

GFN and AWSG Thanks to Liz

Volunteers are the backbone of so many scientific projects undertaken in Australia, now most commonly referred to as citizen science.

Each individual who takes part does so of their own free will but that doesn't limit the admiration I have for them. I do a fair bit of vol stuff myself (that reads rather conceitedly!)

And each of those individuals has their own reasons and motivations to volunteer.

That doesn't mean that praise shouldn't be showered on them now and again and perhaps most particularly when they have to stop volunteering due to their health after years of dedicated and skilled input.

That's enough of that.

Elizabeth Rosenberg (Liz, the lady in the silly hat) has been by my side as a scribe on shorebird research (cannon nets, counts, mist-nets and editing reports) for 18 years.

Liz heard a talk by Clive here in Broome in 1982 and thought 'wow that's fascinating, I would like to get involved with that'.

She then heard a talk by me in 2000 and thought wow I'd----'.

She joined the local catching team after my talk.

So either she had more time in her life then or my talk was much better than Clive's. I know which reason I like to believe!

Liz's scribing skill is outstanding and now she is not by my side it is even more obvious to me as I now need to 'keep an eye' on my scribes. Before that Liz kept an eye on me and never hesitated (even enjoyed?) pointing out when I messed up. 'Chris that bird has 11 primaries', 'Chris are you sure that wing length is 7,456mm?' It is a classic case of not noticing something when it is being done efficiently.

At cannon net catches Liz would also be in charge at the cages mostly dealing with all the people new to catching with boxes of birds with just a brief introduction to help them understand the process. This she did with a calm demeanor and a smile (mostly) but her efficiency never wavered.

On counts Liz was also by my side and we shared some phenomenal experiences, in November 2012 half-way through a count 50km south on 80 Mile Beach and about 30,000 birds coming swirling down in and around us. The log for that day reads:

On Nov 26 my team were doing the 50-60km count. We had counted about 20+ thousand birds in the 50-55 section when there was an enormous and long lasting disturbance. Some 30plus thousand birds in the air as far as the eye could see for 20 minutes or more. They went north they went south they went east they went west. I decided that it was impossible to finish the count with any semblance of accuracy and it was abandoned. We did though carry on driving south and when we found large flocks of settled birds, as the tide dropped, we counted these carefully to get the proportions of each species in the total flock. In total we counted 30,864 birds and worked out the %age of the species.

As we drove back from 56km south to 50km south I estimated the number of birds now in the area and came up with 63,000.

Another experience was driving north back up the Anna Plains stretch of 80 Mile Beach after scanning with Theunis and counting the not insignificant numbers of 514,900 Oriental Pratincoles and 144,300 Oriental Plovers on the 75 km of Eighty Mile Beach south of the Anna Plains beach access point. The next day we counted 241,400 Oriental Pratincoles and over 14,200 Little Curlew. These are special experiences and that I could share them with Liz was an added bonus for me.

We also had some hilarious times, which for this family orientated post must remain under wraps.

Counting is not a relaxing experience (particularly if you have to do it with me) and Liz never wavered in concentration and put all and every number faithfully down on the count sheet regardless of the volume or speed or coherence it was communicated at.

At one stage Liz was also scribing for me during scanning outings and this led her to teach me the phonetic alphabet. She is a very good, if somewhat strict teacher! I didn't see the problem with seeing 'NMA' on a Great Knot flag and calling out Nutty, Miserable, Avenger. Or 'JSP' on a Greater Sand Plover as Jolly, Stupid, Person. But no that wasn't suitable to Liz so now it's all November, Mike, Alpha and Juliet, Sierra, Papa.

I could go on, but you might stop reading and Liz might get embarrassed at so much praise.

Thanks Liz for your unstinting dedication and lovely company over the years.

Chris

