

All change again here in Bohai. The unpredictable Red Knots continued to keep us on our toes as they roamed around the area, seemingly at random. Many birds have left now towards the northern breeding grounds and we have a little over one week left to scan like crazy before the last of the Knots do the same.

The weather has been mixed with poor visibility, strong winds and some rain. Overall we feel the weather has been against us a little this year with bright sunny days in the minority. Of course there is absolutely nothing we can do about this so we carried on as usual and toured various sites scanning where possible. Initial efforts were north of Beipu where, in the same spot as before, we met four policemen who made it clear that ignorance and/or stupidity were no excuse and we really shouldn't be crossing the fence! In recent days we have been back at Nanpu and the salt ponds. Numbers of Red Knot in all these sites fluctuated with repeated flag and band sightings showing that the birds readily moved around between all or regular sites. Meanwhile, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew and Dunlin numbers all fell and Curlew Sandpiper numbers also seem to have dropped off in the last couple of days. Two Red-necked Phalarope from the 27th was our first record here but was always a species we expected to bump into eventually.

Despite a few productive days our totals of Broome birds sighted remains much lower than this time last year. We have been hampered in part by subtle changes in the mud. The surface is much more uneven and pitted making it particularly difficult to see the birds' legs properly. It seems this may have been caused by a colder winter with more severe freezing and thick sea-ice across the mudflats. In any case, in the last few days this has been irrelevant since the birds have abandoned the mudflats altogether in favour of the saltpans... oh, the complicated lives of Knot – we have much to learn! Red Knot of the subspecies *piersmai* have started to dominate the flocks now as many *rogersi* birds have left to their Chukotka breeding grounds. As a result, sightings of orange flags and white flags from Victoria and New Zealand have decreased noticeably to be replaced by yellow ones from North West Australia. This reflects the non-breeding grounds of the 2 subspecies.

Unusual flag sightings have included a Curlew Sandpiper from Indonesia (with nice orange and black flags – not cable ties), several from Hong Kong and a Red-necked Stint from Queensland. Our 18th flagged species of the season was recorded and it was a goodie – a yellow flagged White-winged Black Tern, the first ever seen outside of Australia. Very likely from a catch of 286 made on 80 Mile Beach in March 2011.



South Australian Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Adrian Boyle*)

With long days spent staring at shorebirds little other birding was done and few passerines of note were recorded. A couple of trips to the park were fairly quiet but this is often the case as the end of May approaches. The first Arctic Warblers were seen, two Chinese Leaf Warbler were in the park and Thick-billed Warbler was regular.

A trio of endangered species were seen in the area in the last week. First, on the 19th, a Black-faced Spoonbill was at the dried up remains of Caofei Lake. It was in the company of 2 Eurasian Spoonbill and apart from a few Avocets these were the only birds left at what was once a very productive little corner. This represents our first record in this area. Single Oriental Storks passed overhead on 22nd and 23rd. A species we have now recorded in three out of four years. Saving the best for last, from the 25th a Spoon-billed Sandpiper was among the Red-necked Stint in the salt ponds near the prison with a second bird (with much more breeding plumage) on the 28th.



Super sporadic species sporting superbly specialised spatulate spoons (*Matt Slaymaker*)

We have rarely visited Zuidong this season. A few birds were present in the area early in April but otherwise the site has been quiet, to say the least. It was only a few years ago that this was one of our key sites with many of our sightings coming from this area. Now the ‘development’ continues with extension of the new highway and the first buildings appearing on the newly reclaimed land.



Zuidong: The area formally known as prime shorebird habitat (*Ginny Chan*)

With Ady and Ginny leaving it will be down to Chris and Matt for the last week. If the birds cooperate we may catch up a little to 2012’s totals but it seems unlikely will match last year – certainly not for sheer numbers of sightings. As I write this the sun is shining for the first time in several days



Above: White-winged Black Tern, Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper in the Saltpans
Below: Relict Gull (both *Adrian Boyle*)





Colour-banded Red Knot – this is the primary reason for our annual trips to Bohai. These birds caught in Broome and at 80 mile beach have been intensely studied in Australia for many years and, since 2009, here in Bohai. The unique colour band combinations allow individual identification in the field and, with each sighting, key information such as subspecies and scores on breeding plumage and ‘abdominal profile’ (a visual score of the fat being carried by a bird) are recorded. The data set that has been built up by the Global Flyway Network’s staff and volunteers is truly extraordinary and now some hard analysis is underway. Survival studies, staging times, refuelling rates, migration timings are just some of the things being looked at with changes over time and implications for the future of these birds. The results are set to be very interesting and will certainly be worth the wait. There is still much to be done but let’s hope it will continue for many years to come.

Number bird species recorded so far in 2013	206
Number band/flag sightings so far in 2013 (+ number regions)	4215 (19)
Number NW Australia colour-band Sightings so far in 2013	427
Ratio Red Knot ssp. <i>rogersi</i> : <i>piersmai</i> in last 10 days	1717:7232 (81% <i>piersmai</i>)



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/>

