

BOHAI UPDATE #1 APRIL 22 2016

Hi to you all from the Luannan Coast once again. We are a little concerned that our updates are a little bit predictable. If you are new to these Bohai Updates then you can see all the previous years here (you may need a bit of spare time) <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/bohai-bay/bohai-bay-fieldwork-journal/>

However this is our life here, eat, scan, data entry, sleep but have a quick bird watch when there's a bit of down time!

We hope you continue to enjoy the updates.

It is that time of the migratory shorebirds year that sees them migrating from north west Australia (and many other places!) to and through East Asia on their journeys to their breeding grounds. And so this means GFN swinging in to action and following them (or at least through the Luannan Coast, northern Bohai Bay China). GFN and its funders are serious about studying this area and assisting with conservation efforts to gain the inter-tidal flats and Salt Ponds Nature Reserve status. This is the eighth year that GFN have been here. Our major funders over the years have been BirdLife Netherlands (2007-2012) WWF Netherlands (2010-2014, 2016) and Spinoza Premium of Netherlands Organisation Prize for Scientific Research to Theunis Piersma (2014-2016). We also receive financial and much logistical support during field work from Beijing Normal University principally from Professor Zhang Zhengwang, and PhD students Leiming and Dew Bingrun. In previous years Yang Hong-Yan was a huge help.

As most of you will know our main work here is the resighting of marked birds from NWA but we record every flag or band that passes before our telescopes and we have already recorded a total of 562 flag and band sightings. 73 of these are colourbanded NWA birds. This represents 7 species from 21 banding sites throughout the EAAF.

We always get 'interesting birds that we get alerted to when we look at their resighting history and already this year is no different.

Red Knot 1BRYR is one such bird. He (DNA sexed) has 40 resighting's in his 'Life History' so I shall summarise, not list them all!

Banded in Roebuck Bay as a 1st year bird in July 2008.

Later that year seen in Roebuck Bay, then moved 200km south west to 80 Mile Beach (October 2008).

Next sightings were in Auckland, New Zealand (2009, 2010).

Has been seen numerous times, every year in Bohai Bay (2011 to 2016).

Seen in New Zealand (Austral summer 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015).

But (and here's the interesting bit in case you were still waiting!)

It has been recorded on southward migration back to New Zealand in Roebuck Bay and on 80 Mile Beach in (2013) and in New South Wales (2015).

We (think) this is an unusual route for birds to get back to New Zealand. We certainly have very few records of our marked birds taking this route.

And not only is it a fine resighting history we have 2 images of the bird from New Zealand! One from March 2010 and one from January 2012, thanks to Ian Southey.



Image: Ian Southey



Image: Ian Southey

And an interesting Great Knot that we saw. This Great Knot was banded in Roebuck Bay as an adult on 29/08/2010
It has been seen regularly in Roebuck Bay every year since banding.
We have recorded it here in 2012 and 2015.

The bird was seen and photographed at Futuan River Mouth, Rizhao, Shandong Province on 05/04/2016 (430km south east of our Luannan Coast study site).

This year we recorded this bird on our first day in the field here on 12/04/2016. 7 days after the Futuan River sighting. This is a normal movement for Great Knots migrating from northern Australia. They usually land in southern China and then make one or two short stops as they head for the northern Yellow Sea sites, Luannan coast, Shuangtaihekou National Nature Reserve (near Panjin and Yingkou) and Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve (near Dandong).



Image: Zong Feng Li

It is interesting for us to see migration from the Luannan Coast. We are familiar with seeing this wonderful event in Roebuck Bay but what is interesting here is that while some migrants are still in Roebuck Bay 6,400km south of us some birds here are already leaving and heading to their breeding grounds.

On April 19th we saw 34 Eurasian Curlew fly up off the mud flats calling noisily and gather in to a 'Vee' and head north. Most of Red Knots that will use the Luannan Coast on migration are still in Roebuck Bay. The geographical locations of their respective breeding grounds are the explanation, of course, but it is still a little odd to see it!



Eurasian Curlew (not migrating). A Boyle (especially for John Graff)

Some good news on the reclamation front is that, so far, it looks like there has not been any more habitat loss since last season. This is good news for the main feeding areas for the majority of birds.

As mentioned at the beginning of this update when we get time we visit a few areas of trees, wetlands and the town's local park to record the many birds in the region. We keep a daily log off all birds seen and now have a great data set on what species pass through this area and when. Each year is slightly different and this year is no exception.

Some species we don't encounter often that we have seen already this year are Carrion Crow, Russet Sparrow and Short-eared Owl.

Looking at previous logs it seems migration is a little earlier for a few species this year. This could be due to the regular warm temperatures we are experiencing.

On the 18th of April we recorded a Sulphur-breasted Warbler, surprisingly this is our second record of this species in the area as this species range only extends to south of Shanghai some 1,300km away!.

On the 20th a visiting researcher Jason Loghry spotted a Chestnut-crowned Warbler that also should have been south of Shanghai!

An unsuccessful search on the morning of the 21st for the Chestnut-crowned Warbler did however turn up yet another Sulphur-breasted Warbler! So it's been a great season already for vagrants and there are still many weeks to go.

The salt ponds that we pass through to reach our survey sites are looking good already with water levels being fairly low, which gives favoured feeding conditions for the shorebirds. Huge numbers of shorebirds, in particular Black-tailed Godwits and Marsh Sandpipers are using the ponds. We hope to count these over the next few days. Drew has estimated that more than 10,000 black-tailed godwits are present.

So far we have seen a total of 127 species since we arrived 10 days ago.



The first of 2 Sulphur-breasted Warblers seen in the park recently.

A Boyle



Buff-bellied Pipit. One of the many migrants encountered daily.

A Boyle



Grey-headed Lapwing.

A Boyle



The mandatory Yellow-bellied Tit for the first update.

A Boyle

So we are underway once more and wish the birds good luck.
And to other researchers throughout the world's flyways have a good spring season.

For those of you with a scientific or statistical bent then the link below is a hard-core scientific paper written from the mass of data collected here and in NWA.

<http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/JApplEcol2016-simultaneous-declines-in-summer-survival-along-EAAF-signals-flyway-at-risk-Piersma-Lok-et-al.pdf>

Chris and Ady (The Current Team)

GFN

2016 04 22