

## RESIGHTING OF MARKED BIRDS

There is much talk lately of the importance of resighting birds that have been marked. I have just seen a few presentations about just this on the webinar of 1<sup>st</sup> East Asian-Australasian Flyway Shorebird Science Meeting. And the EAAFP is promoting resightings via [https://www.eaaflyway.net/legflagchallenge\\_photo\\_contest\\_2020/](https://www.eaaflyway.net/legflagchallenge_photo_contest_2020/)

Many projects are keen to mark birds but without dedicated resighting work their scope is limited.

Theunis Piersma recognised this when he set up GFN and it is an integral part of the project. Here on the northern shores of Roebuck Bay 17° 58' 32"S 122° 19' 17"E conditions are very easy for resighting work. Marking and resighting started in December 2005. Resightings are conducted using 20-60x zoom telescopes usually several times a week during the 4-hour, high-tide period during daytime high tides but, about 10% of scanning time is done while birds are still feeding on the mudflats as the tide pushes them close enough for observers to record their colourbands.

This 'local' work combined with the dedicated work of GFN in Bohai Bay each spring for the last 11 years, Dmitry Dorofeev and his team on the west coast of Kamchatka, The Taiwan Wader Study Group, recent work by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China team in Tiaozini and Lianyungang and a variety of records turning up from literally throughout the EAAF from southern New Zealand to Far Eastern Chukotka, Russia has resulted in the GFN db having 106,000 resighting records in it. Various papers have been produced using this data set and it grows ever more useful as the time goes by. And it has also produced 10's of 1,000's of records of birds banded throughout the fly that we have recorded at our main sites of Roebuck Bay, Anna Plains or Bohai Bay.

The GFN team here in NWA had also been conducting resightings at Anna Plains, a 65 km section (mid-point 19° 23' 58"S 121° 16' 41"E) of the 220 km long Eighty Mile Beach. This site is 190 km south west of Roebuck Bay. Dedicated resighting work was conducted every April for 3 days, 2010 – 2017. Logistical issues in 2018 and 2019 and COVID restrictions in 2020 stopped us from going to the site. So, I arranged an October trip when I had 3 skilled and experienced observers available.

The purpose of this note is to show it can be very productive to get out resighting leg flags and give some insights in to various aspects of the bird's movements, both short and long distance. Of course here we have the huge benefit of so many marked birds. But even at sites with few marked birds it is valuable work.



Scanning is done from vehicles at Anna Plains

K Curran

In just 12 hours of scanning over 2 days and 65 km we recorded 90 birds that were not marked at Roebuck Bay or Anna Plains and included in that 90 are 30 Engraved Leg Flags (ELF). They came from 11 banding sites;

China - 4 - Bohai Bay, Yalu Jiang, Southern Jiangsu, Chongming Dongtan

Japan - 2 – northern Hokkaido, Miyagi Prefecture

Australia – 2 – Vic, SA

Taiwan - 1 – mid-west coast

Thailand – 1 – Inner Gulf of Thailand

Russia – 1 – Kamchatka

We also read 254 ELFs from the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) project on 11 species that were banded either at Anna Plains or 190 km north east at Roebuck Bay. It is mainly birds in their first year of life that move from Roebuck Bay to Anna Plains but adults do so as well and a few birds seem to move back and forth more than once during the non-breeding season.

We recorded 134 resightings of colour-banded birds from the GFN project. 2 Great Knot were seen on consecutive days and 3 Red Knot were seen on the same day but in different 5 km sections of the study site so, we recorded 129 individual marked birds. 5 Bar-tailed Godwits, 30 Great Knots and 96 Red Knots. Of the 96 Red Knot 72 have also been recorded at our study site in northern Bohai Bay, The Luannan Coast 'Nanpu'. That is 75% and I think is very representative of the incredible connection of the 2 sites and the critical importance of the Bohai site to the NWA population of Red Knot. If we were to take out the 4 birds marked as first year birds in July 2019 and not expected to be in the migrating population this becomes 72 from 92 or 78% seen in Bohai Bay.

Please note this is my 'back of the envelope' calculations not hard-core science!

In addition to the resighting data we conducted some juvenile ratio scans. This requires a high level of experience with shorebird plumages and some species are still very difficult to age in the field, Terek Sandpiper is an obvious example. As catching has not been done in the September and October period and it is not certain that an AWSG expedition will go ahead. On these trips birds are aged in the hand to obtain the age ratios. Danny Rogers has encouraged me to conduct these scans. I have assessed 9,475 birds of 10 species in Roebuck Bay and we assessed 3,757 birds of 8 species at Anna Plains. All species have very low juveniles at this stage, some worryingly so, let's hope that changes through November.

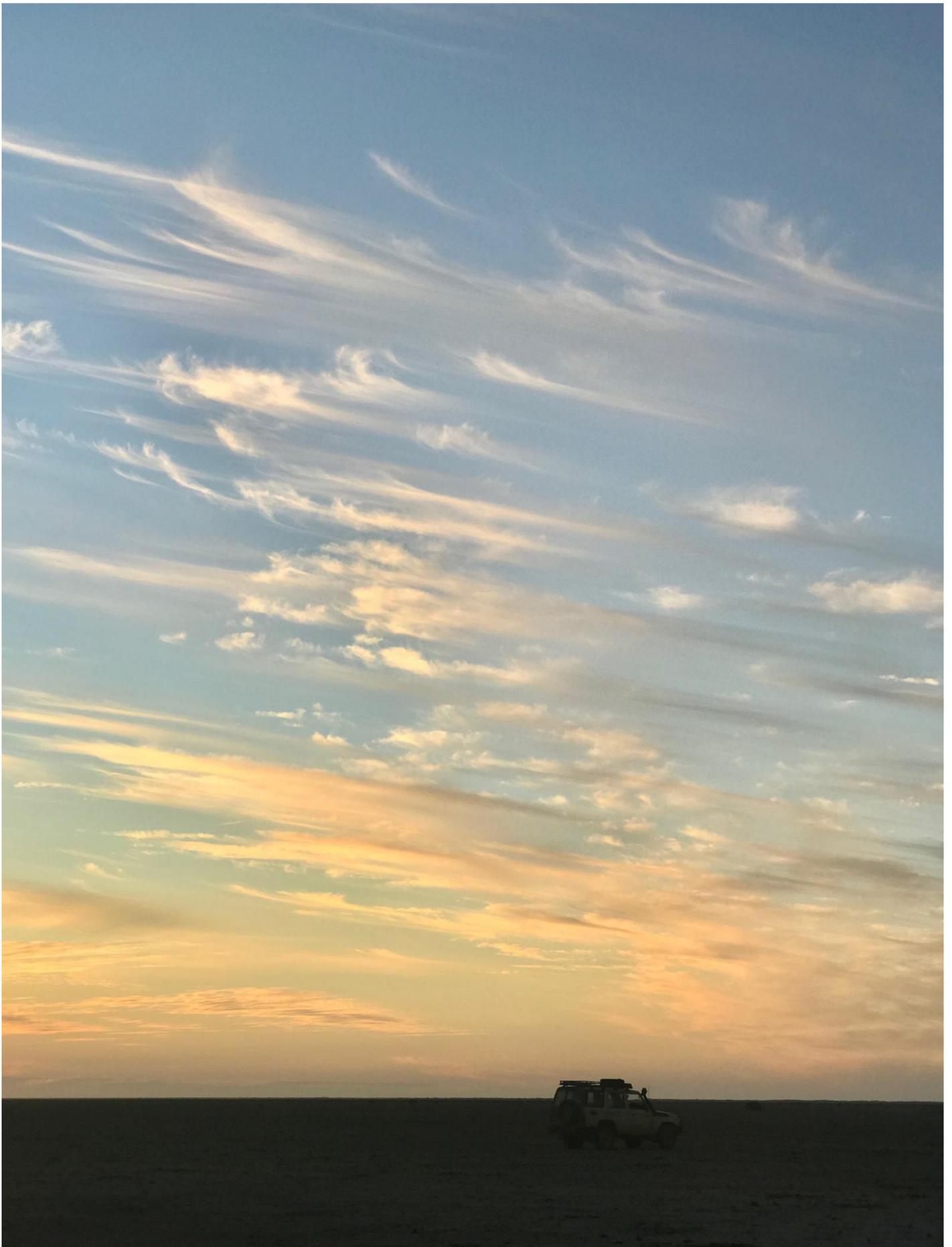
So while I accept that we are lucky here with our viewing conditions, numbers of marked birds I still encourage you all to get out there and have a look for some marked birds.

Thanks to Adrian Boyle, John Curran, Kandy Curran, Kerry Hadley and Nigel Jackett.

Chris Hassell

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The adjacent plains to the beach at Anna Plains are vast and they become a wonderful breeding habitat for resident shorebirds and waterfowl. And a foraging area for migratory shorebirds. At this time of year they are dry we only recorded Oriental Plover, Little Curlew and Australasian Pratincole feeding there. See below.



The plains are flat!

K Curran