

GFN fieldwork season in Bohai Bay 2014, Update 2

Oh, what a 10 days it had been. Shorebird numbers continue to rise on the mudflats and in the saltpans as birds pile in from throughout Asia and Australasia. We have had some excellent scanning in the last week, comfortably some of the best we have ever had in April.

By this date last year we had had plenty of flag and band sightings, we were doing well but there is a big difference between simply seeing a flag and reading an engraved flag to be able to recognise an individual bird. This year, not only have we recorded more flags but, crucially we have read a much higher percentage of those that we have seen. By this time in 2013 we had read 35 Broome flags and 23 from New Zealand which was a good total compared to the previous years. In 2014, at the time of writing, we have read 246 (131 Broome & 115 NZ) – up a massive 324%!!! Our colour band total is also much higher on 90 sightings. There are probably numerous reasons for this increase. Certainly, so far at least, the weather has been better than previous years. The birds have been cooperative and, enthused and inspired by our success, we have been putting in some long hours. On some days we have been scanning on the incoming tide, scanning for a few hours on the roost and following the birds back out on the mud as the tide recedes. Hopefully the success will continue in the coming weeks.

In total, since spring 2010 the 'Bohai team' has recorded over 16 000 flag and band sightings of shorebirds here. This includes nearly 2500 colour bands from Broome and thousands of engraved flags from throughout the flyway. We have seen markings from at least 23 ringing regions on at least 23 species! The opportunity to amass this amazing data set from the Luannan coast is made possible due to the generous and long-term funding from Birdlife-Netherlands, WWF-Netherlands, Beijing Normal University and WWF-China-Beijing Office.



As well as all the usual Red Knot from Broome, Victoria and New Zealand we have plenty of other leg-flagged birds in the area. The Great Knot flock at Zuidong is almost 5000 strong and includes individuals ringed in Queensland and Sakhalin. A Curlew Sandpiper in the salt ponds became our first here with an engraved flag from Victoria and one with Hong Kong flags was the first of the season. A Red-necked Stint from Queensland and two Sanderling from Hokkaido have been seen and the first Thai-ringed Red Knot and Broad-billed Sandpiper were found a couple of days ago.



Left; Our primary target - a Broome colour-band. This is the first year this particular Bar-tailed Godwit has been seen in Bohai (AB). Right; a Great Knot with an engraved Green flag from Queensland (MS).

In the last update we wrote about a man illegally catching shorebirds in the salt pans. We have since heard that he has been visited by the authorities who issued an official warning and a fine! Good news and hopefully a deterrent to others who may be tempted to do the same. We also promised to tell about some of the changes on the mudflats at Nanpu. Firstly, it seems that many of the fishing nets used here in the past were not up to legal specifications and, since people have been made aware of this, none have been put up. Normally by this stage of the season there would be several kilometres worth of these funnel-like nets stretched along the coastline through our main study sites. We have shown photos of them in previous years with birds trapped inside. Secondly, due to a dispute between neighbouring villages over who has the ownership rites nobody is currently permitted to collect the shellfish at Nanpu either. It seems that this spring will be a quiet one on the mudflats and it will be interesting to see what effect, if any, this has on the shorebirds.

Up to 7 Nordmann's Greenshank are now present at Nanpu and a couple of Little Curlew have been seen. Numbers of Sanderling, Curlew Sandpiper and Broad-billed Sandpiper all continue to rise while other species such as Eurasian Curlew and Grey Plover are starting to leave. 155 Asian Dowitcher on the 26th was an excellent count for Nanpu. We have had another 'Bohai tick' in the form of a Short-eared Owl which flew through the salt pans on the 22nd and a pair of Chinese Grosbeak was the highlight from the park.

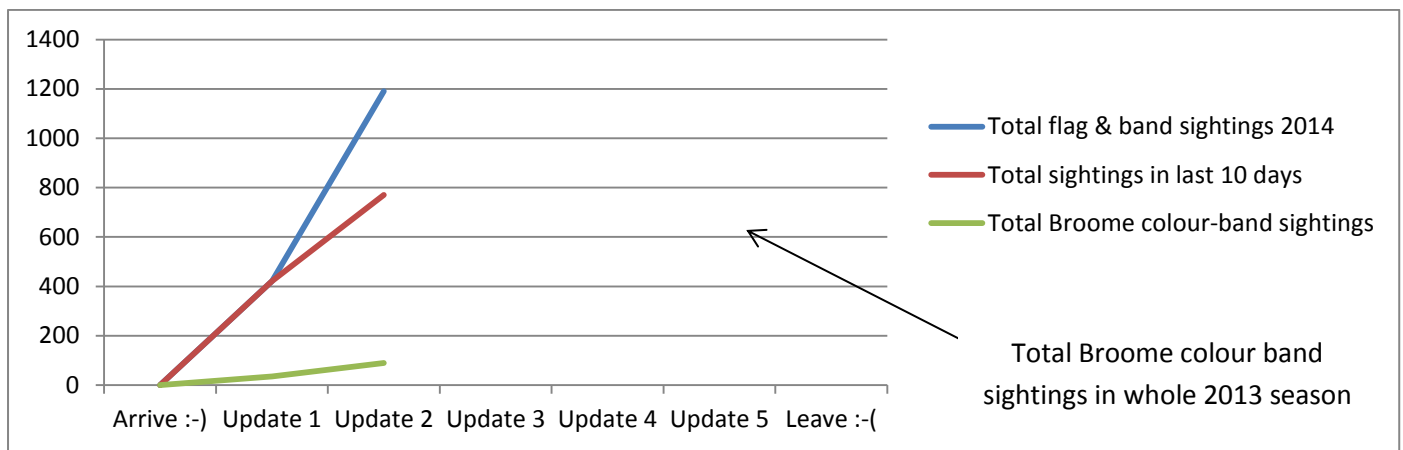
If previous years are anything to go by then we are due another arrival of Red Knot in the next few days and, in early May, we will also get an influx of people to help scan them.

Sir Scanalot & Sir Countalot

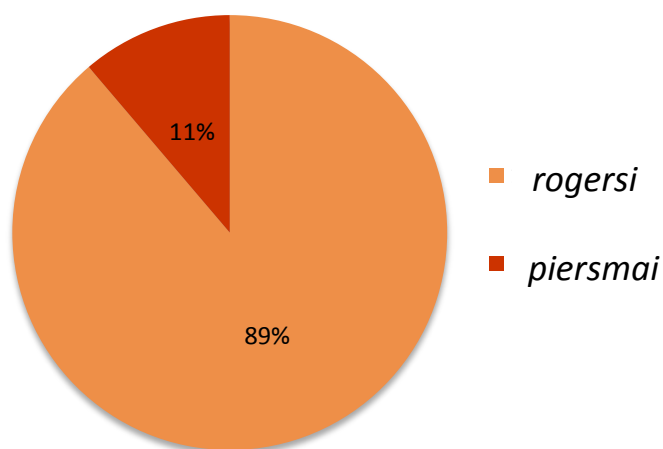


Red-flanked Bluetail is an early migrant and most have already passed through, male (AB) and female (MS)

The numbers so far...



Red Knot sub-species ratio - Update 2



Number species seen so far:

132

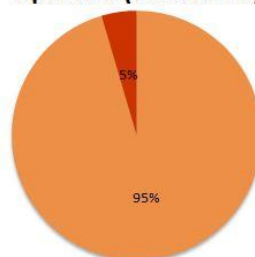
Flagging regions:

15

Flagged species:

10

Update 1 (3680 birds)



C. c. rogersi are most abundant in the first half of the season. Overall they are paler and often have silvery edges to the back feathers

C. c. piersmai mostly pass through later and dominate the flocks in May. They have deeper red underparts and are darker on the back.



Roosting Red Knot (Adrian Boyle). Often in this situation it is difficult to see flags so it is a good opportunity to count and assess subspecies proportions. Although both *rogersi* and *piersmai* pass through here they have different global distribution and as a result, different migration strategies.



Left; Adrian Boyle going for a scanning session on the wall complete with camera, cup of tea and shiny new boots.
 Right; Matt Slaymaker birding in the park. The weather must be good, shorts in April in unheard of!



Olive-backed Pipit at 'Tree Lane' (*Adrian Boyle*)



Nordmann's Greenshank (*Adrian Boyle*). This species is classified as 'Endangered' by the IUCN. Here in Bohai we get a few annually. So far we are up to 7 in 2014, just short of our record of 10 in early May 2012.



Mammals are scarce in this area but we do occasionally see them like this Siberian Weasel on the sea wall (*Matt Slaymaker*) and a Spotted Redshank in the saltpans (*Adrian Boyle*)



Marsh Sandpiper (*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/>

