

Knot again... Bohai Bay, China. 2012 Update 2

As hoped for in the last update the sun did eventually force its way through and we have had a few great scanning sessions in the last 10 days. A couple of misty days on the mud flats and the occasional rain shower couldn't dampen our spirits and with an extra pair of eyes we collected another swag of flag and band sightings as well as an increase of passerine migrants in the usual hot spots. Interestingly, Zuidong held almost no birds for the first week but now is a regular site for several thousand Knot and band sightings have shown some birds moving regularly between here and Nanpu, sometimes on the same day.

As a further introduction for anyone not aware of the issues here I will take a paragraph to briefly sum up why we are in Bohai Bay. The Yellow Sea is a vitally important staging site for a whole suite of shorebirds in the flyway. The northern shores of Bohai Bay are an excellent example of the significance of the area for many species, notably Red Knot and Curlew Sandpiper, with large numbers stopping here on route to their northern breeding grounds. Unfortunately it is also an excellent example of the threats that the area faces with large scale habitat destruction the most obvious and we shall give more details about this in future updates. Our work here involves studying the shorebirds using the site throughout the season with particular emphasis on searching for flags and colour-bands.

The last 10 days have seen a large increase in numbers of birds of many species. Red Knot now number over 25 000 spread between our two primary sites, Nanpu and Zuidong. As is typical in late April, Marsh Sandpipers became very evident with tens of thousands now scattered throughout the salt pans. Numbers of Curlew Sandpiper began to grow along with Sanderling and the first few Red-necked Stint arrived. The highest single count of Asian Dowitchers was 68 at Zuidong on the 26th and up to 3 Nordmann's Greenshank have been seen daily at Nanpu.



Red Knot Roosting in the salt pans at Nanpu (*Adrian Boyle*)

Scanning has been productive with many highlights. So far we have recorded 871 flag and band sightings from 12 regions on 9 species. At least 8 Red Knot from Chukotka have been seen (including 2 with geo-locators) along with a single bird banded in Kamchatka. Good views of birds in the roost at Nampu have resulted in a good selection of New Zealand engraved leg flags with a few from Broome and Chongming Dontang. The area now holds at least 2 Dunlin flagged in Sakhalin and the Japanese Grey Plover was seen sporting much more breeding plumage than before.

Passerine migration has also picked up a lot since the last update. Obvious highlight were two Bianchi's Warblers, the first was in the local park on the 21st and the second on the 26th at a site we call 'tree lane'. This species breeds in forested areas in Central and Southern China and is well out of range here in Bohai although with several records from nearby Beidaihe it is not unprecedented. The first bird turned up with the first real push of warblers of the year with Eastern-crowned, Two-barred and numerous Yellow-browed and Pallas's Warblers all present together. The following day an Asian Stubtail was in the park, this cute little bird represented the first we have seen at Bohai. While exploring marshy areas near 'tree lane' we came across the missing ducks from the lake. It is now a bit late for large numbers of diving species but over 600 Falcated Duck were present along with smaller numbers of Garganey, Wigeon, Pintail and Shoveler. At least 5 Baikal Teal were the pick of the bunch. Passerine migrants in the area included a few Yellow-browed, Black-faced and a single Rustic Bunting along with thrushes and Olive-backed Pipits.



Lost and lonely Bianchi's Warbler over 800km north of its breeding grounds! Although this shot is below Adys usual photographic standards it serves as a decent record shot to prove we know what we are talking about... sometimes. *(Adrian Boyle)*

Unfortunately not all the passerine migrants make it through here alive. In the first couple of weeks we found 6 mist-nets with a total of 72 dead birds in them. Judging by the state of many of them and the plumage of the birds it seems the nets were left up from last autumn and presumably surviving birds at the time found their way into Chinas' booming cage bird market. Needless to say, after consultation with the local wildlife office, we took the nets down and destroyed them. Some of the shorebirds suffer at the hands of nets out on the mudflats but more on that next time.

With the first major arrival of Broome Red Knots due in a week or so coupled with a good upcoming series of tides we hope to see an increase in colour band sightings as we head into the peak shorebird period of early May. And it gets better... May also brings the arrival of Mr Chris Hassell. So much to look forward to! Bring on the birds...

Cheers, Matt and Adrian



Female Grey-backed Thrush, regular in the town park during April. (*Adrian Boyle*)



Home sweet home ... continuing the grey theme from the last update (*Matt Slaymaker*)



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