

GFN fieldwork season in Bohai Bay 2014, Update 1

We are back! This is Global Flyway Networks 5th consecutive year of complete spring coverage at Bohai Bay on the Luannan Coast, one of the most significant shorebird staging sites in East Asia. Over the next 7 weeks we will be scanning, counting, watching, recording, and scanning some more, as huge numbers of birds stop off here to rest and refuel as they head towards their northern breeding grounds. Many readers will be familiar with the aims of the project but for anyone that isn't, please check out the website for reports and updates from previous years which should tell you everything you ever wanted to know... <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>

Ady Boyle and Matt Slaymaker (both Bohai regulars) arrived in Beijing on April 9th and were in the field at Nanpu early on the 10th. The first few days are usually spent getting to know the site and finding our way around the tides but this year we were treated to some good scanning from day one onwards. Still, this is China and the weather has been predictably unpredictable as have the tides and the last couple of days have been less productive, mostly down to poor visibility and light. Despite this, so far it has been a promising start to the season.

We were welcomed back to Bohai by around 4000 Great Knot and over 1000 Red Knot with numbers of the latter species rapidly increasing following a big arrival of birds on the 13/14th. As usual for early in the season Eurasian Curlew and Dunlin were plentiful and small numbers of other species are beginning to filter in such as Terek Sandpiper, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Ruddy Turnstone. In the Salt pans up to 10 000 Black-tailed Godwit are present and are now being joined by up to 16 Ruff, 10 Little Stint and increasing numbers of Marsh and Curlew Sandpiper. The first Nordmann's Greenshank of the season was seen on the 14th, this is our earliest record since 2010.



Salt pond scene, mixed shorebird feeding flock (*Matt Slaymaker*)

Colour-bands and leg-flags are the primary target and we have seen a wide selection already. Some old friends are here such as two of our regular Bar-tailed Godwit, Y1YLYB originally ringed in Broome and W5YWBB originally ringed in New Zealand. Both of these birds have been seen here every spring since 2010! Since the arrival of the Red Knot, these have been our main focus. There are plenty of orange flags (ringed Victoria, Aus) and white flags (New

Zealand) which is what we have come to expect as the subspecies *rogersi* pass through the area first. Less regular flag combinations have included 4 birds ringed in Chukotka (including one with a geolocator), 1 from Sakhalin and 1 ringed in South Korea. The latter is the first time we have seen this flag combo at Bohai.



Grey Plovers from Hong Kong S6 and E8, S6 on the right was also seen here regularly in 2013 (*Adrian Boyle*)

As regular readers will be aware, this area has a few environmental problems! On our first day in the field we hadn't even made it to the mudflats before we came across an all too familiar issue. Every year we find mist nets set up to illegally catch birds although these are usually targeting passerines. This time we noticed a line of nets set in a saltpan, the first time we have found someone actively trying to catch the shorebirds here. In total we released (alive) 13 birds from the 7 nets (Sanderling, Dunlin and Kentish Plover) over 2 days and, with permission from the Wildlife and Forestry department, we destroyed the nets and so far have not seen any more.



Above; Illegal mist nets in saltpans. Below; Trapped Kentish Plover & Ady removing birds (*Matt Slaymaker*)



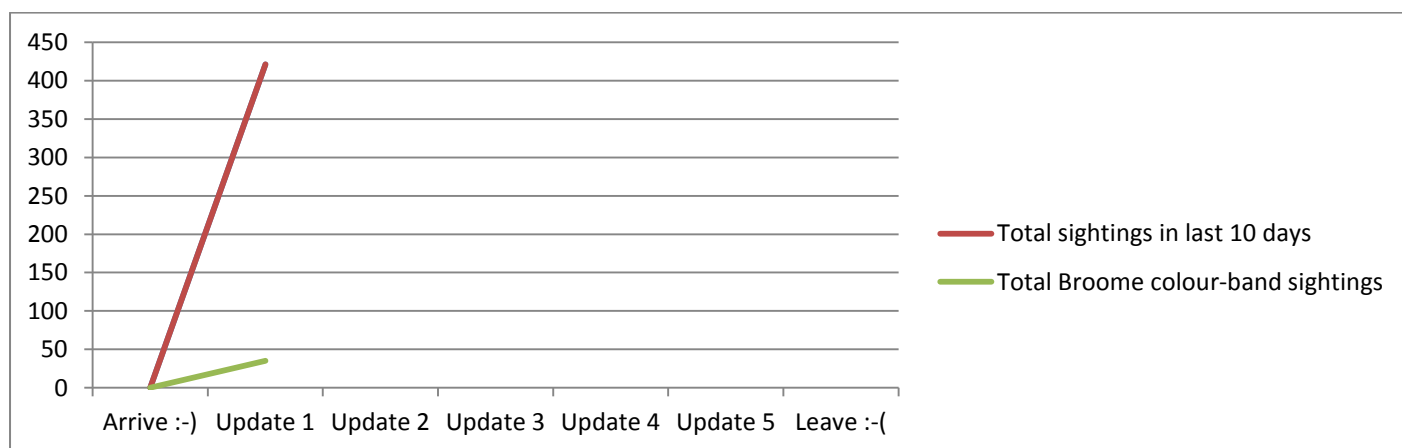
As usual, there is so much to write about in the first update. This year there seems to be significant changes to the fishing (both nets and shellfish collection) and local peoples use of the mudflats at Nanpu but we will expand on this in the next update.

Although shorebirds are the focus of our visit we like other birds too and, when opportunities allow, we enjoy a bit of casual birding. Along the seawall and in our local patch, the small town park, we have seen the usual selection of early migrants. Red-flanked Bluetail, Pallas's Leaf Warbler and Stejneger's Stonechat are all recorded daily with more unusual sightings including a female Pied Wheatear (a species not seen here every year) and a Rook which, perhaps surprisingly, was our first in Bohai. Over 200 Brambling feeding in the park was an impressive sight on the 16th and the same evening we also found our first Yellow-browed Warbler, Eastern Crowned Warbler and Chestnut-flanked White-eye of the year. The following day an Asian Stubbletail was present. A visit to nearby Caofei Lake was productive. A little over 600 duck is a vast improvement on last year when the site was drained for building work but nowhere near as good as it was 4-5 years ago. A single adult Bewick's Swan was another first for us here as was the two Greater White-fronted Goose that flew through the salt pans on the 16th. Our total 'Bohai list' now stands at approx. 272 species.

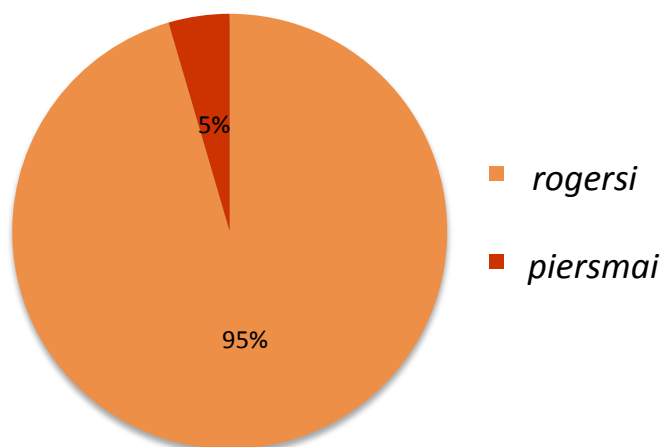
There are still plenty of birds to arrive and we have many hours of scanning ahead of us. The season has just begun...

Bohai Team 2014

The numbers so far...



Red Knot sub-species ratio - Update 1



Number species seen so far:

112

Flagging regions:

13

Flagged species:

6



Shorebirds in the fog – not good conditions for scanning (*Matt Slaymaker*)



Yellow-throated Bunting (*Matt Slaymaker*) and Saunderson's Gull (*Adrian Boyle*)



Capture from a Go-Pro mini video camera left next to a favoured Red Knot roost site! (*Adrian Boyle*)



This unfortunate Bar-tailed Godwit was found in the channel just behind the seawall at Nanpu with a wing injury, presumably caused from hitting the nearby power lines. There was a little swelling but the wing wasn't broken and it could flap ok. It was hard to tell how bad the damage was but we wished it luck and released it nearby. The fact that it was originally ringed and flagged in Broome is helpful as we will be able to identify it in the future and see if it recovers. (*Matt Slaymaker*)



Left: Great Knot with Broome leg-flag 'USE' – we have seen this individual here several times in previous years.

Right: A moulting Ruff in the Saltpans (both *Adrian Boyle*)

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/>

