

NOTES & NEWS

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Compiled by Lys B. Muirhead
& Robin M. Ward

DID YOU COLOUR RING THIS LAPWING?

On 2 May 1993 a colour-ringed female Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* was seen in the Eden Valley, Cumbria, UK. The same bird was seen 15 more times in 1994. The bird was ringed, right leg black over white and left leg red over metal. All rings were below the knee. Although Lapwings have been ringed in the area for a number of years, this bird was not ringed as part of a local project. Did you, or anyone you know who rings Lapwings, ring this bird? If so, please send any details you can provide to Patrick S. Thompson, Dept. of Biological Sciences, University of Durham, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK.

AFRICAN BIRD CLUB

The African Bird Club has been established to:

- provide a worldwide focus for African ornithology;
- encourage an interest in the conservation of the birds of the region;
- liaise with and promote the work of existing regional societies;
- publish a twice-yearly bulletin;
- encourage observers to visit lesser known areas of Africa, and actively search for globally, threatened and near threatened species; and
- develop a Conservation Research Fund.

The area covered by the African Bird Club is that covered by *Threatened Birds of Africa and related islands* namely, Continental Africa, Indian

Ocean Islands west of 80° east, and the Atlantic Ocean islands on or east of the Mid Atlantic Ridge. For further details about the African Bird Club including membership, contact: African Bird Club, c/o Birdlife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK.

COLOUR-MARKED SABINE'S GULLS *XEMA SABINI*

Over 300 immature and adult Sabine's Gulls *Xema sabini* on the Colville River Delta, Alaska (70° 25.5'N 150° 24.8'), have been colour-ringed since 1983. James Helmericks would be grateful for any information concerning recoveries or sightings of marked Sabine's Gull during migration or on their wintering grounds, presumably off the west coast of South America. Please send information or enquiries to: James W. Helmericks, Colville Village via pouch 340109, Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, USA 99734.

FUNDS FOR CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Birdlife International and the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society, with support from British Petroleum, hold an annual competition for conservation exploration projects. Projects entering the competition are judged especially on the level of host country involvement and the global importance of the conservation issues on which the project is focused.

Among the requirements for entering the competition is that the expedition must take place in a country outside North America, Northern Europe, Australia, Japan and New Zealand. The project must clearly address a conservation issue of international importance and should preferably be derived from the priorities identified by Birdlife, FFPS, IUCN or similar organisations. The project must fall within one of the following categories: Tropical Rainforest, Wetlands, Oceanic Islands & Marine, and Globally Threatened Species.

Expedition teams should consist of young people, preferably under-

graduate students, with local students or counterparts included. Experienced teams with many expeditions behind them, will not be considered. For reasons of administration only Europeans are eligible at present. The organisers hope to achieve global participation soon.

First prize in each category will be £3,000 (50% of which should be intended for local counterparts). In addition eight runner-up teams will receive £1,000 each. From the returning expeditions a single winner will be chosen, based on reporting and conservation achievement, to receive the BP Conservation Expedition Award.

Proposals for 1995 expeditions must be entered no later than 31 December 1994. Proposals will be screened by a committee of five specialist advisors and assessed by Birdlife and FFPS experts along with a representative of BP's Environmental Services Team. For further information including the recommended format to be used when submitting a project description, contact Michael K. Poulsen, Birdlife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA, UK. Tel: +44 223 277318; Fax: +44 223 277200.

GULF WAR OIL SPILLS

M.I. Evans and G.O. Keijl have recently published their findings of the impact of the Gulf War oil spills on wader populations of the Saudi Arabian Gulf coast in *Sandgrouse* (1993; 15: 85-105). The northern half of the Saudi Arabian Gulf coastline (c. 560 km) was heavily polluted by the enormous marine oil spills of the Gulf War from February 1991 onwards. Within the area of the impact, almost all the tidal flats were covered by oil at some stage as it was regularly re-floated and re-deposited by the tide. The Gulf overall is thought to be one of five most important areas in the world for wintering waders; 4 million were considered to be present at the time of impact. The number of migrant waders stopping to re-fuel during March-May is thought to be of a similar order of magnitude.

Evans & Keijl's study investigated the effects on coastal wader populations, and found that the oiled coastline no longer supported significant numbers waders during the spring migration period of April-May 1991 in contrast to early winter (November-December 1990): the magnitude of the reduction in numbers compared to a single previous baseline survey was estimated as c. 97%. It is not known what happened to the "missing" waders, but it was considered likely that most were displaced due to die-off of their food supply and due to the noxiousness of the oil itself.

Observations on the reaction of birds towards oil suggested that the greatest oiling occurred in the initial impact, when the birds were naïve, yet to learn to avoid oil. The number of waders which died within the impact zone and elsewhere due to oiling and/or starvation is not known, but possibly was in the order of tens of thousands. A net reduction in the size of the flyway populations of the wader species concerned was considered as an almost certainty. Evidence in support of this pessimistic view has been provided in that a 50% reduction was recorded in Saudi Arabian Gulf wintering wader populations during November-December 1991.

Differences in oiling vulnerability of different species due to feeding strategies were considered to be obscured by other factors which cause generalised mass oiling of all species e.g. roosting in mixed flocks amongst oiled saltmarsh vegetation. Of the relatively few waders remaining in the oiled zone during March-May 1991, at least three-quarters were oiled. Waders with more than 10% of their plumage oiled were found to be significantly lighter in weight than unoiled waders, and such individuals are unlikely to have successfully migrated or bred in 1991. The potential disruption to migration schedules was illustrated by the only two retraps in the study; a Lesser Sandplover would have needed 73 extra days of feeding in order to attain the peak weight recorded, whilst a Common Sandpiper would have been delayed by 12 days.

Previous incidents suggest that some recovery of the coastal habitat and bird populations may occur after 5-20 years. However, the Gulf War oil spill was unprecedented in size and occurred early in the year in relatively cool conditions. Thus oxidation and evaporation of toxic compounds would have been limited. The authors, however, consider land claim in the Gulf to be a greater threat to the bird populations because it is permanently destructive.

AWSG EXPEDITION TO N.W. AUSTRALIA, MARCH/APRIL 1994

This was the fifteenth special visit to N.W. Australia by the AWSG since 1981 and the first to cover the complete period of northern migration. An international team led by Clive Minton and Ros Jessop achieved the majority of the expedition's objectives. Waders (and terns) were studied by counting, banding, colour flagging, photography, and recording migration. Three locations were used as expedition bases - Broome Bird Observatory, 80 Mile Beach and Port Headland Saltworks.

Banding

A total of 6,105 waders of 36 species (or one in six of the world's wader species) and 151 terns were caught, and almost all were yellow leg-flagged. The most numerous species were Bar-tailed Godwit (1,196), Great Knot (969) and Greater Sand-Plover (722). Samples of more than 100 birds were caught for 12 species. Pintail Snipe (1) and Australian Pratincole (4) were the first banded by N.W. Australia expeditions. The expedition gathered valuable data from samples obtained at weekly intervals over the whole nine week period for most of the main study species. Thus patterns of weight gain before and during migration were determined. Typical rates were 1-2% per day. Estimated departure weights were 40-80% above fat free weight, depending on species. The proportion of juvenile birds in the population of the main species was 10-15%, and in Greater Sand-Plover it was twice this level. Overall 1993 appears to have been a moderately successful year for breeding waders from the northern

hemisphere (see Russian breeding conditions paper elsewhere in this *Bulletin*).

Retraps or controls constituted nearly 10% of birds caught, and included many from earlier in the expedition thus providing useful data on weight and moult changes. Two Curlew Sandpipers from Hong Kong were caught and also an orange leg-flagged Red-necked Stint from Victoria. Two further orange leg-flagged Red-necked Stints and a Curlew Sandpiper were seen and provided the best evidence to date that some waders from S.E. Australia return via N.W. Australia in mid/late April.

Visible migration

19,326 birds were seen departing in 285 flocks from Broome, the peak occurring in early April. The main departure time for Great Knot was the third week in March, whilst Red-necked Stint, Grey-tailed Tattler and Terek Sandpiper continued until the end of April. Following a large migration of Great Knot in March from 80 Mile Beach, three yellow leg-flagged birds were seen in Hong Kong a few days later. This was unexpected since birds would normally reach Shanghai in China in one flight (5,500 km). They were thought to have been forced to land prematurely due to an unseasonal north-east monsoon. Two yellow leg-flagged Bar-tailed Godwit were seen in South Korea in late April (the first in that country). Knowledge of the migration dates allowed catches of several species to be timed to estimate departure weights. A paper is being prepared to cover observations made in 1993 and 1994.

DNA

Prof. Allan Baker and Mark Peck from Toronto University, Canada collected blood samples from a total of 35 species of wader. DNA classification of waders is used to assist in the delineation of migratory movements. The results of the DNA analysis will be reported in a future *Australasian Wader Study Group Bulletin* (and elsewhere).

Other research!

At 80 Mile Beach a small scale mark-recapture study of Hermit Crabs

developed after several showed particular interest in the barbecue. The crab population exhibited a wide range of biometrics and characters and were given the appropriate team members' names!

RESEARCH PAPERS WANTED

Thiru Raajalinga Raja is currently undertaking research on the shorebirds of the Great Vedaranyam Swamp in Tamilnadu, India. He would be particularly grateful for copies of recent research papers on habitat utilisation, activity budgets, wader food and feeding and the effects of human disturbance. Any WSG member able to help with copies of literature in these areas is asked to send them to: Thiru S.V. Raajalinga Raja, C2 Staff Quarters, Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Vandalur, Madras - 48, India.

Thank you!

Many thanks to all those who have helped recently with all stages of *Bulletin* publication:

EDITORIAL

Rob Butler, Nick Davidson, Nigel Clark, Tony Fox, Rhys Green, Phil Grice, Geoffrey Harper, Phil Holland, Henk Koffijberg, Elena Lebedova, John Marchant, Lys Muirhead, Taej Mundkar, Mike Pienkowski, Hans-Ulrich Rösner, Greg Ruiz, Des Thompson, Robin Ward and Sylvia White.

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REVIEWS

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Rogers, A. 1992. *Addicted to birds*. Published by the author. 240 pp. 84 colour photographs. ISBN 0 646 11194 9.

Available for Australian \$25 plus postage and packaging (\$4 in Australia, \$10 elsewhere), from Annie Rogers, 340 Ninks Road, St Andrews, Victoria, Australia 3761.

Addicted to birds is different to most of the books that find their way into the *WSG Bulletin* review pages. It is not explicitly about waders. The area it covers is inhabited by just over two percent of the Wader Study Group membership. Much of the book is about passerines or other bush birds, most of which are endemic to an island west of New Zealand (Australia). Most of us will have remarkably few clues about what these birds are like, so why does it happen to be reviewed here?

Simply because it is a splendid book, about birds, birders, and especially bird banders (or ringers, if you prefer). Annie Rogers is a third of the well known 'Australian' trio of Annie, Ken and Danny, and *Addicted to birds* details their communal slide from normal people into dedicated banders.

The story starts in Iran, taking in the Caspian coast, deserts and mountains and moves briefly to South Korea and settles in Australia. What you have over that time is a wonderful collection of tales of how regular birders got into banding, from which they have never extricated themselves. (Nor would they want to, and after reading this book you will know why!)

There is something for everyone here. For non-banders there are first-hand insights into what banders really get up to; for banders there are tales of trials and tribulations that all will identify with; for waderologists there is

exposure to the fact that there are other birds in the world; (for non-waderologists there is also this same realisation); and for everyone there is the undeniable message that 'amateurs' can and do have a huge impact on ornithology. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Australia where the Rogers privately published a manual for the ageing and sexing of bush birds, based on their years of experience in weekend banding trips.

The book is extremely easy to read, and the anecdotes and tales of personal embarrassment for those who have ended up on trips with the Rogers make for compelling reading. There is a good section on waders in Australia, and you can learn all about the first of the now legendary north-west Australian banding expeditions (see *Notes and News* p. 5-6 this *Bulletin*). It is easy to forget that the Australian north-west was only 'discovered' not much over a decade ago - how many other wader habitats do we know nothing about?

You don't need to know anything about Australia to enjoy *Addicted to birds* (Annie's first knowledge about Australia came from a documentary called "Australia, the land with more venomous creatures than anywhere else on earth"! - the stories are the same even if the species and people are different.

The tales range from the frustratingly quizzical ("They were almost close enough to look for rarities amongst the flocks when a man stood up in the back of the boat and clapped. Of course all the birds took off. Ken and Danny asked him in amazement - "Why did you do that?" His reply was "I wanted to see them fly""); to the all too familiar ("... "Oops, I see you've found it" as I suddenly sank up to my waist in water ..."); and the bluntly honest ("Having transcribed for most of the day, I would be quite irate by this time. "What's the point in writing this stuff down if no-one can bloody well read it?" I would find myself screaming at him "And what the hell is FAP?" ...").

The language is surprisingly free of Australian idiosyncrasies, although it may be important to know that an "Esky" is a chilli-bin (if that helps at