

GFN Northward Migration Season on the Luannan Coast, Bohai Bay 2015

Update number 2

A day in the life of a GFN Red Knot researcher.

Welcome to GFN on The Luannan Coast 2105.

For more news on GFN such as this year's Satellite Transmitter work and previous year's updates then please visit <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>

So what's it actually like to be doing what we do in China? Apart from seeing some of the doom and gloom that we post in the journals it may look like we just drink beer and eat dumplings. Of course this is not the case so here is a break down.

What we do each day is governed by three things

1; the tide (the tide chart isn't always too reliable), 2; what the birds are doing (the birds are not always too reliable) 3; the weather (yes, correct, the weather isn't -----).

This past week has been great for tides. The light is best in the morning and from around 10.30 it starts to get very hazy as the brighter sunlight seems to worsen the effect of the air pollution. In the afternoon unless' we are out on the mudflats, scanning can be pretty difficult as we are generally looking into the sun.

So with tides like the recent series with medium high tides peaking early in the morning.

We start off from our apartment at around 4AM. Leaving at this time of the morning means that we can't get our breakfast dumplings on the way (we don't like that!). It's still dark outside and the journey to our main site takes around 45min so you can sometimes get a little bit of extra sleep if you're lucky as the road is very bumpy. Sometimes the journey takes longer due to all the trucks that are building the new road.

One of the reasons we can be slowed down on the way to work. The amount of rock carried in each of these trucks is incredible. We see large rocks that have fallen off the trucks all the time on the road and this is the 2nd truck we have seen tipped over this week.



A Boyle

We get to our site around 5AM and get into position behind a small wall of concrete and peer over to scan the shorebirds as the tide pushes them closer and closer. It's not until 5.20 that there is just enough light to start reading bands. Depending on the time and height of the tide we can be here for several hours until the tide gets high enough to push the birds off to their salt pond roost sites (or a truck beeps its horn at us for no obvious reason and scares the birds away!) As the birds head to the roosts they fly over the top of us and into many large salt ponds and sleep a lot during the high tide period. This is a very different experience for us and the Broome birds. Roebuck Bay's birds get a lot of disturbance at their roosts from raptors and people. Here the feeding areas are under threat from reclamation but the roosts are relatively undisturbed by either raptors or people.

Bob Loos scanning from the sea wall. However thick fog cancelled play early this day and you can see it rolling in on the mudflats behind.



A Boyle

Once the birds have gone to roost it's time for a quick cup of tea and then into the salt ponds to continue scanning. At this time of the year and day it can be a little cold and many of the birds are all fluffed up keeping warm whilst they sleep and therefore they are hiding the treasures we are seeking, flags and colourbands, under their feathers.

Sometimes they reveal them as they walk around the roost site but it's still a great chance to collect data. Here we do many scans of the flocks to work out the percentages of the 2 different subspecies of the Red Knots we are researching. Combining this with our counts we can get an estimate of just how many of each subspecies are using this site at a particular time.

This is a typical view of roosting knots and Dunlin. Can you spot the 2 subspecies of Red knots present in this flock?



A Boyle

On average we spend 3 hours in these ponds and then it's time to walk out back up onto the road and get into position for when the birds fly out of the ponds and back onto the mud exposed by the falling tide. This doesn't always work as we would like! Often the knots choose to sleep well after the tide has dropped enough for the mud to be exposed and when they finally arrive back on the mud they are too far away to scan successfully for bands and flags.

As the tide goes out it moves on an angle to the road so we are able (up to a point) follow the birds along as the mud that is exposed giving us close enough views to read more of the many different flags and bands that have been placed on the shorebirds in banding studies throughout the EAAF. So far we have recorded 1033 birds marked with flags and or colourbands on 11 species from 23 sites in our flyway.

As we mentioned above the light does start to work against us and eventually it is unproductive to continue so it's then time to head off for the rest of the day's activities but you'll have to wait for another update to read about those.

Spotted Redshank. One of the sexier shorebirds.



A Boyle

Saunders Gull with green flag U7 banded near Panjin China.



A Boyle

Male Yellow-bellied Tit. One of the more common non-shorebirds that we occasionally find a moment to enjoy.



A Boyle