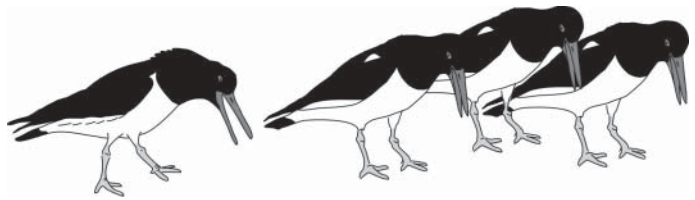


NOTES & NEWS



Notes & News is compiled by Silke Nebel to whom contributions should be sent.
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PROJECT NEWS

New shorebird habitat selection study

A new two-year NSERC-funded study of estuary-wide habitat selection patterns in nonbreeding shorebirds is to start in the Fraser River Estuary (British Columbia, Canada) in October 2005. Using satellite, GIS and ground-collected data the study will aim to:

- (1) develop spatially explicit predictive models of non-breeding shorebird distribution in a large estuarine system (Fraser River Estuary)
- (2) test the models locally, i.e. at the site at which they were developed as well as regionally, i.e. at a site with broadly similar climatic and environmental characteristics that supports an independent population of the study species (Dunlin *Calidris alpina*)
- (3) test the applicability of the models developed in one season during a different season, and
- (4) produce habitat suitability and/or species abundance maps of the study area.

The overall goal of the work is to assess the applicability of remotely sensed and GIS data for rapid development of predictive models of shorebird distribution as opposed to the more labour- and time-intensive models traditionally developed using data on food abundance and sediment characteristics.

For more information and progress on the work please contact Yuri Zharikov (Centre for Wildlife Ecology, Department of Biological Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby B.C. V5A 1S6, Canada; y.zharikov@uq.edu.au).

Shorebird training workshops in Indonesia

Wetlands International organized several Shorebird Skills Training Workshops in Indonesia over the period 20 March to 5 April 2005. The three workshops in West, Central and East Java uncovered a pool of talented and very enthusiastic young waderologists in a part of the East-Asian-Australian Flyway where still little is known about the availability of stop-over habitat and the ecology of migrant waders. Ferry Hasudungan and Yus Rusila Noor (Wetlands International – Indonesia Programme) and Silke Nebel (University of New South Wales, Sydney) provided intensive training for 19 university students, 2 government officials and 8 NGO staff from Indonesia and 2 Wildlife Agency staff from Malaysia. The training has had a considerable impact on awareness for

wetland and shorebird conservation in Indonesia. Media coverage was provided by local and national newspapers as well as by a live TV interview. The training will assist in gathering the information needed to declare additional sites as part of the East-Asian Australasian Shorebird Site Network.

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New information from the Yellow Sea

The Australasian Wader Studies Group, in conjunction with Wetlands International – China, has just completed the ninth year of shorebird counting in the Chinese part of the Yellow Sea during northward migration. This year we surveyed new areas in southern Jiangsu and Liaoning provinces. These activities were carried out as part of the Asia-Pacific Shorebird Action Plan funded by the Australian Department of Environment and Heritage.

In southern Jiangsu Province we surveyed 170 km of coastline between the Yangtze estuary and Yancheng National Nature Reserve and counted 64,368 shorebirds of 33 species. The most common were: Dunlin (20,749), Bar-tailed Godwit (13,337), Grey Plover (7,001), Red-necked Stint (3,458), Whimbrel (1,829), Great Knot (1,800), Terek Sandpiper (794) and Eastern Curlew (607). One Spoon-billed Sandpiper was seen.

In Liaoning Province we surveyed three different regions: 34 km of coastline and a large saltworks in NE Liaodongwan; 200 km of coastline between Dalian and Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve; and extensive saltworks north of Dalian. In total we counted 87,370 shorebirds of 31 species. The most common species were Great Knot (22,761), Dunlin (21,511), Bar-tailed Godwit (13,364), Whimbrel (3,291), Eurasian Curlew (3,654), Grey Plover (1,556), Eastern Curlew (1,444) and Marsh Sandpiper (1,341). One Spoon-billed Sandpiper was seen.

We also did a partial count (about 60%) of the Yalu Jiang National Nature Reserve. As usual there were plenty of shorebirds and we totaled 119,008 birds of 29 species. Most common species counted were Bar-tailed Godwit (49,100), Dunlin (22,913), Great Knot (20,270), Grey Plover (6,010), Eastern Curlew (955) and Eurasian Curlew (645). A flock of 12 Spotted Greenshanks was seen at the artificial roost built by the Reserve. This also had a nice roost of 10,000 Great Knots.

On the way back to Beijing we visited Beipu Saltworks near Tianjin. Here we counted 6,979 shorebirds of 12



species, the most common being Curlew Sandpiper (6,099) and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (735). This count was another demonstration of the exceptional importance of this kind of habitat for a particular suite of shorebirds, e.g. Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint and Marsh Sandpiper.

The counts of the new areas in Jiangsu and Liaoning provinces confirm the extensive nature of important shorebird habitat around the shores of the Yellow Sea – both in intertidal areas and in saltworks.

The flock of 12 Spotted Greenshanks seen at Yalu Jiang NNR was highly significant, given the estimated world population of 250–1000 individuals. The northern Yellow Sea appears to be an important northward migration staging region for this species as 3 individuals were seen at Yalu Jiang in 2000. Birds were also seen at the Yellow River NNR in 1997 and 1998.

A total of 83 leg-flagged shorebirds (59 Bar-tailed Godwits, 12 Great Knots, 2 Eastern Curlews, 2 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 3 Red-necked Stints, 1 Sanderling, 1 Red Knot, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Whimbrel and 1 Terek Sandpiper) were encountered during the surveys, including six individually marked Bar-tailed Godwits from New Zealand.

Summaries of the counts are available in Excel files (four files totaling 300 KB). Please let me know if you would like to have copies.

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Assistance and input required: reclamation and shorebird censuses on the west coast of Korea

Many IWSG members will be aware of the huge pressure on intertidal land around the Yellow Sea, along the coasts of China and the Korean Peninsula. The largest reclamation attempted is currently underway at Saemangeum, the confluence of the Dongjin and Mangyeong Estuaries. A 33-km long seawall will eventually enclose 41,000 ha, including approximately 33,000 ha of tidal flat. Saemangeum is regarded as the single most important site for shorebirds in the Yellow Sea, which is itself a funnel for most of the migrants from further south in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. It is particularly notable for being one of the few regular sites for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Nordmann's Greenshank, and for supporting up to a third of the world's Great Knot population.

Despite the prevalence of large-scale reclamation, little is known of the effects on shorebird populations, at least in the Yellow Sea region. In the past, small-scale reclamation may have been offset by ongoing accretion of tidal flats, but reductions in river flows are causing sediment inputs to the Yellow Sea to decrease. Massive reclamations such as Saemangeum will drastically reduce the habitat available to migratory shorebirds, but an argument commonly used to justify such land claim is that the birds will simply go somewhere else. Studies are required to confirm or refute whether local declines occur because affected shorebirds move to other wetland systems, or whether some or all of the affected shorebirds perish. Understanding this issue is of considerable importance to governments, which have obligations under a range of international agreements to maintain populations of migratory shorebirds and waterbirds. The Australasian Wader Studies Group is already conducting census work in NW Australia targeted at key species that use the Yellow Sea

in an attempt to detect any population changes as a result of the Saemangeum reclamation.

Whether the Saemangeum reclamation is carried through to completion (the seawall is now about 90% complete) is likely to depend on political decisions, but the importance of undertaking high-quality survey work cannot be overstated. Surveys would establish more fully the importance of Saemangeum to shorebirds before seawall closure, and, if the land-claim project proceeds, to document its impact on migratory shorebirds.

We are proposing a collaborative, international effort to conduct survey and other work in the estuaries and tidal flats of the west coast of the Republic of Korea, starting in 2006. Our aim is to make repeated surveys within the migration period, as well as making more detailed observations over time at key sites to try and estimate turnover rates. All work will be done jointly with Birds Korea volunteers and the community of Korean shorebird researchers, and we are requesting help from IWSG members for this project. The fieldwork will be linked with an expansion in population monitoring counts carried out on non-breeding grounds of Saemangeum shorebirds in Australia and New Zealand.

Plans for fieldwork in Korea are in their infancy, but we envisage repeated, coordinated large-scale surveys, starting in April 2006 and repeated in subsequent years. The key season for this is the northward migration in 2006, from around 10 April to 5 May. If we cannot make this the first season of counts, then we may lose the opportunity to count populations before seawall closure. If possible, we would like to organize surveys during both northward and southward migrations. Other activities will include searches for flagged and colour-banded birds and migration watches. There will probably be a good deal of other bird-watching too; the Korean coast offers one of the most remarkable wader-watching spectacles in the world.

There is a need to recruit experienced, international shorebird counters to take part in the Korean work. IWSG members are ideal! We need to set up a small working group to develop research plans. Just as importantly, we need expressions of interest from quite a lot of volunteers prepared to participate in the fieldwork. Funding is still under consideration (actually, we'd like ideas on that too). A likely scenario is that volunteers will need to fund their own way to and from Korea, but will not need to pay for accommodation and food while there.

If you would be interested in participation in any aspect of this work, please get in touch with us. Further detail on Saemangeum and other Korean wetlands can be found on the Birds Korea website, at:

http://www.birdskorea.org/saemhome_apr2005.asp

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REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

IUCN Status of the Black-tailed Godwit: change from Least Concern to Vulnerable?

I would like to draw attention to the BirdLife International website discussing year-to-year changes in the IUCN status of bird species:

(<http://208.185.149.227/WebX?13@210.irfRa0PiaSU.0@.Ide4282b>

or go to

<http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/index.html>
and link to forums at the bottom of the page).

There is a suggestion that the Black-tailed Godwit should be listed as Near Threatened or even Vulnerable. The website text is reproduced below, as well as a question on the Australian population I circulated a couple of years ago. If there is any additional relevant information, it would be very useful to help move the debate forward. Global listing of the Black-tailed Godwit as Vulnerable could have substantial implications for its conservation and may lead, for example, to listing under the Australia Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

“Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*): up-list to ‘Near Threatened’ or ‘Vulnerable’?”

Black-tailed Godwit is currently listed as ‘Least Concern’. The status of the European population (99,000–140,000 pairs, occupying 50–74% of the global breeding range) was recently reassessed in *Birds in Europe* (BirdLife International 2004). Following a large decline in Europe during 1970–1990 (Tucker & Heath 1994), the species continued to decline during 1990–2000, when up to 35% of birds were lost (including many from key populations in the Netherlands and European Russia). Overall, the European population declined by >30% in three generations (15 years). Although the species is believed to have increased in Iceland and in some parts of central Asia, recent trends in the rest of its Asiatic breeding range are unknown (Wetlands International 2002). If these populations are declining at a similar rate to those in Europe, then the species would warrant up-listing to ‘Vulnerable’. Even if non-European populations are stable, the magnitude of the decline in Europe suggests that the species’ global status may need to be revised to at least ‘Near Threatened’. Any comments or new information, particularly on recent trends outside Europe, would be very welcome.”

In 2003, I raised the following question on an Australian forum site. There was no detailed response but the idea may be worth reconsidering in light of the European experience:

“Has the abundance of Black-tailed Godwits declined to the point where the subspecies that uses the East-Asian Flyway should be considered ‘Near Threatened’? In Australia, the reporting rate of the Black-tailed Godwit declined by 35% from 1977–1981 to 1998–2001 despite the discovery of the importance of the Broome mudflats in NW Australia during that period which led to an increase in the reporting rate for that region. This decline contrasts with the reporting rate for Bar-tailed Godwits and Great Knots, neither of which changed significantly but which might be expected to occur alongside Black-

tailed Godwits. Also, far fewer Black-tailed Godwits were reported to be using the southeastern shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, once thought to be their major over-wintering site in Australia, than were estimated to be present in the early 1980s. While the species is still relatively abundant, with Wetlands International estimating a flyway population of 160,000, it may be declining at a rate approaching the criterion for listing as ‘Vulnerable’ under category A2 (>30% decline over the last ten years or three generations). Are there any other observations that would corroborate this suggestion?”

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Searchable Ornithological Research Archive

The Searchable Ornithological Research Archive (SORA) is an excellent resource for professional and amateur ornithologists alike. SORA is an online journal archive produced jointly by the University of New Mexico, the Association of Field Ornithologists, the Cooper Ornithological Society, the American Ornithologists Union, and the Wilson Ornithological Society. The archive provides access to an extensive ornithological literature of international scope, and detailed material documenting the history of Ornithology in North America over the last 120 years. At present, SORA contains the following journals: *Condor* (1899–2000), *Auk* (1884–1999), *Wilson Bulletin* (1889–1999), *Journal of Field Ornithology* (1930–1999), *Studies in Avian Biology* (1978–1999), *Pacific Coast Avifauna* (1900–1974), and the *North American Bird Bander* (1976–2000). A multitude of downloadable articles can be located by browsing the contents of different journals, or by using a search engine with fields for Keyword/Subject, Title, Author, and Years. Check it out at: <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/index.php>

CONSERVATION NEWS

Hope for the Mesopotamian Marshlands

It was a strange sight – after eight years of bloody war in the 1970s – to have the Iraq and Iran delegations sitting amicably side by side and agreeing on working together to designate the shared Hawr Al Hawizah wetland, one of the major remaining parts of the Mesopotamian Marshlands, as a transboundary Ramsar Site of International Importance. This hopeful event occurred during the ‘High-level Conference on the Restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands’, held in Manama (Bahrain) on 28 February and 1 March 2005, co-organised by UNEP and ROPME (Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment). The meeting was well attended by representatives of most of the governments of the region, by UN agencies, the World Bank and a number of NGOs already involved with these wetlands, but not by any delegation from the indigenous Ma’dan people, the Marsh Arabs.

The great Mesopotamian Marshlands, one of the iconic wetlands of the world, were inhabited by a proud people, inheritors of the Sumerian civilisation, with a vibrant culture and a unique architecture based on the ingenious use of reeds. They lived in harmony with nature, in a vast area (of about two million hectares), fed by the waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers, rich in biodiversity. In the early



1990s, the impact of large upstream dams in the countries sharing their catchment basin resulted in a dramatic reduction of freshwater inflow. The *coup de grâce* came from Saddam Hussein's government just after the first Gulf war, when it implemented a policy of draining the Marshlands. The result was the almost total destruction of the wetland ecosystems and the flight of the inhabitants to the towns, while a large number of refugees crossed the border to Iran.

After the fall of the Saddam regime, starting in late 2003, returning Ma'dan breached some of the dykes and initiated the re-flooding of the marshes. The interim Iraqi government agreed to the restoration of the wetlands and established CRIM (Centre for the Restoration of the Iraqi Marshlands) to co-ordinate this major effort. The UN (mainly through UNEP), a number of countries (such as Canada, Italy, Japan and the US) and various organisations rallied to assist. Already a considerable numbers of the Ma'dan have returned to their wetland villages, and, in spite of a variety of difficulties, the prospect for the future may be considered as positive.

Ramsar participated in the meeting through Thymio Papayannis, MedWet Senior Advisor, who represented the Secretary General and intervened with a joint presentation with the title *Wetlands and human wellbeing: The case of the Mesopotamian sites*. The designation of Al Hawizah as a Ramsar site presupposes the accession of Iraq to the Convention on Wetlands. The Iraqi delegation expressed its willingness to complete rapidly the necessary procedure, with the advice of the Ramsar Secretariat, and to take part in COP9 with an observer status. All in all, the potential contribution of the Ramsar Convention to the rehabilitation of the Mesopotamian Marshlands was highly appreciated by the participants, who would welcome a more active role by this international body. In a broader context, the need of a regional wetland initiative was felt by many of the participants, and Iran suggested it would consider playing a catalytic role for its launch.

http://ramsar.org/w.n.iraq_unep1.htm

Ramsar News

Samoa recently joined the Ramsar Convention, and designated Lake Lanoto'o, the largest freshwater lake in the country, to be its first Wetland of International Importance.

Sudan also just joined the Ramsar Convention. Its first Wetland of International Importance is Dinder National Park (1,084,600 hectares), a very large complex of about 40 wetlands.

The United Kingdom has designated three new Ramsar sites, all of them reef and shoal systems off-shore from the Channel Island of Jersey. Les Écréhous and Les Dirouilles, Jersey (5,459 ha) consists of two reefs which form an extensive shoal area on the east of Jersey. Les Minquiers, Jersey (9,575 ha) is an extensive shoal area lying 34 kilometres due south from Saint Helier on Jersey. Les Pierres de Lecq (the Paternosters), Jersey (512 ha) is an extensive reef uncovered at low tide, lying off the north-west coast of Jersey. The UK now has 162 Wetlands of International Importance.

The Republic of Korea has designated a beautiful island peatland area as its third Wetland of International Importance. Jangdo Island High Moor in Chollanam-do province is one of 1,596 islands that are part of the Tadohaeh-Haesang National Park.

Jamaica has designated its second Wetland of Interna-

tional Importance: Palisadoes - Port Royal (7,523 hectares). It features cays, shoals, mangrove lagoons, mangrove islands, coral reefs, seagrass beds and shallow water, thus hosting a variety of underrepresented wetland types.

The USA designated three new Wetlands of International Importance: Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve and Grassland Ecological Area, both in California, and Kawainui and Hamakua Marsh Complex, the largest remaining emergent wetland in Hawaii. The marsh provides primary habitat for four of Hawaii's endemic and endangered waterbirds, including Laysan Duck and Hawaiian Goose or Nene, and contains archaeological and cultural resources, including ancient walled taro water gardens (lo'i) where fish were also cultivated.

Argentina has designated the Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur (353 hectares) as a new Ramsar site. Declared a Natural Park and Ecological Reserve in 1986, the site is located in the east of Buenos Aires, the most populated city in Argentina. The site sustains a large population of *Cygnus melancorpus* swans and other waterfowl. In total, 250 species of birds, nine of amphibians, 23 of reptiles, 10 of mammals and 50 of butterflies have been identified in the area.

WADERS IN THE MEDIA

Red Knot – Wildlife officials seek to have shorebird declared an endangered species

Faced with a sudden and devastating decline in the population of one of the country's showcase shorebirds, Canadian wildlife officials are scrambling to have the Red Knot – a migratory marathoner that breeds in the High Arctic but winters in southern Argentina – declared an endangered species. Red Knot numbers have plunged so much in the past few years that this week U.S. authorities warned that the bird's Western Hemisphere subspecies could be extinct within five years. The small, russet-coloured bird depends on a healthy supply of horseshoe crab's eggs at Delaware Bay to complete its remarkable 16,000-kilometre annual journey from the southern tip of South America to its nesting sites on islands in northern Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean.

National Post, 28 May 2005

See also Ottawa Citizen, 30 May 2005

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wader Study Expedition to NW Australia, November/December 2005.

The next Australasian Wader Studies Group expedition to NW Australia to study waders (and terns) will take place from 12 November to 3 December 2005. Additional participants will be most welcome: traditionally up to half the 20-strong fieldwork team has come from outside Australia.

The Roebuck Bay (Broome) and Eighty Mile Beach regions hold over half a million waders during the non-breeding season. They also have the highest diversity of waders anywhere in the world, with 50 species being recorded (nearly a quarter of all wader species). The main activity will be catching and banding waders, with a target catch of 2,000–3,000 waders of about 30 species plus up to eight species of terns. Counting will be carried out by a small, separate team.



Half the period will be based at Broome Bird Observatory (air conditioned rooms or camping available) and half at Eighty Mile Beach (based in a house at Anna Plains cattle station plus camping on adjacent lawns). Costs of the expedition are shared by participants – food/other costs at A\$25 (about UK£10 or US\$18) per day and transport at A\$200 per week. Flight costs are covered by participants. There are excellent air services into Broome from all the main Australian cities.

All interested in participating should please email Clive Minton at: mintons@ozemail.com.au or phone/fax him on 61-3-95894901. Full information is available from him in the form of an expedition prospectus.

Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group meeting, February/March 2006

The first Shorebird Science in the Western Hemisphere Meeting will be held at the University of Colorado campus in Boulder, Colorado, between 27 February and 2 March 2006. The purpose of the meeting is:

- (1) to bring together biologists studying breeding, staging and wintering shorebirds throughout the Western Hemisphere in one location,
- (2) to promote information sharing on methodologies and study design among biologists working on different shorebird species,
- (3) to promote range-wide studies of shorebirds by fostering collaborations among biologists interested in particular species,
- (4) to integrate science into the implementation of various shorebird conservation plans, and
- (5) to generate enthusiasm among the shorebird community to conduct additional studies of shorebirds in the future.

Additional details of the meeting, including the venue, abstract and symposium submittal deadlines, science program, etc., are posted on the US Shorebird Conservation Plan website:

<http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/ScienceMeeting.htm>

Please mark your calendars now and plan on attending. Questions about meeting arrangements should be addressed to Rick Lanctot, Overall Meeting Coordinator: richard_lanctot@fws.gov, telephone: 1-907-786-3609;

Brad Andres, Boulder Logistics Coordinator: brad_andres@fws.gov, tel. 1-303-275-2324 and Stephan Brown, Science Program Committee Chair: sbrown@manomet.org, tel. 1-508-224-6521.

'Migration of Wild Birds and Avian diseases', November 2005, Taiwan

The Waterbird Society will hold an International Scientific Meeting in Tainan, Taiwan during 24–28 November 2005. The conference will include symposia on avian influenza and other diseases, the migration of waterbirds in Asia and workshops on conservation themes.

For more information please see www.waterbirds.org

NEW SERVICE FOR WADER RESEARCHERS

Sexing waders using molecular markers

Identifying the sex of waders is often required in studies of ecology, behaviour and conservation. For instance, we may want to find out whether males migrate through a site earlier than females, males and females may have different feeding ecology and wintering sites, or the sex ratio of chicks may be biased. The plumage and morphology of males and females, however, are similar in many waders, especially during the non-breeding season. Using DNA (blood, tissue) now it is possible to identify the sex of most individuals. Taking a few droplets of blood is routine in most field ecological study, and perfectly safe if the person knows what he/she is doing.

Our laboratory at University of Bath (UK) offers this service free of charge for any wader species (Charadriiformes, excluding gulls and auks). Molecular sexing will be carried out as part of a collaborative agreement between the tissue collector(s) and our lab, and we anticipate that it will lead to joint publications. We provide a kit, if needed, for taking blood samples. We anticipate that molecular sexing will boost the knowledge of migration, feeding ecology and breeding behaviour of waders, and ultimately will lead to more effective conservation. This service is subject to prior agreement. Anyone interested should please contact Dr T Szekely (T.Szekely@bath.ac.uk) BEFORE embarking on tissue collection.

