

GFN fieldwork season on the Luannan Coast, Bohai Bay 2014, Update 3. The half-way mark!

Perhaps we should have seen it coming? After commenting in the last update about how exceptional the weather has been we were left frustrated and cold. The sun was out and the skies were clear, the light was perfect and the birds numerous. Unfortunately, for three straight days, we were subjected to a ferocious wind which unsettled the birds from their usual routine and shook our telescopes to the point where making any observations outside was near impossible. The gloriously sunny days of April seemed such a long time ago.

Fortunately, this change in the conditions proved only a minor setback. We were joined in the field by Chris Hassell and a day later by Theunis Piersma and Ginny Chan. Extra eyes are always helpful and it didn't take them long to get back in to the swing of things. The Luannan coast is quite different here to a Knot-less Dutch office or a leisurely shorebird scan on a sunny Broome beach but they were all marching out onto the mudflats in no time.



Professor Piersma in his natural habitat (*Matt Slaymaker*)

The number of Red Knot on site has doubled since the last update, there are now close to 30 000 with the vast majority concentrated into a small 3km stretch of mudflat at Nanpu. In the last couple of days Curlew Sandpiper have really arrived in force with our best count so far totalling almost 24 000 in a single salt pond. This is a good number but there are still many more to come. Marsh Sandpiper numbers have dropped off quickly but Black-tailed Godwit are still present in force with over 12 000 counted on a couple of occasions. 82 Ruff counted in the salt pans is a site record for us and a minimum 5 Nordmann's Greenshank have been seen in the last few days.



Black-tailed Godwit in the salt ponds (*Matt Slaymaker*)

A clear increase in sightings of yellow flags and colour bands is a strong suggestion that we have received our first wave of Broome Red Knot. A continued increase in the proportion of '*piersmai*' in our sub-species scans is another useful indication as this is the dominant race occurring in North-west Australia during the non-breeding season. A couple of 'new' birds from Chutkotka have been seen including a second bird with a Geo-locator. Interestingly, Ady saw and photographed the same individual recently in Australia. We think it is great the way these birds travel around the flyway, linking both countries and people. Every individual has an interesting story into which we are occasionally allowed a glimpse to remind us that there is still much to learn. Where has this bird been between sightings? Where will it go next? Who will be the next observer to share this bird's world? Hopefully the device that this bird is carrying will aid our understanding but it will also raise more questions. It may help address the 'what?' but leaves many 'why?' and 'how?' questions wide open. Ever improving technology is providing us with increasingly detailed data-sets which, not only help us to learn about and ultimately conserve the birds, but also leave us in awe at the remarkable capabilities and lives of these creatures.

Other interesting flag sightings included a Kentish Plover flagged in Taiwan, this is a common breeding species and we often encounter nests and chicks as we walk the mud walls of the salt ponds, but this is our first flagged individual from overseas. Black-tailed Godwit from both Thailand and Hong Kong were notable and a Turnstone from King Island (Tasmania) was our first for a couple of years. With the increase in Curlew Sandpiper came an increase in flags with birds from South Australia, Hong Kong, Thailand and Victoria all being seen. Predictably Red Knot leads the table of most flag and band sightings with a respectable 1411 records.

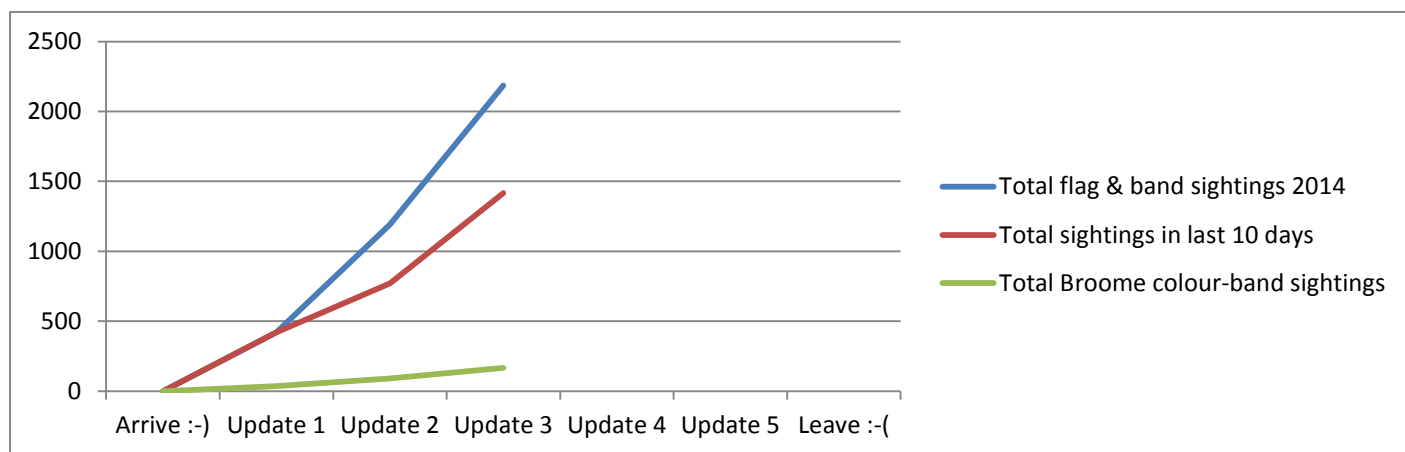
General birding has been productive as early May often is. Many new migrants arrived including Siberian Rubythroat, Brown Shrike and Asian Brown Flycatcher. Among the less regular were Blue-and-white Flycatcher, Oriental Scops Owl and Coal Tit all recorded in the town park. Following a brisk south wind overnight and a heavy rain shower the morning of the 7th we arrived to find the sea wall covered in birds. It wasn't so much the numbers but the variety that was impressive and throughout the morning during our shorebird work we recorded over 30 species of migrant passerines including Blue Rock Thrush, Citrine Wagtail and 2 Yellow-breasted Bunting. The latter species in particular we rarely see, unfortunately, in some areas they are considered a delicacy which has contributed to a rapid decline in the global population (in 2013 they were up listed to 'Endangered' on the IUCN redlist). Between us we also clocked up a remarkable day total of 38 species of shorebird including our first Long-toed Stint and Grey-headed Lapwing of the year. The day was completed with a Brown Hawk Owl in the town park. Spring has sprung.

Team Bohai 2014

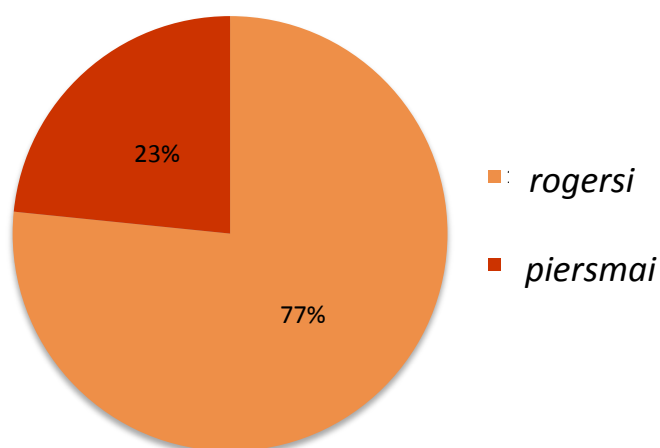


Left; Pallas's Leaf Warbler Right: Black-browed Reed Warbler (Matt Slaymaker)

The numbers so far...



Red Knot sub-species ratio - Update 3



Number species seen so far:

171

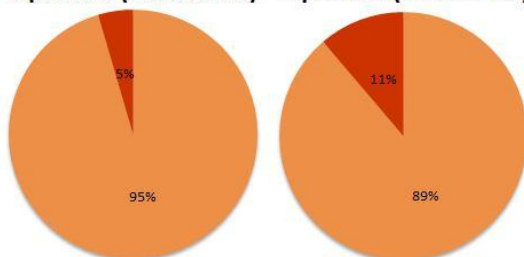
Flagging regions:

18

Flagged species:

16

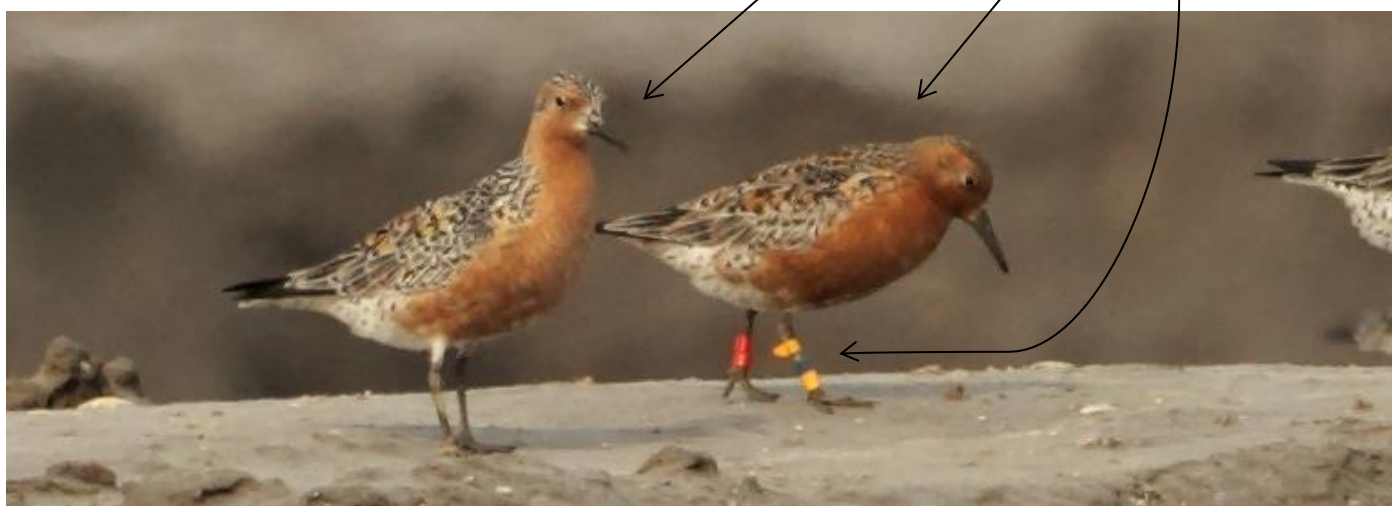
Update 1 (3680 birds) Update 2 (5291 birds)



rogersi

piersmai

Broome colour band



Red Knot (Ady Boyle)



Left; Chinese Pond Heron. Right; Asian Stubtail (*Ady Boyle*)



Oriental Scop's Owl (*Ady Boyle*)



More Black-tailed Godwit flock-shots (*Matt Slaymaker*)



Every year we show someone stuck in the mud, this year it's Ady's turn. Here he is trying to pull his nice white boots out of a salt pond. (Matt Slaymaker)

Scanning the Luannan Coast with a GoPro – some more people shots from various unusual angles...



Scanning preferences ... Ady is a left-eye 'scoper with right handed focus whereas Matt is all right





Above; Coal Tit. Below; Kentish Plover. (*Adrian Boyle*)



STOP PRESS – Ady has just come back with some (more) stunning shorebird photos – Check back in 10 days to see them along with all the latest updates from the field!!!

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/>

