

CATCH REPORT 26-08-2018

Another big catch but with a team double the size of 2 weeks ago. It is always a pleasure to see a bunch of strangers working seamlessly together and this team were no exception. We had plenty of kids under 12 but everyone was brilliant at the net, pretty much the whole catch was in the shallow water, but we 'tented' the net immediately and all went well.

The catch was dominated by small species. This was expected as recently the same scenario has been playing out repeatedly. Most of the birds come off the mud at Crab Creek and gather on Wader Beach, they seem to have little interest in being anywhere else at the start of the high tide period (2 hrs before to 2 hrs after). But after a very short time at Wader Beach they are 'jumpy' and constantly flying up and down back and forth. Only a small amount of this disturbance is by birds of prey. I have always felt at this time of year the roosts are much noisier and birds more unsettled than at other times of year. I think all the returning adults mixing with the young birds that have spent the Austral winter here makes for general restlessness. At each flight the flock splits a little and the small species return back to Wader Beach but gradually the larger birds (knots and godwits predominately) start to drift away. And they're not seen again. Even when I go and look for them. Odd, I know the Bay pretty well! But they aren't roosting anywhere that I can find them.

So this played out on catch day. We were lucky in that 30 Red-necked Stints had no desire to leave the beach at all and stayed roosting bang in front of the net even when 2,000 other birds swept past them in a rush of wings. Gradually birds landed with these stints and after a few aborted count downs we had a chance. The net went beautifully, as it had all but no camouflage on it, and caught everything in front. We let 10 Red-capped Plovers go directly from the net but the rest were banded and flagged.

The Curlew Sandpiper comparisons between the 2 catches were very interesting. It is very obvious that there has been a big influx of returning adults. Of those 188 adults only 2 had started primary moult. So these birds were very recently arrived.

Capture date	Species	New	Retrap	Age 1 1st Year of Life	Known age 2	Age 3+ 3rd year of life or older	Total
11-08-18	Curlew Sandpiper	225	5	0	203	27	230
26-08-18	Curlew Sandpiper	180	56	0	48	188	236



The Greater Sand Plovers moults were also interesting. All our knowledge here suggests most species and particularly the species that stick to the mudflats while they are here, arrive back from southward migration having done no primary moult and then start to moult very soon after arrival. They usually moult 1 to 4 feathers at a time on the inner wing. So to have 13 Greater Sand Plovers in 'suspended' moult was unusual to me. It seems they have either moulted very quickly after arrival and are going to move somewhere else (unlikely?) or they did some moult en-route to Broome (more likely?)

Enough moult-nerdery!

There were 2 juvenile Greater Sand Plovers and we all oohhed and aaahhed over them!

Thanks to all for your help most notably BBO and the Broome regulars. Thanks to Connie and David for images

Chris Hassell

29-08-2018

26-08-2018						
SPECIES	NEW	RETRAP	Age 1 1st Year of Life	Known Age 2	Age 3+ 3rd year of life or older	TOTAL
Broad-billed Sandpiper	4	0	0	4	0	4
Curllew Sandpiper	180	56	0	48	188	236
Greater sand Plover	61	10	2	12	57	71
Great Knot	8	1	0	7	2	9
Lesser Sand Plover	1	0	0	0	1	1
Red Knot	5	0	0	4	1	5
Red-necked Stint	53	6	0	22	37	59
TOTALS	312	73	2	97	286	385

