Tattler

Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways & Australian Shorebirds 2020 Project

No. 41 October 2016

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Red-necked Stint (Photo courtesy Charles Dove)

Editorial

Migratory shorebirds arouse awe in many people when they learn of their amazing long-distance migrations. Capturing that awe and turning it into conservation action is a huge challenge that must be met on many fronts – from art to funding to science to diplomacy to active participation. Amellia Formby's inspiring project Wing Threads has the potential to engage a wide audience and raise awareness of the need to protect stopover and staging sites within Australia and along the EAAF.

Recent revision of the population estimates for shorebirds using the EAAF has been conducted by a team of scientists using monitoring data as well as innovative techniques for estimating numbers of shorebirds that may be using un-surveyed suitable habitat. The need to explore potential habitat and monitor newly discovered areas is highlighted in the article about a new flyway site in Palau, Micronesia. Figures from this site were included in the revised population estimates.

Satellite tracking continues to provide exciting details about migration routes and stopovers while flag sightings confirm repeat visits and links throughout the Flyway. A summary of the 10th Australasian Shorebird Conference reveals the broad scope of research into shorebirds – something for everyone in this issue!

Liz Crawford, Editor

Contributions are welcome and should be sent to: tattler@awsg.org.au

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Since April of this year, I began learning to pilot a microlight aircraft with the intention to fly the migratory path of the Red-necked Stint, travelling the length of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) from Australia to Siberia, to raise awareness for shorebird conservation.

The idea to fly to Siberia first came to me when I was driving to Bunnings. My friend Carl had been talking to me a few nights previously about how he and his brother had always wanted to fly around Australia in a microlight to raise money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. I was surprised to hear from Carl that flying a microlight was relatively simple to learn and didn't cost the earth as I had assumed. These facts settled themselves in my mind and over the coming days I found myself daydreaming about learning to fly. So there I was several days later, waiting at the traffic lights outside QEII hospital in Perth, when the thought popped into my head – 'I could fly a microlight to Siberia following the migration path of the shorebirds'. It left me stunned. Straight away I knew the idea was big and inspiring and I could do it if I chose to. That was in March 2015. It would be another year before I was brave enough to share the idea with people who could help me see it become a reality.

My background is in science and the arts. I live in Perth and work as a technician in The School of Animal Biology at The University of Western Australia, but am originally from Gippsland, Victoria. In 2014, I completed a research project on the behavioural ecology of Black Swans for my MSc majoring in zoology at The University of Melbourne. Prior to studying zoology, I worked as a tapestry weaver for over 7 years at the Australian Tapestry Workshop (ATW) in South Melbourne. Funnily enough, it was while at the ATW that I first discovered shorebirds through collaboration with artist, John Wolseley in 2010. John had invited my fellow weavers and I to the unveiling of his public mural '*Wild Cries Wild Wings of Wetland and Swamp*' in Melbourne Square. The book *Invisible Connections* was launched at the same event and I bought a copy. Learning of the birds' migratory feats fascinated and astounded me. Soon after, I joined the VWSG and my passion for shorebirds was strengthened through many an expedition to band and flag shorebirds around Victoria. Earlier this year I was privileged to be a part of the annual AWSG banding expedition to 80-Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay in north-west Australia. It was here that I witnessed the breathtaking sight of hundreds of thousands of shorebirds carpeting 80-Mile Beach, as far as the eye could see. The thought that this migratory phenomenon could one day be spoken about in past tense reminiscences like those of the Passenger Pigeon, was the deciding factor that gave me the courage to commit to experiencing the journey of the shorebirds firsthand.

So in April of this year, I found myself at Sky Sports Flying School in York - about 2 hours drive east of Perth – learning to fly a microlight with my flight instructor, Gordon Marshall. As fate would have it, the microlight model I am learning to fly just happens to be called the XT 912 *Tundra*, manufactured by Airborne Airsports. In addition to this fortuitous coincidence, there are many parallels between the microlight and the Red-necked Stint, which make them the perfect flagship duo. First, the Red-necked Stint is the smallest of the shorebirds in the EAAF, weighing only 30g. Likewise, the microlight is the smallest of the ultralight aircraft, weighing only 220kg with a maximum take-off weight of 450kg. Being an open-cockpit aircraft, I will also be exposed to the elements during flight and being able to fly at all will be largely dependent on prevailing wind conditions. Last, you wouldn't think a small aircraft like a microlight could make a long-distance journey such as this, but it can - if you put some extra fuel on board, just like the Red-necked Stint. Fitted with ferry tanks, a microlight can achieve distances over 1000 kilometres in a single flight, effectively doubling its range.

Wing Threads - flight to the tundra cont.

As I write this, I have 13 hours of flight training under my belt. Gordon tells me I will need 500-1000 hours of flight training to gain the kind of experience required to safely undertake an international flight of this scale. What I find incredible is that I will have to practice flying for several years, build up hundreds of flight hours, learn to navigate, and be reliant on safety equipment, radio communications and a ground crew just to achieve what newly fledged shorebird chicks are capable of doing at only 8 weeks of age!

My plan is to first do a cross-country flight from Melbourne to Broome at the start of 2019, arriving at Roebuck Bay just before the birds depart on their northward migration at the end of March. I then intend to complete the international flight from Broome to Siberia in 2022, departing Broome with the shorebirds in March/April and arriving on the Arctic tundra in early June at the start of the breeding season.

Throughout the journey, I intend to capture my experiences on film to create a documentary. Shorebirds are a living example of how we are all linked to one another through a global ecology - their migration path is a *thread* that ties people living along the Flyway together. Therefore, it is not just the story of the shorebirds I would like to tell, but also of the people that they share their lives with. This theme of *threads* is also reflected in the stitched fabric wing of the aircraft itself and my past history working with thread as a tapestry weaver. In this way, *Wing Threads – Flight to the Tundra* unites my three main passions in life – shorebirds, flying and the creative arts.

You are invited to join me for every flap of the way by following *Wing Threads – Flight to the Tundra* at www.wingthreads.com. *Wing Threads* is also on Facebook (search for @wingthreads) and Twitter (@milly_formby). A big thank you to BirdLife Australia and the AWSG for their generous support as project partners.

Amellia Formby

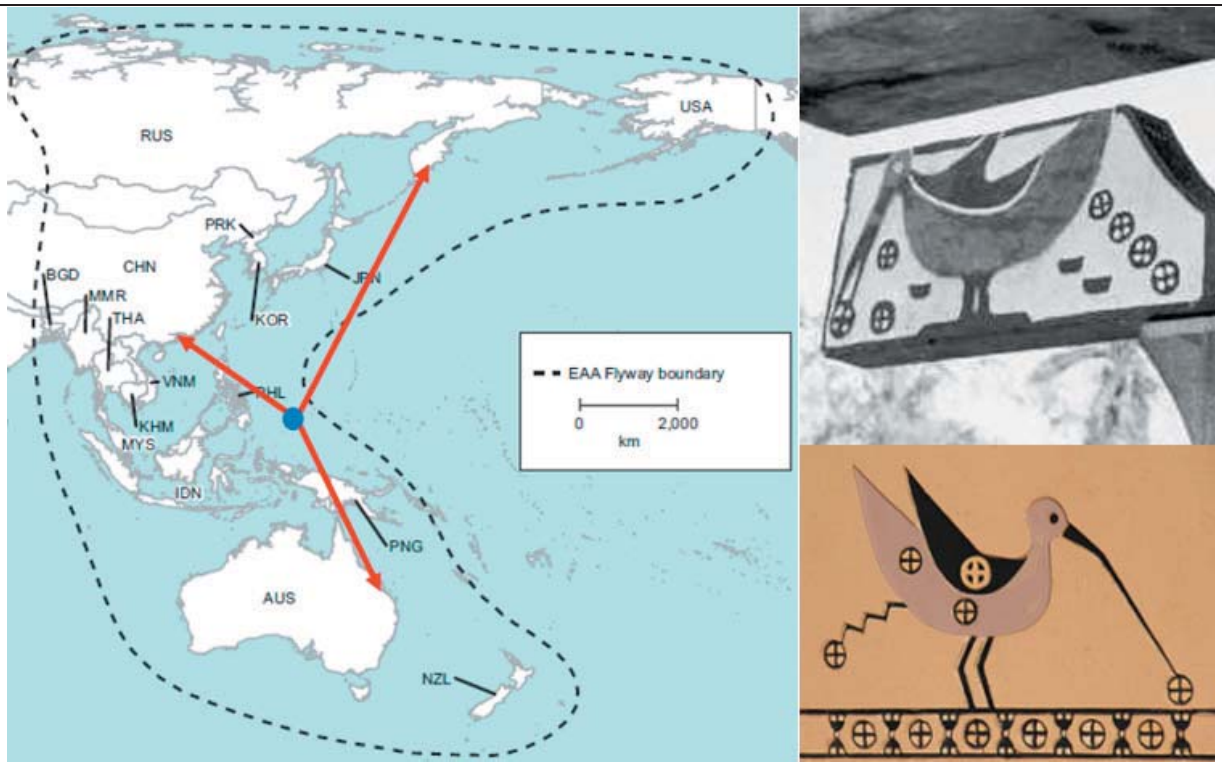
Whimbrel recorded second year in a row on the Yangtze River

The Singapore-flagged Whimbrel Green over White flags engraved A0 was seen on 21 August 2016 at Zhangjiagang, Jiangsu Province in China along the Yangtze River. Mr Qian Feng, a local birdwatcher saw the bird within a flock of 700-900 Whimbrel. This bird ws also seen at the same location a year ago on 29 August 2015. Mr Qian Feng kindly contacted me and shared the information through a local bird expert Mr **Zhang Lin** in China.

Whimbrel A0 was ringed and flagged on 4 October 2012 at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, and aged as a first-year juvenile. It's believed the bird is taking a break at Zhangjiagang while returning from its breeding ground to its wintering ground in Singapore. It's wonderful to know the bird is actually using the same site for stopover during its annual migration. Thanks to Mr Qian Feng for his great effort!

David Li

A new flyway site in Palau, Micronesia - discovery, observations and challenges



Palau's location in the flyway, and flag re-sighting links (left).
Shorebird cultural depictions: on traditional "bai" meeting house (top right) and on Palau's capital building (bottom right).

The Republic of Palau, Micronesia is the Pacific Island nation closest to Asia. The main island complex lies about 875 km east of the southern Philippines, and 975 km north of western Irian Jaya, Indonesia. While usually considered part of Oceania by humans, from the perspective of many migratory birds, Palau is within the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). Shorebirds have long been known as part of Palau's avifauna. The story of the 'delaroch' (Whimbrel/ Far Eastern Curlew) that flew to Palau, bringing Palauan money - a treasured cultural heirloom, is illustrated by prominent shorebird motifs on Palau's capital building, on traditional meeting houses, and on the Melekeok state flag. Migratory shorebirds were significant to a culture who lived for 4000 years with little contact with the outside world.

Modern ornithological knowledge is still catching up. Shorebirds were collected from Palau in the 1800s, on the 1930s Whitney South Seas Expedition, and after WWII, and recorded in more recent decades. High species diversity, links to the EAAF and the non-breeding overstay of many shorebird species were documented, but Palau's shorebird numbers were thought to be low, and most recent ornithological work focussed on the endemic land birds.

Following a suggestion from Ron Leidich, expert Palau naturalist and tour guide, I set out by kayak in December 2013 to explore remote sandflats in Peleliu State. The objective was my own Palau species list, but I was quickly rewarded beyond expectations, with a Black-faced Spoonbill, and far more shorebirds than I had seen in the rest of Palau combined. Then the tide receded and I spent 8 hours marooned under a blisteringly hot sun contemplating that this shorebird hotspot beyond all expectations for Palau needed to be documented, and that I would have to learn to love such unforgiving conditions to be able to do that. Results to date are presented here.

Site description

The Peleliu Lkes Important Bird Area (IBA) (as it is now known) is an unusual geographic feature. Small oceanic islands such as those in Micronesia do not typically provide substantial areas of intertidal habitat suitable for shorebirds. Large sediment-depositing rivers are absent and most coastlines are wave exposed, and/or coral and mangrove dominated.

However, a combination of geological and marine factors has created an area of tidal flats within Palau's southern lagoon. These Peleliu sandflats ("Lkes", in Palauan), are bordered by lagoon seagrass on three sides and the mangroves of Olngewaol island to the south, with two small islets Belualasmau and Ngeuall, within. The sandflats are unpolluted and unmodified, as is the surrounding marine lagoon, which protects the sandflats from wave exposure. The adjacent

A new flyway site in Palau, Micronesia cont.

small islands are uninhabited. Only a few fishermen and crab hunters visit. There is no fresh water, and except for a long hot walk, the islands are only reached by small boats on spring high tides. Multiple species of fish, rays and sharks come onto the sandflats to feed at high tide. The sandflats are very flat, drain slowly, and are dotted with stingray holes; many holding water through the low tides, a possible contributor to biological productivity.

The area of sandflat in the IBA looks to be 35-50 hectares, but less area is exposed during neap tides (an important constraint?). Some areas beyond may provide food, but likely not on all tides.

Methodology

I have now visited the site sixteen times since March 2014. Except for two half-day visits, these each lasted 2-3 days, allowing several tide cycles for counts. Telescope counts are made for larger and distinctive species, and when possible all species. These are supplemented by photos of roosting birds, providing panorama montages, over which colour-coded dots are overlaid and counted, for the smaller numerous species. Photo counts usually exceed equivalent visual counts by 20 to 50%. Only the birds visible at a single point in time are included, so all results are conservative minimums, and sometimes clearly undercounts. The highest species counts from each 2-3 day visit is used – this partly offsets challenging observation conditions. All species have been documented photographically.

Counts have improved with site knowledge, with a jump in late 2015 after discovering that neap tides improved viewing. Earlier visits were made on spring tides, due to easier kayak access.

Most visits were during migration periods; September-November and March-May. One breeding season visit was in late June 2015. In early December birds could still be moving through, so the early February visits may best indicate non-breeding season numbers.

Results to date

Table 1 shows the highest species counts by month, plus International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Convention on Migratory species (CMS), and EAAF status, and the site maximums as a percentage of the EAAF population estimates.

Peleliu Lkes IBA: view from above (top)
Demanding logistics (below)

The site has recorded 25 shorebird species, including 8 IUCN listed, 15 from EAAF priority populations and the 3 species listed under the CMS for "Concerted and Co-operative Action". Grey-tailed Tattler has exceeded the 1% of global population threshold, and several other species exceed or might exceed important site criteria for EAAF priority populations.

The maximum species counts sum to 3543 individual shorebirds recorded, with seasonal top counts of 3059 in April, 2832 in October, 1493 in early February and 611 in late June.

Grey-tailed Tattlers in flight at Peleliu Lkes IBA

A new flyway site in Palau, Micronesia cont.

Table 1: Peleliu Lkes IBA: Maximum species counts by month, March 2014 to September 2016

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	All	IUCN	CMS	EAAF (4)		
Visits (1)		2	1	4	1	1			2	2	1	2	15		(3)	Pop	%	Pri*
Grey-tailed Tattler (2)		300	300	772	150	74			363	632	85	109	772	NT		61,000	1.27%	yes
Red-necked Stint		439	Pr	1,101	111	261			207	948	374	386	1101	NT		466,000	0.24%	yes
Asiatic Whimbrel		304	48	484	53	114			271	489	230	222	489			64,000	0.76%	yes
Grey Plover		118	81	42	31	7			30	61	31	67	118			79,000	0.15%	yes
Pacific Golden Plover		95	Pr	254	3	41			20	80	17	30	254			125,000	0.20%	yes
Ruddy Turnstone		280	Pr	305	36	44			260	328	72	28	328			30,000	1.09%	yes
Sandplover sp.		165	30	138	27	38			110	277	70	58	277					
of which, Greater													?			166,000	?	yes
of which, Lesser													?			38,500	?	yes
Common Greenshank		79	16	34	13	20			36	60	10	51	79					
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper		-	-	8	-	1			12	24	4	2	24					
Terek Sandpiper		5	7	17	3	2			5	5	2	7	17					
Kentish Plover		14	3	4	-	-			-	2	8	17	17					
Bar-tailed Godwit		16	11	14	11	3			9	4	6	8	16	VU	**			yes
Great Knot		7	5	10	9	1			4	10	-	6	10	EN	**			yes
Common Redshank		3	2	5	2	-			6	9	5	6	9					
Sanderling		7	6	4	3	-			7	2	5	2	7					
Far Eastern Curlew		4	3	3	1	2			3	4	-	5	5	EN	**			yes
Curlew Sandpiper		5	2	4	2	1			5	4	-	1	5	NT				yes
Black-tailed Godwit		-	-	4	2	2			3	4	-	-	4	NT				yes
Broad-billed Sandpiper		-	-	1	-	-			4	1	-	-	4					
Marsh Sandpiper		2	-	1	-	-			1	1	-	-	2					
Common Sandpiper		-	-	1	-	-			-	2	-	-	2					
Dunlin		-	1	1	-	-			-	-	-	-	1					yes
Long-toed Stint		-	-	-	-	-			-	1	-	-	1					
Eurasian Curlew		-	1	1	-	-			-	-	-	-	1					yes
Sum, shorebirds		1843	516	3208	457	611			1356	2948	919	1005	3543					
Black-faced Spoonbill		-	1	-	-	-			-	-	-	1	1	EN				

Pr = Present; good numbers observed, but not counted

(1) 0.5 = short visits with partial counts

(2) Estimates in italics: flock flushed from mangrove roost

(3) ** = Listed for "Concerted and Co-operative action during 2014-2017", under the Convention on Migratory Species

(4) Table 2, WWF shorebird prioritisation report; Pri* - Priority

Stop Press: A 9 October 2016 count for Asiatic Whimbrel was a record 596, with many in wing moult. That exceeds 1% of the current 55,000 population estimate, but not quite 1% of the new 64,000 population estimate which includes estimates for non-coverage of suitable habitat.

A new flyway site in Palau, Micronesia cont.

Mixed shorebird flocks at Peleliu Lkes IBA

Key species results

Grey-tailed Tattler: Always present in good numbers, but often roosts in the mangroves so difficult to count; undercounts are likely. The highest counts on 25 October 2015 and 16 April 2016 exceeded 1% of the estimated global population, and doubled the highest site counts outside the migration periods. Birds with wing moult were recorded on 2 October 2016. A Grey-tailed Tattler satellite tracked from Queensland stopped over elsewhere in Micronesia on both north and south migrations.

Red-necked Stint: The most numerous shorebird at the site year round, with peak counts on 24 October 2015 and 16 April 2016. 1101 birds is just short of the EAAF 0.25% stopover threshold, and over double the high non-migration season site count. No other site known in Palau appears to hold this species, except for very small numbers for short periods.

Asiatic Whimbrel: High counts on the same October 2015 and April 2016 dates exceeded the EAAF staging threshold, but were only 60% higher than an early February 2016 count. Primary wing moult was recorded on 2 October 2016. Ngeuall islet is the main high-tide roost.

Ruddy Turnstone: The high of 328 is 1.09% of the estimated EAAF population, and more than 260 have been recorded in February, April, September and October. Count fluctuations do seem to align with low-tide density, but unreliability of this species at the main high-tide roost, means that birds are usually counted in front of incoming tides. It is easy to miss birds this way.

Greater and Lesser Sandplover: Sandplovers are numerous at times, but viewing distances do not allow separate species counts. Greater Sandplovers may comprise up to 80-95% at times. Lesser Sandplovers are confirmed most months, and are sometimes more numerous, including a partial count in April 2016 of 27 birds – more were probably present. Breeding plumage Lesser Sandplovers show the black breast line of the *mongolus* group, and a flagged bird was from Kamchatka. Birds taken in 1945 were tentatively assigned to *Calidris mongolus stegmani.* Confirmation of sand-plover species/subspecies and counts remains a challenging priority. One or both species may exceed EAAF staging thresholds, particularly if Lesser Sandplovers are *stegmani*.

Pacific Golden Plover: Present year-round, with a large peak recorded in April. Common on grassy areas elsewhere in Palau. A bird banded in January 2010 as part of an Avian Influenza project was re-sighted in the exact same location in January 2015.

Grey Plover: Present year-round, the only known Palau location where this occurs. Large fluctuations in numbers. Wing moult recorded in October.

Bar-tailed Godwit: Small numbers are present year round, the only known Palau location where this occurs. Other known Palau sites hold only occasional short-stay birds. The Peleliu Lkes birds are *menzbieri*, except for one bird lacking a clear white V up the back.

Great Knot: Small numbers are present year round, a significant discovery as Great Knots were thought to be a rare visitor only, and Palau was not generally considered a range state. They may have been more common, given an observation of 15-20 Great Knots near the new IBA, in 1945.

Far Eastern Curlew: Small numbers are present year-round, the only known Palau location where this occurs. The species was once more common, but sightings elsewhere are now rare.

Black-faced Spoonbill: The Black-faced Spoonbill found on the first December 2013 visit stayed until March 2013. By then it was changing to breeding plumage.

Flagged birds

Flags were not actively looked for until 2016. The confirmation at Peleliu Lkes IBA of a Greater Sandplover (flagged at Chongming Dao, China), a Lesser Sandplover (flagged Kamchatka), and a Great Knot (flagged Queensland) at another Palau site, demonstrate links with other EAAF sites.

A new flyway site in Palau, Micronesia cont.

Discussion and the challenge of long-term site protection

The annual dynamics of shorebirds at the Peleliu Lkes IBA, are starting to be understood, but there are large coverage gaps, and new discoveries and higher counts continue to be added. The site appears to function as a stopover location, perhaps a crucial one given the across-ocean distance from other sites, but also as a full non-breeding season destination.

A site with over 3500 shorebirds and 25 species is exceptional for a small oceanic island. Future stopover counts may surprise, and the long-term conservation value of a pristine shorebird refuge at this latitude and distance from other sites warrants consideration, and linking to research on migration strategies, particularly for the smaller species. The site meets criteria for IBA, EAAFP and RAMSAR, and Convention on Migratory Species commitments apply. The site is of high national significance – the top shorebird count from other Palau sites is only 128. Palau has a strong environmental leadership record: traditional mechanisms; the world's first shark sanctuary; the 2015 declaration of 80% of the nation's EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) as a marine sanctuary; the 'Micronesia challenge' commitments; and the Palau Protected Area Network, a formal conservation mechanism.

However, the way forward is unclear. Palau is a very small country economically reliant on tourism. Since 2014 there has been an explosion of new visitors from China, accompanied by investors advocating new projects. Islands adjacent to the sandflats, and some of the sandflats themselves have been proposed for developments. It is hard to envisage how this can occur and the integrity of the site be preserved. A very large-scale plan promoted a year ago seems to be on hold, but new proposals may be imminent and challenging. Awareness raising has begun, including the new Important Bird Area announcement by the Palau Conservation Society (the local BirdLife partner), and shorebirds featuring in the State of Palau's Birds 2015 report (Belau National Museum). With shorebirds now on the local radar, there is interest in joining the EAAFP, but for reasons unknown Palau is not listed as an eligible country. Hopefully this will not impede practical international conservation partnerships. Key needs are to effectively engage the local community and Peleliu State government, achieve formal protection status, and develop quality locally-based conservation management and monitoring capacity for the long term. Entities and individuals with an interest in assisting, or discussing this new site and findings, are encouraged to contact the author: **gmckinlay@hotmail.com**.

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Glenn McKinlay

Ruddy Turnstone links King Island, Tasmania to China

A photo of a flagged Ruddy Turnstone taken by Stephen Shen in April 2016 at Shenzhen Bay, China and posted in **Shorebird leg-flag sightings in the EAAF - highlights photos reports etc**. added to the known history of sightings for this long-distance traveller. The AWSG Flag Sightings database manager Joris Driessen said: "This is the first re-sighting for Orange Engraved/Blue 'WSJ', banded aged 2+ on 1 December 2015 on King Island, Tasmania and retrapped at the same location on 10 February 2016." The bird is carrying a data logger.

Ruddy Turnstone - Stephen Shen

Posting of photographs of flagged shorebirds on this Facebook site adds to our knowledge of bird migration and provides a great forum for sharing information.

Revision of East Asian-Australasian Flyway shorebird population estimates

During the first half of 2016, a team comprising Danny Rogers, Richard Fuller, Doug Watkins and Dan Weller, led by Birgita Hansen, revised population estimates for the 37 shorebird species in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), listed under the Federal *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* 1999 (EPBC Act).

This project was initiated due to the recognition that shorebird populations are rapidly decreasing in the EAAF and that previous population estimates were well out of date and could no longer be used for management and conservation efforts.

Two important differences between this revision and the previous synthesis (Bamford *et al.* 2008) was the enormous increase in the quantity and quality of data available for the contemporary analyses and some new methodological approaches used.

Count data from the Shorebirds 2020 program (previously the Australasian Wader Studies Group's Population Monitoring Program), the Ornithological Society of New Zealand Wader Census and the Asian Waterbird Census were compiled and summarised to derive country-based species estimates.

There continue to be many areas within the EAAF supporting significant numbers of migratory shorebirds that are not counted during regular surveys. These occur both within and outside of Australia, for example, much of the Northern Territory coastline, inland Australia, and countries such as Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Myanmar and several others.

The under-counting of inland habitats in Australia has long been recognised as problematic for estimating population sizes of certain species of migratory shorebirds. To address this problem, a modelling approach that used existing inland count data and a number of variables likely to be predictors of inland habitat suitability (e.g. rainfall and climatic variation) was undertaken to derive estimates of "inland" population sizes for a selection of non-coastal obligate freshwater and grassland species (e.g. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Little Curlew). These estimates were added to those derived from analyses of count data from coastal and near-coastal Shorebirds 2020 sites, to produce a population estimate for Australia.

Previous estimates had made only cursory attempts to account for areas where shorebirds were being undercounted or not counted at all. This current effort used a novel approach for the EAAF to account for uncounted habitat and thus, estimate the number of "missing" birds from regular censuses. The new approach was considered to be more robust and more accurate in its estimates than previous efforts for Australia and the EAAF.

A process of spatial extrapolation using modelled intertidal areas (derived from intertidal/coastal bathymetry and tidal predictions) was used to estimate the proportion of suitable coastal habitats not counted. This allowed for refinement of the existing data sets from counts of coastal roosts and feeding sites.

Extrapolation factors were generated for every country using this extrapolation method and used to adjust estimates based on actual count data. In the case of Australian states and biogeographical regions, and several Asian countries, separate extrapolation factors were derived and applied to shorebird count data from that region (e.g. north-west Australia was distinguished from central and southern Western Australia) based on the species present.

In addition to the spatial extrapolation, population estimates from the above method were combined in an analysis using the breeding distribution of each species and derived breeding densities to generate a second population estimate based upon breeding data. These estimates were generated for species with poor count data in the EAAF.

In several other cases, other sources of information were used to generate a population estimate, usually where a species was data deficient in both its breeding and non-breeding ranges (e.g. Latham's Snipe) or where the majority of the species' population occurs in another flyway and the proportion using the EAAF is relatively minor (e.g. Pectoral Sandpiper).

The new approaches highlighted gaps in our monitoring, which need to be filled, and assumptions, which need to be refined and tested. This will require engagement with, and active support of the shorebird monitoring community.

The final population estimates for some species were substantially different to those from previous assessments, owing largely to the availability of much newer shorebird count data, plus the usage of the spatial extrapolation method to account for uncounted intertidal habitats. These new population estimates will enable us to continue to identify nationally and internationally important sites for shorebirds with confidence.

The EPBC Act Policy Statement 3.21 - Industry guidelines for avoiding, assessing and mitigating impacts on EPBC Act listed migratory shorebird

Revision of EAAF shorebird population estimates cont.

species – will be updated to reflect the new estimates.

The project team would like to thank Dr Mark Carey and the Department of the Environment (Australian Government) for supporting this project. The team would also like to thank Rob Clemens, Eric Woehler and Mike Newman for their significant contributions to this project.

The report will be made available later in 2016.

The report citation is:
Hansen, B.D., Fuller, R.A., Watkins, D., Rogers, D.I., Clemens, R.S., Newman, M., Woehler, E.J. and Weller, D.R. (2016). Revision of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Population Estimates for 37 listed Migratory Shorebird Species. Unpublished report for the Department of the Environment. BirdLife Australia, Melbourne.

Birgita Hansen

Managing migratory shorebird habitat at Sydney Olympic Park

The last 16 years at Sydney Olympic Park has seen a period of consolidation and maturation for shorebird habitat after the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. For estuarine wetlands, this period has focussed on habitat enhancement for long-term provision of feeding and roosting habitats for migratory shorebirds. Initiatives include: reinstatement of a natural regime of daily tidal exchange; artificial roost sites; tidal level control to balance saltmarsh and mudflat extent; control of mangrove colonisation; reinstatement of sightlines and reduction of disturbance and predation. Management of the wetlands is guided by an extensive ecological monitoring program.

The Waterbird Refuge at high tide, Sydney Olympic Park. Black-winged Stilts can be seen feeding in the shallows with healthy coastal saltmarsh in the foreground.

A nocturnal survey was added to the program when large numbers of migratory shorebirds were observed flying in to roost at the Waterbird Refuge in Bicentennial Park on several evenings in late 2006. These observations stimulated the annual nocturnal migratory shorebird survey, run by the Sydney Olympic Authority since 2007, as the primary tool for understanding migratory shorebird activity at the Park after dark. These surveys aimed to answer questions about how many waterbirds were using this waterbody at night and by extension, how they utilise the various habitats within the Parramatta River estuary.

From 2007, the surveys have shown that the estuarine wetlands of Sydney Olympic Park comprise part of an inter-related network of waterbird habitats within the Parramatta River estuary. Birds move between these sites in a complex manner depending on a number of environmental variables.

The 2016 survey was completed over four nights in February 2016, coinciding with three high tides and one low tide. Surveys began approximately one hour before sunset and continued until darkness, approximately 45 minutes after sunset. A red-filtered torch was used briefly at the Waterbird Refuge after dark to confirm species present in mixed roosting flocks.
Surveys were undertaken at the following sites:

- Waterbird Refuge, Badu Mangroves, Sydney Olympic Park
- Main Lagoon, Newington Nature Reserve, Sydney Olympic Park
- Mason Park, Strathfield Local Government Area (LGA)
- Hen and Chicken Bay, City of Canada Bay LGA

Surveys were conducted with the assistance of volunteers from the local community and Strathfield Council.

A total of 26 bird species were observed during the migratory shorebird surveys. The greatest

Managing migratory shorebird habitat at Sydney Olympic Park cont.

biodiversity was seen at the Waterbird Refuge with 22 species followed by Mason Park with 11 and Newington Nature Reserve with 10. Three species were migratory shorebirds: Bar-tailed Godwit (max 137 birds), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (max 23 birds) and Pacific Golden Plover (max 1 bird). These species were observed at the Waterbird Refuge (Bar-tailed Godwit and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper), Hen and Chicken Bay (Bar-tailed Godwit and Pacific Golden Plover) and Newington Nature Reserve (Sharp-tailed Sandpiper). Outside of Sydney Olympic Park, Hen and Chicken Bay appears to be the most important site for migratory species, with none seen at Mason Park. The length of time birds remained at sites throughout the night is unknown.

Bar-Tailed Godwit

Before dark, Bar-tailed Godwits fed and roosted mainly on the intertidal sandbanks/mudflats at Hen and Chicken Bay. These individuals were observed to leave Hen and Chicken Bay at or just after dark. Not long after, flocks of Godwits would appear at the Waterbird Refuge where they exhibited feeding behaviour during the incoming tide or roosted when the tide reached into the saltmarsh. It is assumed that these are the same birds moving through the catchment from a diurnal feeding/roosting site to a nocturnal feeding/roosting site. The surveys show a decline in overall numbers at the Waterbird Refuge since surveys began, dropping from 250 in 2007 to 120 birds in 2016.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were observed at two survey sites: Newington Nature Reserve and the Waterbird Refuge. A maximum of 23 birds was recorded at Newington Nature Reserve but, unlike the Bar-tailed Godwit who moved sites during the surveys, the sandpipers were present at either Newington Nature Reserve or the Waterbird Refuge before dark and were still present at the end of the survey.

Since these surveys began in 2007, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper's presence at Sydney Olympic Park has been sporadic with the species present in 2009-10 (maximum 130 birds) and then 2013-16 (max count 115 in 2013-14 and minimum of 21 in 2016). Prior to 2012-13, the majority of records for this species were from Mason Park, whereas after 2013, the birds appear to use the wetlands within Sydney Olympic Park with more frequency.

Pacific Golden Plover

One individual Pacific Golden Plover was observed at Hen and Chicken Bay in association with the Bar-tailed Godwits. This individual appeared to leave Hen and Chicken Bay at the same time as the godwits but its destination was not ascertained during this survey. This species has historically been recorded in small numbers (1-15 birds) regularly in Mason Park, the Waterbird Refuge and Hen and Chicken Bay.

Four other surveys, part of Sydney Olympic Park's biodiversity monitoring program, recorded a total of six migratory shorebird species within the wetlands of Sydney Olympic Park during 2015-16. A Common Sandpiper was observed for the first time since 2008, roosting and feeding around the barge at Shipwreck Lookout and feeding in the Waterbird Refuge. A Double-banded Plover observed at the Waterbird Refuge in March 2016 is the first record of this species within the Park. An incidental sighting of one Pacific Golden Plover was recorded at the Waterbird Refuge in November 2015.

The results indicate that within Sydney Olympic Park, the Waterbird Refuge continues to be important to migratory species, particularly the Bar-tailed Godwit and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Tidal management in both wetlands appears to be having a positive effect on shorebird habitat. It is expected that mudflats of Newington Nature Reserve will continue to mature, resulting in greater use over time.

Both the Waterbird Refuge and Newington Nature Reserve have the following qualities that are widely considered to be important elements of significant shorebird habitat:

- Large, tidal estuarine waterbody
- Large expanse of mudflat
- Subject to low levels of artificial light
- Little disturbance from visitors at night
- Low levels of noise

Management of estuarine wetlands at Sydney Olympic Park will continue to be informed by the migratory shorebird survey and other diurnal surveys and aims to provide suitable habitat for resident migratory shorebirds over the summer months and as a transit site for birds moving to and from more southerly parts of Australia.

More information on habitat management at Sydney Olympic Park can be found at:
http://www.sopa.nsw.gov.au/our_park/environment/biodiversity/sustaining_healthy_habitats

Jenny O'Meara

Latham's Snipe Tracking by Wild Bird Society of Japan

The Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ, Birdlife International/EAAFP member in Japan) launched a project to study Latham's Snipe's migratory route and identify their important stopover and wintering sites for their conservation.

Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii* is one of the waders breeding mainly in Hokkaido in Japan. The males perform a unique display flight making sounds like thunder with beating their tail feathers. They migrate to eastern Australia and stay there during their non-breeding season. But little is known about their migration routes. While Yufutsu Plain (Tomakomai city, Hokkaido, Japan) is one of their breeding and stopover sites in Japan, the importance of the plain for snipe is poorly understood. To reveal where Latham's Snipe fly through and stop and to identify important sites for conservation of the species, we placed metal rings and leg flags on 102 individuals of Latham's Snipe at Yufutsu Plain during July 2016. We also attached platform transmitter terminals (PTTs) for satellite tracking to 5 Latham's Snipe. One of those birds is en route to Australia and was last recorded in West Papua. Follow the snipe progress at:
http://blog.livedoor.jp/wbsj_oojishigi/

We are seeking reports on sightings of flagged Latham's Snipe. Combination of flags and metal band is as follows:

Right tarsus (lower right leg): 2 blue flags (some birds are bearing engraved leg flags)
Left tarsus (lower left leg): metal band

If you spot a Latham's Snipe with leg flags, please report the following information to us.
Your name, address and e-mail contact
Date and Time
Location, lat. / long., Environment
Position and colour of flags
Characters on the flag (if they are marked, they should be 0M-9M, 0N-9N, 0L-9L or 0P-9P in white)
Photographs (if you have any)
Other information

Please send your snipe sightings to: Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ)
Maruwa Bld. 3-9-23 Nishi-Gotanda Shinagawa Tokyo, Japan 141-0011
Fax: +81-3-5436-2635
E-mail: **oojishigi-pj@wbsj.org**

Distribution of Latham's Snipe

Flagged Latham's Snipe

Preparing mist net at Yufutsu Plain (above)

Yufutsu Plain lies on the western part of Hokkaido Island (left)

Konnichiwa Ojishigi: following Latham's Snipe from Japan to Australia

Even though Latham's Snipe are only just arriving back in Australia, 2016 so far has been a very busy year for the Latham's Snipe Project!

Since completing a successful 2015-2016 season of counting and catching in Port Fairy, Victoria, the Latham's Snipe Project has expanded to include new collaborators in the ACT: the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust (Jerrabombera Wetlands). This collaboration has forged strong links between the South West Victorian team and raft of experienced and passionate people in the Trust, as well as in Canberra Ornithologists Club, and the ACT Government. Through the collaboration, funding has been provided to fit four snipe with satellite transmitters over the 2016-2017 summer in Canberra.

During July 2016, the project team members Birgita Hansen, Jodie Honan, David Wilson and Rich Chamberlain, travelled to Hokkaido, Japan, to work with their colleagues in the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ). There they were joined by (Port Fairy) South Beach Wetlands and Landcare Group members Don and Sherril Stewart, and the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust (Jerrabombera Wetlands) project manager Lori Gould. In Japan, the team assisted in catching Latham's Snipe at Yufutsu Marshes, one of the species' main staging areas in coastal Hokkaido. Catching is very different in Hokkaido, with birds being caught as they fly to, and around, wetlands during night-time foraging (they roost in the day in adjacent shrub and woodlands). The team also had the chance to observe the Japanese team attaching two satellite transmitters – experience that will be extremely useful when we deploy satellite transmitters in Canberra this summer. Most of the team participated in a workshop on Latham's Snipe, with Birgita presenting on the work done to date in SW Victoria. There was also time for out-reach, with presentations on snipe and migration at a Uenae Elementary and Junior High School local to where the catching occurred, and at Sapporo Kaisei Secondary School. Students at both were very engaged in the talks!

Birgita and team talking to students at Uenae, Tomakomai, Hokkaido. Photo: Hironobu Tajiri

This snipe season, the objectives for capture-base studies have expanded. Not only are we seeking previously captured birds in the hope of retrieving geolocators deployed last year, we are also aiming to deploy the remaining 26 geolocators from the project on new birds at Port Fairy. We will also be deploying 30 radio transmitters on birds at Port Fairy in order to learn more about local movements of birds during the day and night. With the satellite tracking planned for Canberra plus the information being shared by the WBSJ, we are expanding the data collection approaches to increase our understanding of movement and migration patterns of Latham's Snipe.

On September 10 and 11, the first catching attempts were made back in Port Fairy. The team was successful in catching five birds at Sandy Cove. As with other catches, these birds were caught in mist nets over low vegetation at dawn as birds returned to their daytime roosts. This brought our total catch of snipe and deployment of geolocators to 19 birds. Catches are scheduled for October 8 and 9, and October 29 and 30.

On Saturday September 17, the first of three scheduled south-east Australian snipe counts was conducted. We were very excited to have participation from counters not only in SW Victoria

Sandy Cove Reserve - Rich Chamberlain's favourite place to see snipe in Port Fairy. Photo: Rich Chamberlain

Konnichiwa Ojishigi: following Latham's Snipe from Japan to Australia cont.

at our regularly monitoring sites in Port Fairy, Warrnambool and Peterborough, but also on the SA /VIC border, in SE South Australia, northern Tasmania, Geelong and Bellarine Peninsula, Melbourne, West and East Gippsland, Canberra, Bowral (Southern NSW) and even as far afield as Eumundi (Noosa). In addition, the ACT monthly snipe surveys, which involve 25 volunteers at around 30 sites, are being conducted at the same time as the SE Australian count to complement data being collected in south-west Victoria.

Updates on count results will be available soon at **https://lathamssnipeproject.wordpress.com/news/**.

We were extremely interested to find far fewer snipe at regular sites than normal, particularly in western Victoria. We think is this may be due to the extreme flooding rains the previous week across the region, meaning that birds may have been widely dispersed across the landscape. In contrast, sites around Melbourne, eastern Victoria and interstate had more birds than usual. It seems likely that some birds are still making their way south, a hypothesis supported by the satellite tracking information coming from the Wild Bird Society of Japan (http://blog.livedoor.jp/wbsj_oojishigi/)

Flooding along the Hopkins River, north of Warrnambool, with the heavy rains in mid-September across western Victoria. Photo: Birgita Hansen.

We would like to thank all the counters who volunteered to help with the first count and we hope that they can help again during the November 17 and January 7 (2017) counts. Also thanks to landholders and agencies that have provided permission to conduct surveys and catching, including Moyne Shire Council.

This project is supported by grants from the Australia Japan Foundation, Glenelg Hopkins CMA and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

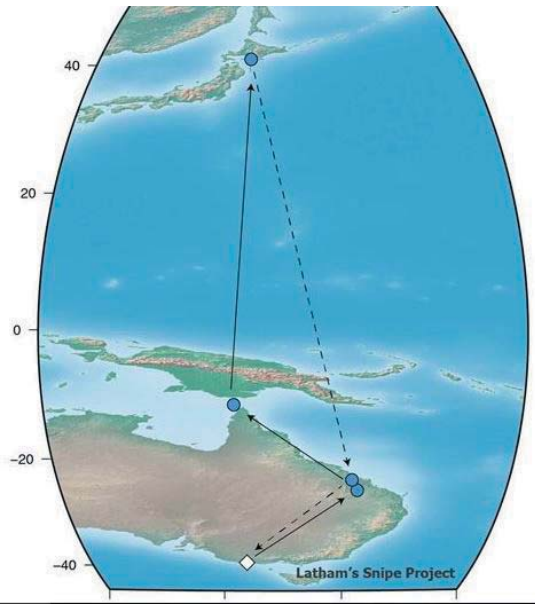
Birgita Hansen, Jodie Honan, David Wilson, Rich Chamberlain, Don Stewart and Lori Gould

Stop Press: First Latham's Snipe 'T0' with geolocator recaptured at Port Fairy!

The Latham's Snipe project team is hugely excited to have recaptured their first snipe at Port Fairy, Victoria, Australia on Sunday morning 9 October 2016 only a few hundred metres from its original capture site on 1 October 2015! The geolocator appeared in good condition and the bird was in good health.

With the help of Simeon Lisovski and Ken Gosbell, we have obtained a full migration track for the snipe (see below). 'T0' left Port Fairy in February and spent about 2 months in SE Queensland before flying to Cape York (or somewhere in the region) in April. From there the bird flew direct to Hokkaido and arrived around early May. The bird may have incubated a clutch whilst on the breeding grounds somewhere in southern Hokkaido, over May-June. In late August it flew direct from Hokkaido back to SE Queensland in 3 days, where it spent about a month presumably staging before returning to Port Fairy on September 26.

This is the first time a migration track has been obtained in this manner from Latham's Snipe. We are ecstatic at re-encountering one of our birds as it confirms what we had suspected, that some snipe return to Powling Street wetlands in Port Fairy each year. We are therefore hopeful we may recapture another of our birds.



BirdLife International endorses conservation strategy for China and the Yellow Sea Region

In March 2016, BirdLife facilitated a workshop with experts on nature conservation in China to develop the China Coastal Wetlands Strategy 2016 – 2020. It forms part of BirdLife's Flyways Programme.

The Strategy builds on significant achievements over the last 10 years and includes six objectives to divert the direct threats to key sites:

- Stop land reclamation in Rudong-Dongtai and Luannan
- Conservation of an ecological network of key sites
- Support local conservation action
- Improve the scientific knowledge base for conservation
- World Heritage nomination of the Yellow Sea
- International encouragement

The strategy will see BirdLife recruit a Flyway Coordinator and collaborate with an experienced Chinese-based partner in wetland conservation. A Flyways Campaign will help to highlight the threats to migratory birds and role of the BirdLife Partnership in their conservation. It will also include an event at the 2017 BirdLife World Congress in Singapore.

China, South Korea and North Korea will be encouraged to place all relevant Yellow Sea sites on the 'tentative' national lists for World Heritage nomination and to promote the sites' eco-tourism and natural values. It is an opportunity to engage high-level decision makers and build international coalitions for conservation, leveraging the strength of BirdLife's global network.

BirdLife Australia is working closely with BirdLife's Global Flyways Coordinator. Current initiatives include a partnership with Woodside to protect the Geum Estuary in the Republic of Korea; working with the Australian Government to engage Japan, China and Korea through its bilateral agreements; ongoing flyway research by AWSG and facilitating a Conservation Action Plan for Migratory Shorebirds.

Geum Estuary Project

Off the back of the work that has been undertaken in partnership with AWSG in the region, BirdLife International and BirdLife Australia are working together with Seocheon County Government, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Secretariat and other stakeholders including local communities and NGOs, national government and international agencies, to support and enable the long-term, participatory conservation of Geum Estuary in the Republic of Korea, the most important area for migratory waterbirds nationally. The Geum Estuary contains two Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), a Ramsar site, and an EAAFP Flyway Network Site. The long-term conservation plan includes securing World Heritage Site status for the site (with Wadden Sea Secretariat staff advising), and supporting the development of nature-based tourism.

BirdLife Australia Shorebirds 2020 Update

This upcoming summer wader survey season marks the 10-year anniversary of the Shorebirds 2020 program. Subsequent to the completion of the flyway population estimates revisions, the Australian Government's Wildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds identifies the revision of all Australian shorebird sites that meet national and international conservation significance as a priority. As a result we will be trying to get as many sites surveyed this upcoming season as possible and contacting all program participants that have been involved to date in order to mobilize as many counters as we can. This will also involve a network audit, where we will be checking the status of the site and state coordinator network, as well as the accuracy of mapped survey areas and site nomenclature in the new database. Please keep an eye and an ear open for more project communications in the coming weeks.

As all *Tattler* readers will be aware, Shorebirds 2020 is a national project and now includes over 420 registered Shorebird Areas which we aim to have surveyed on at least a biannual basis.

The main annual summer count window is now upon us, being scheduled for 15 January 2017. As with other years, conditions may not be suitable on this date, and therefore surveys conducted between 1 November 2016 and 28 February 2017 are also regarded as summer counts. If you are scheduling a population monitoring survey, try to aim as close to 15 January 2017 as you can.

Chances are there is a Shorebird Area near you regardless of where you live, especially if you are situated in proximity to the coast. To see if there is a site near you, visit the BirdLife Australia website and download the just updated survey

BirdLife Australia Shorebirds 2020 Update cont.

areas map for use in Google Earth - **http://birdlife.org.au/projects/shorebirds-2020/counter-resources**

In most cases, each designated "Shorebird Area" will have a nominated site coordinator, someone who schedules the surveys and coordinates a team of counters, especially at the larger sites. If you are keen on conducting surveys and don't know where to begin, please email **shorebirds@birdlife.org.au** beforehand so we can put you in touch with the local survey coordinator(s) in your area.

To join Shorebirds 2020 or get involved again and be updated on volunteer opportunities, training workshops and field work please contact **shorebirds@birdlife.org.au**.

Similarly, if you intend to undertake surveys for S2020 as part of the upcoming summer count, please send a quick email to the above address so we are able to monitor where surveys will be undertaken and channel resources/counters to areas in which there have been limited or no surveys conducted in recent years.

S2020 funding status

BirdLife Australia continues to support and develop the Shorebirds 2020 program. As a minimum this means one full-time staff member managing the S2020 project with assistance from the volunteer network where required. The primary funding source is through major fundraising appeals (e.g. Farewell Shorebirds). Shorebirds 2020 also continues to receive funding support for specific project components from various sources, most notably the Federal Government Department of the Environment, Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges NRM Board, and the Western Australian Department of Parks and Wildlife.

We are also continuing to identify small funding opportunities through the provision of consulting-type work, most of which directly relates to Shorebirds 2020 (e.g. GLMAC Gippsland Lakes hotspots project).

Shorebirds 2020 Database transfer and new BirdLife data portal

It has been a long time in the making but BirdLife Australia's new Birdata web portal is ready. The new Birdata portal incorporates the existing Shorebirds 2020 database, so from 7 September 2016, all Shorebirds 2020 count data must be entered into the new Birdata portal, rather than the current Shorebirds 2020 database portal, which will be decommissioned in the not-too-distant future. The web address for the new data portal is **http://birdata.birdlife.org.au**

The new Birdata portal includes a dedicated app for your handheld Apple or Android device, which allows for data entry in the field for a number of key BirdLife Australia monitoring programs. This is available through the App store and Google Play Store.

Some important things to note:

- If you have a current Shorebirds 2020 database account or login, this will not work for the new Birdata portal. To login to the Birdata app and portal you need a BirdLife Australia username and password. To create a login go to **http://support.birdlife.org.au/portal**. **Note**: your BirdLife Australia username is not the same as your Shorebird database login, Atlas number, or member number, although you can choose this as your new username.
- The new portal is significantly different from the existing S2020 database portal; it will take some getting used to. However, it is intuitive and much easier to use. A how-to guide and a step through for data entry using the new portal and app will be available shortly.
- For existing S2020 database accounts, all your own historic shorebird survey data will be transferred over to the new Birdata and be available to you once you have setup a new BirdLife Australia username and password.
- We will be closing down the current Shorebirds 2020 database website in the not-too-distant future.
- We will still accept the paper shorebird count forms; these can be sent to BirdLife's current postal address.
- There is no longer the requirement to enter the same survey data in separate databases for that data to be held in each of those databases, as was the case previously. All data entered into the Shorebirds 2020 database through Birdata automatically gets fed into the Atlas & Birdata databases.

Please contact us at **shorebirds@birdlife.org.au** if you have any questions or queries about the new shorebirds database or data handling, or would like assistance setting up a user account. For general birdata or portal enquiries please send an email to **birdata@birdlife.org.au**.

New Shorebird ID booklets and App

The very popular ID booklets have been revised and updated in light of data entry and management changes, but also to include other helpful information such as leg-flag combinations and reporting instructions. These are printed and ready for distribution from BirdLife's national office. We are also in the process of developing a new shorebird ID App which will be flyway relevant.

BirdLife Australia Shorebird Conservation Action

Migratory Shorebird Conservation Action Plan

Earlier this year, BirdLife Australia convened the first Migratory Shorebird Summit of its kind in Australia, bringing together stakeholders from government, civil society, research institutions, NGOs, business and the international community, to discuss the implementation of the Australian Government's updated W*ildlife Conservation Plan for Migratory Shorebirds*. Using the Conservation Action Planning approach, a process was undertaken to workshop the high and very high priorities identified in the Plan, with a view to coordinating Australian partner efforts to conserve migratory shorebirds over the next five years. Stay tuned for further updates as the Conservation Action Plan continues to take shape!

Campaign to conserve Moolap Salt Works

BirdLife Australia has been spearheading a campaign to conserve a nationally important wetland for migratory and resident shorebirds in Geelong, Victoria. Cheetham Salt Works in Moolap was decommissioned in 2007 and despite the cessation of operational flow, the site still hosts over 2,000 shorebirds each year, including the Critically Endangered Curlew Sandpiper. The Victorian Government is currently undergoing a three-stage public consultation process to develop a plan for the site and surrounding land at Point Henry. BirdLife Australia, along with other local environmental groups including Geelong Field Naturalists Club, is calling for the creation of the Geelong International Bird Sanctuary within the former salt works to secure this wetland for shorebird species and improve habitat quality. The second stage of public consultation is now closed, and the Victorian Government is expected to release a Draft of the *Moolap Coastal Strategic Framework Plan* later this year. This plan will be subject to another round of public consultation, with a final plan expected in 2017. For more information, visit **birdsyoulove.org/moolap**

10th Australasian Shorebird Conference - Auckland NZ 2016

Conference delegates - Photo Diane Fraser

The 10th Australasian Shorebird Conference was held in Auckland from 1-2 October 2016, hosted by the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists Trust (PMNT) in association with Birds New Zealand and Unitec Institute of Technology. Around 130 participants attended the Conference.

The Conference Organising Committee, chaired by Adrian Riegen, produced an excellent program of presentations with two keynote addresses. The program was stimulating, thought-provoking and at times sobering and focused on shorebirds through two keynote addresses and seven themes:

- Management;
- Tracking;
- The Yellow Sea;
- Flyway Population Estimates;
- Community Engagement;
- Biology and Local Sites; and
- Local Sites and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF).

Opening keynote address by John Dowding on "*Conservation Status of New Zealand's breeding shorebirds: the issues and outlook"* focused on the plight of New Zealand endemic birds, particularly breeding shorebirds. His address outlined the predation impacts of introduced mammals, loss and degradation of habitat on the mainland, and shortfalls in resources for management and research, all of which are leading to further

10th Australasian Shorebird Conference - Auckland NZ 2016 cont.

declines and potential extinction of species. John's especial focus was on the shore plover and its susceptibility to predation.

Management - Four presentations on management included an interesting perspective on natural resource management planning in South Australia for the protection of migratory shorebirds. Managing areas for migratory shorebirds in New Zealand, where human disturbance is not included under existing regulations demonstrated the need for updating the existing legislation to provide better protection for shorebirds. A presentation on managing for migratory shorebirds in artificial coastal habitats in the Yellow Sea indicated that these habitats could prove to be vital for migratory shorebirds although their value is not currently well understood. A case study on a community group challenging government decisions regarding the taking of beach-cast marine algae in important sites for three migratory shorebirds demonstrated the value of monitoring and long-term data that clearly showed how the species would be impacted in contravention of the Australian *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* that protects migratory species and their habitat.

Tracking – Five presentations on tracking migratory shorebirds (through geolocators and satellite trackers on Grey Plover, Common Redshank, Grey-tailed Tattler, Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone) allowed some very innovative technology to demonstrate graphically the routes taken by these species between their breeding and non-breeding grounds. Tracking is proving to be a highly valuable method for obtaining accurate data on the routes and destinations of migratory shorebirds. It is dramatically improving the understanding of their conservation needs.

Yellow Sea – Five presentations provided further insights into monitoring of migratory shorebirds in their stopover sites and their food and habitat needs in this vital area of the Flyway. Bivalve size and quantity intakes of Bar-tailed Godwit and Great Knot were studied to assess foraging effectiveness. The Recipient of the Mark Barter Award, Peng He, provided information about site familiarity and food availability for Great Knot using Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve in the northern Yellow Sea during their northward migration. The stopover ecology of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is the subject of joint surveys and long-term monitoring by a local conservation group and international conservation NGOs in the intertidal mudflats of southern Jiangsu Province which are important for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper but are also under severe pressure from coastal development.

Of particular interest to Conference attendees was the presentation by Adrian Riegen about the joint surveys that have been conducted in North Korea by the Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists Trust and the Korean Natural Environment Conservation Fund along the North Korean west coast, north and south of Mundok, with significant numbers of Great Knot, Dunlin and Bar-tailed Godwit in the areas surveyed.

Second keynote address by Doug Watkins as a joint Australian and New Zealand presentation on *"Southern Collaboration within the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership"* looked at the history of the Flyway Partnership, its establishment, the challenges facing migratory shorebird conservation in the Flyway and the contribution that government and non-government collaboration in Australia and New Zealand is making towards conserving migratory shorebirds and their habitat in the southern end of the Flyway.

Flyway population estimates - Dr Birgita Hansen provided an update on a project to revise the EAAF population estimates for 37 listed migratory shorebird species. While the project has indicated many of the population estimates are higher than previous figures due to increased count coverage, estimation of shorebird numbers in un-surveyed areas and the use of an estimate based on breeding-range size for non-coastal species, ongoing population declines swamped this effect in some species with current flyway population estimates now even lower than previous assessments.

Community Engagement – Five presentations about community engagement in shorebird conservation demonstrated the efforts by a number of community groups to conserve migratory shorebirds in innovative and committed ways. One of the most innovative is a project that will see Amellia Formby following the path of the Red-necked Stint from Melbourne to Broome in a microlight aircraft in 2019 and in subsequent years she plans to follow their path through the Flyway to their tundra breeding grounds.

Biology and local sites –Five presentations demonstrated some excellent work that is being done to better understand shorebird biology. Foraging ecology of migratory shorebirds in Roebuck Bay has shown several shorebird species feeding opportunistically on an unexpected variety of marine invertebrates with crabs as a significant part of their diet. Studies on the Red-capped Plover have shown differences in the amount of parental care and that handover of care by the female to the male occurs when chick survival to fledging is almost a certainty. Predation

10th Australasian Shorebird Conference - Auckland NZ 2016 cont.

of beach-nesting Banded Dotterel chicks in South Bay, Kaikoura, is having a significant impact on breeding success of an already endangered species. A more sobering session by vet Janelle Ward looked at the physiological impacts, particularly myopathy, in catching shorebirds, especially godwits and Great Knots. The gap in knowledge about shorebirds along the coastline in the Darwin region of the Northern Territory was also examined.

Local sites and the EAAF – Three presentations looked at poorly understood southward migration strategies of shorebirds in the EAAF as well as potentially different migration strategies by shorebirds between seasons. A case study looked at six years of survey of shorebirds in Gladstone Harbour and the Curtis Coast in Queensland as part of research and monitoring of shorebird presence conducted by Gladstone Ports Corporation as a condition of approval of a major port development in Port Curtis.

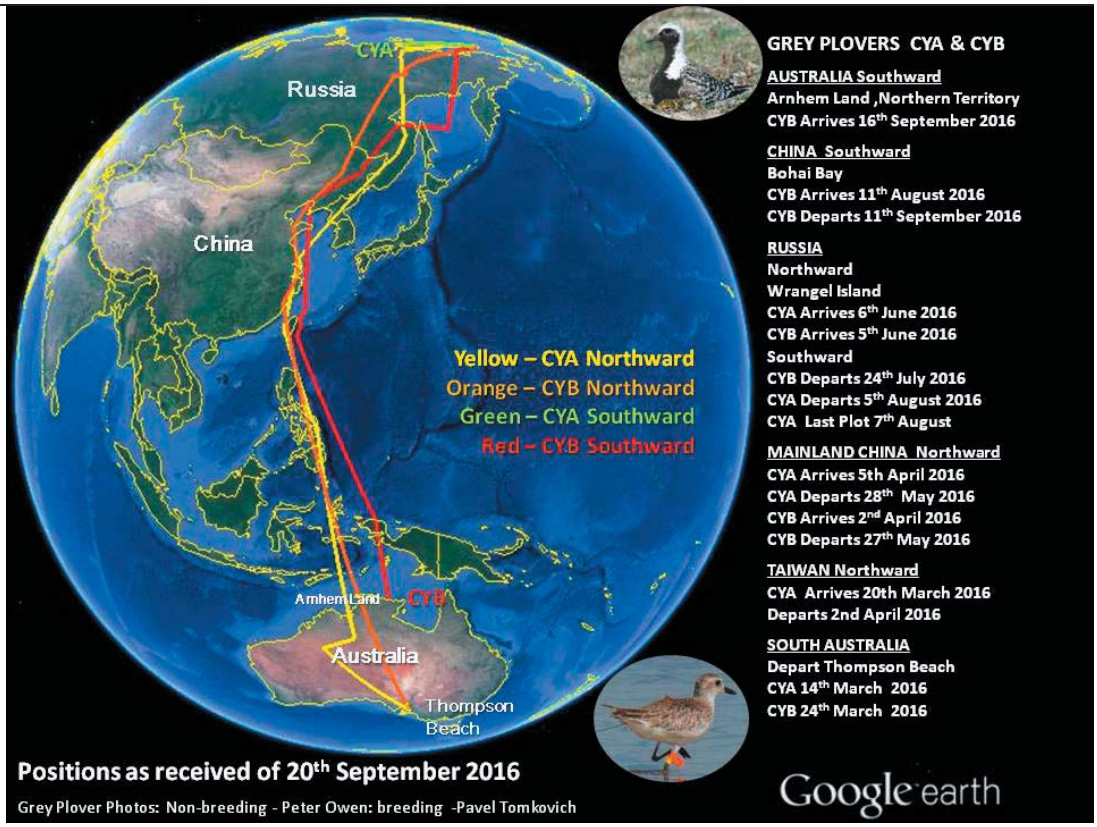
Overall, the Conference Program represented a good balance of science, community engagement, the particular value of tracking migratory shorebirds to improve the knowledge base, and the critical importance of predator control and conserving habitat, especially that of staging sites in the Yellow Sea. Field trips arranged for 3 October 2016 provided opportunities to see shorebirds around Auckland and at Pukorokoro Miranda Naturalists Trust.

Congratulations to Adrian and the whole organising Committee for a wonderful Conference. The next Australasian Shorebird Conference will be in Hobart, Australia, in 2018.

Alison Russell-French
AWSG Secretary

Update on South Australian tracked Grey Plovers 22 September 2016

No further transmissions have been received for **Grey Plover CYA** since the last position on 7 August 2016 some 280 km south from the Siberian coast, very close to a tundra pond area where CYA appears to have had a short half-day stopover on 4 June 2016 during northward migration.



Grey Plover CYB made a 6,200 km non-stop flight from Bohai Bay in China to the NT coast, arriving 16 September 2016. As of 22 September 2016, she is still on the coast of the Arafura Sea in the Northern Territory, near Bat Island in the Liverpool River Estuary, 12 km southwest of Maningrida. CYB has traveled 11,592 km from her breeding ground on Wrangel Island and has clocked up over 25,187 km since leaving Thompson Beach, South Australia on 24 March 2016. It is now only 2,500 km to return to Thompson Beach.

Map data courtesy Victorian Wader Study Group & Friends of Shorebirds SE.
http://www.vwsg.org.au/Grey-Plover-tracking.html
Map data shown includes a range of satellite fixes of varying accuracy and is provided for public information. The presentation of data here does not constitute publication. All data remain copyright of the project partners.
Project supported by Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board and the Australian Government funded Samphire Coast Icon Project.

Obituary – Luc Hoffman

Luc Hoffmann, ornithologist and conservationist, died on 21 July 2016, aged 93.

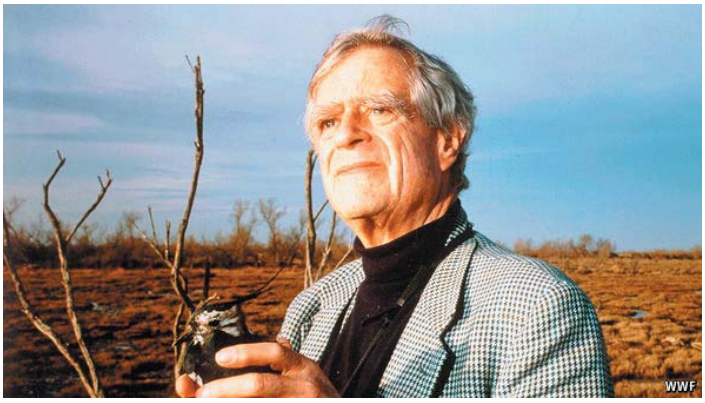
When it came to birds, Luc Hoffmann was no elitist. Every species was precious to him. At boarding school in the Swiss Alps he watched migrating passerines—Barn Swallows, Wrynecks, Pied Flycatchers—flocking through the passes between the peaks. His first scientific article, written at school, was on migrating shorebirds; his first long expedition, at 16 with his friend Dieter, was to Brittany in search of gannets, a bird rarely spotted in France. His doctoral thesis at the University of Basel was on the colour variations in the down of the chicks of the Common Tern. As an old man, standing tall and straight, he liked to watch the valiant efforts of brightly coloured bee-eaters to fly, and catch their food, in the *mistral*. And his binoculars often searched for his favourite, the Collared Pratincole, so small and neat in its brown and white, which also hunted in the air.

The birds he was most closely associated with, however, were the Greater Flamingos of the Camargue in south-eastern France. He first saw them when he was still a student, chasing the big grey chicks through stones and tamarisk in an effort to ring them. Everything about them fascinated him, from the wondrous pink-and-scarlet of their adult plumage to their strange tongues, spined and hooked to filter food from water like a baleen whale, to their surging flights in flocks of thousands from one lagoon to the next. In 1948 he bought an old farm at Tour du Valat, without water or power, with a mind to live there for ever and set up a centre for study.

He did both. His centre eventually welcomed up to 100 researchers; the flamingos, which had declined sharply in the 1960s, were monitored and re-established within a decade. And his ambitions embraced the wetlands themselves. His "emotional predilection" for such places in boyhood—a typical *Basler* understatement—had become, in the water-lit land of the Camargue, a *coup de foudre* of both mind and senses. The world's swampy, estuarine places were then mostly ignored by naturalists. But to him they were like plants, with their roots reaching down to hydrate the whole planet. If they were drained, the birds and all nature died in consequence. He was passionately determined to save them.

A pot of gold

In this he was not alone. Others too, like Peter Scott and Julian Huxley, were thinking that way. What distinguished him was an enormous pot of money. His grandfather had founded Hoffmann-La Roche, and he himself was a majority shareholder in what became a giant pharmaceutical company with annual sales, in this century, in the billions of dollars. This wealth was never flaunted. He drove a Fiat Panda, and stayed in hostels. At Tour du Valat his four children were brought up as little *camarguais* with the children of the estate workers, and told that their grandfather had a "chemist's shop" in Basel. Only the glass of Montrachet offered to a visitor, or the glimpse of a Braque in the drawing room (Braque, a friend, had also fallen for the Camargue), hinted that Mr Hoffmann could have led a different, self-centred life.



Wherever and whenever he thought good, he gave money. It was done either overtly, as grants or loans with his name attached, or covertly, through donations from organisations whose finances he controlled. When the World Wildlife Fund was set up in 1961, Scott invited him to be president, but he declined; he became its second vice-president, and made quietly sure his money bankrolled the WWF to success. His dollars, as well as his drive, also saved the wetlands at Coto Doñana in Andalucia, home to imperial eagles; the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania, the stopover point for millions of migrating waders; the Faia Brava in Portugal, haunt of Griffon Vultures; and many others. In 1971, at Ramsar in Iran, he oversaw the signing of the first global treaty protecting wetlands.

His charm, tact and optimism proved important, for in setting up protected areas he was often dealing with difficult people: officials of Franco's Spain, Soviet Russia and Mao's China, and industrialists and developers of every stripe. He was dealing, too, with many struggling, suspicious locals who earned their living from the wetlands. His technique was to bring them alongside, showing that they could benefit from conservation—even the Camargue rice-farmers, who each spring found flamingos foraging among their newly planted crops. In Faia Brava the dwindling band of hill-farmers were encouraged to open their houses to hikers. In Banc d'Arguin tribal fishermen were given exclusive access to the waters of the reserve. His motto, reversing the theme of conservation to that point, was "with man, not against him".

Few understood, though, how far he meant that philosophy to go. The concept of reserved areas deeply dissatisfied him, for he wanted the whole globe to be a place where man lived in harmony with nature, and no special protections were needed any more. He was no militant, seeing the cause of conservation as going far beyond partisan politics or the shock tactics of Greenpeace; but in old age he shared much of their frustration. Small successes had been notched up here and there; not much more. Like the bee-eaters battling the wind, he was grateful to have caught a few flies on the wing; but his real ambition had been to change the wind itself.

Source: http://www.economist.com/news/obituary/21703339-luc-hoffmann-ornithologist-and-conservationist-died-july-21st-aged-93-birds-and
6 August 2016