

Bohai 2013 Update 1 – Knot a bad start to the season

And here we are again, back for the spring in the (generally unpleasant) surroundings of the north shores of Bohai Bay. Although overall grey and dull there have been a couple of surprises already and in the last few days the Knots have come flooding in!

The team so far consists of Ady Boyle on his 5th trip to Bohai, Matt Slaymaker on his 4th and Ginny Chan for her 2nd year here and we are here to conduct research for the Global Flyway Network. Just like in previous years, the primary aim of our trip is to scan the shorebirds that are passing through as they migrate to their northern breeding grounds. Among the data that we collect are flags and colour-bands sightings of birds from throughout the East Asian-Australasia flyway as they stop off at this internationally important site.

As usual, in the 10 months since we left the site, there have been a number of changes to the area. Many of these we will expand on in future updates, something for our readers to look forward to! Our first immediate concern was that the small mud island just offshore from Nanpu was no longer there. In previous years we have had a lot of sightings from here but our worries were unfounded as the birds actually land closer to the wall and stay closer for longer so, in this case, a change for the better!

On our arrival on site on the 9th April we were welcomed by the usual species such as Eurasian Curlew, Dunlin and Grey Plover, all present in good numbers. There were also a couple of thousand Knot, mostly Great, but at the time of writing this total has increased to over 12 000, with the majority being our primary target species ... Red Knot. Small numbers of other species are arriving with the first Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed and Terek Sandpipers being seen a few days ago. The 16th saw a particularly large jump in numbers of birds present which included the first Asian Dowitcher and Nordmann's Greenshank of the season. At least 2 of the latter were present from the 17th onwards.



Mixed shorebird flocks gathering on an out-going tide (*Adrian Boyle*)

A noticeable increase in Red Knots sporting white or orange flags on the 16th suggested arrivals of birds from Victoria and New Zealand. A few Broome birds have been seen already although most of the colour-band sightings so far relate to Great Knot. One of the scanning highlights has been a Great Knot from Broome also carrying a Geo-locator, one of 57 deployed recently to try and gain more of an insight into the details of their migration. The next step is to recapture the bird on its return to Australia to collect the data. Other flag sightings include Red Knot and Dunlin from Sakhalin, Grey Plovers from Hong Kong and Japan, a Red Knot from Queensland and at least 5 individuals from Chutkotka! Overall a good start and an improvement on this time in 2012.



Above: High-quality photo of a Bar-tailed Godwit with (mud covered) Green and Black flags, originally caught in Thailand (*Adrian Boyle*). Below: Low-quality record shots of Grey Plover from Hong Kong and a Red Knot from Chutkotka with flag 'CKE' also seen here in 2012 (*Matt Slaymaker*)



With relatively few shorebirds present on the mud, and tides favouring scanning opportunities in the morning we had some time to explore some of our favoured birding areas. Unfortunately, there have been some major changes here as well. In the past Caofei Lake has supported large numbers of ducks (including a record of the critically endangered Baer's Pochard) but this year it has been drained and is the site of some major development works. The only other lake we know in the area which has also supported lots of ducks has met the same fate since we were last here.



Caofei Lake: former site of thousands of duck (*Adrian Boyle*)

Fortunately the local park remains unchanged and we were treated to a Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher on our first visit there this year. This is a species normally found in southern China and south Asia so is a bit out of range here in Bohai. We also saw one at the same site in May 2010 so it isn't unprecedented although the early date surprised us. Also, on the same visit, we saw two species that we have not seen here before, a Hawfinch and an Eastern Great Tit (AKA. Japanese Tit or Great Tit *ssp. minor* depending on your taxonomic viewpoint). A mini-arrival of warblers on the 15th included over 40 Pallas's, our first 4 Yellow-browed of the season and an early Claudia's Leaf-warbler. Also on the 15th a Goldcrest was only a second record in the area and on the 17th 4 Bohemian waxwings were another first.

More birds will arrive in the coming weeks and we will be here into early June to scan them. Hopefully 2013 will mirror or even beat the success of last year, it is early days but we will see...

Bohai Team 2013

Number bird species recorded so far in 2013	117
Number band/flag sightings so far in 2013 (+ number regions)	384 (13)
Number NW Australia colour-band Sightings so far in 2013	29
Ratio Red Knot <i>ssp. Rogersi</i> :Piersmai in last 10 days	7996:585 – 93.2% Rogersi

To learn more about our work here as well as see reports and updates from previous filed seasons in Bohai check out the Global Flyway Network website ... <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>

