

## BOHAI UPDATE #5 MAY 31, 2016

Hi All

Welcome to the 5th update from the Luannan coast, Bohai Bay, China.

Scanning is going merely OK, or could even be described as poor, relative to what it is usually like. But we need to remember that we are thousands of kilometres away from most of the marking sites, so all the records we collect are adding to the bigger picture of migration through the EAAF.

We have now recorded 3,463 birds from 31 sites on 17 species. Red Knot still leads the way with 2,585 sightings. So we shouldn't be too downhearted!

### **Spotlight on Species: Sanderling**



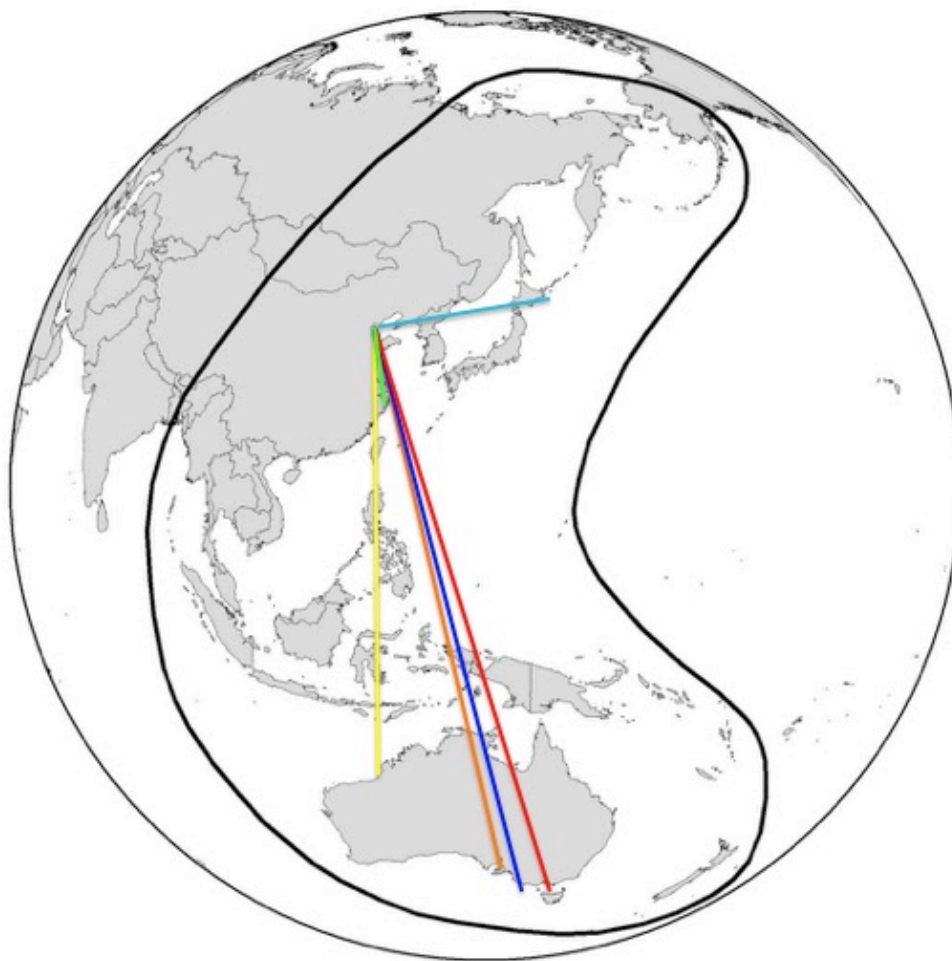
Breeding plumage Sanderling. © A Boyle

The Sanderling *Calidris alba* is one of the small shorebirds, like many it is a grey and white bird in non-breeding plumage, but 'brighter and cleaner' than many others. It is known in most parts of its global range as a bird of ocean beaches. It has a charismatic and characteristic feeding style. Sanderlings are often seen rushing in and out on ocean beaches as the waves wash on to the sand, feeding vigorously before the next wave and so on. This is not the case here on the Luannan Coast, no waves crashing on sandy beaches here, just the grey sea as a grey tide washing gently across the grey mud! The Sanderlings here, seem to spend a lot of time roosting in groups on the mud, as thousands of other shorebirds feed around them, and don't start feeding until the tide is well out, and mud with a firmer substrate is uncovered. Sanderlings in Roebuck Bay are only found south of the Bay in the Bush Point area, another habitat with firmer mud. They are also found north and south of Broome at Coconut Wells and Eighty Mile Beach – both ocean beaches.

The Sanderlings here at Luannan use the salt ponds. Despite the lack of ocean beach, this area supports 20 percent of the current estimated EAAF population of 22,000. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of May this season, Adrian was out on the mudflats with a few thousand Sanderlings scattered over a large area of mudflat, when an Amur Falcon frightened the shorebirds and two big flocks of Sanderlings (and nothing else), landed close to him. As we have often said, if we see an opportunity to count a species, we do so, and don't just do so on 'count days'. The total of 4,320 has far surpassed our previous biggest count of 2,430 from 29<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Sanderlings breed across the entire high Arctic (they are circumpolar) and their non-breeding range reflects this - with the species found on every continent except Antarctica. They are one of the last species to leave Luannan. Despite this huge area for both breeding and non-breeding, the bird is monotypic (has no subspecies), as the breeding grounds are continuous and not geographically distinct.

The marked Sanderling that we have recorded here come from six banding sites of the EAAF, Australia (four sites NWA, South Australia (two), Victoria), Chongming Dongtan National Nature Reserve, near Shanghai and Shunkunitai, Hokkaido, Japan.



Map showing all the areas marked Sanderling sighted by us, originate from on the Luannan Coast.

### **RED KNOT NUMBERS – UPDATE**

As mentioned at length in Update #4 Red Knot numbers are down on previous years.

We speculated and hoped that they would arrive, but they haven't, or (k)not in any great numbers. We are only seeing around 5,000 in the area now, very low in comparison with other years, and the questions posed in Update #4 still stand. But some new birds are arriving and we can tell this from our colour band resightings.

### **EGG COLLECTING**



We see egg collectors on most days that we are working in the salt ponds. The collectors are taking the eggs for food and are mostly workers in the salt ponds. If they are only taking a few for their own use it may not be a huge problem. How to tackle the issue is difficult, if we contact the authorities (egg-collecting is illegal) our currently friendly association with everyone we meet in the salt ponds may sour.

Since the last update Leiming and his team observed a lady collecting many eggs. Leiming approached her and explained it was an illegal activity. She said that she was unaware that collecting eggs is illegal.





Lady collecting eggs. © Leiming

The lady said she had collected 210 eggs and they were for her own use, but that seems unlikely and the number would indicate they are being sold. The eggs were mostly from the nests of Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt - with smaller numbers of Kentish and Little-ringed Plover. The eggs were confiscated and taken to a conservationist, Mr Tien. We made mention of Mr Tien back in 2012 in #Update 5 (check it out it's a great story!). Mr Tien had success in hatching, raising and releasing Pied Avocets last year and has five incubators, so the eggs are now in his care and hopefully he will have similar success and the birds will be released back into the wild. We have heard that the eggs have already started to hatch.



Eggs being transported to the incubators. © Leiming.

### **SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER**

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a critically endangered species, trying to survive with many of the same problems our knots are facing. There are a lot of conservation programs going on at the moment to try and help protect this species.

With possibly fewer than 100 pairs left in the wild, it was exciting to find one on the Nanpu mudflats on the 25/05/16 This is our fourth record over the many years we have been surveying this site. All have been in late May or early June. None of the individuals we have recorded have been banded or flagged. Although we would love to see a flagged one here to help understand the migrations of this troubled species, the fact it was un-flagged gives hope that there could be more 'spoonies' around than estimated. Most of the well-studied population in Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka, Russia have already got flags on them.



Record shot of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. © A Boyle

### **NON-SHOREBIRDS**

Since the last update the weather has remained fair, so limiting the amount of passerines on the seawall. There has been a steady increase in the amount of Lanceolated Warblers, cuckoo numbers and species are increasing. In nearby Beijing recently there have been five satellite tags placed on Cuckoos. Here is a link to more information on this project. <https://birdingbeijing.com/beijing-cuckoo-project/>

The 'out of range' Greater Flamingo has been putting in several appearances again over the past week. Although the Black-headed Gull is a common species here, a flock of 5,640 roosting in a pond is the highest count we have recorded on the Luannan coast during spring.





Some of the large Black-headed Gull flock. © A Boyle

Our record of a Black-legged Kittiwake on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of May is a rare bird for China and our first record here on the Luannan Coast.



Black-legged Kittiwake at Nanpu 26/05/16. © A Boyle

Our third Bianchi's type Warbler for the season was in the 'Magic Wood' on the 27/05/16 Unfortunately it wasn't calling so ID was not confirmed once again for this almost identical trio of beautiful warblers from the genus *Seicercus*.



Our third Bianchi's Type Warbler. © A Boyle

Despite our talk of low numbers of birds, shorebirds, waterbirds, raptors and migrating passerines, diversity is high. We have recorded 223 species of birds since our first day in the field on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April. This is our highest total of species in our eight years working here, and, we only look for them in our 'down time'!

Chris, Ady, Bob

31/05/2016