

As of March the 3rd I will have been living in Broome for 25 years. And if you're in to shorebirds (I am!) then why would you live anywhere else?

A typical Roebuck Bay roost, this one is Richards point on 25 02 2021.

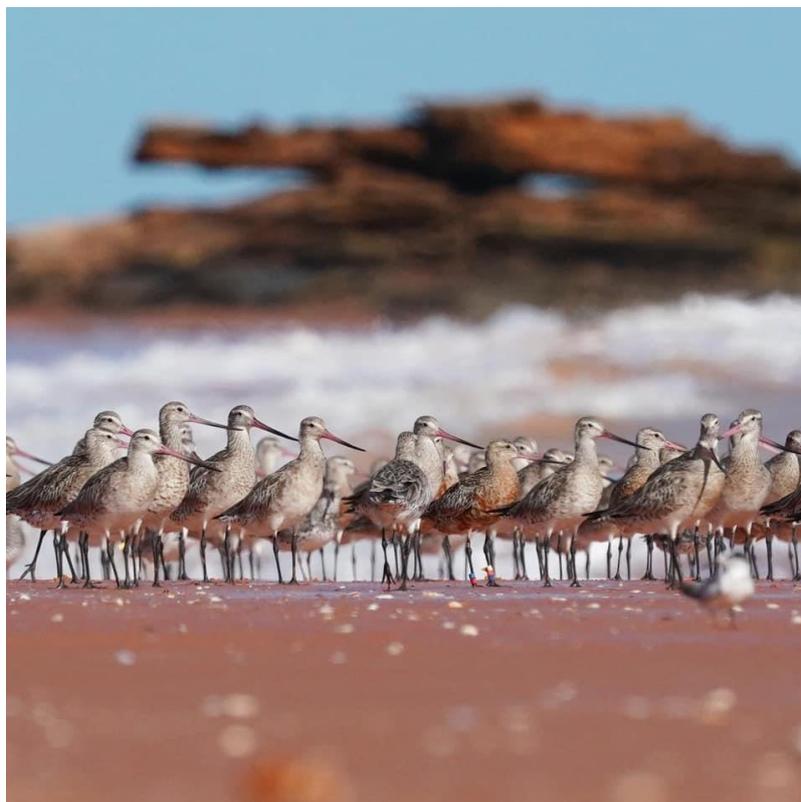
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiMxalXhbZs&feature=youtu.be>

Video footage by C Hassell (yes seriously!)

It's time for change here in Roebuck Bay. Not, unfortunately, in the weather which is still very humid and hot but the birds are changing. Breeding plumage is being acquired and weight put on in preparation for the first leg of migration to the northern hemisphere. Eastern Curlew and Greater Sand Plovers will start to leave in the next 7 to 10 days.

Numbers have seemed high all wet season and there are still plenty of birds to see. The Black-tailed Godwits haven't left the bay like they do in some years. This is despite the fact we have had very good rainfall. This is a species ripe for tracking to see where the freshwater habitats that they utilise in some years actually are. Or is it indeed freshwater? That's what we think, but biologists have been wrong before once tracking devices are attached to birds!

Bar-tailed Godwit males are starting to colour-up and the odd bird is at 75% BP. That is 75% of what a '100% full breeding plumaged male' will look like when he is finished all his body moult and is on the breeding grounds defending a territory or doing an aerial display to attract a female for the breeding season. Most of them have started to put on some weight and I am scoring them at 'AP 3'. The abdominal profile score goes from 1 to 5. 1 a skinny thing and 5 a fat beast. A few of the big females I have scored at 4, always tricky, is that just because they're big females or do they have lots of fat already?



A typical February scene on 20-02-2021. Centre right is 3RBRR. The bird is a male. From the image I scored him as 25% BP and AP 3. He was first marked 15-10-2011 aged 3+, in his third year of life or older. So, he is now a minimum age of 12 (could be a little or a lot older). This is his 93rd sighting, only ever in the bay no overseas records.

Many thanks to Darren Stevens for permission to use the image.

Black-tailed Godwits have no more than a trace 5% of BP and very few appear to be putting on any weight.

Great Knots vary from just trace to 75% BP and a few are at AP 4 but the majority of the adults are still only AP 3.

Red Knots range from 0% to 25% none are at AP 4 and some not even at 3. This is not surprising as most Red Knots don't leave until mid-April and later so they still have up to 2 months for moulting in to full breeding plumage and packing on the fat for migration.

The Australian contingent of GFN won't be going to Nanpu this year but Professor Lei Guangchun of Beijing Forestry University continues to give us financial support and we are very lucky to once again have Katherine Leung leading the field work for us. Katherine will be joined for some of the season by Rainy Cai and Tong Mu. She will have the support of our regular drivers (who are so much more than that) Mr and Xiao Liu and Hebo Peng will be busy with administration and logistical support. I'll be at the end of the email banging in data and giving any advice needed on field work strategies. Adrian and I are devastated to be missing a second year.

Stay safe and those heading out for northward migration studies good luck to you and the birds.