



Notes & News is compiled by Silke Nebel to whom contributions should be sent.
(Department of Biology, University of Western Ontario, 1151 Richmond Street North, London, Ontario,
N6A 5B7, Canada; Fax: +1-519-661-3935; snebel2@uwo.ca).

PROJECT NEWS

Bar-tailed Godwits set to hit the satellite waves again

Bar-tailed Godwits in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway are set to hit the satellite waves again in 2008. Last year the Pacific Shorebird Migration Project (PSMP) tracked female godwits from New Zealand through Asia to Alaska, and, for some, back across the Pacific Ocean. With further funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and ongoing support from PRBO Conservation Science, USGS Alaska Science Center and the U.S. Department of Interior, the PSMP has embarked on another round of tracking.

Nine godwits were given implanted tags at Miranda in New Zealand in mid-February – three large males and six females of the *baueri* subspecies. This is the first time that males have been tagged with implants, and we hope that these tags will confirm whether males match the females in flying ~10,000 km direct to eastern Asia.

The project also tagged 16 birds of the *menzbieri* subspecies in Broome, Northwest Australia. This subspecies also refuels in the Yellow Sea in Asia but breeds in eastern Russia rather than Alaska. The two subspecies overlap in the Yellow Sea but how much temporal and spatial overlap exists is not clear, and the flights to and from the Russian breeding grounds have not been documented.

As we write in early March, migration from New Zealand has already started and by the time you read this will be well advanced. Nevertheless, you'll still be able to check the unfolding events on the project website (http://alaska.usgs.gov/science/biology/shorebirds/pacific_migration.html). If the amazing transmitter performance that Microwave Telemetry managed with their units last year continues then we are set for an exciting and informative year!

Phil Battley,

Ecology Group, Massey University, NZ
(p.battley@massey.ac.nz)

Bob Gill,

USGS Alaska Science Center
(robert_gill@usgs.gov)

Nils Warnock,

PRBO Conservation Science, U.S.
(nwarnock@prbo.org)

Chris Hassell,

Global Flyway Network, Broome, Australia
(turnstone@wn.com.au)

Shorebird Research Group of the Americas launches new website

The Shorebird Research Group of the Americas (SRGA) is a consortium of researchers from academia, government, non-governmental organizations, and the public who are interested in the biology and conservation of shorebirds in the Americas. The purpose of the SRGA is to encourage collaborative working groups, facilitate communication between individuals and groups, and be a clearing house for emerging ideas and issues related to shorebirds. The group recently launched its new Website, <http://www.shorebirdresearch.org>, which further explains the SRGA and provides information about its next meeting, slated to be held in Mexico in Spring 2009. The Website also contains links to species-focused working groups that are exploring potential causes for shorebird declines, and invites those working on shorebird research to provide the SRGA with their brief bio, publications, and Websites describing their work. A Spanish-language SRGA “mirror site” is currently under development.

Thanks to Humphrey Sitters for this item

Sociable Lapwings tracked to Sudan

Two Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*, satellite tagged in Kazakhstan last summer, have flown more than 5,000 miles to central Sudan, where they have spent the winter. Satellite tagging is adding rapidly to our understanding of the distribution of this Critically Endangered species outside the breeding season. The birds left Korgalzhin in central Kazakhstan on August 3, 2007 and arrived at Viranşehir, Turkey around October 8. They joined a flock of over 3000 birds – the largest assembly of the species recorded in over a century – before leaving Turkey in late October, arriving in Sudan on 3 November. The last sighting of Sociable Lapwings so far south in Africa was a small flock in Kenya 20 years ago. The tagging project began last year when scientists from the RSPB and Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan fitted satellite-tracking devices to three birds on their breeding grounds on the barren steppe expanses of central Kazakhstan. Conservationists from the Sudanese Wildlife Society, part-funded by the UK government's Darwin Initiative, will try to locate the Sudanese birds, count them and find out more about the sites they are using.

For more details, go to http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/02/sociable_lapwing_sudan.html



Walvis Bay Ramsar Site, Namibia – January 2008 Bird Count

The Walvis Bay Ramsar site is a large embayment on the central Namibian coastline. It is currently awaiting a government decision to substantially expand the protected area. It supports the largest number of waders of any wetland in southern Africa (see Wearne & Underhill 2005. Walvis Bay, Namibia: a key wetland for waders and other coastal birds in southern Africa. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 107: 24–30 for details). Since the late 1970s, numbers of waterbirds and of waterbird species using the site have increased dramatically, most likely because of an increase in feeding area due to the building of new pre-evaporation pans, the natural creation of a large tidal area (6,000 m by 500 m) and/or the silting up of the lagoon causing larger areas of shallow water, thereby temporarily increasing the feeding area. On 19/20 January 2008 the latest count took place. There was a total count of 190,000 birds of 46 species, seven species of which had a count of over 5,000 birds. These were Greater Flamingo (35,100), Curlew Sandpiper (26,400), Lesser Flamingo (25,900), Common Tern (38,000), Black Tern (20,900), Sanderling (10,400) and Chestnut-banded Plover (5200). A few 'specials' were also identified, including 28 Red-necked Phalarope, a Redshank and a White-rumped Sandpiper.

Keith Wearne & Les Underhill

Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program 2008

The Saemangeum Shorebird Monitoring Program (SSMP) is being carried out in partnership by Birds Korea and the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG). The impetus for the project was concern about the reclamation of Saemangeum, the confluence of the Mangyeung and Dongjin estuaries on the west coast of South Korea. Until recently, this was the most important staging site for migratory shorebirds in the East-Asian Australasian Flyway, being used by perhaps as many as 400,000 shorebirds annually, including some 30% of the world population of Great Knot and internationally significant numbers of 15 other shorebird species, including the globally endangered Nordmann's Greenshank and the now Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. We were also concerned about the Geum Estuary, immediately north of Saemangeum, now the most important shorebird site in Korea; this site is also threatened by reclamation (though less imminently than before, due in large part to the success of the SSMP).

The focus of SSMP fieldwork has been to record the numbers of shorebirds using Saemangeum during northwards migration, and the changes caused by the ongoing reclamation project there. These surveys have been extended to the Geum Estuary and Gomso Bay (immediately north and south of Saemangeum respectively), as proponents of the Saemangeum reclamation argued that birds displaced by the reclamation would move to these sites. In all three sites, it is necessary to conduct surveys throughout April and May to assess the number of birds passing through on migration, as different species pass through at different times.

Reports and papers on the first two years of the SSMP detailing results of the surveys can be downloaded from the Birds Korea website (<http://www.birdskorea.org>). In brief, the first season of fieldwork in April–May 2006 coincided with official closure of the Saemangeum sea-wall. Sea-wall closure

resulted in highly reduced tides within Saemangeum, and a massive shell-fish die-off. We suspect that shorebirds managed to get through in 2006 by harvesting the one-off crop of dying shellfish, and that the count totals we obtained that year were representative of "normal" northward migration through the region. By 2007, tidal range within Saemangeum had declined to just a few centimetres, causing a drastic decline in shorebird numbers, most noticeably in Great Knot (the mid-May peak was 88,000 in 2006, only 3,000 in 2007). Most other species experienced smaller declines, and although the number of shorebirds in Saemangeum declined alarmingly, the site remained of international significance to a number of species, notably Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Numbers of shorebirds increased slightly at the Geum Estuary and Gomso Bay, but the increased numbers at these sites were far too small to account for the "missing" birds from Saemangeum. Nevertheless, SSMP surveys have confirmed the importance of the Geum Estuary to shorebirds; it is a wonderful site, with highlights including the world's largest staging population of Nordmann's Greenshank. Luckily the site appears to have narrowly escaped the huge oil-spill which hit the Taean Peninsula (c. 100 km north) in December 2007, but it remains threatened, given its close proximity to a large industrial city, the passing of two Special Laws late in 2007 aimed at increasing reclamation and development of the coastal zone, and other more recent political changes.

The SSMP was designed as a three-year program, and this will probably be the last full season of field studies. One of the main reasons for the program being restricted to three years is that this will allow us to analyse and publish the results in time for the next (triennial) Ramsar Convention Conference which will be hosted by South Korea in October 2008. This massively important conservation meeting provides a unique opportunity to emphasise the international importance of tidal flats in Korea and in the Yellow Sea. The SSMP will provide the data that all of us need in the run up to and at the meeting more to get governments along the Flyway focused much more on the conservation of migrant waders and their habitats.

Planning is now well underway for the SSMP fieldwork in South Korea in April–May 2008, and we are seeking additional volunteers. We cannot fund air travel to Korea but can cover the costs of volunteers once they join us in the field. There are four periods of spring tides in the study period when we will focus our efforts on comprehensive shorebird surveys in Saemangeum, the Geum Estuary and Gomso Bay: 4–11 April, 18–25 April, 4–11 May and 21–25 May. There will also be other shorebird research between those spring tide series: searches for flags and colour-bands, a Korea-wide survey (tentatively between 2–14 May), and assisting with a catching program in late April/May (the catching is being done by an independent team from the Wildlife Conservation Society to monitor birds for Avian Influenza, but there is scope for other studies on top of it). As in previous surveys, there will also be some free time during neap tide series for birdwatching in other settings, including the famous passerine migration site at Eochong Island. The SSMP provides a great opportunity for people from overseas to make a conservation difference, to see Korea, to meet Korean people and to see some superb shorebird spectacles.

If you are unable to come to Korea yourself, you can still make a big difference by donating to the SSMP, by joining Birds Korea as an international member (easy to do through the website, www.birdskorea.org) or by sending emails of



concern to the Korean Government through embassy channels. Ricki Coughlan's website (<http://www.restoresaemangeum.com/>) makes this a task that only takes seconds to complete.

Danny Rogers, AWSG, drogers@melbpc.org.au
 Nial Moores, Birds Korea, N.Moores@Birdskorea.org
 Ken Gosbell, AWSG, ken@gosbell.id.au
 Phil Battley, AWSG, P.Battley@massey.ac.nz

CONSERVATION NEWS

Highly important sites for wintering Spoon-billed sandpiper found in Myanmar

The findings of an International survey of the Species Recovery Team raise hopes for saving the species

The observations of a total of 84 Spoon-billed Sandpiper during an international survey of coastal Myanmar in January 2008 not only highlights the importance of these coastal ecosystems, but also suggests that Myanmar hosts important numbers of wintering birds of this critically endangered shorebird. This is equivalent to 10–15 % of the global population and these figures raise hopes for a species in rapid decline in the breeding and non-breeding areas (no records from Bangladesh this winter! and 50% less breeding pairs in Chukotka (Eastern Siberia) from 2006 to 2007!

The international survey team was part of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team with members of ArcCona Consulting, Cambridge, UK, and Kiel, Germany, JAWAN, Tokyo, the BirdLife partners in Russia (RBCU) and Thailand (BCST), teamed with and well looked after in Myanmar by local BirdLife partner BANCA and local Wetlands International partner MBNS. The 14 survey members were divided in two teams covering the mudflats of the Martaban (Mottama) Bay east of Yangon near the Thai border and selected coastal habitats in the SW state of Arakan (Rakhine), near Bangladesh.

The experience of previous surveys in India, Bangladesh and Thailand, combined with the interpretation of satellite images allowed both teams to target selected suitable habitats in the Bay of Bengal, such as intertidal mudflats in Arakan, where 35 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were counted at one high tide roost. Among them was one juvenile ringed with a light blue flag in North Chukotka in the last summer. Being the only observed flagged among 84 birds, the survey results hint to a potentially larger population yet not discovered in the breeding grounds.

The Arakan coast has never been surveyed before and the Martaban coast only marginally in 2003. So it was no real surprise to find so many Spoon-billed sandpiper and further globally threatened species, such as 27 Indian Skimmers, several pairs of Sarus Cranes and huge numbers of wintering Bar-headed Geese. Due to restricted access, strong winds and inappropriate transport means only a small section of the promising Arakan coast was covered. The survey team believes that Arakan most likely hosts many more of the globally endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Although small scale reclamation of the mudflats for prawn ponds has been observed the coastal zones are largely healthy ecosystems, which not only provide the crucial habitat for thousands of Arctic waders, but also livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people in coastal communities, relying on small-scale fishing, shellfish and crab harvesting on the mudflats.

The Martaban team found in total 48 Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which were much more scattered over the huge mudflats of the Bay, which is believed to host more of 50,000 waterbirds with globally significant numbers of Broad-billed Sandpiper, Lesser Sand plovers and Pallas's Gulls. No reclamation of the highly dynamic coast was observed here. However, as a major threat the hunting and trapping of waders, including Spoon-billed sandpiper, was identified. Local fishermen, who displayed a profound knowledge of waterbirds, which they catch preferably in new moon nights, caught four birds only last December.

In direct response to our findings the local authority in Arakan secured the important site temporarily and arranged signs to be posted immediately. A formal protection process will take longer and will also be based on future survey results taking into account the understanding of the entire suitable coastline. The government authorities of Myanmar were very supportive during the preparation and conduction of the survey and indicated further activities to secure the protection of the species in Myanmar.

World Wetland Day 2008 was celebrating healthy wetlands for healthy people. The survey teams found the coastal wetlands in Myanmar largely in a healthy condition, which not only provide the crucial habitat for many ten thousands of Arctic waders, but also the livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people in coastal communities, relying on small-scale fishing, shellfish and crab harvesting on the mudflats. The gradually encroaching reclamation of mudflats for prawn pond development along the western coast can jeopardise the healthy wetlands in the longer term. Likewise the continuation of trapping waders in the Martaban region can shift the species in to even deeper crisis. Suitable alternatives for local communities should be developed in both areas. Follow up expeditions are planned to further survey suitable habitats along the 2,000 km coastline of Myanmar and help promote further conservation activities.

The survey was operated in Myanmar by WATT (Wild-bird Adventure Travel and Tours) and generously funded by Keidenran Foundation in Tokyo with additional contributions by the RSPB, UK, BirdLife Asia, the Manfred Hermsen Foundation and private Russian sponsors. The surveys would not have been possible without the full support of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism of Myanmar. We are grateful to all of them for their support.

Contact:

*Dr Christoph Zöckler, ArcCona Cambridge
 Dr Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, RBCU, Moscow
 Minoru Kashiwagi, JAWAN, Tokyo
 Dr Htin Hla, BANCA, Yangon*

Paraguay's first Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site – right on the capital's doorstep!

Monitoring of shorebirds by Guyra Paraguay (BirdLife Partner in Paraguay) has resulted in the designation of the country's first Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site. Bahía de Asunción – an IBA wetland just north of Paraguay's capital city Asunción – has been identified as a key site for the Near Threatened Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*. The inclusion of Bahía de Asunción within the WHSRN will strengthen the network of sites, which aims to conserve shorebirds and their habitats



across the Americas. Bahía de Asunción is a relatively small wetland covering 522 ha located on the northern outskirts of Paraguay's capital city Asunción. Bird monitoring, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (U.S.), has recorded 260 bird species including 539 Buff-breasted Sandpipers – representing an impressive 3.6% of the global population. Go to http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2008/02/guyra_paraguay_western_hemisphere.html to read the full story.

Ramsar News

Yemen has become the 158th Contracting Party to the Convention and has designated as its obligatory first Ramsar site the **Detwah Lagoon** in the north-west of Socotra Island some 340 km to the south in the Indian Ocean.

Serbia has designated two new Ramsar sites. **Gornje Podunavlji** (22,480 ha) is a marsh complex along the Danube River that is part of a natural unity with the Gemenc and Kopacki Rit Ramsar sites in Hungary and Croatia respectively. **Vlasina** (3,209 ha) comprises, along with the surrounding countryside, the reservoir Vlasinsko, which at the time of its creation in 1949 inundated what was thought to be the largest peat bog in the Balkans and one of the largest in Europe. Brief descriptions of the sites and some photo can be found at http://www.ramsar.org/wn/w.n.serbia_2new_e.htm.

Macedonia has designated **Dojran Lake (Dojransko Ezero)** (2,696 ha), a lake that it shares with Greece, as its second Wetland of International Importance. Dojran is a shallow eutrophic lake with no natural outlets with a surrounding swamp and thermal spring. The local community employs a unique and ancient fish hunting practice, with its own implements and traditions using birds and reed traps, first described by Herodotus in the 5th century BC and thought now to be practiced only here. The lake hosts several endemic species and subspecies of fish as well as 11 endemic invertebrates and many protected bird species. More than 100 individuals of *Pelecanus crispus* are supported every year in the period from November till March. A decreasing water level from over-abstraction is perceived as a potential threat.

Cameroon's third Ramsar site is the **Partie camerounaise du fleuve Sangha** (6,200 ha), part of the Lobéké National Park. River Sangha is a tributary of the Congo, has its source in Cameroon and flows across CAR and Congo, and is surrounded by equatorial humid forest of great ecological value to all three countries. The site comprises the Sangha River, its tributaries, submerged land masses, and woody marshlands, raphia forests and grasslands. Its remoteness from major cities, combined with the rich flora and fauna, precious wood species, and mineral resources, make it a target resource base for the surrounding population (as a freshwater reserve, source of fish and other freshwater resources) and a haven for rare plant and animal species. Some photos of the site can be found at http://www.ramsar.org/wn/w.n.cameroon_sangha.htm.

Congo has designated four new Wetlands of International Importance: **Conkouati-Douli** (504,950 ha) and **Cayo-Louf-oualeba** (15,366 ha) are both at least partially mangrove sites on the Atlantic coast. **Grands affluents** (5,908,074 ha) is an enormous area that includes basins of a number of important tributaries of the Congo River and surrounds Congo's only previous Ramsar site, the Réserve Communautaire du Lac Télé/Likouala-aux-Herbes, and **Libenga** (59,409 ha), near the northern border, comprises the river Libenga and associated marshes and floodplains. Site descriptions and photographs

at: http://www.ramsar.org/wn/w.n.congo_4new.htm

Mauritius has designated **Blue Bay Marine Park** (353 ha) as its second Wetland of International Importance. This Marine Protected Area is a unique coastal wetland recognized for its exceptional underwater seascape with diverse marine fauna and flora, especially its coral diversity (38 coral species representing 28 genera and 15 families). The presence of mangroves, seagrass meadows, and macro algae contribute to the overall stability of the marine environment and make it a habitat for about 72 fish species and the endangered green turtle, as well as a nursing ground for juvenile marine species. This site adjoins the popular Blue Bay Beach, 5 metres away, which is widely used by the local community for recreational purposes, and tourism is also significant. Threats posed to the coral ecosystem by diving activities are controlled by allowing only certified divers to operate in the area.

Mexico is designating 45 new Wetlands of International Importance. Mexico's total number of Ramsar sites should come out to 112 Ramsar sites, which will be the second highest national total after the United Kingdom. More details can be seen at http://www.ramsar.org/wwd/8/wwd2008_rpts_mexico_semarnat.htm.

Hungary announced the designation of two new Ramsar sites: **Borsodi-Mezoség** (17,932 ha) is a Landscape Protection Area and Natura 2000 site, a large alkaline marshland on the bank of the river Tisza. **Montág-puszta** (2,203 ha) is part of a National Park located on the Hungarian Great Plain. In addition, one of Hungary's first Ramsar sites, Hortobágy, designated back in 1979, has been extended by over 8,000 ha to 32,037 ha.

Estonia has designated the **Sookuninga Nature Reserve** (5,869 ha), a Natura 2000 SPA and BirdLife International IBA, as its 12th Wetland of International Importance. Estonia and Latvia have established a Transboundary Ramsar Site (http://www.ramsar.org/key_trs.htm), including **Sookuninga** and the **Nigula Nature Reserve** in Estonia and the **Northern Bogs (Ziemelu purvi)** Ramsar site in Latvia, with the name of **North Livonian Transboundary Ramsar Site**. The Sookuninga NR is a complex of six different raised bog massifs with hummock and hollow complexes as well with numerous pools. The site supports rare, vulnerable and endangered species of birds and plants, some of them occurring in great numbers or densities. Highly endangered and strongly protected are Black Stork, Golden Eagle, Lesser-Spotted Eagle, Great-Spotted Eagle and Willow Grouse. The site also supports populations of large mammals including Wolf, Lynx, Brown Bear and Elk. The site plays an important role in the recharge and discharge of groundwater as well maintenance of water quality in south-west Estonia and north-west Latvia. It also has a significant cultural and historical importance for its small-scale battlegrounds, burials, and war routes. Due to its remote location the area is sparsely inhabited, and the main uses are tied to forestry, berry and mushroom picking, and small-scale hunting – all at comparatively low intensities.

There are presently 158 Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention, with 1721 wetland sites, totaling 159 million ha.

WADERS IN THE MEDIA

Bar-tailed Godwits on BBC radio

BBC Radio is running a series on animal migration called "World on the move", which is focusing on satellite tracking.



Go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/worldonthemove/> to hear about the discovery of the two Sociable Lapwings in Sudan or to listen to Dr Phil Battley from Massey University discuss the difficulty of catching and tagging Bar-tailed Godwits in New Zealand.

CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENTS

Asian wetland Symposium 2008, 22–25 June 2008, Hanoi, Vietnam

AWS2008 is a symposium to reflect on the importance of wetlands to the daily life of people in Asia and to look into the progress and Challenges in wetlands management and conservation in the Asian Region. For further information see <http://www.aws2008.net/>.

PUBLICATIONS

Emu flies into Cyberspace

Birds Australia has created a complete digital archive of *Emu – Austral Ornithology*, back to the first issue in 1901 – an invaluable resource for all those interested in Australian birds and the history and social significance of ornithology in this unique environment. The opening up of the digital archive means ornithologists around the world will be able to access a wealth of scientific information on the unique birdlife of the region, as well as stories of social significance from early expeditions and meetings of the Royal Australian Ornithologists' Union. Subscription and online access to *Emu* is available to individuals through Birds Australia, and to libraries and interested institutions from CSIRO PUBLISHING. Selected articles of historical significance will be available free of charge throughout 2008, and are accessible from the *Emu* website: <http://www.publish.csiro.au/journals/emu>.

Arctic birds breeding conditions survey – 2007

The first part of the 2007 data on breeding conditions for Arctic birds and their reproductive success is available at the survey websites (<http://www.arcticbirds.net>, <http://www.arcticbirds.ru>). The production of the *Arctic birds* bulletin no. 9 (primarily with information for summer 2006) was unfortunately delayed beyond expectation due to management issues, but we promise it to appear on the ABBCS website in a few weeks and soon afterwards to become available also as hardcopy.

Mikhail Soloviev & Pavel Tomkovich

...AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST!

A new wader taxon??

by David Bakewell and Peter Kennerley

“Is it possible that a small plover, not described or illustrated in any modern literature or field guide, occurs in southeast Asia? This is the question we were faced with following sightings of several small *Charadrius* plovers in Malaysia and Singapore. Regular and detailed observations of up to four birds in Singapore in winter 1993–1994, and of 12 birds in Malaysia in winter 2006–2007, combined with a series of photographs illustrating both non-breeding and breeding plumage, have established that these birds possess a unique suite of plumage and structural characters which make them readily recognisable but, as yet, not identifiable to a specific taxon.”

Read the full story at <http://www.surfbirds.com/Features/plovers1108/malayplovers.html>.

Thanks to Humphrey Sitters for this item

