Tattler

Newsletter for the Asia Pacific Flyways & Australian Shorebirds 2020 Project

No. 46 January 2018

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Grey-tailed Tattler Very fat and in full breeding plumage ready for departure to breeding grounds. Long Reef, Sydney. Photo © Mark Young

Editorial

As the years turn over, the wonderful cycles in nature continue to amaze. Already shorebirds in the southern hemisphere are storing up fat supplies in preparation for their long journeys north to the breeding grounds. How many will successfully breed and return to their over-wintering grounds? Only with dedicated shorebird counters, banders, satellite trackers, geolocators, database managers and analysts will we have some idea of their success. Without years of data for comparison, we adjust to lower bird population levels, rejoicing in 600 Bar-tailed Godwit at a site while forgetting that there used to be double that number only a few years ago.

Some recent news from China suggests that reclamation of tidal mudflats may be less rampant in the future, particularly in Bohai Bay, which is great news for shorebirds.

I am currently cruising in Thailand and seeing Common Sandpipers around the islands in Phang Nga Bay. Happy wader watching wherever you are.

Liz Crawford, Editor

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

Compiled and published by the Australasian Wader Studies Group
www.awsg.org.au
A Special Interest Group of BirdLife Australia

Grey-tailed Tattlers score a dedicated website

In the summer of 2011-12, Lois Wooding and Alan Stuart began to take an interest in the Grey-tailed Tattlers in their local areas around Newcastle and Port Stephens in New South Wales. Initially they were driven by curiosity about population densities and feeding/roosting preferences. Little did they know that their interest would become a passion and lead to new insights into the behaviour of this understudied species and an international network of like-minded individuals, especially in Russia and Japan.

Lois and Alan have accumulated lots of material about Grey-tailed Tattlers since they started their project six years ago. Recently they decided to put all that material onto a website so that it could be more easily shared with others. The new website (www.tattlers.org) is also intended to serve as a forum for information exchange throughout the entire East Asian-Australasian Flyway. An accompanying Facebook page has also been created.

Compared to many other shorebird species, Grey-tailed Tattlers are currently listed as "stable" but their numbers are slowly decreasing, and their range along Australia's east coast appears to be gradually contracting northward. Observations by people on the ground regarding their numbers, stop-over points, and behaviour are invaluable. By pooling our knowledge and understanding of the movements of Grey-tailed Tattlers throughout their entire migratory cycle we may be able to increase our ability to safeguard the future of this fascinating shorebird.

The Travels of Ruddy Turnstone WMA

On 9 December 2017 the tenacious team of the Victorian Wader Study Group (VWSG) retrieved the geolocator from Ruddy Turnstone WMA. This was only one of 16 loggers retrieved but has been singled out for early analysis due to the interest it has drawn. Does it call Newcastle (NSW) or King Island (Tasmania) home?

It will be recalled that this bird created interest last year when the geolocator analysis showed it not only made a southward journey across the Pacific from Japan to Bougainville but also spent the 2015 austral summer in Newcastle on the NSW coast before it made its 2016 migration north again through Taiwan. As the geolocator failed on the breeding grounds we have little detail of this track but the bird was seen again in Newcastle on 4 November 2016. At some time over the summer it must have returned to King Island because it was recaptured there on 30 March 2017, its geolocator removed and a new one fitted.

This geolocator was retrieved on 9 December 2017; I set out below some of the salient notes on its journey. **Figure 1** shows the simplified track which was obtained from data provided by the geolocator. The fundamental observation is that the journey it made in 2017 almost exactly replicates that made in 2015 and 2016. **Figure 2** plots the tracks for those years. It departed King Island on 24 April 2017 and flew non stop to Taiwan in 6 days where it stopped over for 3 weeks before flying over the Korean peninsula to Sakhalin Island. From here it went to the breeding grounds in northern Siberia. (The actual breeding location is yet to be analysed). At the end of July it departed the breeding grounds and after a brief spell on the Sea of Okhotsk, it spent a month in Japan. It then made a long flight of 5,300km across the Pacific to Bougainville Islands where it spent some 6 weeks. It then flew south and made landfall at Newcastle on the NSW coast. It was here that the keen wader watchers noted its arrival on 27 October 2017. It was observed several times up until the third week of November. On about 24 November it made its final leg to King Island where it arrived approx. 5 December. It was cannon netted on 9 December! A new geolocator was fitted so the story will hopefully continue.

This is a remarkable story and thanks are due to a lot of people who have contributed; Deakin University for provision of funds for the geolocators, the VWSG teams who undertook the task of retrieving and deploying them and particular thanks to the wader watchers in Newcastle whose observations have assisted enormously in ground truthing the geolocator data.

Please be aware that this is a preliminary analysis and there is more to do.

Ken Gosbell
21 December 2017

The Travels of Ruddy Turnstone WMA cont.

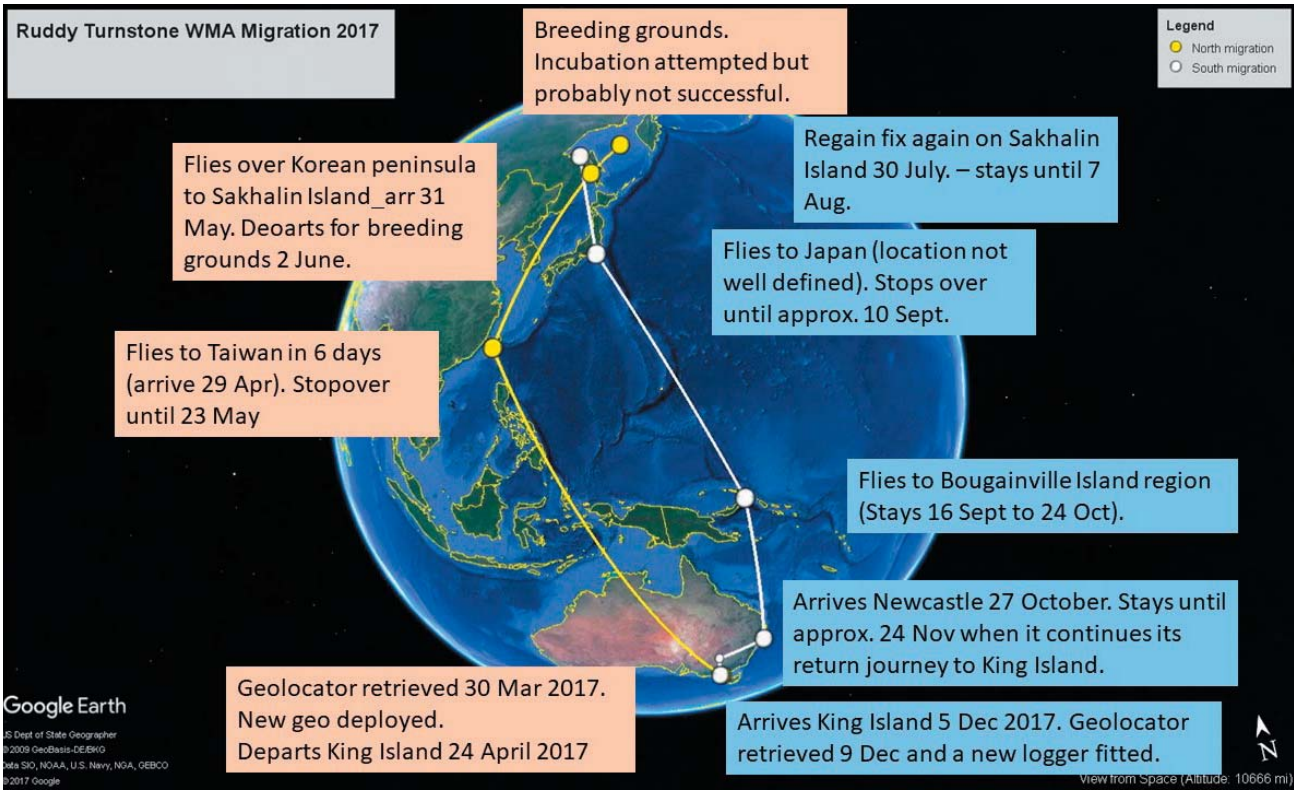

Figure 1 - Migration route of Ruddy Turnstone WMA in 2017

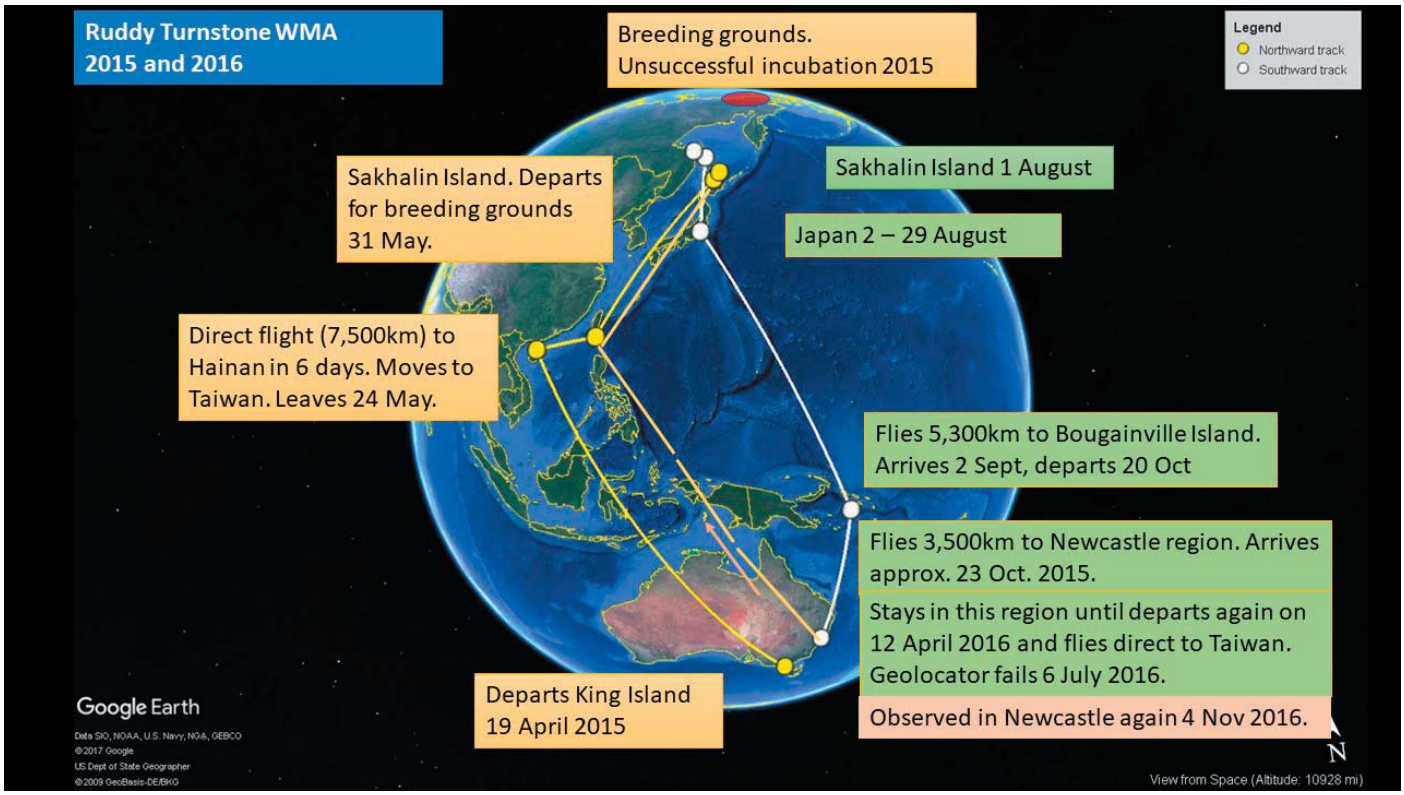

Figure 2 - Migration route of Ruddy Turnstone WMA in 2015 and 2016

Victorian Tern Breeding Report 2017

November-December each year is the time when the Victorian Wader Studies Group (VWSG) fieldwork programme is normally full to the brim with tern chick-banding activities. We've now comprehensively monitored all breeding terns on the central sections of the Victorian coast (Corner Inlet to Port Phillip Bay) for 39 seasons.

Generally, breeding locations and breeding numbers are fairly stable (except for the big increase in Crested Terns in the early years because of our conservation activities). The main annual variable has been breeding success. We've also banded almost all the chicks produced and this has given us an excellent understanding on the migratory movements of Caspian Terns and Crested Terns, and to a lesser extent Fairy Terns.

This year the terns have really given the VWSG the run-around, with almost nothing being the same as in most previous years. The Mud Islands colonies are having a bonanza year, The Nobbies Crested Terns a pretty poor year and Corner Inlet is a disaster.

Mud Islands, Port Phillip Bay

Three visits have been paid to Mud Islands, the most recent being on 18 December 2017. It was apparent from the first visit that exceptional numbers of Crested Terns were breeding there this year, with an estimate of a minimum of 2,000 pairs. This figure has been gradually revised upwards and on 18 December it was estimated that at least 3,000 pairs were present. Nearly 1,400 chicks have been banded and there were still 1,000 chicks unbanded and 500 unhatched eggs. It may be that we have to make yet another visit to try and top-up our Crested Tern chick-banding tally.

Caspian Terns have also had a bonanza breeding year on Mud Islands. The 30 nesting pairs was at the top-end of the normal range of breeding pairs but breeding success seems to have been way above average, probably due to the complete absence of storm tides during November/ December. Over 30 Caspian Tern chicks have been banded and flagged this year – a record.

It is disappointing however that the now well-established Fairy Tern colony again failed to produce a significant number of young, with 24 nests on 7 December (all with eggs, except one with a chick) being reduced to one nest with eggs, one chick, and only six adults remaining by 18 December. It appears that a high tide may have washed away most of the colony which was situated on the beach to the west of the Crested Tern colony.

The Nobbies, Phillip Island

For the second consecutive year Crested Terns at Phillip Island nested on the outer Seal Rocks. At least 1,000 pairs were noted in November, but we don't have breeding success information available as yet. In contrast to last year, no other Crested Terns nested at the usual location at The Nobbies.

Clonmel Island, Corner Inlet

The first recce of the Clonmel Island tern breeding site in Corner Inlet by Brian Martin on 18 December revealed only 15 pairs of nesting Caspian Terns, compared with the normal colony of 30-95 pairs (average 55 pairs). Only one pair had young (newly hatched). There were no signs of any nesting Crested Terns. The whole of the rest of the Corner Inlet complex, from Port Albert to McLoughlins Beach, was searched with the aid of two Parks Victoria boats on 21 December. Amazingly, no Crested Tern colony was found and only five birds were actually seen. This is the first time in 39 years of monitoring that Crested Terns have not nested somewhere in Corner Inlet. Only one additional pair of Caspian Terns was found, meaning that this year's colony is only half the size of the smallest breeding population previously recorded. Furthermore, there were none of the usual 100+ Common Terns and 100+ Little Terns – non-breeding visitors from the northern hemisphere. A few (about 20) Fairy Terns were seen, mostly feeding on the ocean near the Kate Kearney entrance, but no signs that they were nesting anywhere.

It would seem that there must be a marked scarcity of food for all species of tern in the Corner Inlet area this year. Normally one is never out of sight (and hearing) of terns anywhere in Corner Inlet during the breeding season, with feeding birds criss-crossing the area all the time. In our terminology, this year it was like a 'ghost town' as far as terns were concerned.
It seems too late now for any further marked change to occur in the tern breeding populations. Whilst it is not clear whether food-shortage is also the reason for the different situation from normal at The Nobbies, it would appear that there has been a major exodus of breeding Crested Terns from that area. Whilst clearly some have moved to Mud Islands and contributed to the record breeding population there (usually about 1,200 – 1,500 pairs, maximum previously 2,200 pairs) some must have moved even further afield. The VWSG team on King Island (off NW Tasmania) in early December noted that the Crested Tern colony at Currie (Burgess Bay) was larger than normal (2000 pairs, compared with the normal 1000 pairs) and it could be that some of The

Victorian Tern Breeding Report 2017 cont.

Nobbies birds had decamped to there. We are currently analysing the 50 controls of banded breeding adult birds at Currie and this may help answer this question. It is interesting that the ecological equivalent of the Crested Tern in Western Europe, the Sandwich Tern, also is prone to moving its breeding location between years, sometimes over quite large distances (200 miles or more).

Certainly an atypical year for breeding terns on the central Victorian coasts!

Clive Minton

Nordmann's (Spotted) Greenshank in Thailand

On 16 December 2017, the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BirdLife partner in Thailand) organised the Big Day waterbird count at Pak Thale - Lam Pak Bia, Petchaburi province, Thailand. The count was supported by TOYOTA and BirdLife Asia Division.

After analysing data from the largest-ever count of 179 Nordmann's Greenshank Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) compared the count with the global population from BirdLife Data Zone Spotted Greenshank (Tringa guttifer) - BirdLife species factsheet and IUCN red list: http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22693225/0

We found the global population is only 600 - 1,300 individuals and decreasing!!! (same population as Giant Panda in China).
That means the number of Nordmann's Greenshanks in Thailand today is about 13.8 to 29.8% of the global population!!! They stay with us during November to April annually. Thailand is also a key wintering site for this species outside Russia (first place in South East Asia and second place from China). Since the year 2000, BCST is working hard to save their habitat for the next generation.

We can do it together. Just support BCST or come over here for birdwatching.

Kaset Sutasha
Bird Conservation Society of Thailand

Woodside Energy donates building to Broome Bird Observatory

Since the mudflats of Roebuck Bay, near Broome, were revealed as a premier site to see migratory shorebirds – that was back in the 1980s – it has been the most important destination in Australia for people keen to see and study shorebirds.

With a seasonal population of many, many thousands of migratory shorebirds, which in turn draws a multitude of visiting shorebird-watchers from across Australia and around the world, all eager to train their spotting scopes in their direction, it's difficult to overstate its importance.

The Broome Bird Observatory was located on the shores of Roebuck Bay specifically because of the presence of shorebirds, and quickly became the epicentre of Australian shorebird studies.

The Observatory has now increased its capacity to cater for those visiting birdwatchers, students and ornithologists after Woodside Energy generously donated a demountable building (and also transported it out to the Observatory) so that it can be fitted out as a migratory shorebird interpretive centre — a vital resource for the continued study of the shorebirds of Roebuck Bay.

Source: BirdLife Australia Our Network in Action 19 January 2018

BirdLife Australia's Migratory Shorebird 2020 Program Update

We're well into the summer count window and it's great to see so many people helping with surveys around the country. We've been actively encouraging people this year to conduct counts during January to coincide with the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) and we've also shortened the survey window to December-February (previously November-March).

As mentioned in our October update, we are in the process of conducting a network audit, checking the status of the site and state coordinator network, as well as the accuracy of mapped survey areas and site nomenclature in the database. We've been busy calling and emailing count coordinators and identifying where we have coverage and capacity gaps. This will inform our workshop schedule for the next year, so we can target areas that need a reinvigoration of trained counters.

This audit has proven to be a rewarding task. It's been great to touch base with so many of our dedicated volunteers around the country. It has, however, also proven to be a very time-consuming task. Our lofty aspirations of having the audit completed before the end of the summer count window unfortunately is now out of reach due to other work commitments, such as facilitating the new Migratory Shorebird Conservation Action Plan (MS CAP) and developing the Directory of Important Habitat for Migratory Shorebirds mentioned in our previous update.

We are, however, starting to get a picture of where some of our coverage gaps are in Victoria and Western Australia. In some cases, we have a small contingent of dedicated volunteers that simply cannot cover large shorebird areas and need more volunteers. In other areas, we do not have a listed count coordinator in our records.

Below is a list of some of the places where we have no count coordinator or need increased volunteer capacity. **Please note that this list is incomplete and likely to have some errors. We're still very much in the process of conducting this audit and the more you dig, the more you find!** Some of these apparent gaps in our survey coverage may in fact be simply that the data has not been provided to us to enter into the Shorebirds 2020 database, others may be that count coordinators have changed and we haven't been notified.

If you know of any data or contacts we may be missing for these areas or would like to help out with surveys or count coordination, email us at **shorebirds@birdlife.org.au**. For further detail on these mapped areas, feel free to contact us or check them out on birdata.

Victoria

No identified count coordinator
Ballarat region
Lake Modewarre
Lake Murdeduke
Kerang Lakes
Arapiles Lakes
Horsham
Lake Buloke
Lake Tyrell
Winton Wetlands
Lake Albacutya
Lake Hindmarsh
Lake Elingamite
Extra volunteer capacity needed
Laverton/Altona
Port Fairy

Western Australia

No identified count coordinator
Beaufort Inlet
Blackwood Estuary
Broke Inlet
Camballin
Derby Sewage Ponds
Dongara
Dunn Rock Nature Reserve
East Mungilup
Fincucane Island
Guraga Lake
Jerdacuttup Lakes
Karakin Lakes
Kent River and Parryville Wetlands
Kordabup Estuary
Kununurra Irrigation Area
Lake Argyle
Lake Grace Region
Lake Gregory
Lake King
Lake Powell
Onslow
Shaster Lake Nature Reserve
Torbay Inlet
Upper Kent
Walyormouring Lake
Wedge Island
Wilson Inlet
Extra volunteer capacity needed
Shark Bay
Exmouth Gulf
Exmouth Gulf Islands

Dan Weller and Connie Warren
BirdLife Australia

China moves to protect coastal wetlands

BEIJING, 17 January 2018 (Xinhua): China has introduced its toughest regulation on land reclamation along the country's coastline, vowing to demolish illegally reclaimed land and stop approving general reclamation projects.

The State Oceanic Administration (SOA) said that it would demolish or shut down all illegally reclaimed land and illegally established waste discharge outlets that damage the marine environment.

Lin Shanqing, deputy director of the SOA, said at a press conference that reclamation projects that did not concern the national economy and people's livelihoods would not be approved in future.

"Reclamation projects that have been approved but have not started and do not comply with the current policy will all be stopped," Lin said, adding that the administration would also stop giving annual land reclamation quota to provinces.

"Using reclaimed land for commercial real estate development is prohibited and all reclamation activities in the Bohai Sea area will be banned," Lin said. "Reclaimed land that has remained deserted for a long time will be confiscated."

The power of granting administrative approval for land reclamation projects must not be delegated to lower authorities and administrators, who have behaved improperly in project approval, and supervision will be held accountable.

Since the law on administration of maritime space use was put into use in 2002, China legally approved a total of 158,000 hectares of land reclamation by the end of 2017, accounting for about 12 percent of the newly added construction land area in coastal areas over the same period.

Gross ocean production accounts for 9.5 percent of China's **GDP**, statistics show.

Last year, the SOA dispatched inspectors to 11 coastal provinces, municipalities and regions. The first six, Fujian, Guangxi, Hebei, Hainan, Jiangsu and Liaoning, were cautioned over reclamation projects and coastal pollution.

Also on Wednesday, the SOA disclosed the findings of a nationwide survey on land-based sources of marine pollution, identifying a total of some 9,600 such sources, including about 740 rivers, 7,500 sewage outlets and 1,350 emergency flood outlets. Among the sewage outlets, only 8 percent were licensed, and about one-quarter were established in ecologically sensitive areas.

The SOA found that the marine environment near more than 80 percent of sewage outlets failed to meet standards. About 80 percent of the marine ecosystem under watch was rated unhealthy or sub-healthy.

To address the issue, the SOA will monitor sources of pollution and introduce real-time monitoring.

Source: **http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/18/c_136903321.htm**

China moves to protect coastal wetlands used by migratory birds

Erik Stokstad
Science Mag
30 January 2018

China has armoured its coastline over the past several decades, building sea walls and turning more than half of its marine wetlands into solid ground for development. The impact on the almost 500 species of migratory birds that rely on this habitat has been severe. But the tide is turning in favour of wildlife, conservationists believe, as the government is now moving to tighten regulations and designate new reserves to protect coastal wildlife.

"The message has reached the central government," says Jing Li of Saving the Spoon-Billed Sandpiper, a non-profit based in Shanghai, China.

In particular, China's State Oceanic Administration (SOA) earlier this month announced **it will dramatically curb commercial development of coastal wetlands**. "I've never heard of anything quite so monumental," says Nicola Crockford of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, based in Sandy, U.K., which has worked to protect habitat of migratory birds in China and elsewhere.

SOA's 17 January 2018 statement said the agency will only approve coastal wetland development that is important for public welfare or national defence. Unauthorized projects will be stopped, and illegal structures torn down. The administration will nationalize already reclaimed wetlands that have not yet been built on. (Despite the loss of tides, these areas can still benefit wildlife.) "This represents a … true 'sea change'

China moves to protect coastal wetlands used by migratory birds

in the official political attitudes to the very large, and internationally shared, biodiversity values of the shorelines of China," says ecologist Theunis Piersma of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. "Man, is this hopeful!"

China's coastal wetlands—and in particular those in the Yellow Sea, which is at the midpoint of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway—are crucial for birds that migrate between Siberia and Australia. But **development has robbed the birds of habitat and food**, and some 10% of the species that use the flyway are in peril of extinction. Case in point is the critically endangered spoon-billed sandpiper, which specializes in plucking tiny crustaceans from the mud with its eponymous beak. Only about 220 breeding pairs survive.

Lax regulation

Madcap economic development in coastal China led to intense demand for new land. Although there are some regulations to protect wetlands, local governments and businesses often ignored or dodged them. The central government began to give more because of environmental protections in about 2012. For example, China's equivalent of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cracked down on some local government officials charged with destruction of wetlands, says Zhijun Ma, a conservation biologist at Fudan University in Shanghai.

In 2015, the central government created a "red line" to protect 53 million hectares of wetlands, but a report from the State Forestry Administration, which has jurisdiction over much of the wetlands, **warned that ongoing reclamation has put those wetlands in danger**. SOA has stepped up action to prevent more destruction, issuing several regulations in recent years. And in 2016, SOA created 16 marine parks, bringing the total area with various levels of protection to about 124,000 square kilometers.

But the newest regulations are "a turning point" in SOA's attention to marine ecosystem protection, says Zhengwang Zhang, an ornithologist at Beijing Normal University. By deflecting development pressure, the new regulations will make it easier to create new reserves and should add momentum to efforts to expand a World Heritage Site around key wetlands, Crockford says.

More work awaits

Piersma and other researchers in the Global Flyway Network hope to continue research with satellite tracking of migratory birds to show which habitats are most important and to track progress in reserves. "We need to keep a close eye on the developments of the population, and see whether the recoveries actually will take place following political change." Ma says a more comprehensive evaluation on the status, trends, and threats to coastal wetlands at national level is still required.

There's political work to do, too. China still lacks national wetland protection laws, Zhang says, as well as a national action plan for coastal wetland protection. Penalties for damaging wetlands need to be strengthened.

Li notes that the current regulation is focusing on stopping reclamation but not directly on conserving biodiversity. It will take "huge resources" to restore reclaimed wetlands that have been invaded by spartina grass, which degrades the habitat for migratory birds, she says.

Enforcement will be important. Li suspects there is still opposition to the regulations from local governments that depend on development for revenue. Ultimately, Crockford says it will be important to win over locals by demonstrating the benefits of tidal wetlands, including nature tourism and flood protection.

Source: **http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/01/china-moves-protect-coastal-wetlands-used-migratory-birds?utm_campaign=news_daily_2018-01-30&et_rid=345368167&et_cid=1821013**

Russian Far East Shorebird Workshop – October 2017

Workshop Summary: Twenty-one avian specialists from Russia and the United States met from 9-11 October 2017 at the Wildlife Conservation Society's Sikhote-Alin Research Center in Ternei, Primorskii Krai, Russia. The purpose of this meeting was to share ideas, practice advanced avian tracking and data analysis skills, and to identify pressing trans-border conservation needs that can be addressed via collaborative action across the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Workshop participants were experts who conduct research across the region, including the Russian Provinces of Chukotka, Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Yakutia, Khabarovskii Krai, and Primorskii Krai, as well as the United States state of Alaska. Participants hailed from three institutions of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Far Eastern Federal University, Moscow State University, one federal-level protected area, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Russia and WCS Arctic Beringia Programs, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

We discussed several international initiatives (i.e., East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, Arctic Council's Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative) that seek to elevate conservation action from the country level to the international flyway level, and solicited thoughts for future collaborations that adhere to these frameworks. Several ideas for multilateral projects were proposed in the lively discussion that followed, including a study of Nordmann's Greenshank, a practically unstudied species and the second-most endangered shorebird of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (after the Spoon-billed Sandpiper).

The timing of this workshop overlapped with the peak autumn migration of Dunlin, the shorebird that has been the focus of a scientific collaboration between a number of the Russian scientists present, WCS Arctic Beringia, and USFWS (through support from the Trust for Mutual Understanding). Consequently, the third and final day of the workshop focused on Dunlin captures, as demonstrated by Aleksandr Matsyna (Dront EcoCenter) and Konstantin Maslovskii (Institute of Biology and Soil Science, Russian Academy of Sciences). Rick Lanctot (USFWS) and Rebecca Bentzen (WCS Arctic Beringia) then demonstrated the nuances of shorebird-specific transmitter attachments, with participants able to practice first on stuffed animals and then on live Dunlin before the (non-functional) transmitters were removed and the Dunlin released to continue their journey south.

Workshop Outcomes: This intensive, three-day workshop facilitated goodwill among nearly two dozen Russian and American scientists working on both sides of the Bering Strait. Significantly, this workshop resulted in the identification of true conservation needs that allow all parties (i.e., Russian and American researchers) to contribute their strengths to further conservation of migratory shorebirds at the international level.

Figure 1. The Wildlife Conservation Society's Sikhote-Alin Research Center, in Ternei, Primorye. The host site of the workshop. Photograph © Jonathan Slaght, WCS.

Figure 2. Dr Rebecca Bentzen gives a presentation of Wildlife Conservation Society work in the Arctic Beringia region. Photograph © Jonathan Slaght, WCS.

Russian Far East Shorebird Workshop – October 2017 cont.

Figure 3. In a covered gazebo in the Sikhote-Alin Biosphere Reserve, Drs Rick Lanctot and Rebecca Bentzen demonstrate how to attach a leg harness transmitter to a small shorebird, using a stuffed animal as an example. Photograph © Jonathan Slaght, WCS.

Figure 4. One of the Dunlin captured (and later released) as part of the technical component of the workshop program. Photograph © Jonathan Slaght, WCS.

East of Siberia: a Spoon-billed Curiosity

Credit: Jonathan C. Slaght

This Spoon-billed Sandpiper was hatched somewhere in the Arctic of northeastern Russia, in the spring of 1988, a diminutive fluff camouflaged among the tundra vegetation. A few months later she flew south for her first winter, aiming instinctively for the intertidal mudflats of Southeast Asia.

About two thousand miles into her journey—still in Russia—she found herself on a wide, sandy beach washed by the Sea of Japan. It was the first day of September, and she was mixed in with other migrating shorebirds, some possibly making this trip for the first time as she was. Someone else was on that beach that day: a young boy named Anton, and Anton had a slingshot.

The sandpiper never made it further south.

The boy, perhaps noticing the peculiar nature of her bill, brought the carcass to the local ornithologist, who preserved her, and the circumstances of her demise, as this museum specimen.

To be fair to Anton, when he killed this bird in 1988, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper was not the most endangered shorebird species in the world, as it is now. It was not until 2004 that the species was listed as Endangered, and only in 2008 was it considered Critically Endangered. Today, fewer than 400 are thought to exist.

While Anton did not personally make Spoon-billed Sandpipers endangered, the cumulative actions of indiscriminate hunters along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway are why this species is on the verge of extinction today. All indications are that the recent and cataclysmic free-fall of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population is due to sustained hunting of these birds on migration and on their wintering grounds.

Efforts to keep Spoon-billed Sandpipers from the yawning void of extinction have been nothing short of Herculean. Today, Russian conservationists guard breeding pairs on the Arctic tundra like pots of feathered gold, and English specialists struggle to breed them in captivity in case they disappear from the wild. In China, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Myanmar, aggressive education campaigns aim to raise awareness of this species and provide economic alternatives to shorebird hunting.

Why so much focus devoted to this one shorebird species? The Nordmann's Greenshank, for example (named after a 19th century Finnish biologist with a soft spot for microscopic parasites) is nearly as endangered, with as few as 600 individuals left. While it seems to share much of the same wintering habitat with Spoon-billed Sandpipers and faces the same conservation threats, this is probably the first time you're hearing of one.

The reality is that the Nordmann's Greenshank is a dull, anonymous thing, indistinguishable to most eyes from the pulsing masses of sandpipers, stints, and redshanks flecking Asia's shores during migration. It doesn't have a special hook to attract our attention. Or, should I say, a spoon.

There's something about that flared, spatulate bill that we find endearing, and humans are drawn to defend the charismatic, the peculiar, and the unique. For better or worse, this may be enough for Spoon-bills. Otherwise, the only Spoon-billed Sandpipers we may soon see will be museum curiosities like this one, drawn from the sterile cabinets of species we could not save.

Dr Jonathan C. Slaght
Russia and Northeast Asia Coordinator for the Wildlife Conservation Society
December 2017

Source: https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/east-of-siberia-a-spoon-billed-curiosity/

World Migratory Bird Day

The dates for World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) are announced as the second Saturday in May and October, which for 2018 are: 12 May and 13 October.

Both World Migratory Bird Day and the International Migratory Bird Day, which was initiated in 1993 and has been raising awareness throughout the western hemisphere, are now combined into a single campaign. It will increase the potential for its reach as a world-wide campaign, and the name will be kept as WMBD, but will be held on two dates. Please read more about the new World Migratory Bird Day here: http://www.eaaflyway.net/a-change-for-world-migratory-bird-day/

EAAFP encourages the celebration of WMBD in each country through events, messages, and media and also by encouraging national and local partner organizations to support its implementation, notably for migratory waterbirds.

Thank you very much for your active cooperation.

Tomoko Ichikawa
Communication Officer
East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat (EAAFP Secretariat)
Email: communication@eaaflyway.net
Tel: +82 32 458 6504
Skype: tomoko.ichikawa.e

The Year of the Bird - Why Birds Matter

In 1918 the US Congress passed the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to protect birds from wanton killing. To celebrate the centennial, National Geographic is partnering with the National Audubon Society, BirdLife International, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to declare 2018 the Year of the Bird.

Jonathan Franzen has written an article celebrating birds for the January 2018 edition of National Geographic, titled **Why Birds Matter, and Are Worth Protecting**

Here is an extract:

"For most of my life, I didn't pay attention to birds. Only in my 40s did I become a person whose heart lifts whenever he hears a grosbeak singing or a towhee calling and who hurries out to see a golden plover that's been reported in the neighbourhood, just because it's a beautiful bird, with truly golden plumage, and has flown all the way from Alaska. When someone asks me why birds are so important to me, all I can do is sigh and shake my head, as if I've been asked to explain why I love my brothers. And yet the question is a fair one, worth considering in the centennial year of America's Migratory Bird Treaty Act: Why do birds matter?"

The article, with magnificent supporting photographs by Joel Sartore, concludes:

"There is, however, one critical ability that human beings have and birds do not: mastery of their environment. Birds can't protect wetlands, can't manage a fishery, can't air-condition their nests. They have only the instincts and the physical abilities that evolution has bequeathed to them. These have served them well for a very long time, 150 million years longer than human beings have been around. But now human beings are changing the planet—its surface, its climate, its oceans—too quickly for birds to adapt to by evolving. Crows and gulls may thrive at our garbage dumps, blackbirds and cowbirds at our feedlots, robins and bulbuls in our city parks. But the future of most bird species depends on our commitment to preserving them. Are they valuable enough for us to make the effort?"