

Tattler



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 from all working with shorebirds and their habitats along the East Asian - Australasian Flyway.

Please contact the editor for more information.

Editorial

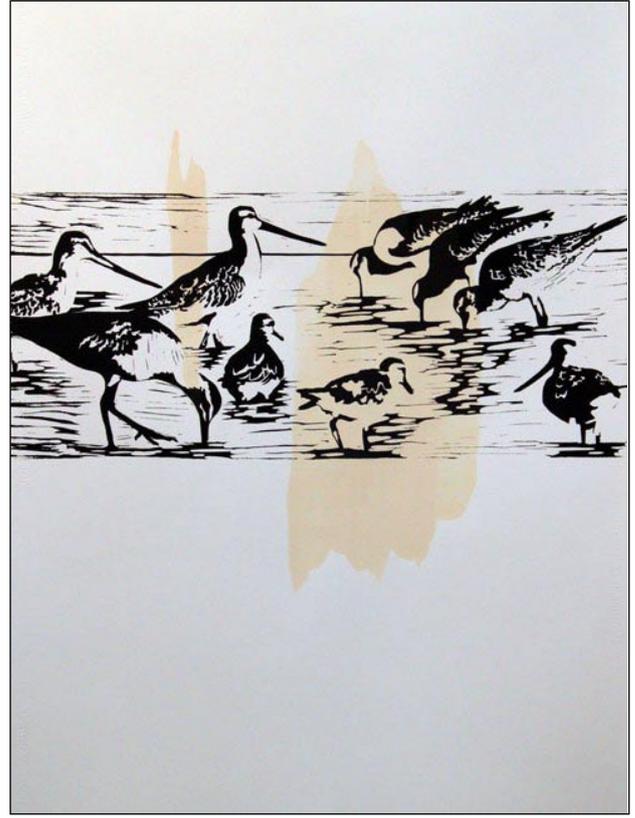
How do we engage the vast numbers of people who are unaware of biodiversity and the importance of preserving the natural environment? Art is a powerful way of reaching out to people through representations of the beauty, mystery and wildness of nature. The shorebird migration story contains all these features and is a great source of inspiration to artists. Hopefully Kate Gorrington-Smith's call for Expressions of Interest in a Flyway Print Exchange will be answered by artists along the Flyway so that a powerful travelling exhibition can be mounted.

Several reports in this *Tattler* celebrate the personal commitment of individuals to catching, banding and releasing hundreds of shorebirds in the hope that these flagged birds will be observed during their travels and those observations will be reported to the AWSG database. Site faithfulness in most mature shorebird species allows re-trapping of birds fitted with geolocators at their original banding sites, greatly enhancing the likelihood of data collection. Such detailed information from bands, flags, geolocators and satellite tags is facilitating identification of essential shorebird habitat and emphasising the fragility of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Too much habitat can be removed by the sweep of an engineer's pen and a planner's decree. It is encouraging to read of the conservation project in Minjiang Estuary, China, but discouraging to hear of the inexorable rate of development along the Flyway and particularly around the Yellow Sea staging area. As Rob Clemens declares, we cannot wait for scientific certainty, we must act now! As a start we could write to the Minister for the Environment to encourage efforts to include and discuss the IUCN resolutions on the Yellow Sea on the agenda for the EAAFP 7th Meeting of Partners to be held in Alaska in June 2013.

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www.awsg.org.au

Call to Artists for Expressions of Interest: Flyway Print Exchange



With the endorsement BirdLife Australia, I am currently initiating a print exchange around the idea of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Print exchanges are a way of creating an art community around the subject of the exchange. The formalities of an exchange are that each participating printmaker creates a print (e.g. a linocut, etching or lithograph) of which the artist then creates multiples, a process known as editioning. The exchange is then created by each artist editioning enough prints for every artist in the exchange to receive one of the other artists' prints – so if you have 20 artists participating they will receive at the end a folio of all 20 prints.

For the Flyway Print Exchange, I will be asking participating artists to create some extra prints: some to sell, one for exhibition and two to go on a journey. My idea is to post unprotected prints along the flyway and back and to then exhibit the travelled print alongside its pristine counterpart. If they find their way home, the prints will be weathered by the journey. If they don't, that too will be significant.

I am looking for representative artists from as many of the 22 countries comprising the East Asian-Australasian Flyway as possible (these are: the USA (specifically Alaska); Russia (Siberia); Mongolia; China; North Korea; South Korea;

Japan; the Philippines; Vietnam; Laos; Thailand; Cambodia; Myanmar; Bangladesh; India; Malaysia; Singapore; Brunei; Indonesia; Timor; Papua New Guinea and New Zealand). After an initial exhibition in Melbourne I hope to travel the exhibition to some of the countries of the other participating artists.

In my own work, I have concentrated on the Bar-tailed Godwit. The endurance of these birds, the continuing mystery of how they navigate, their beauty and their restlessness, make them a rich source of imagery. My interest in birds stems particularly from my time back in the 1990s when I worked at BirdLife (then the RAOU) on HANZAB (Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds) and then Wingspan. I now work from my studio in Brunswick, Melbourne, making etchings and linocuts and doing the odd bit of illustrating.

I would love to hear from anyone who is interested in the project, and particularly if you are from any of the flyway countries or have contact with artists along the flyway who you think may be interested in participating. Please email me at:

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Kate Gorrings-Smith

Western Australian Sites join the Flyway Site Network

Eighty-Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay are among the most important non-breeding and migratory stop-over areas for hundreds of thousands of migratory shorebirds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. The sites are home to more than 300 species of birds including 50 species of shorebirds. For some species of migratory shorebird, the highest concentrations have been found at these sites. Both sites were designated as new additions to the Flyway Site Network (FSN) on 4 March 2013, bringing the total number of Australian sites to 19.

Eighty-Mile Beach, in remote north-west Western Australia, is the most important site in Australia for use by migrant shorebirds, particularly on their southward migration during August to November. This site extends over 175,000 hectares and consists of a 220km section of coastline and adjacent mudflats, as well as inland marshland with two large ephemeral lakes and a series of springs. Eighty-Mile Beach is a designated Ramsar wetland as well as a Western Australia "Class A" Marine Park, listed in January 2013.

For 15 migratory shorebird species at Eighty-Mile Beach, numbers exceeded the 1% criterion level of the FSN. These species include: Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes*, Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*, Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* and Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*.

The second site, Roebuck Bay covering an area of 34,119 ha, is considered to be the arrival and departure point for large proportions of the Australian populations of several migratory shorebird species, for instance Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*. This species is believed to fly non-stop between continental East Asia and Australia.

With extensive, highly biologically diverse intertidal mudflats, Roebuck Bay regularly supports over 100,000 migratory waterbirds, including globally significant numbers of at least 18 migratory shorebird species, all of which occur in numbers well in excess of 1% of the flyway population. These include: Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Ruddy Turnstone, Great Knot, Red Knot, Sanderling, Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Greater Sand Plover, Oriental Plover, Grey Plover, Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and Oriental Pratincole. This area has been jointly managed by the Yawuru Traditional Owners and the Department of Conservation of Western Australia.

These new FSN sites can be searched on the following link where the FSN Site Information Sheets are placed. With these two designations Australia contributes to one of the EAAFP objectives contained in the Partnership Document and the Implementation Strategy 2012-2016, which is to achieve the target of 7-10 new sites per year. <http://www.eaaflyway.net/information-sites-maps.php#australia>

Adapted from: <http://www.eaaflyway.net/partnership-news.php> 19 March 2013



Shorebirds on the wing at Roebuck Bay (above); the natural beauty of Roebuck Bay (right) (Photos - Daniel Herbert)



AWSG Banding Expedition to Northwest Western Australia 2013

23 February to 16 March 2013

This year the first five days of the expedition were severely disrupted by a large, slow-moving, intense cyclone which dumped 200mm of rain on us at Broome and blew a bit. We only made two small catches in this period – in dry interludes and getting birds into keeping cages before the next downpour – and our travel to 80 Mile Beach was delayed by a day because the main road was closed. Nevertheless a total of 3160 birds was caught - 1387 at Broome and 1773 at 80 Mile Beach. A total of 11 cannon-net catches was made, with a record average of 287 birds per catch.

On the extremely high tides at 80 Mile Beach, on four successive days, catches were made on the beach at a point 40km south of Anna Plains Station. This is where the highest concentration (30-50,000) of waders occurs at high tide along the 220km of 80 Mile Beach.

Great Knot (899) as usual topped the species composition list. But, unusually, this was followed by 584 Grey-tailed Tattlers. Red-necked Stint catches totaled 583 and Greater Sand Plover a rather lower than usual 393. On two occasions there were significant numbers of Broad-billed Sandpipers in a catch, totalling 22.

It is normal to have regular disturbance of roosting wader flocks by passing birds of prey along the shores of north-west Australia. But this year an added problem was the seabirds blown ashore by Cyclone Rusty. These were principally Common Noddies, Frigate Birds and Brown Boobies but also the occasional Skua. Although

the Noddies are most unlikely to ever prey on waders the birds seemed to be considerably disturbed by them, presumably because their presence is unusual.

Nine waders banded elsewhere were recaptured during the Expedition – eight from overseas and one from Victoria. Particularly pleasing was Great Knot F07-4245 which carried an engraved (EC) orange flag over a green flag. This bird had been marked by Hebo Peng, of Professor Zhijun Ma's team at Fudan University in China, at Yalu Jiang at the northern end of the Yellow Sea in 2012. Hebo was the person who took this bird out of the keeping cage when we recaptured it on 5 March!

The Red Knot from Victoria further illustrates just how far this species can change its non-breeding area. It had been marked as an adult in the middle of the non-breeding season in Victoria, 3000km away, seven years previously.

As usual some old birds were recaptured. The oldest was a Great Knot in its 22nd year, followed by a Curlew Sandpiper and a Greater Sand Plover, both in their 20th year.

Satisfactory samples were accumulated of the 10 species on which we try to monitor breeding success, as well as on Broad-billed Sandpiper. It seems that the more southerly breeding species had better breeding success in 2012 than those species which breed in the Arctic. This is almost a repeat of the situation we found on last year's expedition in relation to the 2011 breeding season. Only Greater Sand Plover, Grey-tailed Tattler and Broad-billed Sandpiper had good



NWA 2013 Shorebird Survey participants (Photo - David Li)

Banding Expedition to Northwest Western Australia 2013 cont.

breeding outcomes in 2012. Bar-tailed Godwit and Great Knot had poor results and the outcome from Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper, Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone was disastrous. Presumably this year's results are again a function of a combination of poor weather situations (snowmelt date, June and July temperatures, late snowfalls at chick hatching etc.) or high predation levels.

Fifty-seven new geolocators were deployed on Great Knot. These were all of the Migrate Technology Intigeo design which has an extremely low weight of 0.65g.

Two of the six Biotrack units put on Great Knot in 2012 have been retrieved but both failed prematurely and provided little information on migration. Even more disastrous is that we failed completely to recapture any of the 44 geolocators put on to Red Knot at Roebuck Bay in March 2012. Only one of these was even seen

on the recent expedition, and this was on a bird which had moved to 80 Mile Beach. The lack of faithfulness to a particular non-breeding site is a characteristic of Red Knot and the prime reason for this poor return on investment.

Acknowledgements

The NWA 2013 team thanks: those who provided vehicles for use during the expedition; the Nyamba Buru Yawuru Limited for permission to catch on the shores of Roebuck Bay, traditional lands of the Yawuru people; the Yawuru ranger staff at the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) for assisting with catches; the WA DEC for funding; AQIS for assistance in field work; Broome Bird Observatory for providing accommodation and facilities; and Anna Plains Station for providing accommodation while catching took place at 80 Mile Beach.

Clive Minton

Visit to King Is, Australia by VWSG to Study Ruddy Turnstone

27 March to 4 April 2013

Have you ever been on a fieldwork visit where everything went right? The most recent visit to King Island was one of those rare occasions when we achieved all our principal objectives, made a catch each time we set the cannon-net, and were not adversely affected by the weather conditions even though it was quite windy and showery for the first half of the nine-day period. This was the seventh March/April visit to King Island by the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) as part of its long-term study of Ruddy Turnstone.

These results suggest that the decline in Ruddy Turnstone numbers on the west coast of King Island (and at many other locations in the Flyway) is still continuing.

Ten cannon-net catches were made in eight days, catching 285 birds, of which 255 were Ruddy Turnstone and 130 of these were recaptures. The highlight was recapturing a Ruddy Turnstone banded at Bohai Bay on the west side of the Yellow Sea in China in May 2009. Other recoveries and flag sightings, and particularly data from geolocators, has shown that most King Island

Ruddy Turnstones make a stopover somewhere on the west coast of the Yellow Sea on both northward and southward migration.

Three Ruddy Turnstone originally banded in South Australia were also recaptured. All three birds had been banded as immatures – two in their first year and one just at the beginning of its second year. As in many wader species it appears that the younger birds are rather less site faithful than adults, with these three birds changing their non-breeding area from South Australia to King Island. Two of the three birds have now been caught several times on King Island, one of them five times in seven years.

Only 3 (1.2%) of the 255 Ruddy Turnstones captured were juvenile/first-year birds. Over the last seven years there have been four satisfactory years of breeding productivity (14.2 to 17.9% juveniles) and three years of very poor breeding outcomes (0 to 1.2%).

Four Ruddy Turnstone already carrying geolocators were recaptured. Two of these had only been put on in November 2012, as replacements of previous geolocators. These were therefore left

Table 1 - Counts of Ruddy Turnstone on King Island

Date	March 2009	March/April 2010	April 2011	April 2012 (2nd week)*	March/April 2013
Total	827	890	686	445	645

*By the 2nd week of April 2012 some of the adult Ruddy Turnstones, particularly the males, had already departed on northward migration.

Visit to King Island by VWSG to Study Ruddy Turnstone cont.

on birds. The other two, older, geolocators were removed. One, originally deployed in April 2012, has given a full migratory path to, and back from, its breeding grounds in Arctic Siberia, where it also appears to have bred, but unsuccessfully. The other geocator had been deployed in March 2010 and will need to be sent back to the U.K. manufacturer for downloading as the battery had (not surprisingly) run out.

A further 34 geolocators were deployed during the visit in order to build up sufficient data for a quantitative analysis of Ruddy Turnstones' migration tracks and also to obtain further comparative data on breeding activities and outcomes. It will be interesting to see if the geolocators indicate poor breeding success in 2012 in line with the percentage juvenile results.

An in-depth analysis of the data collected on King Island over the past seven years will be published later this year, probably in the VWSG Bulletin and in the AWSG journal *Stilt*.

Acknowledgements

Everyone who participated in the fieldwork in March/April 2013 is greatly thanked for their efforts. Thanks also to Angus Roberts, the Captain of the Searoad cargo ship, for arranging transport of heavy equipment to King Island; to Jenny Marshall, Graeme and Margaret Batey and Margaret Bennett for providing accommodation; to Shelley Davidson of the Tasmanian Parks Service for loan of a trailer; and the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service for providing the necessary permits for our banding and other activities.

Clive Minton and Roz Jessop

Catching Sanderling & Ruddy Turnstone in South Australia

10 April to 18 April 2013

The Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) have been visiting the south-east of South Australia, principally to catch Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone, since November 1993.

This visit took place later than all previous major autumn visits. However, in line with previous flagging and geocator data, it appeared that no Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling or Red-necked Stint had yet departed on northward migration. In contrast all Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and Pacific Golden Plover had already left.

Significant numbers of Ruddy Turnstones (at least 100 birds) were still present at Port Macdonnell, Green Point, Nene Valley, Blackfellows Caves and Beachport.

There were marked variations in the number of Sanderling at Green Point. Only 90 were present on the day we arrived (10 April) but this had increased to at least 600 by 14 April. This was almost certainly associated with changes in food availability. A large concentration of larvae developed in the sand at the top of the beach and at the foot of the dunes and attracted intense feeding by the waders, particularly on 13/14 April.

Eight cannon-net catches were made in seven days, catching 580 birds comprising 243 Sanderling, 153 Ruddy Turnstone, 178 Red-necked Stint and 6 Sooty Oystercatcher.

All species showed a high re-trap rate as a result of our 20 years of regular catching at various sites along this part of the coast of south-east South Australia. The overall re-trap rate for Ruddy Turnstone was 49%, and 37% re-trap rate for Sanderling.

One of the Turnstones had been originally banded in King Island – as a juvenile at Manuka on 6/4/11. This further supports previous information indicating that it is nearly always Turnstone banded as immatures which subsequently relocate to a different non-breeding area.

Two recaptures were of record age. One of the Sanderling caught at Brown Bay on 13 April had been banded there originally as an adult in January 1998. It is now at least 17 years old – several years older than any previous Australian-banded Sanderling (and equal to the oldest recorded by the British Ringing Scheme). The old Turnstone was banded as an adult on 8/4/99 at Blackfellows Caves and is now at least 16 years old.

It is particularly interesting that both the old Sanderling and the old Turnstone had unusually low weights for an adult at this time of year, suggesting that they were possibly not going to migrate northwards. Maybe old age causes deteriorations in the abilities of waders as well as in wader banders?

The very low percentage of juveniles in both Sanderling (3.3%) and Ruddy Turnstone (2.6%) confirms data on these species generated at other sites in south-east Australia, illustrating

Catching Sanderling & Ruddy Turnstone in South Australia cont.

that their breeding season in the Arctic summer of 2012 was particularly unsuccessful. This was in marked contrast to the figure for Red-necked Stint (24%). Other data also suggests that Red-necked Stint had a reasonable breeding outcome in 2012.

Twenty-nine geolocators were placed on Ruddy Turnstone on 11 April. A geocator was retrieved from a Ruddy Turnstone at Green Point on 14 April. It had been put on two years previously at Danger Point. It looked to be in good condition so we are hopeful of obtaining satisfactory migration tracks.

Acknowledgements

The small VWSG team, and local helpers, are greatly thanked for their efforts during this nine-day visit. Thanks to Paul Feast and Iain and Sandy Stewart for providing accommodation and to the South Australian Department of Environment for issuing the necessary permits for our banding, flagging and geocator deployment activities. The Caring for Our Country Project, "the south-east cooperative coastal conservation initiative" and Newbery Park Primary School generously provided financial support for purchasing the geolocators. Thanks to the

Clive Minton

Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering site - Bangladesh's 20th IBA

Sonadia Island in Bangladesh, where 10% of the known population of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* spends the winter, has been recognised as Bangladesh's 20th Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International.

"A series of recent surveys confirms that Bangladesh is still an extremely important wintering ground for Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and we identified Sonadia Island as the main wintering site in Bangladesh", said Sayam U. Chowdhury, Principal Investigator of the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project, a group of young conservationists who monitor the wader population, and work with local communities to raise awareness and reduce threats.

Sonadia Island also supports the globally Endangered Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, and other threatened and Near Threatened birds such as Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*.

BirdLife Partners and others involved in the "Saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper" project have been working at Sonadia since 2009, when hunting of waders on the mudflats was identified as a major threat to the fast-diminishing Spoon-billed Sandpiper population. Local hunters have now been trained and equipped for alternative, more secure and sustainable livelihoods. A very successful campaign has led to a better understanding of the importance of shorebird conservation in general, and a sense of pride and custodianship towards the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in particular.

"The work has gone extremely well, and we are trying to really deliver conservation through the

local communities," said Sayam Chowdhury. "Through the provision of alternative livelihoods we have seen hunting reduced to almost zero. Hunters are now working as fishermen, tailors and watermelon producers. An awareness-raising event we held in December 2012 involved close to a thousand people, local government and non-government organisation representatives."

Inamul Haque is Assistant Conservator of Forest (coastal) for Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region, and has been involved in the restoration of mangrove cover on Sonadia. "We have been supporting the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project by avoiding mangrove planting in areas that are important for shorebirds", he explained. "We have also been protecting the key sites from illegal hunting. I am delighted that Sonadia is receiving the international recognition it deserves by being declared an Important Bird Area."

Birdfair - Global Sponsor of the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme, Heritage Expeditions, WildSounds, The Dutch Birding Association and VBN (BirdLife in the Netherlands), The David & Lucile Packard Foundation, Disney Friends for Change, The CMS Secretariat, The MBZ Foundation, Save our Species, Ed Keeble and many other generous individuals have all become BirdLife Species Champions or Programme Supporters under the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme helping this species.

Martin Fowle

Communications Officer, BirdLife International
22 April 2013
www.birdlife.org

Conservation Project in Minjiang Estuary, Fujian Province, China

Minjiang Estuary, located at Changle City of Fujian Province, China, and at the mid-point of the EAAF, is an important stop-over and wintering site for more than 50,000 migratory waterbirds. Moreover, it is the only site in China where critically endangered Chinese Crested Tern and Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill can be recorded regularly every year.

The ecological importance of Minjiang Estuary has been known for a long time. Ten years ago, a nature reserve at county-level was established, and it is now being upgraded to the national level. This reflects the recognition of the importance of the site, as well as the Chinese Government's commitment to protect the site. Although a Management Bureau was set up in 2007 with the approval from the People's Government of Fujian Province, managing a 2,100 ha wetland wisely and effectively is never an easy task.

In view of this, WWF-Hong Kong, which has successfully managed Mai Po Nature Reserve in Hong Kong for more than 30 years, and the People's Government of Changle City launched a 5-year Fujian Minjiang Estuary Wetland Conservation Cooperation Project in July 2012. The project aims to build the wetland management capacity of the Management Bureau, encourage the wise use of wetland resources by the local people and

raise public awareness of wetland conservation. Since the project started, staff from the Bureau have been trained in Mai Po to improve their knowledge about wetlands, equip them with skills in conducting waterbird and water quality monitoring, and initiate the development of a management plan for Minjiang Estuary Nature Reserve. A study tour was also organized for the local government officials in Changle City to let them understand how wetland conservation and education work are carried out in Hong Kong.

At the moment, a 5-year management plan for Minjiang Estuary Nature Reserve is under development. Local stakeholders such as local village committees, villagers, birdwatching societies and various government departments will be invited to attend workshops on management planning to give their comments. Surveys for collecting socio-economic information of the local communities will also be conducted in order to investigate the economic dependency of the local communities on the wetlands and explore ways to use the wetlands wisely.

Since Minjiang Estuary is one of the eleven selected sites in the Flyway Project of Rio Tinto-BirdLife International-Wetlands International, cooperation between the two projects can be looked for in the future.

Shorebird trapping threatens Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering site



Mist nets found at the survey sites (Photo -Jonathan Martinez)

Four Spoon-billed Sandpipers were found at Fucheng, near Leizhou, south-west Guangdong Province in December 2012. Together with several other recent sightings this record indicates that

Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a more widespread wintering species on the coast of southern China than was previously known. However, evidence was found of large-scale trapping of shorebirds and action is needed to address this threat.

The discovery was made by Jonathan Martinez and Richard Lewthwaite of Hong Kong Bird Watching Society during a project to investigate the winter distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in southern China. They surveyed nine sites in south-west Guangdong and found the group of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in a large area of drained-down fishponds at Fucheng. This site is close to Zhanjiang, where the French ornithologist Pierre Jabouille described Spoon-billed Sandpiper as fairly numerous in winter in the 1930s, and where Professor Fasheng Zou of the South China Institute of Endangered Animals recorded three Spoon-billed Sandpipers in March 2003.

Since 2005, there have been sightings of Spoon-billed Sandpiper during the winter months at several other sites in southern China, indicating that this is a more important wintering area for the species than was previously known. The

Shorebird Trapping at Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering site cont.

northernmost wintering location is the Minjiang Estuary in Fujian, where a flock of Spoon-billed Sandpipers has regularly been present in recent winters. There have also been sightings of up to three birds at Xitao in south-west Guangdong, Mai Po in Hong Kong, Fangcheng and Qinzhou Bay in Guangxi and the Changhua Estuary in Hainan. The on-going project will carry out further surveys in Fujian, Guangxi and Hainan and will hopefully locate some more wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers.



In 2003, a Spoon-billed Sandpiper was found caught in a hunter's net (Photo - Fasheng Zou)

One of the three Spoon-billed Sandpipers recorded at Zhanjiang in 2003 was caught in a bird trapper's net. Since then the problem of trapping appears to have become even worse and illegal bird-netting now poses a major threat to Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other shorebirds. The team counted a total of 460 mistnets during

the survey – these were typically 25 m long and 3 m high, meaning that the nets counted equated to a length of 11.5 km. The nets were placed, often in parallel lines or V-shapes, beside shorebird roost-sites on fishponds, saltpans and sandbars on the coast, as well as in nearby paddyfields and marshes.

The shorebird trapping found during the survey has been reported to Guangdong Forestry Department, which is responsible for the protection of wildlife. Discussions are underway amongst Chinese birdwatchers and conservationists about how to support the local government agencies to address the trapping of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other migratory birds (and other forms of illegal hunting) at the key sites for these birds.

The project "Study of the non-breeding distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Southern China" is being managed by The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and supported by Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong. It is being implemented in partnership with Fujian Bird Watching Society, Xiamen Bird Watching Society, Beilun Estuary National Nature Reserve and Kadoorie Conservation China of Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden.

From **BirdLife International**

<http://www.birdlife.org/community/2013/01/shorebird-trapping-threatens-new-spoon-billed-sandpiper-wintering-site-in-china/>

18 January 2013

Knot a bad start to the season - Bohai Bay 2013 Update 1

And here we are again, back for the spring in the (generally unpleasant) surroundings of the north shores of Bohai Bay. Although overall grey and dull there have been a couple of surprises already and in the last few days the Knots have come flooding in!

The team so far consists of Ady Boyle on his 5th trip to Bohai, Matt Slaymaker on his 4th and Ginny Chan for her 2nd year and we are here to conduct research for the Global Flyway Network. Just like previous years, the primary aim of our trip is to scan the shorebirds that are passing through as they migrate to their northern breeding grounds. Among the data that we collect are flags and colour-bands sightings of birds from throughout the East Asian-Australasian Flyway as they stop off at this internationally important site.

As usual, in the 10 months since we left the site, there have been a number of changes to the area. Many of these we will expand on in

future updates, something for our readers to look forward to! Our first immediate concern was that the small mud island just offshore from Nanpu was no longer there. In previous years we have had a lot of sightings from here but our worries were unfounded as the birds actually land closer to the wall and stay closer for longer so, in this case, a change for the better!



Bar-tailed Godwit with mud-covered green and black flags, originally caught in Thailand (Photo - Adrian Boyle)

Knot a bad start to the season - Bohai Bay 2013 Update 1 cont.

On our arrival on the 9th April we were welcomed by the usual species such as Eurasian Curlew, Dunlin and Grey Plover, all present in good numbers. There were also a couple of thousand Knot, mostly Great, but at the time of writing this total has increased to over 12 000, with the majority being our primary target species ... Red Knot. Small numbers of other species are arriving with the first Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed and Terek Sandpipers being seen a few days ago. The 16th saw a particularly large jump in numbers of birds present which included the first Asian Dowitcher and Nordmann's Greenshank of the season. At least 2 of the latter were present from the 17th April onwards.

A noticeable increase in Red Knots sporting white or orange flags on the 16th April suggested arrivals of birds from Victoria and New Zealand. A few Broome birds have been seen already although most of the colour-band sightings so far relate to Great Knot. One of the scanning highlights has been a Great Knot from Broome also carrying a

Geolocator, one of 57 deployed recently to try and gain more of an insight into the details of their migration. The next step is to recapture the bird on its return to Australia to collect the data. Other flag sightings include Red Knot and Dunlin from Sakhalin, Grey Plovers from Hong Kong and Japan, a Red Knot from Queensland and at least 5 individuals from Chukotka! Overall a good start and an improvement on this time in 2012.

More birds will arrive in the coming weeks and we will be here into early June to scan them. Hopefully 2013 will mirror or even beat the success of last year, it is early days but we will see...

Bohai Team 2013

To learn more about our work here as well as see reports and updates from previous field seasons in Bohai check out the Global Flyway Network website ...

<http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au>

Migratory birds, citizen science and scientific certainty

Multiple lines of evidence are telling us that many species of migratory bird are in crisis. It's a global problem crossing multiple national borders and there are no easy solutions. It's also a problem which needs to be addressed quickly yet our political leaders have largely consigned it to the too-hard basket. One of the reasons for this is a desire for scientific certainty before action is taken.

Demanding certainty

The profile of science has risen dramatically in policy making in recent years. Whether it's climate change mitigation, the Murray-Darling Basin Plan or the appropriateness of super-trawlers fishing our territorial waters, all are talked about in terms of whether the science is certain. But what happens when government demands certainty in the science before acting, but won't fund the studies to provide that certainty? And when it comes to endangered species, not acting can lead to irreversible loss.

Migratory shorebirds are a point in case. Many groups of migratory shorebird appear to be showing widespread decline. Recent research on migratory birds and shorebirds in Japan and around Australia indicate that some species appear to have declined by anywhere from 30% to 80% in the past 15 to 30 years.

When faced with potential biodiversity losses such as those in shorebirds, decision makers often require high levels of certainty regarding any negative impacts of human activity on ecosystems before doing anything. They are unlikely to support the typically costly actions to avoid impacts until they have strong evidence. Unfortunately, such evidence can be difficult and expensive to deliver. The unfolding evidence of large declines in migratory shorebirds exemplifies a rare long-term data set collected by volunteers that shows just how much information is needed to deliver strong evidence.

Damaging developments

Most migratory shorebirds feed in the non-breeding season on invertebrates living under the mud and sand. On their northern migrations these birds must stop at least once at habitats rich in food to fatten up again. One of the most important and widely used areas to stop and refuel is in East Asia's Yellow Sea. There is growing evidence that the critical refuelling habitats in the Yellow Sea are declining rapidly. In fact many decision makers in these areas view intertidal habitats as an easy place to reclaim cheap land from the sea for other uses, as can be seen easily from space. See the satellite image of Bohai Bay (the innermost gulf of the Yellow Sea), China, taken in 2010. Evidence of declines in migratory shorebirds, combined with the enormous loss of refuelling habitats, is sparking

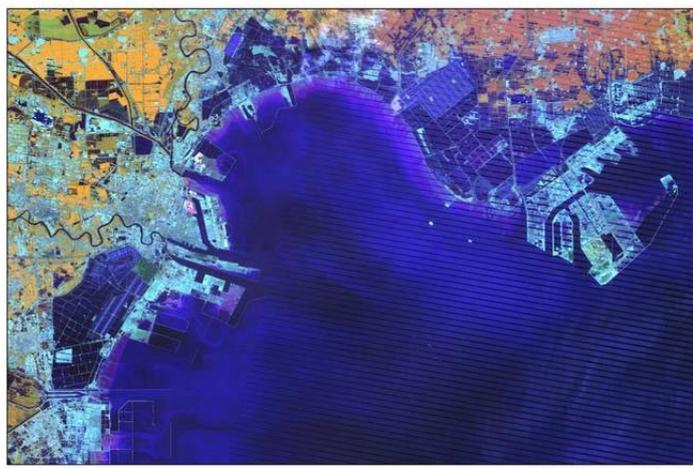
Migratory birds, citizen science and scientific certainty cont.

conservation planning efforts throughout the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Citizens and shorebirds

It's been noted in many places that citizen science focused on birds, which are relatively easy to monitor, may provide a barometer of the level of threat associated with increasing human activity on the planet. Indeed, without the efforts of hundreds of volunteers who have dedicated themselves to monitoring these birds across Australia and Japan for decades, we would have little idea that they appear to be in trouble. Further work in this area, harnessing the combined observations of citizens from multiple locations, is determining the scale of declines across migratory shorebird species. It's helping us identify other factors aside from habitat loss in East Asia that may be reducing populations.

The threats to migratory shorebirds span a variety of interconnected habitats across the globe, from growing ecological imbalances in the Arctic, to large-scale degradation at inland non-breeding wetlands in Australia, such as the Coorong. As work continues I'm hopeful that the web of causes of declines in migratory shorebird populations can be untangled so that sufficient and compelling evidence can be delivered regarding what is needed, and where, to reduce impacts to these birds. It is striking though that had it not been for the long-term efforts of volunteers (such as the Australasian Wader Studies Group) we would have no idea of the problem or its scale, and still less hope of beginning to formulate solutions.



The changing face of Bohai Bay, China - land reclamation takes intertidal shorebird habitat (Image courtesy of Nick Murray. LandSat data from the US Geological Survey).

We need to act now

The reclamation of inter-tidal habitats in the Yellow Sea needs to stop, and it needs to stop now. And that's especially the case in those areas used by large numbers of migratory shorebirds. China's coast in the Bohai Sea is a place where this need is perhaps most immediate. The evidence for this need has been developed by members of the Australasian Wader Study Group, Birds Korea, the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Programme and, most recently, from work being led by researchers from Richard Fuller's lab at the University of

Queensland. Evidence of declines in the migratory shorebirds that visit Australia has been growing for over a decade, including recent work highlighting the declines of migratory shorebirds in Moreton Bay (Wilson *et al.* 2011). Evidence of the loss of inter-tidal habitats throughout the coasts of the Yellow Sea has also been growing with a recent paper highlighting a method for quantifying the extent of large areas of intertidal habitat (Murray *et al.* 2012). A recent motion at the World Conservation Congress regarding the conservation of intertidal habitats reflects a growing understanding of the plight of migratory shorebirds and the large losses of intertidal habitats in the Yellow Sea. It is important that governments act now based on the best available evidence to conserve intertidal habitats in the Yellow Sea, and that the lack of certainty around some parts of the shorebird story not be used as an excuse for inaction.

References

Wilson HB, BE Kendall, RA Fuller, DA Milton & HP Possingham (2011). Analyzing Variability and the Rate of Decline of Migratory Shorebirds in Moreton Bay, Australia. *Conservation Biology* **25**:758-766.

Murray NJ, SR Phinn, RS Clemens, CM Roelfsema & RA Fuller (2012). Continental Scale Mapping of Tidal Flats across East Asia Using the Landsat Archive. *Remote Sensing* **4**: 3417-3426.

Rob Clemens

This article adapted from a discussion that appeared recently in *The Conversation* and also on *Decision Point*, see:

<http://theconversation.edu.au/bird-conservation-trapped-by-scientific-certainty-9835>

<http://www.decision-point.com.au/past-issues/dpoint67/migratory-birds-citizen-science-and-scientific-certainty-uncertainty-how-certain-do-we-need-to-be-before-we-do-something.html>

Book Review - Atlas of breeding waders in the Russian Arctic

This impressive tome arrived, hand-delivered from Moscow by the head of the ringing office, with a satisfying thump as it was placed on my desk! Reading through the book was relatively quick as most of the text is in Russian with English summaries. Not being able to read Russian wasn't such a big problem as you might imagine due to the exquisite maps prepared by Elena Lappo along with easy-to-read tables etc. Elena and her co-authors, Pavel Tomkovich and Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, are to be congratulated on a massive achievement in covering such a large area as the Russian Arctic regions and so many species in a comprehensive manner.

Included in the Atlas are 120 locations at which the authors have studied wader populations over many years of research, clearly demonstrating why they are so uniquely qualified to produce this milestone publication.

The present accepted understanding of the term 'Arctic' includes all treeless territories in the northern parts of the two continents of Eurasia and America. For this Atlas the authors have adopted a broad definition of the term 'to ensure that breeding ranges of most species of tundra waders are mapped in their entirety'. As a result the Atlas also covers contiguous territories of the subarctic and sometimes even more southern areas, including the entire coastline of the White Sea, extensive tundra-like bogs in West Siberia, northern mountains of Yakutia and the Magadan Region, all of Kamchatka, northern Sakhalin, and the northernmost Kurile Islands. The resulting area covers 7,000 km east-west and 2,500 km north-south.

Not only is the enormity of the Atlas apparent in the physical range covered but also in terms of the time span covered. This encompasses 150 years of research including 2,859 locations from data in 1,360 published and unpublished sources, including a mass of information gathered by the authors themselves. As the authors point out, the waders breeding in Arctic Russia are all long-distance migrants that visit many other countries along several migratory flyways. Their research is important for waders crossing many other countries; they belong to the world at large. The Atlas does much to bring together information on the distribution, abundance, population structure and migratory links of all the waders of the Russian Arctic, acting as a stimulus for further

studies and an increased understanding of their conservation needs and management.

The Atlas describes the limits and natural zones of the Russian Arctic (Chapter I), the origin of the data, how they accumulated over different historical periods and how they were analysed (Chapter II). Chapter III explains how breeding and core ranges were determined using a combination of the data on bird distribution and abundance and a digitised vegetation map. Many of the data are fraught with error requiring the authors to work out a way of using them to determine at least a rank of abundance (low, moderate and high) as explained in Chapter IV. All 79 species of waders that have been recorded in the Russian Arctic are covered in Chapter V, giving brief details of the status of those that are not included amongst the 51 regularly nesting species.

By far the largest chapter (Chapter VI) provides comprehensive accounts of the distribution of the 51 species regularly breeding in the region covered. These are represented by three maps for each species including distribution, breeding range, as well as an abundance and breeding range map. Breeding densities are also included in tables showing various surveys, with separate tables for data obtained in different ways (plot mapping, linear densities along shores, etc.). Needless to say there are a few surprises. Some of the most abundant species are quite restricted in distribution, such as the Red Knot, while others such as the Great Knot are comparatively widely distributed given the population size. This is explained to a large extent in the nesting densities shown of the two species.

The final chapter, Chapter VII, evaluates historical trends in distribution and abundance of the species in the region over the past 150 years. No wonder the two years originally estimated by the authors for the production of this huge undertaking took a decade!

Copies of the Atlas are available from Elena Lappo <ellappo@mail.ru> putting "Atlas purchase" in the subject line. The cost is €40, plus the cost of postage which will be notified to each purchaser.

Phil Straw

Of beach-nesters, migratory shorebirds and miniature horses



Shorebirders field trip to Kioloa Beach to view beach-nesting shorebirds (above) and Shorebirds Workshop participants (right) (Photos - Dan Weller)



Recently, the NSW far south coast played host to BirdLife Australia's Shorebirds 2020 and Beach-Nesting Birds teams, where a pair of two-day workshops were held in Kioloa and Merimbula. The workshops were a collaboration between BirdLife Australia and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Over 70 people chanced Kioloa's unusually dreary weather over an intensive two days in late February to learn more about migratory and resident shorebirds of the NSW south coast. Despite the weather, participants were impressed with the recently completed environmentally friendly conference facilities at the Kioloa campus of Australian National University, as well as gourmet catering funded by the NPWS.

Day One focused on beach-nesting birds of the South Coast, their ecology, threats relevant to the local area, and research and conservation measures being undertaken by BirdLife Australia and the NSW NPWS. Over the course of the day participants heard all about the now infamous Hooded Plover, Little Tern and Oystercatchers from Jodie Dunn (Shorebird Recovery Coordinator, NPWS), Dr Grainne Maguire (Beach-Nesting Birds Project Manager, BirdLife Australia), and Judith Carroll and Robin Berkhout (local South Coast Shorebird Recovery volunteers). An afternoon fieldtrip was attended by all to the local Kioloa beach, during which everyone was blessed with excellent views of a new family of Hooded Plovers, as well as the obligatory responsible dog owners walking their dogs off leash (in on-leash areas) and a dog-sized miniature horse being taken for its afternoon gallivant. At least it was on a leash.

While for some participants this was the end of the day's proceedings, volunteers involved in the South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program were involved in a further three round-table workshop discussions regarding nest-site protection and signage, pest-animal control, and how to best approach communication with beach-goers. One of the key outcomes of these discussions was the need for better engagement of and

more involvement from the local council, and volunteers came away enthused with positive ideas for prompting more council concern about local issues.

Day Two was all about migratory shorebirds, during which participants heard from Dan Weller (Shorebirds 2020 Project Officer, BirdLife Australia), Phil Straw (Vice Chairman, Australasian Wader Study Group), and Phil Craven (Project Officer, NSW NPWS and local Shorebirds 2020 count coordinator). The first half of the day focused on migratory shorebird ecology and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, including impacts and threatening processes, while Phil Craven gave a local perspective and presented findings and trends from recent years of shorebird count data. Attendees were then given an hour's respite for lunch before being bombarded with an intensive ID course and quiz. The day was concluded in the field, unfortunately without the weather's cooperation, although those who braved the conditions were rewarded with close but foggy binocular views of Ruddy Turnstones, Double-banded Plovers and Sooty Oystercatchers.

Thanks to all participants, presenters and especially Jodie Dunn for organising the workshop. Thank you to Phil Straw, Chelsea Hankin and Amanda Lilleyman who made the trip down from Sydney to assist with the proceedings. Special thanks must also go to Steve and Robin Berkhout, managers of the Kioloa campus of the ANU, for their hospitality and tireless efforts over the course of the two days.

If you would like to know more about BirdLife Australia's Shorebirds 2020 and Beach-nesting Birds program and annual workshop schedule you can visit www.birdlife.org.au. For further information about the South Coast Shorebird Recovery Program please contact Jodie Dunn jodie.dunn@environment.nsw.gov.au. More information about the ANU's Kioloa Campus can be found at <http://kioloa.anu.edu.au/>

Dan Weller

Wildlife Conservation Society Joins the EAAFP

On 19 March 2013, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) became the 29th Partner of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), with the unanimous support of all Partners. Many Partners already work collaboratively with WCS programmes, projects and staff in many countries of the Flyway. In addition to bringing in the knowledge and experience of conservation scientists in the region and beyond, WCS also offers a programme of field-based initiatives addressing threats and opportunities to conserve key species and sites. For example WCS scientists in the Russian Far East are already contributing valuable information and field work on priority waterbirds such as the critically declining Baer's Pochard and Scaly-sided Merganser. By joining EAAFP we believe that WCS offers a great opportunity to integrate migratory waterbird conservation into its current and ongoing projects and help strengthen cooperation among existing Partners and we look forward to joint initiatives in the near future.

Steve Zack, Coordinator of Bird Conservation, Wildlife Conservation Society writes:

We at the Wildlife Conservation Society are excited to join the EAAFP as a Partner, and to begin to work collaboratively to protect key migratory places and help conserve at-risk bird species in this immense and important Flyway. We are a science-driven conservation organization, with country programs (and thus regional conservation capacity and expertise) throughout much of the Flyway. As such, we can

assist the EAAFP in identifying priority areas for different migratory species and we also have the standing to help protect them.

We look forward to working with the Partnership and discovering how best to align our capacity with the group's most important strategic interests. In Arctic Alaska, I have led efforts to study and protect huge numbers of breeding birds in the coastal plain. Our efforts there, together with others, recently resulted in the protection from development of some 11 million acres of habitat, much of that in the wetland complex surrounding Teshekpuk Lake where millions of breeding pairs of shorebirds, waterfowl, loons, and others occur. Species like Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, and Yellow-billed Loon form part of the EAAF. We have collaborated in studies of Dunlin migration with use of geolocators, and so have a clear idea of where populations from Alaska spend the winter, primarily in and around the Yellow Sea. Studies like these are promising starting points for helping to conserve Dunlin and other species across the range of their impressive migrations.

I look forward to meeting partners and collaborators of the Partnership in the upcoming meetings in Alaska. There, we can begin discussions and planning of how best we at WCS can assist in protecting birds and their migratory habitats in this most important Flyway.

Adapted from <http://www.eaaflyway.net/partnership-news.php>

New Science Officer for EAAFP

After an extensive recruitment effort, Judit Szabo has been appointed as the Science Officer at the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Secretariat Office in Incheon, South Korea. As you can see from the brief biography below, Judit has extensive experience with the Flyway, primarily in Australia, and with migratory waterbirds and we warmly welcome her to the Secretariat team. Her email is science@eaaflyway.net

Judit Szabo has been fascinated by birds since childhood, which she spent watching and ringing birds in the floodplains of the Danube River. She has a Master's degree in Theoretical Ecology and completed her thesis studying nesting behaviour and migration of the Black Stork. She studied for a Doctoral degree in Environmental Toxicology at Texas Tech University in the United States of America and her research focussed on the effects of locust-control pesticides on Australian birds in remote parts of the continent. During her academic career she has studied optimal monitoring of birds, including threatened species, such as the Plains Wanderer. She also worked extensively

with volunteer-collected datasets looking for patterns and trends in bird distributions. Recently she has contributed to the Red List assessment of all Australian bird species and subspecies and co-authored the Action Plan for Australian Birds (2010). She has contributed to capturing and marking shorebirds in various parts of Australia and has studied disturbances to migratory shorebirds in northern Australia. She also has extensive experience working with storks, raptors and passerines, and a keen interest in training the next generation of bird researchers in methods of bird capture and handling. Judit has lived in Europe, the Middle East, the USA and Australia and has travelled widely to observe and study birds around the world.

Spike Millington

**Chief Executive
Partnership for the East Asian - Australasian
Flyway Website: www.eaaflyway.net**

Working together to protect shorebirds in the Hunter Estuary

WetlandCare Australia's Shorebird Protection Program in the Hunter Estuary of NSW is in its final phase with work due to conclude in May. The project was funded by the NSW Environmental Trust and aimed to improve habitat and protect shorebirds from fox predation. WetlandCare Australia's Hunter Region Manager Louise Duff has been working closely with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Hunter Bird Observers Club and the Hunter Wetland Centre on the project.

The Hunter Estuary is a designated network site on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and the most significant shorebird habitat in NSW. 31 species of migratory shorebird have been recorded in the Estuary, most of which are listed in international treaties. The Hunter Estuary is listed by BirdLife Australia as an Important Bird Area supporting more than 1% of the world population of Chestnut Teal, Red-necked Avocet, Eastern Curlew and sometimes Latham's Snipe, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Straw-necked Ibis.

Project partner Tom Clarke from Hunter Bird Observers Club undertakes regular volunteer work to protect shorebird habitat in the Estuary and is an enthusiastic birdwatcher. He recently reported: *"Not a great deal of work was achieved today at Stockton Sandspit because the parade of coloured-up shorebirds just kept distracting us! It was fun to scan through the various groups and see that some birds were much further advanced than others both in breeding plumage and in putting on weight. All the birds have some individuals fairly advanced with breeding plumage and how good is it to see Red-necked Stint with red necks! Other birds with good colour included Bar-tailed Godwit, Pacific Golden Plover and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. The greatest number of any shorebirds today were definitely the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and I conservatively estimate 700 plus of these little beauties. They looked spectacular in a large flock whirling over the beach. The funniest sight was the Terek Sandpipers as they frantically fed along the shoreline; these birds seem so intent with their bent-over forward stance and when they spot something they just rush forward hoping to grab their target before it disappears into the mud. They never once let up all afternoon!"*

It has been rewarding for WetlandCare Australia to support the work of such great volunteers. The project has used a range of tools including community education, capacity building for stakeholders, fox control and weed control to help protect migratory and resident shorebirds. WetlandCare Australia developed educational displays and children's activities to raise

awareness of shorebirds at a series of community events over two years.

A Scientific Seminar was held to address knowledge gaps regarding shorebird management identified during the consultation phase. The program featured 11 specialist speakers disseminating up-to-date information to an audience of 60 land managers and consultants working in the estuary from 21 organisations in the government, industry, consulting and community conservation sectors.

Vegetation management focussed on controlling Water Hyacinth, *Juncus acutus*, Bitou Bush and mangroves, all of which threaten shorebird habitat. *Juncus acutus* was treated to protect the important saltmarsh habitat at Ash Island and Kooragang Dykes. Water Hyacinth was treated on a private property upstream of Pambalong Nature Reserve, home to Latham's Snipe. A weed boom was installed to help prevent mangrove propagules from spreading through Milhams Pond, and bush regenerators were engaged to remove mangroves. A revegetation project was undertaken to improve Latham's Snipe habitat at the Hunter Wetlands Centre.

Four rounds of fox control were undertaken, with 16 weeks of coverage over the two-year period. In total, WetlandCare Australia established 123 fox-bait stations across the Hunter Estuary and a total of 90 baits were taken. We also supported programs at Hunter Wetlands Centre and initiated fox control on Newcastle City Council land adjoining Hunter Wetlands Centre.

The project was an excellent way to further develop productive working relationships with stakeholders in the Hunter Estuary. WetlandCare Australia recently held a field trip and workshop for stakeholders to review results of the project and discuss collaborative action to sustain outcomes into the future. Paul Davidson, WCA's fox control field officer, has offered to treat foxes at Ash Island as a volunteer for NPWS. NPWS has also applied for a Caring For Our Country grant to continue controlling threats to shorebirds and their habitat in the Hunter Estuary including *Juncus acutus*, mangroves and foxes.

Migratory shorebirds are much loved international visitors to the Hunter Estuary. WetlandCare Australia is committed to contributing to their conservation.

Louise Duff

Manager Hunter Region
WetlandCare Australia

Australian Pied Oystercatcher - death of a very old lady

In September 2012 the corpse of an Australian Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris* was found at the northern end of Gorringes Beach, Mortimer Bay, Tasmania. It had been banded during cannon-netting at the South Arm Neck in August 1982. Both the metal and colour bands which had been fitted to the bird had survived remarkably well for 30 years.

The late Mark Barter was involved in banding the oystercatchers at that time and he subsequently helped with my nest surveys along Gorringes Beach while I was overseas. When I returned Mark told me he had found two of our cannon-netted oystercatchers breeding at the north end of the beach, each marked with a unique combination of colour bands; one was the recently recovered bird. When we had caught these birds we had aged them as 4+ years old, based on their plumage. The bird which has recently been recovered was deemed to be female based on bill shape and length: needle-shaped and longer.

Although I have lived in NSW since 1993, I return regularly to Tasmania and go to Gorringes Beach to check how many of my banded oystercatchers have survived. This bird was the last. Her body was found near the territory where she was first found breeding by Mark Barter.

From our knowledge of the life history of oystercatchers we know that she was at least 34 years old and possibly older, having bred on the beach in the same area for 29 successive years. For most of this time she was faithful to not only the same territory but also the same partner. She is one of the few documented cases of divorce in oystercatchers; the deposed hubby joining the non-breeding flock. For me it is the end of an era as she was the last of the tagged birds at Gorringes Beach. I have seen her every year for the last 30 years, and she has been the subject of at least three publications. People familiar with the beach will remember there used to be a line of fence posts running out into the sea. They were in great demand at high tide, often occupied by perched Crested Terns *Thalasseus bergii*. I have this enduring memory of the female perching on the one remaining free pole and as she settled, the male, with no remaining post to perch on, spontaneously mounted her and copulated.

One of the advantages of having banded breeding birds which are site faithful, is that you can easily monitor their longevity. It will take a lot of monitoring to beat this record, the oldest Pied Oystercatcher on the Australian Bird and Bat Banding System.

Mike Newman



Australian Pied Oystercatchers
(Photo - Silva Vaughan-Jones)

Arctic Report Card November 2012 - Erratum

A section of the paper on Waders (Shorebirds) by Zockler, Lanctot, Brown & Syroechkovskiy (2012) from the **Arctic Report Card** was included in the January 2013 *Tattler*. The section included "Figure 4.13 Curlew sandpiper trends monitored at seven sites in Australia (Gosbell & Clemens, 2006)". Unfortunately this Figure has been wrongly attributed to Gosbell & Clemens (2006). It is in fact **Figure 4 from a paper by Rogers & Gosbell (2006)**:

Rogers, K.D. and Gosbell, K. (2006). Demographic models for Red-necked Stint and Curlew Sandpiper in Victoria. *Stilt* **50**: 205-214.

This paper explores in some detail the reasons for the dramatic decline in Curlew Sandpiper numbers shown as a straight line trend in Gosbell & Clemens.