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## Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways

No 18: July 2010

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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.

with the introduction of geolocators. Amazing information is being garnered from species around the world adding important knowledge to the species and habitat requirements. And not too soon! With the loss of habitat occurring on flyways at an increasing rate, knowing the importance of staging sites and the non-stop efforts taken by some species to get there will only add weight to the argument for habitat protection and species conservation throughout the flyway.

### Editorial

Migratory bird studies are moving forward quickly

## Geolocators update

Our geocator projects have finished up for the year with the deployment of the final units for this year in March/April. Details are given in the table on the following page.

Our greatest emphasis is on Ruddy Turnstone, with a total of 75 now carrying geolocators. These have been done at four sites, three of them long-term catching sites for our Ruddy Turnstone studies. One of the reasons for using a range of locations is that the timing and rate weight gain prior to northward migration in April is markedly different for Victoria/South Australia/Tasmania. There may, or may not, be associated differences in their migration strategy.

BAS geolocators come from British Antarctic Survey in the U.K. Some of these are the same as those used last year at Flinders (Mark 10, weighing 1.0g) and some are an even newer model (Mark 12, weighing 0.8g). The Swiss-made geolocators were provided by Professor Marcel Klaassen of Deakin University (Geelong) who has now joined the VWSG and AWSG in the Ruddy Turnstone project in Victoria and the Greater Sand Plover project in north-west Australia. In addition he has his own project on Sharp-tailed Sandpipers at Werribee Sewage Farm (where most birds had already migrated northwards before it was possible to start

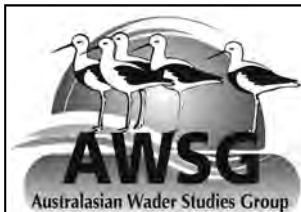
deploying geolocators this year).

Greater Sand Plovers were selected as the first species on which to try geolocators in north-west Australia because they have a reasonably high recapture rate and because they are of increasing conservation concern with plummeting numbers in the last five years. At present we have no recoveries or flag sightings on or near the possible breeding grounds and no clear indication of any migratory stopover hotspots.

Two of the Ruddy Turnstone to which geolocators were applied at Flinders on 17th April were birds which had carried geolocators the previous year. One was the famous 9Y, which made the 27,000km round trip with a return migration through the Central Pacific. It will be fascinating to see if this bird adopts the same migration route in 2010. It was also photographed at its first stopover in Taiwan in May 2009, so let us hope this happens again this year. Its engraved flag was worn and has now been replaced by CMY.

Next October/November is going to be an exciting time as we try to recapture birds with geolocators and find out where they have been.

*Clive Minton*  
*Victorian Wader Studies Group*



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A Special interest Group of Birds Australia

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## Geolocators deployed in 2010

Species	Location	BAS	Swiss	Total
Ruddy Turnstone	Nene Valley, SA (4/3)	10	-	10
	King Island, Tas (17&18/3)	22	16	38
	Barwon Heads, Vic (16/4)	6	10 (3 Juv)	16
	Flinders, Vic (17/4)	6	5 (4 Juv)	11
	<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>75</b>
Greater Sand Plover	Broome, WA (14/3)	15	16	31
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Werribee S.F., Vic (early March)	-	4	4
<b>Total deployed 2010</b>		<b>59</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>110</b>

BAS = VWSG/AWSG

Swiss = Marcel Klaassen, Deakin University

## Bohai Bay 2010

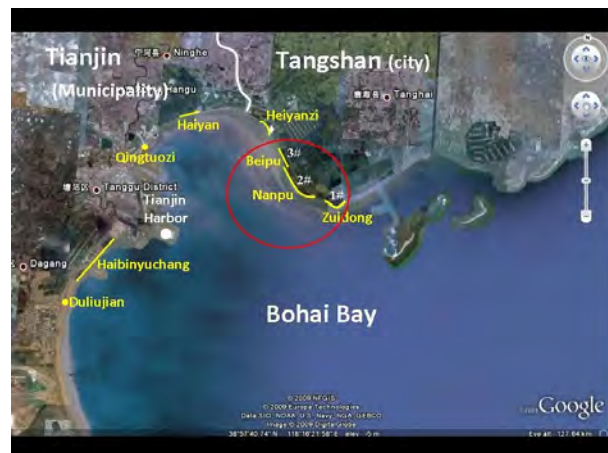
During April and March this year Global Flyway Network (GFN) and the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) were once again in north western Bohai Bay to join PhD student Yang Hong-Yan at her study sites 180km south east of Beijing.

The main objective of our work was to search for individually colour-banded birds from Roebuck Bay in Broome northwest Australia. Naturally while doing this we encounter marked birds from throughout the EAAF. The remarkable importance of this very small site is obvious from the set of sightings below and the counts conducted by Yang Hong-Yan during her studies.

Unfortunately, like many important shorebird sites in the Yellow Sea, the area is under intense and ongoing pressure from habitat destruction. Theunis Piersma from GFN had a meeting with WWF-China with the hope that some part of this critically important area can be saved. The site is important for a number of species during winter and spring migration. Red Knot and Curlew Sandpiper are two of the very obvious species with a minimum of 30% of the EAAF populations using the area during northward migration.

The field work segment of this years' effort was hugely successful and it is planned for more spring migration studies in the coming years. The table shows the totals from 56 days of field work.

A big thank you to Yang Hong Yan, Chen Bing, Mr. Zhao and Li Jing for their constant help throughout our stay.



Thank you to the team in the field over the 2 months; Adrian Boyle, Chris Hassell, Steve Holliday, Li Jing, Greg Kerr, Theunis Piersma, Sytze Pruiksma, Matt Slaymaker.

There will be a more comprehensive report on our website in due course

[www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au/](http://www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au/)

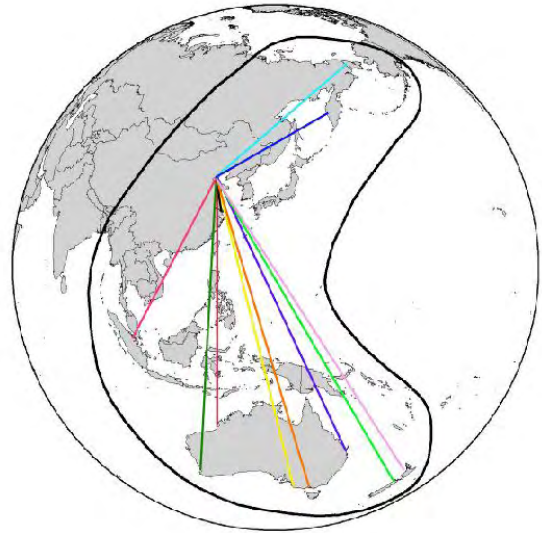
Thanks to the various funding bodies;

Birdlife-Nederlands via GFN, WWF-Nederlands, Beijing Normal University, the Australian Government via WI-Oceania and AWSG, participants who covered their own flights, train fares etc.

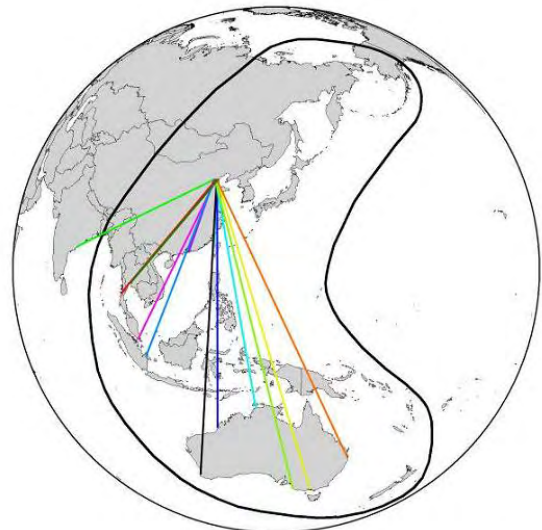
*Chris Hassell and Adrian Boyle*

*Global Flyway Network & AWSG*

Flagged in:	No. of sightings	Known individuals
Bohai	122	0
Chongming Dontang plain	273	0
Chongming Dontang ELF	48	21
Chukotka	1	0
Hong Kong	5	0
India	1	1
Japan	1	0
Java	1	0
Kamchatka	1	0
Northern Territory	3	0
NWA age cohort study	28	0
NWA colour band	317	108
NWA ELF	305	97
NWA plain	577	0
NWA tracking 2000	2	0
NZ ELF	243	82
NZ plain	186	0
NZ colour band	171	76
QLD ELF	1	1
QLD	6	0
Saunders Gull ELF	1	1
Singapore	1	0
South Australia	12	0
Sumatra	12	0
SW Western Australia	6	0
Tasmania, King Island ELF	3	1
Taiwan ELF	2	1
Taiwan plain	2	0
Thailand	66	0
Unknown	3	0
Victoria	746	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3146</b>	<b>394</b>



The map shows the different banding areas that we recorded Red Knot from; including Chukotka, Kamchatka, Sumatra, Chongming Dongtang (China), 5 sites in Australia and both north and south islands of New Zealand. Due to the size of the map not every one can be seen.



The map shows the different banding areas that we recorded Curlew Sandpipers from; including India, 2 sites in Thailand, Singapore, Sumatra, Chongming Dongtang (China), Taiwan and 6 sites in Australia. Due to the size of the map not every one can be seen.





## **Record Breeding Success in the 2009 Arctic Summer**

For many years the breeding success of waders from the Northern Hemisphere which spend the non-breeding season in Australia has been estimated from the percentage of juveniles in cannon-net catches.

Data is collected in two regions of Australia – north-west Australia (NWA) (Broome and 80 Mile Beach) and south-east Australia (SEA) (Victoria, the south-east of South Australia, and King Island, Tasmania). This information was gathered during the 2009/10 non-breeding season and relates to breeding success in the 2009 Northern Hemisphere summer.

There are potential limitations of this method of measuring breeding success. However, in the absence of other proven techniques and established monitoring programs, it is the only comprehensive quantitative breeding success information available on arctic and Northern Hemisphere waders in the East Asian/Australasian Flyway at the present time. Given the comparability of sampling techniques used each year the data is considered to, at least, provide a good index of annual variations in breeding success.

Sampling in SEA was satisfactory for six of the seven main study species. However, for the third successive year, sampling was inadequate on Red Knot as no Red Knot were caught at all. This is mainly as a result of the large decrease in Red Knot population which has taken place over many years, with numbers now reduced to a level which makes them difficult to catch at all.

Good samples were obtained in NWA for all of the usual species except Little Curlew and Ruddy Turnstone. The latter is only present in relatively low numbers at the sites we visit, and therefore obtaining an adequate sample is difficult in most years. Little Curlew are also ephemeral in their numbers and location and in some years no suitable catching opportunity is available. As an offset, reasonable samples were obtained of four species which are not normally caught in sufficient numbers (Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Oriental Plover and Eastern Curlew).

In Australian terms this was the "year we had to have"! It was a record year for breeding success for most of the wader populations which spend the non-breeding season in NWA and a good/very good year for all but one of the species regularly monitored in SEA. This welcome turn-round from the disastrous breeding success experienced by most of these species in 2008 is especially welcome. Presumably it resulted from most of the factors affecting breeding success being favourable in 2009. There must have been a propitious combination of an early snowmelt, above average June/July temperatures, absence of late snowfalls and low predation levels.

### **South-east Australia**

In recent years Curlew Sandpiper seem to have fluctuated between particularly good and particularly bad breeding success. The 2009/10 percentage of juveniles (27%) was the second highest in the last 12 years. Their current population is still well below previous levels and a more sustained period of good breeding success is required. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper returned to a high level of breeding success (32% juveniles), continuing a long series of eight good years which was only interrupted by the poor performance of 2008 (3.6%). Bar-tailed Godwit (31%) also continued their recent run of six consecutive above-average breeding years. Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling (both 19%) showed a welcome return to good breeding success after a disastrous performance in 2008.

It is a pity that no data could be collected on Red Knot. However there was a marked increase in the population counted in the main Victorian habitat (Corner Inlet) and it is probable that 2009 was a good breeding season for this species.

Red-necked Stint again had a breeding outcome slightly below the long-term average. It is now seven years since Red-necked Stint had an above average breeding performance.

### **North-west Australia**

Almost all species which are regularly sampled had a good/very good/excellent breeding outcome in 2009. For Curlew Sandpiper (35%), Great Knot (41%), Bar-tailed Godwit (28%) and Greater Sand Plover (35%) breeding success was the highest recorded in 12 years of monitoring in NWA. In Red Knot (52%) it was the second highest figure ever. Of the main study species only Red-necked Stint (17%) had an outcome below (only slightly) the long-term average.

The high productivity of Great Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit is particularly welcome given the huge losses of feeding habitat these species have experienced in their main migratory stopover regions of the Yellow Sea. One might speculate whether the high breeding success is an indication of density dependent factors coming into play. However this seems unlikely on the arctic breeding grounds. Considering the high breeding success values for other species in 2009 it seems more likely an effect of favourable climatic and predation conditions in their breeding areas.

It is interesting that Broad-billed Sandpiper (11%) and Sanderling (10%), the two species most similar in size to Red-necked Stint, also appear to have had relatively poor breeding outcomes in 2009. In contrast Eastern Curlew, which are rarely sampled, had 15% juveniles – unexpectedly high for a large species and well above the occasional data collected

**Table 1. Percentage of first year birds in wader catches in SEA 1998/1999 to 2009/2010**

Species	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	Average (11 yrs)
Ruddy Turnstone	6.2	29	10	9.3	17	6.7	12	28	1.3	19	0.7	19	12.7
Red-necked Stint	32	23	13	35	13	23	10	7.4	14	10	15	12	17.5
Curlew Sandpiper	4.1	20	6.8	27	15	15	22	27	4.9	33	10	27	16.8
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	11	10	16	7.9	20	39	42	27	12	20	3.6	32	18.9
Sanderling	10	13	2.9	10	43	2.7	16	62	0.5	14	2.9	19	16.1
Red Knot	(2.8)	38	52	69	(92)	(86)	29	73	58	(75)	(-)	(-)	53.1
Bar-tailed Godwit	41	19	3.6	1.4	16	2.3	38	40	26	56	29	31	24.6

All birds cannon-netted between mid November and third week in March (except Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper to end February only). Averages (for last 11 years) exclude figures in brackets (small samples) and **exclude** 2009/2010 figures

**Table 2. Percentage of first year birds in wader catches in NWA 1998/1999 to 2009/2010**

Species	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	Average (11 yrs)
Red-necked Stint	26	46	15	17	41	10	13	20	21	20	10	17	21.7
Curlew Sandpiper	9.3	22	11	19	15	7.4	21	37	11	29	10	35	17.5
Great Knot	2.4	4.8	18	5.2	17	16	3.2	12	9.2	12	6	41	9.6
Red Knot	3.3	14	9.6	5.4	32	3.2	(12)	57	11	23	12	52	17.0
Bar-tailed Godwit	2.0	10	4.8	15	13	9.0	6.7	11	8.5	8	4	28	8.4

**Non-arctic northern migrants**

Greater Sand Plover	25	33	22	13	32	24	21	9.5	21	27	27	35	23.2
Terek Sandpiper	12	(0)	8.5	12	11	19	14	13	11	13	15	19	12.9
Grey-tailed Tattler	26	(44)	17	17	9.0	14	11	15	28	25	38	24	20.0

All birds cannon-netted in the period 1 November to mid-March. Averages (for last 11 years) exclude figures in brackets (small samples) and **exclude** 2009/2010 figures

on this species in previous years.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper do not normally occur in sufficient numbers in NWA for their breeding success to be monitored annually. However unusually large numbers were present on the shores in November 2009 and these proved to be mostly adults. Only 5.7% were juveniles which compares with a much higher figure (32%) for Sharp-tailed Sandpipers sampled in SEA. It is also interesting to compare the 5.7% figure from cannon-netted birds in NWA with the figure for 72 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers mist-netted (58%) at the inland freshwater site of Lake Eda, near Broome.

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the 2009 breeding season was a very good one for most of the wader populations which spend the non-breeding season in SEA and NWA. Breeding success in 2009 appears to have been especially good for species nesting in the high arctic but still also generally good for many of those nesting in more central regions of Siberia.

Percentage juvenile monitoring in SEA and NWA will

continue in the 2010/2011 season. However the main monitoring period in NWA will move from November to the late February/early March period, (for non-wader reasons). This is still within the specified 1st November to mid-March sampling period, when adult and juvenile populations are considered stable. The ongoing monitoring of breeding productivity is fundamental to understanding reasons for population changes recorded in the long-term wader count programs.

**Acknowledgements**

Enormous thanks are due to those in the Victorian Wader Study Group and those who have taken part in north-west Australia wader expeditions and other catching activities, for all their hard work which enabled good samples of the main wader species to be caught in the 2009/10 season. Their preparedness to go into the field regularly, often at some inconvenience and under difficult climatic conditions, is fundamental to our achieving the required minimum samples of key monitoring species each year.

*Clive Minton, Rosalind Jessop and Chris Hassell*







## The anticipated impacts of the Four Rivers project on waterbirds—Republic of Korea

Seasonal patterns of precipitation in the Republic of Korea resulted historically in seasonally shallow rivers and extensive floodplain wetlands supporting a rich avian biodiversity. Especially during the second half of the twentieth century, all large and most small rivers in the Republic of Korea have been modified to a greater or lesser degree by dams, reinforced banks and in some cases by estuarine barrages. Most stretches of river are also prone to disturbance from roads and other infrastructure along their flanks, and most floodplain wetland has already been converted for agriculture and other uses. While there are few historic data, several waterbird species have been lost to the Republic of Korea due to habitat loss and degradation or due to human pressure, while many other species have become more localised or have declined. Despite these changes, many stretches of river and estuaries still remain internationally important for waterbirds, and/or support globally threatened waterbird species, and should be conserved in accordance with national laws and e.g. the Ramsar Strategic Plan (2009-2015). The Four Rivers Project (launched in November 2009) threatens many of these remaining wetlands. It entails further simultaneous large-scale construction



Four Rivers Display at the Mokpo Ferry Terminal

along the Han, the Nakdong, the Geum and the Yeongsan Rivers, four of the nation's five largest rivers. It includes deep-dredging of 691 km of river, the construction of 16 new dams, the rebuilding of two major estuarine barrages, the strengthening of embankments and the construction of >1700 km of bicycle road and other tourist-related infrastructure. Predictions of the economic and social costs and benefits of the Four Rivers Project have been presented in a range of literature and statements. This preliminary report aims to assess some of the anticipated impacts on waterbirds of the Four Rivers Project through (1) reduced flood-pulse, (2) loss of shallow river habitat, (3) increased degradation and reduced opportunity for the restoration of estuaries, and (4) an increase in disturbance. Species and some of the sites that are likely to be affected are identified in the main through analysis of data generated by an annual bird census coordinated by the national Ministry of Environment (MOE Census) first conducted in 1999. Out of >140 sites now covered by the MOE Census, this report considers that 48 such sites are likely to be affected, in addition to several thousands of kilometre of stream and river that are not covered by the Census but which are included in related infrastructure plans. Data from these 48 sites can provide some insight into the numbers of waterbirds and the species likely to be most affected, and in future years should enable impacts of the Four Rivers Project to be monitored with greater confidence.

The MOE Census data also confirm that within the Republic of Korea shallow stretches of river and (near-natural) estuaries tend to support a higher density of waterbirds per hectare than river-impoundments, as also indicated by independent survey at the Geum Estuary during northward and southward migration and at the Yeongsan and Nakdong Estuaries throughout the year. In addition, the MOE Census data confirm that several species considered ecologically dependent on rivers, their



The Republic of Korea and the Four Rivers Project

floodplains and/or their estuaries are already nationally scarce, and in some cases have shown declines over the past decade. While analysis of the MOE Census is unable to produce national population estimates of very local and scarce species such as the globally Endangered Scaly-sided Merganser, in combination with other sources the data do confirm this species' presence on a very few stretches of river and its ecological dependence on relatively undisturbed and free-flowing rivers.

This report concludes that without cancellation or adequate mitigation, the Four Rivers Project will impact ca. 50 bird species negatively (including 30 species of waterbird), causing further declines in several sensitive waterbird species that are ecologically dependent on shallow rivers, flood-plain

wetlands and estuaries. It will also reduce the conservation value of at least one Ramsar site and negatively affect eight BirdLife-designated Important Bird Areas. As such the Four Rivers Project will hinder the nation's efforts to achieve genuinely sustainable development as set out by the United Nations and the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2008).

*Executive Summary from Birds Korea Preliminary Report*

17 March 2010

See <http://www.birdskorea.org/Habitats/4-Rivers/BK-HA-Preliminary-Report-2010.shtml> for the full report.

## **Tidal power projects of South Korea**

The government of South Korea is pursuing its Green Growth National Vision and under this vision local electricity companies have to find ways to increase 'new and renewable' energy generation to meet the new Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (RPS) by 2020. They have not taken the environmental and social implications into consideration but just want to pursue the easiest course to meet the new standard, with the large-scale tidal power projects.

The Ganghwa Tidal Power Project will connect four islands with a 6.5km artificial concrete sea-wall. The project is expected to significantly affect the surrounding tidal flats, which are listed as protected Natural Monument No. 419, and the breeding ground of the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill.

The Incheon Bay Tidal Power Project will connect two islands with a 15km artificial concrete sea-wall. The project is expected to significantly impact the Wetland Protection Area of Jangbongdo Tidal Flat. Some of the Wetland Protection Area and the Natural Monument will lie within the artificial seawater lake created by the sea-walls.

The natural tidal flow will be dramatically changed if these tidal power projects are implemented. The protected tidal flats are very important breeding and feeding grounds for numerous marine animals and migratory waterbird species. The planned projects will also impact on the livelihood of local fishermen as productive tidal flats and the sea will be severely degraded or lost. These fishermen were not considered in the planning of the projects and the results of the Feasibility Studies for the two projects were not open to the general public for comment.

The Garorim Bay Tidal Power Project is proposing to build a 2km long concrete sea-wall at the mouth of the bay. According to 2005 research by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, these tidal flats are the most well conserved in the country. Research commissioned by the ministry in 2007 rated the bay's environmental values as the highest



*Ganghwa and Incheon Bay Tidal Power Projects which overlap the protected tidal flats of the Natural Monument and Wetland Protection Area*

among all the coastal areas of the country.

The largest tidal power facility in the world is in France and it has a generation capacity of 240MW. The tidal power projects planned in Korea are 2-6 times larger in capacity and consequently their environmental impacts will be greater. Though a great deal of damage to marine and coastal environments are expected from the tidal power projects in South Korea, they are just being pushed as one of green energy projects under the Green Growth National Vision of this country. Such projects should be stopped and important coastal wetlands and marine environment of the country should be protected. The proponents of the Green Growth Plan of South Korea should pay more attention to the conservation of natural environments and biodiversity. Any project that results in severe degradation of the natural environment can hardly be called green growth.

*Korea Federation for Environmental Movements*

6th November, 2009

<http://koreawetlands.blogspot.com/2009/11/impacts-of-tidal-power-projects-of-s.html>





## Field Report for Wildlife Conservation Society, Sumatra, Indonesia: December 2009-January 2010

Between December 2009 and January 2010, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) continued the third season of our avian influenza virus surveillance project of migratory shorebirds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The WCS team returned to Cemara Beach, located in the Cemara River village, Province of Jambi, Sumatra, Indonesia. This tidal beach borders Berbak National park which is designated as a Wetlands International Important Bird Area (IBA) and Ramsar site – but the Cemara Beach does not have a protected status, despite it being used as a wintering site by large numbers of migratory shorebirds.

Birds were captured using mist nets and stationary nets between dusk and dawn, making use of the tidal changes on the beach. WCS staff collected swab samples from the oropharynx and cloaca to test for the presence of avian influenza viruses, recorded morphometric measurements and placed coloured flags specific for Sumatra (orange over black) on the right leg, and an individually numbered Indonesian ring on the left leg.

During two months of fieldwork, the team captured 1,121 birds: the total number of waders caught was 774 birds of 22 species, and terns, 347 individual birds of 8 species (Table 1).

Interesting species captured include: three Endangered Nordmann's Greenshank, 22 Near-Threatened Asian Dowitcher, and one recently (re-) discovered White-faced Plover. Species which had not previously been captured by the WCS team on



Photo: Iwan Londo ©  
Mixed wader flock on Cemara beach including several with Sumatra-specific coloured legflags.

Cemara Beach were: Far-eastern Curlew and Red-necked Stint.

We re-trapped a total of 174 Sumatran-flagged waders and 24 terns. For 81 of the re-trapped birds, both first and second date of capture were during this field period, with time between captures ranging between three days to one month.

Eleven captured birds had the Sumatran-specific leg flag colour combination, but neither engraving or an individually numbered ring, thus the date of original capture is unknown.

During this season, two birds ringed elsewhere were

**Table 1. New captures and re-trapped birds previously captured at this location**

Terns			New	Retrap					Total
	Common Name	Scientific name		2007	2008	2009	2010	Unknown	
1	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	4						4
2	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	1						1
3	Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>	27			2	2	1	32
4	Great Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>	10						10
5	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	127		2	2	1		132
6	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	149	1		7	5	1	163
7	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	2						2
8	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	3						3
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>323</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>347</b>



Waders			Retrap						
	Common Name	Scientific name	New	2007	2008	2009	2010	Unknown	TOTAL
1	Pintail Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>	4						4
2	Swinhoe's Snipe	<i>Gallinago megala</i>	1	2					3
3	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	6						6
4	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	24				2	1	27
5	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	4	1					5
6	Far Eastern Curlew	<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	1						1
7	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	63	1	6	2	4		76
8	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	5						5
9	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	7			1	1		9
10	Nordmann's Greenshank	<i>Tringa guttifer</i>	3						3
11	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	81		4	9	14		108
12	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	32		3	6	4		45
13	Asian Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>	22						22
14	Great Knot	<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>	14						14
15	Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	1			1			2
16	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	11			2	1		14
17	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	10			1			11
18	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	7			2	1		10
19	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	2			1			3
20	White-faced Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus dealbatus</i>	1						1
21	Lesser Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	286	1	15	21	53	8	384
22	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	18		1	1	1		21
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>603</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>774</b>

captured: one Bar-tailed Godwit ringed ten years ago with a BTO ring (Brit. Museum London SW 7 DK65325) in Hong Kong (April 21, 2000), and a

Lesser Crested Tern with a Saudi Arabian ring (NCWCD RIYADH E005242), year of ringing unknown - no confirmation from the Saudi banding



## Tattler

scheme has been received.

Our ongoing environmental awareness education project for local children at their school and in the field continued between December 2009 and January 2010, and included introductions to animals and their habitat, birdwatching, and educational games. Parents are invited to join, and environmental issues are discussed with village leaders. Since 2007, the number of mangrove and pine trees has visibly increased due to enhanced local awareness, mangrove re-planting and locally imposed restrictions on cutting down the mangroves to make fishtraps (until recently up to 300 trees were used for one fishtrap).

Using data collected since 2007 and the raised awareness at local government and community levels on the importance of this wintering site for

migratory shorebirds (including the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank), WCS aims to secure a national protected status for Cemara beach.

### Acknowledgements

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*Fransisca Noni and Iwan Londo*

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## Lake Torrens turns on an exciting breeding event

The normally dry, salt encrusted bed of Lake Torrens was transformed into a lake following significant local rain which occurred in April this year. Members of Friends of Shorebirds SE have been monitoring the large flock (150 – 200,000) of Banded Stilt that has been utilising the hypersaline conditions of the lower Coorong for the last 8 years. Iain Stewart, who had been tracking water flows throughout the arid interior since the floods in northern Australia, reinforced by David Dadd's report of the absence of birds in the Coorong, immediately realised the significance of the water in Lake Torrens. A call went out to members and the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) Coorong staff for news of the Coorong flock. The last documented sighting of a significant number was on 5<sup>th</sup> April.



Photo: Ken Gosbell

The DEH, South Australia, was contacted stressing the urgency of the situation – high in every-one's thoughts was the massive predation that had occurred at Lake Eyre in 2000, and the need to locate and protect a breeding colony as soon as possible. They firstly flew over the Coorong and confirmed the missing birds and then subsequently made a search of a number of inland lakes from Lake Eyre to the south. In early May they located a

large colony of around 140,000 Banded Stilt which appeared to be nesting on an island in Lake Torrens. This was a very special event as this species had not had an extensive breeding event since the one at Lake Eyre South in 2000 although a small attempt was recorded in the Coorong in 2006.

This species requires small isolated islands in large ephemeral inland salt lakes where the influx of fresh water stimulates the dormant brine shrimp and other small crustaceans to hatch and reproduce. Such conditions are erratic given the nature of inland Australia and Banded Stilts are known to have bred in SA only seven times in the last 70 years.

In response to the discovery of this breeding colony, DEH sent in an expedition of ecologists and rangers in early May, led by Alex Clarke of the Port Augusta office of DEH. Their objective was to observe and check for any excessive predator activity. They were able to confirm the colony had 140,000 - 150,000 birds and that they were witnessing probably the largest breeding event on record with up to 200,000 chicks produced. Even better news was the fact that predation activity by Silver Gulls was minimal and within natural bounds. It was also observed that following the first hatching, the colony split with half moving to a northern island and the remainder laying a second clutch of eggs in the original colony.

The AWSG, VWSG and Friends of Shorebirds SE, were invited to participate in a second expedition timed to coincide with the second hatching to record observations and to attempt to place bands and coloured leg flags on some of the chicks. The latter was aimed at finding more about the movements of these birds including any possible movement between the WA and south-eastern Australian populations. Accordingly four of us (Maureen Christie, Iain Stewart, David Hollands and Ken Gosbell) accompanied a team of rangers and ecologists from the Coorong office of DEH (Simon

Oster, Clare Manning and Chris Thompson). We set out from Port Augusta and camped on the shores of Lake Torrens from 14 – 18 June when we returned to Port Augusta. To view this body of water almost 200km long and up to 30km wide, surrounded by gibber and desert, listening to a colony of Banded Stilts almost 3km away was an amazing experience.

The colony occupied about half of a small island some 320m by 200m which was located 2.7km from the shoreline campsite. Hence a walk through water 20 – 30cm in depth for this distance to get to the colony each day was more than sufficient exercise. The colony was much reduced by the time we arrived with less than 10,000 birds in it. It was located on sandy patches interspersed with low salt bush (*Atropex sp*), Nitre-bush (*Notraria sp*), Samphire (*Sarcoconia sp*), *Rhagonia* and other plants. Birds were nesting in scrapes which were at a density of 10 – 15 per square metre and were sitting on 2 to 4 eggs. Some 30% of the colony had been abandoned probably due to disturbance by a fox and/or dingo which had killed quite a few adult birds. We assessed that chicks from the second clutch had been hatching for the last week and this continued at a reasonably constant rate for the days we were there. When the chicks are 1 or 2 days old the adults take them across the stony beach and introduce them to the water. The rate of chicks being taken to the water varied from 50 to 350 chicks per hour and we saw very few actually taken by gulls. However, as the colony thinned out, more gulls were entering the colony.



Photo: Ken Gosbell

One of the inspiring sights was to see the adults shepherd their family of 2 – 4 fluffy white/grey down covered chicks to the water, negotiate past the line of gulls and reach the open water where they amalgamated with other family groups to form crèches. The largest crèche we observed was 40 chicks but as they were moving some distance (several kilometres) to feed we suspect that even larger crèches were being formed which is their normal behaviour.

Several attempts were made to band chicks while they were in their family groups in the water. This was a tedious process due to adults appearing to abandon the chicks when captured. This meant



Photo: Ken Gosbell

great care was needed to reunite chicks with adults who were caring for crèches. Because of these constraints we were only able to band and leg flag 54 chicks. So, if you see a Stilt with orange/yellow on the Left tibia it is a very special bird and we need to hear about it. We are also interested in observations of juvenile stilts – recognizable by their grey legs. The first clutch is thought to have started hatching on the 10th May. Allowing 50 days to fledge, they could be arriving at a wetland near you any day! Indeed news of the arrival of adults is also of interest as it will help us understand how they disperse after such a large breeding event. One of the highlights of our visit to the colony was when Clare spotted a bird with flags on its right leg which was the result of the banding undertaken by Maureen and her team in the Coorong in 2006.

Overall this was an exciting event which at this stage appears to have been extremely successful for this enigmatic species. To have observed and photographed this unique event combined with the experience of witnessing the way in which outback Australia comes alive with water was very special. We would like to thank the staff of DEH SA for their consideration, co operation and assistance on site; it was a great team effort. We also thank our flag making teams for making a large number of flags at short notice.

It should also be noted that a small breeding event also took place on Lake Eyre where some 5,000 birds nested. This was reported in the media earlier this month.

Although we have increased our knowledge of one of the most interesting of our resident species through the observations of this event, there is still much to learn. Just how did those birds who were happily feeding in the Coorong know that suitable breeding conditions had been created 1000kms away? Maybe in time we will learn.

*Ken Gosbell, Maureen Christie, Iain Stewart and David Hollands*

4 July 2010







## Hunting in Myanmar is probably the main cause of the decline of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

The rapid decline of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population has led to a series of expeditions to locate the species' main wintering areas. Surveys conducted in Myanmar during 2008–2010 showed an estimated wintering population of over 200, which is probably more than half the world population.

Within Myanmar, the key estuary is the Bay of Martaban. We found extensive evidence of the hunting of waders in all sites visited, mostly by the poorest people in each village. The majority of 26 bird-hunters questioned in 15 villages on the east side of the Bay of Martaban knew of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and most probably catch the species every year.

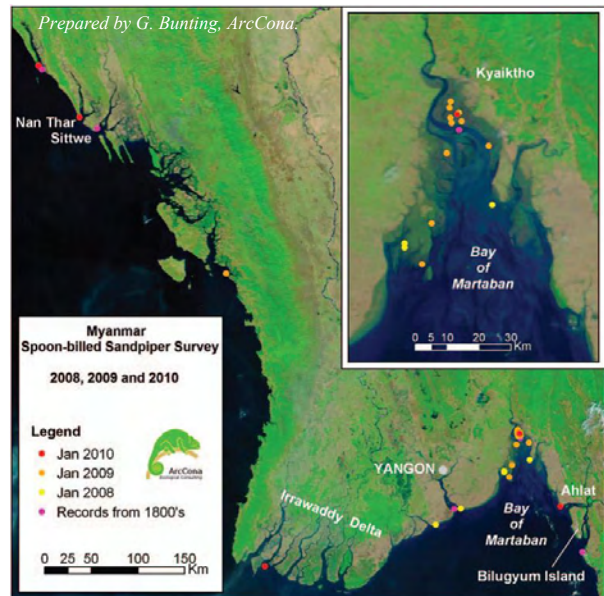


Photo: Rob Robinson/BTO

A Spoon-billed Sandpiper caught by a hunter is released by local children after intervention by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

use for other target species, such as Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* and Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*.

It is likely that hunting in the wintering area is the major cause of the species' decline, which may have been exacerbated by the fact that the Spoon-billed Sandpiper's core wintering area happens to be an area of high hunting pressure. Urgent action is



Records in Myanmar during 2008–2010 and where skins were collected in the 1800s.

needed to find ways to give the local hunters economic alternatives to hunting. An awareness campaign will also help to persuade hunters to release Spoon-billed Sandpipers they catch. It is also vitally important to protect the habitats of the Bay of Martaban for its large waterbird populations. Without urgent conservation action we believe that the Spoon-billed Sandpiper will become extinct within 10–20 years.

Christoph Zoeckler, Tony Htin HLA, Nigel Clark, Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Nicolay Yakushev, Suchart Daengphayon and Rob Robinson

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