

BOHAI UPDATE #5 JUNE 2nd 2017

The Red Knots have started to use the complex of ponds to forage in during the last few days. As in previous years they prefer the large shallow ponds and forage on any exposed wet sediment and in very shallow water. Birds also feed on the edges of ponds, particularly after strong winds have blown brine flies and larva on to the banks. Scanning the birds in ponds can be very successful but is unpredictable and if birds are in the middle of the large ponds then they are too far to see their legs. If they are close to the wall that is great but as we are often scanning from a road when large trucks pass by the birds fly away. They come back anything from 30 seconds to 30 minutes later, 30 minutes makes the scanning session a bit frustrating!

An additional issue making it difficult to get close to the Red Knots in the ponds is that as we walk down the banks towards the birds we are surrounded by Pied Avocets and Black-winged Stilts making noisy alarm calls and this can then alarm the knots and away they go!



One reason for an upset Pied Avocet.

Adrian Boyle

As in previous years our records of colour banded resighting's show that there is a near constant arrival of 'new' birds in to this site at this time of year. It appears that birds, who arrive here early in the season, before May 1st, stay for up to a month but birds that arrive late in the season, mid-May onwards, are only here for a short time, a week or so. This is just what we glean from checking the sightings each day, it is not analysed data. Our GFN colleague Tamar Lok has done some preliminary analysis of the duration of staging time spent here and that indeed indicates that the average stay is only of about 7 days. This obviously points to Red Knots having other very important staging sites further south in the EAAF.

As the season here is starting to wind down our colleague Bob Loos has returned to the Netherlands to prepare for a trip to Mauritania soon. We thanks Bob for his efforts for the past month. As we have mentioned previously the weather has been very good to us this year with mostly warm conditions. But just as a goodbye to Bob there was a change two mornings ago.



Even Bob's enthusiasm for scanning was dampened today!

Education is a major part of GFN's role. When Chris is in Broome he gives talks to the local community and visitors in formal presentations about shorebirds and conservation. Another way to engage the public is to have them participate in the catching and marking of shorebirds. GFN do this regularly in association with Australian Wader Studies Group and Broome Bird Observatory. This engagement between researchers, skilled volunteers and the visiting public is a great way to get people interested in shorebirds. There are few places in the world that I know of other than Australia where shorebird research activities are so open to the general public. Here on the Luannan coast we don't do any catching and there is the language barrier but we have some information brochures printed in Chinese developed by university students and we hand those out to many people who approach us to ask what we are doing. A big bonus is that Mr Liu and his son Xiao Liu both seem interested in what we do and they chat to various people who we encounter during our work.



Xiao Liu (right) our driver interacting with some local fisher people.

We continue to be nervous about the loss of the mudflats to industrial growth and this also applies to other areas where we go birding. But slowly things are maybe changing for the better. We have had the New Zealand Ambassador to China and Chinese politicians on the seawall this year and recently we have spotted this sign at one of our favourite birding spots that we refer to as 'Tree Lane'. As it has, yes you guessed it, a reasonable amount of trees. It also has open fresh water, reeds and rice cultivation.



Part of the sign at 'Tree Lane'.

Adrian Boyle

We can't read it but the images make it clear that catching wild birds is against the law. We shall ask a Chinese-speaking friend to translate the words and see exactly what it says. Hunting of migratory shorebirds maybe an under-reported conservation issue and as such one that doesn't have much attention paid to it.



A cooperative Yellow Bittern at our Tree Lane birding site.

A Boyle

Shorebirds have been migrating north from our study area since mid-April but at this time of the year it becomes obvious as the counts many species have dropped off to very low numbers, in some species to almost zero. We recorded 40,000 Dunlins in the first week of May but that number has been reduced to 2 individuals! As far as we can tell, 2 birds with 0% breeding plumage differentiated by the fact one has yellow and white flags on having been marked in Sakhalin, Russia. We have recorded visible migration of Eastern and Eurasian Curlews, Grey Plover, Sanderling and Red Knots. Many other species have left when we have not been on the mudflats to witness it.

General birding continues to reap rewards with multiple exciting sightings.

A Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Nanpu was recorded over 3 consecutive days. A Watercock at Tree Lane was a new bird for our Bohai list. We have only recorded 2 Tiger Shrikes over all or the previous years but we have seen 2 over the past 10 days in the town park and the Nanpu sea wall. Indian Cuckoos seem more common this season and we have recently completed our '4-Bittern set' for the season with Black and Von Schrenck's Bittern being seen in the past few days to add to Yellow and Great. We have also flushed a crane from a tiny patch of reeds at the Magic Wood but we did not see it well. Despite walking around, with great difficulty and getting our feet rather wet in the tangled patch we did not relocate the bird and frustratingly it remained not positively identified. From the brief and poor view we got we feel it was most likely a Ruddy-breasted Crane.



One of two recent Tiger Shrikes recorded.

A Boyle

So far we have recorded 2,770 marked birds from 27 sites throughout this flyway on 15 different species. 680 of these are from the GFN colourbanding study comprising 295 individually recognisable birds. Total bird species recorded stands now at 226 and all records have been submitted to the Ebird database to help understand bird distributions in China.

Chris, Adrian and Bob
02/06/2017



Pallas's Warbler is a species we don't record every year.

A Boyle



White-winged Black Terns have arrived in their thousands.

A Boyle



Gratuitous baby Pheasant image.

Adrian Boyle