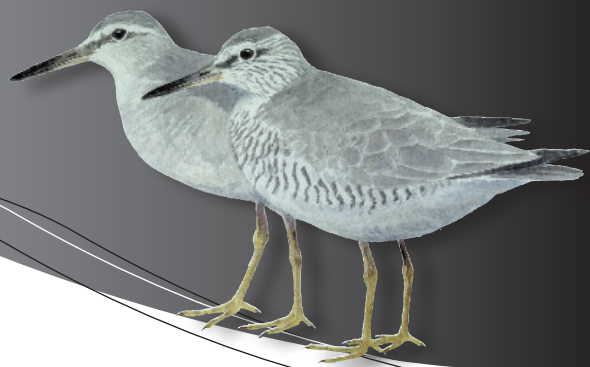


Tattler



Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways

Editor: Liz Crawford Email: tattler@aws.org.au No. 29 July 2013

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Editorial

At this time of year, millions of shorebirds are sitting on eggs or guarding chicks in the vast reaches of the Arctic tundra, having staged successfully on those critically important mudflats and salt pans around the Yellow Sea. As various articles in this edition emphasize, the inexorable destruction of intertidal mudflats around the Yellow Sea continues, seemingly unabated. Tentative diplomacy appears helpless in the face of continuing economic growth and development. However, there is hope. Read the story of Tina Lin (page 18), a 12-year-old schoolgirl from Fujian province in South East China. Tina has become a passionate advocate for shorebirds after attending an environmental education training workshop with her mother, a teacher. The workshop, organised by the Fujian Birdwatching Society, assisted by RSPB's International Education Manager, was aimed at birdwatchers but 35 local teachers and educators also attended. From this small beginning a strong force for conservation is emerging within China. Let's hope her voice is heard.

Egg Thief Caught on Camera

After flying 10,000km to their northern breeding ground on the beautiful Arctic tundra of Chukotka Peninsula, northeast Siberia, a Red Knot couple suffered predation of their first clutch. The thief was captured by an automatic nest camera installed by Pavel Tomkovich in his study area.

Also present in the area is a breeding adult Red Knot with a lime flag (Chukotka) and two metal bands. This bird was banded here as a chick in July 2004 and given a lime flag and a metal band. In June 2005 the bird was caught in Corner Inlet, Victoria and given an extra metal band.



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.

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AWSG North-West Australia Wader and Tern Expedition 2014

Sunday 16th February to Sunday 9th March 2014

North-West Australia was "discovered" to be one of the prime locations in the world for wading birds during the first RAOU (BirdLife Australia) "Expedition" there in August/September 1981. It is now known to have a peak population of nearly 750,000 waders, with a huge variety of species (50, nearly a quarter of the 214 species of waders worldwide). It has also proved to be an ideal place for wader studies with a warm, sunny, dry climate for 10 months of the year (usually!). Furthermore there is easy accessibility to the principal wader areas at Roebuck Bay, Broome (150,000 birds) and 80 Mile Beach (500,000 birds).

The fieldwork program will principally consist of regular banding and appropriate counting of waders and terns at two locations (Broome and 80 Mile Beach). This year additional effort will again be put into scanning for leg flags and colour bands, particularly at 80 Mile Beach. The specific objectives of this Expedition are:

- to obtain an estimate of the relative breeding success in the 2013 Arctic breeding season of all the main species of migratory waders. This is achieved by measuring the proportion of juveniles in catches;
- to catch additional samples of species which are less frequently caught in NW Australia, e.g. Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Grey Plover, Common Greenshank, Oriental Plover, Eastern Curlew, Little Curlew, Oriental Pratincole;
- to continue the program of putting individually lettered/numbered yellow leg flags on all the main medium/large migratory wader species caught at Broome and several species at 80 Mile Beach. This is to facilitate the collection and calculation of survival rate data in the future and to enhance the information obtained from flagged birds seen overseas.

Participants will be responsible for the costs of travelling to join or leave the expedition at Broome or 80 Mile Beach. When in NW Australia costs for participants will be:

a) a charge of **\$35 per day** to cover the cost of food, gas, laundry, other consumable items (black-powder, electrical fuses, engraved flags etc.) and other equipment costs/ overheads.

b) a charge of **\$280 per week** for local transport costs (hire of 4WD, fuel, servicing of other vehicles).

c) camping or accommodation costs at Broome Bird Observatory, (paid direct to BBO). Accommodation bookings should be made directly with the BBO; a deposit may be required PHONE: +61 8 9193 5600 E-mail broome@birdlife.org.au

d) "use" charge at Anna Plains of **\$10 per person per day**. We hope to be able to use one of the buildings/lawns at the Anna Plains homestead as our base (as usual).

A large number of people (25-28 ideally) will be needed if a satisfactory team is to be available throughout the 3-week period. Previous wader banding or expedition experience is not essential. What is important is the readiness to work hard (when required) and be a contributor to the team (lazy/loners won't fit in!). It is a wonderful opportunity to mix with, and learn from, others with different backgrounds and experience. You are strongly encouraged to participate. **Please contact a leader as soon as possible if you intend participating in 2014.**

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Southeast Gulf of Carpentaria Shorebird Census March-April 2013

The first shorebird census of the vast area in the south-east of the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Queensland since 1999 took place between 18 March and 5 April 2013. A team of Australians and New Zealanders were invited to take part and arrived either at the start or part way through the period of the project, flying from Cairns to Normanton. From here the road journey to the coastal settlement of Karumba took over an hour and passed through wetlands, light forest and finally the almost treeless Karumba Plain.

Our merry band of enthusiasts comprised Peter Driscoll and Adrian Riegen, the organisers; Arthur Keates, Chris Herbert, Liz Crawford, Roger Jaensch, Penny Johns, Detlef and Carol Davies, Dan Weller, Keith Woodley, Kristelle Wi, Robert Bush and Jun Matsui. The team occupied the upper floor of the *Pilot's Rest*, a comfortable place to stay with well-equipped kitchen, mostly shared rooms and, of course, ways to keep cool in hot, tropical weather. Shops and places to eat out were within walking distance so stocking up with food was easy and sharing household jobs went smoothly and efficiently.



Karumba from the helicopter with the Norman River in the background - Detlef Davies

Karumba lies at the mouth of the Norman River, roughly at the point in the Gulf where the west-facing coast meets the north-facing coast. The area is very flat and incoming tides rapidly cover large areas of mudflats, beach and mangrove. Existing information suggested that shorebirds were very numerous for about 100km to the west and north of Karumba and it was essential to find the high-tide roosts in order to concentrate our efforts in this vast area. Transport options included a 5-seater 4WD; Peter Driscoll's open aluminium boat and his small Ukrainian Aeroprakt 22 Foxbat plane; larger boats provided by the Ferryman and by Carpentaria Barra; and a helicopter service. Costs for these options varied greatly so detailed planning was necessary to make best use of the budget.

Peter and Adrian had already surveyed much of the area by plane and mapped the locations which we should try to get to. The first two days of the survey produced setbacks in that the Ferryman was unable to land us at our first destination due to adverse weather conditions (the only really



Helicopter transport took us to distant roost sites - Detlef Davies

windy and rough day of the survey) and a fault with the aluminium boat meant we were unable to land on the second day. After that things improved markedly and on several later occasions the use of the plane and the helicopter enabled us to be dropped down on suitable places to walk to roosts of large numbers of birds.

The roosting places almost became household names, firstly to the north of us: Brannigans (the mouth of the creek by that name), Cape Misery (a *nice* place!), Brian's Beach and Pelican Island; and secondly to the west: The Oaks, Mark's Beach, Disaster Inlet (no, it never happened!) and Gore Point. On days when we were not being transported by air, we explored the rivers by boat and spent time on the Karumba Plain which was extraordinarily rich in birds, particularly around the many patches of open water.

Even for Australians, the variety of shorebirds was impressive; for New Zealanders it was mind-boggling. The predominant species at the coastal high-tide roosts were Red Knot, Great Knot, Greater & Lesser Sand Plovers, Black-tailed Godwit, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Whimbrel and Pied Oystercatcher. In smaller numbers were Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Greenshank, Marsh, Terek, Broad-billed and Curlew Sandpipers, Grey-tailed Tattler, Eastern Curlew, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling and Pacific Golden and Grey Plovers; also Red-capped Plover, a locally-breeding species. In terms of numbers, the closest site, The Oaks,



Peter's plane was used for aerial surveys.

Southeast Gulf of Carpentaria Shorebird Census March-April 2013 cont.



Group of Great Knot and a few Red Knot - Detlef Davies

was thought from an aerial survey to contain a few thousand birds. On the ground the count of knot alone was estimated at 2,800 birds. Invariably the roost sites contained varying numbers of terns, stilts, cormorants, pelicans, herons, egrets, ibis and spoonbills. We counted terns too; Little Terns often reached 3 figures; also present were Gull-billed, Caspian, Crested, Lesser Crested and Black-naped Terns.

While counting birds, we also searched for banded and flagged birds. In total there were 160 flag sightings involving 7 species but there will be some duplication through some sites being visited more than once. The sources of these birds are still being investigated but some knot originated in Chongming Dao in China (dating from 2001); others in Australia (Broome, WA and Corner Inlet, Victoria), and New Zealand (Miranda and Foxton Beach).

The birds of Karumba Plain were also part of our project. At 5 marked points along the road we regularly conducted 20-minute bird counts and spent additional time there surveying particular migratory species like Little Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Apart from those, we were most impressed with the hundreds of ducks which included a few of the rare Freckled Duck and groups of the boldly marked Pink-eared Duck. Also present were herons, egrets, spoonbills, Black-necked Storks, big flocks of White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns, Red-kneed Dotterels, Australian Pratincoles; birds of prey including Black-breasted Buzzard, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Spotted & Swamp Harriers; Australian Bustards, Brolgas & Sarus Cranes feeding by the roadside.

The opportunity for general birding in such a rich area was appreciated by all of us. Even between our house and the shops, you could look over a shallow lake at Pied Herons and Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos, and enjoy such species as Yellow-tinted Honeyeater, Star Finch and Great Bowerbird. Those still on site in April witnessed a mass movement of Australian Bustards when c.300 of them passed over the house over 3 days.

Mangroves in northern Australia are very special for birds and we took full advantage of this, especially on the river trips where the list of sightings included Mangrove Robin, Mangrove Fantail, Mangrove Golden Whistler, Rufous-banded Honeyeater, Collared Kingfisher, and for me that star bird, the White-breasted Whistler.

As if day birding was not enough we ventured out at night several times to enjoy the local owls, nightjars and other nocturnal species. Barn Owls were very common; Barking Owls and Southern Boobook also around; Tawny Frogmouths, Spotted Nightjar and Owlet Nightjar put in appearances; along with a Black-headed Python and various other reptiles and amphibians.

For such a superb experience we thank the organisers, our fellow observers, Doug the car hire man, Glen and Allison of the Ferryman, Gavin from Carpentaria Barra, and Lochie and Des, our helicopter pilots. Detailed results of the census, and opinions and conclusions on the plight of our shorebirds as a result, are still to come and will be published in *Stilt*.

Detlef Davies

Kerikeri, New Zealand



The Oaks roost west of Karumba - shorebirds congregate on sandspits and bars adjacent to the beach - Detlef Davies

Editor's Note: The first comprehensive and detailed survey of shorebirds in the **Southeast Gulf of Carpentaria** was conducted in 1998 and 1999 and resulted in a report by Peter V. Driscoll (2001) for the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency titled *Gulf of Carpentaria Wader Surveys 1998-9*. The report was prepared on behalf of the Queensland Wader Study Group of Birds Queensland with assistance from the Australasian Wader Studies Group. Results indicated that the area met criteria for inclusion in the Flyway Site Network.

Delaware Bay Visit, 11 May to 1 June 2013

We joined the shorebird research team on the New Jersey side of Delaware Bay, USA to see benefits emerging from the research and conservation activities undertaken over the last 17 years, since the magnitude of the over-harvesting of horseshoe crabs and its negative effects on shorebirds were first realised.

Shorebird populations

When the team arrived on 11 May they were surprised to find that 5000 Red Knot had already arrived and settled in close to the team's base at Reeds Beach. Unusually, they preceded the first big arrivals of Sanderling and Ruddy Turnstone. Numbers built only slowly during the month, although weather conditions were generally favourable for arrivals from the south. Our first attempted bay-wide ground, boat and aerial census on 24 May could not be completed because the storm which arrived that day caused the aerial flight to be cancelled and one of the two boat trips to be prematurely curtailed. However we were blessed with perfect weather for the second census on 27 May. This revealed a total of 26,000 Red Knot present on Delaware Bay with, amazingly, 25,000 of these on the New Jersey side. This year's Red Knot total was 4,000 higher than in 2012 and confirms that a real increase in the Red Knot population has now started.

In recent years there has been a gradual trend for a greater proportion of the Red Knot population to use the New Jersey shores of Delaware Bay. Reasons for the gradual decline in the number of Red Knot using beaches on the Delaware side are not fully understood but probably include:

- a) birds in Mispillion Harbour are more susceptible to surprise attack by avian predators because of its more enclosed nature. Peregrines frequently hunt there and were continuously attacking the earliest arrivals this year;
- b) the beaches on the Delaware side of the Bay are not closed off to the public whereas the beaches most used by the birds for feeding and roosting in New Jersey are closed to the public from early May to the first week in June (i.e. during the main period of shorebird migration); and
- c) the beach restoration work in New Jersey provided more and better habitat for crab spawning than in previous years.

Crab Spawning

Horseshoe crabs again appeared in increased numbers for the third successive year. Spawning continued throughout the month with only one significant interruption – a three-day storm from

24-26 May. Even then crab eggs on the sandy shore and in the edge of the tide were plentiful because the onshore waves uncovered many of the eggs previously laid (usually about 10-20cm deep). The restrictions on crab harvesting are now definitely showing positive results. But a huge factor this year was the \$US1.6 million beach restoration project which Larry Niles and Mandy Dey organised to replace the sand lost during Superstorm Sandy last November. Tens of thousands of tons of sand from local gravel pits were used to replenish several kilometres of the key beaches and the horseshoe crabs voted in favour by homing in on these for most of their spawning.

Catching Programme

Catches of the three main study species (Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling) were made throughout the study period. On Red Knot and Turnstone these were nicely spaced at approximately three-day intervals, allowing close monitoring of weights. All species steadily gained weight throughout the period and arrivals of new, low-weight birds continued right through until almost the end of May. A total of 1594 birds was caught – 588 Red Knot, 639 Ruddy Turnstone and 367 Sanderling.

As usual there was a good variety of re-captures of birds banded elsewhere in the flyway, including Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Canada (including the Arctic). Re-traps included a Turnstone and a Red Knot banded in May 1998 – birds which are now a minimum of 17 years old.

Geolocators

A few birds with geolocators were caught, including a Turnstone that had been banded on its nest in the Canadian Arctic. Some new geolocators were deployed on Red Knot and Turnstone, including a few new trial units which carry a small radio transmitter to aid detection in remote arctic regions.

Scanning Program

Intensive scanning of shorebird flocks was conducted each day to search for and record individual engraved leg flags. This information facilitates calculation of annual survival rates – a particularly important parameter in species where population levels are changing.

Dave Ward, a local scanner, achieved an incredible total of 365 individual flag sightings in one day alone.

Migratory Departures

One of the most thrilling and satisfying aspects of our visit each year is the sight of birds

Delaware Bay Visit, 11 May to 1 June 2013 cont.

setting off on their three or four-day flight to the Canadian Arctic at the end of May. Reeds Beach is particularly well placed for observing flocks departing from the southern parts of the New Jersey bay shores. Even flocks which have probably set off from the Delaware side of the bay can sometimes be seen way offshore.

This year the start of the main emigration of our main study species was delayed by the three-day storm of 24-26 May. The pent-up demand was released when the weather cleared and conditions became ideal for departure on 27 May. 18,395 birds left in a two-hour period before sunset on that evening. Conditions remained ideal for departures on each subsequent night with 8,000 leaving on both 28 and 29 May and nearly 12,000 more on 30 May. All headed due north, gradually gaining height until they disappeared out of sight - a very moving experience for both us and the birds.

The large numbers seen departing this year were because the population of Semi-palmated Sandpipers on the New Jersey beaches was much higher than usual. Overall some 80% of departures were of this species, particularly those departing in the later part of the count period each evening. Flocks of departing Semis ranged widely, from occasionally only 5-20 birds to frequently 100 or more (maximum 900). Knot flocks were usually less than 100 and their departure time tended to be in the early part of the watch period each evening. Quite often flocks

of mixed-sized waders were seen departing (e.g. even Knots and Semis in the same group), but the species may have formed separate groups later along the route.

Avian disease testing

Once again a small team from the University of Georgia was present throughout our visit to collect samples for testing for avian diseases. They can detect birds which are currently infected and those which have previously been infected. Turnstones apparently show a much higher prevalence of infection than any other species of shorebird tested.

Meals on Wheels

A delightful variety of super dinners were again generously provided by Citizens United (organised by Jane Galetto). This support is fantastically appreciated by the team who do not have to return home and prepare meals after a long day in the field.

The Future

As usual, the international contingent included people from Canada, UK, New Zealand and Australia. Several members have been involved annually since the initial visit in May 1997. This year's Australian participants were Clive Minton, Susan Taylor, Peter and Helen Fullagar and Robyn and Steve Atkinson. Most of the team plan to return once again in May 2014.

Clive Minton and Susan Taylor

Recent Book Releases

Shorebirds: Field Guide in Cemara Beach by Fransisca Noni Tirtaningtyas and Iwan Febrianto was published by cooperation with Wildlife Conservation Society-Indonesia Programme and Natural Resources Conservation Agency of Jambi. This book is presented to emphasise the importance of Cemara Beach as a stopover for shorebirds. It aims to: introduce Cemara Beach, Jambi, Sumatra, Indonesia as a destination of migratory shorebirds; give information about and descriptions of shorebird species that stopover in Cemara Beach; and encourage monitoring of shorebirds. Conservation of Cemara Beach is important since there is more than 1% of the global population of Nordmann's Greenshank present. Re-trapping of colour-flagged shorebirds shows that Cemara Beach is a regular stopover location for migratory shorebirds, with 26,000 individuals counted. There are 4 species included in IUCN categories: Nordmann's Greenshank (endangered); Asian Dowitcher (near-threatened); White-faced Plover (rediscovery); and Red-necked

Phalarope (new data) in Cemara Beach. We hope this book will help the monitoring of Cemara Beach by local government and Cemara villagers in order to increase its conservation status.

Iwan Londo

Terns, by David Cabot and Ian Nisbet, was published recently by HarperCollins, London. Part of the respected New Naturalist series, this is the first book on the natural history of terns to be published since 1934. It covers in detail the five tern species that breed in Britain and Ireland; three of these (Common, Roseate and Arctic Terns) also breed in North America and the other two (Little and Sandwich Terns) have close relatives in Australia. There are also four chapters on terns of the world; single chapters on history, conservation, passage migrants and vagrants; appendices on demography and research; and a bibliography of more than 500 references. It is lavishly illustrated with colour photographs, many of which depict key aspects of behaviour.

Bohai Bay - Global Flyway Network Research

During the period of northward migration, the Bohai 2013 Team of Adrian Boyle, Chris Hassell, Ginny Chan and Matt Slaymaker spent long hours counting and scanning shorebirds in the Bohai Bay part of the Yellow Sea, as part of ongoing research for the Global Flyway Network. Among the data collected are flag and colour-bands sightings of birds from throughout the East Asian-Australasian Flyway as they stop off at this internationally important site. Scanning started on 9 April 2013 and finished in early June. Flocks built up in mid-April and by 29 May 2013 many birds had departed to their northern breeding grounds.

Highlights from a journal of their experiences are reproduced here but the complete journal is available on: <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/bohai-bay/bohai-bay-fieldwork-journal/>

Matt Slaymaker writes:

Colour-banded Red Knot are the primary reason for our annual trips to Bohai. These birds caught in Broome and at 80 Mile Beach have been intensely studied in Australia for many years and, since 2009, here in Bohai. The unique colour-band combinations allow individual identification in the field and, with each sighting, key information such as subspecies and scores on breeding plumage and 'abdominal profile' (a visual score of the fat being carried by a bird) are recorded.

The data set that has been built up by the Global Flyway Network's staff and volunteers is truly extraordinary and now some hard analysis is underway. Survival studies, staging times, refuelling rates, migration timings are just some of the things being looked at with changes over time and implications for the future of these birds. The results are set to be very interesting and will certainly be worth the wait."

Away from the mudflats the saltpans have been very productive. Large numbers of birds use these shallow lagoons and during mid-May they often hold more birds than the coastline but with a very different species composition. Later this year a PhD project at Beijing Normal University will begin studying the birds within the saltpans. This will complement our (primarily mudflat-focused) work, and add to the overall understanding of this vitally important staging site. To illustrate the importance of the area - in a single salt pond, which measured approximately 3km², we counted over 92,500 birds! About two thirds of these were Curlew Sandpiper with Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and 12 other species accounting for the rest. Tens

of thousands of White-winged Black Terns were present in the area dipping and diving, picking at the surface of ponds throughout the complex. Overall, the sheer numbers and variety of birds throughout this small area is a spectacular sight. To lose it to 'development' would be a tragedy.

On another occasion, we counted almost 35,000 Red Knot in a single pond. With most, if not all, Red Knot from Broome staging in Bohai, it is possible that we had the entire migratory population of North-west Australia in front of us lined up in a single pond measuring a little over 4km²!! With unusually clear skies and the beautiful evening light from behind us we saw an amazing 82 colour-bands and only scanned a relatively small proportion of the birds.

Ginny Chan writes:

From 23 April to 3 May, I left Nanpu and joined the Fudan University team which is surveying Yellow Sea coastal shorebird habitat, led by PhD student Ingrid Chen and David Melville as a core team member. We explored two major shorebird staging sites in Liaoning Province.

After a 12-hour night train, we reached Dandong city in Liaoning Province. From there we headed towards the Yalu Jiang estuary, a key stopover site for shorebirds, which is recognized by the establishment of the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve.

While pointing our telescopes at North Korea at the other side of the Yalu Jiang River, we adjusted our focus on flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits and Great Knots, scanning for bands and flags. On the second day in the early morning high tide we conducted a count of shorebirds together with the reserve staff, while in the afternoon during low tide we walked on the mud to scan for flags and bands. Altogether, we got over 20 colour-banded Great Knots from North-west Australia, and over 30 colour-banded Bar-tailed Godwits banded in New Zealand and Yalu Jiang, plus many engraved flags. Other highlights included two NWA geolocator Great Knots, and two Great Knots which were equipped with radio transmitters last year (of course the radio transmitters are already shed).

'Nature Reserve' in China does not mean a permanent safe haven for migratory birds. In 2007, the boundary of the Yalu Jiang Nature Reserve was adjusted so the reserve area is reduced by about 7,000 ha to accommodate the development of Dandong Port. As the highest counts of shorebirds have been recorded at the east and west ends of the reserve, the on-going

Bohai Bay - Global Flyway Network Research cont.

reclamation and industrial developments outside the 'new' reserve boundary pose serious threats to the shorebirds staging at this area. While driving through industrial areas built on reclaimed mudflats on our way to the coast, the emptiness of the 'industrial' buildings is very noticeable. Are all these developments necessary? No matter what's the answer, many more mudflats are currently reclaimed for the sake of 'economic growth'.

After three days in Yalujiang, we headed westwards, aiming to explore the coasts of the cities Jinzhou, Panjin and Yingkou, where three rivers (Ling River, Shuangtaizi River and Liao River) reach the sea. The centre of this region is the Shuangtaizihekou National Nature Reserve, established as an important site for Red-crowned Cranes and breeding Saunders's Gulls.

At the town close to Shuangtaizihekou National Nature Reserve, we were welcomed by Mr Zhang, the chairman of the Panjin Bird Watching Society. With his help we entered the Reserve early in the morning and had a first look at the area. Again, 'nature reserve' in China doesn't mean no development; the Shuangtaizihekou nature reserve is the largest reed farm in the world, and oil wells are all around the reed fields and out in the sea. At the coast there are also hundreds of sea cucumber ponds, while on the mud loads of workers are harvesting shellfish and other seafood.



Huge flock of Great Knot

In the late afternoon, we returned to the area where the highest numbers of shorebird occurred, according to Mr Zhang. With a massive spring tide rising, we witnessed waves of Great Knots flying over us, and swirling in the air! The 'count' that we originally planned gradually became an impossible task as flocks of ten thousands of shorebirds, mostly Great Knots, flew over us mainly in a direction from east to west. After the mudflats were all inundated, huge flocks were swirling around in the air; it seemed that the shorebirds were very excited, one reason could be that they could not find suitable roosting sites. As night approached, the birds were still not landing and it had been over 1.5 hours.

David, Ingrid and me, standing at different locations, tried to estimate the number of shorebirds, and our estimates ranged from 96,000 to 120,000, while about 70%-80% were Great Knots, so approx. 70,000-90,000 Great Knots were in the area! That's an astonishing figure, so we decided to stay longer in this region where very little shorebird study has been conducted, but it might be an extremely important staging site, especially for Great Knots. On the following day we didn't record the same high number of shorebirds as the day before. We suspected that the extremely high numbers were a result of shorebirds from neighbouring regions being 'pushed' towards our site by the spring tide, in search of roosts.

The next day we investigated the coastline of the city of Yingkou. Once outside the Nature Reserve, we felt the immense pressure of coastal reclamation: new ports, a university city, and a sports centre were being built on the reclaimed land. We did find some remaining narrow mudflats. Afterwards we headed towards Jinzhou city where we found a similar story: mudflats were being destroyed for the development of a port, an industrial area and a high-end residential/recreational area with man-made beaches. Moreover, the sea cucumber ponds that extended kilometres towards the sea had destroyed massive areas of mudflat.

On the last day we finally found the way to the mudflat at the mouth of Ling River, located just west of the Shuangtaizihekou National Nature Reserve. After riding on little 'three-wheelers' for 3 hours, we reached the end of the sea cucumber ponds, finally seeing the mud! We walked on the mud to scan, but with our limited time and an outgoing tide we didn't get much. On our way we learnt of plans to build a new highway and a hot spring resort in the area, taking over more reed fields and mudflat.

While we anticipated vast mudflats in this region from Ingrid's Google-Earth satellite images, after 6 days of searching for mudflats in this region, we figured out not much was left, and more destruction is on the way. Ingrid has faced a similar situation since she left Shanghai, where the survey began.



The three-wheeler - the ultimate field transportation if you're ready for a massage of all your muscles!

Current geolocator work on Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots in NZ

In 2008 and 2009 we deployed geolocators on non-breeding godwits at the Manawatu River Estuary in the lower North Island of New Zealand. This was (as far as I am aware) the first attempt made to tag and recapture non-breeding waders, and the success of it showed that if the birds are site-faithful, and the catching situation favourable, then such work is possible. The AWSG has since put huge efforts into tracking waders from Australian non-breeding grounds. In 2013 we resumed geolocator work in New Zealand, with two projects tracking Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knots.

Previous work established that the timing of migration of individual godwits is very consistent year after year, with some birds being perennial early migrants and others perennial late migrants. The geolocator work revealed that early birds tend to be southern-breeders in Alaska, whereas the late-departers tend to be northern breeders, whose schedules are shifted to match a later spring thaw. As part of a large study into the molecular basis for this differential timing (in collaboration with Dr Andrew Fidler, a molecular ecologist at the Cawthron Institute in Nelson, New Zealand), we aim to deploy about 100 geolocators in 2013 and 2014. This year we got 57 units out, from the Manawatu River Estuary (again) and from a site in the lower South Island, Catlins Lake. We have a mix of Biotrack and Migratetech geolocators, attached to a leg band on the tibia. This method has proven suitable and durable in the earlier work. All birds also have colour-bands for individual recognition. We hope to get geolocators onto some first-time northward migrants, though difficulties in accurately ageing immatures may make this a bit of a lottery. As the migrations of Bar-tailed Godwits from New Zealand have been well resolved through satellite-tracking, the information we are after in this study is largely about timing of migratory flights, and breeding location. We hope that the Migratetech units, which measure continuous light levels, might enable us to more accurately locate the breeding sites of any birds going above the Arctic Circle and into 24-hour daylight.



Bar-tailed Godwit with newly-deployed geolocator on right tibia. Manawatu River Estuary, New Zealand, 12 February 2013. Photo: Phil Battley.



Red Knot with engraved flag on right tibia and geolocator on left. South Korea, 25 April 2013. Photo: Ju Yung-Ki.

The second project aims to determine the migration routes and stopover sites used by Red Knots from New Zealand. A major gap in knowledge for this species has been whether birds make stopovers between New Zealand and the Yellow Sea, and if so, where. It had been suspected that some birds use areas such as the Gulf of Carpentaria on their way north, though extensive surveys there this year failed to locate the expected birds. We know that knots leave New Zealand from mid-March to early April, and there is evidence of some New Zealand birds arriving in China in early May, implying they have made a stopover en route. As yet, any such stopovers are undocumented. We tagged 25 knots in New Zealand in February this year (again, at the Manawatu River Estuary, and in the same catch in which we tagged 38 godwits), and while we know that a small number are overwintering in New Zealand, most migrated away. Several of these were seen by Adrian Boyle, Chris Hassell, Matt Slaymaker and Ginny Chan in Bohai Bay, China, in April-May. Additionally, Ju Yung-Ki photographed another in the Gomso Estuary, South Korea, in late April. These ground-truthing records are highly valuable for calibrating the positions calculated from the geolocator light-data. Now all we need to do is recapture the birds! Fingers crossed for the November–January period next southern summer. Our previous geolocator work has formed part of three published papers (listed below). The PLoS One paper should be freely downloadable. Please contact me if you would like a copy of the others.

Conklin, J.R., Battley, P.F. and Potter, M.A. (2013). Absolute Consistency: Individual versus Population Variation in Annual-Cycle Schedules of a Long-Distance Migrant Bird. *PLoS ONE* 8(1): e54535. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0054535

Conklin, J.R., Battley, P.F., Potter, M.A. and Fox, J.W. (2010). Breeding latitude drives individual schedules in a trans-hemispheric migrant bird. *Nature Communications* 1:67. DOI: 10.1038/ncomms1072

Conklin, J.R. and Battley, P.F. (2010). Attachment of geolocators to Bar-tailed Godwits: a tibia-mounted method with no survival effects or loss of units. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 117: 56-58.

Phil Battley

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Wader breeding success in the 2012 arctic summer

Reproduction rate is one of the two key parameters controlling wader populations. A full account of the following results of percentage juvenile sampling of waders in south-east Australia (SEA) and north-west Australia (NWA) during the November 2012 to March 2013 non-breeding season will be published in *Stilt* and in *Arctic Birds*. The data in Tables 1 and 2 provides estimates of wader breeding success for a range of species in the 2012 Northern Hemisphere summer.

Table 1. Percentage of juvenile/first year waders in cannon-net catches in SE Australia in 2012/13

Species	No. of catches		Total Caught	Juvenile/1st year		Long term median* % juvenile (years)	Assessment of 2012 breeding success
	Large (>50)	Small (<50)		No.	%		
Red-necked Stint	6	7	1902	414	21.8	14.5 (34)	Good
Curlew Sandpiper	1	6	329	11	3.3	9.8 (33)	Very poor
Bar-tailed Godwit	0	2	77	15	19.5	17.9 (23)	Average
Red Knot	0	1	1	0	-	58.0 (18)	-
Ruddy Turnstone	1	22	546	13	2.4	10.1 (22)	Very poor
Sanderling	4	4	674	19	2.8	10.1 (21)	Very poor
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	0	8	116	21	18.1	10.7 (31)	Good

* Does not include the 2012/2013 figures.

All birds cannon-netted in period 15 November 2012 to 25 March 2013 except Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper to end February 2013 only and some Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling to early April 2013.

Table 2. Percentage of juvenile/first year waders in cannon-net catches in NW Australia in 2012/13

Species	No. of catches		Total Caught	Juvenile/1st year		Assessment of 2012 breeding success
	Large (>50)	Small (<50)		No.	%	
Red-necked Stint	3	5	583	86	14.8	Below average
Curlew Sandpiper	0	7	108	2	1.9	Very poor
Bar-tailed Godwit	2	6	184	14	7.6	Below average
Red Knot	1	8	130	2	1.5	Very poor
Ruddy Turnstone	0	8	24	0	0	Very poor
Sanderling	0	4	31	1	3.2	Very poor
Great Knot	6	4	899	59	6.6	Poor
Non-arctic northern migrants						
Greater Sand Plover	4	7	393	111	28.2	Good
Terek Sandpiper	1	7	187	23	12.3	Average
Grey-tailed Tattler	3	6	584	104	17.8	Average
Broad-billed Sandpiper	0	2	22	4	18.4	Average

All birds cannon-netted in period 1 November 2012 to mid-March 2013.

The 2012 breeding season appears to have been even poorer than the 2011 breeding season for most of the wader populations which visit SEA and NWA (Minton *et al.* 2012). This was especially so in NWA where in the Arctic-breeding species four out of seven were rated "very poor" and none achieved even average breeding success. In SEA Sanderling and Curlew Sandpiper also experienced a second successive very poor breeding outcome, but Red-necked Stint and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were rated as being "good". This variation between species in some years has been noted previously, with Sharp-tailed Sandpiper particularly being a species which quite frequently differs in its breeding outcome from the majority of other species (Minton *et al.* 2005).

Given the pressures on many species of waders caused by loss of feeding habitat in key stopover locations in the Flyway it is desirable that they have the opportunity of offsetting survival losses due to this cause by having good breeding success when they are in the Arctic or elsewhere in Siberia. Arctic waders, in particular, badly need an above-average breeding outcome in 2013.

Clive Minton, Roz Jessop and Chris Hassell

Reference

Minton, C., Jessop, R., Collins, P. and Gosbell, K. (2005). Monitoring Wader Breeding Productivity by the Proportion of First Year Birds in Wader Populations in S. E. Australian Non-Breeding Areas. Pp. 73-85. In: Straw, P. (Ed.) Status and Conservation of Shorebirds in East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Proceedings of the Australian Shorebirds Conference, Canberra, Dec. 2003. IWSG Special Publication 17 and Wetlands International Global Series 18.

Sea Level Rise and Migration Bottlenecks

Migratory shorebird populations are at greater risk from rising sea levels than previously realized, according to researchers in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF) (Iwamura *et al.* 2013). Sea-level rise (SLR) will greatly alter littoral ecosystems, causing habitat change and loss for coastal species. Although loss of habitat directly impacts on species, there is a magnifying effect when the habitat lost is critical to a large proportion of the species, as in the case of stopover sites for migratory shorebirds.

Using a mathematical technique that models the flow of water through a pipeline, scientists have developed an innovative method to measure the effect of habitat loss on shorebird populations. The study focuses on ten species that migrate annually between breeding areas in the Russian and Alaskan arctic regions and non-breeding areas in Southeast Asia and Australasia. The species include: two sub-species of Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica baueri* and *Limosa lapponica menzbieri*), Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*), Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*), Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*), Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*), Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus mongolus* and *Charadrius mongolus stegmanni* combined), two sub-species of Red Knot (*Calidris canutus rogersi* and *Calidris canutus piersmai*) and Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*).

They show that reductions in population flow far exceed the proportion of habitat lost for these 10 long-distance migrant shorebirds using the EAAF. They estimate that SLR will inundate 23–40% of intertidal habitat area along their migration routes, but cause a reduction in population flow of up to 72 per cent across the taxa. This magnifying effect was particularly strong for taxa whose migration routes contain bottlenecks—sites through which a large fraction of the population travels. They develop the *bottleneck index*, a new network metric that positively correlates with the predicted impacts of habitat loss on overall population flow.

Sites such as Bohai Bay in the Yellow Sea mark some of the biggest bottlenecks in the EAAF and need to be conserved immediately. International cooperation along the EAAF is crucial if we are to succeed in conserving shorebirds.

Reference

Iwamura, T., Possingham, H.P., Chadès, I., Minton, C., Murray, N.J., Rogers, D.I., Treml, E.A. and Fuller, R.A. (2013). Migratory connectivity magnifies the consequences of habitat loss from sea-level rise for shorebird populations. *Proc R Soc B* **280**: 20130325.

An interesting review of this paper is at <http://news.mongabay.com/2013/0619-smith-seabirds.html#fmcyEZcBdXJEDfui.99>

Use of AWSG and VWSG recoveries and flag-sighting data

This note was triggered by the recent publication of the paper above by the University of Queensland team who are looking at the consequences for shorebirds in our Flyway of habitat loss due to sea level rise (and also, separately, from reclamation). The principal conclusion was that the effects of habitat loss are significantly magnified for many species because they preferentially use those areas of shoreline which will be most affected by changes from these causes.

Examination of the recoveries and flag-sighting data generated by AWSG and VWSG banding provided the basis for determining the principal areas of shoreline in the Flyway used by each species. This data was examined and “brainstormed” by a knowledgeable group at a meeting at the BirdLife Australia HQ a couple of years ago. Outline maps of both northward and southward migration were constructed for each species with estimated proportions of the population using each stopover location. This was based on a rough quantitative examination of the volume of leg-flag sightings and recoveries at each place.

In all our conservation actions we need to be aware that in most species the adverse effects of habitat loss are generally magnified in relation to the actual amount of habitat loss. A simple example to illustrate this would be the Red Knot. With some 60% of the population using Bohai Bay as a stopover on northward migration more than half of the total Red Knot population in the Flyway will be affected by the changes taking place to the shoreline in that area, which in itself is only a tiny fraction of the total shoreline in the Flyway.

AWSG and VWSG members will be particularly interested to see the way in which their data has been utilised for conservation purposes – EVERY flag-sighting and recovery counted. It is the quantitative data we are obtaining for flag sightings which is now the most important element of our on-going flagging programme (which has already given us a good outline of the migration route/main stopovers of most of our regularly banded species).

Clive Minton

International Wader Study Group Conference

Registration is now open for the **International Wader Study Group** (IWSG) Conference 2013 to be held in **Wilhelmshaven**, Germany from Friday 27 September to Monday 30 September. It will be preceded by and overlap with the 37th Annual Meeting of the **Waterbird Society**. The IWSG conference will start with a full day of excursions on Friday 27 September. Workshops will be conducted on Monday 30 September and will include a significant workshop on Numenini. To register, see: <http://www.waderstudygroup.org/conf/2013.php>

Size differences and differential migration

A recent paper published in *Emu* explores the question: *Is geographical variation in the size of Australian shorebirds consistent with hypotheses on differential migration?*

The abstract of the paper by Nebel, S., Rogers, K.G., Minton, C.D.T. and Rogers, D.I. (2013). *Emu* **113**: 99-111 is reproduced below.

In differential migrants the members of different age-classes or sex travel to geographically separate non-breeding areas. Here, we test five competing hypotheses explaining differential migration using more than 40,000 records of 22 species of shorebirds (Charadriiformes) occurring at two non-breeding areas at different distances from the breeding grounds and that also differ in climate. We showed that across species, the larger sex was more abundant in south-eastern than

in north-western Australia. Size, as indicated by wing length, was greater in the south-east than in the north-west for both males and females, whereas bill length showed the opposite pattern. Based on these trends we conclude that the interaction between ambient temperature, body size and bill length determines the geographical distribution of shorebirds wintering in Australia. Our findings are not consistent with the resource partitioning, dominance and arrival time hypotheses. This is the first study that dissociates overlapping predictions of competing hypotheses on differential migration, thus contributing to our understanding of the evolution of differential migration in birds.

Note: This study makes use of wing length, bill length and head length data recorded from 40,000 shorebirds caught and banded by the Australasian Wader Studies Group and the Victorian Wader Study Group.



Black-tailed Godwit Southeast Gulf of Carpentaria - Detlef Davies

Vale Fred T.H. Smith

Fred T.H. Smith, one of Australia's most renowned birdwatchers, passed away peacefully on the morning of Wednesday, 19 June 2013. He was 90. Famous for his extraordinary bird-watching skills and extensive knowledge of Australia's birds, Fred is widely acknowledged as among the best field observers of his generation. Over the years he discovered numerous species that were new to the Australian list.

Migratory shorebirds became his specialty, and he pioneered their study in Australia. Accordingly, the western shores of Port Phillip Bay that stretch between Altona and the Western Treatment Plant

at Werribee soon became his 'patch', where he would make so many remarkable discoveries over the years. Fred was widely renowned for passing on his vast knowledge to others, willingly and patiently answering questions and keenly explaining various points to a new generation. Remarkably, Fred was able to continue bird-watching right up until this year, including visits to old haunts along the Yarra River in early June. He was a remarkable man and will be sadly missed.

Adapted from <http://www.birdlife.org.au/media/vale-fred-t.h.-smith/>

Banded Stilt Breeding Event

On the 1st of June 2013, the Northern Flinders Ranges and areas between Woomera and Andamooka in northern South Australia (SA) received ~50 mm of welcome winter rain following over 12 months of extremely dry conditions. After two small follow-up rains totalling nearly 20 mm in the fortnight following, Roxby Downs resident Reece Pedler checked the online satellite image to find some small 'puddles' of water on nearby Lake Torrens. He organised a charter flight, mainly to confirm his theory that Banded Stilts needed almost double this amount of rain to give a bare minimum of water coverage in the lake for breeding. From the air a few hundred Banded Stilt were detected standing around a small island not far from where they'd bred in 2011 and hundreds more were scattered across shallow sheets of water in the massive salt lake. He thought, "surely they can't be nesting, there is hardly any water here!" None-the-less, being well aware of just how canny Banded Stilt are, Reece cancelled all his other plans and headed for Lake Torrens the next day. He arrived to discover not just a few hundred, but several thousand stilt on a neighbouring island and first eggs already laid!

And so Reece embarked on an intense period of field work – which has resulted in the colony being closely monitored not only for research, but also for control of predators (namely Silver Gulls, through the SA Environment Department's permits and protocols). The colony, estimated at ~8,000 nests is due to begin hatching in the

second week of July and so flightless chicks will be at banding age by late July.

Already Reece and his father Lynn Pedler have managed some wonderful flag sightings - perhaps the most exciting being of two individuals sporting plain orange flags – one positively identified as being a juvenile from a wonderful catch at Werribee (Victoria) in December 2000 of 151 Banded Stilt (89 juveniles), 40 Avocets (13 juveniles) and some stints! I am sure anyone involved with Banded Stilt will remember the trauma of the 2000 breeding event at Lake Eyre when predation by Silver Gulls caused the failure of two breeding attempts. After human intervention a third attempt successfully produced about 50,000 young, and a fourth attempt failed when the water ran out. And now, 13 years later, at least one of these chicks is sitting on 3 eggs at Lake Torrens, only a couple of hundred kilometres from where it hatched.

But for those of us involved with the banding at the very end of the breeding event in 2010, nothing compares to this spreadsheet entry: *1.7.2013, Lake Torrens breeding colony, left leg – plain square orange/plain square yellow, full breast band 100% – incubating 3 eggs.* We only flagged 54 chicks in 2010 and all present were concerned whether or not these 'tail-enders' would make it through to adult hood.

Maureen Christie,
Friends of Shorebirds, SE Australia

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Habitat Protection at Key Sites

World Wetland Day in February 2012 and again in 2013 was dedicated to the Ramsar designation of the Gulf of Mottama in **Myanmar**, demonstrating a strong Government commitment. Considerable progress has been made. The national partner of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, BANCA (Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association), together with BirdLife, Ramsar Network Japan/Wild Bird Society of Japan (RNJ/WBSJ) and the Royal Society for Bird Protection, have pushed for the designation and it is hoped that the coastal area around Nan Thar Island will also be included in the next batch of designated areas. The benthos-shorebird survey in the Gulf of Mottama that has been carried out jointly by BANCA and RNJ/WBSJ is expected to contribute important data on the ecosystem of the site by the time of designation.

Surveys in October illustrated the huge importance of the Rudong mudflats in **China**

for stop over and moulting and the imminent threat of habitat loss. Almost all other Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites in China, including those officially protected (e.g. Min Jiang), are also threatened. In addition trapping and poisoning were identified as widespread and common threats. BirdLife China Programme supported an awareness and education campaign working with local people and schools. It is inspiring to see the many different levels of Chinese society becoming engaged in shorebird conservation. This included national and local government as well as small businesses and the wider public with an increasing number of small campaign groups.

A BirdLife International partner, the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) has conducted Spoon-billed Sandpiper surveys in southern China (Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan) and identified two new sites in western Guangdong

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Habitat Protection at Key Sites cont.

and Guangxi. The surveys are funded by the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong.

The Deep Sea Port development on Sonadia, **Bangladesh** is still a threat and requires input and coordination from the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force as the plans have been raised again by developers. The issue remains delicate within the country and urgent concerted international action is required. An extensive awareness campaign by our partner the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project in Bangladesh has been conducted on Sonadia to keep up the momentum of conservation and hunting mitigation.

In **Japan**, a project started to search for undisclosed past observation records of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. It is searching for past detailed data when the population was larger than today and will lead to an effort to restore potential habitats of this species.

HKBWS also worked on a Spoon-billed Sandpiper

animation for promotion amongst younger people. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper animation project has invited students from places along the migratory route of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper: Russia, China, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh for the production. The project is funded by Eric Hosking Trust, and supported by all flyway partners and Task Force member organisations as well as the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (Barry Cooper) and BirdLife International. Vivian Fu is preparing to upload the video online so that people can get access it freely.

Request for Support by EAAFP members

All EAAFP range state members are requested to help protect the stop over and wintering sites of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, stop the reclamation of crucial stop over sites and follow the excellent example of Myanmar.

**Dr Christoph Zockler, Coordinator,
Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force**
May 2013

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Project Update

Stopping bird trapping



Good progress is being made to stop bird trapping on the Spoon-billed Sandpipers' non-breeding grounds. Bird trappers sign agreements to cease hunting, in return for small grants to buy fishing equipment. The East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force estimates that as many as 80-90% of hunters in the Bay of Martaban, Myanmar (the most important wintering site in the world for Spoon-billed Sandpiper) have now signed an agreement to stop hunting and surrendered their trapping equipment.

But even if everything goes well and winter mortality is halved every five years from 2011, population modelling shows that the population

will still be extremely small and highly vulnerable to extinction for more than a decade. Without Spoon-billed Sandpipers in captivity, there would be no safety net against extinction in the wild.

Conservation breeding



The conservation breeding programme is needed to boost the wild population with captive-reared juvenile birds while we tackle the threats it faces. And, if the worst happens and the wild population is lost, birds reared in captivity can be used to reintroduce the species to the wild.

Before the conservation breeding programme was started, the project team used population modelling to assess the effect of taking eggs on the wild population. Using the estimated

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Project Update cont.

population size and information available on adult survival, productivity and recruitment the models indicated that any effect would be negligible.

A captive flock is now established in specially-designed biosecure aviaries in Slimbridge, Gloucestershire. Through breeding, the size of the flock will be built up to the point where some eggs can be transported to the Russian Far East, to be hatched, reared and released on the breeding grounds.

Headstarting



The second element of conservation breeding is 'headstarting', in which specialists take eggs from incubating birds into captivity and raise the chicks by hand to fledging age in the Russian Far East, before release back into the wild.

In the wild, of every 20 eggs laid, just three chicks survive to adulthood. Our headstarting programme increases this likelihood by five times. Their chance of survival leaps from a mere 15% to 85%.

Headstarting has major strategic benefits:

1. Currently, very few fledglings survive to return to the breeding grounds two years later. Hunting in Myanmar and Bangladesh is thought to be a major factor in this. Already measures to reduce hunting are showing significant progress and within two years we could start to see more birds surviving to return to breed. If numbers at this stage have been boosted by headstarting, the population will stabilise and recover more quickly.
2. By rearing birds in captivity, we have the chance to attach leg-flags. Like rings, these give us the chance to track them through their flyway and detect when the number of birds returning to the breeding grounds starts to increase. This will help us assess and adjust our conservation strategies.
3. Head-starting also gives us critical experience of in-the-field methods that will potentially be needed when eggs are returned from the Slimbridge flock.

Project Partners

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding programme is a collaboration between Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Birds Russia, Moscow Zoo and the Royal Society for Protection of Birds working with colleagues from the British Trust for Ornithology, BirdLife International, ArcCona and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force.

Downloaded from <http://www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com/the-project/> on 14 June 2013

World Migratory Bird Day May 2013 - Port Macquarie, NSW

Hastings Birdwatchers at Port Macquarie on the NSW coast of eastern Australia celebrated World Migratory Bird Day with a survey trip to Pelican Island in the Hastings Estuary. They have been monitoring this site since 1985 and have found 72 resident species and 18 migratory species. The island is part of Woregore Nature Reserve, administered by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. The group has received a grant from the Australian Government's Biodiversity Fund which is being used to restore roosting habitat on Pelican Island. The local newspaper presented a comprehensive report on the Pelican Island shorebirds and threats to their survival through habitat destruction both locally and internationally - an excellent article to raise community awareness of shorebirds and their plight.



Eastern Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwit on the Pelican Island roost in the Hastings Estuary - Photos Silva Vaughan-Jones



Miranda Shorebird Centre New Zealand

Every year the Miranda Shorebird Centre, located on the Firth of Thames (NZ) has a '**Welcome to the Birds**' public open day in September/October and a '**Farewell to the Birds**' open day in March. The Miranda Shorebird Centre, established in 1990, is an information/education centre run by the Miranda Naturalists Trust (formed in 1975). To fund the running of the organisation we receive a small amount from shop sales, accommodation, membership and grants for larger projects, but we rely heavily on donations from the public. Events such as these open days are important for sustaining public interest and supporting our role as advocates for shorebirds and their habitats. Public open days usually consist of a guest speaker – the topic is usually but not necessarily related to migratory birds, followed by bird watching at our reserve. During the event we have dozens of knowledgeable birders and naturalists equipped with telescopes that can assist visitors, newcomers in particular, with bird identification and answer any questions. Over the years it has become evident that when a visitor can get a close view of a bird through a telescope, be it feeding or preening – close enough to see the twinkle in the bird's eye, their interest grows, and having people right there to answer any questions, enables more interest to develop.

One constraint we face is our capacity to comfortably seat up to 90 people only, so we have been hesitant about publicising our events too widely. We do however have plans to expand our facility. Nevertheless the media has proven to be a useful tool in spreading the word. Before our last open day, the 'Farewell to the Birds', there was a decent article (accurate and well presented) in the *NZ Herald* about the alarming rate of habitat loss on the Yellow Sea coasts of China and Korea, and how this affects our migratory birds. This provoked a positive reaction from the public. A mere few words were mentioned about our 'Farewell to the Birds' at the bottom of the article which caused a wave of first-time visitors to pour into our centre. When asked who hadn't previously been to our centre at least a third of the audience raised their hands. In the weeks following, we had a constant stream of visitors coming out to the reserve and asking 'what can we do to help?' which proved how influential the article was, emphasising how beneficial the media can be to a small organisation.

The newspaper article can be found at the following link: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10867153

Kristelle Wi



Miranda Shorebird Centre *Farewell to the Birds* open day
- photos Kristelle Wi

7th Meeting of Partners to the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership

The 7th Meeting of Partners (MoP7) to the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), was held recently in Anchorage and Seward, Alaska (USA) from 10 to 14 June 2013. The AWSG and BirdLife Australia were represented by Ken Gosbell, Alison Russell-French and Phil Straw. (Doug Watkins also participated representing Wetlands International).

The EAAFP, a Ramsar Regional Initiative, works to conserve migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent upon those habitats in the EAAF region, and is currently made up of 30 Partners, including national governments (15), inter-government organizations (4), NGOs (10) and the international business community (1). At the start of MoP7, a ceremony was held to mark the addition of three new Partners, these being the Government of Malaysia, the Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora, and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

The Flyway Site Network is one of the foundations of the Partnership; of over 1,000 sites that have so far been identified as being internationally important for migratory waterbirds, 113 have been officially recognized by being added to the EAAFP's Flyway Site Network (<http://www.eaaflyway.net/list-of-sites.php>). During MoP7, celebrations were also held for five new sites that were added to the Network:

- Arao-Higata (Japan), an important stopover site for migratory birds in the Flyway. In spring 2008, during the survey of "Monitoring site 1000, Survey on Shorebirds" conducted by the Ministry of the Environment, 6,521 birds were counted to score the second highest population in the country. See http://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/npr/ramsar_wetland/pamph/ramsarpamphen/arao.pdf
- Bako Buntal Bay (Malaysia), an important area of 3,590 ha of coastal wetland for migratory and endangered waterbirds. See <http://www.theborneopost.com/2012/12/18/plan-to-include-bay-in-flyway-site-network/>;
- Eighty-Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay (Australia), the most important non-breeding grounds for many shorebird species at the south end of their migration route; and
- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (USA), a key breeding area for shorebirds migrating along the EAAF (see video <http://youtube/4yyMEoqG0jA>).

The listing and prioritization of internationally important sites was prepared by Roger Jaensch

in a report which provides guidance and tools to assist in the nomination of many more sites for the Flyway Site Network (see reference document 3.1.3 on <http://www.eaaflyway.net/7th-mop.php>). It was also recognized that there was a need to better identify site boundaries and improve count data for sites. These are important to include in a Critical Site Network Tool as soon as practicable.

During a Shorebird Working Group session, David Melville (from NZ) reported on a survey of the Yellow Sea coastline of China, a survey he had undertaken recently with two Chinese students. The survey replicated the work of the late Mark Barter, emphasizing many of the important areas for migratory and endangered shorebirds. The increasing loss of tidal zones to reclamation and development was concerning and stimulated discussion on priorities. These issues were also key to the Yellow Sea Task Force which was established by the Partnership to develop collaboration for conserving priority areas of this critical eco region. The task is obviously complex and involves action at both local and national levels, and between a range of stakeholders. However, representatives of the national governments that border the Yellow Sea and who were present at the meeting, agreed to continue working to raise awareness of the issue at the national level. This would include holding workshops and promoting discussion and cooperation between the government departments with responsibility for the conservation and management of the coastal areas. On a positive note the Partnership recognized the action of China on their initiative to evaluate the establishment of a protected area along the Luannan coast in Hebei. In recent years the Luannan coast has been found to be a critical feeding site for shorebirds on migration from Australia and New Zealand to their breeding grounds in Far East Russia. The work lead by Chris Hassell for the Global Flyway Network, has shown the site supports over 60% of the Flyway population of the Red Knot during northward migration.

Richard Fuller of the University of Queensland assisted by Judit Szabo, the new Science Officer of the Partnership, held a 'Science Workshop', recognising the rapid decline in waterbird populations throughout the Flyway and the need for conservation decisions to be based on the best available science. The workshop commenced with several short presentations ranging from: population collapse in migratory shorebirds in Australia; new methods of assessment of tidal flat losses in the Yellow Sea; understanding migration routes through use of geolocators; to costs and benefits of habitat loss. Some of the key

7th Meeting of Partners to the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership

questions demanding answers included: (i) how are numbers of waterbirds in the EAAF changing over time? (ii) how do waterbirds respond to habitat loss? (iii) what are the migration routes and key stopover sites for all species? (iv) what makes a site important for a species? and (v) population viability analysis for endangered populations in the Flyway.

WWF(HK) reported on their initiative for regional prioritization of the status of shorebird species using the EAAF, the first step towards a flyway-wide Conservation Plan. This will be developed further through workshops and collaboration in coming months.

The importance of communicating the information shared at the meeting was also recognised and the CEPA (Communication, Education and Public Awareness) working group will be progressing some initiatives in conjunction with the Secretariat over coming months. It is useful to regularly check the EAAFP website, <http://www.eaaflyway.net/> for latest information on flyway happenings as well as information on publications and current issues.

The meeting was hosted by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Management Division who provided excellent

support and organisation in an exciting location for wildlife enthusiasts. Our hosts reinforced this by providing an excursion to the Kenai Fjords National Park by sea, as well as encouraging six of us to visit the top end of Alaska to see large numbers of breeding shorebirds in the 'land of the midnight sun' after the meeting. Thanks to our hosts for a stimulating and successful meeting.

Ken Gosbell

Chair, Shorebird Working Group of the EAAFP
July 2013



EAAFP delegates enjoying the spectacular scenery and wildlife of the Kenai Fjords

Inspiring Future Conservation Leaders - 12-year-old Tina Lin's story

Tina Lin has always had an interest in birds, but since her lucky attendance in August 2011, when just 10 years old, at a teacher-training workshop, she has become a passionate advocate for two of the world's most threatened birds. Tina lives in Fuzhou, in the Fujian province of South East China, very near to the Min Jiang Estuary, a vitally important location for migrating and wintering waterbirds, in particular the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the Chinese Crested Tern, which breeds on islands off the coast.

Although the entire world population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper travels through China on its northwards and southwards migrations every year, most of the millions of people living in eastern China are unaware that this endearing little wader relies on the coastal wetlands in their country. BirdLife International's project "*Saving Spoon-billed Sandpiper's Chinese wetlands*" – supported by the Disney Friends for Change program in 2010/11 – worked to raise awareness of this threatened species and the value of these coastal wetlands for both birds and people.

As part of the project, the International Education Manager for the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK),

helped to run highly successful environmental education training workshops, organised by the Fujian Birdwatching Society. The training was mainly for members of the Fujian Bird Watching Society, and those of the Wild Bird Society of Shanghai, but 35 local teachers and educators also attended.

An additional participant was ten-year-old Tina, who came with her mother, a local teacher. The workshop spurred Tina into taking action to raise awareness of the importance of the Min Jiang Estuary for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the Chinese Crested Tern. During the workshop, she was given a copy of the RSPB's magazine for children, *BirdLife*, which prompted her to sign up as an RSPB *Wildlife Explorer*. Since then, she has been translating articles from the magazine to share with her teachers and fellow students, and, more widely, through the Fujian Birdwatching Society website.

But Tina's devotion to saving these precious birds didn't stop there. Perhaps motivated by her first ever sighting of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper in December 2011, Tina has been working alongside members of the Fujian Birdwatching Society to

Inspiring Future Conservation Leaders - Tina Lin's story cont.

educate her teachers and classmates - and those at another local school - about the birds of the Min Jiang Estuary and introduced them to the joys of wildlife watching - even teaching them how to use a telescope.

News of Tina's activities spread, and in May last year, she was featured not only in *Birdlife* magazine but also in a local newspaper. Expanding her audience even further, in November last year Tina was invited to speak at a TEDxYouthDay event in Fuzhou. TEDxYouthDay is a series of 'TEDx' events, part of the global ideas-sharing forum TED, that happen all around the world in late November to coincide with *Universal Children's Day*. The events are designed to empower and inspire young people and Tina was the youngest speaker at the event in Fuzhou. Alongside her enthusiastic advocacy and education activities, Tina also gets directly involved in monitoring

the birds themselves - adding to her, and our, knowledge of their behaviour and needs.

In June this year, BirdLife International held its World Congress in Ottawa, where Tina told her inspirational story as part of the workshop on 'Connecting Youth to Nature'.



Adapted from an article prepared by BirdLife International

BirdLife International Congress – Ottawa, June 2013

As a major supporter of BirdLife International, I was invited to attend the International Meeting of Partners, World Congress and be a guest at the 90th Anniversary Gala Dinner by Peter Schei, BirdLife Chairman and HIH Princess Takamado of Japan, BirdLife Honorary President.



Phil Straw (diplomatically) discussing some of the issues facing wetland conservation in Japan with HIH Princess Takamado

BirdLife International holds an international Meeting of Partners and World Congress once every five years. These are big affairs. However the 2013 Congress was an exceptionally large event marking the 90th anniversary of what was known as the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICPB) until its name change in 1993. More than 500 people representing 121 Partner organisations covering 150 countries across the globe were in attendance. The BirdLife Partnership now has almost 3 million members and employs 7,400 staff. The 2013 Global Partnership Meeting and Congress were held in the beautiful city of Ottawa. In addition to these events a Gala Dinner was held for the organisation's major supporters, some 600 in all.

The evening provided an opportunity to debate the challenges and meet with key conservation leaders and those delegates working on the front lines of fieldwork.

I accepted this invitation at a time when we in Australia need to communicate on a much wider scale than we have been doing in the past, when endangered species in Australia, and in our Flyway, are heading for extinction at an alarming rate. I missed the first day of events including the Regional Partnership business meetings of Europe and Central Asia, Africa Regional, Americas Regional, Asia Regional, Middle East Regional and Pacific Regional. This was due to my attendance at the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership Meetings in Alaska, which overlapped part of the BirdLife events.

The most important of these meetings would have been the Asia Regional Partnership as this covers our Flyway, and the Pacific Regional Partnership of which BirdLife Australia is a Partner. However, the EAAF Partnership Meeting included members of the Pacific Regional Partnership (a few days earlier) and I was able to catch up with our Pacific Regional Partnership colleagues and accepted an invitation to visit the Regional Office in Fiji in the near future. Fortunately, James O'Connor, Research Manager of BirdLife Australia was able to attend business meetings as well as the World Congress. James was kept very busy and we never had more than a few minutes between us to catch up during the events. I know that the BirdLife CEO, Marco Lambertini, was very pleased to see an active involvement in the meetings and

BirdLife International Congress – Ottawa, June 2013 cont.

congress from BirdLife Australia and is “looking forward to discussing opportunities to engage BirdLife Australia more closely with the Pacific and global BirdLife Partnership”.

There were many events relevant to bird conservation world-wide and clear indications of the advantages of working with Partners struggling with, or solving, conservation threats in different parts of the world. One area of particular interest I found was during one of the thematic workshops on ‘Local Empowerment’, *A global programme for connecting and inspiring young people with nature*. The star of this workshop, and at the Gala Dinner, was Tina, a twelve-year-old Chinese student who had been inspired by the threats to shorebirds on the intertidal mudflats close to her school. These shorebirds included the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Chinese Crested Tern, as well as species migrating to Australia and New Zealand. A few of us in the BirdLife supporters family were asked to sponsor Tina and her mother’s travel from China to attend the events.



Tina Lin talking to Phil about her enthusiasm for helping to protect migratory shorebirds in China.

Tina was originally inspired by BirdLife International’s project “*Saving Spoon-billed Chinese Wetlands*” which raised awareness of this threatened species and the value of coastal wetlands for both birds and people. As part of this project the International Education Manager for the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB) (BirdLife Partner in the UK), helped to run highly successful environmental education training workshops in China, organised by the Fujian Bird Watching Society. The training was mainly for members of the Fujian Bird Watching Society, and those of the Wild Bird Society of Shanghai, but 35 local teachers and educators also attended. An additional participant was Tina, then ten years old, who came with her mother, a local teacher. The workshop spurred Tina into taking action to raise awareness of the importance of the Min Jiang Estuary for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the Chinese Crested Tern. During the workshop, she was given a copy of the RSPB’s magazine

for children, *BirdLife*, which prompted her to sign up as an RSPB *Wildlife Explorer*. Since then, she has been translating articles from the magazine to share with her teachers and fellow students, and, more widely, through the Fujian Bird Watching Society website.

News of Tina’s activities spread, and in May last year, she was featured not only in the RSPB’s *BirdLife* magazine but also in a local Chinese newspaper. Subsequently Tina was invited to speak at a TEDxYouthDay event in Fuzhou, China, as part of the *Universal Children’s Day* events. The events are designed to empower and inspire young people and Tina was the youngest speaker at the event in Fuzhou.

An animated video project to highlight the plight of migratory shorebirds, under the flagship species the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, was spread across schools right across the bird’s flyway, from Russia to Bangladesh. This project, *Journey of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper*, involved 500 children and helpers from 12 areas in 8 countries (Russia, Republic of Korea, Japan, mainland China, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh). Children coloured the animation series picture by picture. About 1200 pictures were coloured. The project was organized by the China Programme of BirdLife International/Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and was sponsored by the Eric Hosking Trust. I am sure you will find the results touching (see link on You Tube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJq4eaoeWig>)

I think BirdLife Australia can learn a lot from the power of school education in bringing to attention the threats to many of our birds and telling people about the existence of BirdLife Australia nationally, across the region and globally. I am sure more will be said as part of James’ report to the board and members of BirdLife Australia.

We are fortunate that so many people and organisations have taken a keen interest in the immense pressure on shorebird habitat within the EAA Flyway, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature, International Wader Study Group, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, the British Bird Fair (as a funding source) as well as BirdLife International. Nicola Crockford, International Species Policy Officer BirdLife International and RSPB was very busy organising side events, both at the EAA Flyway meeting in Alaska and during the BirdLife events in Ottawa, to emphasise the need to keep the threats in the Yellow Sea in the thoughts and actions of China and Korea. Such effort from people and organisations on the other side of the globe to highlight the plight of migratory shorebirds in ‘our’ flyway is remarkable.

Phil Straw