

Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways

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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

International collaborations as well as local actions are essential for the survival of migratory shorebirds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Heartening news from the Flyway Partnership Meeting in Indonesia emphasises the actions being taken on an international scale and at government level to protect shorebird habitat. In contrast, the success of local actions in Bangladesh to provide alternative employment for former shorebird hunters emphasises the need to think globally and act locally. It also shows that focus on an iconic threatened species such as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper will benefit all shorebird species.

A recurring theme is the need to scientifically monitor and assess shorebird populations, to provide robust data for shorebird protection and management. Results of flagging, geolocators and breeding success studies all contribute to our understanding of these amazing birds. And what a contribution one Dunlin has made to scientific study!

The next Australasian Shorebird Conference in Adelaide in September provides an excellent opportunity to share the results of local studies.

8th Australasian Shorebird Conference

The Role of Science in the Conservation of Shorebirds

Napier Building, University of Adelaide, South Australia, 29/30 September 2012

Call for abstracts of papers or posters

The theme for the 8th Australasian Shorebird Conference is the Role of Science in the Conservation of Shorebirds. However papers may be presented on any aspect of shorebird research, especially relating to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Abstracts, of no more than 200 words, should be sent to the Conference organisers asc.adelaide2012@gmail.com as soon as possible with a title, author(s) and affiliation(s). The closing date for all abstracts is 11 June 2012.

Australasian Shorebird Conferences (ASC) are held every two years at a time and location to focus on local issues and to provide the best opportunity for attendees to see shorebirds at key shorebird sites in company with local experts, as well as to hear about the latest research and developments in Australia and the wider East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

The conference organisers endeavour to encourage researchers from other countries in the Flyway. However opportunities for financial assistance to attend the ASC are limited and are available only to students, or researchers in South East Asia, that demonstrate a need for financial assistance after the receipt of an abstract.

For further information or to apply for funding assistance please contact the Conference Convenor: Paul Wainwright asc.adelaide2012@gmail.com

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Progress made at recent Flyway Partnership Meeting in Indonesia

One of the roles of the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) is to progress conservation initiatives with the Australian government and also to be a voice within the East Asian - Australasian Flyway (EAAF). One forum for this involvement is the EAAF Partnership, launched in 2006. This is made up of Partners comprising Governments, Inter-Government Organisations and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and has the objective of protecting migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent on them. There are currently 27 partners including 17 countries, 9 NGOs and 1 corporate member. It is one of the only forums where NGOs (such as AWSG), can sit as partners with governments to discuss flyway issues. With the increasing decline in our migratory shorebirds observed in Australasia it is essential to find solutions to mitigate these declines which are largely thought to be the result of habitat destruction at critical stopover areas. The most recent Meeting of Partners was held in Palembang, Indonesia in late March 2012. AWSG and BirdLife Australia were represented by Ken Gosbell and Phil Straw. These MoPs tend to need to be a two person affair due to the number of side meetings and working group workshops relevant to the AWSG and both men are kept busy. Ken has to spend a lot of time preparing for the meeting as Chair of the Shorebird Working Group and Phil has taken an active role in the recently formed, all important, Communication Education Participation and Awareness (CEPA) Working Group. MoP6 was particularly challenging. In Phil's absence (still overseas) Ken's summary of the meeting is presented below.

Notes from the Sixth EAAF Partnership Meeting (MoP6) on 19-22 March 2012

Having been a participant at all Partnership meetings since inception, I found this to be one of the most stimulating and constructive meetings. In an attempt to feedback some of the initiatives and directions from the meetings I have compiled the following notes. I stress that these are an outline only and many of the issues will be raised in more detail subsequently.

The meeting was hosted by the Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation of the Ministry of Forests, Indonesia. It was held in the city of Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia and I would like to acknowledge the superb organization which enabled the large meeting to proceed so smoothly. A field trip was organized for 22 March to the Sembilang National Park where a range of waterbirds, including endangered species were observed.

The meeting was somewhat larger than normal due to the many international experts and observers that attended. In attendance were one or more representatives from Government Partners (14), IGOs (2), NGOs (22), Private Sector (1), Potential Partners (3), Technical Advisors, Observers etc. (19), Secretariat (4) and a number of Local Observers.

Although there are always negative issues that dominate when discussing this flyway in such forums, I will focus here on some of the positive aspects that came from this meeting.

(i) Three (3) new Partners were admitted to the Partnership viz Mongolia, New Zealand Government and Rio Tinto. Each of these brought a new dimension to the Partnership but I would particularly stress the importance of Rio being the first Corporate Partner. Rio was represented by Ms Denise Goldsworthy, MD of Dampier Salt Limited (DSL).

(ii) As a result of the recognition by the international community of the critical condition of our flyway the meeting welcomed experts from Europe and US as well as those from throughout our region. Some of these included:

- a. Nicola Crockford and Dr Rob Sheldon RSPB – BirdLife (UK)
- b. Dr Nigel Clark, British Trust for Ornithology
- c. Dr Yvonne Verkuil and Dr John Mackinnon – IUCN
- d. Dr Rich Fuller and Nic Murray – University of Queensland
- e. Dr Nils Warnock – US Audubon, Alaska
- f. Rick Humphries, Rio Tinto Flyway Program

(iii) Input was made to the IUCN Situation Analysis. IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, has recently commissioned an independent desk study that aims to: i) summarize currently available information on intertidal wetlands in East and Southeast Asia, and ii) document the impacts of the loss and degradation of these natural wetlands on migratory waterbirds. This desk study has been requested by a number of IUCN Members, who are concerned that the loss and degradation of this region's intertidal wetlands is one of the greatest threats facing the planet's migratory birds. Oversight of this situation analysis is being provided by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), in partnership with IUCN's Asia Regional Office (ARO). Dr Yvonne Verkuil and Dr John Mackinnon held discussions throughout MoP6 as they sought to complete the draft of this study ready for wider review in early April.

Progress made at recent Flyway Partnership Meeting in Indonesia cont.

(iv) Side meetings were convened by Nicola Crockford (BirdLife International, Global) to discuss how to coordinate international efforts of non-government organizations and experts to conserve the intertidal habitats of East Asia, making the most of the opportunity presented by the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Jeju, Republic of Korea in September 2012. A number of issues to which AWSG/BirdLife Australia can contribute were noted. These will be discussed separately but the importance of this opportunity should not be underestimated.

(v) At the Yellow Sea Task Force meeting, Dr Rich Fuller and Nic Murray of the University of Queensland (UQ) reported on the progress of their studies on habitat changes in the Flyway and the Yellow Sea in particular. Some of the satellite imagery presented by Nic dating from the 1970s provided startling data on the loss of tidal habitats on the coasts of Korea and China.

(vi) Rio Tinto, Wetlands International and BirdLife International outlined a proposal for a Wetland Centre in the vicinity of Bohai Bay. One objective is the protection of the remaining tidal flat habitat found to be critical to Red Knot and Curlew Sandpiper on northward migration (GFN, Chris Hassel and WWF (China) findings). This proposal is in the pre-feasibility stage and is currently under discussion with relevant regional and national authorities in China and hence is keeping a low profile at this stage.

(vii) At the Shorebird Working Group Meeting, WWF(Hong Kong) advised a proposal for the preparation of a Shorebird Conservation Plan. In view of the pending IUCN Situation Analysis this proposal will likely focus on the knowledge gaps identified and the habitat needs of the most seriously declining species. The Shorebird Working Group along with RSPB is working with WWF(HK) to help them develop the scope of this Plan.

(viii) The Shorebird Working Group also agreed with a proposal from Rich Fuller (UQ) to form a Red Listing Working Group in Australia. This would have a life of a year and make recommendations to the Australian government and IUCN. Rich Fuller agreed to chair the group which would liaise with BirdLife International.

(ix) Miranda Naturalist Trust (NZ) (Keith Woodley) proposed a program of population surveys of DPRK (North Korea) from 2013 to 2017. These will build on the survey undertaken in 2009. Keith sought assistance with modest funding for these surveys.

(x) A report was provided of a review of 63 of the 100 Flyway Network Sites. A summary of this will be provided on completion of the remaining 37 sites anticipated within the next 2 months.

(xi) A new CEPA Working Group was proposed at MoP5 and has since held several meetings between MoPs. The group, represented by Sharon Chan (Singapore) and Phil Straw (Australia) presented a Communication Strategy for the Partnership, in the absence of Lew Young, the CEPA Chair.

(xii) An Implementation Strategy for the EAAFP 2012-2016 was developed and agreed. This strategy broadly follows the structure and content of the first Strategy (2007-2011). However, the content has been rationalized and importantly, Key Result Areas have been introduced as a means of assessing progress towards the desired outcomes. This document and several supporting documents can be viewed on the Partnership website:

<http://www.eaaflyway.net/6th-meeting.php>

(xiii) The Colour-marking Task Force previously established the Science Officer of the EAAFP as the key contact point for colour marking coordination across the flyway. However, all responsibilities/decisions regarding individual projects remain with national banding offices (or national coordinators where banding officers do not exist). As the EAAFP Science Officer has resigned, Paul O'Neil (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) agreed to temporarily fill this role as chair of the task force. However, any decisions regarding protocols will continue to be made by consensus of the whole task force. Refer to <http://www.eaaflyway.net/coordination-of-marking.php>

(xiv) The Secretariat advised several key changes. Following the resignation of Roger Jaensch (CEO) and Dr Chang-yong Choi (Scientific Officer) it was advised that the new CEO appointed was Mr Spike Millington. More details to follow. At this stage there has been no replacement for the Scientific Officer and Partners were requested to consider seconding a suitably qualified person to this position. It is essential that this position be filled asap.

Some other aspects arising from discussions that I would like to raise with the AWSG in coming days include:

(a) The need to publish as much population trend data for Australasia and the flyway prior to the IUCN meeting in September.

(b) To explore the possibilities of forming relationships with Mongolia with whom we have much in common. They have a need for training and contact with other parts of

Progress made at recent Flyway Partnership Meeting in Indonesia cont.

the flyway; schools, sister sites etc might be explored.

(c) The increasing importance of the China Waterbird Census teams. These surveys have been carried out for 6 years and coordinated by the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society (HKBWS). Counts are published every 2 years. I would like to propose to the Committee that we bring one of these counters to our Conference in Adelaide in September.

(d) The need to encourage the Australian Government to support the proposed IUCN resolution – a draft will be circulated shortly.

I hope that the above brief report provides some encouragement that by enlisting the help

of the international community combined with the provision of rigorous data and the best scientific analysis, we can use the events of 2012, in particular, Ramsar and IUCN WCC, to help improve the conditions for our migratory shorebirds.

If anyone would like more details or explanations or would like further involvement please visit the EAAF Partnership website: <http://www.eaaflyway.net/6th-meeting.php> or get back to me by email: ken@gosbell.id.au

Ken Gosbell

28 March 2012

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force Meeting, Palembang 23-24 March 2012

I attended the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Taskforce meeting in Palembang as Chair of the Partnership Shorebird Working Group. While this species does not occur in Australasia, there are many aspects of the management of this species that can be utilized throughout the flyway. The following observations highlight some of these management issues.

- Recent counts and analysis would indicate between 35 and 120 pairs of Spoon-billed Sandpiper remain. A realistic number is probably 100 pairs.
- Presentations from the range countries was impressive in terms of dedication of teams working in incredibly difficult (and sometimes dangerous) locations e.g. Myanmar, Bangladesh, Thailand, Far East Russia etc.
- The ability of many of these local NGOs to successfully negotiate with local and national governments for the protection of critical areas is outstanding. In one case (Myanmar) an extensive Ramsar site is being proposed while in other cases it is more local protection by the regional authorities.
- It was also impressive to see the thorough analysis of threats and causes of decline in several regions. Equally impressive are the socio-economic solutions that have been found. For example, hunting of shorebirds has been replaced by offering training and alternative livelihood support so hunters can support their families. In Bangladesh 25 hunters signed a Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation agreement.
- The count program of coastal sites in China (funded by EAAFP) is particularly

useful, not only for this critical species but for all shorebirds. The Rudong region is increasingly important for not only Spoon-billed Sandpiper (103 birds in 2011) but many migratory shorebirds. Threats to this area are manifold.

- The Conservation Breeding Program for Spoon-billed Sandpiper is proceeding successfully; 12 young are now housed at Slimbridge (UK) and, it is hoped, will become the source of future breeding.
- A new technique titled 'head-starting' is now proposed for some of the breeding Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites. Essentially this means taking eggs from the nest, artificially incubating and rearing the chicks in captivity (July), then releasing the birds in the wild shortly after they can fly (August). Breeding success is estimated to improve significantly and is necessary if the rapid decline is to be arrested.
- The Spoon-billed Sandpiper continues to face enormous threats from the breeding grounds through stopover regions to wintering areas. In many cases these are the same threats that are faced by so many of our shorebirds in this flyway. Being a flagship species this bird can help focus the attention of the international community on the inherent problems of the Yellow Sea and other key areas.
- It was noted by the team that Spotted (Nordmann's) Greenshank is likely to be uplisted to critically endangered in the near future due to critical declines. There was debate as to whether a species task force would be formed for this species. BirdLife International is reviewing.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force Meeting, Palembang cont.

The 'take home' message from this group is that through good science, focused management and dedicated people on the ground, a difference can be made to not only saving a species but a wide group of migratory waterbirds. While the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a wonderful flagship species we must recognize that the resources being

used are helping encourage wider biodiversity preservation. There are many lessons for the wider conservation of shorebirds arising from this program.

Ken Gosbell

Towards a secure wintering ground for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Bangladesh

Starting in September 2010, a series of surveys were conducted to identify hunters and alternative livelihood options for them in Sonadia Island. After a solid year of background work, the team of the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project finally signed conservation agreements with 25 active shorebird hunters of the island between October and December 2011. A Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) conservation agreement ceremony was held on 7 October 2011, where initially eight hunters signed agreements in the presence of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (Sub-district Executive Officer of Government of Bangladesh), local leaders, Village Conservation Group executive members, local NGO staff, shorebird hunters, and Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project team. Later on, an additional 17 hunters signed up to the scheme by December 2011.

Eight "Professional", ten "Opportunistic" and seven "Occasional" hunters (Professional=50-100% of income from bird hunting, Opportunistic=20-49% and Occasional=0-19%) of Sonadia Pochimpara, Ghotibhanga, Tajiakata, Dembunipara and Borodia villages have signed agreements to stop shorebird hunting and protect them instead. Village Conservation Groups (VCG) of these villages will be in charge of monitoring and hunters will repay a small percentage of the income generated by the alternative livelihood to their VCG over the next 24 months. The respective VCGs will then use this money for further hunting mitigation and shorebird conservation awareness within these villages. The entire process will be monitored and guided by the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project of Bangladesh Bird Club.

Hunters who have taken alternative livelihood support agreed that all of their family members shall not hunt, net, capture, sell, poison, kill or harm any bird. Instead, they will strongly protect birds from any sort of threat including hunting, habitat destruction and assist nature conservation movements in their villages. Also a few of them took responsibility specifically to

guard and monitor bird hunting activities at nearby shorebird sites and these newly ex-hunters will visit these sites one day every week by rotation. In addition, they now understand that birds are completely protected under Bangladesh law and confirmed that they will comply with the law. If any of the above mentioned points are disobeyed then the agreement will be discontinued, the former hunters will have to return the funds given to them and they will also be exposed for possible legal actions against them.



Figure 1. A Lesser Sand Plover caught in noose trap on Sonadia



Figure 2. A hunter signing the agreement during the ceremony

Towards a secure wintering ground for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Bangladesh cont.



Figure 3. An ex-hunter working at the watermelon field October 2011

Alternative livelihood options taken up include fishing boat, net, livestock, watermelon cultivation, grocery and tailoring (sewing machine) shops. After providing watermelon seeds and fertilizers as the first set of alternatives for shorebird

hunters of Sonadia Pachimpara in October 2011, a revisit to the village in December 2011 revealed that the hunters were extremely busy in the watermelon fields and they completely stopped hunting.

Future actions will include a massive awareness campaign in five targeted villages, monitoring activities of ex-hunters and engaging them for further motivation, and hunting surveys in additional villages to investigate the scale of shorebird hunting. In addition, regular monitoring of shorebirds including wintering, passaging and over-summering Spoon-billed Sandpiper will be carried out on Sonadia Island and new areas around the island will be searched.

Sayam U. Chowdhury & Mohammad Foysal

Extracted from the *Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No. 7*, February 2012

Broome Bird Observatory

It is, once again, all change staff wise at Broome Bird Observatory in 2012. Kath Southwell takes over as warden after working eleven years at Australian Seabird Rescue in Ballina, NSW with two assistant wardens: Teresa Montras from the NE corner of Spain, fresh from bird surveying in Columbia and working at Long Point Bird Observatory in Canada; and Simon Davies from the bird observatory circuit in the UK, with seasons at Dungeness, Fair Isle and the Calf of Man behind him.

It was straight into the action when we arrived in February with the very successful North-West Australia canon-netting expedition taking over the Observatory (in a good way!) for three weeks allowing one assistant warden at least to get his eager hands on a wide variety of shorebirds. This was followed by our two *Wave the Waders Goodbye* courses in March and April, which perfectly coincided with some spectacular wader migration with thousands of birds seen heading north from Roebuck Bay and from sites further south – almost 17,000 waders have been counted during our two-hour evening watches so far with many more heard overhead after dark.

It is set to remain very busy over the next few months with tours based on Shorebirds, Mangroves, Town and Bush and Plains habitats.

There are regular bush and mangrove mist-netting sessions to which everyone, residents and day-trippers alike, is welcome to be involved. In May there will be a vital working bee where volunteers can take advantage of free camping or reduced room rates in return for a few hour's work each day. A shorebird canon-netting programme will commence in late June and two *Birds of Broome* courses will be held in Sept/Oct.

Please check out our website www.broomebirdobservatory.com for details of tours, courses and accommodation and our 'flyways' blog for recent sightings around Roebuck Bay.



Shorebirds on the pink sands of Roebuck Bay. Photo by Dan Herbert

Wader Breeding Success in 2011

Each year the VWSG (in south-east Australia) and the AWSG (in north-west Australia) try to obtain useable (defined as greater than 30) samples of the principal waders in order to obtain an estimate (an index) of the apparent breeding success of each species in the preceding breeding season. This is obtained from the percentage of juveniles in cannon-net catches made in the November-March period when populations are relatively stable, with most adult and juvenile waders having reached their non-breeding destinations.

The table below gives the results for the 2011/12 season. It can be seen that almost all species, in both south-east and north-west Australia, appear to have had an average/poor breeding season in 2011. This is in marked contrast to each of the previous two years, when breeding success was above average for most species. Particularly poor breeding outcomes in 2011 appear to have been experienced by Sanderling and Curlew Sandpiper. The only population with an above-average breeding outcome was the Red Knot which spends the non-breeding season in south-east Australia. This particular sub-species

(*rogersi*) breeds in the Chukotski Peninsula in the far north-east of Siberia.

Pavel Tomkovich and Mikhail Soloviev from Moscow are, as usual, collecting together reports from scientists and others who have visited the various Arctic regions of Russia and Siberia in 2011. This may well help to understand why it was a relatively poor breeding season for waders. Factors which are known to affect breeding success include date of snowmelt, June and July average temperatures, unusual late snowfalls (particularly at the time of chick hatching) and the number of predators (jaegers, snowy owls and arctic foxes). The level of predators is related to the lemming population – being highest in 'lemming years'. The most damage to breeding waders takes place in the subsequent year when the lemming population has crashed and the predators are forced to turn to alternative prey such as breeding waders, their eggs and chicks.

A fuller report on the 2011/12 '% juvenile'/breeding success results will be published in a future edition of *Stilt*.

Apparent breeding success of waders in 2011

South-east Australia				
Species	Total Catch	% Juv 2011/12	Long-term Average %Juv	Assessment of 2011 Breeding success
Red-necked Stint	3869	15.5	14.3	Average
Curlew Sandpiper	304	3.6	10.0	Very poor
Bar-tailed Godwit	184	18.5	18.5	Average
Red Knot	34	67.6	58.0	Good
Ruddy Turnstone	177	9.6	9.6	Average
Sanderling	348	2.0	12.2	Very poor
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	115	5.2	10.7	Poor
North-west Australia				
Species	Total Catch	% Juv 2011/12	Long-term Median %Juv	Assessment of 2011 Breeding success
Red-necked Stint	90	24.4	21.1	Average
Curlew Sandpiper	79	1.3	19.4	Very poor
Bar-tailed Godwit	491	7.7	10.8	Below average
Red Knot	77	7.8	19.8	Very poor
Ruddy Turnstone	58	13.8	-	-
Great Knot	1369	6.5	13.1	Poor
Grey-tailed Tattler	285	20.0	21.4	Average
Terek Sandpiper	225	5.3	14.3	Very poor
Greater Sand Plover	544	18.8	23.6	Below average
Broad-billed Sandpiper	46	28.3	-	-

Clive Minton

Geolocators – Update of VWSG/AWSG Activities

During the past year studies of waders via the use of geolocators has been continued energetically. The programme has been expanded to include new species and new locations.

122 new geolocators were deployed during February to April 2011 and 26 have been retrieved during the subsequent non-breeding season (October 2011 to April 2012). A further 125 were deployed in March/April 2012.

The table below gives details for the 2011/2012 season. The greatest success has been with Ruddy Turnstones at King Island where 11 geolocators were retrieved, equivalent to 50% of the number deployed in April 2011. Return rates on Greater Sand Plovers at Broome were also good (7 back from 29 deployed). We had hoped for more retrievals from Eastern Curlew, especially after obtaining 3 in the initial catch of 7 birds in October 2011, but for the rest of the non-breeding season the Eastern Curlew eluded all our catching attempts by roosting in "impossible to catch" locations. We were disappointed with only 1 geocator retrieved from 24 Sanderling, especially since 3 of these birds were seen on migration in The Flyway – Korea, China, Japan – and at least 3 were present in the flock of 400 at the original catching site when we caught 250 (but only 1 geocator) in November 2011.

The technical performance of the geolocators over the past year has been good, with almost all giving a download of a full northward and southward migration. One Ruddy Turnstone

geocator retrieved had been on a bird for two years and the battery had lasted long enough to record two complete round-trip migrations. It is also pleasing that this year we were able to track the Greater Sand Plovers all the way to their Gobi Desert breeding grounds, in Mongolia/Northern China, and to obtain return tracks back to Broome for several of them.

Ken Gosbell, the technical guru who carries out all the data extraction from retrieved geolocators, is now working through the ancillary data which we can obtain from the geolocators while the birds are on their breeding grounds. It has proved possible to determine when birds are laying and incubating, the timing and duration of these events, and a measure of the breeding success. This is an exciting new development which again adds greatly to what can otherwise only be obtained by extensive and expensive field observations in the remote regions of Siberia.

In March/April 2012, 42 new geolocators were deployed on Red Knot and 7 on Great Knot in north-west Australia. A further 44 were placed on Sanderling in South Australia and 32 on Ruddy Turnstone on King Island. The geolocators were from two sources – Biotrack, who have now taken over the manufacture of geolocators previously supplied by BAS, and Migrate Technology, the company which James Fox (previously with BAS) has now moved to. We are hoping for exciting new results from all of these when we start the 'retrieval season' later in 2012.

Clive Minton

Geolocators deployed/retrieved in 2011/2012 by VWSG and AWSG

Species	Location	Deployed Feb-April 2011	Retrieved Oct 2011 - Apr 2012
Eastern Curlew	Inverloch, VIC	23	3
Greater Sand Plover	Broome, WA	29	7
Sanderling	Canunda, SA	24	1
Ruddy Turnstone	Barwon Heads, VIC	5	0
	South Australia	19	3
	Flinders, VIC	0	1
	King Island, TAS	22	11
Total		122	26

Assistant Warden Opportunity - Broome Bird Observatory 2012

An opportunity has arisen at the Broome Bird Observatory for a volunteer to take up an Assistant Warden's role from June to late November 2012. A reasonable living allowance is provided along with a contribution to travel expenses involved in getting to Broome. The Assistant Warden lives at the Observatory and works in a small team environment. Duties include conducting bird-watching tours (training provided), daily cleaning and facility maintenance, running the small shop and taking accommodation reservations and tour bookings plus assisting with ongoing research. Applicants must hold a 'C' class drivers licence (or equivalent) with no restrictions and be immediately eligible to apply for an 'F' class endorsement (requires a minimum of four years licensed driving experience). For further information please contact the BBO Warden Kath Southwell on 08 91935600 or email your application to: broome@birdlife.org.au

Australasian Wader Studies Group North-west Australia Wader & Tern Expedition 18 February to 11 March 2012

The NWA 2012 was very similar to the previous year's expedition in many ways. The team of 30 turned out to be of the usual high standard and was better than ever in terms of compatibility and of everyone enjoying themselves immensely. We were particularly helped by having a large young contingent (age 40 and under!). The 11 people from Asia were notable for their effervescent personalities and enthusiasm. Whilst we had some rain on most days in February on only one occasion did it coincide with catching activities and therefore limit success. Some of the main points from the comprehensive report on this expedition are provided below.

The total number of birds caught (3384), mostly in 13 cannon-net catches, gave the highest average cannon-net catch size for many years (260 birds per catch). The largest catch was 846 at Boiler Point, Roebuck Bay, on 6 March 2012. Chris Hassell had predicted that we would need to catch about 500 Great Knot in order to catch around 50 Red Knot and he was proved right when we had 42 Red Knot with 485 Great Knot (and a further by-catch of 294 Bar-tailed Godwits).

Yet again Great Knot (1369) topped the list of birds caught, with Greater Sand Plover (544) again second.

The number of Grey-tailed Tattlers (285) and Terek Sandpiper (225) caught were well above the previous year's total whereas Red-necked Stint (90 versus 232) were well down. It is not clear why there was such a dearth of Red-necked Stints this year at both Roebuck Bay and at 80 Mile Beach – maybe there were still attractive inland locations to which they had adjourned.

We also struggled to catch Red Knot (77 vs. 210 the previous year). In contrast we did better than usual on Ruddy Turnstone (58 vs. 4) and we again did well for Broad-billed Sandpipers (46 vs. 29).

A record number of overseas-banded birds was caught during the expedition (14 Great Knot and 1 Bar-tailed Godwit – all from China). In addition a Curlew Sandpiper banded in Victoria was recaptured. Amazingly three of the Great Knot caught at 80 Mile Beach had been banded on the same day in March 2008 at Chongming Dao, near Shanghai. Two even had adjacent band numbers. Nine of the Great Knot, and the Bar-tailed Godwit, were caught in the same catch on 6 March 2012 at Broome. Most birds had been marked as adults on northward migration through China but one of the Great Knots had been banded as a juvenile on southward migration.

Clive Minton

Oldest recaptures during NWA 2012

SPECIES	BAND NUMBER	DATE BANDED	BANDING LOCATION	AGE AT BANDING	RETRAP DATE	RETRAP LOCATION	AGE AT RETRAP
Bar-tailed Godwit	072-56578	1/04/1996	80 Mile Beach	2+	1/03/2012	80 Mile Beach	18+
Bar-tailed Godwit	071-86894	18/07/1991	Roebuck Bay	1+	6/03/2012	Roebuck Bay	21+
Bar-tailed Godwit	071-85994	31/03/1990	Roebuck Bay	2+	6/03/2012	Roebuck Bay	24+
Bar-tailed Godwit	*072-61207	28/09/1998	Roebuck Bay	3+	6/03/2012	Roebuck Bay	16+
Bar-tailed Godwit	*072-61203	28/09/1998	Roebuck Bay	3+	6/03/2012	Roebuck Bay	16+
Curlew Sandpiper	042-13900	15/12/2002	Roebuck Bay	2	6/03/2012	Roebuck Bay	11
Great Knot	062-43900	29/08/1998	Roebuck Bay	3+	21/02/2012	Roebuck Bay	16+
Great Knot	062-13731	4/03/1998	Roebuck Bay	2+	21/02/2012	Roebuck Bay	16+
Great Knot	062-15912	6/03/1998	Roebuck Bay	2+	21/02/2012	Roebuck Bay	16+
Great Knot	062-15258	19/04/1996	80 Mile Beach	1	26/02/2012	80 Mile Beach	17
Great Knot	062-15441	25/04/1996	Roebuck Bay	1+	6/03/2012	Roebuck Bay	17+
Greater Sand Plover	051-92345	4/04/1996	80 Mile Beach	2+	24/02/2012	80 Mile Beach	18+
Greater Sand Plover	051-96618	11/09/1998	80 Mile Beach	2+	24/02/2012	80 Mile Beach	16+
Gull-billed Tern	072-78831	8/01/2001	80 Mile Beach	2	25/02/2012	80 Mile Beach	13
Ruddy Turnstone	052-01740	2/01/2001	Roebuck Bay	?	8/03/2012	Roebuck Bay	13+

*Note that two Bar-tailed Godwits were banded together and recaptured together 14 years later.

Dunlin Gives [Almost] All for Shorebird Research and Conservation

Biologists strive to summarize what populations as a whole are doing so as to focus limited conservation efforts and finances to areas most in need. Seldom, however, do they recognize the contribution individual birds make towards scientific inquiries or international collaborations. This point was made clear recently when I investigated the identity of a Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) that was re-sighted near Aphae Island in South Korea by Dr Kim Seok-Yee and Mr Andreas Kim on 8 April 2012. A cursory examination of my database indicated that Dunlin AUE (representing the engraved letters on the bird's dark green leg-flag) was originally banded nine years earlier on a nest in Barrow, Alaska, on 19 June 2003. A bit more digging into my various databases indicated this bird had contributed much more than showing the path it migrated northward as it endeavored to return to Barrow to breed for perhaps its 10th time.

Over the intervening nine years, my crew and I were fortunate to capture, see, and some might say torment AUE during our research activities at Barrow. Indeed, he had been recaptured at his nest in 2005, 2009, 2010 and 2011; been re-sighted in 2004 and 2006; and been captured with a brood in 2007. 2008 was the only year we did not observe him on the breeding grounds. In 2005, we outfitted AUE with a radio transmitter attached by a leg-loop harness to allow Audrey Taylor (PhD student) to track his movements from Barrow to post-breeding locations along the North Slope of Alaska. Unfortunately, Audrey was unable to locate him away from his breeding site. In 2009, we attached another smaller transmitter to AUE's back using glue, allowing Brooke Hill (MS student) to follow him and document that his brood fledged successfully.

During the six times he was captured at Barrow, AUE was poked and prodded to help unravel other natural history traits of this species. In 2010 and 2011, AUE's blood was used by Andy Doll (MS student) to determine when and at what speed he switched from marine food used during migration to terrestrial food used during breeding. In other years, his blood was used to determine his sex (collaboration with Dr Stephen Yezerinac at Mount Allison University and Dr Sandy Talbot of US Geological Survey), assess his relatedness to other populations of Dunlin breeding in Beringia (collaboration with Dr Susan Haig at US Geological Survey), and was archived for future paternity and immunity studies. He also had his throat and cloaca swabbed in 2007, 2009 and 2010 to determine if he had highly pathogenic H₅N₁ avian influenza (fortunately he did not; this was part of a nationwide effort to monitor this disease). AUE also had two flight



Alaskan flagged Dunlin AUE in company with Bar-tailed Godwits at Aphae Island South Korea 8 April 2012. Enlargement of leg flag at right - note white letters on dark green flag. Photos by Andreas Kim / Birds Korea



feathers pulled in 2009 to assess whether locally acquired resources, which are used to grow these flight feathers on the breeding grounds, can be used to differentiate the five subspecies of Dunlin breeding in Beringia (collaboration with Dr Mike Wunder at University of Colorado, Denver). Finally, we collected a poop sample from AUE in 2011 so Kirsten Grond (PhD student) could assess his gut microbiota and relate this to his immune profile.

AUE's long history at Barrow also contributed to other studies that require long-term data on individual birds. For example, information on his longevity contributed to Brooke Hill's (MS student) adult survival study, and information on his mate fidelity (he mated with the same female in 2003 and 2005, and again with the same female in 2009, 2010 and 2011) is being used by Jenny Cunningham (MS student) to investigate factors influencing nest site selection. His nest success record (failed in 2003 but successful in the other 5 years) is also being used to assess how the removal of Arctic Fox, an apex predator at Barrow, is influencing shorebird demographic traits (collaboration with Dr Sarah Saalfeld). His archived blood and feathers will also likely contribute to the studies of future research scientists.

While it is clear that AUE contributed to the education and research objectives of numerous

Dunlin Gives [Almost] All for Shorebird Research and Conservation cont.

students and scientists, perhaps most impressive is how he managed to bring together scientists from many different countries. Field and laboratory tasks included people from Canada, Colombia, Germany, Hong Kong, The Netherlands, Republic of China (Taiwan), South Korea, and the United States. It is my hope that this short story will make people appreciate each and every bird, even in situations where thousands of birds may

be flying together in large migratory flocks. Each bird has an intricate tale to tell that is surely more detailed than this one.

Rick Lanctot

Alaska Shorebird Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Full story can be accessed at:

<http://www.birdskoreablog.org/?p=4262>

Flagged Shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary, NSW September 2011 to March 2012

Scanning shorebird flocks for flagged birds can provide exciting information about these international travelers, especially during the first few months of southward migration in southeastern Australia.

The first two weeks in October was an exciting time for sighting flagged shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary, New South Wales (NSW). A truly international cast was present with Bar-tailed Godwits bearing leg flags from Alaska, China, NSW, Victoria and New Zealand; and Red Knots bearing leg flags from Kamchatka in Russia, Chongming Dao in China, Victoria and New Zealand. Engraved leg flags made field identification of individual birds possible and photos taken with digital cameras often clarified field observations. Scanning roosting shorebird flocks at Stockton Sandspit every two to three days during October allowed us to infer the likely duration of staging in the Hunter Estuary for shorebirds on southward migration. A total of 49 flagged migratory shorebirds was identified; of these, 34 birds were individually marked with engraved leg flags or colour bands in addition to a flag.

One Bar-tailed Godwit bearing a black engraved leg flag (6D) was banded in July 2009, on the breeding grounds in the Colville River basin of northern Alaska – about as far away from the Hunter River as these birds fly! It was observed on 4 and 8 October 2011 but was not seen subsequently – it stayed for only a short time in the Hunter Estuary before moving further south.

Six Bar-tailed Godwits bearing orange engraved leg flags (WS, SS, DN, SY, 59 and KS) that had been banded in Victoria were observed between 29 September 2011 and 18 October 2011, staying for a minimum of 4 to 14 days before moving on from the Hunter Estuary. 'DN' and 'KS' were banded in June 2010 at Corner Inlet in Victoria as one year + birds. It will be interesting

to see if they return to their banding site after their first breeding event. All the others were more than two years old when they were banded in January or February and are likely to return to their banding sites. '59' was banded in February 2009 at Corner Inlet; it was seen in the Hunter Estuary on southward migration between 9 and 17 October 2009 and again between 8 and 15 October 2011. 'SS' and 'SY' were banded in January 2011 at Barwon Heads in Victoria and 'WS' was banded in February 2011 at Corner Inlet. We expect these birds will be seen again in the Hunter Estuary during southward migration in September - October 2012.

Four flagged Bar-tailed Godwits stayed in the Hunter Estuary for the entire non-breeding season: three had been banded in the Hunter Estuary in 2004 and the fourth with a distinctive notched orange flag had been banded in Victoria in 1996 - some 15 years ago.

Two Red Knots with white engraved leg flags from New Zealand arrived in mid to late September while another five arrived in the first week of October. Most stayed for less than a week. A Red Knot wearing an inverted 'AAA' white flag was last seen in the Hunter Estuary on 18 October 2011; five days later it was seen at Miranda, New Zealand. It had most likely flown directly across the Tasman Sea from the Hunter Estuary.

Two Red Knots marked in China with black over white engraved flags arrived in the first week of October; both these knots had gone by the third week in October. Most knots had passed through the estuary by December.

Some shorebirds returned from their northern hemisphere breeding event as early as August but the majority began arriving in September and continued to arrive well into November, with a few stragglers arriving in late December. Observations of engraved leg flags confirm that many shorebirds stage for a relatively short

Flagged Shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary, NSW September 2011 to March 2012 cont.

time in the Hunter Estuary while on southward migration. Stays may be as brief as a couple of days or up to several weeks, while others stay for the whole non-breeding season. Red Knots generally spend only a limited amount of time in the Hunter Estuary before moving further south to Victoria or New Zealand.

Figure 1 shows the marked increase in the number of flagged and banded birds arriving in the Hunter Estuary during the first week in October. Subsequently the number decreased into early November when at least half of the flagged birds that remained were those previously flagged in the estuary.

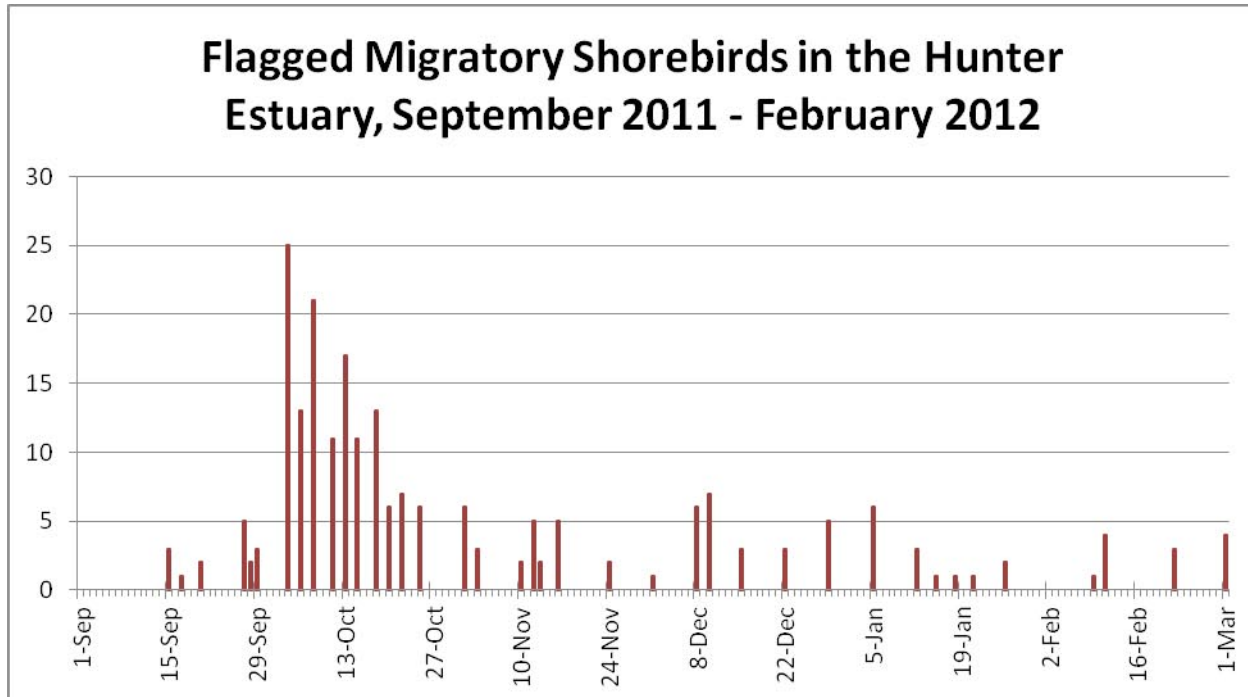


Figure 1 – Observations were made weekly in September and every two to three days in the last week of September and over most of October. Successful observation of leg flags depended on the mobility of the flock - if all birds were roosting, usually only one leg was visible and then only along the front of the flock. Periodic disturbance often provided opportunities to view both legs while the birds re-positioned. As birds began to forage and move away from the flock there were additional opportunities for sighting flags.

Liz Crawford and Chris Herbert
Hunter Bird Observers Club

Next AWSG Expedition to North-West Australia

The next Wader and Tern Banding Expedition to Roebuck Bay, Broome, and 80 Mile Beach / Anna Plains in north-west Australia will take place from **Saturday 23 February to Saturday 16 March 2013**.

The objectives will be the same as in other recent expeditions except that more time will be spent scanning for engraved leg flags and colour-bands, particularly at 80 Mile Beach.

We would again like a team of around 30 for the full three-week period. People who have taken part in previous expeditions are particularly encouraged to come again, but new participants are also welcome. We again hope to have around half of the team members from overseas. We also particularly encourage younger participants.

Please get in touch with Clive Minton (mintons@ozemail.com.au), Roz Jessop (moonbird@waterfront.net.au) or Chris Hassell (turnstone@wn.com.au) if there is any possibility you can take part in 2013. We like to have a good idea of the strength of the team as early as possible.