

BOHAI 2019 - UPDATE 6

Shorebirds

Since the last update we have spent the majority of our time scanning the Red Knots, far from the sea wall, out on the mudflats. The birds have been arriving late onto the mud after the tide has fallen, so scanning from the seawall is impossible due to the distance the knots were landing at. So, if the birds won't come to us then we will go to the birds. In previous years, at this time of the year, the majority of the Red Knots have been feeding and roosting in the ponds. This means they are either standing in water with their bands covered or too distant to reliably record the combinations. But as you will have read in earlier updates the water levels in the ponds are deep. This is presumably the reason why such large numbers are still out on the mudflats. To take advantage of the good light we have been starting early and walking for approximately 20 minutes to get to the birds which are often in a single flock. Because of this ease of access to the birds the scanning of Red Knots has been more successful (in terms of the number of individually marked birds seen) in the last 7 days of 2019 than in most previous years.

Table 1 shows the count data from the last week of our studies on the Nanpu mudflat. Count refers to the total number of Red Knots, 'Individually marked Red Knot' means a unique code was recorded and attributed to an individual. We sometimes see the same bird multiple times but that is not shown in this table. 'New for the season' means a unique code recorded for the first time during the 2019 studies. The table shows that new birds are continuing to arrive at Luannan very late into the season. This is (k)not news to us but it is nicely reflected below.

Table 1. Red Knot counts on the Nanpu mudflat during our final week.

Date (2019)	Count	Colour-banded individuals	New for the season
31-May	16,000	81	27
1-Jun	10,000	72	16
2-Jun	8,370	35	9
3-Jun	6,550	39	11
4-Jun	4,720	19	9
5-Jun	4,213	17	4
6-Jun	1,765	3	0

The numbers of codes recorded are of course influenced by the sighting conditions and how close we can get to the birds. Generally weather conditions are not perfect, but we can get reasonably close to the flocks.



Colour banded Red Knots 6YYYY and 4LBRY (on one leg) in a salt pond at Nanpu on 5 June 2019



Chris heading out to scan



Red Knot 2YLBL out at the Nanpu mudflat on 1 June 2019

We have to be patient when the birds are in shallow water until the birds reveal their full combination. 2YLBL is now aged 12. It was banded in Broome in September 2008 in its second year of life (age code 2). It has been seen 35 times since banding. Most of these sightings are from Roebuck Bay and 80 Mile Beach, but we have also recorded it here in Nanpu in 2014, 2015, 2018 and 2019.



Adrian scanning the Nanpu mudflat



A rare scanning opportunity in a pond



Kath Leung scanning

Long-eared Owls

On the 31st of May, Mr Liu (one of our drivers) sent Adrian a WeChat message with two pictures of owls he had seen earlier in the day. Oddly, both owls appeared to be fledglings, which meant they had bred locally. This was the first we had heard about locally nesting owls, so were intrigued. After a number of mistranslations, we finally arranged for him to take us to see them in the afternoon. It wasn't long before we laid eyes on a family of Long-eared Owls – their beautiful plumage perfectly camouflaging them in the pine trees. We were absolutely thrilled, being a new 'Bohai bird' for us, and a spectacular one at that. We were most impressed with Mr Liu's find, and admire his and Xiao Liu's rapidly growing interest in the local birdlife.



One of 'Mr Liu's Long-eared Owls



Mr Liu birding



Xiao Liu birding



Chuyu CHENG assessing Pied Avocet eggs



The Liu family and students



Egg collecting and catching birds is illegal.

Spartina

The introduced cordgrass, *Spartina alterniflora* (Spartina) is a serious problem along the Yellow Sea coast. It spreads rapidly across mudflats, in very dense swards, destroying valuable shorebird foraging habitat. At the end of last season we reported that there was preparation for the Spartina to be sprayed. This was a project initiated by WWF-China with help from Fudan University and the local forestry department. It was obvious when we first arrived this season that it had been a huge success. We estimated approximately 70% of the sprayed Spartina had died. There will be a follow up application of herbicide in the next few weeks to kill new growth. This is exactly what GFN had hoped for and look forward to monitoring its success next season. Congratulations to the parties involved for such a successful outcome.



***Spartina alterniflora* in late May 2018 before the first spray**



***Spartina alterniflora* in Late May 2019 before the second spray**



Nigel showing he's not just a shorebird-nerd

The GFN team 2019 extend a big thank you to all of those who have helped us over the 2019 field season. There are too many to name here, but you know who you are!

Thanks and we'll see you in 2020.

The GFN Team

7 June 2019