
A unique record of a colour-flagged Little Stint in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway

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The Little Stint *Calidris minuta* is an abundant wader species with an estimated world population of about 1,500,000 birds (Delany & Scott 2006). It has an extensive breeding range that spans almost the whole of Arctic Eurasia from northern Norway east to the Bering Strait (Lappo *et al.* in prep.). However, numbers of this species are small in East Siberia and the Russian Far East with only a few records during migration periods in the Russian Far East. Little Stints are also rare farther south in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (e.g., Brazil 1990, 2009, Higgins & Davies 1996, Viney *et al.* 1996). This situation possibly reflects the position of the species' main non-breeding grounds farther west, in Africa, SW Asia, and the Indian subcontinent (e.g., Hayman *et al.* 1986, van Gils & Wiersma 1996). This rarity of the species in the eastern portion of its distribution together with lack of site tenacity within the breeding range (shown by Underhill *et al.* 1993 and Tomkovich & Soloviev 1994) gives grounds for the assumption that the Little Stints that occur along the Pacific coast of Asia are mostly accidental. Few distant ring recoveries or sight records of colour-marked Little Stints are available for the Asian breeding grounds of this species and there is a total absence of such records for the huge area east of 130° longitude (Lappo *et al.* in prep., Tomkovich *et al.* 2000, Tomkovich 2003).

Few Little Stints have been ringed in East Asia. We are aware of one bird ringed in Japan (Brazil 1990) and nine birds, four adults and five downy chicks, ringed on breeding grounds in the Chukotka autonomous area of the Russian Far East (Tomkovich 2003). In the latter case the birds were also given colour flags (a light blue flag which has been the regional code for northern Chukotka since 2002). Ringing activities were undertaken in 2002 on Belyaka Spit, Kolyuchin Gulf, Chukotski Peninsula. Red and yellow colour rings were attached to the legs of one of five Little Stints ringed in 2002 enabling it to be individually recognisable. This particular adult was incubating a clutch of eggs in a nest with co-ordinates 67°03.822'N, 174°35.675'W close to (c.0.5 km) the cabin where the Arctic Expedition in Chukotka was based. Most probably this bird was observed as one of a pair on 11–13 June. Its nest with a complete clutch of four eggs was found in the same restricted area on 15 June. This Little Stint (Fig. 1) was captured on the nest on 23 June, ringed with a standard metal ring Moskva FS00146 and colour-marked. Its sex was not determined; however, it was likely a male because it was rather small (straightened wing length 96.5 mm, bill length 16.7 mm, total head length 37.6 mm, tarsus length 22.3 mm, weight 25.1 g). This bird was observed on several occasions incubating the clutch until at least 4 July. On 9 July



Fig. 1. The incubating Little Stint on Belyaka Spit, northern Chukotski Peninsula, Russia, on 23 June 2002 just before being caught, ringed and colour-marked.



Fig. 2. The very same Little Stint photographed by Wen-Chung Lin on 6 April 2008 at Budai Township, Chiayi County, Taiwan.

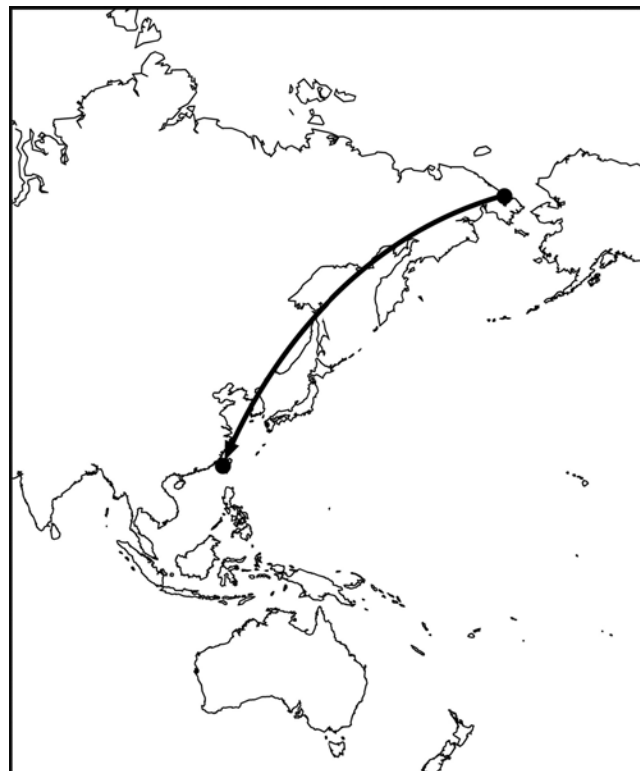


Fig. 3. Position of the ringing and observation sites of the Little Stint in the north-west Pacific region connected by the great circle route line.

it was found attending two downy chicks which were also ringed. Ten days later the bird was still in the area warning at the approach of humans.

Knowing that Little Stints produce few ring recoveries or sight records of colour-marked birds (Tomkovich *et al.* 2000) we did not expect to get any distant record from these few ringed Little Stints in Chukotka. Nevertheless (to our great surprise and pleasure) the Chukotkan Little Stint with a light blue flag and two colour rings was photographed on 6 April 2008 at Budai Township (2°21.433'N, 120°10.417'E), Chiayi County, Taiwan by Wen-Chung Lin (Fig. 2). From a set of his photos it was also possible to determine most digits of the ring number (we got FS001?6). This is the first sight record of a colour-marked Little Stint on the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. At the time of resighting it was at least 6 years 9 months old and at a distance of 6,567 km from the ringing site (Fig. 3). It is also a unique record for the species taking into account the rarity of Little Stints in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway and few birds ringed. It also suggests that Little Stints on the eastern fringe of their distribution may not just occur there accidentally, but are instead rare migrants that may be faithful to the flyway.

The first Little Stint record from Taiwan was reported during ringing activities in 1988 (Tsou 1988). Since then, the species has been considered as a vagrant or rare migrant in Taiwan. According to the Bird Census Database of the Chinese Wild Bird Federation, there were 49 records of Little Stints in Taiwan between 1996, the year the database was set up, and January 2009. About half of the records (21/49) relate to northward migration (March–May). However, it is also a season when identification of Little Stints among similar and abundant Red-necked Stints *C. ruficollis* is simplified because of the start of moult into breeding plumage.

Records of Little Stints in Taiwan have increased significantly since March 2007 when a small flock (at least seven individuals) in breeding plumage was found at Szutsao area, Tainan City and stayed there for over three weeks. The next year, at least four birds stayed at Budai Township, Chiayi County, for over two weeks in March and April. More surprisingly, five Little Stints were seen in December 2008 at Budai and four at Szutsao. Some of them stayed until April 2009.

Considering the records reported in 2007–09, the status of Little Stints in Taiwan should probably be amended to that of “rare winter visitor” rather than rare migrant. It is also necessary to collect more records from both Taiwan and elsewhere in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway before we

can expect to fully understand the species' status in that region and estimate the size of the flyway population.

Our ringing activities in 2002 were undertaken in the framework of the Arctic Expedition in Chukotka that has been running since 2000 under the leadership of Dr Evgeny E. Syroechkovski, Jr. For this note we used some observations on the breeding grounds made by Ivan Taldenkov and Little Stint records from the Bird Census Database of the Chinese Wild Bird Federation. Only the sharp eyes of Wen-Chung Lin made it possible to find the colour-flagged bird in Taiwan and to document the record. Les Underhill commented on a draft of our note. We are grateful to all these people.

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