

## Bohai 2019, Update 1

It's that time of year again! Early-April to early-June is shorebird season on the mudflats of East Asia and we are back on the northern shores of Bohai Bay, on the Luannan coast. This is the tenth consecutive year monitoring has been carried out in its current format, and we will be searching, scanning, counting and recording for the next two months.

For 2019, your early-season correspondents will again be Adrian Boyle, veteran of 11 Bohai seasons, and Matt Slaymaker, back for his seventh. It is always a relief to return to find the mudflats intact and the expected birds present and correct. Our core survey site, the Nanpu mudflat, was earmarked for nature reserve status; however, this doesn't seem to have happened. The site and surrounding area is fundamental to the survival of the numerous species that pass through annually and we had hoped this positive development would offer some additional protection. We are still trying to find out the exact reason why reserve status has not been given and hope to be able to provide more information in future updates. For now, the mudflats are still here and being heavily used by the shorebirds that we all love.



Matt scanning at Zuidong and Adrian pretending to be a bush

Shorebird numbers seem normal for the time of year. Typical early arriving species such as Great Knot bolster the numbers of the wintering and really-early species such as Dunlin, Grey Plover, Kentish Plover and Eurasian Curlew and our daily commute through the salt ponds is enlivened by ever increasing numbers of Marsh Sandpipers. Red Knot are here with numbers rising from a few hundred to a few thousand over the last week. During a count on the 13<sup>th</sup> we found approx. 17,000 shorebirds of over 29 species across the mudflats of Nanpu and Beipu.



*A mixed flock of shorebirds, primarily Great & Red Knot, at Nanpu mudflat*

Enjoying hazy sunshine and balmy mornings we have been out on the seawall daily. Scanning success has been mixed with the unfavourable neap tides of the last week, but we still managed to amass a reasonable number and diversity of flag and band sightings. At a shade over 320 observations, including 33 different NWA colour-bands and a further 70-odd identifiable individuals from various places, we feel this is a pretty solid start to the season. We have seen birds from a diverse range of banding locations, from coastal India to the Chukotka tundra. We have representatives on the mud from Japan, Kamchatka, New Zealand and Thailand, among others from throughout the flyway. Great and Red Knots make up the majority of our flag and band observations, but we have a few flagged Bar-tailed Godwits, Dunlin and Sanderling to keep things interesting. It's also nice to see a few regular birds back in the bay, individuals that turn up here each spring such as 'AKK' the South Australian godwit and 'CKY', a Red Knot banded in Chukotka.

At Nanpu, there are a few fishing nets on the mud and a few fishermen collecting shellfish but numbers are small compared to a few years ago. In 2018, fishing activities were restricted during the summer to avoid disturbance to shorebirds. Hopefully this will continue although, worryingly, during a count at neighbouring Beipu we encountered some fishermen regularly firing explosives from the back of a boat. These fireworks make a flash, a loud 'bang' and a splash and are an effective way to scare shorebirds away from an area, presumably in this case a section of the mudflat that has been seeded with shellfish for harvest later in the year. Although in recent years Beipu hasn't been such an important site for many species, if this practise were to spread it could cause a lot of disturbance to the birds already under pressure.



*A boat in the smog resting on the mudflats at Beipu, using fireworks to displace the shorebirds.*

Away from the mud, passerine migration was, frankly, abysmal during the first few days. The odd pipit along the sea wall and small numbers of Pallas's Warblers and Red-flanked Bluetails in the local park did not meet our high expectations and duck numbers at the lake were barely 10% of the count from this time last year. From the 15<sup>th</sup>; however, things started to kick off with a notable arrival of birds, mostly typical early migrants such as Dusky Thrush, Black-faced Bunting, and Daurian Redstart.



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*Left: Glaucous Gull at Beipu. This species is recorded once or twice most seasons but always during the first week or two in the field. Right: White Wagtail, this is 'ocularis', one of 4-5 subspecies that pass through in early spring.*



Surprise of the period (and an early contender for the coveted 'bird of the season' title) was a Crested Goshawk that spent a couple of days in the local park. This apparently non-migratory species has a normal range that barely reaches Shanghai and there have been few records this far north. Other highlights included a female Russet Sparrow and Manchurian Bush Warbler; our third and fourth records of these species, respectively.

From shorebirds to stubtails, more birds are arriving daily so fingers-crossed for another great spring.



## GFN Glossary

For readers who may not be familiar with some of our terminology, we hope this handy glossary may assist people to decipher our regular drivel:

**GFN:** Global Flyway Network. <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>

**Shorebird:** A confusing and at times controversial term that applies broadly to birds found by the shore, although some only seasonally. And some not at all. Variably used for waders, not all of which wade, as well as gulls and terns (depending on who you talk to). Occasionally also herons and ducks, but this really is stretching it a bit.

**Scanning:** The process of searching through a flock of birds, in this instance with the intention of finding flags and bands. Depending on the weather, light, location, species, bird behaviour, distance, etc. this activity can be pleasantly rewarding or deeply frustrating.

**Flags and Bands:** Marks used to identify a shorebird individual or banding location. Coloured flags represent an area/location. Engraved coloured flags have a unique alpha-numeric inscription that can identify an individual from that region. Colour-bands are small coloured leg-bands used to identify individuals bird as part of a specific project.

**NWA Colour-bands:** Our main target here; colour-bands from northwest Australia (Broome/80-mile), particularly on Red Knot.

**Red Knot:** *Calidris canutus*. A small shorebird species that is partially red and for most of the year is found close to some sort of 'shore'. Large tangles occur here on northward migration and is the focus of the GFN study.

**A Tangle:** Collective noun for a group of Knots.

**Migrants:** The things we look for when all the scanning and data is done. This area is on a flyway for everything from ducks to nightjars, raptors to warblers. We never know what we will see and its all very exciting.

**Mega:** A rare or very cool bird; be it out of its normal range, few in population, difficult to see or any combination thereof, e.g. "that Crested Goshawk was mega!".

**Twitch:** (i) A gathering of birders to see a specific bird, often a mega. (ii) Involuntary movement by birder when unable to see said mega.

**eBird:** Not a species of bird but a citizen-science project that collates bird observations from around the world. All of our daily sightings and counts from Bohai are recorded on here (for example <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5689517> ) and you should use it too.





*Mega in the park... Crested Goshawk that may have been eating our migrants...  
Below: A Bohai twitch!*



<http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/>