

# Notes & News

*Notes & News* is compiled by Silke Nebel to whom contributions should be sent: School of Biological, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia; fax: +61-2-9385-1558. [silke.nebel@unsw.edu.au](mailto:silke.nebel@unsw.edu.au)

## PROJECT NEWS

### International Eurasian Golden Plover survey October 2008

At the 2005 International Wader Study Group conference in Ireland a workshop was held to discuss information needs for passage and wintering Eurasian Golden Plovers (see report in WSG Bulletin 108: 5–12). One of the main conclusions of that meeting was that an assessment of population size for *Pluvialis apricaria altifrons* was a high priority. It was agreed that a survey should be conducted in October 2008. October was chosen as the month for the survey because the NW European population is relatively concentrated at that time in the Baltic and Wadden Sea area and hence should be easier to count than later in the winter when birds are far more widely dispersed over large regions further to the south and west.

In April 2006 a small group met at Ribe, Denmark to discuss how to take the planning of the survey forward. It was agreed that the survey should focus on the weekend of 18–19 October 2008. Whilst co-ordinated counts over that weekend would be preferable, the count period can extend three days either side of Saturday 18th October. Simon Gillings has agreed to undertake the role of co-ordinator for this international survey and will be seeking to establish a network of country organisers. The October 2006 International Wader Study Group Conference in Sweden will give an opportunity for further discussion on the survey. For further information contact Simon Gillings on [simon.gillings@bto.org](mailto:simon.gillings@bto.org) and check the WSG website (<http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/wsg/>) where developments will be posted.

### The Non-estuarine Coastal Waterfowl Survey (NEWS) December 2006–January 2007

The United Kingdom is internationally important for its numbers of wintering waterbirds, and many of these are monitored annually by the Wetland Bird Survey counts (WeBS). However, WeBS counts are mostly made on estuaries and inland waterbodies, leaving the majority of the coastline uncounted. Important populations of several species occur around our shores away from estuaries, and consequently their numbers are not monitored annually by the WeBS counts. To increase the knowledge of waterbird populations around the UK coastline, the BTO organised the 1984/85 Winter Shorebird Count (WSC), followed by the 1997/98 Non-estuarine Coastal Waterbird Survey (NEWS). The latter revealed declines in the numbers of wintering Ringed Plover (–15%), Sanderling

(–20%), Purple Sandpiper (–21%), Bar-tailed Godwit (–44%) and Turnstone (–16%) in many regions. NEWS also suggested that the winter distribution of species such as Ringed Plover and Purple Sandpiper within the UK was changing, with the greatest densities of birds recorded on the Western Isles.

It is nearly a decade since the 1997/98 NEWS, and we are planning to run it again over the next winter (2006–2007) between 1st December and 31st January. We are hoping that several other European countries will also be organising additional coastal counts next winter. For further information contact Steve Holloway ([Steve.Holloway@bto.org](mailto:Steve.Holloway@bto.org)).

*Thanks to Mark Collier for this item.*

## REQUESTS FOR SIGHTINGS AND RESIGHTINGS

### Norwegian Knots

As part of a long term project, Red Knots on spring migration are being colour banded in Porsanger, northern Norway. In 2006, 137 Knots were marked with a yellow flag on the left tibia and a red ring on the right tibia. The flag has three letters engraved in black. The birds are *Calidris canutus islandica* and are likely to be seen in Europe as far east as Poland on southward migration in W Europe in winter and spring and on the breeding grounds in Greenland and NE Canada in June to August.

Please report sightings to Jim Wilson, Granveien 46, 1911 Norway ([jimwils@frisurf.no](mailto:jimwils@frisurf.no)). Sightings should include details of flock size and approximately how many birds were searched. Negative sightings where flocks were searched, but no birds were found, are also wanted. We especially want to find out how far west these birds are occurring in the British Isles and if any are to be found in Iceland.

### Sociable Lapwing

We are currently in our 2nd year of a 4-year study researching the breeding biology of Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*. To date we have colour-ringed more than 400 chicks and 40 adults with the aim of deriving survival estimates and monitoring migration patterns. The birds have been marked with four coloured plastic rings above the tibio-tarsal joint. In addition to sightings of colour-ringed birds we also need sightings of any un-ringed Sociable Lapwings observed either on breeding grounds or during the non-breeding season. We are currently compiling a database of all historical records of Sociable Lapwing to help us target survey

effort on the migration and wintering grounds. Anybody who has historical records of Sociable Lapwing: we would be pleased to hear from you.

The project is a collaboration between RSPB and the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan, supported by BirdLife International, and funded by the UK government's Darwin Initiative. Please contact Maxim Koshkin ([esey@mail.ru](mailto:esey@mail.ru)) or Rob Sheldon ([robert.sheldon@rspb.org.uk](mailto:robert.sheldon@rspb.org.uk)).

## CONSERVATION NEWS

### The Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program: counting the cost of reclamation in South Korea and beyond

The vast Saemangeum estuarine system on the west coast of South Korea is thought to be the single most important site for migratory shorebirds in the Yellow Sea, a core area on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Single day counts exceed 150,000 shorebirds during northward migration and as many as 124,000 Great Knot have been counted on southward migration. At least 18 species of shorebird have been regularly supported by the site in internationally important concentrations, as well as at least nine other waterbird species.

After 15 years of on-off construction, bulldozers closed the last remaining gaps in the 33-km long Saemangeum seawall on 21 April 2006, finally damming 40,100 ha of tidal-flats, with no clear end-use for any land created. Although the estuarine system had already suffered significant ecological change (with a gradual reduction in tidal exchange and shifts in patterns of sedimentation), this year saw a drastic reduction in tidal range from a near-natural 7 m at peak in March to less than 1 m by late April. Tidal exchange is now controlled by two 540 m long sluice gates. Forecast models predict that 90% of the tidal-flat will be either dried out or permanently flooded within the next year. Impacts are already enormous: the livelihoods of an estimated 25,000 local people have been affected; the region's most important shorebird site has been significantly degraded; and a report by a government institute suggests that this single reclamation could even cause a region-wide rise in sea level, leading to a loss of a further 5% of the Yellow Sea's tidal-flats.

Despite the system's outstanding international importance (recognized by South Korea's government, which allowed a small part of Saemangeum to be designated as a Shorebird Network Site), few organized shorebird counts have been conducted there in recent years, and very little government data have been made publicly available. In addition, apparently no program was in place to monitor the impacts of this reclamation project on shorebirds – beyond single-day waterbird counts being conducted monthly under the auspices of the development agencies. With the promise of “environmentally-friendly reclamation,” the same proponents claim that the reclamation will create new bird habitat and that Saemangeum's shorebirds will simply move to the adjacent Gomso Bay and Geum Estuary.

Recognising the need to monitor and publicise the impacts of what is probably the largest single ongoing coastal reclamation project in the world, the domestic conservation organization Birds Korea has partnered with the Australasian Wader Studies Group to conduct the Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program (SSMP): over 30 volunteers conducted intensive shorebird surveys in the Saemangeum system, and



**Fig. 1.** Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Saemangeum, spring 2006. Photo © Birds Korea/Jan van de Kam.



**Fig. 2.** Shellfish graveyard, near Simpo, Saemangeum, mid-May 2006. Photo © Nial Moores.

at the adjacent Gomso Bay and Geum Estuary, through April and May 2006 (similar survey efforts are planned for 2007 and 2008). Although a percentage of early-migrating species (e.g. Kentish Plover, Eurasian and Far Eastern Curlew) and very late-migrating species (e.g. Red Knot) might have been missed, the counts likely have recorded the vast majority of individuals of most species in the area on northward migration. This assumption is based on the steady rise in number of shorebirds throughout April into May, coupled with a peak in number of the most numerically dominant species, followed by a rapid fall off in numbers of almost all species, especially between 20 and 25 May.

The three most abundant shorebird species recorded in the combined Saemangeum/Geum area were Great Knot (116,126 birds, about 30% of the world population, not considering turnover), followed by Dunlin (82,718), and Bar-tailed Godwit (15,876). Also recorded were 34 Spoon-billed Sandpiper and fourteen Nordmann's Greenshank within the Saemangeum area, along with 70 Nordmann's Greenshank at the Geum Estuary. Other threatened species recorded by the SSMP included Black-faced Spoonbill, Chinese Egret and Saunders's Gull.

The rapid seawall construction and closure led to a sudden reduction in tidal exchange, and a mass die-off of shellfish. This provided many Great Knot and Dunlin with a temporary, abundant and easily accessible food source, and perhaps as a result, birds did not appear to die of starvation or move to alternative areas. Most of these shellfish beds were completely exhausted by late May, however, when birds' abdominal profiles also suggested that Great Knot remaining within the Saemangeum system appeared less well-fed than those at the Geum Estuary. It can be assumed that unless there were to be a rapid return of more natural tidal conditions, the Saemangeum system will no longer be able to support large concentrations of shorebirds.

With the massive degradation, and probable loss, of Saemangeum, the adjacent Geum Estuary now becomes South Korea's most important remaining shorebird site. This site too, however, is threatened with imminent reclamation, to be conducted in two phases, one infilling the natural coast, the other converting offshore tidal-flats into an industrial estate.

In order to raise awareness of the impacts of reclamation on shorebirds the SSMP data for 2006 has already been made widely available, in both Korean and English, on websites (e.g. <http://www.birdskorea.org>) and in published accounts, with a fuller report underway. In addition, an international workshop is planned in Seoul for September 2006, and counts will be repeated in spring 2007 and 2008 – the year in which

South Korea hosts the next Ramsar Convention conference. We continue to welcome further volunteer participation from experienced counters, as well as financial support. We suggest that readers wishing to express their concern about the situation write to the South Korean embassy or consulate in the country where they live, and to their own nation's embassies in South Korea. Background information for preparation of such letters is provided on <http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/articles/saemangeum.html> and on the Birds Korea web-pages (<http://www.birdskorea.org>).

The SSMP will not only be of local or national value. While it will clearly reveal local changes in shorebird use, the data will also mesh into monitoring programs already being conducted by shorebird specialists in Australasia, perhaps providing one of the first examples of tracing the impact of large-scale reclamation on the population level.

*Nial Moores, Birds Korea & Danny Rogers, AWSG*

## Ramsar News

The **UK** has designated a new Wetland of International Importance: **Lihou Island and L'Erée Headland**, Guernsey (427 ha) comprises several coastal areas on the west coast of the Channel island of Guernsey. Within a relatively small area there is an amazing variety of interesting habitat types including rocky, gravelly and sandy shoreline, the sublittoral zone, coastal grassland, saltmarsh, reedbed and saline lagoon, as well as vegetated shingle banks, seagrass *Zostera* beds, and wet grassland, altogether supporting a rich diversity of animals and plants such as 214 different species of seaweed on the tiny shore around Lihou Island. The area also has a rich cultural heritage, with many important archaeological and historical remains.

**Cameroon** has joined the Ramsar family as the 151st Party. Its first designated wetland is the **Waza Logone Floodplain** (600,000 ha), which includes two National Parks and a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The site comprises the whole of the floodplain of the lower Logone River in the extreme north of the country, between Nigeria and Chad, within the Lake Chad basin between Lake Maga and Lake Chad. Said to represent 10% of the surface area of major inland wetlands in the West African Sahel, the area is home to more than 100,000 people who depend upon wetland products for fishing, seasonal grazing, and agriculture. A 2001 census counted more than 320,000 waterbirds from 104 species, and there is a huge concentration of wildlife, particularly in the parks, including large mammals such as elephant, ostrich, giraffe, lion, and many others. Two decades of poor rainfall and the construction of the Maga Dam in 1981 for rice irrigation caused severe disruption to the ecological character of the floodplain, but an important rehabilitation project has shown good results in demonstrating the feasibility of the partial rehabilitation of the floodplain.

**Lake Techirghiol** (1,462 ha) is **Romania's** fifth Ramsar site. It is situated near the Black Sea coast, divided into three parts by two dams constructed in the 1980s: the eastern part remained salty, between the dams the water became brackish, and the western end of the lake contains fresh water. The site provides a very important roosting place for waterfowl, especially geese and ducks, and at the same time the reed beds offer ideal breeding grounds for many bird species.

**Belarus** has designated its eighth Wetland of International Importance: **Prostyr** (6,800 ha) is a complex of near-natural

sedge and reed fen mires together with black alder groves and scrub formations along the banks and floodplain meadows between the rivers Pripyat, Prostyr and Styr, continuing as a transboundary wetland across the Ukrainian border. It is a breeding ground of the globally endangered Aquatic Warbler. Photos of the site are available at [http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.belarus\\_prostyr.htm](http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.belarus_prostyr.htm).

**Fiji** has joined the Ramsar community with the **Upper Navua Conservation Area** (615 ha) as its first Wetland of International Importance. The upper Navua River cuts a narrow gorge in the central highlands of Viti Levu, the main island – the gorge itself is some 75 m deep and 5 to 25 m wide and hosts important fauna and flora. Due to its relative inaccessibility, the site is in a nearly undisturbed state, but increased logging in the area poses a potential threat. The land is owned by traditional families and managed on their behalf by the Native Land Trust Board, and is presently leased to Rivers Fiji Ltd, an ecotourism and rafting venture which is designing training and education programmes, among other efforts, in order to develop sustainable ecotourism further. Villagers' centuries-old traditional knowledge of the river and its systems is seen as the foundation for the long-term preservation and sustainable use of the river and near-river resources. See [http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.fiji\\_joins.htm](http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.fiji_joins.htm).

**Portugal** has designated five new Ramsar sites: **Bertiandos and S. Pedro of Arcos Lagoons** (346 ha) a complex of permanent and temporary freshwater lakes; **Estrela Mountain upper Plateau and upper Zêzere River** (5,075 ha); **'Fajãs' of Caldeira and Cubres Lagoons** (87 ha), two small coastal lagoon systems formed by landslide processes off steep coastal cliffs on S. Jorge Island in the Azores Autonomous Region; **Mira Minde Polje and related Springs** (662 ha); and **Mondego Estuary** (1,581 ha). See [http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.portugal\\_five.htm](http://ramsar.org/wn/w.n.portugal_five.htm).

**Turkey** has designated three new Ramsar Sites. **Kizören Obrouk** (127 ha), **Meke Maar** (202 ha), and **Yumurtalık Lagoons** (19,853 ha). Turkey now has 12 Wetlands of International Importance, covering an area of 179,482 ha.

**Chad** has designated its fifth Wetland of International Importance, thereby effectively doubling Chad's surface area under the Ramsar umbrella. **Plaines d'inondation des Bahr Aouk et Salamat** (4,922,000 ha) is now the world's third-largest Ramsar site, a complex of floodplains, hills, a lake, rivers and ponds located in a natural depression at the border with the Central Africa Republic. The site plays a very important role for the surrounding wildlife, providing breeding grounds for several migratory waterbirds and supporting hippos, leopards, elephants and different antelope species.

**Indonesia** has designated the large **Wasur National Park** (413,810 ha) in Irian Jaya as Ramsar Wetland. The park is a low-lying wetland in the monsoon climate zone of southern New Guinea, with intertidal mudflats and coastal mangroves with extensive seasonally inundated grasslands, reed swamps, savannahs, and monsoon forest. Tens of thousands of waterbirds visit the region during migration between eastern Siberia and northern Australia.

**Ecuador** has designated the **Complejo de Humedales Ñucanchi Turupamba** (12,290 ha) as Ramsar Site, which hosts endangered species such as the CITES Appendix I spectacled bear (*Tremarctos ornatus*) and the Andean condor (*Vultur gryphus*). The site constitutes an important nesting and breeding ground for numerous waterfowl species.

In **Guatemala**, **Eco-región Lachúa** (53,523 ha) com-

prises the Laguna de Lachuá National Park and its surrounding buffer zone. Among the most representative species reported are the cougar (*Puma concolor*), jaguar (*Panthera onca*), Baird's tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*), and various monkeys and reptiles including the boa (*Boa constrictor*).

**Sudan** announced the designation of the **Sudd marshes** as the country's second Ramsar Site. Sudd (5,700,000 ha) is one of the largest tropical wetlands in the world, located in Southern Sudan in the lower reaches of the White Nile. It is a wintering ground for birds of international and regional conservation importance, such as *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, *Balaeniceps pavonina*, *Ciconia ciconia* and *Chlidonias nigra*; and is home to some endemic fish, birds, mammalian and plant species, and to the vulnerable Mongalla gazelle, African elephant and shoebill stork. Migratory mammals depend on the wetland for their dry season grazing. See [http://ramsar.org/wm/w.n.sudan\\_sudd.htm](http://ramsar.org/wm/w.n.sudan_sudd.htm).

The **Parque Provincial El Tromen** (30,000 ha) in Neuquén Province has become **Argentina's** 15th Ramsar Wetland. Reaching an altitude of up to 3,978 m a.s.l., this wetland forms a complex hydrological system in which the snowmelt slips through cracks in the basaltic bedrock and rises again at the base of the mountains to create small water bodies that in turn feed a variety of High Andean Wetlands. Apart from serving as a resting and feeding ground for several waterfowl species, the wetland also qualifies as a Ramsar site under the recently added Criterion 9, being the only site known to host the endemic lizard *Liolaemus punmahuida*.

### Six new Australian Shorebird Sites

Six internationally important sites for migratory shorebirds in Australia have been added to the East Asian-Australasian Shorebird Site Network. These six sites are along the eastern states of Queensland and Victoria: *Shallow Inlet Marine and Coastal Park, Discovery Bay Coastal Park, Bowling Green Bay, Shoalwater Bay, Great Sandy Strait* and *Currawinya National Park*. With the addition of these sites, the three Site Networks now span 92 sites in 14 countries of the 23 countries of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Seventy-five per cent of these sites are also recognised as Ramsar Sites. For more information visit: <http://www.wetlands.org/article/menu.aspx?id=1ce3de74-733a-412a-96cf-828233c26753>.

*Taej Mundkur, Strategy Coordinator*

## CONFERENCE AND EXPEDITION ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 2006 Wader expedition to NW Australia

The Australasian Wader Studies Group will be having its 26th expedition to north-west Australia between 4 and 25 November 2006. This area is one of the top five locations in the world for waders with over half a million present at Roebuck Bay (Broome) and at Eighty Mile Beach. The diversity of waders, 50 species, is also huge. The main activity is cannon netting waders at their high tide roosts, though some mist netting at inland freshwater locations will also take place. Principal objectives are to obtain satisfactory samples of the main species to determine breeding success in 2006 (from percentage juveniles), putting engraved flags on birds for survival rate studies and catching additional samples of species where the total data are still not large (Little Curlew,

Oriental Plover, Grey Plover, Greenshank, Whimbrel, etc). About 3,000 waders of 30 species are usually caught in the three-week period, together with several hundred of up to eight species of terns. The optimum team is 22 persons. Usually half of these come from outside Australia. A few places are still available. If you are interested please contact Clive Minton, one of the expedition leaders, immediately ([mintons@ozemail.com.au](mailto:mintons@ozemail.com.au)).

### Second Shorebird Science in the Western Hemisphere Meeting, Venezuela, 13–19 May 2007

Several events of interest to shorebird biologists will take place at the VIIIth Neotropical Ornithological Congress in Maturín, Estado Monagas, Venezuela, 13–19 May 2007. Among these will be the 2nd "Shorebird Science in the Western Hemisphere" meeting including a round-table discussion introducing the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group (WHSG). The formation of WHSG was proposed at the 1st Shorebird Science meeting at Boulder, Colorado, in March 2006. Those interested are encouraged to fill out the 1-page questionnaire on the form and function of this organization (see <http://www.fws.gov/shorebirdplan/>) and send this to Richard Lanctot at [Richard\\_lanctot@fws.gov](mailto:Richard_lanctot@fws.gov) by 1 January 2007. There will also be three shorebird symposia: (1) challenges and advances in the conservation of important shorebirds sites in the Neotropical region (*Desafíos y Avances en la Conservación de Sitios Importantes para Aves Playeras en el Neotrópico*), organized by Charles Duncan, (2) the ecology of Nearctic shorebirds during the non-breeding season (*Ecología de aves playeras neárticas durante la época no-reproductiva*), organized by Guillermo Fernandez and Stephen Brown, and (3) ecology of endemic Neotropical shorebirds (*Aves Playeras Neotropicales*) organized by Graciela Escudero, Julián Torres Dowdall and Monica Abril. In addition, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network will have a one-day meeting of site partners and others interested prior to or after the main meeting.

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

### Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund

The Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund has been established to provide financial support to projects at sites of importance for migratory waterbirds in the East Asia-Australasian Flyway. Cathay Pacific placed an initial donation of US\$65,000 into the Fund which is administered by WWF Hong Kong, and further donations are actively being sought to increase the amount in the Fund so that a greater number of worthwhile projects can be supported in future. Each year, up to 25% of the amount in the Fund will be earmarked for disbursement to support approved projects. At present, the maximum amount that can be applied for each project shall not exceed US\$4,000. There will be a single call for applications to the Fund each year with the deadline currently being 31 October 2006. For further information, see <http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/maipo/awcf/>.

## RESEARCH TOOLS

### Free online tools to calculate Great Circle Distances

Did you ever wonder how far your birds are really flying? To

calculate the distance between two geographical locations, you can use the online *Great Circle Calculator* <http://www.gb3pi.org.uk/great.html>. This (and many many other things) can also be done in *Google Earth*, a free-of-charge, downloadable virtual globe program. It maps the entire earth by pasting images obtained from satellite imagery, aerial photography and GIS over a 3D globe. It can be downloaded at <http://earth.google.com/>.

*Thanks to Humphrey Sitters for this item.*

### Launch of electronic newsletter INFOWETLAND

The newsletter is an information service of the *Ramsar Regional Center for Training and Research on Wetlands in the Western Hemisphere* (CREHO) directed at organizations, networks and the general public interested in wetlands. The newsletter will be produced quarterly in English and Spanish. The objectives of the newsletter are: 1. to disseminate up-to-date information about wetlands in the Americas; 2. to inform about the achievements of the countries in the region in terms of declaration of Ramsar sites and specific actions towards the wise use and conservation of wetlands; 3. to inform about CREHO's activities, the Ramsar Secretariat and partner organizations working in the region; 4. to provide a space for stakeholders to publish key information related to wetlands; 5. to provide relevant information about workshops, symposiums and meetings related to wetlands in the region.

Please contact Carolina Hoyos, Institutional Development Officer ([desarrollo@creho.org](mailto:desarrollo@creho.org)), for more information.

### . . . AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST!

#### "Australian" Dowitcher sighted in Mongolia

A team of German birdwatchers visited Lake Airag in western Mongolia in June 2006 and made an exciting observation: a breeding male Asian Dowitcher with a yellow leg flag, which indicates that the bird was banded in Northwest Australia. This was only the sixth overseas sighting of an Asian Dowitcher flagged in Australia and the first sighting of an Australian flagged wader in Mongolia that was not a Red-necked Stint. Apparently, a disproportionate number of Mongolian sightings are made by German birdwatchers. Keep up the good work!

*Thanks to Clive Minton and Heather Gibbs for this item.*

#### The scandalous behaviour of Curlew Sandpipers is a media scoop!

The IWSG is pleased to announce publication of the latest volume 19 of the *International Wader Studies* series entitled *The Annual Cycle of the Curlew Sandpiper Calidris ferruginea* edited by Les Underhill, Pavel Tomkovich and James Harrison. This erudite volume comprises 38 papers on the status, migrations and life cycle of Curlew Sandpipers throughout their almost worldwide distribution. As we all know, the media often see things in a rather different, more lurid light, as appears in this article from the front page of the *Cape Argus* of Cape Town, South Africa, published on 21 September 2006.

## Cape sex tourists fly 13 000km for hot time in Siberia

**JOHN YELD**  
Environment and Science  
Writer

AS CAPETONIANS know from recent court cases, Russian women travel a long way to bring their sexual allure to the Mother City.

But few know that local males travel 13 000km to Siberia in far northern Russia every year to seek sex, then fly home almost immediately afterwards.

And, not surprisingly, they arrive back decidedly thin and well ... shagged out, so to speak.

However, these particular males are birds – Curlew Sandpipers, to be precise – and the females also undertake the marathon migration.

The full story of the amazing annual journeys and



Determined: the curlew sandpiper

other habits of this delightful little species has just been synthesised in a new book co-edited by two UCT bird scientists, Les Underhill and James Harrison.

The third editor is Russian ornithologist Pavel Tomkovich of Moscow University's Zoological Museum.

He struck up a friendship with Underhill during the Soviet era, after finding another member of a wading bird species, a Sanderling

ringed by Underhill, breeding in the Taimyr Peninsula in the Siberian tundra.

Underhill has visited this region several times, and in 1991 became the first South African to see a Curlew Sandpiper on its nest.

Their book, *The Annual Cycle of the Curlew Sandpiper, Calidris ferruginea*, was published during Russian President Vladimir Putin's recent South African visit.

"It's a brilliant piece of South African-Russian scientific collaboration," says Underhill, the director of the Avian Demography Unit at UCT and vice-president of the International Ornithological Committee.

Curlew Sandpipers, which migrate to such places as Langebaan lagoon and Saldanha Bay in the Western

Cape, breed in the Taimyr Peninsula, inside the Arctic Circle, during June.

Chicks fledge 15 days after hatching, gather in small flocks and leave the peninsula in the first 10 days of August.

The first arrivals reach the Western Cape late in September, after taking an average of 42 days for the 13 000km journey.

Ornithologists do not yet know what routes they fly, but they do know that they weigh about 85g on departure and just 52g on arrival.

"All that a Curlew Sandpiper male does is fly to Siberia, find a mate, and as soon as his female is incubating the eggs, he's off back to South Africa or Australia," says Underhill.

[john.yeld@inl.co.za](mailto:john.yeld@inl.co.za)