

## Not Bohai, 2020. It's that time of year again, but this year is distinctly different...

Another morning in not Bohai and we don't have to get up at 4am to get to the seawall. It's probably a bit cold with a brisk onshore breeze, and thousands of birds may or may not drop in right in front of where we are, unfortunately, not waiting for them.

An early morning outgoing tide can be the best for scanning with good light and close birds. Today, maybe they behave impeccably, dropping onto the mud and slowly jostle for position, each preening and moving around to show off both legs. Perhaps a Noddy calls and lands amongst the flock and Bar-tailed Godwit numbers could be notably higher and more of the Grey Plovers are developing breeding plumage?



As the tide recedes and more mud becomes available the birds could be slowly moving away but we don't hop in the van and make our way along the wall after them. Potentially, birds continue to arrive from the roosts further along the coast and migrants skip along the seawall with nobody there to identify the first Wryneck of the year or to appreciate the high numbers of Olive-backed Pipits around today.

Ady doesn't pick out a tattler in amongst the knots, maybe another 'first record' for the year, and Matta doesn't climb on to a large pile of pig poo to get some height and better view along the coast. Pig poo is regularly dumped along the seawall and is used for feeding the shrimps in the adjacent ponds, which Matta knows but still thought it was mud until he isn't ankle deep and doesn't struggle to get down again.

We don't get to the end of the wall and can't look along the coast to Beipu. A flock of Knots is possibly feeding around the channel outflow, but we are unable to walk out onto the wall to secure a few more colour-bands and cap off a potentially successful morning.

If we were there, there is always time for a quick stop at the Prison Trees, where maybe the first Eastern Yellow Wagtails of the year feed around the pond edges and a couple of Dusky Warblers and Pallas's Warblers call from the stunted willows. We don't return to the apartment for lunch and have no data to input...



In the strange and unexpected world of April 2020, it is a gloriously sunny day in southern England but I am stuck safe indoors of a small flat in suburban Taunton. Gazing out of the bay window I scan three Herring Gulls, two Chaffinch, a Blackbird and half-a-dozen pigeons but see no colour-bands. Not even a flag.



We are allowed a short period outside each day for 'exercise', and in the afternoon I wander through the streets to a nearby park. It is spring and a few newly arrived warblers are singing while some Mallard bob along the river, clearly ignoring the social-distancing guidance. On the way back home, I swing past the church where a pair of Peregrines breed and I check around the grounds for prey remains, finding a few feathers and a half-eaten golden plover. No rings or bands (and only one leg) but at least it is a shorebird.



In Bohai we could be seeing 70+ species a day in mid-April and be eagerly looking forward to fresh migrants each morning and an impending arrival of Red Knots from North-west Australia. In April 2020, I have a window list of 19, accumulated over 4-weeks, and am eagerly looking forward to, once again, being able to drive 10 miles to get out and see somewhere other than my own street! Let alone visit another country...

Oh, to be back in Bohai!

Matt Slaymaker

