

Bohai 2018, Update 3 ...

It has been a busy week here in Bohai with early mornings, lots of people and loads of birds!

As usual, we have been out scanning every day. Given the recent tides and distribution of the birds, this has mostly involved observations from the sea wall at Nanpu, with some occasional forays into the nearby roosts and along the coast of Zuidong. At Nanpu, the tide doesn't go out parallel to the wall, but at an angle, allowing us to follow birds along the coast and obtain good close views at numerous points. Our primary target species, Red Knot, have continued to increase in numbers but, based on our flag and band sightings, we are still waiting for a big arrival of birds from northwest Australia.

A shorebird count of the whole study site coastline and nearby salt ponds was completed in early-May. At Nanpu, we had a few teething problems with birds of prey flushing the birds but still managed what we hope is a reasonably accurate count of most species. A total just short of 30,000 birds were recorded on the Nanpu mudflats with a further 50,000 in the wider area. Red Knot, our primary study species numbered around 18,000, almost all of which were on the coastline at Nanpu and neighbouring Beipu.

Since the count, birds have continued to arrive. Numbers of Red-necked Stint in particular seem to have jumped in the last couple of days and, with the salt ponds so full of water this year, much greater numbers are present on the mudflats. A total of 29,337 Curlew Sandpiper constitutes our highest 'official' count for the area since 2014 when we revised our count data table to reflect the latest EAAF estimates.

The knowledge-base for the Luannan coast is continually growing and the area seems to be inundated by shorebird researchers. It has been great to catch up with many old and new faces since we have been here. Drew, Leiming, Tong and Hebo, together with a large team of volunteers, have all been here working on various projects and studies. Ongoing research includes benthic sampling, spatial counts on the mudflats, observations of feeding ecology of Knots, studies on Black-tailed Godwits, salt pond habitats and the breeding terns! It is great seeing so much good research being carried out in the area.



Left: Mud sampling by Red Knots and shorebird researchers; and Right: Researchers catch up with Theunis at Nanpu

We were also graced by the presence of professor Theunis Piersma, making his annual pilgrimage to the site. Katherine Leung from Hong Kong joined us for a week's scanning, Scott Weidensaul from the USA spent a few days with us and Terry Townshend dropped by for a weekend.

Hank and Wendy Paulson spent a morning birding on the sea wall and surrounding area. The Paulson Institute (<http://www.paulsoninstitute.org/>) has been influential in helping to attain Nature Reserve status for Nanpu mudflats and the birds behaved impeccably for their visit.

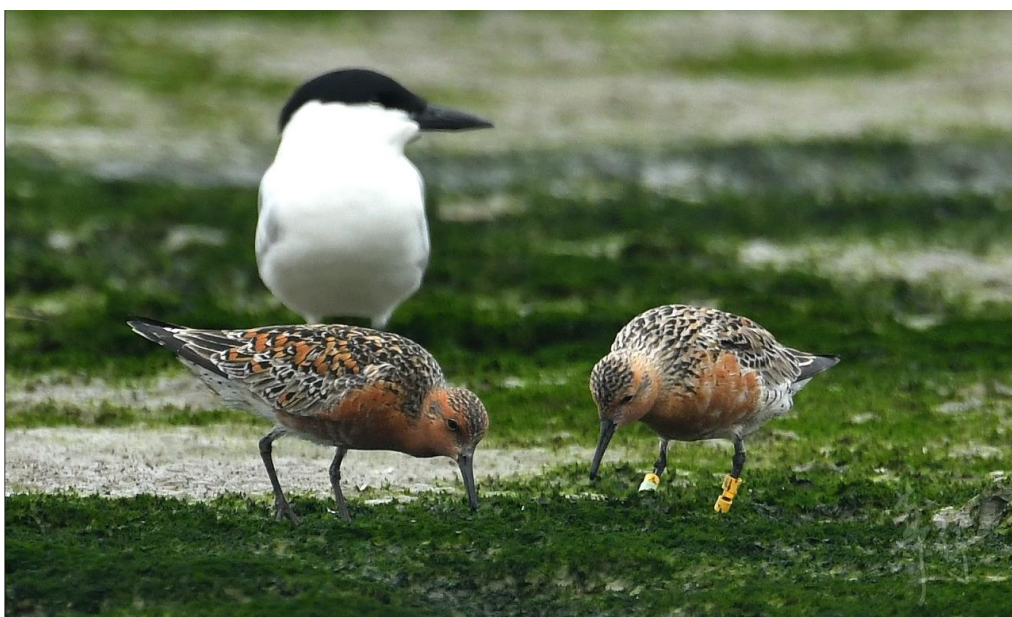


Red Knot stream over from the roost with perfect timing during the Paulson visit.

Scanning has been productive, and we have now recorded a total of 1,762 flag and band observations, including 426 individually identifiable birds. This is a similar pace to last year and with many shorebirds still to arrive in the bay, we hope to see a lot more marked birds over the next few weeks.

Northwest Australia colour-bands, including birds from 80 Mile Beach and Broome, are the focus of our day and we have so far recorded 99 individual Red Knots, 44 Great Knots (almost twice as many as in 2017!) and three Bar-tailed Godwits. A new banding region for the season seen this week was Hong Kong and we have seen further birds from places as diverse as Chukotka in Russia, Tamil Nadu in India, and King Island, in Tasmania.

This is not unique information but always good to document. Red Knot 5YYYYL was banded at 80 Mile Beach 04/03/2014 as an 'adult' aged 2+ (in its second year of life or older). It has been recorded here on our Luannan coast study site in 2015, 16, 17 and again this year, 2018. But on the way here it dropped in to Mai Po Nature Reserve, Hong Kong where it was seen and photographed by Kevin Lok. The Mai Po sighting was on 18/04/2018 and the first sighting here was 04/05/2018. Thanks to Kevin for the record and the cracking image.



Image; Kevin Lok

There is a prize for the 1st e-mail I receive with the correct sub-species of 5YYYYL!



Great Knot, Red Knot and Dunlin arrive on the mud

It has been a productive week for general birding with some good visible migration along a sea wall and some surprises at our 'recreational birding' spots. Bull-headed Shrike was a new species for our Bohai list as was a Collared Finchbill, both at the 'Prison Trees'. The latter was quite a surprise as, with a distribution far to the south and limited migration, it is seemingly an unlikely vagrant. There is always the possibility that it has escaped from a cage but, as the bird showed no signs of recent captivity and turned up during a strong passage of Bulbuls, perhaps it should be given the benefit of the doubt. Large Hawk-cuckoo, Oriental Cuckoo two *Seicercus* warblers (likely Bianchi's, although ID can be very difficult without hearing them call) were all good local records of birds we don't see every year. With all the regular migrants passing through, it has been a busy week!



Clockwise from top left: Bull-headed Shrike, Collared Finchbill, Large Hawk-cuckoo and (probable) Bianchi's Warbler.

Team Bohai 2018

