

## Cannon Netting:

Sunday the 20th of October, 2019. The best day ever! For me, a 12 year old hardcore birder, who loves to watch, draw and handle birds (even if I don't get to do the last one very often), the opportunity to do cannon netting was definitely the thing for me. The waiting process at the start was a bit stressful as we all had to be ready to run at a moments notice, but I had lots of people to talk to under the Jiggle Tree, to prepare me for what was coming.

While I was waiting the adrenaline coursed through my veins, got my heart pumping and my pulse racing. When the net finally went off it was all action. I slid down the sandy hill, sprinted down the beach and to the net. When I got there I was assigned to a nice lady named Helen. Our job was to collect all the Great Knots, they were way smaller than the Bar-Tailed Godwits. Basically, I just followed her around the net, carrying the box and transporting the birds. When all the Great Knots were in the one box, she directed me to the shady 'work office' where all the canvas netting cages were. If it got too heavy for me to carry, someone else was on hand to carry it. But I managed it so it was all good. Chris, who was in charge, told me to gently put down the birds in the shade, but then told me to move them over to Helen who I was working with. She started moving the birds into the cage. Then I was asked by Chris to grab some equipment from up the hill, and bring it down. One of my jobs was to get some glue, small screwdrivers, pliers and clipboards for Chris.

Then I was assigned to a team, Jane from the Broome Bird Observatory, Connie, who was our scribe and Kerry who was the expert bird scientist. The great thing about this was that you don't have to be experienced with birds, and you can still help out. Connie did all the measurements, writing down numbers in boxes, like how old they were, if they had molted and if there were any traces of breeding plumage. Kerry was doing the measurements, but she was also teaching Jane how to do it. I also got to help out with the weighing which is where you get a cylinder, place it on the scale then weigh the birds. My team was happy to help with any of my questions, they were all very nice and I had a wonderful time. We got to handle the big Bar-Tailed Godwits. Their beaks are very long and very sensitive and so you had to be gentle around the bill. They were also very squirmy, the males more than the females but the females still put up some good fights. The males bills were much smaller than the females, that was generally the way that we could tell them apart.



Drawn by Bronte.F

My job was with the small screwdriver and the glue. I squeezed a drop of glue onto the tip of the screwdriver and when Kerry had the yellow flag ready I would push the screwdriver with the glue into it, then she would slide the glue off and onto the flag and I would slide the screwdriver back out again. Then she would stick the two sides together to close the flag and so it wouldn't come off. It was very strong glue and dried very quickly so I had to time it just right. Sometimes I didn't put enough glue in and then one time the wind blew it off the screwdriver, then it dried on the next try and then the birds leg wiped it off! I had to redo the glue four times!

The banding process is basically just clamping 4 colourful bands, lime, yellow, red and blue, onto the leg in the order that Connie read out from the sheet of paper that held all the measurements for each bird. Each bird got its own engraved metal band attached to their leg with their numbers on them.

I could take breaks whenever I liked and I got to see the birds being bled, this was when the birds would have a blood sample taken. I actually got to hold the Bar-Tailed Godwits after they had been bled, they kicked a lot but there were a few that were calm and one even pooped on me, which is gross but it meant that the bird was very calm which was good. My Mum handed the birds to me and made sure that they were comfortable with me. To make sure the bleeding had stopped I had to hold the bird for a minute or so, then I would put the bird into the box to rest for approximately 5 minutes. Then we would release them!

There was one Godwit that hadn't been rested enough, so it had to go back in the box for another rest. Before we released the birds we had to check the sky for predators like White-Bellied Sea Eagles, Brahminy Kites, Black Kites, Whistling Kites and sometimes even Torresian Crows. That is a lot of birds to look out for! The first time we tried to release the birds a Brahminy Kite was circling overhead, looking for prey. We had to wait until it had passed and was heading down the beach, away from us. Then we could release the birds. You pull back the fabric lids that have little flaps in them, and tipped the box sideways so the birds would tumble out gently. They were disorientated and just stood there for a second and then they flew away. Sometimes you had to turn them around so they were facing the sea and then they would fly away to join some bigger flock so they would feel safer. We did four releases, I helped out with 2 and a little bit with the last one.

I also got to hold a Great Knot, which were better suited for my smaller hands. It was very cute, but I think all birds are cute except for the crow, which honestly, creeps me out a little because of the way they stare at you.

Later when all the birds had been tagged and bled, everyone else except me, Gareth and Tracy who were the two people left doing the bleeding of the birds, rolled up the shade cloth that made the roof of our makeshift office. Then the poles were uprooted and I helped to bring up the poles and metal stakes up the narrow sandy hill. We all made a human chain which was cool and that made it easier because then only 1-2 people had to go all the way up and grab all the stuff that had been passed up the line. When that was all up and Dad had passed up the shade cloth (I heard that Chris hates it when sand gets in it so Dad took his job very seriously) my family and I grabbed our stuff and headed up the hill.

I absolutely enjoyed the day, it was a really amazing experience. I learnt so much about the birds and how to handle them, which is what I've dreamed of doing since I was eight. I would love to have more opportunities to work with birds in the future.

-By Bronte.F