

Bohai 2013 Update 6 – Knot migrating (not a bad pun, there were actually lots of migrating Knot)

That's it, we've had enough and we're going home. Some of us have been here scanning daily for 8 weeks and we need a rest so it is with a little relief that we can report that most of the Knots have headed north. We wish them all the best for the upcoming breeding season and hope to see them safely back in the southern hemisphere in a few months' time.

For a few days the smog cleared and we were been bathed in sunshine for a change. Chris and Matt continued counting and scanning as usual and even complained about the heat proving that some people are never happy with the weather.

Just as the last update was going to press we were treated to a couple of sensational days scanning. For a few days many Red Knot abandoned the mudflats completely in favour of the saltpans and gave great views. We don't know the reason for this change in behaviour but the management of the salt ponds has seemed different this year. Water level in ponds has been more variable and frequently left large areas of mud exposed. We think this choice of foraging area is more to do with the ponds being better than in previous years rather than the mud deteriorating in quality as a feeding area. Still, the Knot move freely between all these areas depending on the tide and weather as is confirmed by our colour bands re-sightings, counts and observations.

On one evening we counted almost 35,000 in a single pond. With most, if not all, Red Knot from Broome staging in Bohai then it is possible that we had the entire migratory population of North-west Australia in front of us lined up in a single pond measuring a little over 4km<sup>2</sup>!! With unusually clear skies and the beautiful evening light from behind us we saw an amazing 82 colour-bands and only scanned a relatively small proportion of the birds. Many of the birds were very vocal and some were seen to migrate as dusk approached along with small flocks of Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and 12 Asian Dowitcher. Fortunately, this spectacle was enjoyed by everyone and provided a good last day in the field for Ady and Ginny prior to their departure.



A large tangle of Knot in the salt ponds (*Adrian Boyle*)

Numbers decreased gradually with 27,000 counted the following day, 11,000 the day after and down to 7000 a couple of days later. Our last real day in the field was on the 4<sup>th</sup> when we could only find a couple of thousand. With birds leaving nightly our daily swag of flag and band sightings also diminished but we were still seeing new identifiable individuals right until the end. A single Red Knot from Taiwan was our first this year from that area as was one from South-west Western Australia. Including these two, in 2013 we have recorded Red Knot from 15 widely scattered banding locations!

Little other birding was done although a trip to 'tree lane' was a colourful break from the grey monotony of the salt pans. Although most migrants have passed through the place was alive with territorial Oriental Reed Warblers and we saw plenty of Yellow Bitterns chasing each other across the reed beds. On the sea wall a couple of Bush Warblers were typically skulking and, as usual, weren't seen well enough for a specific identification.

The GFN Bohai expedition 2013 has been a great success but in many ways much harder than in previous years. The birds have been even more unpredictable than usual, have gone missing for days at a time and have frequently favoured inaccessible areas. The weather has been against us, both during our stay and even before we arrived with the cold winter has seemingly 'pitting' the mud deeply to make scanning much more difficult than in the past. Even so, we have battled on and put in many extra hours and walked many extra kilometres and once again go home with a very complete and satisfying data set.

Stay tuned for a full report and some forthcoming analysis of the data and hopefully some, or all of us, will be back again in 2014 to do it all over again...

Thanks for reading

Ady, Chris, Ginny & Matt – The Bohai team 2013

|   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Total number bird species recorded in 2013                          | 207                            |
| Total number band/flag sightings in 2013 (+ number regions)         | 4615 (21)                      |
| Total number NW Australia colour-band Sightings in 2013             | 613                            |
| Ratio Red Knot ssp. <i>rogersi</i> : <i>piersmai</i> in last 7 days | 608:4166 – 88% <i>piersmai</i> |

The total of 4615 sightings is slightly higher than last years' total. Given the difficulties we have had this year we found this a little surprising. Also worth noting is that although the number of colour band sightings is down almost 30% on 2012 we have seen almost exactly the same number of individuals – just each one was seen less times on average. In conclusion... it's all good (regarding data at least!)

### Bohai 2013 photo album...



Ady likes to take off his clothes on the sea wall & Red Knot 'CKY' from Chukotka roosting in the salt pans (MS)



Ginny Scanning (MS)



Ady asleep & our driver, Zhao, fixing the car (GC)



A balloon stuck in the fence surrounding the prison! (GC)



Chris getting filmed for (another) documentary and drinking tea on the sea wall (GC)



Reclamation continues at Zuidong and collisions with power lines are a danger in the salt ponds (GC & MS)



A marker on the sea wall shows the shoreline in 2013 – hopefully not a sign that it is going to be changing! And the days catch of shellfish (*MS & GC*)



Red Knot with an engraved Broome Flag and an immature Black-tailed Gull (*AB*)



White-winged Black Tern (*AB*)



A splendid Spoonie, recorded for the second year on a row and Bohemian Waxwing – our first record (MS)



Birding the park & celebratory fireworks at a busy cross road (GC & MS)



We did get a bit muddy this year... (GC & AB)

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/>

