

## NOTES & NEWS

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& LYS B. MUIRHEAD

### WADERS IN JAPAN DECLINING?

The first national wader count in Japan since 1985 was conducted in spring 1996 under the co-ordination of Japan Wetlands Action Network. The nation-wide co-ordinated counts during the period 1973 - 1985 took place on a single date in autumn (September) and spring (April). The present count programme covers 85 of the most important known wader sites in Japan. It is aimed at identifying those sites still able to support significant wader numbers rather than attempting national species population estimates. During the two migration periods, April-May and August-September, at least one count is undertaken at each site. Taking the peak counts of these sites to estimate national wader populations is likely to provide over-estimates. Despite this, numbers of several species e.g. Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, are considered to be much lower in 1996 when compared to the average spring population estimates from the period 1973-85. In contrast the Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* data suggests an increase (as seen elsewhere within the species range).

Over the last two decades tidal-flat loss in Japan is reported to have been averaging more than 1% annually.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* is a species less effectively covered by the present Japanese count programme due to its habitat preferences i.e. estuarine sites and paddyfields. Anecdotal evidence however suggests that the Red-

necked Phalarope was Japan's commonest passage shorebird perhaps even as late as 1990, numbers reported to have declined catastrophically over the past decade. Japan Wetlands Action Network are interested to hear from anyone else with trend data for this species, regardless of the flyway concerned.

The current count programme is set to continue for the next five years, with reports published bi-annually in Japanese. Further details can be obtained from: Niall Moores, International Co-ordinator, Kyushu/ Japan Wetlands Action Network at Tel/fax 81-92-672 9780 or e-mail e95m09@kyushu-id.ac.jp .

### UK BREEDING BIRD SURVEY RESULTS

A new survey, mainly the work of hundreds of volunteer participants recording in nearly 2 000 one kilometre squares across the length and breadth of the UK, is set to provide the most comprehensive, continuous monitoring of the status of the United Kingdom's breeding birds ever attempted. The report on its first two years, 1994 and 1995, has just been published.

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), organised by the British Trust for Ornithology in partnership with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, will eventually replace some existing bird monitoring programmes. The existing programmes, whilst very valuable in showing us how bird populations have changed over the last 30 years, have been concentrated in the south-east and restricted to certain habitats. The new survey will cover the whole of the UK and many more species and habitats.

The coverage attained by BBS will now enable more waders to be monitored accurately, including Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. The latter two species have been poorly covered by the existing monitoring programme in recent years because of population

decline and consequent problems of survey design and implementation. Uplands were a under-recorded habitat, but now its breeding wader community, in particular Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, will be well represented by BBS.

Changes in the status of breeding birds will be used by government as one of their indicators of sustainable development in the United Kingdom. For this, BBS results will make a key contribution in the future.

*The Breeding Bird Survey 1994-95* (Gregory, R.D. et al. 1996) is available from BTO, The Nunnery, Nunnery Place Thetford, Norfolk IP24 2PU, UK for £5.

### INTERRUPTED FLIGHT

A recent report compiled by World Wide Fund for Nature, considers how climate change and resulting sea-level rise threatens bird migration. *Interrupted Flight* details the problem of sea-level rise, the impact this will have on wetland areas and the consequences for migrating waterfowl. A list is given of critical bird areas most threatened by climate change which includes the Wash (UK), Delaware Bay (USA), Banc d'Arguin (Mauritania) and Yangtze Delta (China). A review of the report is intended to for *Bulletin* 82. *Interrupted Flight: The Case of Climate Change and Migratory Birds* is available from Cherry Farrow, WWF press office, Panda House, Weyside Park, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 1XR, U.K..

### LITTLE STINTS GALORE!

Passage of juvenile Little Stints *Calidris minuta* and Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea* during September 1996 has occurred in unprecedented numbers across western Europe as reported by several subscribers to the e-mail listserver *Wader-I*. Rasio Wader Ringing Station (Eastern Finland) ringed over 350 juvenile Little Stints in five days, the main passage period being from the 6 - 15 September. On a single day over a 1 000 Little Stints were counted by one observer on the Finnish west coast.

For both Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers, numbers peaked in the Netherlands and Germany during mid September, the majority being juveniles. Individual flock counts of Little Stints reported include in the Netherlands 1 400 at Noord-Holland and 100+ on Texel, and in Germany 800-1 200 in Schleswig-Holstein, 270 Hiddensee, 200 on Helgoland, and up to 50 in Bavaria. Curlew Sandpipers numbers are comparatively lower with "tens" ringed at Rassio (Finland), several tens seen on Texel and a flock of 700 noted in Noord-Holland.

A third species which in Finland at least has occurred in exceptional numbers during September is the Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva*. At least 26 juveniles had been located by 24 September, the majority after the 13th. Prior to this, they had only ever been about 23 records of *P. fulva* or *P. fulva/dominica* in Finland

Britain and Ireland did not begin receiving a notable influx of Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers until after 11 September when the weather system altered giving easterly winds from the continent. Around the latter date a few hundred of both species arrived along the coast of Suffolk (south-east England; usually expect 10-20 birds) with only Little Stints occurring in exceptional numbers along north-east England from the 14th (flocks of >35 at many sites, which usually have 1-10 birds), the latter species penetrating to the Cork coast, Ireland from 18 September with up to 20 at many estuaries but 300 at Tacumshin, Co. Wexford.

Though the influx in Britain and Ireland can in part be attributed to the weather system, across the continent high breeding success is the obvious candidate for this unprecedented passage. Several workers have reported via the e-mail listserver *Waders-I* on the breeding success of waders from several regions of the Arctic. Below are summaries/edited versions of three such reports.

#### BREEDING SUCCESS IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC

Based on the initial reports from the Arctic, Pavel Tomkovich reported

[*Wader-I*: 133] that it was already clear that in many regions it was a good wader breeding season in spite of a late spring and cool summer. Lemming numbers are growing in some regions even permitting Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* to breed in NW Taimyr. Breeding success of wader species was "average" to "high" from six areas of northeast Europe, Yamal and Taimyr.

#### .....EASTERN SIBERIA,

Christoph Zöckler visited the Yana River Delta in Eastern Siberia and reported [*Wader-I*:143] finding hardly any waders breeding due to very bad weather conditions (delta flooded, cold June and July) and hardly any Lemmings. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* among many others like Ross's Gull *Rhodosthetia rosea* did not nearly start breeding at all. Others like Little Stint, Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos*, Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*, Great Knot *C. tenuirostris* and Grey Plover *P. squatarola* started very late if at all and presumably with little success.

#### .....AND ALASKA

From Prudhoe Bay, northern Alaska, Declan Troy has reported the following preliminary results: This summer we experienced an exceptionally early nesting season. Snow was essentially gone by the start of June, a condition we have seen only once before (1990). Correspondingly, nest initiation was early, although most species nested slightly later than in 1990. For the commonest waders median nest initiation dates ranged from 6 June (Dunlin *Calidris alpina*) to 16 June (Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria*).

On our long term study plots total wader nest density was about a third higher than average (1981-1996). The greatest differences, species with densities most above their averages, were: Grey Phalarope, Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, Stilt Sandpiper *C. himantopus* and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*. Relative to 1995 wader nest densities were up about 10%, largely due to higher densities of Grey Phalarope

and Stilt Sandpiper. Pectoral Sandpiper *C. melanotos* nest density was lower than in 1995 but still the third highest we have recorded.

Hatching success was rather mediocre, averaging about 40%, depending on the species. Lemming numbers at Prudhoe Bay do not fluctuate as widely as in other parts of northern Alaska. In surrounding areas, microtine abundance was quite high based on abundance of breeding Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca*.

#### "GOLDEN" PLOVERS

Though a lot of Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* were ringed during the last decades it is largely unknown if Grey Plovers staging along the German Baltic coast on autumn passage stop over in the Wadden Sea again to fill up their energy reserves. To increase our knowledge of the migration patterns, Grey Plovers along the German Baltic coast have been marked with plumage dyes during autumn passage in 1996. The great majority of birds have been marked with picric-acid (yellow). Additionally, all birds have been ringed with colour-rings, scheme marker: one dark green ring above the joint.

All observers in Europe and Africa are asked to look out for these colour marked Grey Plovers.

Please forward any sightings to: Michael Exo, Institut für Vogelforschung, An der Vogelwarte 21, 26386 Wilhelmshaven, Germany. E-mail address: [exo@ifv-terramare.fh-wilhelmshaven.de](mailto:exo@ifv-terramare.fh-wilhelmshaven.de).

#### A RIVAL TO WSG CONFERENCES?

Whilst surfing the *Internet*, the *Notes & News* compilers came across what is probably a unique celebration but will it spread? The fifth annual Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival will take place May 8-11, 1997 in Homer, Alaska. Over 100 000 shorebirds of 25 or more species utilise the tide flats within the city of Homer as a staging area during migration to their arctic breeding grounds. The festival celebrates the annual arrival of the

shorebirds and will include guided birding, workshops, boat tours, an arts and crafts fair, children's activities, wooden boat show and much more. This year's guest speaker is renowned birder Kenn Kaufman, author of *Field Guide to Advanced Birding* and *Lives of North American Birds*.

For further information contact the Homer Chamber of Commerce, P.O. Box 541, Homer, Alaska 99603, USA. Phone + (907) 235-7740 or Fax + 235-8776. E-mail enquires may be sent to [r7amnr@mail.fws.gov](mailto:r7amnr@mail.fws.gov). Please include "Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival" in the subject line.

### WESTERN SANDPIER WORKSHOP

The 1996 annual Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri* Workshop was held in Ensenada Baja California, Mexico from 9-11 November at Centro de Investigacion Cientifica y de Educacion Superior de Ensenada (CICESE). The aim of the workshop is to gather those interested in the Western Sandpiper biology to present and discuss recent work and future plans in the study of the Western Sandpiper biology. Concurrent to the 1996 workshop, Fullbrigh-Garcia Robles sponsored a month long course on wintering biology of Western Sandpipers.

### WALK-IN TRAPS GO SOUTH

Walk-in traps set for migrating waders at coastal stopover sites are presently popular among European ringers mainly along the Baltic coasts, where tides are negligible. In the past, they were also very much in use in the Mediterranean, thanks to Tunisian ringers who used them to catch *Calidris* waders almost year-round, at the edge of lagoons and salinas.

After mist-netting almost everywhere along the Italian coast during the last ten years, our ringing team had a positive experience testing (or resuming) walk-in traps in a large industrial salina (Margherita di Savoia, southeast Italy; 4 000 ha). We used 14 traps, similarly shaped to those used by the Gdansk

Ornithological Station. During the last week of August 1996, an average of 70 birds per day were captured in this way, mostly Little Stints *C. minuta*, Curlew Sandpipers *C. ferruginea* and Dunlins *C. alpina*. Although this figure is not particularly high, it would probably be hardly obtainable by mist-netting at night in the same situation. Indeed, on the only night we tried to do this no more than 15 birds were ringed and also experience at other Italian salinas showed that these are usually difficult sites for mist-netting, totals exceeding 100 birds being rather exceptional due to unpredictability of roosts' location and many other problems.

Traps, therefore, might offer much help to wader research in salinas. It should also be considered that we were dealing with nearly 10 000 waders (excluding Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta*) spread over a large area mostly unsuitable for placing traps (shores either too muddy or too steep) and that the three most captured species were in full primary moult, having possibly settled in the salina for quite a long time and partly belonging to local wintering populations.

Last but not least, we had neither any casualties nor problems like damage to plumage etc. For the welfare of birds (and that of ringers too - we have really enough with night walks in sticky mud, sleepy ringing under poor light conditions and so on) we strongly recommend that walk-in traps are used wherever possible. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further details at: INFS, via Ca' Fornacetta 9, I-40064 Ozzano Emilia BO, Italy.

Nicola Baccetti & "Anonima Limicoli Italia"

### THE ATLAS OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN BIRDS

Preparation of the manuscript for *The Atlas of Southern African Birds* is nearing completion and it will be published early in 1997. The Southern African Bird Atlas Project covers Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Based on seven million

records of bird distribution, this is the largest biodiversity project in Africa. The 1600 page two volume atlas contains distribution maps and texts for 750 species; for many, the ranges are strikingly different to those shown in current field guides and handbooks. 160 vagrants are also covered. The atlas will be published by Birdlife South Africa (formerly the Southern African Ornithological Society). As the total print run is being determined largely by pre-publication sales, after publication it is likely to be difficult to obtain a copy.

To receive information on the pre-publication offer write to the Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, 7700 South Africa, email [adu@maths.uct.ac.za](mailto:adu@maths.uct.ac.za) or access the Avian Demography Unit's web pages at <http://www.uct.ac.za/dept/stats/adu/>.

### XXII IOC

The 22<sup>nd</sup> International Ornithological Congress will be held in Durban 16 - 22 August 1998. The first Congress Brochure has been sent out recently. The Secretary-General is Dr Aldo Berruti (Tel/Fax + 27-31-26 26 114, e-mail [berruti@superbowl.und.ac.za](mailto:berruti@superbowl.und.ac.za)) who will provide further details about this venue.

### WETLANDS WONDERS

In June, Wetlands International-Asia Pacific and the New Straits Times (Malaysia) in collaboration with the Hong Kong Bank officially launched *Wetlands Wonders*. *Wetlands Wonders* is a four page news supplement devoted to wetland issues which will be published monthly in the *Sunday Style* magazine of the national newspaper *New Sunday Times*. *Wetland Wonders* hopes to raise awareness of wetlands and the need to use them wisely and will potentially reach 250 000 Malaysians every month.

To increase distribution and awareness we are launching *Wetlands Wonders Online* as part of the Wetlands International-Asia Pacific WWW site at <http://ngo.asiapac.net/wetlands/>.

*Wetlands Wonders Online* will be updated every month and provide a global audience with an insight into what Malaysia is achieving for wetland conservation.

John R. Howes

### UNKNOWN TUNISIAN RINGS

Three recoveries of Tunisian ringed waders at Rasio Wader Ringing Station, Finland, has highlighted, through *WADERS-L*, that the Tunisian ringing centre does not apparently work any longer. The Italian Ringing Centre understands (N. Baccetti, *WADERS:161*) the current Tunisian contact to be Prof. Ali El Hilli based at the University Campus of Tunis Belvedere; the centre was previously at Hammam-Lif station. However, the Italians have not managed to get any replies about Tunisian ringed recoveries in recent years. Does any one have further information regarding the current status of the Tunisian Ringing Scheme?

Via *WADER-L* the ringing details of two of the Tunisian ringed waders recovered at Rasio have been obtained but the details for the Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Museum Tunis S11124 is still outstanding. Ringing details for this latter bird should be sent to Kalle Ruokolainen, Kasurilanmaentie 55, FIN-71800 Siilinjärvi, Finland, or by E-mail to kalle.ruokolainen@vyh.fi.

### WADERS ON THE NET

Wader related World Wide Web sites (WWW) on the Internet are on the increase; details of three such sites follow.

A source of information on wader conservation in the Western Hemisphere (Americas), is the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) WWW site. From their home page (<http://www.wetlands.ca/wi-a/whsrn/whsrndex.html>), you can access a variety of shorebird pages ranging from informative text about the WHSRN, it's current events and sites, to a shorebird gallery and quiz. Within the "Shorebird Handbook"

option, essays are provided on subjects such as migration, moult and roosting behaviour, all written with respect to Western Hemisphere shorebirds and fully referenced. Current population estimates for Western Hemisphere species are given within the population essay. Of particular interest to WSG members are the full transcripts from the WHSRN Workshop in May 1995 (<http://www.wetlands.ca/wi-a/whsrn/workshop/workshop.html>). The transcripts discuss the past, present and future roles and activities of WHSRN within the Americas.

Two Scandinavian ringing stations, Ottenby Bird Observatory and Rasio Wader Ringing Station, support WWW pages. Rasio Wader Ringing Station (63°09' N 27°42' E), situated about 30 km north of the city of Kuopio, the capital of Eastern Finland, has during its' nine years of operation ringed over 8 200 waders. The WWW-page <http://koti.kolumbus.fi/~visa/pslty/rasio-o-en.html>, provides information about the station, its ringing activities, species and numbers ringed, and examples of recovery maps. Ottenby Bird Observatory is a much long established centre studying the migration of birds, including waders, through SE Sweden. Most of Ottenby's homepage (<http://www.mc.hik.se/ottenby/index.html>) concentrates on passerines with some information provided on Dunlin. This page is aimed mainly at schools, but may be of general interest as well.

### WADERS-L: A REMINDER

Les Underhill & Rene Navarro at the Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, operate a listserver for waders to which anyone interested can subscribe. The idea is to have a world wide discussion group on waders open to all through e-mail. Obviously, the success of this enterprise depends entirely on the people that want to join and take part on the discussions.

The list is not moderated and anyone can post messages. Messages are distributed by the server to all subscribers, who will receive the postings on their mailbox, either as they are posted or in the form of a

digest once a while. It is hoped that the WSG will find this a useful tool for speeding communications amongst wader workers.

To subscribe send a message to: [listserv@uct.ac.za](mailto:listserv@uct.ac.za) and in the body of the message put: subscribe waders-l your\_name

Omit signatures on the message, or put two dashes (--) under the command line. The subscription will be acknowledged by the server, and you will get a welcome message with further instructions. Questions can be directed to R. Navarro at [trauco@maths.uct.ac.za](mailto:trauco@maths.uct.ac.za).

### SATELLITE TAGS

Reliable sources state that Cape Aerospace (South Africa), developer of the long-awaited 5.8 g satellite tags suitable for the medium to large sized wader species (see *Notes & News 79*), have gone bust. Apparently continuing delays in the product launch caused an intolerable financial burden on the company.

**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:**

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