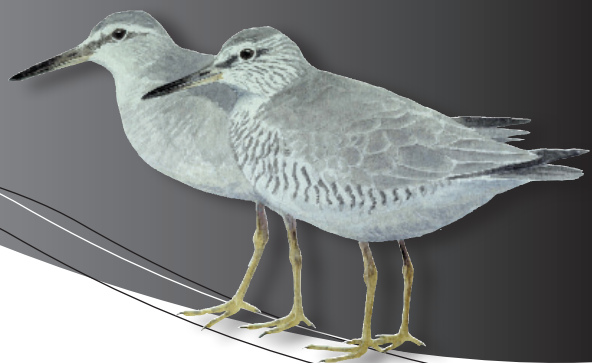


Tattler



Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways

Editor: Liz Crawford Email: tattler@awsg.org.au No. 25 August 2012

In this issue:

| | |
|---|----|
| An insight into the African - Eurasian Waterbird Agreement | 2 |
| British Birdwatching Fair Supports Conservation in the EAAF | 3 |
| New EAAF Workshop at IWSG Annual Conference 2012 | 4 |
| Bohai Bay Update | 5 |
| Banded Stilt Update July 2012 | 7 |
| New AWSG Committee 2012 | 7 |
| East Kamchatka Northward Shorebird Migration 2011 & 2012 | 8 |
| Report on a Visit to Delaware Bay May - June 2012 | 9 |
| AWSG Conference Program Adelaide Sep 2012 | 10 |

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

Included in this issue are articles about the African - Eurasian Flyway and the American Atlantic Flyway, as well as articles about northward migration on the East Asian - Australasian Flyway (EAAF). It is heartening to read about progress in conservation of critical stop-over sites such as the Wadden Sea in the African - Eurasian Flyway, but disheartening to read about on-going reclamation of tidal flats at Bohai Bay, a critical stop-over site in the Yellow Sea on the EAAF.

However, there is an international push to assist shorebird and waterbird conservation along the EAAF: this year the high profile British Birdwatching Fair is raising funds to support BirdLife International's conservation programs in the EAAF. Additional support will be provided by the Rio Tinto-BirdLife Programme. One of the awareness-raising activities will be *Welcome to the Birds*, an annual Flyway-wide festival to be held in October, timed to coincide with southward migration.

Finally, the provisional program for the AWSG Conference to whet your appetite and encourage you to register for this exciting and informative conference in Adelaide.



Great Knot in flight Photo: Adrian Boyle

An insight into the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement

In May this year I had the pleasure of accepting an invitation from the Secretariat of the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement to attend the Fifth Meeting of Partners (AEWA MoP5). The meeting was held in the picturesque historical port town of La Rochelle on the French Atlantic coast. It was an invitation I was keen to accept as the Coordinator of the Asia Pacific Shorebird Network, and also because of my involvement with the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Meeting of Partners on behalf of the AWSG.

There are many similarities between AEWA and the EAAFP and I was keen to see what we could learn from our African-Eurasian counterparts as well as sharing some of their resources.

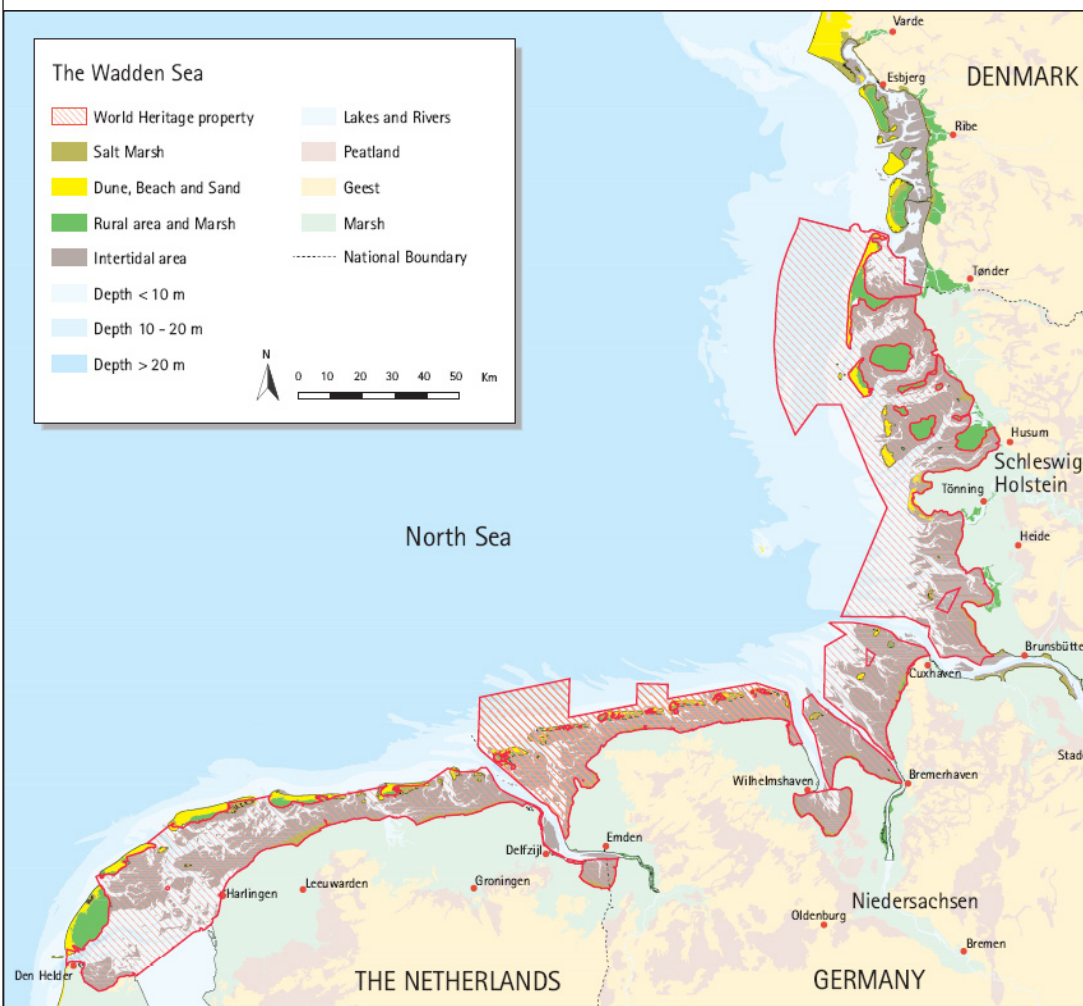
I was impressed with some of the resources developed by AEWA in collaboration with other international organisations. In particular the 'Wings over Wetlands' project that culminated in the production of a comprehensive training kit, 'The flyway approach to the conservation and wise use of waterbirds and wetlands'. The training kit is packed full of interesting information covering so much about waterbirds and their migration, their ecology, moult studies, site management, advocacy skills, and much more. A very useful tool for training conservationists and wetland site managers.

One obvious similarity between AEWA and the EAAFP is the composition of its membership of representatives

from governments and NGOs from all parts of the flyway. However, one major difference is that the 'agreements' made by member partners of AEWA are legally binding, while agreements made by partners in the EAAFP have been deliberately non-binding to encourage involvement without committing to obligations (a similar situation to the membership of contracting parties of the Ramsar Convention).

A big difference I found was in the attitude towards the critical staging areas in each of the two flyways, the Wadden Sea in the African-Eurasian Flyway compared to that of the Yellow Sea in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Both the Wadden Sea and the Yellow Sea are bordered by three influential countries: Germany, The Netherlands and Denmark on the one side and China, North Korea and South Korea on the other.

At the end of June 2009, UNESCO, the United Nations organization for nature and culture, placed the Wadden Sea on the World Heritage List (Figure 1). This puts the Wadden Sea on the same footing as other world-famous natural wonders on the World Heritage List like the Grand Canyon in the USA and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. The Wadden Sea World Heritage Site encompasses the Dutch and German parts of the Wadden Sea. It covers an area of almost 10,000 square kilometres along a coastal strip about 400 kilometres long. The protection of the Wadden Sea brought to an end the unsustainable machine harvesting of shellfish from the tidal flats and the side effects this had on the benthic fauna and shorebirds.



In order to be included in the World Heritage List, an area must be of outstanding universal value and be intact, and its protection must be guaranteed. UNESCO uses several different criteria to assess whether an area merits World Heritage Site status. It deemed the Wadden Sea to be globally unique in at least three of those criteria!

In contrast, important feeding habitat in the Yellow Sea is disappearing at an alarming rate as a result of industrial development involving the reclamation of hundreds of square kilometres per year with no signs of protecting significant areas for the future.

There is no apparent

An insight into the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement cont.

commitment by the countries bordering it to protect its values to migratory waterbirds or the thousands of people who have depended on it for livelihoods for hundreds of years.

The commitment by member parties of AEWA was evident by the representation and enthusiasm shown by more than 200 attendees at the AEWA MoP5, covering the 31 agenda items, which extended to late into the night on at least one occasion to make sure objectives were completed. As if that was not a busy enough agenda, numerous side events were included during lunch breaks and evenings, such as phasing out of lead shot in hunting, and the fitting

of bird protection markings to overhead power lines using helicopters, just to name two.

Despite the frenetic pace, there was time for occasional field trips, cocktail receptions provided by various French government bodies, and sharing a few drinks with old friends and new at one of the numerous waterfront cafes: *c'est la vie!*

I hope to see closer cooperation between AEWA and the EAAF Partnership in the future and would like to suggest a memorandum of understanding between the two.

Phil Straw

British Birdwatching Fair Supports Conservation in the EAAF

As Global Sponsor of BirdLife International's Flyways Programme, the British Birdwatching Fair is this year raising funds to support conservation in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Additional support is being provided by the Rio Tinto-BirdLife Programme and the project will be implemented in collaboration with Wetlands International and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership.

This project will be implemented by the BirdLife Asia Partnership and aims to take conservation action at intertidal wetlands that are critical for migrating waders, to improve the availability of data on the bird populations that use the flyway, and to raise awareness throughout the region of the threats to migratory birds and the value of coastal wetlands to people.

The BirdLife Asia Partnership currently includes nine Partner organisations, two Affiliate organisations, and country programmes covering the Indochinese countries and mainland China (where the BirdLife China Programme is working with a network of more than 20 birdwatching and conservation organisations). BirdLife also works closely with contacts in countries where it is currently not represented.

During meetings held in Thailand and South Korea in February 2012, 11 sites in South Korea, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Myanmar were chosen for inclusion in the project, because they are of critical importance for migratory waterbirds (as confirmed by the IUCN Situation Analysis) and because they are places where BirdLife organisations have the capacity to implement conservation activities. The sites are:

1. Han River estuary, Yellow Sea, South Korea;
2. Geum River estuary, Yellow Sea, S Korea;
3. Yellow River delta, Yellow Sea, China;
4. Chongming Dongtan, Yellow Sea, China;
5. Min Jiang estuary, China;
6. Red River delta, Vietnam;
7. Mekong delta, Vietnam;
8. Gulf of Martaban, Myanmar;
9. Inner Gulf of Thailand;
10. North-central Selangor coast, Malaysia;
11. Bako-Buntal Bay, West Sarawak, Malaysia.

One of the key activities at the project sites will be to mobilise local communities for the protection and management of wetland habitats. This will be done by establishing and building the capacity of Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) (site-based groups of local stakeholders, often consisting of volunteers), which will support the efforts of protected-area managers and local government agencies. They have already been established at some project sites in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. For example, the LCG at Bako-Buntal Bay in Malaysia includes restaurant owners and tour operators, village committee representatives and members of the Malaysian Nature Society's Kuching Branch, who work together towards better management of the bay for wildlife and livelihoods.

In the Inner Gulf of Thailand, four LCGs are working closely with local government agencies and at Khok Kham lobbying by the LCGs is playing an important part in its designation as a new Ramsar site.

The Flyways Project will help guide the activities of the LCGs at the project sites where they have already been established, will set up new LCGs at the other sites, and will support initiatives such as lobbying for designation as Ramsar sites.

The February project planning meetings identified a lack of secure high-tide roost sites for waders as a major problem at the two sites in South Korea (the Han estuary and the Geum estuary), because of development and disturbance along the coast. This is also a potential problem at the North-central Selangor Coast, where the current roost site at Kapar Ash Ponds might soon be lost. The project will investigate the potential to restore abandoned roost sites or create new ones.

In Eastern China, introduced cord grass *Spartina* is a growing menace, rapidly covering sandflats and reducing waterbird habitat. At Chongming Dongtan, the reserve authorities are currently removing *Spartina*, and the project will monitor how the tidal flats recover and determine the best methodology to apply at other sites.

Despite the efforts of international and national programmes and NGOs, awareness remains low in

British Birdwatching Fair supports Conservation in the EAAF cont.

many countries in the Flyway of the value of tidal flats for migratory birds and other biodiversity, as well as the ecosystem services they provide for people. This lack of awareness amongst government and local communities often leads to insufficient attention being given to the environmental value of wetlands in coastal zone planning and management.

The project will organise awareness-raising activities including an annual Flyway-wide festival with the theme *Welcome to the Birds*, timed to coincide with southward migration. This will be modelled on BirdLife's World Bird Festival, with events organised in as many countries as possible in the Flyway during October. The project will seek to generate as much media coverage as possible, to tell people about the spectacular migrations that are happening around them and to show that people throughout the Flyway are concerned about the birds and wetlands.

Conservation action in the Flyway depends on sound population-monitoring information. There are well-

established monitoring programmes in some countries including Japan, Australia and New Zealand, and new schemes have recently been initiated in China (the China Coastal Waterbird Census) and Korea (the Korean Shorebirds Census). The Asian Waterbird Census, coordinated by Wetlands International, organises annual counts at many wetlands in the Flyway, and gathers large amounts of valuable data on populations and sites. However, the overall coverage of the Flyway is still incomplete. The project will support the expansion of the existing monitoring schemes by providing training to build capacity, and by promoting increased communication between the national programmes to help harmonise, share and communicate the data collected. It will also use the internet to improve communication and sharing of information about migratory birds in the Flyway.

Adapted from Nick Langley's (2012) article "Conserving the East Asian-Australasian Flyway" in *World Birdwatch*, **34** (2):12-15.

New EAAF Workshop at IWSG Annual Conference 2012

The International Wader Study Group Annual Conference 2012 will take place in Séné, Golf du Morbihan, Brittany, France, on the weekend of 22/23 September. For more information go to:

<http://www.waderstudygroup.org>

The Conference will include a Workshop on: ***Urgent conservation crisis endangers many wader species in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway***

Along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, the loss of intertidal wetlands is progressing at worrisome pace. The vanishing of main stopover and wintering sites has led to serious declines in a number of wader species in this flyway. The wealth of knowledge of numerous international waderologists brought together in one place at the IWSG meeting in France is an excellent opportunity to help safeguard migratory waders in the EAAF.

A recently published **IUCN situation analysis** on (South) East Asian intertidal habitats has shown extraordinarily fast rates of intertidal-habitat loss, up to 60% in the Yellow Sea, and an astounding number of future reclamation plans for the intertidal zone. Both scientists and conservationists are developing tools to eventually turn the fates of migrating waders within this threatened flyway.

Presenters at the Workshop will report on:

- a summary of the IUCN report
- several studies on migrants from the EAAF
- a report on the current knowledge about waders breeding in NE Siberia
- presentations on conservation actions in a highly threatened region (Bohai Bay, Yellow Sea, China) and the almost extinct enigmatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper

They will then spend a large amount of time on public discussions to bring together established methods and new ideas to improve our combined efforts within the area.

The IWSG conference takes place one week prior to the Australasian Wader Studies Group conference. We will report our findings to this conference in order to feed their respective discussions on the subject.

Visit the **workshop website** for more information.

On behalf of the workshop team, *Yvonne Verkuil, Jutta Leyrer and Nicola Crockford*



Bohai Bay Update

Is this the greyest place in the world? It must be close, especially at this time of year when the grey polluted sky merges with the murky grey mudflats in the shadow of a noisy grey oil refinery. Fortunately, from our favourite scanning position on the grey sea wall, just in front of the grey saltpans, we can see plenty of shorebirds adding splashes of colour to an otherwise bleak landscape!

As a further introduction for anyone not aware of the issues here, let us take a paragraph to briefly sum up why we are in Bohai Bay. We are back for another season on the northern shores of Bohai Bay in NE China, where, throughout the spring migration, our small team has been collecting observations from this vitally important shorebird staging site. The northern shores of Bohai Bay are significant for many species, notably Red Knot and Curlew Sandpiper, with large numbers stopping here en route to their northern breeding grounds.

Unfortunately it is also an excellent example of the threats that the entire Yellow Sea faces with large scale habitat destruction being the most obvious. Our work here involves studying shorebirds using the site throughout the season, with particular emphasis on searching for flags and colour-bands.

It seems that news about the importance of this area is getting out, as this year we had a string of visitors keen to see the area for themselves. Doug Watkins and Lv Yong from Wetlands International dropped in for a couple of days, fortunately just missing the fog. Nick Murray from Queensland University stopped off on his tour of the Yellow Sea as part of his project

| Flagged In | No. of sightings | Known Individuals |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| BOHAI BAY | 122 | 0 |
| SOUTH BOHAI / INDIVIDUALS | 7 | 4 |
| CHONGMING DONTANG ELF | 104 | 27 |
| CHONGMING DONTANG PLAIN | 461 | 0 |
| CHUKOTKA | 43 | 13 |
| NW AUSTRALIA DANNY | 44 | 1 |
| HONG KONG | 19 | 4 |
| JAPAN | 10 | 0 |
| KAMCHATKA | 4 | 0 |
| KING ISLAND | 4 | 1 |
| NW AUSTRALIA COLOUR BAND | 904 | 287 |
| NW AUSTRALIA ELF | 592 | 151 |
| NW AUSTRALIA PLAIN | 529 | 0 |
| NEW ZEALAND COLOUR BAND | 171 | 60 |
| NEW ZEALAND ELF | 340 | 108 |
| NEW ZEALAND PLAIN | 198 | 0 |
| QUEENSLAND | 8 | 0 |
| SAKHALIN | 5 | 0 |
| SUMATRA | 5 | 0 |
| SOUTH AUSTRALIA ELF | 13 | 8 |
| SOUTH AUSTRALIA PLAIN | 48 | 0 |
| TAIWAN ELF | 2 | 1 |
| THAILAND PLAIN | 70 | 0 |
| UNKNOWN | 12 | 0 |
| VICTORIA ELF | 21 | 6 |
| VICTORIA PLAIN | 776 | 0 |
| TOTALS | 4512 | 671 |



Red Knot *piersmai* subspecies Photo: Adrian Boyle

mapping and quantifying the decline in intertidal areas in East Asia. A presentation of his work only confirmed what is widely known and that some serious changes need to be implemented for the shorebirds to have any future. Two film crews interviewed Chris, Matt, Theunis Piersma, David Melville and Yan Hong Yan so hopefully the message will reach the Chinese public.

Things seemed to be happening a little earlier this year with Ruddy Turnstone, Curlew Sandpiper and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper among the species seen in the first few days in the field, all 4-5 days earlier than in 2011. Both species of Knot were present in good numbers as well, with a few thousand of each species present when we first arrived on site (12 April) and numbers of Red Knot growing steadily ever since. The first Asian Dowitcher of the year was at Nanpu on 15 April and the first Nordmann's Greenshank was on exactly the same small patch of mud the following day.

Scanning for leg flags was productive with many highlights. We recorded 4,512 flag and band sightings from 16 banding studies in the EAAF on 13 species.

Red Knot numbers continued to rise through late April until mid-May but the peak was much lower than last year - 35,000 as compared to 65,000 in 2011. This does not seem to be a loss of birds from the population as the numbers of colour-bands and flags were at very similar ratios. The birds were definitely using the adjacent Salt Ponds for foraging and this area is all but impossible to census so we need to analyse the colour-band resightings to work out the turn-over of birds on the mud, in the ponds and in the whole area. In mid-May numbers of Red Knot began to decline as the *rogersi* subspecies headed off to their breeding grounds in Chukotka leaving about 30,000 *piersmai* Red Knot behind in the latter stages of May. Over 90% of the world population of that subspecies in 2 flocks on 2 km of mudflat!

That's why we think it's an important site!

The area also hosts some rarities that all shorebirders like to hear about; up to 10 Nordmann's Greenshank were being sighted daily at Nanpu until Mid-May, and the Asian Dowitcher flock peaked just short of 200 at Zuidong. A single Grey-tailed Tattler on 5 May was an unusual record for this site as was Long-toed Stint. The enigmatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper was recorded in late May and seen at the same site for 4 days and then 5km away a day later.

Bohai Bay Update cont.

Scanning for flags continued unabated come rain or shine, tide high or low, Knot or not for 52 days! 'Old friends' continued to be seen with the Thai Godwits, 'JE' the Victorian ELF Godwit and the Japanese Grey Plover all occasionally recorded. A Ruddy Turnstone with an ELF flag from Taiwan was the first bird from there recorded here in 4 years of scanning. It was initially seen in the afternoon in a Saltpan near the Prison but the following morning it was one of the first birds onto the mud as the tide receded. This shows how some birds wander around the area although this movement of just over 10km is nothing for a bird which can easily fly 1000s!

Red Knot numbers dropped suddenly in late May as we had a noticeable departure of the *rogersi* subspecies. Overall counts halved and our 'subspecies ratio scans' swung heavily in favour of *piersmai*. This was expected as many birds departed for the northern breeding grounds, less expected was a second peak in numbers.

Having dropped to less than 20 000, Red Knot numbers surged up to close to 30 000! Where did they come from? There had been birds feeding in the saltpans, perhaps they just came back to the mud for a final few days feeding before leaving? Every season is a bit different and the behaviour of the birds is changing from day-to-day ... there is still a lot to learn! With the influx of birds comes an influx of colour bands, including many new individuals seen for the first time this season. During this trip we surpassed our 2011 total for flags.

A visiting birder reported a lonesome Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the saltpans on 22 May. We checked the area a little more frequently than usual but if it was still there we failed to pick it from the thousands of Red-necked Stint present. On 25 May Chris was lucky enough to get great views of one feeding at very close range on the receding tide at Zuidong. The rest of the team were a few kilometres away at Nanpu and with no Knot to scan we made our way over to Chris to take a look. The bird flew off just before we arrived so Matt got out to scan and check through some other birds on the way. This turned out to be a bad decision as he was the only team member to not see it when it came back, albeit briefly, to the original spot! Spoon-billed Sandpiper is among the most threatened birds in the world and certainly one of the most high profile. This



Victorian flagged Red-necked Stint Photo: Adrian Boyle

is the first we have seen here in our 8 solid months of field work over 4 years, but it seems reasonable to assume that they occur annually and can easily be missed in amongst the large numbers of stint present, especially when we are looking primarily at the knots! We are unable to be upbeat about the sighting though as presumably it is not an expanding population but declining habitat that has led this bird to be in our study site.

With all the attention the Bohai study site has been getting this season, from various visitors from varied organisations, hopes are high of a permanent solution to the threat of the site becoming another industrial zone. Just like last year, WWF have taken a huge interest in the site and have provided much support, not least of which is financial support in conjunction with WWF-Netherlands and Beijing Normal University, that has made our work here possible. A conference organised by WWF was held on the 25-26 May in nearby Tangshan to offer an opportunity for interested parties to meet, discuss the problems and raise awareness about the issues. The first afternoon was very entertaining with various speakers including our own Professor Piersma. The second day included a field trip to the mudflats where participants were able to see the site as well as a large flock of Red Knot. Overall it seemed to be a success and with the media attention that was received anything that can raise the profile of the site can only be a good thing. However, exploration of a former favourite scanning area at the east-end of Zuidong brought home the reality of how



Two NW Australian colour-banded Red Knot Photo: Adrian Boyle

Bohai Bay Update cont.



Red Knots roosting in the salt pans at Nanpu Photo: Adrian Boyle

quickly and radically the coastline can be changed. In previous years we have recorded thousands of birds and many flags on the Zuidong mudflats, but over just a few years most of the mudflats have gone, a 6-lane highway has been built and preparation of the area for construction is well underway. Zuidong, the small fishing village, is being systematically destroyed as a series of apartment blocks take shape behind. As things stand at the moment it seems this is the

destiny of the rest of the coastline in this area. So let's hope that the super-biodiverse mudflats at Nanpu can escape that fate.

A sobering end, as ever, when discussing shorebirds and the Yellow Sea.

For more information visit

www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au

Chris Hassell, Matt Slaymaker, Adrian Boyle and Ginny Chan

Banded Stilt Update, July 2012

This episode of the Banded Stilt story starts in March 2012 when news of widespread, extensive rainfall in central Australia led to an expectation of a possible breeding event. Water was flowing into Lake Eyre South and Lake Torrens, and by 15 March, Reece Pedler and Ben Parkhurst had found a breeding colony on a small island in Lake Eyre South, and another at Lake Torrens. The Lake Eyre South colony was on a tiny island/mound spring. On a beautiful calm day, the site looked idyllic with Banded Stilt on nests, clear blue water, and stilts feeding in the shallows. But Silver Gulls were present, hassling nesting stilt and predating eggs. After dark eight adult Banded Stilt were captured, banded, flagged, and fitted with transmitters.

Hopes were high that the breeding on Lake Eyre South would be successful, despite Clive Minton's gloomy prediction that the presence of even a small number of Silver Gulls spelt doom for any chicks. Unfortunately Clive was right and no chicks survived from this breeding event.

Since then Banded Stilt have moved in all directions – some going ~1700 km W to the Canning Stock Route in Western Australia and 1400 km SE to Lake Corangamite near Colac in Victoria!

Maureen Christie, Friends of Shorebirds, SE Australia

New AWSG Committee 2012

The new Australasian Wader Study Group Committee was declared following receipt of nominations in July. An election of committee members was not necessary because there were no more nominations for committee positions than those provided under AWSG Rules. The term of office is two years.

Committee Office Bearers

Chair: Alison Russell-French

Vice Chair: Phil Straw

Treasurer: Arthur Keates

Secretary: John Renowden

Stilt Editor: Birgita Hansen

International Liaison: Ken Gosbell

Conservation Officer: Joan Dawes

Chair of Research Committee: Danny Rogers

Other Committee Members

Heather Gibbs

Chris Hassell

Roz Jessop

Marcel Klaassen

Clive Minton

Adrian Riegen

Paul Wainwright

Doug Watkins

East Kamchatka northward shorebird migration - 2011 & 2012

In 2011 and 2012 we continued the study of northward migration of shorebirds on the east coast of Kamchatka after 3 years' work on the southwest coast of the peninsula. As in previous years, our observations of visible migration were conducted from one point during the migration period.

In 2011, observations were made from 20 April till 24 May. The observation point at 56° 13' N 162° 33' E was located on the sand spit between Kamchatskiy Gulf and Nerpichie Lake (a big saltwater lagoon), 1.5 km from the mouth of the Kamchatka River. During migration of shorebirds (14 – 24 May), observations were conducted 8–18 hours per day, on average 14.3 hours per day. During the work we obtained new information about shorebird migration; however our hopes for large numbers of shorebirds were not fulfilled. We counted only about 3,000 shorebirds, with Whimbrel, Dunlin and Wood Sandpiper being the most numerous (see Table).

Migration peak of Wood Sandpiper was 18 May, Ruddy Turnstone – 18 and 20 May, Dunlin – 20 May, and Whimbrel – 21 May 2011. Nerpichie Lake has international importance as a staging site for Whimbrels in spite of the small total number of shorebirds counted. Flocks of Whimbrels totaling more than 1,000 stop to rest and feed on banks and islands of the lakes. Obviously migration of shorebirds was proceeding after we finished our observations on 24 May 2011. Unfortunately we could not see the majority of some species which arrived in the study area from the central part of Kamchatka. These species are Wood Sandpipers, Greenshanks, Black-tailed Godwits, Eastern Curlews and probably some others. Also, we have information that many more shorebirds stop on the mudflats of Nerpichie Lake in the case of an earlier spring. In 2011 spring was late and all the mudflats were covered by ice during shorebird migration.

In 2012 the shorebirds migration study was conducted 500 km north from the previous point. Observations were made on Ilpyrskaya Spit (59°58' N; 164°12' E) from 11 May till 12 June. During this time we gathered new information about shorebird migration on the north-east coast of Kamchatka and our observations covered all the migration period of this group of birds – from 14 May (first Wood Sandpipers arriving) till 9 June (final flying-past flocks of Ruddy Turnstones). During 14 - 31 May observation time was 6–18 hours per day, on average 12.2 hours per day.

In total we counted about 17,000 shorebirds of 25 species. Most numerous were Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked Stint and Dunlin (Table). We do not make any calculations with counted number of shorebirds and for estimate of minimum total number we used only the counts made during direct observations.

The shorebird migration period was much longer than in the southern part of Kamchatka. Significant migration of Mongolian Plover was registered from 16 May till 2 June, Wood Sandpiper 16 – 24 May, Dunlin from 21 May till 2 June, Red-necked Stint from 22 May till 2 June, Grey-tailed Tattler from 23 May till 2 June 2012.

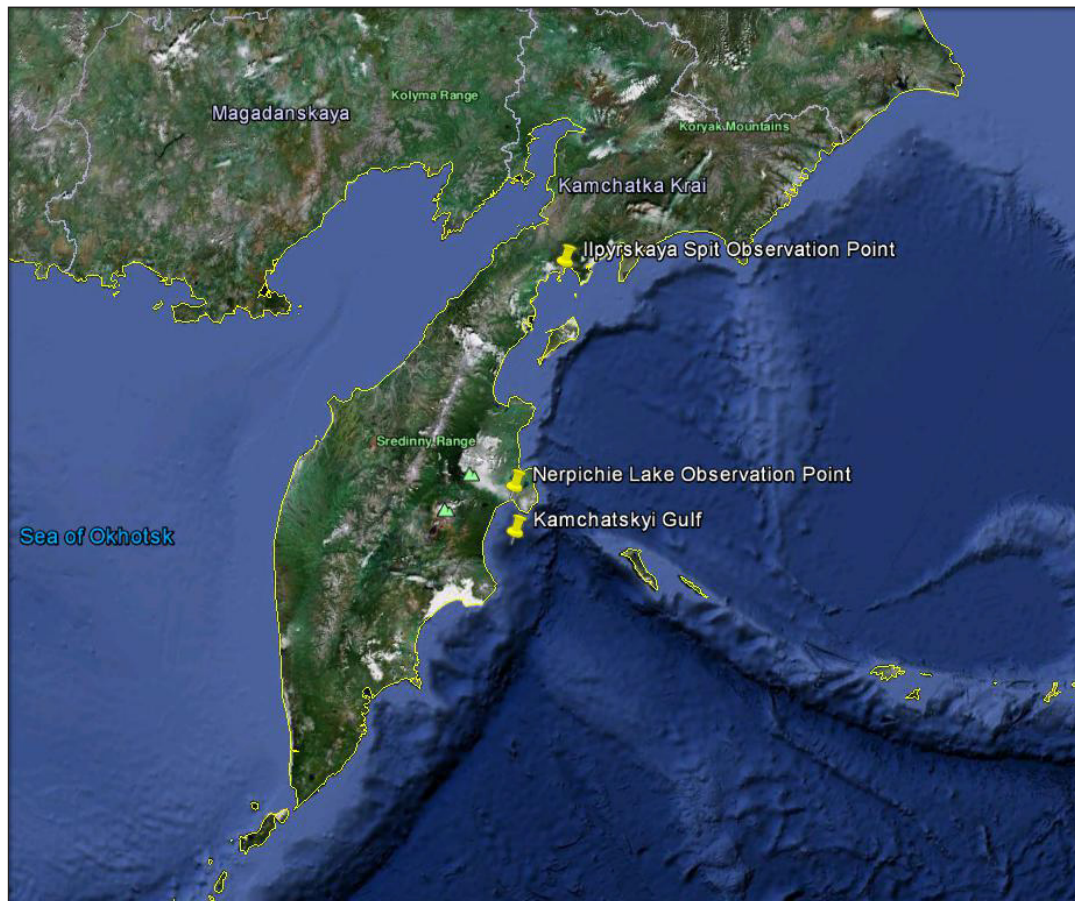
Most important data were obtained for Ruddy Turnstones, whose migration flocks we could see from 16 May till 9 June. Obviously this area, which is located outside of the breeding range, is very important for this species during northward migration. In total we counted about 8,500 Ruddy Turnstones and we think that this number can be used as the minimum estimate for the observation area. It means that the study area supports, during northward migration, at least 27% of the total population of this species on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. All Turnstone flocks stop in the study area to feed, rest and roost. At least some of them stay there for several days. At one time, up to more than 1500 birds (about 5% of the total flyway population) were feeding on the spit.

Ilpyrskaya Spit and the adjacent shallow water bay have much smaller importance for other shorebird species. On 2 June 2012 we made a short visit to Koshka Spit. This 5-km long spit is located 15 km to the north from our observation point. On the spit and adjacent ice-free part of the shallow-water lagoon, we counted about 1600 shorebirds, including 800 Red-necked Stints, 500 Dunlins, 120 Great Knots and 6 Red Knots. For these four species, the number counted on Koshka Spit was higher than in any day in the area of our work on Ilpyrskaya Spit. We had no possibility to cover both these areas by our observations. But both these areas are located close to each other and we assume that together they support at least 25,000 – 30,000 shorebirds during northward migration.

Yuri Gerasimov, Rimma Bukhalova & Yulia Zavgarova

| Species | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|------|-------|
| Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> | | 139 |
| Pacific Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis fulva</i> | 1 | 37 |
| Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> | – | 13 |
| Lesser Sand Plover <i>Charadrius mongolus</i> | 335 | 820 |
| Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i> | 144 | 8483 |
| Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i> | 550 | 217 |
| Common Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i> | 4 | 65 |
| Grey-tailed Tattler <i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i> | 6 | 142 |
| Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> | 1 | 11 |
| Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i> | – | 30 |
| Grey Phalarope <i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i> | – | 104 |
| Red-necked Phalarope <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i> | – | 1431 |
| Spoon-billed Sandpiper <i>Eurynorhynchus pygmeus</i> | – | 6 |
| Red-necked Stint <i>Calidris ruficollis</i> | 70 | 2807 |
| Long-toed Stint <i>Calidris subminuta</i> | – | 4 |
| Temminck's Stint <i>Calidris temminckii</i> | – | 24 |
| Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i> | 902 | 2367 |
| Great Knot <i>Calidris tenuirostris</i> | 25 | 211 |
| Red Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i> | – | 10 |
| Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i> | – | 1 |
| Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i> | – | 6 |
| Eastern Curlew <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i> | 6 | 24 |
| Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i> | 1131 | 67 |
| Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i> | – | 3 |
| Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i> | 1 | 101 |
| Total | 3176 | 17123 |

East Kamchatka northward shorebird migration - 2011 & 2012



Observation Points at Nerpichie Lake and Ilpyrskaya Spit, East Kamchatka, during northward shorebird migration

Report on Visit to Delaware Bay – 12 May to 2 June 2012

This is a good news story. This is the year that everyone who has been taking part in research and conservation activities at Delaware Bay over the last 15 years (covering 16 northward migrations) has been looking forward to. At last there were real signs of an upturn in the population of Red Knot on the east coast of the United States, most of which visits Delaware Bay during the northward migration for 1 – 3 weeks in May/early June each year.

Just about everything possible was good this year. Sea temperatures reached the critical 59°F threshold for horseshoe crab spawning at the end of April, instead of in the first half of May. Thus, there were already eggs available for the Red Knot when they arrived on the bay from about 7 May – again an earlier arrival date than usual. The crabs continued to spawn on every tide on every day throughout May regardless of whether it was full moon or new moon spring tides (the traditional peak spawning times) or neap tides. It was not possible to tell whether the number of individual crabs spawning had increased (winter dredging of the ocean floor suggests it hasn't) or whether the effect was entirely the result of the continued warm, fine, calm weather. For the first time ever there were no on-shore winds of significance on the New Jersey side of the bay. Crabs won't spawn in rough seas because they get turned over by the waves and are left stranded on the beach by the outgoing tide.

Red Knots and Sanderling continued to pour in daily to Delaware Bay from the south and Ruddy Turnstone as well, although these were rather fewer and a little later than usual. The Red Knots stayed, particularly on the New Jersey side of the bay where conditions were exceptionally good. In many previous years good numbers of Red Knots have only stayed for a few days in NJ before retreating to the sheltered horseshoe crab spawning grounds in Mispillion Harbour, on the Delaware side of the bay, as soon as adverse weather conditions occurred and the food supply dwindled.

Most Red Knot seemed to have reached Delaware Bay by 20 May and it was most fortunate that virtually all were still present when the first complete aerial and ground counts were made on 24 May. This revealed 24,000 knots in New Jersey (including the 1500 at Stone Harbour) and only 4000 in Delaware. The count covered the whole of the relevant coastline of the eastern shores of the USA (South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey) and the total population was estimated at around 33,000, compared to around 28-30,000 in other recent years. A part of the increase in Delaware Bay itself seems to have been the result of the word getting around that plentiful food was available in New Jersey this year, with some of the Virginia population moving a little further northward to take advantage of this.

Report on Visit to Delaware Bay – 12 May to 2 June 2012 cont.

The northward emigration of Red Knot commenced on the evening of 24 May and nearly 50% departed that night. This is the earliest date ever recorded for a major Red Knot departure in the 16 seasons of the study. Half the remaining population departed on 25 May and a further similar proportion on the evening of 26 May. Although the local weather conditions, and those for the projected flight to Hudson Bay, continued to remain ideal the remaining few thousand Red Knot chose to linger longer on the Bay. The average weight (191g) of the sample caught on 27 May was the highest for any year/date since late May 1998. Virtually all the Red Knot had departed by 1 June. This is in marked contrast to a few years ago when almost all the Red Knot were still stuck, with low weights, on Delaware Bay on 5 June when the last of the research team dispersed.

Individual Red Knot recaptured had been putting on weight at 6 – 8g per day, with one bird averaging 10g per day over a five-day period. This year they really could gorge themselves with winnows of spilled eggs present on the surface throughout the last 10 days of May. Just like old times (before 1997)!

Sanderling also had an exceptionally good year, with the good food supplies aiding a steady gain in weight. The average weight achieved of 91g on 31 May was the highest mean weight recorded since 2001. One individual weighed 114g – the highest weight ever recorded for a Sanderling anywhere in the world (fat-free weight average 53g). Again departures took place earlier than usual and only a few hundred birds were still left on 1 June.

For some reason Ruddy Turnstone did not fare quite as well as the other two species this year. Their arrival was delayed and their numbers appeared to be significantly down, yet again, though an exact comparison has not yet been made. Arrival weights were satisfactory and weight gains steady with the average reaching 157g on 31 May – well above the long-term average. Some notable gains were recorded in retraps with one bird gaining 70g in 10 days (86 to 156g). The oldest bird recaptured was an adult from 1999 – now aged a minimum of 15 years. Turnstones are pretty site faithful on Delaware Bay and two individuals have now been cannon-netted five times (over 13 seasons and 10 seasons respectively). Turnstone departures started a day or two later than Red Knot but again most of the population had left by 1 June.

Geolocator retrieval was another highlight this year with 10 units being retrieved from Red Knot – twice the number of any previous year. Downloading completed so far has again shown the huge flight capabilities of

birds with two individuals each covering nearly 8,000 km (5000 miles) non-stop over seven days. Another feature of the geolocator tracks is the huge deviation which some birds make around hurricane storms which they encounter in the western Atlantic/Caribbean in August/September. Fifty new geolocators were deployed on Red Knot, including replacing geolocators on all birds from which geolocators were removed. For the first time geolocators (50) were also deployed on Ruddy Turnstone.

Vast amounts of time were spent by the teams on both sides of Delaware Bay in scanning to identify the engraved leg flags on Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling. In excess of 10,000 sightings were recorded. Most exciting was the appearance again of B95, a Red Knot originally marked in the first significant catch of Red Knot in the Flyway, in February 1995 at Rio Grande in Tierra del Fuego, the southern tip of Argentina. This long-term survivor has been seen and caught multiple times at a multitude of locations in the Flyway, most recently in December 2011 in Argentina. It is the subject of a recently published book (Moonbird). The title reflects the fact that this individual has now flown a distance equivalent to that to the Moon and halfway back again. Its reappearance at Reeds Beach, New Jersey, on 27 and 28 May justified a column in the New York Times the following day.

All the NJ team from the previous year returned again this time, to form an extremely friendly and efficient and happy unit. All returned home with the satisfaction of knowing that 16 seasons of science, fieldwork and conservation activities were at last producing a dividend. Let us hope that conditions are good for breeding in the relevant parts of the Canadian arctic in 2012 so that all the waders can obtain the full benefits of leaving Delaware Bay on time and in such good condition.

The same study team will be back again in 2013 hoping for further signs of an improved situation.

Clive Minton
8 June 2012

PS. It is ironic that after sending all the waders away from Delaware Bay with satisfactory fuel for their journey and enough to cover contingencies at their destination our Qantas flight from Dallas back to Australia had to make an unscheduled stop on the Pacific island of Noumea to refuel! A late forecast of fog at Brisbane triggered a requirement for additional reserves of fuel when we were only three hours out from our destination. The 16-hour journey is apparently the longest scheduled by any airline in the world.

Australasian Shorebird Conference Program Adelaide 29-30 September 2012

If you are yet to register for the Australasian Shorebird Conference in Adelaide this year, perhaps the fantastic range of topics to be covered in the program outlined below will encourage you.

Registration can be made on line at: <http://www.awsg.org.au/pdfs/ASC-Registration4.pdf>

Two field trips to view shorebirds in their habitat are being planned to follow the conference on Monday and Tuesday, 1 and 2 October 2012.

The conference will be held at the Napier Building, University of Adelaide, North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia.

For further information please contact the Conference Convenor, Paul Wainwright by email on: asc.adelaide2012@gmail.com

Saturday 29 September

Keynote

David Paton - *Ecological consequences for the Coorong from over-extraction of water in the Murray-Darling Basin.*

Migration

Clive Minton - *Unlocking some of the mysteries of migration – geolocators providing new insights of the migration strategies for 4 shorebird species.*

Ken Gosbell - *What can geolocators tell us about shorebirds breeding in the Arctic?*

Danny Rogers - *Females fly further - extreme differential migration in the Grey Plover.*

Gregory Kerr - *Departure dates and flock characteristics of northward migrating waders from Roebuck Bay, Western Australia 1994 to 2008.*

Jutta Leyrer - *Monitoring annual survival in migratory shorebirds: some aspects on sample sizes and recapture/resighting efforts.*

Ecology of migratory shorebirds

Yaara Aharon- Rotman - *Breeding success of migratory waders indicates that lemming cycles are losing their grip on the functioning of Arctic ecosystems.*

Sora Estrella - *Lynghya majuscula blooms in Roebuck Bay, WA: effects on Bar-tailed Godwits.*

Jody O'Connor - *Modelling waterbird responses to ecological conditions in the Coorong, Lower Lakes, and Murray Mouth Ramsar site.*

Sayam Chowdhury - *Saving the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Bangladesh.*

Jing Li - *The China Coastal Water-bird Census Team.*

Resident shorebird ecology

Reece Pedler - *Banded Stilts: cross-continental movements by an extreme boom-bust species.*

Stuart Collard - *Banded Stilts in the brine: Lake Torrens breeding event, May 2010.*

Grainne Maguire - *Returning the balance: Five years of managing threats to the Hooded Plover.*

Simeon Lisovski - *Avian Influenza in Australian waders: A souvenir from migrants?*

Kasun Ekanayake - *Does sexually dimorphic ornamentation in birds attract predators as well as mates?*

Australasian Shorebird Conference Program Adelaide 29-30 September 2012 cont

Sunday 30 September

Symposium – Shorebirds and Saltworks

Plenary: Jose Mazero – *Saltworks as suitable habitats for shorebirds: an overview*

Demetrios Bertzeletos - *Water, salt and substrate; how these abiotic parameters create globally significant shorebird habitat in tropical Australian salinas.*

Chris Purnell - *A pinch of salt: The value of the commercial saltfields as supratidal habitats for shorebirds in Gulf St Vincent.*

Steve Rusbridge - *Use of biodiversity action planning to protect migratory birds.*

Siriya Sripanomyom - *Traditional salt-pans vitally sustain shorebird populations in the Inner Gulf of Thailand.*

Sora Estrella - *Feeding mechanisms of migratory shorebirds in saltpans.*

Flyway population monitoring

Rob Clemens - *Progress toward uncovering evidence of declines in migratory shorebirds in Australia and the habitats they rely on in Southeast Asia.*

Dan Weller - *Tracking flyway population trends using Australian Shorebirds 2020 volunteer survey data.*

Danny Rogers - *Effects of the Saemangeum reclamation on shorebird populations in Australia.*

Kiran Dhanjal-Adams, - *Spatial and temporal changes in Shorebird abundance across Moreton Bay.*

Chris Herbert - *Shorebird population trends in the Hunter Estuary.*

Conservation and adaptive management

Chelsea Hankin - *Shorebird responses to major infrastructure developments on Botany Bay.*

Karen Hunt - *Headlines, deadlines and sexing up - the role of media in conservation of shorebirds.*

David Milton - *The tricky question of how to monitor the ecological character of Australia's Ramsar sites to measure unacceptable change.*

Meghan Cullen – *Human dimensions of managing beach-nesting birds.*

Accommodation options for the Shorebird Conference in Adelaide can be found at several on-line booking sites. Two that are relatively easy to navigate are:

<http://www.wotif.com/hotels/australia-adelaide-hotels.html>

<http://www.southaustralia.com/search/booking-search.aspx>