

Letter From AWSG Chair - Welcome to 2022

This is the first of the quarterly letters planned to be sent to AWSG members this year. The quarterly letter is intended to provide updates to members on activities related to shorebirds in addition to our publications *Stilt* and *Tattler* and increase our communication with members.

The 2022 - 2024 AWSG Committee

A new AWSG Committee will come into operation on 1 July 2022. I have attached the Committee composition (at **Annex A**) including some brief information about the members of the Committee. The Committee will continue to meet quarterly by Zoom and relevant issues arising from the meetings will be included in the quarterly letters.

I would like to express on behalf of the Committee our sincere appreciation to retiring Committee Members Ken Gosbell, Dr Amanda Lilleyman and Milly Formby for their contribution to the work of the Committee over the last two years.

Reports on Wader Studies Groups

AWSG

AWSG Shorebird and Tern Expedition 2022 (Report from Roz Jessop)

Unfortunately, the annual AWSG Shorebird and Tern Expedition 2022 has had to be postponed from its traditional February timing for another year. This is one of AWSG's ongoing major annual activities and one that was very closely associated with Clive Minton. Many will remember Clive's enthusiasm for leading teams including international participants in banding and leg flagging shorebirds in NW Western Australia.

The AWSG NWA Expedition Leadership Team – Rob Bush, Tegan Douglas, Roz Jessop, and Prue Wright - have advised that due to COVID restrictions, the Expedition has been rescheduled to 4th to 27th November 2022. Unfortunately, this means we will not have

information from bird capture on the breeding success in the northern hemisphere for 2021 for shorebirds. While we appreciate this change of date may have a negative impact on those whose employment involves extensive field trips in spring and early summer, a trip in November will allow percentage juveniles from flock observations and catching to be made early in the “off season”.

The deployment of satellite trackers on Oriental Pratincole 2021/22 will go ahead with a WA-based team lead by Grace Maglio. Currently the birds have not concentrated on traditional areas such as Anna Plains Station which is probably due to the widespread rain from the monsoon trough this year.

Global Flyway Network and Monitoring Yellow Sea Migrants in Australia (Report from Chris Hassell)

During the summer months the main role for field researchers, both volunteer and professional, in NWA is the shorebird population counts (MYSMA) and resightings of birds that have already been marked especially with no NW WA shorebird and tern research expedition possible this summer.

In total the MYSMA team counted 264,987 shorebirds (30 species) and 11,208 terns (11 species) during the 5-day survey in December 2021 at Roebuck Bay and over an 80 km section of 80 Mile Beach.

Resightings of flagged birds is vitally important, but often the poor cousin to the glamour that is the capture and marking of the birds in the first place. However, if you don't resight the flagged birds, you don't find much out! The northern shores of Roebuck Bay have many ideal roost sites that make resightings of birds quite easy (assuming the heat, humidity, rain and biting insects don't bother you too much).

The total resightings of colourbanded birds from the Global Flyway Network project from August 6th 2021 to January 27th 2022 are listed below:

SPECIES	TOTAL RESIGHTINGS SINCE 06-08-2021
Bar-tailed Godwit	1066
Black-tailed Godwit	807
Great Knot	1617
Red Knot	490
	3980

August 6th is the date chosen as some adults are arriving back by this date but, note also the total above includes a small number of resightings from China of birds still on southward migration.

The number of Engraved Flags from the AWSG marking project that comprises all shorebirds except Red-necked Stints and Red-capped plovers was 5,121.

To follow more work particularly the work with Chinese and Dutch colleagues go to <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>

VWSG

Victorian Wader Studies Group activities (<https://vwsg.org.au/>) (Report from Roz Jessop)

Field work in Victoria, King Island and SA

During 2021/22 field work has continued, however the planned trip to King Island in November 2021 to retrieve geolocators from Ruddy Turnstone had to be cancelled due to travel restrictions for non-Tasmanians. The next trip is scheduled for March 2022.

Field work in South Australia was also impacted with no inter-state visitors allowed. However, the SA team, led by Maureen Christie and Jeff Campbell, made catches of Ruddy Turnstone and was able to retrieve geolocators in autumn 2021. A field trip is scheduled from 2 April to 9 April 2022 to deploy and retrieve geolocators and volunteers are welcome. Field dates and contacts available on the VWSG web site <https://vwsg.org.au/>

Field work in Victoria has continued as scheduled with good catches made and geolocators retrieved from Red-necked Stint and Curlew Sandpipers. VWSG was unable to catch Red-necked Stint at the Western Treatment Plant as due to management changes the Curlew Sandpipers and Red-necked Stint now roost in Avalon Saltwork a bit further west. Good catches were made of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

Sanderling Tracking Project

The VWSG also commenced a new project investigating the use of the oceanic beaches between Killarney Beach near Warrnambool Victoria and Canunda National Park in SA. The Sanderling Tracking Project is a coordinated effort of community groups, researchers and land managers. Initiated through the Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar Coordination Committee, the project is funded through a Victorian Government Grant to the South-west Environment Alliance with support from Birdlife Australia, Deakin University, Friends of the Great South Walk, Friends of Shorebirds SE, Nature Glenelg Trust, Victorian Wader Study Group and coordinated by Gavin Prentice of the Glenelg Hopkins CMA.

Sanderling are declining throughout their range and the area from Killarney Beach near Warrnambool Vic to Canunda National Park in SA is their stronghold in Australia. The Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar site is one of the most important sites for this species in Australia holding over 1.4% of the flyway population.

This project aims to fill this knowledge gap by estimating the space use and time and energy budgets of foraging and roosting Sanderlings using Discovery Bay and adjacent coastlines, (Vic/SA). In doing so, the project seeks to define roosting and foraging habitat characteristics for Sanderling at Discovery Bay, which, once complete, will allow the better prioritisation of resources to safeguard critical habitat.

Radio tags were deployed in December and data obtained on the quick dispersal of birds along the coast, ongoing collection of leg flag sightings is also highlighting the need for long stretches of beach to support these birds. A further field trip is scheduled from 10 to 14 April. Field dates and contacts available on the VWSG web site <https://vwsg.org.au/>

A Sanderling photographic competition is being run in association with the project and entries from anywhere in the flyway can be made
<https://www.ghcma.vic.gov.au/2022/01/snap-a-sanderling-this-summer-and-win/>

An excellent report on the VWSG Field Trip to Discovery Bay 29th November to 5th December 2021 is at **Annex B**.

QWSG

Queensland Wader Studies Group Update on Activities (Robert Bush)

Despite COVID restrictions the QWSG managed to maintain its program of field activities quite well in 2021. Some joint surveys with Qld Marine Parks were cancelled and a joint training initiative with the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation

was held over but monthly surveys and the catching and flagging and transmitter program largely continued throughout the year.

The program for 2022 is filling up nicely so far. The first expedition to the Great Sandy Ramsar site near Fraser Island was held in January. For the first time there are now leg flagged waders and one with Bar-tailed Godwit with a transmitter attached and signalling at this site with local members already recording movements. This work is part of a large grant from the Queensland State Government to improve knowledge for conservation and the impacts of climate change along Queensland's coastal Ramsar sites.

In February and March, the second survey of another Ramsar Site at Bowling Green near Townsville will take place in collaboration with the Gudjuda Reference Group Aboriginal Corporation. Expeditions to the Mackay and Fraser coast are in the planning stages and the monthly counts of the major roosting sites along the Queensland coast have commenced again for 2022. We are hoping that as COVID restrictions lift, QWSG will be able to commence again its schools' education initiative with the Moreton Bay Environmental Centre and the Port of Brisbane.

Report on South Australia Shorebird Activities (Maureen Christie)

The issue of vehicle access to beaches in South Australia is finally on the public agenda. In 2019 there was a Parliamentary inquiry into the use of off-road vehicles in SA. Birds SA member Davide Gaglio produced a video – “On the Right Track” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs9pKDyqKns>, launched in August 2021. A Stakeholder Forum convened by the Department of Environment and Water on the specific issue of vehicle access to beaches, was held in December 2021. Attendees at this forum included representatives from the various land managers along with user groups, conservation groups, tourism and Aboriginal Corporations. Under discussion were options such as a system of classifying beaches giving various levels of access along with the possibility of having a permit system.

South Australia will go into care-taker mode later this month prior to state election on 19th March. But meanwhile, at least there is widespread concern that it is not only hoon behaviour that is an issue, but simply the sheer numbers of people/vehicles using the beach. What is happening at the moment is definitely not sustainable. There have been two incidents when Red-necked Stint have been killed by vehicles on beaches – late January this year at Goolwa, and April 2021 at Kangaroo Island. See

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-01-28/goolwa-beach-slow-down-as-red-necked-stints-get-squashed/100786304>,. The Kangaroo Island incident is reported in the Birds SA Winter newsletter No 258.

Other Waterbird/Shorebird related Activities

Report on Latham's Snipe National Project (Birgita Hansen)



Latham's Snipe at Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve, ACT

Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii* breed in Japan and far eastern Russia and they migrate to Australia between July and October and return in March – May. The Latham's Snipe Project was initiated to improve our understanding of the ecology and migration of the species. The main components of the project have been:

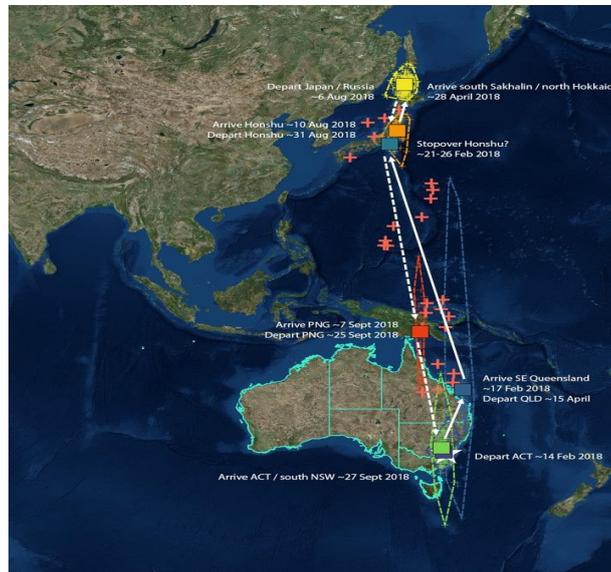
- Conducting National Snipe Surveys thrice-yearly since 2015,
- Movement studies of Latham's Snipe in Port Fairy and Canberra using light-level geolocators, satellite transmitters and VHF tags.

Latham's Snipe Surveys

Surveys of Latham's Snipe commenced in south-west Victoria 2014-2015 and were expanded to other parts of SE South Australia in 2015-2016. The surveys now cover all eastern states and territories. To date, >300 surveys sites have been counted with the assistance of ~400 volunteers. 54 nationally important sites have been identified so far and three of these are in the ACT (Jerrabomberra wetlands, West Belconnen Ponds, and Horse Park Wetlands).

Surveys were conducted across western Victoria in 2014-2015 and surveys were expanded to other parts of SE South Australia in 2015-2016 at up to 37 sites. In 2016-2017, surveys were expanded to all states in eastern Australia. As of September 2016, 53 sites were included. National Snipe surveys were conducted in November 2021 and provided the biggest count to date with approx. 1700 birds sighted across 140 sites.

A single ACT Snipe P3 with a geolocator was recaptured in 2018 and data showed it had made a ~2-week stopover in southern or central PNG. It may have bred in southern Russia (or northern Hokkaido) but the resolution of geolocator data was poor so it was difficult to determine exact locations.



Leg flagging and data obtained

63 individual Snipe have been leg flagged with orange engraved leg flags (52 in Port Fairy and 11 in Canberra). Blue leg flags have been placed on Snipe in Japan (>1000 birds). Flag re-sightings in Port Fairy have been infrequent. 39 geolocators were fitted on birds in Port Fairy (14 in 2015-2016 and 25 in 2016-2017). 6 birds were recaptured and two moved between local sites

In December 2021, 11 birds were caught at Jerrabomberra Wetlands, the largest single catch since 2016. 3 adult birds weighing more than 150g were fitted with leg loop harnesses and orange leg flags. Regular transmissions have been received from two of the birds. Excellent data has been provided from both birds on roosting and foraging showing different daytime and night-time use of the wetlands

Lori Gould has been awarded a 3-year ANU PHD scholarship to study the movement and migration of Latham's Snipe at Jerrabomberra Wetlands in the ACT and her study will focus on:

- Using GPS tracking to determine migratory pathways and key stopover sites in eastern Australia,
- Key characteristics on non-breeding and staging sites
- Making an assessment of the relative abundance and distribution of snipe in urban ACT compared to alpine areas
- To what extent individual snipe move between the different wetlands within Canberra

Lori has established a large volunteer support group to assist her with monitoring and observing Latham's Snipe in the ACT.

Overwintering Project Mapping Sanctuary Project (Kate Gorringe-Smith)

The Overwintering Project Mapping Sanctuary Project is the brainchild of Kate Gorringe-Smith and is about migratory shore birds that spend a large part of their year on the shores of Australia and NZ. To participate in the project artists from Australia and NZ are asked to respond to the unique nature of their local migratory shorebird habitat and invited to create an intricate and personal map of precious shorebird habitat. To date over 200 artists from around Australia and NZ have joined the project which is expected to continue for at least 3 years. Artists who join the project donate 2 prints from the same edition, one to exhibit in ongoing Overwintering Project Exhibitions and one to sell to raise funds for shorebird conservation.

The project has donated to AWSG. In 2019 the project donated \$10,000 (2019), \$13,000 (2020), \$14,000 (2021) and \$5,000 (2022 to date). \$10,000 of the funds were allocated to purchase of satellite trackers for the Oriental Pratincole project. AWSG is immensely grateful to Kate for her great fundraising efforts to assist AWSG research activities.

Check the Overwintering Project on Facebook website to see future exhibitions to be held. The ***Miracle of Shorebird Migration*** is currently on at the Vancouver Arts Centre in Albany WA from 1-28 February as part of the 2022 South Coast Festival of Birds and Biodiversity and will be well worth visiting.

Sharing the Awesomeness of Shorebirds from 5000ft! (Milly Formby)

Intrepid micro flight pilot Milly (Amelia) Formby is undertaking an impressive shorebird flying adventure called Wing Threads: Flight Around Oz. Setting off from the shorebird capital, Broome, Western Australia, the flight will start in May 2022 and finish in November 2022. The distance of her entire flight will be about 20,000 kilometres, similar to the shorebirds' annual migration. On her way Milly will stop at schools and libraries to share *A Shore bird Flying Adventure* with local communities in over 70 towns.

In 2019, CSIRO Publishing commissioned Milly to capture the message of the shorebirds and her dream to follow them on migration. A ***"Shorebird Flying Adventure"*** is a 32-page, non-fiction story book aimed at mid-primary students. It is written by acclaimed Australian author, Jackie Kerin and illustrated by Milly Formby. The main character, Microlight Milly, takes the reader on a flying adventure along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway showing them why shorebirds are so awesome.

You may like to help Milly and contribute to her adventure with a donation. Your donation will help cover the fuel, aircraft maintenance, food and accommodation costs for a two-person ground crew and me over a period of 6 months. You can visit the following website <https://chuffed.org/pay/campaign/86761> if you would like to support Milly's adventure.

BirdMark Database

After the launch of BirdMark a little over a year ago, more than 3000 resightings have been submitted through the new portal and the rate of accrual is steadily increasing, with further

improvements to the interface and feedback to observers and banders. One of those changes is that the address of the portal has now been simplified to just <https://www.birdmark.net/>. Moreover, on the site, interesting links have been added to not only allow submitting observations but also enjoy the sighting of others (e.g. <https://www.birdmark.net/birdmark/overviewSubmittedPictures.php>) and to see where our flagged birds actually go (e.g. <https://www.birdmark.net/birdmark/overviewPlainFlags.php>). And there is more there. Check it out.

Still, with all this, the portal has not yet seen the end of its development with possibly one of the more exciting (and most visible) planned improvements being the launch of a vetting site, where you will all be invited to help perfect observations (where there is e.g. doubt on the species observed) and filter out mistakes. We anticipate that to come online by mid-year.

For some possibly new, BirdMark is not only a portal and a database for colour marks on shorebirds. Albeit only visible to few, BirdMark also contains the metal data band database of the AWSG, VWSG (including FoSSE) and from the NT. Thus, with all this banding data now being online and in a standard format, it can now be mined from behind any computer with internet (provided you have the login details), which has seen a considerable increase in the data's use and exciting scientific papers currently in the making. Also here development is still ongoing with the next milestone being a convenient facility to import new banding data.

AWSG Publications

Tattler (Editor Phil Straw)

“As current editor of *Tattler*, I would like to take this opportunity to make direct contact with all members of the AWSG, for the first time ever, as part the President's letter to you all. You will hear about the activities of our committee members and what keeps them busy in the many research projects and duties as office bearers.

Tattler started life as '***The Tatter***' in October 1994 at my suggestion, as a need for a quarterly newsletter to increase the level of communication for members of the AWSG as well as other researchers, and conservationists rather than include a more obscure news section in the AWSG's biannual science journal, 'The Stilt'.

The change of the newsletter title to '***Tattler***' in 2006 coincided with a move to form an Asia Pacific shorebird group to widen communications outside the AWSG membership along our migratory flyway. This included people involved in shorebird conservation and research from most of the countries in the Asia Pacific region. It is now known as the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF) Network.

We now intend to provide articles on shorebird projects/conflicts around Australia as well as along the EAAF Network. Contributions are welcome if you have suitable articles than need attention, particularly relating to shorebird conservation issues. You will receive reminders from time to time a month or so before publication is due. **However**, as we are late with the next edition #51 we intend to have it mailed out on 28 February!” (Phil Straw)

Stilt (Editor Imogen Warren)

“***Stilt*** is on track to be published again in May and we hope to continue to issue twice a year from now on. The team has worked hard on streamlining processes and ensuring our review

procedures are robust. We welcome any feedback or suggestions, and you can contact me at info@imogenwarrenphotography.net. Please remember that *Stilt* is a scientific journal but is open to reports and short notes and we encourage members to submit their observations and findings about shorebirds. If you would like to be involved but are not sure what is where to start, please do contact us.

The May edition (*Stilt* 77) will have interesting articles from around Australia, Asia and Russia. As previously, it will be sent electronically for most members, and we hope you enjoy it. Thanks to our Editorial Board for their hard work at the moment preparing the journal.” (Imogen Warren)

International Activities

Meeting of the Partners (MOP) of the EAAFP

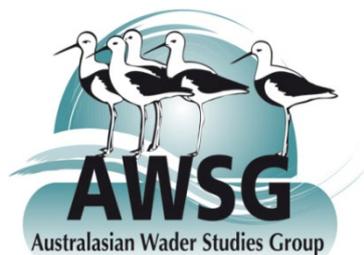
The 11th Meeting of the Partners of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) continues to be deferred due to COVID. It has been provisionally scheduled for March 2023, but timing of the Conference will continue to be reassessed during the year depending on the state of play with COVID internationally. AWSG continues to provide input to the Partnership through participation on the Finance Sub-committee (President Alison Russell-French) and the CEPA Working Group (AWSG International Liaison Officer Phil Straw)

Australasian Shorebird Conference (ASC)

The next ASC is currently under consideration and in view of the constraints imposed by COVID it is likely that it will be held on-line later in the year. Information about the Conference and the program, speakers and other arrangements will be provided at a later date.

Alison Russell-French OAM
Chair, AWSG
19 February 2022

Annex A



AWSG Committee – 2020-2022

The AWSG Committee for 2020-22 which comes into being on 1 July 2020 is as follows:

Nomination	Position	Skills and Interests
Alison Russell-French	Chair and interim Secretary, AWSG representative to the EAAFP	Policy and program management experience especially in wetlands and migratory species, representational and negotiation skills, some field activities, PR and awareness raising about migratory shorebirds
Birgita Hansen	Vice Chair and Treasurer, National Coordinator of the Latham's Snipe project, and actively involved in shorebird field activities	Shorebird monitoring through counting and catching, identification and conservation of important sites, citizen science, science editing, (effectiveness of) conservation law and policy, engaging land managers for wetland protection
Phil Straw	EAA Flyway Liaison Officer, Editor of Tattler newsletter and consultant on shore birds	Design, construction, management and restoration of shorebird feeding, roosting and nesting habitats.
Danny Rogers	Chair Scientific Committee including overseeing of data requests, co-leader of the MYSMA project, active in migratory shorebird research and	Shorebird migration, counts and monitoring; moults and biometrics; shorebird identification; habitat selection; management of constructed

	actively involved in shorebird field activities	wetlands; Western Treatment Plant; north Western Australia; Australian Painted Snipe.
Steve Klose	Committee Member, AWSG Conservation Officer, actively involved in shorebird field activities, and liaison with BirdLife Australia	Policy development and implementation, international treaties and negotiations, environmental impact assessments, monitoring, conservation innovation and strategy, community involvement, National Shorebird Monitoring, Migratory Shorebird Conservation Action Plan, links with IUCN
Dan Weller	Committee Member; Former national Migratory Shorebird Program Manager. Actively involved in shorebird field activities AWSG representative on the Migratory Shorebird CAP Steering Committee	Shorebird monitoring, banding and flagging, national shorebird monitoring site network management, important migratory shorebird habitat directory, Indigenous education and conservation action capacity building, conservation advocacy, citizen science, environmental impact assessments, interpretation and application of state and Commonwealth environmental legislation, shorebird photography
Joris Driessen	Committee Member and Flagging Database Officer, and actively involved in shorebird field activities	Shorebird counts, banding and flagging, national shorebird monitoring site network, data analysis.
Maureen Christie	Committee Member, representative of Friends of Shorebirds SE South Australia and actively involved in shorebird field activities	Catching, banding and monitoring both migratory and resident shorebirds. Advocacy work on behalf of shorebirds.
Grace Maglio	Committee Member and actively involved in shorebird field activities	Satellite tracking shorebirds with particular interest in Oriental Pratincoles. Catching, banding and monitoring shorebirds. Coordinator of Flock Oz - Broome, conducting community engagement activities in Broome and surrounds, working with DBCA and Indigenous ranger groups. Shorebird welfare and

		rehabilitation. Benthos and foraging behaviour.
Chris Hassell	Committee Member, GFN Representative and co-leader of the MYSMA project, and actively involved in shorebird field activities	Shorebird capture. Age and moult. Resighting work and public engagement associated with that throughout the EAAF. China coast Shanghai to Bohai Bay, field work and communication with EAAF shorebirders. Global Flyway Network (GFN) contact.
Robert Bush	Committee Member representing QWSG and actively involved in shorebird field activities	Migration, surveys and counts, banding and banding training, transmitters, demography, education (app development) and policy advocacy work.
Roz Jessop	Committee Member, lead on the NW WA Expedition, VWSG Representative and actively involved in shorebird field activities	Habitat use of migratory and resident shorebirds and terns. Study of shorebird movement between habitats using leg-flag sightings and external tracking devices. Facilitating partnerships and linkages between shorebird researchers, volunteer groups and government organisations. Volunteer newsletters.

VWSG Field Trip to Discovery Bay

Aim: Catch Sanderling to put on radio transmitters (20) and leg flags to support the project “Characterising patterns of habitat use among endangered migratory shorebirds using tagging and tracking technologies”.

29th November to 5th December 2021.

Background:

Shorebirds the world over are in decline, and migratory species using the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) including the Sanderling *Calidris alba* are of foremost conservation concern. The reason for dramatic population declines across the EAAF are diverse and includes land reclamation / coastal development (both overseas and in Australia), climate change, invasive species, and human disturbance.

Sanderlings are small shorebirds (<100g) that can be seen in flocks along the oceanic coastline of Discovery Bay and the lower SE of South Australia throughout the year. Adult birds spend the Austral summer here and then begin their journey along the East Asian Australasian Flyway in May, breeding in the high Arctic and arriving back in northern Australia in September, flying overland to southern locations after a brief rest. Juvenile birds remain in these areas all year until they are at least two years old.

Sanderling are declining throughout their range and the area from Killarney Beach near Warrnambool Vic to Canunda National Park in SA is their stronghold in Australia. The Glenelg Estuary and Discovery Bay Ramsar site is one of the most important sites for this species in Australia holding over 1.4% of the flyway population.

Flocks frequent the oceanic beaches running back and forth as the waves wash in and out actively feeding on small animals that live between the sand grains. Sometimes they are concentrated in large flocks of up to 1500 birds if a hatching of insects from the sand is happening. Flocks offer protection from predators such as birds of prey.

Participants at a shorebird expert and land manager workshop held in Warrnambool in June 2019 agreed that the limited knowledge on roosting and foraging behaviours of Sanderling at Discovery Bay and SE SA is a barrier to effective species conservation.

This project aims to fill this knowledge gap by estimating the space use and time and energy budgets of foraging and roosting Sanderlings using Discovery Bay and adjacent coastlines, (Vic/SA). In doing so, the project seeks to define roosting and foraging habitat characteristics for Sanderling at Discovery Bay, which, once complete, will allow the better prioritisation of resources to safeguard critical habitat.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Grant Applicant: South West Environment Alliance.
Coordination: Glenelg Hopkins CMA (Gavin Prentice)
Technical design: Birdlife Australia - Dr Dan Lees, Arthur Rylah Institute -
Dr Danny Rogers
Animal procedures and ethics: Prof Marcel Klassen

Other partners and volunteers

Land manager: Parks Victoria
Volunteer support: BirdLife Australia, Friends of the Shorebirds SE, Victorian
Wader Study Group, Nelson Coastcare, Friends of Great South West Walk, Nature Glenelg
Trust

The VWSG agreed to support the program by catching Sanderling for the deployment of radio transmitters.

Field work was scheduled from 30th November to 10th December with 29th November and 10th December being travel days.

Prior to the field work commencing local volunteers surveyed the coast between Killarney Beach and Canunda National Park for flocks of Sanderling. Up to 1500 Sanderling were sighted at the mouth of the Glenelg Estuary in November 2021 and 400 seen at Piccanninie Ponds SA.



Sanderling at the mouth of the Glenelg Estuary – photo by Dave Nichols - Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority 16/11/2021.

The team gathered in Nelson on the 29th of November after travelling from eastern Victoria and South Australia.

30/11/2021 – as the birds were not regularly in one site the team dispersed to check out possible catching locations.

Glenelg River mouth – 06.30am a flock of Red-necked Stint and Red-capped Plover with a few Sanderlings were present on the sandbar just inside the mouth. A canoe was used to transport volunteers to access the western side of the river mouth where Sanderling had been seen previously (photos Roz Jessop). No Sanderling were present.





Estuary mouth where the birds were observed in previous days.

Further reccies were carried out after breakfast. At the Glenelg River mouth between 13.00 and 16.00 Caspian and Crested Tern were observed heading back to roost from off-shore fishing trips, a SA Red-necked Stint was observed in a flock of 250 along with 16 Sanderling and 50 Red-capped Plover and two Hooded Plover and Pied Oystercatchers. The stints and Sanderling moved between roosting on the sand islands in the mouth of the estuary and the north-western shoreline where a small bay was a hot spot for feeding. The afternoon also brought more recreationists in boats and jet skies and swimmers to the area, with the swimmers disturbing the feeding birds when they explored the western bank.



Roosting shorebirds on the sand island in the estuary (Photo Roz Jessop)

Elsewhere a flock of Ruddy Turnstone were seen on Killarney Beach, but no Sanderling were present, nor were any seen on nearby beaches. However a large flock was found feeding between Nobles Rocks and the mouth of the estuary. Unfortunately, this location was inaccessible other than by foot, so we decided a small team would go out the next day equipped with noose mats and attempt to catch birds for deployment of radio transmitters.

01/12/2021 – one volunteer commenced walking from Nobles Rocks and the others from the mouth of the estuary hoping to meet up with the Sanderling. The team was able to catch three birds which were fitted with radio transmitters – see photographs below.

The rest of the team divided up to do further observations for flocks in suitable catching locations. Reports were also received from local volunteers. Sanderling were reported from beaches east of Port Fairy, but only small groups, some had suitable access.





Sanderling fitted with radio transmitter (S. Woodend).

2nd December.

As birds had not been seen in big flocks elsewhere the team decided a further day would be devoted to trying to catch birds using the roost mats near Noble Rocks. VWSG, local volunteers and GHCMA personnel made up the team, leaving at 7.30am from at 7.30am from the Nobles Rocks end and 7.30am from the estuary end. Although the flock and two transmitter birds located using the radio receiver, no birds were captured.

The rest of the team split up with FOSSE volunteers from South Australia checking out access at Piccanninie Ponds – where the cannon net equipment would need to be transported from and beaches nearby to see if any birds had split off the main flock.

A report was received from BirdLife shorebird counters that a flock of 40 Sanderling had been seen at Yambuk at 09.00. So part of the team hot-footed it to Yambuk and were able to catch up with the counter for the good news that birds had been seen below the main pathway and at the mouth of the estuary. The birds were still there at 12.35pm roosting on the far side of the estuary and on a sandy beach on the eastern side of the outlet. The equipment would have to be carried 700m, so a request was sent out for the SA members to bring back barrows and trollies.

When we met up in the evening, we planned to try catching at Yambuk to put on the remaining transmitters the next day.

03 December 2021

Left at 07.00 for Yambuk and had the net set near the estuary entrance by 9.30am. The birds quickly returned to their previous activities, having a quick feed, and then going to roost on the beach. We fired at 10.30am and made a good catch of 119 Sanderling including two birds previously banded in South Australia at Stony Drain near Port MacDonnell. The BA counter also saw two additional leg flagged birds banded at Danger Point in South Australia. The remaining transmitters (12) deployed making a total of fifteen.

We took a rest day on 4th December to go bird watching along the Glenelg River. When we returned to camp, we found that SA had bought in new Covid restrictions. This meant the SA contingent had to return home or be subject to changed testing and quarantine requirements. The Vic contingent returned home the next day.

FOSSE and local volunteers have been monitoring the birds' using receivers loaned to the project by Deakin University and searching for leg flagged birds.

Glenelg Hopkins CMA have prepared a flyer and are undertaking publicity on social media to encourage reporting of leg flags and Sanderling. This includes a prize for the best photo of a leg-flagged bird - see

<https://www.ghcma.vic.gov.au/2021/12/december-2021-newsletter/>

Roz Jessop

26/12/2021