

## **BOHAI 2019 – UPDATE 4**

### **Shorebirds**

With a series of incoming tides, and expectations of recently arrived birds from NWA, we had high hopes of finding new colour-banded Red Knots. Our scanning was mostly focused on the Nanpu mudflat, and here we added 51 new records of colour-banded Red Knots, almost doubling our total to date this season. A quick comparison with this time last year shows our total is 35 colour-banded birds in the red, but we hope to close the margin by the next update.

As of the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, the GFN team had recorded 106 Red Knots, 51 Great Knots and 2 Bar-tailed Godwits that had been individually colour-banded in NWA. We've also now recorded 118 individually identifiable shorebirds with yellow engraved leg flags (from NWA) comprising 71 Great Knots, 32 Red Knots, 10 Bar-tailed Godwits, 5 Curlew Sandpipers, 2 Ruddy Turnstones and a single Sanderling.



**Red knot *Calidris canutus piersmai* TAU from Broome feeding in a salt pond at Nanpu**



**A male Kentish Plover prepares its self to start incubating its four eggs after swapping with his partner.**



**Little Terns are migrants to Luannan. There are colonies existing of up to 100 nests but they are mostly found nesting in small numbers on bund walls and islands within the ponds.**

## **Nature Reserve/Wetland Park**

At the end of the GFN Bohai Report 2018 we reported that an MOU had been signed to establish a nature reserve at the Nanpu site. It was supposed to be designated on December 18<sup>th</sup> 2018. This process is being delayed, maybe due to the government department restructure and strict rules governing nature reserves. GFN are supportive of a Nature Reserve or a Wetland Park. The banning of commercial fishing and shell fishing activity was not welcomed by the local government as it has the potential to reduce local employment and income generation. GFN have no desire to see the local fishermen banned from the area. From our observations over the years the current level of fishing activity isn't detrimental to the diversity or populations of birds. Also, there is a national ban on fishing from May 1<sup>st</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup> each year and that is good timing for the birds as it obviously coincides with the main time of the year when most migratory birds are passing through the region and reduces disturbance and competition for resources.

Recently a new path has been built at the south east end of the Nanpu seawall and information signs erected. We can't read the signs, but we can see that some of the images don't match the species mentioned! This is a common problem all over the world and it would seem non birders have done the design work. It's a shame that information provided is incorrect as the signs look good and could influence people to take more notice of the birds. A viewing platform has also been built. To GFN this really seems a completely unnecessary addition. Great views of the birds can be obtained from the path and the platform doesn't get people any closer to the birds. The only outcome from people climbing on to the platform will be disturbing the birds. When the birds first return from the salt pond roosts they land close to the wall, start to feed, sometimes bathe and sleep. GFN assume that the Nature Reserve/Wetland Park will have some promotion to the public and attract people there. The close proximity of the people to the birds could lead to increased disturbance. Of course, we don't know how many people the new structures will bring to the area. But some careful management of people will be required if large numbers are drawn in.

If you are on Facebook here is a link to a situation at a site close to Nanpu where large numbers of people are disturbing the endangered Relict Gull. This is not what we want to happen at the wetland park.

[https://www.facebook.com/cbcgdf1985/posts/902645130067283?\\_tn=K-R](https://www.facebook.com/cbcgdf1985/posts/902645130067283?_tn=K-R)

## Sea Wall upgrade

During the first few seasons we were usually scanning shorebirds with big trucks loaded with tonnes of large rocks roaring past us. The ground would shudder as they went past due to the rocky road being laid on former mudflats. The rock was then tipped out onto the mud to create walls and once the walls were finished the destruction of the mudflat would be complete. Luckily for us and the shorebirds the pace of destruction has slowed and all but stopped in our study area.

So you can imagine our concern when 13 trucks were seen moving along the sea wall laden with large rocks this week.



A few hours later we were able to find out that the work was reinforcing the sea wall. We are unsure if it is just for general maintenance or if future development requires a stronger and wider sea wall.

The trucks have continued to arrive over the past few days bringing with them enough rock to lay flat a small mountain.



The weedy habitat on the inland side of the seawall has been amazing for bird watching over the years as exhausted migrants have a chance to rest and find food after crossing the Bohai Sea.



The now inland side of the seawall after being strengthened. Great habitat if you're a rock thrush but not good for much else. We are currently unsure of just how much upgrading they will be conducting in our study site this season.



The newly erected viewing platform along with the new brick path



One of the many information panels recently erected - this one showing a photo of a Bar-tailed Godwit on a Red Knot panel

## **Prison Trees**

A few years ago we started visiting a site we refer to as 'Prison Trees'. It is a very small patch of trees that sits among a few buildings and ponds. We have to drive past it to get to our main study site so it is easy to stop and have a quick bird on the way home. It really is a tiny patch with approximately 30 trees and some reeds, but it is beacon to migrant birds seeking shelter or needing a rest. It is one of a very few patches of green a migrant passerine would see after coming in off the ocean and over vast ponds and mud bunds. We have had some amazing records for Luannan here including Fujian Niltava, Slaty-backed Flycatcher and Black-winged Cuckoo Shrike.

It's quite incredible to think this site has had 160 species recorded here. 4 hours ago we added Forest Wagtail and Baikal Bush Warbler! Below is a link to the eBird checklist for this site:

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5704238>



**A male Fujian Niltava at the Prison Trees in April 2017**



**'Prison Trees' in mid-April. The pond is now full of water and the trees have more leaves on them**



**A Female Slaty-backed Flycatcher at the Prison Trees was a welcome addition to our Bohai list on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May and apparently a first record for the coast**



**A cracking, male White-throated Rock Thrush observed at one of our birding sites, Tree Lane**

Recently we had the pleasure of introducing Prof. Yali Si, Prof. Ben Wielstra and 3 of Yali's students to the world of migratory shorebirds. They are Professors of migratory waterfowl and Newts (not a common theme that one!) It was a pleasure to meet them all and much interesting conversations were had. Not to mention a very good meal.



**Chris takes the opportunity to speak about Red Knots and the Luannan Coast (of course)**

### **Matt Slaymaker**

GFN would like to thank Matt Slaymaker for his time with us again in 2019. Matt has been an integral part of the team for all but 3 years of the 10 seasons we have had full coverage of the northward migration season of Red Knots thought the Luannan Coast. This year he was with us for 3 weeks before heading off to travel in China. Seeing Snow Leopard (among other things) and gripping us off totally. Matt is a highly skilled ornithologist and adds greatly to our work here. We sincerely hope he will be able to join us again in the coming years.



**Matt looking for a flock of Shorebirds to scan**

### **The GFN Team**

19 May 2019