

It's been a very intense week at the Broome Bird Observatory and I was exhausted, but when Chris came asking for help for setting up the net for the Saturday's catch I almost forgot about the early morning setup. I really like to participate in the catches, it's a fantastic opportunity to see the birds with your bare eyes and it helps to a quicker identification later when they are on the distance. Also, it reminds me to my bird catching days in Spain and The Netherlands and I know that these bird-me encounters bring joy to me. It's always been like that; they have that magic power.

But catching birds is not a game. There are different catching techniques depending on the birds, the season and the environment and I find them all very interesting with its local and special features. Cannon netting was a new one for me and I discovered the setup needs to be very precise for both a successful catch and bird safety.

The bird flocks' movements need to be followed with days in advance to determine the location that birds are finding more attractive. Our target was migratory shorebirds, and it was established that these fellows were liking Wader Beach that week, it must be that the red of the rocks and turquoise of the water was more appealing there. So we went to Wader Beach, considered the past and coming high tide to strategically place the net at the correct distance from water. I still need to learn how to know where to place the net along the hundreds of metres of beach, but that'll be another episode.

The beach was a rocky pavement which means you only have heavy rocks to set the cannons and light sticks to hide the net and cannons. And you don't want rocks flying around so place them wisely!

It was a very windy day and it was supposed to get windier with the pass of the hours, then how do you fire the net when the birds are gliding in the air instead of moving gently on the ground? Well, that's Chris' experienced eye who knows to pick the moment. We were 6 persons hiding behind the sand dunes as the first wave of runners and I just heard a count to three (I promise the 2, 1 fire were there – Ed) and an explosion, we run to the net and we found a few hundreds of different shorebirds there. A total of 454 birds to be exact. It seems like an excellent catch to me!

We were a very small team to get and process all the birds, a very good team to be said, but the smallest team ever with Chris, so we had to let go 110 at the net. Getting quick all the birds out from the net, in to boxes and to the cages is the more hectic moment, but it all went very smoothly. Some groups were colour-banding the Great and Red Knots, blood samples were also taken from them, and other groups were banding and ageing the 230 Curlew Sandpipers, as well as the Broad-billed Sandpipers, the Red-necked Stints and one Terek Sandpiper.

A spark of colour is always welcome among all those grey feathers so I was very happy to band a few Curlew Sandpipers that had up to 75% of breeding plumage. It meant they probably weren't successful at breeding in the northern hemisphere though, but they are just getting prettier for the next year, I promise. Also, 5 of these sandpipers were retraps being one in its tenth year of life, and the others being 11+ and 13+.

Thank you all for a fantastic catch, very efficient and to the point, and special thanks to Helen for teaching me with patience. I have a feeling that those birds will go far...

Itziar López Zanduetta, BBO Assistant Warden.

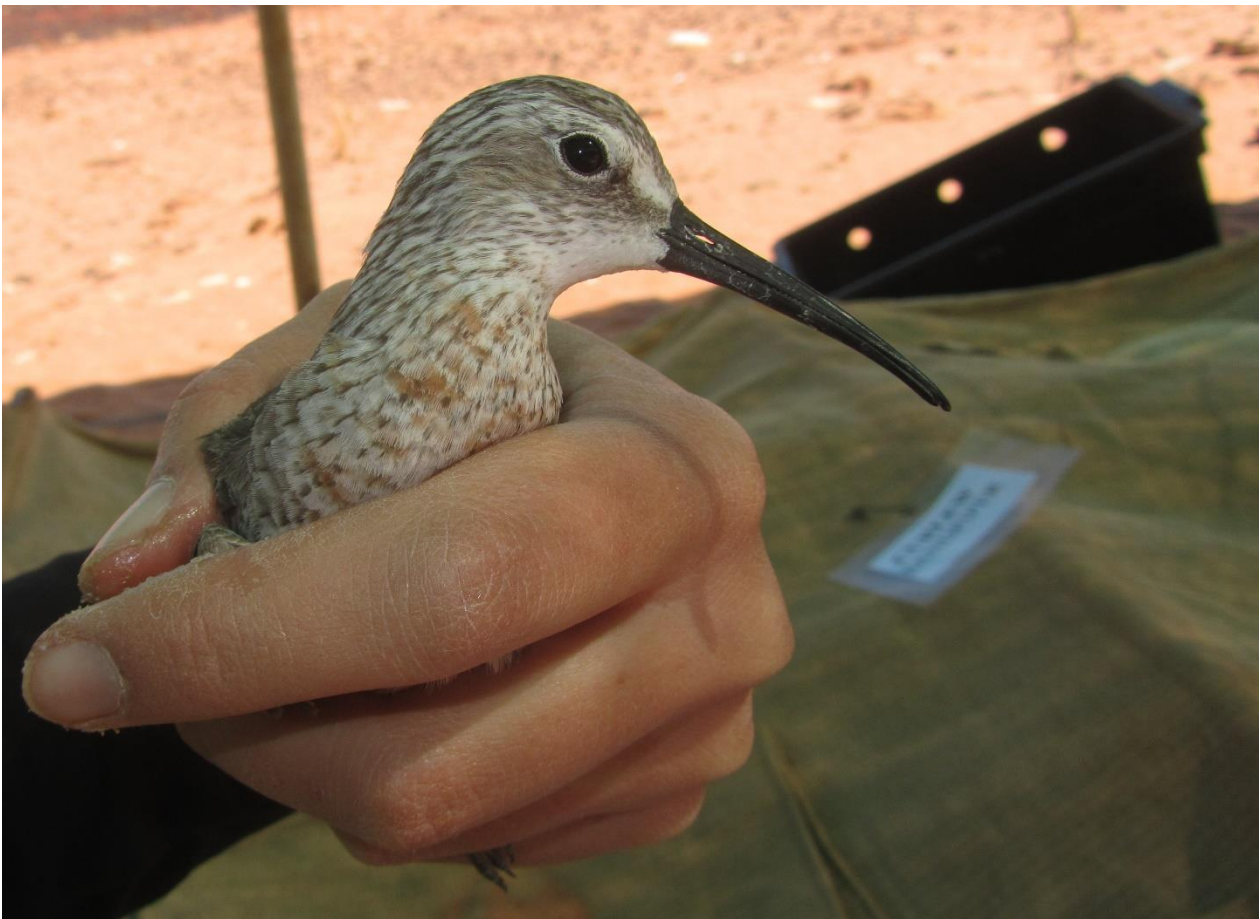
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SPECIES	NEW	RETRAP	Age 1 1st Year of Life	Known Age 2	Age 3+ 3rd year of life or older	TOTAL
Broad-billed Sandpiper	7	0	0	7	0	7
Curlew Sandpiper	225	5	0	203	27	230
Great Knot	43	1	0	39	5	44
Red Knot	27	0	0	23	4	27
Red-necked Stint	34	1	0	31	4	35
Terek Sandpiper	1	0	0	1	0	1
TOTALS	337	7	0	304	40	344



Great Knots return to the bay

Itziar



Portrait of a Curlew Sandpiper

Itziar