School, was a Field Research Officer NPWS for 3 years and eventually set up my own business in 1992 as a consultant avian and wetlands ecologist working on the restoration, design and construction and management of wetland habitats (especially for migratory shorebirds). My current work includes the \$8million Penrhyn Estuary Habitat Enhancement Project as part of the expansion of Port Botany.

I have been a member of the AWSG since 1988, vice Chair since 1996 and started *Tattler* as Editor in 1994, handing over to Lisa in 2007. Over the past



Compiled and published by the Australasian Wader Studies Group

A Special interest Group of Birds Australia



five years I have taken a keen interest in wetlands management and shorebird conservation in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region (especially China including Hong Kong and Taiwan). In my 'spare' time I manage the AWSG and Asia Pacific Shorebird Network websites, soon to include a Chinese language version.

Treasurer: Brian Speechley

I have been interested in birds for as long as I can remember, but first involvement in serious research was several seasons from 1961 assisting Clive Champion with his work on the Little Tern breeding colony situated at that time in the grounds of Sydney airport. I was also fortunate enough to have had my interest in shorebirds in my early teens encouraged and mentored by Arnold McGill and Keith Hindwood. Subsequently I spent eight years on various banding projects working predominantly on heathland communities but also assisting with shearwater and penguin studies and with the early attempts to cannon net and mist net shorebirds in Botany Bay. A ten year concentrated study of population levels and habitat preferences of the shorebirds of the northern shores of Botany Bay during the 1960's led to a lifetime interest in these species.

I completed the Charles Sturt University Graduate Certificate in Ornithology last year, and recommend it to any amateur with an interest in serious research. Since 2001 I have been coordinating the monthly population monitoring program of the NSW Wader Study Group in Botany Bay and looking forward to retirement from business to concentrate on research into shorebirds, heathland birds, etc.

I joined the committee as treasurer two years ago after Ken and Clive discovered that I was an accountant, while chatting over coffee waiting for the return flight from the shorebird conference in Nelson NZ in 2005.

Conservation Officer: Ann Lindsey

I first took an interest in birds when I lived on the northern beaches of Sydney in about 1969 after I saw a TV program called We The Destroyers. The program suggested that if one opened the door and looked outside one would see birds. I did this and became instantly entranced by Kookaburras, Pied Currawongs and Magpies which I started to feed every day. Before long a dozen or more Kookas, Magpies and Currawongs rolled up for their mince and I became very poor indeed, but I was completely hooked. My neighbours hated me because not only did the Kookas eat my mince, but they also fished in their pond for goldfish and I must say they were very successful.

I joined the RAOU and subsequently the Field Ornithologists Club which has become Birding NSW and became the activities officer for a time. I continued birdwatching, but not my bird feeding activities, over the years and my holidays usually revolved around birds which took me to many parts

of the world.

I moved north to the Newcastle area and joined the Hunter Bird Observers Club in about 1989 and have served on the committee ever since. I was president for five years and am currently the conservation officer. Three years ago I took the position of conservation officer for AWSG. These days I do less birdwatching spending more time behind the computer writing letters objecting to ill-conceived developments so damaging to birds and their habitat. As Newcastle is on the estuary of the Hunter River and is an excellent area for waders I take a keen interest in these birds. The Hunter Bird Observers Club now monitors the waders monthly and is contributing the results to Shorebirds 2020. I have been to Korea twice now to participate in the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Project. There is no doubt that birds have contributed to my life and made it all the more interesting and satisfying.

Committee Member: Maureen Christie

I lead Friends of Shorebirds SE, a dedicated group that is occupied with many projects including determining departure weights for Ruddy Turnstone, collecting of data on overwintering turnstone, and determining site fidelity by reading engraved flags. I am also involved with the monitoring and protection of nesting Little Tern and Hooded Plover. I am also involved in various AWSG annual counting programs at two Population Monitoring Sites, the Coorong and Lower SE Lakes. I participated in monitoring at Saemangeum during the 2007 season.

I attended my first AWSG NW Australia expedition in 2001 and have participated in most expeditions since then. Unfortunatley more and more of my time is being taken up by administrative tasks such as making comment on Management Plans!

Committee Member: Chris Hassell

I have been lucky enough to be living in Broome next to the wonderful Roebuck Bay since 1996. I worked at the BBO for 3 years before running my own small tour and survey business.

I now work for the Global Flyway Network with funding from Vogelbescherming Nederland (Birdlife-Nederland) under the guidance of Theunis Piersma. In addition to this I contract to AQIS on their AI surveillance programme and coordinate the MYSMA surveys at Roebuck Bay and 80 Mile Beach.

I run the cannon netting and count activities for AWSG as well, which overlap with all my other jobs which is rather useful!

Committee Member: Adrian Riegen

I have been based in Auckland New Zealand since 1982 but I grew up in England and was interested in wildlife, and birds in particular, from a very early age in the two acre garden we had in Oxfordshire. I joined the Oxford Ornithological Society as a teenager and met other birders who I was soon birding with at weekends. A trip to the Scilly Isles to

see 7 Buff-breasted Sandpipers got me interested in waders and later I was at college with a member of the Wash Wader Ringing Group. A couple of weekends on the Wash sealed my interest in waders, which has continued to this day.

Since 1986 I have been co-leader of the New Zealand Wader Study Group (NZWSG) known as 'Miranda Banders' in those days. We have been catching and banding waders ever since. Unravelling the Bar-tailed Godwit and Red Knot migration story has been a major part of our work.

The NZWSG is part of the Miranda Naturalists' Trust which has been very active in promoting waders to the general public and I've been involved with this and helped establish the sister site relationship with Yalu Jiang in China. The overseas aspect of waders has taken me on expeditions to NW WA, Gulf of Carpentaria, China, South Korea, Japan and Alaska.

Committee Member Jenny Spencer

I completed my BSc (Hons) Zoology at the University of Cardiff, Wales, in 2001 before emigrating to Australia with my family. I started work as a research assistant at the Jervis Bay Marine Park, where I assisted with monitoring projects of bottlenose dolphins, White-bellied Sea Eagles, recreational fishers and SCUBA divers. I started a PhD, at the Australian Catholic University in 2004, which is focused on migratory shorebird ecology in the Hunter estuary, NSW. From 2006, I

have continued my PhD studies alongside employment as an Environmental Scientist, in the Rivers and Wetlands Unit at the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC). During my work with DECC I have been the primary author of an ecological character description for the Lake Pinaroo Ramsar site, in north-west NSW, and I am currently a project leader for waterbird and fish habitat studies in significant inland wetlands in the Gwydir and Lower Murrumbidgee.

Committee Member: Paul Wainwright

Possibly the youngest and newest member of the committee at 32, I grew up in the UK in a world of Woodpeckers and Chaff-finches. I moved to Australia 20 years ago and brought my interest in birds with me. I currently work for Department for Environment and Heritage (SA) as a wetland ecologist. Wetland mapping, classification and management (particularly of the Ramsar estate in SA) are primary areas of my work. My interests in avian ecology and wildlife photography tend to compliment my job. Of the birds, my major interests are waterbirds, shorebirds and pelagic species, most of the Ibb's get a rest these days. I am passionate about the Coorong, and the hope that biodiversity can be restored. Waders are a key component of that biodiversity. I am currently monitoring the decline in wader abundance annually. Optimistic? Unsure!

Team changes at the Broome Bird Observatory

The BBO Committee would like to announce that the Wardens, Pete Collins and Holly Sitters, have now left the BBO. We would like to thank Pete and Holly for the wonderful contribution they have made over the past 2 years and wish them all the best as they head off travelling through the Kimberley and back across Australia to the east coast.

The Committee is delighted to welcome new Wardens, Jon and Anne King, who recently arrived from the United States.

Let us introduce you to the Kings.....

Anne was born and grew up in California. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, obtaining a degree in Anthropology, while also taking many biology classes and beginning to watch birds. After finishing university, Anne spent several years as a naturalist instructor at a not-for-profit marine educational institute. She became increasingly interested in birds, and took a position with the Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO), where she filled many roles during the six years she worked there. Eventually Anne sought to broaden her experience and seven years ago became a wildlife biologist at an international environmental consulting firm, EDAW Inc. She was Leader of the Wildlife Practice from 2005.

Jon was born in Kenya, his family moving back to

the UK when he was a small boy. Jon had become a serious birder by the age of 10, and he became a licensed bird ringer at only 14. He studied Environmental Biology in Oxford, then remained there to work as a research scientist at the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology for five years. During those years he worked on many diverse field projects, living in Spain for more than two years. In 1996, Jon shifted from academic research to applied environmental work, and worked for a season at Long Point Bird Observatory in eastern Canada before heading to California to work for Point Reyes Bird Observatory. He worked as a field biologist for both PRBO and the Museum of Natural Science at Louisiana State University, before taking a position as the Senior Ornithologist for EDAW. Jon has also been a birding guide in a number of countries, guiding individuals and groups of varying sizes for several organisations.

After years learning a great deal in consultancy, Jon and Anne are now returning to their passion in applied bird conservation, fieldwork, and education. The BBO Committee is delighted they have decided to come and join the team and look forward to working with them both

*Andrea Spencer
BBO Committee*





Update 2008: South Korean shorebirds show major declines

This May, Birds Korea and the AWSG completed fieldwork of the third year of the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program (SSMP). They also conducted a national shorebird survey along the west and south coasts of South Korea (May 2nd-May 13th). Based on this research, we can now state unambiguously that the Saemangeum reclamation has caused massive impacts on many shorebird species, including causing a major decline in South Korea's Great Knot. Further, we can state that other shorebird species, such as Black-tailed Godwit, have also shown a significant decline at the national level in recent years.

Most *Tattler* readers already know that Saemangeum, on the west coast of South Korea, was the single most important shorebird site in the Yellow Sea. It supported at least 19 species of shorebird in internationally important concentrations, including a third of the world's Great Knot. However, the area was targeted by South Korea's national government for reclamation in a project that is even now leading to the loss of 30,000 ha of tidal-flats and a further 10,000 ha of shallows.

To the background of unsupported claims from reclamation proponents that Saemangeum's displaced shorebirds would simply move to adjacent wetlands, or to other tidal-flats in Korea, Birds Korea partnered with the AWSG to conduct the SSMP. The SSMP, an independent research initiative only made possible by the enormous contributions of almost 100 people who participated in fieldwork, and funding from private donors and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, entailed repeat shorebird survey and habitat assessment of Saemangeum and the two adjacent wetlands of Gomso Bay and the Geum Estuary throughout April and May 2006-2008.

After three seasons of fieldwork, we are now able to state that the SSMP has successfully documented (and publicised) the bleak and rapid degradation of Saemangeum's shorebird habitat. Following completion of the 33-km long seawall in April 2006, the whole once-magnificent system has suffered from a greatly reduced and artificial tidal-regime, rendering vast areas of upper tidal-flat to desert while flooding former lower lying areas. Data gathered by the SSMP, in combination with the Birds Korea National Shorebird Survey (May 2008), confirm that:

- Numbers of shorebirds within the Saemangeum reclamation area have declined significantly (by more than 137,000 between May 2006 and May 2008);
- Numbers of shorebirds within the SSMP Study site (Saemangeum, and the adjacent Geum Estuary and Gomso Bay), have also declined



Razor-clams: Tombstones in the tidal-flat, Dongjin Estuary, May 22 2008,

significantly (by between 97,000 and 105,000 over the same period);

- Numbers of Great Knot within the SSMP study site have declined by almost 95,000, from 116,000 in May 2006 to only 21,000 in May 2008. Despite counting all major shorebird sites nationwide, the great majority of those Great Knot "lost" to the Saemangeum reclamation were not found: they are also "lost" to South Korea.

Further, there is no evidence that other species displaced by the Saemangeum reclamation have been able to move to other sites within South Korea; rather there is a large body of evidence to show that shorebird numbers in total have fallen in recent years. These declines are most apparent in the Black-tailed Godwit and the Great Knot, and are most obvious at sites affected by reclamation (such as Asan Bay).

Work now being conducted by the AWSG, as part of the Monitoring Yellow Sea Migrants in Australia (MYSMA) program, has also revealed that numbers of Great Knot wintering in North-west Australia have shown a sudden decline since closure of the Saemangeum sea-wall. The conclusion: reclamation in Korea is impacting not only the environment and biodiversity of Korea, but also the shared biodiversity of other nations.

The SSMP and National Shorebird Survey data clearly support calls for the restoration and maintenance of greater tidal-exchange within the Saemangeum reclamation area (leading to the restoration of significant areas of still internationally-important shorebird habitat there); the urgent designation of Korea's most important remaining shorebird site, the Geum Estuary, as a Ramsar site; and the immediate and public cancellation of reclamation projects threatening

other key shorebird sites such as Song Do in Incheon and Asan Bay.

SSMP reports and further information is available from the Birds Korea website: http://www.birdskorea.org/Our_Work/Research/NSS2008/BK-RES-BKNSS2008.shtml

Our commitment remains to make this information and data available to all, especially in the run-up to the Ramsar Convention conference (South Korea, October 28-November 4th, 2008), and to help inform the bilateral "Agreement between the

Government of the Republic of Korea and the Government of Australia on the Protection of Migratory Birds" (ROKAMBA). The SSMP 2008 Report will be published in early October, and there are now tentative plans to conduct a fourth year of the SSMP in 2010. Please visit our websites for more details.

Nial Moores, Birds Korea
www.birdskorea.org / www.birdskorea.or.kr

Danny Rogers, Australasian Wader Studies Group
<http://www.awsg.org.au/>

Taiwan's Dunlins need Saemangeum

There were 11 resightings of flagged Dunlin with white/blue flags in the SSMP 2007 Report (including 5 engraved leg flags (ELFs)). It's really exciting news for us, because before 2007 there were only 6 flag resighting records of Taiwanese dunlin overseas.

We started to put white/blue flags on the left leg of dunlin in 1998 and ELFs at the end of 2006 at Han-Pao and Hsin-Pao, ChangHua County, Taiwan. Over 1,200 dunlins have had ELFs fitted during the 06-07 and 07-08 winter and spring fieldwork periods.

It was a great chance to participate in the SSMP 2008 and we worked with the SSMP team counting and flag searching in early May. In total we sighted about 20 white/blue dunlins before leaving the project. Combining the flag sighting data from Chris Hassell, Adrian Boyle and SSMP team, we had 57 Taiwanese dunlins sighted plus one dunlin which was caught at Yubu Island by the banding team of South Korea. All dunlins with ELFs were banded in the last four years.

Thanks to Danny Rogers and Nial Moores who invited us to join the SSMP this year. We also really thank the best flag searching team, Chris Hassell and Adrian Boyle, as they found most of the ELF dunlins for us. The results show the Saemangeum area is a really important stopover site for our dunlins in northward migration.

Chung-Yu Chiang, Hsuan-Hao Chen, Wei-Ting Liu & Chie-Jen Ko, Taiwan Wader Study Group
twsg.taiwan@gmail.com

Total number of banded and flagged dunlins in Taiwan, and recaptured and resighting records in South Korea.

	Total numbers	2006	2007	2008
Banded (1986-)	7691			1
Flagged*(1998-)	1310	2	6	28
ELFs (2005-)	1202		5	28
Total		2	11	57

* Only plain white/blue flags.



Taiwan Dunlin with ELF 338 was resighted at south of Dongjin River, Saemangeum, South Korea on 7th May 2008

Hooded Plover 2007-08 breeding season update

The 'beach-nesting birds' project has had an amazing team of volunteers, rangers, committees of management and local councils involved in monitoring and implementing management for the protection of Victoria's most threatened resident shorebird, the Hooded Plover. For the first time ever, we have a detailed data set on the threats that these beach-nesters experience across the Victorian coast and on their breeding success in relation to management. We have learnt to adapt our managements to the variability of beaches and

beach user groups across the coast, and from each pair we have gained great insight into how to improve their breeding success. The lessons we have learned have taught us what to do, and what not to do, and this will make for a comprehensive management toolkit that will be produced at the end of June 2008.

Please visit <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/our-projects/beach-nesting-birds.html> for the full report.

Grainne Maguire





Godwits on the Go

Please remember when reading the information below that this is not the 'final story', these are the initial findings and may change when the final analysis is done. In summary we have nine birds on the Siberian breeding grounds, with 900km separating the most westerly and easterly birds. Three have stayed in Roebuck Bay, Broome, northwest Australia, we have lost contact with one bird and two have died.

The arrival date at the breeding grounds of the first bird, H3, on May 19th was earlier than we had expected. This was confirmed when Pavel Tomkovich from the Museum of The Moscow State University told us that the earliest records of arrival at the breeding grounds published are between 25 May and 7 June and 14 June at the New Siberian Islands to the north of the breeding range. Thus the arrival dates revealed with the help of the satellite transmitters are the earliest.

H3 was very closely followed by our only male bird with a transmitter, H8. He left Roebuck Bay a few hours behind H3. It was the same case of them leaving the Yellow Sea within hours of each other and then ending up only 63km apart. They have wandered to within 35 km of each other. And yes of course it would be mind blowing if they ended up on the same nest but let's not get carried away!

Updates on each individual bird

We have three birds H0, H2 and C0 still in Roebuck Bay. Although initially we had hoped and expected these birds to go north on migration, it is almost a bonus that these individuals did not go as we will now get some very accurate insights into the godwits use of Roebuck Bay during our winter dry season. Maybe they were only 3 years old when we implanted the transmitters and not yet ready to breed? Maybe they are taking a year off (because of the transmitter?). This could be a strategy for long lived species if it seems to them too risky to migrate due to lack of condition, safer to take a year off than risk the arduous migration.

C0 is the bird that left Roebuck Bay and went 300km NE to Raft Point and Montgomery Reef before heading off on migration (or so we assumed). She then changed her mind (a woman's prerogative!) and returned to Roebuck Bay. It appears that she stopped for a short time at Ashmore Reef or one of the Indonesian Islands before coming 'home'.

It is no surprise to us that H0 did not migrate as when she was seen on 12/04/08 she was very skinny and had nowhere near enough fat to fuel her on her migration.

H2 is still in the bay and transmitting good signals and was seen in the east of the bay at roost on May 12th by Anne King of the BBO. She did decide to go 120km SW to La Grange Bay but she was

unimpressed and returned to Roebuck Bay 2 hours later! (The Bird not Anne)

We lost contact with C4 as she was flying along the coast of China. We hope that it is a satellite transmitter issue and that we will get a record of her or see her back here in Roebuck Bay in September, but migration is likely to be the stage of these birds incredible life cycle when they are under most pressure and therefore when most mortality may occur.

C3 is 142 54E and after initially sticking to a very small area, very likely establishing in her breeding territory, she appears to have taken a 100km journey to the SE before returning to whence she had come from and then followed this up with another return trip to the SE, this time of 200km each way. She has only been in Siberia since May 29 so she should still be nesting.

C6 settled initially in a marshy area before moving to similar habitat but some 165 km north. She arrived on May 28. She has also been walkabout and on June 4 to 6 was 256km due south of her supposed breeding territory. It seems odd to me for the birds to be moving away from their breeding territory and hopefully it doesn't mean that their nest failed for some reason. She has since returned to her 'core area' and then left for the New Siberian Islands (NSI).

C7 is the most westerly of our birds at 140 54E and she has been behaving in the same way as the previous two birds and between June 4 and 6 was 165km south of her marshy breeding area in some hilly country but has returned to her core area.

H3 was the first to leave Roebuck bay the first to arrive in the Yellow Sea, the first to leave the Yellow Sea and first to arrive in Siberia. She is obviously a very healthy and experienced bird and even beat our transmitter male to the breeding grounds. She landed near the mouth of the Kolyma River and has now moved to the NSI where Pavel Tomkovich suggested the birds may go to fatten up for their southward migration.

H7 had remained at her presumed breeding site since her arrival on May 30 but unfortunately she seems to have died around June 9 based on the readings from her temperature sensor.

H8, the only male bird from Roebuck Bay, was only hours behind H3, as mentioned previously, and they did very similar journeys both taking a short break in the southern Yellow Sea just north of Shanghai before moving to Yalu Jiang in northern China on the border with North Korea. They then ending up within 60km of each other on the vast tundra breeding grounds. H8 seems to have left his territory a day before H3 and has moved 700km west. His last signal had him heading for the NSI from the Siberian mainland.

H9 was the bird that had the most easterly location in the Yellow Sea being our only adventurous soul to use North Korea for her staging area. She spent a couple of days in one location before moving 35km south west of where she landed but after just 5 or 6 days here she flew 70km NNE and still not happy she went 20km SE and then back again 5 days later. She has now head towards the NSI and is 260km from her 'core area'.

We got a fantastic track of A3 in to her Siberian breeding location as her transmitter was on as she arrived. She settled on low mountain slopes and was sticking to a very small area suggesting she was to remain and breed there. However, she seems to have died or been killed on about June 9 as indicated by her temperature sensor.

A7 had landed some 480km south of most birds in very different looking terrain. She is in the Taiga belt and this is usually only a stopover site if it is a late spring which doesn't seem to be the case this year so we are unsure why she has chosen this location. She moved 30km north on June 6 but only within the same habitat. I would think that she is not breeding.

A9 has been very good to us and timed her departure from the Yellow Sea and her arrival on to the breeding grounds when her transmitter was on. She has remained more settled than some birds but has been on short explorations of about 11km away from the core area she transmits from. This was the 13 year old known age bird that I thought would be first to the breeding grounds, she was last of those that made it!

Many thanks to all involved with the project and Pavel Tomcovich for his help with the Siberian side of things and particularly Lee Tibbitts for all her regular updates summaries and Google Earth grabs.

Now we cross our fingers for the batteries to last as well as the ones on the NZ birds did last year and see if we can track the southward migration. Don't turn off yet folks!

For those of you not yet following the tracks of the NZ and Broome birds I recommend you do! It is fascinating stuff (but I would say that wouldn't I?) To view the birds follow the information below.

The best way to follow the project is to visit my Global Flyway Network (GFN) website www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au.

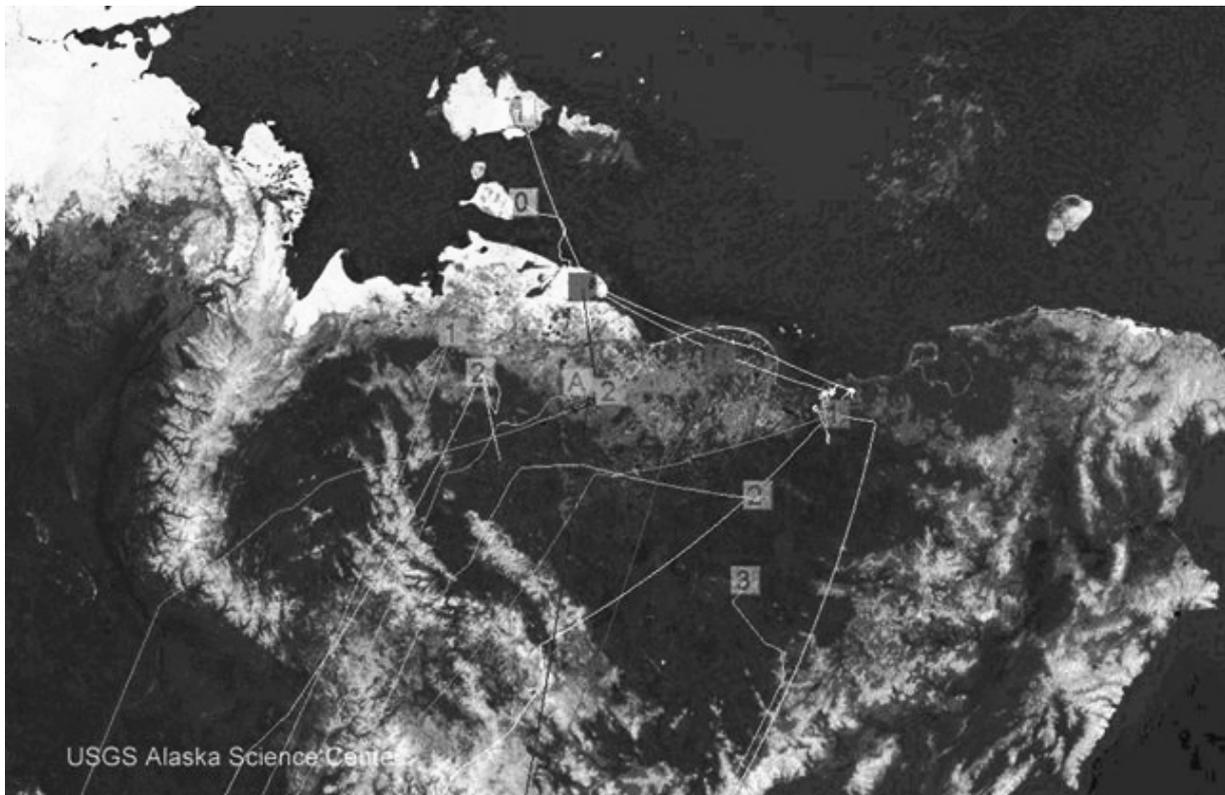
At the top of the first page is a heading 'Follow the Godwits Here' this takes you to the USGS site when you are there scroll down to the bottom of that first page and there is a godwit icon.

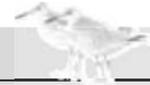
When you click on the icon with a number you will be given a list of information. Note that the date is month/day/year and the time is UTC/Greenwich meantime, add 7 hours for WA and Chinese time. Korea is another one hour ahead.

Click the godwit to download the kmz file and view the Google Earth interactive map.

I hope this works. The computers will need Google Earth installed, it is a free download.

Chris Hassell
Global Flyway Network





First record of NWA Oriental Pratincole overseas

The keen eyes and photography skills of the Taiwan shorebird community have been known to us for a long time now and recently they really came up trumps when Mr Chien-Hua Chen of Wildbird Society of Chia-yi County saw an Oriental Pratincole with a Yellow Leg Flag (YLF) on 08 -10 and 13 - 14 June 2008. He was able to obtain a very good photo and even read a few digits on the band during the first sighting. He consequently, returned and got enough images to be able to read the entire band number. The bird has bred successfully and is currently rearing chicks.

The bird was initially caught at night by mist net on the grasslands of Anna Plains Station, 165km south west of Broome, on February 4th 2004. This was during the AWSG expedition when we recorded 2.88 million Oriental Pratincole on the 220km length of 80 Mile Beach adjacent to Anna Plains station. It was aged as a 2+ adult. That is a distance of 4728km between banding and breeding!

Oriental Pratincoles arrive in Taiwan in late March

and start laying eggs in mid-April. The presence of breeding birds in central and southern Taiwan is well known but the numbers of breeding pairs have not been accurately assessed. Data from local birders show that the numbers of breeding pairs are probably 500-1000 pairs. Oriental Pratincole in Taiwan use mainly fallow farmland (mostly sugarcane fields) for breeding. This brings them in to danger due to modern agricultural activities such as ploughing, sowing and insecticide spraying which start during the breeding season often destroying nests and eggs and reducing the breeding success rate. Besides farmland, they also select the sandy or gravel substrate on reclaimed areas or river banks with sparse vegetation in which to nest.

Despite the enormous numbers of this species in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway there are few breeding records and this is the first-ever overseas flag sighting.

*Chris Hassell
Northwest Wader Study Group*

First record of Taiwanese Kentish Plover overseas

The Kentish Plover is one of the most abundant waders in Taiwan. The wintering population is over 50,000 and about 2,000 pairs breed in coastal areas of Taiwan. It seems these birds are residents according to colour-ring resightings.

The Wild Bird Federation Taiwan and Taiwan Wader Study Group have been banding Kentish Plover since 1986 and flagging since 1998. Now there are over 6000 Kentish Plovers banded in Taiwan and over 1700 birds carrying White/Blue leg flags (about 800 of them are engraved leg flags). The TWSG also colour-ringed over 700 breeding Kentish Plovers since 2002. But, NONE of the 6000 marked Kentish Plovers have been sighted overseas, nor have any foreign banded birds been found in Taiwan in the past 20 years. Comparing this with the 170 records of overseas resightings and recapture of Dunlins, of which about the same amount of birds were banded by us, our Kentish Plovers seems to disappear into the flyway.

The first-ever overseas record finally came to us this May. Mr. Chung-Yu, Chiang of Taiwan Wader Study Group saw a Kentish Plover with White/Blue engraved leg flags (J0) on 12th May while he was counting and looking for leg flagged waders in South Korea for the 2008 Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program in the Saemangeum area, South Korea. The engraved letter "J0" on the white flag is a little faded but can still be clearly identified. The bird was first banded at Changhua county, Taiwan, on October 10th 2006, and was aged as a first year/juvenile.

There is always a population of Kentish Plovers



Photo: TWSG



Photo: C.Y.Chiang

arriving in Taiwan during Oct to Dec every year. We can tell them from other wintering Kentish Plovers by their shorter and thinner bill (16-17mm compared with 18-20mm) and the rufous head of males in breeding plumage. The J0 flagged bird seen in South Korea is one of this population. So we are speculating that maybe this population (those with shorter and thinner bill and rufous head) breed in South Korea and winter here in Taiwan. We still need a lot more overseas records before we can clear up the mystery of Kentish Plover's migration routes. The engraved leg flag is a useful tool and we will also use it on the breeding birds instead of colour rings because we found a similar Kentish Plover colour-ring scheme is used somewhere in South Korea.

We would like to encourage all birdwatchers to look out for the flagged or colour-ringed Kentish Plovers. Please email the sightings to Kentish.plover@gmail.com or dec.chiang@gmail.com. All sightings will be acknowledged!

*Wei-Ting Liu and Chung-Yu Chiang
Taiwan Wader Study Group*

Shorebirds 2020 Project update

Firstly, we've had a go at revising the data sheets based on your input, they can be found on the website at: <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/our-projects/shorebirds-2020.html>. Give them a try on the winter count. We've also put together answers to many of the frequently asked questions, which can be found on the same website.

Ricki Coughlin (Bluepenguin web design) has been putting together some very slick training presentations that will be available at www.shorebirds.org.au to anyone hoping to recruit a new shorebird counter, and we have continued to develop other training and background materials. Please let us know if you are interested in receiving more than what is currently on the website (i.e. a shorebird ID power point presentations etc).

The laminated shorebird ID sheets are still available, just let us know if you want a set. These excellent drawings by Jeff Davies can also be downloaded from the web-site. The Government has also provided us with 900 in water-proof notebook format if you would like them.

We've put a lot of time and work into cleaning the database and redesigning it so it is easier to enter and extract data. Now that the data is relatively clean and less full of errors, we are undertaking an assessment of the current level of sampling, and looking to determine what population trends we can identify now, which species we may be able to find trends for if we adjust sampling slightly. Early indications are that for species like Red-necked Stint the power of the existing program to detect long-term population trends is very good. While for species like Grey Plover, the ability to detect long-term population trends at present is very, very low. We will be able to offer more specifics on all this in the coming months.

We've also put considerable effort into mapping the important shorebird areas in Australia. While there remains much to do, we have now mapped many of the areas important to shorebirds, and can extract the data from those mapped areas. We remain

hopeful that these maps will be used to quickly identify those areas that need to be considered in management and planning decisions.

We had an overwhelming response to the project and were contacted by hundreds of people, with widely varying shorebird ID & counting skill levels, interested in getting involved in shorebird counts in their local area. Overall approximately 500 volunteers were involved in counting at over 70 sites around the country this summer. Many also donated large amounts of time in coordination and training at the local level. We think this is a very positive start to the programme and look forward to streamlining things as the project progresses. The completion of the monitoring protocol (including site selection based on power analyses for key species), GIS of shorebird count areas & training materials by July 25 will greatly facilitate this process.

A report with summaries of all the 2007 and 2008 count data for around the country will be ready soon and forwarded to counters. Also keep your eye out in the next volume of *Stilt* (thank you to all who sent in their data in time).

THANK YOU

It is remarkable that people interested in shorebirds have created a data set that spans 28 years and rivals any similar shorebird count data set in the world. We would like to thank all of you for participating again this year, and for helping us to revitalise the program. Thank you also to the many people who have helped us correct errors in our data, enter data, helped with the mapping we are doing, and especially to those who have helped coordinate the counts throughout the country. We have learned a lot, and appreciate your feedback and patience as we work to make the data collected more powerful when passed on to planners, managers etc. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions, and thank you again for making this year's shorebird counts a success.

Jo Oldland
Shorebirds 2020 Program Manager

China endorses the Partnership for the EAAF

Centrally located in the Flyway, China has more than 100 sites that are recognised as internationally important for migratory waterbirds during their north and southward migrations. These important sites are mostly located along China's coastlines, particularly around the East Sea and the Yellow Sea coastal areas, where rapid population growth and economic development are placing increased pressure on migratory waterbird habitat. China's recent endorsement is therefore significant to the Partnership's success.

The Partnership represents the major international

framework for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitat in the flyway, promoting dialogue, cooperation and collaboration between a range of stakeholders. Such international cooperation is essential for the conservation of migratory waterbirds by providing for their protection throughout the flyway, including a network of sustainably managed and internationally important wetland sites.

Vicki Cronan
Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts





Long-term trends of shorebird populations in eastern Australia and impacts of freshwater extraction

This information has been summarised from a journal article in Biological Conservation. If anyone would like the full version please contact me – Ed

A critical challenge for conservation biology is the estimation of population trends of species where further decline might lead to extinction and management is necessary for their survival. Many shorebirds or waders are long-distance migrants and difficulties in identifying trends are made worse for these highly mobile species. While data exist for shorebird population trends for many parts of the world, two thirds of Australia's shorebird populations have not been assessed.

This study investigated changes in shorebird numbers in eastern Australia over a 24-year period (1983-2006) using systematic waterbird surveys that sampled more than a third of the continent. Waterbirds were counted on about 2000 wetlands along 10 survey bands across the eastern half of Australia. Migratory shorebirds constituted on average just less than half of the shorebirds and counts over the period found that they have declined by 73%. Australian resident shorebirds have declined by 81%.

Shorebird populations decline with reduced breeding success or survival. For resident species causes are confined to Australia, but for migrants impacts can occur at migratory stop-over sites or on the breeding grounds in Asia or Alaska. In this study four of the six resident shorebird species showed a decline, implicating detrimental factors within Australia that affect not only residents but also migrants, given the similarities in habitat use.

In Australia, shorebirds were thought to primarily use coastal habitats but the importance of inland wetlands is increasingly realised. These inland wetlands vary considerably in habitat availability, reflecting unpredictable rainfall and river flows. The availability of many of these inland wetlands in Australia has been reduced by dams, water extractions and levee banks, particularly in the southeast of the continent. Of the 10 wetlands supporting the highest number of shorebirds within the survey bands, eight were inland wetlands and only two coastal, emphasising the importance of inland wetlands for shorebirds. Threats to inland wetlands are thus highly relevant to shorebird conservation.

The 10 most important wetlands found within the survey bands were:

1. Lake Eyre North
2. Lake Torquinie/Mumbleberry Lake
3. Lowbidgee
4. Lake Galilee
5. Lake Denison/ Jack Smith Lake

6. Coorong
7. Paroo River overflow
8. Cooper Creek wetlands
9. Lake Cawndilla/ Nettlegoe Lake
10. Mid-Darling River



Location of the 10 most important wetlands found within the survey bands

Trends in shorebird numbers and wetland area at these wetlands were linked to human-induced changes to river flows over the past two decades that could have detrimentally affected wetland habitat. Most (75%) of the water diverted from rivers throughout Australia is used to sustain irrigated agriculture.

The data showed that declines in shorebird numbers and wetland habitat are primarily confined to parts of eastern Australia where there is significant development of water resources while no change in annual rainfall has taken place. The wetlands within the Murray–Darling Basin that are heavily regulated are those where the most significant declines in shorebird populations was detected. Outside the Murray–Darling Basin relatively little evidence of declines in shorebird populations at the wetland scale was found. Given the significance of the declines found across eastern Australia it is possible that declines will become more apparent at local scales even if these habitats are not affected by water resource development.

Loss of wetlands due to river regulation is a significant contributor to the drastic decline in shorebird numbers in Australia (and the EAAF), largely unrecognized in international conservation agreements in Australia.

*Silke Nebel, John L. Porter, Richard T. Kingsford
University of New South Wales*

Draining the life out of a paradise

Up to 2 million swans, spoonbills and other migratory birds have flocked to Dalai Lake and its surrounding wetlands since early May. Some, like the red-crowned crane, a Chinese symbol of immortality that is threatened with extinction, come here to breed. Others, like the tiny red-necked stint, merely pause to refuel en route from Australia to their Arctic breeding grounds.

The wetlands are a vital "staging ground" in the Daurian Steppe at the intersection of the Chinese, Mongolian and Russian borders, on the so-called East Asia flyway. Nearly 300 bird species have been counted here. Many fly from as far as Australia and New Zealand in an endless pursuit of summer. But next year these birds might be in for a terrible shock because China's largest gold company is secretly laying a huge pipeline to drain water from Dalai Lake. The lake's only artificial outflow will hasten an already rapid fall in water levels. Worse, it is likely to be a catalyst for larger water diversion schemes that threaten the whole cross-border ecosystem.

"This is extraordinarily serious," says Mark Barter, a world expert on the flyway. "The bigger birds are flying 8000-10,000 kilometres non-stop to get there and the human species is absolutely and utterly stuffing it up for them." Leading Australian shorebird expert Clive Minton says: "About half of Australia's shorebirds are migratory, and all of those 1.5 to 2 million migratory birds are using some part of China as a stopover."

Beijing has signed national laws and international treaties to protect the Dalai Lake National Nature Reserve. Local, state and national governments are well aware of their responsibilities. But layers of domestic and international law and a sprinkling of visionary officials are no match for state-owned China National Gold Group and its local government supporters.

In early May, excavators began digging a five-metre-deep trench between the lake and a new copper and molybdenum mine 24 kilometres away, near the border city of Manzhouli. On May 13, police from the nature reserve arrested a worker and impounded a vehicle for damaging a protected area without any environmental approvals. Four days later the worker was released on orders from the very top of the Hulunbuir prefecture Government.

Now the trench is nearly complete and 1.2-metre-high insulated steel pipes are waiting to carry thousands of cubic metres of water that will leach the metal out of the mine's low-grade ore and perhaps drain back into the water table.

The Age's inquiries appeared to send officials and executives into a panic. "There's no such thing — we're using other water. Who told you about this?" said Xu Guowei, manager of environmental affairs

at the local subsidiary company, Inner Mongolia Gold. A China National Gold spokesman referred mysteriously to using "river water", although there is no river anywhere nearby. China National Gold is arguing behind closed doors that its pipeline will not harm Dalai Lake because it will be topped up via a new canal from Hailaer River — a polluted water source that is itself running dry.

As sometimes happens in the far corners of China, the project is both officially sanctioned and brazenly illegal. "If it has an impact on the nature reserve they cannot do it," says Professor Lei Guangchun, dean of nature conservation at Beijing Forestry University, who has just returned from advising the secretariat of the international Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. Russia has complained about a related downstream water diversion project. "This is very, very serious in the context of trans-boundary water management, with countries competing to keep as much water as they can within their own borders and degrading the wetland ecosystems they hold in common," said Eugene Simonov, an environmental consultant and wetland specialist.

The migratory birds face enough challenges in Australia, where 40% of wetlands have disappeared since European settlement. But the challenges they face in China are of a different scale. Most of the Australian bird traffic stops over on the coastal mud flats of Jiangsu province and estuaries near the North Korean border — areas under unrelenting pressure from population, industry and agriculture.

Rapid change is driving many inhabitants of this northern corner of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region to pine for the borderless and nature-centric values of a vanishing nomadic heritage. Hulunbuir prefecture propaganda official Kwang Zhou says the local water is so clean because the Mongols since Genghis Khan have revered it above all else: "You cannot piss in the water or wash clothes, bodies or horses in waterways — you must carry water in buckets away from the stream."

The Government takes pride in the area's natural heritage. But its motto, "Natural beauty co-exists with economic development for a win-win situation", is as awkward in practice as it is in words. An abstract romance with nature is easily overpowered by the reality of cash. One senior official recalls the tragedy of Minqin county in Gansu province: "Fifty years ago they ploughed all the grassland and irrigated it from the underground water supply ... That water was salty, it turned the land to desert and the people had to go. These people were ecological refugees. If our water resources are not protected very strictly, then Minqin will be Hulunbuir some years in the future."

John Garnaut, Dalai Lake, Inner Mongolia The Age, June 7, 2008





Quick Bites

Banding in China

There has been an outstandingly successful banding effort at a new site (for northward migration) in China. Professor Zhijun Ma and his team banded 997 waders at North Bohai Bay between April 4th and June 3rd. Red Knot topped the list with 270 caught. Overall they caught 12 birds banded elsewhere - 5 from New Zealand, 4 from Victoria,

one from north-west Australia, one from Chongming Dao and one from Thailand. Nine of these were Red Knot - a most valuable contribution, further confirming Boa Hai as the major Red Knot stopover area in the Yellow Sea. The bird from Thailand was a Sanderling - their first Recovery of this species.

Clive Minton

New website

The Australasian Wader Studies Group has a new website!

This new and improved website will allow you to read up on the latest happenings, submit your

recent flag sightings, check on the upcoming activities in which to participate and you can even download historical copies of *Tattler*! Now you can never complain about not having anything to read.

Check it out now at www.awsg.org.au.

Lauderdale Quay Development, Tasmania

Walker Corporation Pty Ltd (Walker) is proposing to develop a mixed use waterfront housing and marina development located on approximately 52 hectares of land within Ralphs Bay, southern Tasmania.

This proposed marina development has environmental issues relating to resident and migratory bird species, water and sediment quality,

the endangered spotted handfish and saltmarsh and other wetland communities.

The development appears to be still in the "Pipe Line" but together with Save Ralphs Bay Inc, we are prepared to fight this four year old proposal once it is made public.

*Priscilla Park
Birds Tasmania.*

Queen's Birthday List Congratulations

Member (AM) in the General Division

Associate Professor David Cleland PATON, Gilberton SA 5081

For service to conservation and the environment through research into the ecology and behaviour of Australian birds, to the management and restoration of the natural environment, and to education.

Ms Penelope Ann PATON, Gilberton SA 5081

For service to conservation and the environment through the management of natural resources and ecosystems, and as a contributor to environmental and ornithological research projects.

Both have been supporters of various wader study groups and we congratulate them in their achievements.

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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Carlton, VIC 3053, Australia.
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