



UPDATE #1 FROM THE LUANNAN COAST, BOHAI BAY, CHINA 22/04/2017

Hi One and All

The Global Flyway Network (at the moment that being Chris and Adrian) are back at the Luannan Coast. Since 2010 we have been here covering most of the northward migration period. That is about 56 days of field work every year for the last seven years and this 2017 season makes it our eighth consecutive year.

We hope you enjoy the updates this season. Our work is rather repetitive, scan, data entry, scan, data entry, scan, count, data entry----- but we get to eat some great food, do some cool birding and have a laugh, so we hope we can convey some of that to you.

We encounter plenty of familiar faces when we come back, gentlemen in the park doing their evening walk while we bird, fishermen and shell-fishers on the seawall, various café and food stall owners and the Beijing Normal University students. This year Drew is our go to man and has already helped us out with a huge number of tasks as we get set up and into the swing of things.

One of his first tasks was to sort out the below situation. After arriving in Beijing we travelled to Nanpu and up to our apartment, however when we opened the door to 'our' apartment, with our key...there was a light on which we thought unusual. Then when a young woman wandered out of one of the rooms we sensed there was a mix-up somewhere. I am not sure who was more surprised, the woman or us! We spent a night at Drew's apartment and then after a few phone calls, the next day we got back into 'our' apartment.

Another familiar 'face' is a Great Knot. One of the great strengths of the entire Global Flyway Network (GFN) dataset is that we see so many colourbanded birds here, 6,500km away from their marking site. The birds that we see here are of particular value if we don't see them in Roebuck Bay or at 80 Mile Beach, North West Australia (NWA). Great Knot 2YRBR is one such individual. Banded at Roebuck Bay on 12/11/2007 as 3+ (in its third year of life or older) it is now a minimum age of 12 years old (12+). In the nine years five months since banding it has been seen 36 times. Not one of those sightings is from Roebuck Bay. All sightings have been here on the Luannan Coast. We have seen the bird on the mudflats three times already this season. It looks splendid in 100% breeding plumage. Our earliest records are 14/04 in 2013 and in 2017. The latest is 15/05 in 2015 and in 2016.

Another familiar but less welcome sight is the Smooth Cordgrass or *Spartina alterniflora*. This introduced plant is yet another threat to the intertidal mudflats, as it is a colonising plant and rapidly covers roost and feeding areas of shorebirds. This grass has been a multi-million dollar problem in some sites around the world and unfortunately is getting established here on the Luannan Coast. We have mentioned this in previous seasons and shall write more about this in future GFN updates.

Drew is doing his PhD on Black-tailed Godwits and we joined him on a couple of trips to a mudflat area outside our usual study area. A friend of his, Mr Wong, knew of a feeding and roosting area for some 15,000 Black-tails. It is 30km north-west of our study site. On one of our visits we arrived at the seawall at just the right time to watch 2,000 of the Black-tails walking towards us, feeding vigorously and completely unconcerned by our presence - or that of the many cars travelling along the seawall. It was a typical birding experience for this area of the industrialised Chinese coast. Two thousand beautiful birds with a major highway about 200km away and just behind that a gigantic power station looming over the whole spectacle. There was not a single flag or colour band in the entire flock. This is not surprising as these are not the sub-species from NWA. This story about the sub-species in the East Asian Australasian Flyway (EAAF) will come to light in more detail as Drew carries out his PhD. Once they left the mudflats we followed them to their roost pond. Here they were joined by 1,000 Pied Avocet and 3,000 Common Shelduck. Quite a sight to look out on while we had an evening cuppa.



Some of the close Black-tailed Godwits

©Adrian Boyle

General birding, when not focusing on shorebirds, has been great as usual. Despite only being here for ten days we have already sighted a new bird for our recording area. A Slavonian Grebe which we saw swimming on a pond with nine Black-necked Grebes, a species we don't encounter every year.



Slavonian Grebe 3rd from the left.

© Adrian Boyle

We have seen a few other species that we don't often record during our visits here. We have had several sightings of Carrion Crow at Nanpu, Wetland Maze and the Town Zoo, a pair of Rooks at Nanpu, and two Osprey sightings one at Nanpu and one at Tree Lane.



Osprey at Nanpu

© Adrian Boyle

A spectacular Short-eared Owl at Nanpu was a fine sight and a species we don't record every season. An Endangered Black-faced Spoonbill put in an appearance near Tianjin at the Black-tail roost pond. Eurasian Spoonbill is a species we usually spot once or twice during our visit and we already have four separate sightings including a count of 98 at Tree Lane.



The Eurasian Spoonbills at tree lane.

© Adrian Boyle



Random Eastern Curlew image

© Adrian Boyle

So far we have recorded 558 marked birds (562 at this time in 2016) from 16 sites (21 at this time in 2016) throughout this flyway on 10 different species (7 at this time in 2016), 96 of these are from the GFN colourbanding study (73 at this time in 2016).

Our total bird species seen so far this season is 137 (127 at this time in 2016)

Chris and Adrian

22/04/2017