

Bohai 2013 Update 2 – Some good scanning despite Ruff weather!

That's right, at last we have branched out to include species other than 'Knot' in our witty, yet informative, update titles! Since the last update it has been a period of mixed success. Tides have been unfavourable and weather hasn't helped matters. We are rarely troubled by rain here in Bohai but strong wind and poor visibility can cause us problems and this week we have had both in abundance! Despite this, the trees are coming into leaf around town and the reeds sprouting new shoots along the sea wall which adds a splash of colour to an otherwise bleak landscape. A temperature rise in the last few days is also very welcome!

Shorebird numbers remained steady throughout. Red Knot numbers seemed to rise but a drop in Great Knot meant that the overall numbers changed little and, at the moment, numbers are down on this time last year. Interestingly, many of the Knot seem to be feeding in a small area of mud between Zuidong and Nanpu, an area where we have seen few in previous years. Marsh Sandpipers are becoming more numerous in the area and a rise in the numbers of birds feeding in the salt pans included the first Long-toed, Temminck's and Little Stint of the season. At least 3 Nordmann's Greenshank are now present and seen daily at Nanpu.



One of three Nordmann's Greenshank, Nanpu (*Adrian Boyle*)... For a more complete Nordy audio-visual experience, check out <http://www.xeno-canto.org/species/Tringa-guttifer> for, as far as we are aware, the first recordings of this species available on the internet. They are not great recordings but we have a few weeks to get better!

Last week Ginny left us boys to fend for ourselves as she travelled further up the coast to visit some different sites in the northern part of the Yellow Sea. In her absence we have been working hard and despite the conditions we were in the field daily, changing our tactics with the changing tides. We walk out on the mud at Zuidong during low tides, work the roost at Nanpu during the high and view from the sea walls in-between. Flag and band sightings were noticeably down but we still recorded some goodies. A second Great Knot with geo-locator from Broome was seen at Zuidong, as was an old friend. 1YYLY is back – probably the most reliable bird we have on site, this is a Bar-tailed Godwit originally banded in Broome in 2008. We have seen this bird in Bohai in each of the last four years and almost always in the small channel next to the sea wall at Zuidong. A well-travelled bird she was also seen in Russia in August 2012. Several Red Knot from Chutkotka are around and seen on-and-off as well as 2 from Sakhalin, 1 from Queensland and 3 from Thailand.



Two of our regular Godwits seen almost daily. Left: 1YYLY from Broome and Right: Orange/yellow flagged AKK male from South Australia (*Adrian Boyle*) Below: Queensland Red Knot ABE (*Matt Slaymaker*)



As last year, we have encountered a few problems with fishing nets out on the mudflats. There are many kilometres worth of fine, mist net-like, nets in which unfortunate birds become entangled. So far it is just a few individuals, but over the course of the season it could become more of an issue and is something we will keep an eye on. Several of the birds caught so far have still been alive when we have found them so have been removed and released unharmed. Another type of net, made up of low funnels targeting shrimp, seem to be causing more problems this year. In the past we have rescued a handful of Terek Sandpipers from these after they go inside after the trapped shrimp. This year however, there is one section in particular that seems to be catching birds with up to 25 per day! After releasing all we could we have since communicated with the fisherman (initially through elaborate sign language, then through Nicky!) and he seems to be sympathetic to the birds and releases any he comes across although, as he checks the nets only once per day, there always seem to be a few which have drowned in the previous tide.



Left: Olive-backed Pipit and Right: Marsh Sandpiper caught in fishing nets (*A. Boyle & M. Slaymaker*)

As mentioned in the last update, nearby Caofei lake is undergoing some major development work and on our first visit we were disappointed to find the site drained. On a return visit we found a small area on the western side which contained some water and was a magnet for shorebirds! We counted over 4200 Black-tailed Godwit with smaller numbers of Pied Avocet, Curlew and Marsh Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank among other species. One of the Godwits was sporting white and yellow engraved flags from Hong Kong and on another visit a few days later we found a Pied Avocet from the same place! These are the first flagged birds of these species we have recorded in the Bohai area. Unfortunately, numbers of shorebird dropped massively as numbers of fishermen climbed. The area is very small yet on the last visit over 40 people were using a variety of methods (including set nets, throw nets, drag nets and electrocution) to catch fish. Presumably this is unsustainable and the area will be fished out soon enough so the birds can return. Through communication with some of the workers on site we now know that the lake is being made deeper and will be re-flooded once this is complete – whether the site will be as attractive to shorebirds and wildfowl once the work is complete and the lake is surrounded by houses remains to be seen, although we think it's doubtful.



Fishermen at what is left of 'the lake' (*Matt Slaymaker*)

An immature Pallas's Gull was seen at Caofei Lake on the 19th and 21st, our first record of this species in the area. Birding on the sea wall has so far been much less productive than in previous years. Perhaps this is partly due to reeds and vegetation becoming established in previously reclaimed areas just behind the sea wall giving migrants more areas to hide in? In the last couple of days, however, a few more migrants have started turning up with the first Richard's and Red-throated Pipit and Yellow-browed and Chestnut-eared Bunting all seen. Warblers and flycatchers are still a bit thin on the ground but as we approach May this should change and diversity should increase.



Pallas's Gull, Caofei Lake (*Matt Slaymaker*)



male Red-flanked Bluetail, an early migrant which was common when we arrived but becoming much less regular in the last few days (*Adrian Boyle*)

If previous years are anything to go by then the next few days could see another big push of shorebirds arriving and, coupled with better tides, we look forward to the days ahead. Read all about it, as well as Ginny's adventures up north, and much more, in a week and a bit...

Bohai Team 2013

| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Number bird species recorded so far in 2013 | 149 |
| Number band/flag sightings so far in 2013 (+ number regions) | 945 (13) |
| Number NW Australia colour-band Sightings so far in 2013 | 57 |
| Ratio Red Knot ssp. Rogersi:Piersmai in last 10 days | 13521:1519 (89.9% rogersi) |

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

