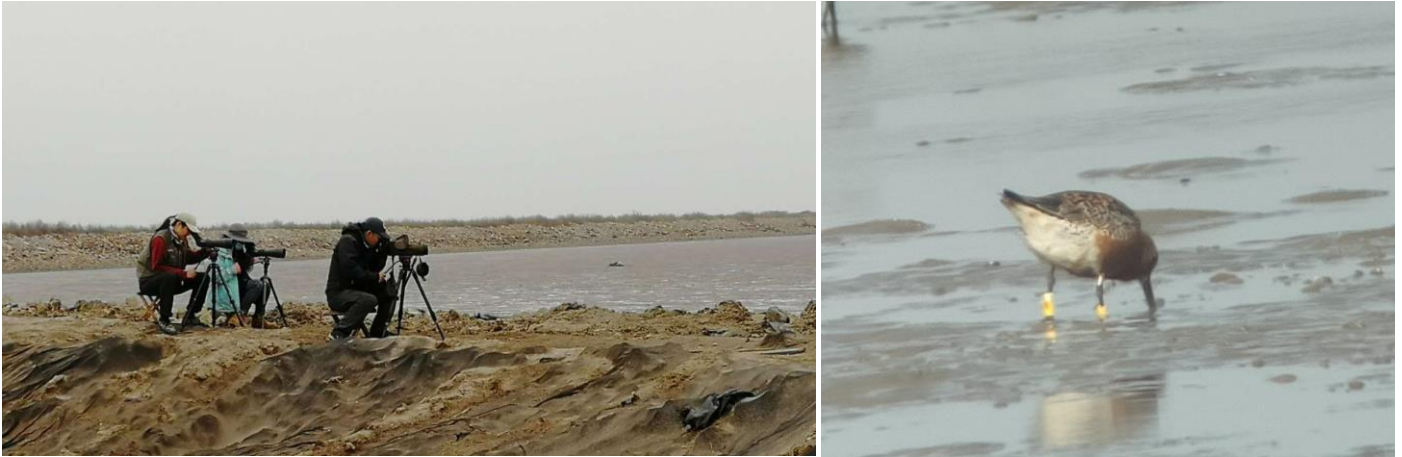


END OF THE SEASON, ALREADY???!!!

Scanning field work

Can't believe that it has already been 5 weeks after I arrived at the GFN flat in Nanpu on 3-May. The "office desk" wasn't too pleasant in the first week when I was required to quarantine at "home". All I can do was to direct the team behind the scene and enter the data every evening (yes Chris, I know how that feels!). Yet, there seems not many colour-banded Red Knots around the mudflat as our team members Wu Entao, Gao Chang and Guan Xianyu started to get the hang of colour-band reading for their first time. After a heavy rainstorm on 8-May, there was an influx of colour-banded Red Knot on 9 and 10-May.



Left: team scanning in 35km/h+ wind (by Xiao Liu on 7-May); right: Red Knot 5LYYL (by Guan Xianyu on 9-May)

We were blessed with very nice weather in my first week on the seawall since 11-May, visibility was very good and there were often flocks feeding close to (or even right below) the seawall, allowing close view of colour bands and engraved leg-flags, even old flags with no more ink on the engraving can be read.



Left: Xiao Liu parked the van at the best position to shield wind for the scanning team (by Katherine Leung on 12-May); right: Wu Entao got into the best position for scanning birds feeding below the seawall (by Katherine Leung on 16-May).

There were no more than 6,000 Red Knots around the Nanpu mudflat in the week, so the team explored Beipu and Hangu in the following days.

Small flock of 400 birds roosting at the mouth of Beipu Creek during high tide on 17-May provided nice scanning opportunity, including colour-banded Red Knot 1GNNN which was recorded in Lianyungang only 5 days before (12-May) by the team lead by Dr. Jimmy Choi surveying Asian Dowitcher there. But that was the only productive day for Beipu in the week.

It was equally quiet at Hangu in Tianjin on 19-May. Only less than 1,000 Red Knots scattered around the salt pond bunds. But Xiao Liu found one of my Curlew Sandpiper carrying leg-flags from Hong Kong, so it was still a good day in my prospective!



Roosting Red Knots and White-winged Tern at Hangu salt ponds (by Katherine Leung on 19-May).

When we came back to Nanpu on 20 and 21-May, there were even less Red Knots around for scanning. As we started to worry where the birds have gone, a heavy rain and hail storm (about size of soy beans) poured over most of north Bohai area in the evening of 21-May. The streets turned into water channels within 30 minutes. I wondered if the birds have known about the bad weather and made an escape beforehand?



Left: various species of “waders” in the middle of Nanpu shopping street (by Katherine Leung on 21-May); right: bicycles “killed” by hails and gusts (by Wu Entao on 21-May).



Left: another storm over the Nanpu mudflat on 31-May (by Katherine Leung); right: “Black Knots” feeding in the rain (by Katherine Leung on 27-May).

On 24-May we finally saw big flock of 20,000 Red Knots at Nanpu mudflat. We had four consecutive very good day, getting >130 colour band sightings in total, with the best day on 26-May with 50 individual combinations read as Hebo Peng and his coastal survey team members Guo Jia and He Ying joining us.



Red Knot flock in the early morning mist on 26-May (by Katherine Leung)



Satisfied scanning team, from front to back: Katherine Leung, Guo Jia, Gao Chang, He Ying, Hebo Peng, Wu Entao and Xiao Liu (by Katherine Leung on 28-May)

As we entered the last week of the season, scanning got more difficult. There were less birds, hence, less colour-banded birds around. We either have to walk out to the mudflat for miles to approach big flock feeding along the tide edge, or disperse around salt ponds to scan through small feeding flocks.



Left: team returned from 5km-walk chasing after bird flock on mudflat (by Katherine Leung on 29-May); right: Knots feeding and enjoying “salty bubble bath” in salt pond on a windy day (by Katherine Leung on 5-Jun).

On 31-May, we found a salt pond near the Prison with low water level. That was the pond where 96,000 shorebirds were recorded one evening in 2013 before the highway cut through the pond. We recorded a couple of late arriving colour-banded birds, including 6YYYY, among the 1,500 birds roosting there.

This pond reminded me of the “scrape” at Mai Po Nature Reserve in Hong Kong where I used to work at. Just drop the water level for a couple of inches, you can create a perfect high tide roosting (and feeding) shorebird habitat.



Above: the Nanpu Prison “scrape” (by Katherine Leung on 31-May); below: 6YYYY, who we called “the Five King”, as yellow pronounces the same as king in Chinese (by Katherine Leung on 1-Jun).

Scanning work ended on 7-Jun as we observed the number of Red Knots decrease from 2,000 to 500 as the last week went pass. Yet, there are some more other than the regular field work to share on this update below.

Leisure birding

Under the COVID-19 pandemic, there seems to be a gate everywhere we wanted to go birding after work. We've only been able to visit the Prison Trees for 2 times, the Eco Lodge for 4 times and the Tree Lane twice. These infrequent visits still result in a few good records and two lifers for me! A male Orange-headed Thrush (seen only by Gao Chang and her friend Mr. Zhang) at the Eco Lodge triggered some jealousy 6,300km across the globe in Broome via eBird.



Left: male Orange-headed Thrush at Eco Lodge (by Gao Chang on 18-May); right: male White-throated Rock Thrush at Tree Lane (by Katherine Leung on 13-May)



Left: male Fujian Nitava at Prison Trees (by Driver Mr. Liu on 21-May); right: snake on the path at Tree Lane (by Katherine Leung on 17-May).

Main entrance to the Town Zoo Park was also closed due to COVID-19 but it was still possible to enter from the hidden back entrance. As citizens in Nanpu were still practicing social distancing, there wasn't too many people at the park and some birds seem to have benefited from the situation.



Corvids, Oriental Magpies, in the Town Zoo Park NOT practicing social distancing under COVID-19 pandemic, evening pre-roost gathering of nearly 50 birds at the open area (by Katherine Leung on 22-May).



Little Terns on the Nanpu mudflat keeping good social distance during high tide (by Katherine Leung on 15-May).

The Park had generally been quiet, except the noisy Magpies! There were at least 8 nests of Magpies in the Park and the parents were quite defensive as we stopped under the tree to look at the young fledglings. That might be the reason why there wasn't many spectacular birds around.



Left: male Yellow-rumped Flycatcher (by Katherine Leung on 20-May); right: Oriental Dollarbird (by Katherine Leung on 22-May).

Thank you very much for reading this “end of season” Update so far, I hope you’ve enjoyed it. A few final important words below.

I would like to say a BIG THANK YOU to Hebo, Chris and Theunis who have given me the opportunity to take part in the project in this special year. Although this is already my fifth time visiting the Red Knots in Nanpu, it is a very different experience to lead the field work for five weeks and observing the arrival and departure of birds throughout the season. It has been a privilege to be able to enjoy working in the field in this special year.

Another BIG THANK YOU to the scanning team members: Driver Mr. Liu, Xiao Liu, Wu Entao, Gao Chang, Guan Xianyu, Guo Jia, He Ying and Hebo. Having trustable teammates to work together is a pleasant feeling. The work surely wouldn’t be as successful if I am working on my own. Not to mention all the nice meal we shared together!

Last but not least, many thanks to Prof. Lei and Jia Yifei of Beijing Forestry University support to the project, and also to Prof. Zhang and his students of Beijing Normal University for many on the ground support. Special thanks to Ady for his very valuable advice on tide for planning field work.

Hope we keep working hand-in-hand for the migratory shorebirds no matter where we are!



Above: my birthday dinner at Nanpu (by Katherine Leung on 5-Jun); below: my mum can’t tell which hand is mine after 4-week in the field (by Katherine Leung on 6-Jun).

Written by Katherine Leung on 8-Jun-2020

Chris writes;

Kath has listed her thanks above but really all the thanks need to be flowing her way. Without Kath’s persistence to get to Nanpu for the field work we would have had zero data this year. She didn’t mention her 28, yes 28 days in quarantine. So Kath a huge thanks from GFN and all associated with the project.