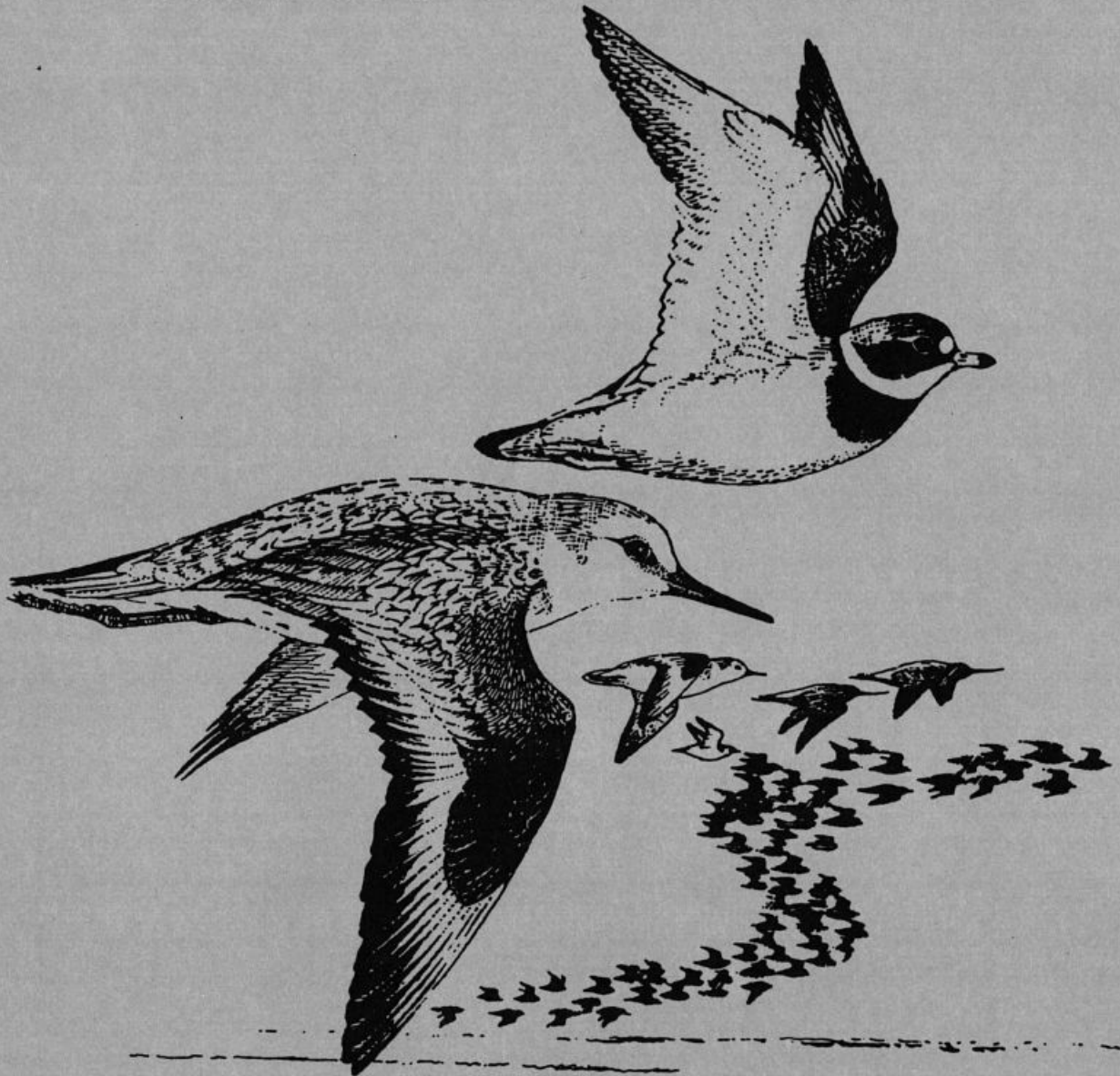


# WADER STUDY GROUP



# BULLETIN

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## CORRESPONDENCE

Except for that concerning *Wader Study Group Bulletin*, all correspondence, including matters and proposals concerning colour-marking schemes, should be sent to the Group's official address; *Wader Study Group, PO Box 247, Tring, Hertfordshire, HP23 5SN, UK*. All general enquiries should be sent to the General Secretary.

### Membership

All applications for membership, initial subscriptions and renewals, changes of address, matters relating to the circulation of the *Bulletin* etc. should be sent to the Membership Secretary.

### Payments and Subscriptions

See details on inside back cover.

### Projects

Matters and proposals concerning co-operative research projects and objectives should be sent to the Co-ordinator.

### Colour-marking Register

Proposals and sightings concerning colour-marking schemes should be sent to the Colour-marking Register at the official address given above.

### Bulletin

Correspondence concerning the *Wader Study Group Bulletin* should be sent to the Editor: D A Stroud, *Wader Study Group Bulletin*, c/o UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough PE1 1JY, U.K.

### Deadlines

1 January for the April issue  
1 May for the August issue  
1 September for the December issue

If correspondence between editor and author(s) is likely to be needed, material must be received well before these dates if material is to be included in the next issue.

There will be a follow up to the methods workshops held at the 1993 meeting during the 1994 conference. Further details will be given in the August *Bulletin* (see also below in this *Bulletin* for a progress report on this initiative).

Saturday evening will be devoted to informal discussions, and there will be a bar (and perhaps music) available. Further talks will take place on Sunday morning, with field trips during the afternoon to the Meldorfer Bucht and the Speicherkoog Dithmarschen, both close to Büsum. The field trips will end at 17.00.

The Monday after the meeting (24 October) will be given over to the one-day workshop on measuring and monitoring the breeding success of waders. This will finish at approx. 17.00.

## General information

Büsum is a very small town on the west coast of Schleswig-Holstein. It is situated in the centre of the East Atlantic flyway on the border between Europe's largest cabbage cultivation area and the Wadden Sea. Büsum is said to be the second most windy place in Germany, and indeed, the weather in October may be a bit cold, stormy and rainy (a fact, however, that does not distinguish October from other months). The town's main income is tourism, but there are also harbour facilities and - of course - the cabbage fields, which in some places even provide breeding grounds for waders like Avocets.

The natural values of Büsum are clearly situated on the Wadden Sea side of the dikes. The vast mud- and sandflats of the outer Elbe estuary hold a very rich wader fauna, especially south of Büsum. Many waders spend the high tide in the Speicherkoog Dithmarschen, which will be visited during the excursion.

## Travel arrangements

Büsum can be reached by plane, boat, railway, and car (and in the case of winds from the east also by bicycle). At present, direct plane and boat services are unfortunately only available from Helgoland. Moreover, the boat trip from Helgoland to Büsum cannot be recommended due to an unfortunate ratio of vessel size and wave heights during storms.

Therefore, **plane** travellers are advised to land in Hamburg and use the train thereafter. The correct station for the trains to the west coast in Hamburg-Altona. This station may be reached from the airport by using a taxi (c. 25 min) or public transport (> 60 min, but 90% cheaper than the taxi). There is a bus shuttle between the airport and the nearest city train (S-Bahn) station (Olsdorf). The S-Bahn line S1 will; bring you directly from the S-Bahn station to Hamburg-Altona. Tickets for the whole trip to Hamburg-Altona may be purchased from the bus driver. For getting closer to Büsum, please continue reading under **train** services.

All **train** connections from the east, the south, and the west, incorporate a small stopover in Hamburg-Altona, the last of the three or four (depending from where you come) train stations in Hamburg. In most (but not all) cases, you will have to change trains here. Arriving in Hamburg-Altona, you may take the next train to Westerland or Husum (**not** Flensburg and **not** Kiel). All trains to Husum and/or to Westerland serve Heide, where you have to change train again. There is a fairly regular service of trains from Heide to Büsum. Travelling from the north (for example from Esbjerg) to Büsum by train is difficult (you have to change trains up to five times!) but possible!

Providing the organising committee know the times of arrival of your planes (at Hamburg), or your trains (at Heide), we might be able to collect you with mini buses. At present **we cannot yet make any promises** in this respect, but it

would help if you could let us know your arrival time by September 15. If you do not hear from us by 10 October, we will **not** be able to collect you.

Car travellers which have to pass Hamburg are advised to use the motorway A23 via Itzehoe to Husum. Near Heide, shortly before the motorway turns to the national road B5, Büsum is signposted. Travellers from the north are advised to use the B5 to Heide and follow the signs from there.

All delegates are kindly requested to arrive first at the Youth Hostel, where the registration desk will be open from 16.00 to 20.00 on Friday 21 October.

## Food and accommodation

Accommodation and meals will be in the Youth Hostel. The number of small rooms (two or three beds) is very limited and will be allocated on a "first come, first served" basis. There will be enough beds available in larger rooms. It is recommended to bring bed linen.

Meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) will also be taken at the Youth Hostel. Delegates with special dietary requirements, e.g. vegetarians, should indicate this on the booking forms. During the breaks, coffee and tea will be served in the conference room. There will be a bar serving beer, spirits and soft drinks in the conference room on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

## Talks and posters

Offers of talks and posters should be made to:

Hermann Hötter, WSG Conference,  
FTZ, Hafentörn, 25761 Büsum,  
Germany.

Phone (work): (0) 4834-604-280,  
(home): (0) 4841-73673,  
fax: (0) 4834-6772.

Please note that the time for talks is limited to 15 minutes, with an

At Esbjerg in 1991, the governments of the three Wadden Sea countries adopted a declaration containing a guiding principle for the trilateral Wadden Sea policy, common management principles and common objectives, which cover all main impacts and uses (Esbjerg Declaration).

The 1993 symposium discussed the Esbjerg Declaration and agreed a series of recommendations to be given to the next Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea. These included recommendations related to protection and zero-use nature reserves, salt-marsh protection and management, location of wind turbines, fisheries, and international scientific co-operation.

The symposium endorsed a continuation of the moratorium on gas exploration and exploitation in the Dutch Wadden Sea recognising the pivotal role that the Wadden Sea plays in the whole East Atlantic Flyway.

Also stressed by the Symposium was the importance of establishing specific conservation plans for the Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* and Dunlin in the breeding season.

## WETLAND BENEFITS

Two new publications have been published by Wetlands for the Americas (WA). In partnership with Asian Wetland Bureau and IWRB, WA have produced a 45 page book describing the benefits wetlands provide to society. It aims to serve as a tool for public awareness and as a reference guide for those seeking further technical expertise. Available from IWRB, AWB or WA and in English, it costs \$15.00.

The second WA publication is in response to a proposed development project called Hidrovia which aims to construct a complex navigation system allowing barge traffic on the Parana-Paraguay rivers of South America. The chief goal of

this project would be to provide economic stimulus to Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

WA's report illustrates the potentially negative consequences of providing a cheap form of transportation at the expense of the region's long term environmental health. Available in English, Portuguese and Spanish, this report costs \$25.00. Both the above publications can be ordered through Wetlands for Americas, 81 Stage Point Road, P.O. Box 1770, Manomet, MA 02345 USA.

recorded on passage or in winter in S.E. Asia and in the Indian sub-continent (all Figure 1) with vagrant individuals occurring as far afield as the U.K., Morocco, Seychelles and Israel. There are however a number of recent records of flocks of Great Knot from Arabian Gulf states where formerly this species was also afforded the status of vagrant. This paper collates all records of Great Knot in the Arabian peninsula and discusses those coming from within the Arabian Gulf.



Figure 1. Breeding (cross hatched) and wintering (single hatched) areas of Great Knot.

## RECORDS FROM AROUND ARABIA (all named sites shown in Figure 2)

### Oman

Great Knot was first recorded in Oman (& Arabia) when three birds were identified at West Khawr (Salalah, Southern Oman) on 23 September 1982 (King & Gallagher 1983). Two previous claims, both of singles on Masirah Island (on 30 November 1974 and 6 December 1975), were not conclusively identified at the time and thus not considered admissible (but see below). Following the 1982 record there was one near Seeb on 26 August 1986 and two at Khawr Awamir on 23 August 1987 (one to 5 September), both sites being in northern Oman. In 1988 two were seen both at Seeb (19 September) and Awamir (29 September) and on 12 September 1989, a single was at Khawr Azaiba, also northern Oman. However since the winter of 1988/9 a single site, Barr al Hikman, has produced a series of unprecedented counts. A total of 119 birds were counted here on 7 January 1989 (Scott & Rose 1989) with five remaining on 3 March while during the survey undertaken by the West Asian Shorebird survey team the following winter (1989/90) 1,193 individuals were found in December/January (Uttley *et al.* 1990). This site is the premier shorebird resort in the country and lies on the central Oman coast *opposite Masirah Island*. Although at least 20 birds had been seen at Barr al Hikman on 6 September 1990 (*Oman Bird News*

9) only 17 were found here in the winter of 1990/91 (Perennou & Mundkhar 1991). Similarly small numbers, 37 and 14, were found during the respective Asian Waterfowl Census counts in January 1992 and 1993 (Perennou & Mundkhar 1991; Eriksen pers. comm).

The first arrivals of Great Knot on the Batinah coast of Oman may be in August but there is no information on arrival dates at the main resort which lies much further south. The relatively small numbers recorded in the mid-winter counts, by which time most birds should have arrived, since that of 1989/90 does not necessarily mean numbers changed between then and the following winters as the area is large (c.200 sq. km) and flocks mobile. They could therefore have been missed quite easily. Only during the WAS survey in December 1989 and January 1990 has complete coverage been achieved whereas the standard AWC counts are made of part of the area on a single day or at best over a few days each winter.

Recent records from other sites are all of single birds, at Sur Masirah on 12 October 1990; Airport Khawr near Muscat in September 1991 and off the Salalah corniche in southern Oman on 9 September 1992 (*Oman Bird News* 10, 12 & 13 respectively). The last of these sightings together with the first Omani record in 1982, represent the most southerly sightings in Arabia to date.

### United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Great Knot is still officially recognised as a vagrant (less than 10 records) to the UAE, this despite the occurrence of a flock at one site (Khor al Beidah) in three of the last four winters. The first UAE record was of a single at Khor Kalba on the east (Gulf of Oman) coast on 8 & 12 November 1986 (Richardson & Richardson 1991). All records since have been from within the Arabian Gulf from the Emirates of Umm al Quwain at Khor al Beidah and from islands off the coast of, and belonging to, Abu Dhabi. The first record from the latter emirate was in March 1993.

At Khor al Beidah up to five were present from 7-9 March 1990. Despite a search being made none were seen in the winter of 1990/1 or early part of winter 1991/2, but 70 were present here on 30/31 March 1992. At the other end of the year 21 found on 18 November had increased to 37 on 17/18 December (1992), followed by the highest count to date at this site of 90 birds on 26 December. Less than 10 were noted on all subsequent visits until late March 1993 but 46 were present on 9 April, with a single sub-adult remaining until at least 27 April. It is generally accepted among resident ornithologists that Great Knot may have been overlooked prior to 1990 when visitors first located birds at Khor al Beidah.

Also in 1993, flocks were seen for the first time on two islands west of Abu Dhabi city. On Abu al Abyadh 31 were seen on 11 March and on Merawah a peak of 227+ on 22 March where they had been noted daily from the 18th. Many of these birds were in full summer plumage and thus presumed to be adults. There are extensive

intertidal areas between these two neighbouring islands and there may be movement of these birds between various feeding sites. Regular observations on the island of Abu al Abyadh in March and April 1993 failed to produce any further sightings, and similarly none had been seen there in late February.

Four immature birds were present on Merawah on 1 August 1993 and had presumably overwintered (in the company of non-breeding plumaged Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica*).

#### Saudi Arabia

The first Saudi record was of two birds on the shore south of al-Khober from 28-30 May 1984 (one remaining until 9 June) (Bundy *et al.* 1989). There were no further records until 1991 when a single (2nd year) bird was seen on sewage fed lagoons (on former sabkha) at Jubail, Eastern Province on 5 April only to be followed by 107 in full summer plumage at nearby Tarut Bay on 9 April (Symens pers comm.). None was seen on subsequent visits here although another bird, again a second year, was found at a second site in Tarut Bay on 11 May 1991. Two more recent records are also from Tarut Bay (at a third site): one (first winter) 26 November 1991 and seven in winter plumage on 17 October 1992.

Two more as yet unsubstantiated records from the winter of 1992/3 concern a single at an "inland" site and "several" at Jizan on the Red Sea coast (Symens pers. comm.). It should also be noted that several claims of Knot *Calidris*

*canutus* in the Eastern Province prior to 1984, all of which were rejected, may well in fact have related to Great Knot. The only accepted Saudi record of the former species concerns a single summer plumaged bird (accompanying the 107 Great Knot !) in April 1991.

There is no doubt that the increase in records is due at least in part to an increase in observer coverage and awareness. Extensive shorebird counts in April/May and November/December 1991 were part of a concerted effort by ICBP/NCWCD (and in particular Peter Symens), following large scale oil pollution in the Gulf.

#### Bahrain

There are only two records from Bahrain, both of roosting singles. The first record was on Muharraq island on 5 January 1990 and the second (a juvenile) at Janabiyah on 17 September 1992 (per Erik Hirschfeld).

#### Other States

There appear to be no records of Great Knot for Qatar, Kuwait or Iraq all of which countries border the Arabian Gulf and possess substantial intertidal areas. Iran which presents an extensive but particularly remote and inaccessible Gulf coastline is also hampered by a lack of observers. Scott (1975) listed no occurrence of Great Knot in Iran and although there has certainly been some recent sight records of singles (and possibly small groups) since, I have been unable to locate them thus far.

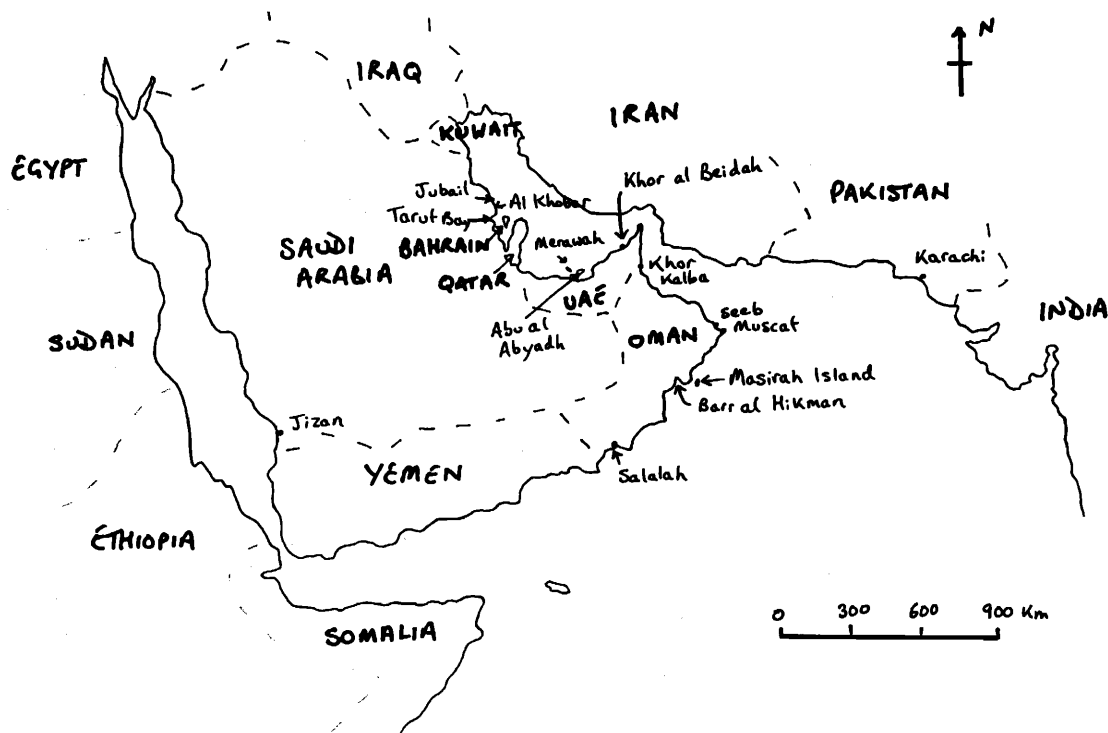


Figure 2. Main sites in Arabia where Great Knot has been recorded.

## OBSERVATION OF GREAT KNOT WITHIN THE ARABIAN GULF

Most of the following comments are based on observation of birds in UAE. In almost all instances there is a close association of Great Knot with Bar-tailed Godwit both at roost and in feeding sites. Typical habitat for flocks is extensive intertidal, often remote, sand and mudflats on open coasts. None has been seen along strictly sabkha coast. Access to these areas is characteristically difficult. The UAE coast, for example, is a maze of islands, channels and extensive intertidal areas and shoals with some large areas of mangrove. On Merawah, Great Knot only arrived close to the shore on the dropping tide having roosted elsewhere, and on one occasion a group of 60 birds was observed feeding over ten kilometres from the shore of the island. At Tarut Bay (Saudi) and at Barr al Hikman (Oman) the sheer size of the intertidal area and mobility of flocks do not lend themselves to easy or accurate counting. Furthermore distinguishing Great Knot from Bar-tailed Godwit and Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* in densely packed mixed roosts is often not possible. The problems with shorebird surveys in this region, where also high-tides frequently fail to get anywhere near the shore, are really self-evident. Comprehensive shorebird surveys are still to be completed in many areas of the Arabian Gulf, particularly the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi Emirate and the northern Gulf shore, as well as in the known wintering areas of Great Knot in Pakistan and N.W. India and Bangladesh.

## DISCUSSION

It is not yet possible to say whether there is any movement of Great Knot between sites in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman. The records to date from within the Arabian Gulf may hint at Great Knot being on passage rather than wintering here. Most records and the highest numbers (except on one occasion in UAE) have been in March and April, at a time when other waders are certainly on passage through the Gulf and are then mixed with the wintering shorebird populations. Current records certainly suggest a passage (perhaps westward) along the south shore of the Gulf in spring. If these birds are on passage then where from and where to?

Those wintering at Barr al Hikman in Oman are not seen further north on the Gulf of Oman coast (Khor Kalba is the only possible intertidal stopover site before Hormuz but is probably not suitable habitat anyway and certainly not for large numbers). They could conceivably cross the Wahiba Sands or enter the Gulf via the Straits of Hormuz but this seems unlikely when their breeding area lies in eastern Siberia. A more obvious route measuring approximately 9,000 km would be that of a near great circle taking birds over the Tibetan Plateau via a first stopover site most likely to be somewhere on the coast of

Pakistan or N.W. India. These areas, as already stated, are known as wintering grounds for Great Knot especially the delta of the Indus below Karachi. A single direct flight across the Arabian Sea to or from the Gulf of Oman would be a formality (for a large Calidrid). Recorded dates for flocks of this species in Pakistan extend between October and May, but with few other details available.

The almost complete absence of autumn records, and certainly of large flocks, from within the Arabian Gulf suggests an easterly approach for those birds wintering on the Gulf of Oman coast with the possibility of a 'looping' return migration through the Arabian Gulf in spring not yet ruled out.

Cramp & Simmons (1983) is unable to provide any information regarding routes used by Great Knot wintering on the Makran and Sind coasts of Pakistan and north-west India. An overland passage through central Asia for this western wintering population seems possible although migration from eastern Siberia to Australia is (and has to be) mostly coastal. A coastal route following a small circle eastward from the Gulf and involving overland crossings of India to Bangladesh/Bay of Bengal and S.E. Asia to reach the South China Sea and then north via the Sea of Japan to Siberia would be at least 12,500 km. This is similar to the distance travelled to reach some of the Australian wintering areas. The relatively late arrival dates of flocks, so far established in the Arabian Gulf, may be the net result of a coastal route having been taken.

Can other wader species wintering in the Gulf shed any light on the subject? Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* is one of the commonest waders on Gulf mudflats in winter. Both migrant and wintering birds appear to be of the race *altifrons* which breeds in Tibet and the Himalayas and winters as far south as southern Africa and east to Sumatra (Hayman *et al.* 1986), although another race - *pamirensis* - hailing from the south central CIS, may also occur. Their route to the Gulf in autumn and return in spring is presumably relatively straightforward. A similar wholly overland route is a possibility for Great Knot reaching Arabia.

Comparison with those species breeding in Siberia in particular may be more pertinent although there is none that comes from as far east as Great Knot. Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* are passage migrant and winter visitors to the southern Gulf from central Siberian breeding areas. Their autumn migration takes many to Africa via the Caspian and Black Seas, passing through Arabia. However unless they are overlooked, this is not the route taken by Great Knot to Arabia, otherwise they would enter the Arabian Gulf at the northern end and would have been recorded there by now. The same applies for returning birds in spring which presumably cross from the southern Gulf to the Laristan or Mekran coast of Iran instead.

Bar-tailed Godwit with which Great Knot frequently associate in the Middle East are of the race *lapponica*

(Uttley *et al.* 1988) breeding in Scandinavia and western CIS and they are thus unlikely to have migrated together. They may just consort in their winter quarters due to similar habitat preferences, or as an anti-predator strategy, and accomplish relatively short distance movements in the winter together. Dunlin *Calidris alpina* of the race *sakhalina* from eastern CIS also certainly reach the Gulf in winter (pers obs), as well as the nominate *alpina*, but again the route taken is not known.

One further possibility to explore is that Great Knot breed further west in Siberia than was previously realised, or have recently spread there with the corresponding development of a new wintering area, (in which case perhaps birds weren't overlooked previously). Only very few nests of Great Knot are recorded in western literature as having ever been found (e.g. two in Hayman *et al.* 1986 and four in Lane 1988) so their breeding range may well be imperfectly known, especially when one considers the size of the population wintering in Australia. Arrival at the breeding grounds is by the second half of May (Cramp & Simmons 1983) so departure from the southern Gulf gives birds a minimum of five weeks to travel there, which presumably they do since many are certainly adults. Some immature birds might be expected to oversummer in the Gulf but so far there are only records of a single bird in Saudi in May and of four in UAE in August.

If Great Knot recorded in the Gulf are *on passage* then their wintering range may extend further south than presently realised. The potential wintering range based on the distance Great Knot could travel compared with the eastern Siberian-Australian 'West Pacific flyway' (over 14,000 km) would easily take them to the East African coast, of Eritrea/ Ethiopia and Somalia for example. King & Gallagher (1983) also postulated on this possibility, but observations would also then be expected in Yemen and other countries bordering the Red Sea which does not seem to be the case either. A look at the map suggests a lack of suitable stopover sites *en route* and perhaps also an unsuitable African coast. However it may be that there are still birds to be found, after all they were formerly described as "rare" in Australia.

The 'West Asian flyway' remains easily the poorest known of shorebird migration routes and discovery of the route of Great Knot to and from the Arabian Gulf remains something of a challenge. The Laristan or Mekran coast of Iran is almost certainly one area from where observations are likely.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Jens Eriksen, Erik Hirschfeld, John Norton, Patrick Osborne, Colin Richardson, Peter Symens and John Uttley all assisted by providing data or by reading and improving drafts of this paper and are thanked accordingly.

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## POSTSCRIPT: RECENT 1993/94 COUNTS

In the UAE, a record 282 Great Knot were recorded on Merah Island on 9 November 1993, with 80-90 remaining from 22 November until at least early March 1994.