

BOHAI UPDATE #4 MAY 22nd 2017

Red Knot

In Update 3 we mentioned we had 'lost' the Red Knot and then 'found' them.

The area we found them is between the Hangu Power Station and the Hangu Wind Farm it is a 29km direct flight from our main Luannan Coast study site. The habitat is exactly the same, extensive mudflats with myriad salt, shrimp and fish ponds just over the seawall (and a major road and through the wind turbines). And the birds use the area in the same way, as far as we can tell from our 8 days of visiting. Roosting and opportunistic foraging in the ponds with their main foraging time spent on the mudflats. And just as at our main study site if we get the timing right on an out-going tide we can be very successful in collecting colourband resightings.

On 2 visits in April on 14/04/2017 and 15/04/2017 we saw only 2 Red Knots each day! Then on May 2 at the site there was about 300. But then bigger numbers started to use the site but the birds there fluctuated in numbers. We had rough counts of 4,000 on 10/05/2017, 10,000 on 15/05/2017 then another big boost to 15,000 the following day before back to 7,000 a day later. We know from our colourband resighting's that birds are flitting back and forth between the 2 sites but what motivates them we don't know. Neither site appears 'better' or 'worse' than the other. Birds seem to forage successfully at each one and the disturbance on their roosts in the ponds is minimal. On 19/05/2017 we located the first salt pond that has really been popular with Red Knot this season. All the ponds have had much higher water levels for the past 2 seasons and as a result there is less suitable foraging area for the birds. In our first 6 years here when a pond was full of birds, especially Red Knot, scanning there would take precedence over the mudflats as we knew the opportunity would only be short-lived. These last 2 seasons the opportunities have hardly presented themselves at all. The pond we did locate we scanned for 3 days but then the water level rose just a little and the birds were gone. Birds that we saw here we had also seen recently at the Hangu Wind farm site, 24km away.



Chris and Adrian scanning a flock of knots.

Jason Loghry

Different shellfish harvest technique for Nanpu

This season we regularly see up to 40 people on the mud at the Nanpu site and they are collecting shellfish we have not seen them target before. They are taking Chinese Razor Clams *Sinonovacula constricta*. The fisher-people seem very skilled at collecting them. They appear to push a wooden stick somewhat randomly in to the mud but when they stop and insert the thin hooked wire they almost have 100% success in getting a clam. It is interesting that we have never seen this mollusc targeted before as it seems common. Tong Mu a student researcher has asked the shellfishers if the clams are 'seeded' but they say they aren't. It is potentially a disturbance issue for the birds with people out on the mudflats but if it is at all it is very minor at this stage with this amount of people. However conflicts between birds and fisherman have been documented in other areas of the Yellow Sea. See the blog here from May 2nd <https://teampiersma.org/category/east-asian-australasian-flyway/>



Razor Clam fishers at Nanpu with the wind turbines of the Hangu site 29km distant. A Boyle



A fisherman in action if you look closely you can see the hooked wire and the clam flying off it in to his pan. Bob Loos.



A fisherman takes a break with his catch. Bob Loos

We have been giving information about our Red Knot colourband resighting's during previous updates but as many of you will know not a marked bird passes our telescopes without it being duly recorded in our note books and hence our dataset.

Some of the less commonly recorded flags we have seen this season include Asian Dowitchers and Curlew Sandpipers from Chilika Lake, Odisha on the east coast of India (white/white), Great Knot and Curlew Sandpipers from Point Calimere in Tamil Nadu (black). We have recorded a single Curlew Sandpiper from Java (black/orange) and a single Red Knot from Sumatra (orange/black). Common Redshank is a species we rarely see with flags on so a record of one from Kinmen Island, Taiwan (white/blue) was interesting and we have had a Curlew Sandpiper from the same site. All these are good records although none are too surprising as we know from our years of study here that this area is a major hub for birds from throughout the EAAF and particularly for Red Knot and Curlew Sandpiper.



Ruddy Turnstone with an ELF from our 'home' site of Roebuck Bay.
Bob Loos

Global Big Day.

On the 13/05/2017 we participated in Ebirds global big day. If you have not heard of Ebird then you should check it out. It's a great platform for recording sightings and also learning about which species occur in certain areas and it can help greatly when planning a trip away to look for good birding spots. It also provides a large amount of data about distribution and abundance of birds on a global scale. As part of raising awareness and also collecting data Ebird has a 'big day' where participants record all of the birds seen on that day. We do this everyday anyway! On the designated day we had a great day and were lucky that it coincided with a really cracking migration day, this helped boost our totals. Of course for us it wasn't just birding as we still had to scan the knots in the morning but this allowed us to record many of the shorebirds for our list. We ended up seeing 119 species for the day and 2 of them were new for our Bohai list, a rare occurrence these days. The new 2 were Alpine Accentor and Pallas's Sandgrouse. This year there were over 19,400 participants and over 6,590 species were recorded.

Check out this link to learn more about the big year. <http://ebird.org/ebird/globalbigday>



Alpine Accentor. The highlight of the Global Big Day 13th May.

A Boyle

Clear Skies

It's not often we have good visibility, when we do it is usually after strong winds that have blown the smog away. On the 22/05/17 we had one of these clear days and noticed a super-tall tower in the distance. It is the Goldin Finance Building. It is still being constructed and when it is completed will be the 2nd tallest building in the world at 597m. This photo was taken from our survey site at Nanpu which is a staggering 96km away from the building site. (Ady was using his 500mm lens).



The Goldin Finance Building in Tianjin across the Bohai Bay.

A Boyle

BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS

It's very interesting witnessing the different species arrive and then vanish over the 2 months we are here. Most of the thrushes, buntings and small warblers have passed through and now we are seeing the flycatchers and the robins. Some highlights in the past 10 days have been the Alpine Accentor and Sandgrouse as mentioned above but also 2 Grey-sided Thrushes, Two-barred Greenish Warblers, White-throated and Blue Rock-Thrushes. A Pectoral Sandpiper was only our second record over all the years. One of the more unexpected sightings was of 3 Bar-headed Geese flying over the Hangu Wind Farm site. (Genuine vagrants or escapees we shall never know.)



Grey-sided Thrush.

A Boyle

So far we have recorded 2,463 marked birds from 27 sites throughout the EAAF (and a few from India!) on 15 different species. 591 of these are from the GFN colourbanding study. Total species seen stands at 215.

Chris, Adrian, Bob 23/05/2017