

**NOTES & NEWS**  
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Compiled by Robin M. Ward &  
 Lys B. Muirhead

**CONGRATULATIONS**

In April Peter R. Evans, currently on the Advisory Panel of the WSG, received the Godman-Salvin Medal of the British Ornithologists Union in recognition of his significant contributions to ornithological science.

**GOLDEN PLOVER USE OF THE FLOW COUNTRY**

The peatlands that make up the "Flow Country" of Caithness and Sutherland are of international importance, not only for their breeding wader populations. The European Communities Directive on the conservation of wild birds obliges the UK Government to establish Special Protection Areas (SPAs) to maintain and protect significant habitat for migratory birds such as Golden Plover, Greenshank and Dunlin.

The Flow Country has been proposed as a SPA and there is an urgent need to obtain detailed information on the range and relative importance of significant habitats for these species. Between 1994-95, Scottish Natural Heritage commissioned Durham University to investigate bird-habitat associations in the Flow Country.

In 1995, four research tools were integrated to study habitat utilisation by Golden Plover: radio-tracking, home range analysis, GIS and compositional analysis. The results highlighted the need for extremely sensitive management of the 'true' bog habitat. They also demonstrated the importance of enclosed agricultural fields to off-duty incubating birds. As a result of the latter finding, a complete survey of

agricultural fields in Caithness and Sutherland has just been completed (1996), and a logistic regression model of the factors affecting the use of these fields by Golden Plover is presently being constructed.

Mark O'Connell

**RADIO-CONTROLLED SANDERLINGS**

It appears that Lack's rule (if you obtain a clear-cut result, stop research immediately, lest you obtain further data which throws doubt on it) has now been shown to apply in shorebird studies.

After last years' successful detection in Iceland in May of four of the six Sanderling tagged with radios at Tesside, north-east England, in April, efforts were redoubled this year to obtain more precise departure and arrival times (and hence flight duration) between England and Iceland. The hope was to establish whether Tees birds needed to stop to refuel in the Western Isles of Scotland or flew non-stop. It seems the latter is probably correct; not only did one of 12 tagged birds make the journey to Sandgerdi, south-west Iceland, in a maximum of 41 hours, but the other 11 did not appear there at all. Perhaps they flew non-stop to the breeding grounds or perished in the attempt - this autumn should reveal all, since they are colour-ringed and will be traceable at Teeside if they return.

This spring was characterised by long periods of northerly winds and it may be that birds stayed longer than usual on the Tees, laying down more fat than last year. Certainly the final wave of passage birds stayed until early June and at least 11 of 184 birds caught on 29 May weighed over 90 g *i.e.* nearly double their lean mass.

Ian Mitchell from Durham joined Gudmundar Gudmundsson at Sandgerdi in Iceland at the end of the first week of May and they made two catches of birds - but including only two Durham-ringed birds (not radio-controlled) amongst them. Birds were colour-marked in the first catch but turnover was rapid. So maybe Sandgerdi was not such a good or

essential refuelling area in 1996. Whether it will be a possible refuelling area in future is open to question as the local council has just disclosed plans to enclose and fill in a large proportion of the intertidal areas used by the Sanderling. Protests are being made.....

Peter Evans

**LANGEBAAN LAGOON**

Langebaan Lagoon is an tidal inlet from the Atlantic Ocean, some 100 km north of Cape Town. It is probably the most important wetland for waders in South Africa, with about 30 000 migrants, mainly Curlew Sandpipers, Grey Plovers, Turnstones, Sanderling, Whimbrel, and a sprinkling of lots of other species, including Knots. The Western Cape Wader Study Group has been conducting summer and winter surveys there since June 1975. On 2 March 1996, the 42nd survey was undertaken, completing 21 years of summer and winter counts. The survey was followed by a suitable celebration! Results of the first 11 years of counts were summarised in *Ostrich* (1987) 58: 145-155.

Les Underhill

**OIL SPILL IN DELAWARE BAY, USA**

In a report to the WADER-L Listserver (No. 79), Nellie Tsipoura reports upon a tanker spill of crude oil in Delaware Bay, an important wader migration staging site.

The Anitra, a Bahamian-registered, French-owned tanker spilled up to 42,000 gallons of No. 2 crude oil in the Delaware Bay between New Jersey and Delaware on 9 May 1996. The wrong valve was opened when attempting to release the ballast water, which further malfunctioned and could not be shut off, resulting in the oil spill. Oil came ashore along South Jersey ocean beaches (Stone Harbour to Brigantine Island) where beach clean-up operations were immediately put into action.

The oil spill occurred at a time when hundreds of thousands of waders are

stopping over at Delaware Bay during their northward migration to the breeding grounds. Sanderling have been the species most affected since they feed both on the Delaware Bay and along ocean beaches. An estimated 1 300 Sanderling (of 10 000 present) were observed to be lightly to moderately oiled (oil on the belly, extending up to the legs). Much of the this oil could have been ingested, as the birds were preening it off. The impact on Sanderling populations was difficult to assess as these birds were migrating through, and any information from the breeding grounds would be critical to determine overall effects of the oil on these birds.

Latest reports (30 May 1996) are that tar balls are still washing up along a wide stretch of the coast from Cape May to Atlantic City.

### SALIM ALI BIRTH CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Although Asia has a rich avifauna, many of the region's species are endangered. As many as 30% of the world's threatened birds live in Asia and are facing threats from various anthropogenic sources. In many cases, their habitats are fragmented, degraded or depleted. As the problems are almost identical for all Asian countries and many birds are migratory, they have to be considered in a regional perspective in a spirit of co-operation. Now more than ever, it is time for the conservationists and ornithologists to sit together and take stock of the situation and come out with time bound concrete schemes for action.

BirdLife Asia Council and Salim Ali Center for Ornithology and Natural History, in commemoration of the British Centenary of the late Dr. Salim Ali, the doyen of Asian Ornithology, are offering an unique opportunity for the above by organising the First Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress and the BirdLife Asia Conference from 9-17 November 1996 at Banglore. Both Conferences are open to all with an interest in Asian ornithology.

For further details and conference brochure please contact:

S.A. Hussain, International Co-ordinator, No 5 Jalan 9/5D, 46000 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. Tel/fax 603-757-7940. E-mail: hussain@botany.um.edu.my

### RUSSIAN WORKING GROUP ON WADERS

The ninth report of the Russian Working Group on Waders, edited by Pavel Tomkovich, has recently been published. It is entirely in Russian, with minimal abstracts in English. Documented is some recent information on the status of rare waders in Russia, including the opinions of the Faunistic Commission on Waders in 1995 whom have drawn attention to published data on distribution on waders in Russia and Ukraine that is erroneous.

Many of the report's papers relate to breeding waders with probably the most interesting internationally being *Breeding conditions for waders in the tundras of Russia in 1995*. Pavel Tomkovich has compiled data from 39 stations from near the Norwegian border to Chukotka. It is predicted that in the western sector of the Russian arctic waders will have a mainly good breeding season in 1996, while the situation in the eastern sector will be more variable and can hardly be predicted with certainty.

Interestingly, Les Underhill later commented via the listserver WADERS-L that 1996 is the "unpredictable" third year in the three year lemming cycle. Other breeding wader papers include details on the studies monitoring waders on Taimyr, and some results from the 1995 International Arctic Expedition of the Institute of Ecology and Evolution.

Two papers are concerned with the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Pavel Tomkovich provides current thinking on Great Knot migration whilst Mark Barter discusses wader studies in Australia, the latter illustrating the Asia end of ringing recoveries between Australia and Russia. Other ringing related papers deal with the current status of colour-marking of waders in the CIS, CIS wader ringing totals in 1995 and findings of ringed waders in the Lena River Delta.

For those with access to e-mail, a contents listing from this publication is provided via WADERS-L, message no. 21 (see previous *Bulletin* for access details).

### COLOUR MARKING OF MIGRATORY SHOREBIRDS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

Wetlands International is currently developing conservation proposals for migratory shorebirds in Asia-Pacific with support from the Australian Nature Conservation Agency and the Environment Agency of Japan. As part of this work Doug Watkins, at the request of the Australian Nature Conservation Agency, is to assist in the development of a protocol for the use of colour marks on shorebirds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Of primary concern is to ensure that the use of colour flags is developed in a co-ordinated manner though out the Flyway.

Wetlands International will develop a proposal on the colour marking of shorebirds for consideration by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme. It is then proposed that the Scheme will correspond with other banding authorities in the flyway to develop an agreed protocol on the use of colour marks on migratory shorebirds.

If you are conducting colour marking on migratory shorebirds in the Asia-Pacific region Doug Watkins would be very interested to hear from you. The first stage in this process is to identify existing projects and to obtain comment on the proposal to increase co-ordination in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

From responses Doug proposes to develop regular e-mail correspondence to keep interested people informed and involved in the project.

Doug Watkins can be contacted at: Wetlands International - Oceania, PO Box 636, Canberra 2601, Australia. Tel. +61 6 250 0780. Fax: +61 6 250 0799. E-mail: dwatkins@anca.gov.au

## UNWANTED FIELD GUIDES

We have received an appeal from an organisation in Moscow called 'Ecosystem' which is responsible for promoting field studies for young people in the CIS. They are desperately short of funds and particularly need field identification guides covering all groups of plants and animals.

If you have any unwanted guides which you would like to donate, please send them to:  
Dr James Hindson, Field Studies Council, Preston Montford, Shrewsbury SY4 1HW, UK.  
Tel. + (0)1743 851074. Fax. 850178.

## AWSG WORKSHOP ON CHONGMING DAO

Mark Barter reported via the listserver WADER-L, upon a shorebird study workshop on Chongming Dao recently run by the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) for biologists from a number of Chinese wetland nature reserves.

Chongming Dao is located on the Yangtze estuary, China. The workshop provided the opportunity to collect valuable data on wetland status, shorebird counts and arrival masses for waders flying non-stop from north-west Australia, where there was a concurrent AWSG ringing expedition.

A complete count of the eastern end of the island over a six day period (25-31 March) gave a total of 24 770 waders of 29 species, a repeat count on the 15 April attaining only 10 950 waders. The principal three species during both counts were Dunlin, Kentish Plover and Great Knot.

Great Knot were arriving with masses, on average, less than 50% of departure masses from north-west Australia. Further food for thought is that none of the 36 Bar-tailed Godwits caught exceeded the non-breeding mass for the respective sex. Preliminary view is that Great Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit move on quickly after arrival, even though very light; Jumpers become hoppers. Mark Barter admits that

understanding their migration strategies will take some time.

During the visit the workshop participants saw or ringed 38 wader species. 309 waders of 20 species were ringed, including one Nordmann's Greenshank! Eleven Australian ringed birds were controlled, mostly from NW Australia, but one from eastern Australia. A hunter reported a green leg-flagged Dunlin and the Workshop participants saw a Grey Plover with a white ring on the left tarsus, metal ring on the right tarsus. Any ideas on the origins of these?

The count and ringing data from this survey is planned to be analysed and results published over the next year or so.

## AWSG 1996 NW AUSTRALIA EXPEDITION

The latest AWSG expedition to North-west Australia took place throughout March and April 1996 under Clive Minton's leadership. This expedition was the best attended so far with at least sixty people from thirteen countries participating. As in previous years, the expeditions fieldwork of wader counting, ringing and systematic observations of departing migrants took place at Roebuck Bay (Broome), Port Hedland and 80 Mile Beach.

Preliminary results from the expedition (WADER-L:65) show the expedition to have caught 8 092 waders of 29 species and 360 terns of 8 species. The three principal wader species caught were Bar-tailed Godwit (1 592), Red-necked Stint (1 354) and Greater Sandplover (912). This brings the total number of waders caught on these expeditions (1981-96) to over 50 000.

Most Palearctic waders were leg-flagged yellow to trace species migration routes in East Asian/Australasian Flyway. Two Greater Sandplovers ringed this year have already been recovered in Vietnam, one only seven days after being ringed at 80 Mile Beach.

A full report will be published in *Stilt* 29 in October 1996. The next major

expedition will take place in 1998 or 1999. Anyone considering participation should make sure that they are on the contact list by writing to Dr Clive Minton at: 165 Dalgetty Road, Beaumaris, VIC 3193, Australia.

## THE STILT

The latest (No. 28) edition of the Australasian Wader Studies Group's journal, *Stilt*, has recently been published. Research papers include: Northward migration of shorebirds through the Red River Delta, Vietnam in 1994 by A. Pedersen *et al*, Ready! Steady! Go? A crucial decision for the long-distance migrants - an interesting challenge for the investigator by M. Barter, A third report on the biology of the Great Knot on the breeding grounds by P. Tomkovich [to be reprinted in the next WSG *Bulletin*].

Amongst other material is the abstracts of the AWSG conference on shorebird conservation in the Asia-Pacific region.

## ANY EUROPEAN NOTES & NEWS?

There has been a lack of news away from the East Asian/Australasian Flyway with which to compile this edition of *Notes & News*. This feature largely relies upon YOU the members feeding the Compilers with your notes and news. Please send any noteworthy news, requests or relevant Press Releases from your organisation to Robin M. Ward at:

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