

Bohai 2019, Update 2

It has been a week that has given us a little of everything; from wind and rain to blue skies and sun. From great scanning to fog with 10-metre visibility.

Shorebird numbers continue to increase in both overall numbers and diversity. Many of the regular species are continuing to arrive and have been joined by small numbers of scarce migrants such as Asian Dowitcher, Nordmann's Greenshank and Little Stint. A count on the 26th totalled around 26,000 birds at Nanpu, our main site, with many more along the neighbouring sections of coast. Numbers seem to be broadly similar to this time last year, but we are also due a big increase in the coming days, particularly of Red Knot and Curlew Sandpiper.



A typical scene in the saltponds. How many shorebird species can you see?

For a more complete audio-visual Bohai experience, check out this video of a tangle of knots: [Click Here for Knots](#). It may not be the highest quality video, as it's only taken with an iPhone, but you can get an idea of the spectacle we are lucky enough to see some mornings. (As we tell ourselves when they repeatedly do this and land at increasingly unscannable distances!)

As usual, our daily scanning has been somewhat inconsistent. Some days the birds behaved impeccably, dropping down onto the mudflats close to the wall and strutting around flashing their flags and bands. Other days they stood us up, leaving us waiting by the seawall, all our scanning hopes and expectations receding with the tide. So far, we have close to 650 flag/band observations, which is a little down on last year, but this includes 260 identifiable individuals, which is a bit higher. Some more regular birds have appeared, including everyone's favourite godwit; JEB. Originally banded in May 2000 as a bird in its first year of life (age 1) and re-trapped in March 2012 (then aged 13) and given the engraved leg flag JEB to allow us to individually ID him in the field. *Jebbo*, as we call him, has been seen at Nanpu every spring since 2012 (now age 19 in April 2019). He can also be reliably found in Roebuck Bay in the non-breeding season. Other annual birds recorded include Godwit 1YLYB, seen for the 10th consecutive spring here, and Great Knot 3YBRB, seen for the last eight springs. Unusual flagging locations recorded this week included India (Great Knot), Taiwan (Great Knot), South Australia (Red Knot) and a Relict Gull from we don't know where yet!

We have seen a lot of changes over the course of our visits here; some bad, some good. Ten years ago, we could spend two months around Bohai, and, aside from a couple of fellow researchers, not see another person with binoculars. Since then there has been a gradual shift and now it is not unusual to see birders or photographers along the sea wall, especially at the weekends when there can be a few cars worth. This development perhaps mirrors an increasing interest and appreciation for wildlife within China, which can only be a good thing. Some of the photographers seem to lack basic field skills and may cause some frustrations if they flush a flock during good scanning, but it is certainly very positive that people are coming here to enjoy the birds. The more people with a vested interest, the more voices in favour the sites protection.



Chinese Photographers at Nanpu mudflats

In other shorebird news, during week one, we found a pair of Grey-headed Lapwing nesting at a nearby site. This is a species that passes through the area each year, with several records annually, but they can turn up pretty much anywhere and at anytime so are always a bit of a surprise. This is not only our first breeding record but potentially the first for the Beijing/Hebei/Tianjin area. During a quick visit last week, the birds were still incubating three eggs, so fingers crossed the area remains undisturbed and the birds can hatch and raise their young successfully.



Breeding Grey-headed Lapwing

Away from the mud, the eternal quest for migrants continues. Typically for April, it has been a mixed bag with a few quiet days but also some quality over quantity. One of our favourite spots is a small patch of trees, isolated in the middle of the saltponds near the prison. On a birds-to-tree ratio, this must be one of the best hotspots in the area and we can turn up to find the site crawling with warblers, buntings, flycatchers and more. Sometimes it is quiet, but might still hold a surprise or two, like the cracking male Grey Bushchat that appeared on the 19th. This is our first record here and perhaps only the 12th or 13th for Hebei province. Other good stuff recently included our second Bull-headed Shrike and our first Eurasian Skylark since 2011, alongside more expected fare such as Yellow-browed Buntings, Blue-and-white Flycatchers and Claudia's Leaf Warblers.



Clockwise, from top-left: Grey Bushchat, Bull-headed Shrike, Blue-and-white Flycatcher, Red-flanked Bluetail.



By the time you read this, the team will have increased in size with the arrival of Chris, Theunis and Nigel. This is exciting for us, as we can now visit different restaurants and order a greater variety of dishes, something that is tricky with a team of two. Hopefully it will also coincide with an increase of NWA Red Knot and their colour-bands...



A few of the varied folk we meet along the sea wall

GFN Top Tip of the Week...

If you find a large ball of discarded fishing net in the middle of the road, drive around it or, better yet, move it and dispose of it appropriately. Don't drive straight over it and hope for the best...



And finally; all our work in Bohai would not be possible without the support and assistance of a great many people. We will try to acknowledge these in due course but, for now, a big thanks to Murray Radestock for his generous donation to the GFN project here at Nanpu. Thanks Murray it will be well spent!



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