

Bohai 2018, update 2. Scanning come rain or shine...

We have had a bit of everything this week, Thunder and lightning, rain, wind and sun. Good days, bad days and completely useless days when the tide simply failed to come in, remaining 100's of meters offshore. This happens occasionally, out of sync with the days either side, and ruins our scanning plans! Perhaps it is due to weather, atmospheric or environmental conditions elsewhere in Bohai Bay or the Yellow Sea?

Generally, numbers of birds on the mudflats are increasing daily. Great Knots, an early migrant, are already here in good numbers; however, Red Knot were a little later than usual. The last few days have seen a significant increase in numbers but there are still plenty of 'Broome birds' yet to get here. Our second count of the season, scheduled for the next couple of days, will hopefully provide a more accurate measure of what is here. While many shorebirds are still some way to the south, others have started to leave with a small flock Eastern Curlew seen migrating north over town on the 25th April.



Left: Matt scanning in the rain. Right: Ady only gets out the car in the sun.

Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Red-necked Stint numbers are slowly building. Late-April is usually when we see the peak of Marsh Sandpipers but so far, there have been relatively few. Water levels in the salt ponds are unusually high at the moment, even more so than the very high levels seen for the last two years. It is expected this will have a big impact on many of these species and it will be interesting to see where they go.



Since our first observation on the 16th, a minimum of six Nordmann's Greenshank are now present on the mudflats at Nanpu and seen daily.

Scanning success has been mixed, but we have recorded birds from the throughout the flyway and beyond! So far, we have recorded around 800 flag/band sightings including over 200 identifiable individuals from various locations, schemes and projects. These figures are down a little on previous years but with the recent increase in Red Knots, more people and favourable tides on the way, we hope to boost our totals in the next few days.

To-date, we have recorded flag/bands on nine species and birds from 25 countries/regions including Chukotka, Kamchatka, South Korea, Japan, various parts of Australia, and a Great Knot from India.

As usual, Nanpu has been our main site and is our first port of call each day. Fortunately for us, many knots have been roosting in the salt ponds behind the sea wall, an easily accessible area for scanning but not used for a number of years. Often, once the birds become too distant at Nanpu we move on to Zuidong where the tide is slightly later and we get great views of Great Knots which prefer this section of the coast.



Red Knot roosting in the salt ponds at Nanpu

A welcome distraction along the sea wall is often some of the fishermen and women. We recognise many from previous years and they are mostly friendly and interested in what we are up to. Some have set nets that catch the fish during high tide and others walk around on the mudflat at low tide collecting shellfish.

They may cause some minor disturbance to the birds but the mudflats are extensive and we feel this, at its current level, does not have a major impact on the shorebirds. Its better to have a mudflat with fishermen and a small amount of disturbance than no mudflat at all.



Left: Our driver sheltering from the rain with 2 of the local fisher people whilst waiting for the tide to recede. The owner of the blue hut wasn't home. Right: Our driver and a fisherman showing the owner of the blue hut the above photo and saying he should have been there the day before, so we could have stayed dry.

An exploratory trip to Hangu Wind Farm site was productive, allowing us to scope out the conditions and scanning opportunities. The site is located on the coast towards Tianjin and is important for Black-tailed Godwits and potentially Red Knots later in the season (if last season's pattern holds true). As well as a good selection of shorebirds we found an immature Kittiwake feeding with Black-headed Gulls, just our second record for the area, and a minimum of 3 Finless Porpoise offshore.

The town 'zoo', as you may have read in previous years' updates, is a small urban park conveniently close to our apartment. It has a few mature trees and shrubs but measures only about 300x100 m in size. Labelled the 'zoo' by us because of its small collection of animals, including an Emu (there were once 2!), several Peacocks, Pheasants, a few deer and some dogs, all housed in a few cages in the corner.

Due to the limited vegetation in the surrounding landscape, the 'zoo' can be a magnet for migrants and we try and go there most days when we are not busy scanning. It really is amazing what we have recorded there over the years and, with migration in full swing for the passerines, anything can turn up and it often does. We have recorded around 140 species here, with many of our records uploaded to eBird: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5689048>



Left: the 'zoo'. Right: a recent Sulphur-breasted Warbler, our 4th record in 8 years birding the area.

As well as an increase of birds, we are preparing for an influx of people next week. Chris Hassell, Kathrine Leung and Theunis Piersma will be joining the team along in the next few days with a number of other visitors. Look out for the next update to hear all about it.

In the meantime, for a good summary of some of the problems shorebirds are facing in the EAA flyway and beyond, there is a very good article published in the New York Times that's worth a read ...

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/27/opinion/shorebirds-extinction-climate-change.html>

Team Bohai, 2018

