

Notes & News

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PROJECT AND EXPEDITION NEWS

Alaska Shorebird Studies 2005

In a recent publication, *Alaska Shorebird Group Summary of Shorebird Studies for 2005*, reports were provided on 33 projects that have been carried out in Alaska; they involved 68 researchers from four US Government agencies, ten US and overseas universities, and four non-government organisations. One of these projects with special relevance to the Asia Pacific Flyways was the international 'Beringian Shorebird Expedition' sponsored by the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat. This expedition involved over two dozen researchers from eleven countries who worked on migration studies of Bar-tailed Godwit, Rock Sandpiper, Dunlin, and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. The expedition was completed successfully despite being hampered by survey and re-supply aircraft flights being postponed by poor visibility from the largest fires recorded in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta (YKD), and by high tides and storms (the worst in 50 years). Some results of this expedition are reported below.

Good news, bad news, and great news: satellite-tagged Bar-tailed Godwits

As a prelude to the 2005 Beringian Shorebird Expedition to Alaska and studies of long-distance migrant waders, nine Bar-tailed Godwits were captured on their nests in early June on the YKD. Five females had new 22-g satellite transmitters (PTTs) surgically implanted in their abdominal cavities while four males had conventional, but long-lived VHF radios implanted under the skin on their backs. Each bird was marked with a black leg flag with a unique alpha/numeric code. This work was viewed foremost as a test to see if 1) shorebirds could adapt to the surgical implant procedure, and 2) a long-distance migrant like the godwit could prepare for, and complete, its migration while carrying an implanted PTT. At the time of capture this represented only the third time that a PTT had been used on a shorebird and the first time one had been implanted in a shorebird. The PTTs were programmed to report for a brief period once every eight days until mid-August and then for an 8-hour period daily through early October.

The good news: all birds departed the nesting area and moved to intertidal flats along the coast where eight of the nine birds were eventually detected as far as 200 km from their capture sites. One highly nomadic female with a PTT flew from the YKD to the Alaska Peninsula and back – a roundtrip of 1,000 km – over a 10-day period in early August.

The bad news: between 25 June and 18 August all PTTs stopped reporting signals.

The great news: to date four of the nine marked godwits are known to have completed their migration. Three were seen in New Zealand and one in Queensland, including different PTT-marked birds at each location. A fifth bird was possibly seen in northern Queensland but this has yet to be confirmed. The first of the marked birds was reported from Manukau Harbour, New Zealand, on 19 September with the most recent coming from Christchurch on 17 December. Interestingly, even some paired godwits – like some humans – take separate vacations. Two birds were captured at the same nest, yet the female was seen in Queensland and the male in New Zealand.

The birds demonstrated, and the manufacturer has acknowledged, that the failure of the PTTs was not due to mortality of the birds but to technical problems with batteries. In 2006, a suite of Beringian-trained biologists will return to sites in western Alaska with plans to capture more nesting godwits and outfit them with both re-designed implantable PTTs and 9.5 g solar PTTs. On behalf of *Beringia 2005*, a hearty THANKS to the keen eyes in the southern hemisphere.

Bob Gill (robert_gill@usgs.gov)
Source: *Tattler* January 2006

Connecting breeding and non-breeding regions of Beringian Dunlin

A Japan-US joint Dunlin Migration Project initiated in 1999 to improve knowledge of migration pathways and wintering sites of Dunlin by marking them on their breeding areas in Alaska and resighting them on their non-breeding grounds in East Asia is bearing fruit. For the full story and a Google Earth Image of the migrations of a Beringian Dunlin see: <http://www.wetlands.org/articlemenu.aspx?id=dbaebfb1-370f-41e1-9d42-edb60f2759c3>

Update on the Saemangeum reclamation project, Republic of Korea

The long-running saga over the Saemangeum reclamation project in South Korea now appears to be reaching a conclusion. In a move that has dismayed conservation groups, the Korean Supreme Court has ruled that reclamation project is not illegal per se, allowing the government to continue building the seawall that will permanently close off 40,000 hectares of bird-rich tidal flats and shallows from the sea.

Although two of the thirteen judges declared that the

project is based on a seriously flawed Environmental Impact Survey, and that it has costs that will need to be borne by future generations, the Supreme Court as a body fell short of demanding the project be cancelled. The decision for restarting or canceling the project now falls once again then to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the government as a whole. Based on developer's claims, the 33 km long seawall will be completed at the end of April this year, in time to choke the tidal-flats (and the several hundred thousand shorebirds they support on migration) this spring. After that time, discussions will be held on how to use any land created.

Domestic protests have flared in recent weeks, with hunger strikes, sit-ins, and public condemnation of the project – including one of the nation's leading and most influential intellectuals. "The finalisation of the Saemangeum project will cause a major loss of feeding habitat for the waterbirds which migrate through East Asia, including several globally threatened species, making the protection of the remaining inter-tidal wetlands around the Yellow and China Seas an even higher conservation priority" said Mike Crosby, Research and Data Manager of BirdLife's Asia Division.

The impacts on migratory shorebirds are expected to be enormous and long term. The site is famous for holding concentrations of globally threatened species such as Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* and Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*. It also is thought to hold up to 30% of the world's Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*. The Australasian Wader Studies Group and Birds Korea will conduct a shorebird monitoring program at the site and in adjacent areas, to gather data on the project's impact on birds and their habitats. Approximately 12 international researchers will join domestic counters to carry out the work, starting on 31 March and continuing until the end of May.

http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2006/03/saemangeum_decision.html
Nial Moores, *Birds Korea*

Spoon-billed Sandpiper expedition Bangladesh 2006

At least 11 of the globally endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper have been found at three sites along the coast of Bangladesh in January, during an international expedition of British, German, Russian and Bangladeshi Ornithologists funded by the German based Manfred-Hermesen-Foundation, raising hopes for the survival of the birds, whose population has declined to just 300–350 pairs in the wild. The sightings are all from previously unknown sites and crucial in the understanding of the wintering. It is now assumed that the species is much more scattered, wintering along the mudflats between the Gulf of Thailand in the East and Eastern shores of Bangladesh in the West. No birds were found in the Western part of Bangladesh, coinciding with no sightings on the East coast of India at last year's expedition in West Bengal. Bangladesh and possibly Myanmar, where no information is available, are highly important wintering areas for the species. In this respect it is of great concern that so many mudflats have been observed as degraded or converted into prawn farms or salt pans without the vital intertidal exchange of saltwater, vital for the species feeding grounds. These mudflats disappear at an alarming rate in Eastern Bangladesh, but also in Thailand, Vietnam and possibly Myanmar and gradually reduce the habitat of the species with equally or worse impact than the devastating large-scale reclamation of the Saemangeum

mudflats in Korea.

The expedition members received a warm reception from the local people, the government and the press. The expedition even received the backing and well wishes of the president of Bangladesh. The level of interest and support is very promising and hopeful for the implementation of a future action plan envisioned in the country and beyond in the region to protect core sites along the flyway. The safeguarding of intertidal ecosystems will not only help the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, but also secure the livelihoods of many million people depending on coastal fisheries.

Christoph Zöckler, ArcCona Consulting Cambridge
Thanks to Nick Davidson, Ramsar, for this item.

WWF 2005 waterbird survey of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River

WWF has recently conducted the second comprehensive waterbird survey along the floodplain of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River stretching through Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Jiangsu to Shanghai. The first count was conducted in February 2004. There were two count objectives this year. Firstly, to visit wetlands missed in 2004 and, secondly, to check key areas identified in 2004 to see if changing water levels affected waterbird distribution. The count took place over a two-week period, shortly after Chinese New Year. The count teams consisted of staff from nature reserves, provincial and county forestry bureaus, universities, and volunteers from non-government organisations.

The survey teams counted 635,967 waterbirds of 95 species. Fourteen globally-threatened species and one near-threatened species were found during the survey. The most common species group was the Anatidae (ducks, geese and swans) comprising 67% of the waterbirds counted; next were shorebirds (16%), egrets and herons (5%), and gulls (4%). The 2005 survey confirmed the exceptional importance of the floodplain wetlands for many waterbird species and showed that waterbird distribution had changed considerably due to the different water levels in 2005 compared to 2004. The count of Swan Geese (61,178 individuals) exceeded the current estimate of the global population (55,000). The numbers of Lesser White-fronted Geese counted (8,636) represented 62% of the estimated flyway population.

Copies of the bilingual 2005 WWF Yangtze Waterbird Survey Report can be obtained by sending a request with your name and postal address to Ms. YANG Qin:

QYang@wwfchina.org at WWF China. The 2004 Report can be downloaded in separate Chinese and English PDF versions from: <http://www.wwfchina.org/aboutwwf/whatwedo/fresh-water/index.shtml>

Mark Barter, markbarter@optusnet.com.au

NW Australia Wader & Tern Expedition, November 2006

The next of the series of wader and tern expeditions to the Broome–Eighty Mile Beach area of NW Australia takes place during 4–25 November 2006. Activities include cannon-netting waders to complete temporal gaps in the long-term dataset on moult and weight as well as counting and general observations. The area is one of the most important for waders in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway supporting up to 50 wader species, some in prodigious numbers. Potential

participants – who need no specific skills, just enthusiasm for studying waders – should contact Clive Minton, 165 Dalgetty Road, Beaumaris, Victoria 3193, Australia; mintons@ozemail.com.au.

CONSERVATION NEWS

Canal decision brings hope for India's rarest bird

The future for one of Asia's most threatened and enigmatic birds today looks brighter, thanks to a decision by the Andhra Pradesh State Government's Irrigation Department that should safeguard the future of the species' last known site.

Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* is a small, nocturnal ground-dwelling wader that was discovered in central India around 1,848. A few sporadic sightings followed until the turn of the 20th century, but then the species was seemingly lost. Today only between 25–200 birds remain and the species is classified by BirdLife International as Critically Endangered, meaning it faces the very real prospect of extinction within the next few years.

At the time of its exciting rediscovery in 1986, the courser's scrub-jungle habitat was threatened by the construction of the Telugu-Ganga canal, an agricultural irrigation project. However, prompt action by the authorities led to the creation of the Sri Lankamalleswara Wildlife Sanctuary to protect the species. In October 2005, unauthorised work on the canal commenced once again, around the border of the wildlife sanctuary. This led to the destruction of a newly discovered site for the species, as forest was cleared and channels excavated. Once forest officials became aware of this construction, work was stopped and on 1 February 2006 the Irrigation Department announced they will re-route the canal to avoid the birds' habitat.

See <http://www.birdlife.org/news/pr/2006/02jerdons.html> and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/4717070.stm> for more information.

Thanks to Nick Davidson, Ramsar, for this item.

Shanghai plans eco-metropolis on its mudflats

An hour's ferry ride from the concrete jungle of downtown Shanghai, on Chongming Island in the silty mouth of the Yangtse river, Dongtan is the site of one of the biggest and most ambitious business projects ever undertaken. The Chinese businessmen and British engineers in charge of it envisage nothing less than a new city, with half-a-million millions of inhabitants – but which does no appreciable damage to the earth's environment.

When the Dongtan development is completed, an 'eco-city' with a population a third the size of Manhattan's will have been built at a cost of billions of dollars. If all goes to plan, it will be the first self-sustaining city environment in the world, and the prototype for future urban development in its most populous country. By 2040, Chongming Island will link China's biggest city, Shanghai, with the neighbouring province of Jiangsu to form a new industrial hinterland and become China's main financial and commercial gateway to the world.

It is part of a futuristic plan to develop thousands of square miles of the mouth of the Yangtse, which includes the building of a deep-sea harbour for Shanghai some 30 km out in the East China Sea. This is the biggest single development any-

where in the world, bigger even than the Beijing Olympics. However, Dongtan is a designated international wildlife reserve. For more information, see:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/china/story/0,,1681385,00.html>

Krabi Estuary, Thailand, now included in the East Asian–Australasian Shorebird Site Network

As of 9 November 2005, Krabi Estuary and Bay in south west Thailand, is included in the East Asian–Australasian Shorebird Site Network, in recognition of its international importance for migratory shorebirds, although it is also important for an array of resident and migratory waterbirds.

Krabi is the first site included in the networks from Thailand. This makes a total of 14 countries actively participating in the international cooperative initiative of flyway networks (the two other networks are for Anatidae in East Asia and cranes in Northeast Asia) established under the Asia–Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy. With this latest designation, the East Asian–Australasian Shorebird Site Network now spans 39 sites in 12 countries.

Taej Mundkur, Wetlands International – South Asia

Ramsar news

There has been a recent flurry of new Ramsar designations, which is probably at least partly attributable to the World Wetlands Day 2006 on 2nd February.

Slovenia has designated its third Wetland of International Importance, Lake Cerknica and its environments, in which the distinctive karst landscape of the region has played an essential role (<http://www.notranjski-park.si>; and some stunning photos: http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.slovenia_cerknisko.htm).

Romania designated two new sites: Dumbravita Fishpond Complex in Transylvania is a complex of reservoir and fishponds surrounded by crops, meadows, dense emergent vegetation with reedbeds, marsh areas and wet grasslands. The Mures Floodplain Ramsar site consists of a mixture of meadows, periodically flooded areas mainly covered with soft and hard wood forests, arable land and pastures, and about 40 isles on the river (http://ramsar.org/wwd/6/wd2006_newsitem_romania.htm).

Mexico has added seven new sites to the list: Cascadas de Texolo, Veracruz; Estero de Punta Banda, Baja California; Isla Rasa, Baja California; Manglares y humedales de Tuxpan, Veracruz (http://ramsar.org/wwd/6/wd2006_newsitem_mexico.htm); Corredor Costero La Asamblea – San Francisquito, Laguna de Tamiahua, Veracruz (http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.mexico_asamblea.htm); and Laguna de Atotonilco, Jalisco.

Guatemala designated the inland National Park Yaxhá-Nakum-Naranjo as its fifth Wetland of International Importance. Located within the well-known UNESCO Biosphere Reserve called "Maya" in Petén province, the site is 97% covered by forested lands, either high or seasonally flooded (http://ramsar.org/wwd/6/wwd2006_newsitem_guatemala.htm).

Jamaica: Portland Bight Wetlands and Cays is a protected area located on the south coast of the island, and it includes some 8,000 ha of coastal mangroves, among the largest contiguous mangrove stands remaining in Jamaica, as well as a salt marsh, several rivers, offshore cays, coral reefs, seagrass beds, and open water (http://ramsar.org/wwd/6/wwd2006_newsitem_jamaica.htm).

Albania: Lake Shkodra and River Buna comprise the eastern side of the largest lake in the Balkan Peninsula, shared with Montenegro (Skadarsko Jezero Ramsar site), as well as the River Buna with its near natural delta on the East Adriatic coast. The area includes freshwater, brackish water, woodland, freshwater marshes, wet pastures, sandy shore and rocky habitats supporting c.1000 plant species (http://ramsar.org/wwd/6/wwd2006_newsitem_albania.htm).

France: Les étangs littoraux de la Narbonnaise comprises five Mediterranean lagoons which, though fed by freshwater, are still connected to the sea, the last natural connections to the sea that are still functioning on the French Mediterranean coast (http://ramsar.org/wwd/6/wwd2006_newsitem_france.htm).

Republic of Korea: Suncheon Bay comprises a wide estuarine tidal flat and intertidal marshes, creating one of the most diverse and beautiful coastal ecosystems in the country (http://ramsar.org/wwd/6/wwd2006_newsitem_repkorea.htm).

Chad designated two new sites: Plaines d'inondation du Logone et les dépressions Toupouri is one of Africa's largest wetlands, characterized by a succession of rivers, lakes, floodplains and permanent and temporary ponds. The Réserve de faune de Binder-Léré contains a variety of wetland types, including lakes, permanent and temporary streams, and swamps at the Chad-Cameroon border.

Zambia: Lukanga Swamps are very important from both an ecological and a socio-economic point of view (http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.zambia_lukanga.htm).

Kyrgyz Republic: Chatyr Kul is a saline high altitude lake (3,530 m a.s.l.) in the Tien Shan Mountains with pristine ecosystem. It is one of the few habitats for Pamir Brown-headed Gulls, a breeding area for Bar-headed Geese, and crucial for nine species of moulting ducks, especially *Tadorna ferruginea*, representing about 40% of the global population.

Guinea: Gambie-Koulountou is a National Park and UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. It is a semi-arid region at the border with Senegal, comprising the floodplain of the Koulountou River, the Gambia River's main tributary, and a number of smaller, often temporary watercourses and ponds. Gambie-Oundou-Liti is a mountainous site in the Fouta massif that plays an important hydrologic role as the origin of numerous water courses which flow into surrounding countries and are regulated by three protected forests.

Rwanda has become the 148th Party to the Ramsar Convention, and its first Ramsar site is Rugezi-Bulera-Ruhondo.

The Central African Republic named as its first Wetland of International Importance "Les rivières de Mbaéré-Bodingué" in an area of dense humid forest, the Forêt de Ngotto, in the south-west of the country near the frontier with Congo.

Barbados designated the "Graeme Hall Swamp", a naturally created coastal wetland area with mangrove forests, a seagrass bed, and a shallow nearshore coral reef, which includes a 12-acre artificially-created lake that constitutes the largest body of inland water on the island.

Japan added 20 (!) new sites to the list (http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.japan_20sites.htm).

India designated six new sites, which brings the total area of Wetlands of International Importance in India to 677,131 hectares in 25 Ramsar Sites.

El Salvador: Cerrón Grande ranks among the top three most important wetlands for waterfowl – together with Santa Marta (Colombia) and Laguna Cabral (Dominican Republic). The almost 100,000 ducks counted on a single day included both migratory species breeding in North America as well as

Neotropical breeding species (<http://www.ducks.org/conservation/latinamerica.asp>).

NEW BOOKS

Philip's Guide to Wetlands (2005). Edited by Patrick Dugan.

This well-made, very attractive 304-page paperback features good maps and graphics and lots of photographs. It covers the many aspects of the study of wetlands in a single, portable volume. It begins by defining wetlands, and describes the many different ways in which they function as environments and habitats both for wildlife and for people. The economic importance of wetlands is given particular attention. The author then explains how plants and animals are adapted to survive in wetlands and describes the extraordinary diversity of life found within their boundaries. The loss of wetland environments, particularly to agriculture, is examined, together with the harm to biodiversity that this causes. Ways in which wetlands may be conserved are discussed. An extensive atlas section maps the location of wetland environments around the world and the topography of wetland regions, and provides descriptions of important and characteristic features.

The book is available for € 15 from the NHBS Environment Bookstore (<http://www.nhbs.com/>).

CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENTS

Society of Wetland Scientists 27th International Conference, 9–14th July 2006, Cairns, Australia

The Society of Wetland Scientists and the Australian Marine Sciences Association will hold their joint annual meeting in Cairns, Australia. *Catchments to Coast* is an international conference, the major focus of which will be the vital role and value of wetlands within the terrestrial and marine environments. Importantly, the joint conference provides an international platform for showcasing the need for, and benefits of, a multidisciplinary approach to the complex issues associated with the land–sea interface.

For more information, see www.catchments.org.au.

Workshop on "Seriously declining trends in migratory waterbirds in the International Wadden Sea: Causes – Concern – Consequences", 31 August 2006, Wilhelmshaven, Germany

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the National Park Wadden Sea in Lower Saxony a one day workshop will be held in Wilhelmshaven on 31 August 2006, organised by the National Park Administration, the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, and the Institut für Vogelforschung on: *Seriously declining trends in migratory waterbirds in the International Wadden Sea: Causes – Concern – Consequences*. Invited speakers will include: Jan Blew, Joint monitoring Group of Migratory Birds in the Wadden Sea, FRG; Christoph Zöckler, UNEP – World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Cambridge, UK; Franz Bairlein, Klaus-Michael Exo, Institut für Vogelforschung, FRG; Theunis Piersma, University Groningen, NL; Jesper Madsen, NERI, DK.

For further information and registration please contact: Petra.Potel@nlpv-wattenmeer.niedersachsen.de

...AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST!**Black Oystercatcher remote camera footage**

The Forest Service, along with USGS and Oregon State University, initiated remote video monitoring of Black Oystercatcher nest sites in Harriman Fiord, Prince William Sound, during the summer nesting season of 2005. Check out some of the “Greatest Hits” in four short video clips at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/pages_district/glacier/GRDWildlifeWeb/grdbloy_videos.html

New website on the waders of Northern Eurasia

This website is maintained by the Working Group on Waders, which was created in 1987 within the Ornithological Society of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The site is in both English and Russian and provides information about the activities of the group. It also includes all 17 issues of “Information Materials of the Working Group on Waders”, published during 1988–2004, and available for downloading in full volume. See <http://www.waders.ru/>

Thanks to Rob Robinson, British Trust for Ornithology, for this item.

The Greenshank Migration Story

On this excellent educational site by Chichester Harbour Conservancy and Farlington Ringing Group, UK, you can find out about Greenshanks, follow the movements of individual birds, help unravel some of the mysteries about their migration, meet other people who are interested in them, and discover more about the places the birds visit and the people who live there. There are also plenty of ways to get involved with the project yourself. Check out <http://www.greenshank.info/index.asp>

Thanks to Robin Ward, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, for this item.

The Greenshank Migration Game

If you want to join a flock of Greenshanks on their migration route and discover the ups and downs of Greenshank life, go to <http://www.conservancy.co.uk/learn/todo/greenshank.htm>

Thanks to Robin Ward, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, for this item.



A really knotty problem . . .

thanks to Nick Davidson, Ramsar Bureau, for this item.