

Forthcoming talks:

28/04/2015 Nar Valley
Ornithological society.
Barn Theatre, Sacred Heart School,
Swaffam. PE37 7QW.

16/05/2015 Norfolk Bird & Wildlife
Fair.
Mannington Hall, Mannington,
Norwich, Norfolk. NR11 7BB.

19/10/2015 Preston Natural History
Society.
St. Mary's Church Hall, Cop Lane,
Penworthan. PR1 0SR.

20/10/2015 Huddersfield
Birdwatchers Club.
The Old Courtroom, Huddersfield
Town Hall, Ramsden Street,
Huddersfield. HD1 2TA.

13/11/2015 Potters Bar and Barnet
RSPB local group.
Tilbury Hall, United Reform Church,
Darles Lane, Potters Bar. EN6 1BZ.

07/12/2015 Hemel Hempstead
RSPB local group.
The Cavendish School, Warners End
Road, Hemel Hempstead. HP1 3DW

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Introducing the new Wader Quest logo and tagline



SUPPORTING SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION

It was decided that as Wader Quest was becoming a more significant and serious organisation, it was about time the logo got an update. There was a lot of discussion about what form it should take and what species should be depicted.

Although the Spoon-billed Sandpiper was the catalyst that

started the whole ball rolling in the first place it was thought that it was probably a little narrow in terms of its reach. A more global species would be required.

In the end the whimbrel was chosen. Now it could be argued that in fact this entails two separate species, the Hudsonian

Whimbrel and the Eurasian Whimbrel, but the part of the body that we have chosen is good for both, that is, the head and neck. Whichever continent you live on (except Antarctica of course, you will have the pleasure of seeing a whimbrel of some kind or another.



Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeops*.
Kotu Creek, The Gambia — Elis Simpson



Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus*.
Antofagasta, Chile — Elis Simpson

2015 Wader Quest AGM — important information

The 2015 AGM will be held at 10:30 hrs. on 26th April 2015 at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust London Wetland Centre. Not on 10th May as previously advertised.

Earlier in the year we sent out a questionnaire to all our sponsors in order to discover how many people would be interested or able to attend the AGM in order to gauge what form the meeting should take. Thank you to all of those who responded.

It was found that very few sponsors would be able to

attend. It was therefore decided that the AGM should be moved to the same date as the next Trustees meeting. In that way we would guarantee sufficient Trustee attendance to make the AGM viable within the rules of our constitution.

Of course any sponsor wishing to attend that meeting would be very welcome, but it will not be

the hoped for series of talks and presentations.

The intention now is to hold the AGM first at 10:30 hrs followed by a Trustees meeting to discuss the coming year.

Sorry if you were hoping for a more entertaining event, maybe next year we will get sufficient numbers to make it more interesting.

Treasurer's report for the financial year 2014/15 – Elis Simpson

Our first full financial year is complete and, even though we say so ourselves, we have done rather well.

Over the year all income has totalled £9,150.74. That can be broken down as follows; sponsorship £1142.75; sales 3885.72; donations £2,133.74; Mobile Charity Shop £1,923.78; other £64.75.

Expenditure totalled £8,144.70 giving us a surplus of £1,006.04 over the period. The costs can be broken down thus; donations £3,199.23; internet commerce fees £209.28; postage £475.55; other £4,260.64.

As you will probably be aware we ring-fence all income that is either through sponsorship or direct donation and this will be used for nothing other than wader conservation projects. This combined income totalled £3,276.49 and we disbursed £3,199.23. Not all the disbursement was from those funds; we do also make additional donations from the general funds where we can.

Here are some details on the income categories above.

Sponsorship: The sponsorship money has come from all categories of sponsorship; we have 59 ordinary, 19 family, 2 club, 13 corporate and 2 life sponsors.

Sales: We have been lucky in having some exciting and exclusive items to sell during the year including our very own *Wader Quest*

Collectables which have included, 6 wader pin badges, some wader figurines and a pair of earrings. Other items include the Lars Jonsson posters which were very popular. Other items include postcards and books from Juha Honkala about birding in South-East Brazil from which we gained 50% of the sale price. We also had a large number of beautifully hand-made scarves which were donated by Annette Cuniffe who brought them over from the USA when she volunteered on the stand at the British Birdwatching Fair.

Donations: These have been collected at events and talks that we have given in various parts of the UK, the Netherlands and Sweden as well as donations made from various parts of the world via PayPal.

Mobile Charity Shop: We carried out a number of car boot sales during the summer of 2014 and the sums raised varied enormously from £9 to approaching a little under £80. We still have a good stock of items to sell and will continue to do so in 2015. Some bigger and more valuable items have been sold on ebay.

Other: we received a refund from paypal for a payment we had to return (£1.75) and also the money that was put aside for Juha Honkala was returned to the system for payment (£63.00).

Expenditure was accounted for as follows:

Donations: This includes money that was placed in the Grants Fund (currently £859.30) and the Magellanic Plover Appeal fund which now stands at £1,338.71 raised, but some of this total (£674.38) has already been disbursed to the purchase of nets for the project. We have also made donations to some appeals that specifically help waders such as Farewell Shorebirds in Australia and Shorebird Extravaganza in the USA. This year we have also made our first payments for equipment for wader conservation projects; £70.81 on ringing equipment sent to Indonesia and £133.14 on mist nets for a project in Peru.

Internet commerce: fees for PayPal and ebay.

Postage: Items sold via ebay or direct were posted via the Post Office or Parcel Force.

Other: This included all other payments made for the manufacture or purchase of items for sale (earrings, posters, pins, fridge magnets, figurines etc.), stands and display material at bird fairs, car boot pitches and other fundraising events, stationery and printing and bank charges.

Remember that none of the Trustees nor any volunteers receive any payment or expenses; their contribution is entirely voluntary.

A full breakdown of the accounts is available on request.

Editor's diatribe; sponsorship renewals — Rick Simpson

In the Treasurer's report above Elis mentioned the contribution that you, our sponsors, have made in making this such a successful first year for us.

Sometimes being involved in conservation can become rather overwhelming leaving you feeling impotent and frustrated, indeed there are days when Elis and I simply want to throw up our hands in despair, fed up with swimming against the tide through waves of apathy and even antipathy. It is easy to become despondent when faced with odds that seem stacked heavily against you but then in these darker moments we remember three things.

Firstly we think of those valiant little waders struggling through each day just to struggle through the next; if they knew the statistical chances of them doing so they too would probably also give up in despair. Thankfully they don't and they press on. At this time of year they make life even harder for themselves by flying long distances to find somewhere safe to breed.

The second thing we remember is a story that one of our young students in Brazil

wrote when asked to do a piece about what conservation meant to her; she was 9 years old and this is what she wrote.

There was a huge fire raging in the forest, all the animals were running for their lives, among them was a Jaguar. As he was running from the flames he noticed a hummingbird fly to the river, collect a drop of water, then fly back to the fire and release the water droplet into the consuming flames. The Jaguar scoffed at the hummingbird

"Why do you waste your time? You are making no difference at all, why not give up and save yourself?"

The hummingbird replied:

"What I am doing may not seem significant to you and in the end may not stop the fire, but at least I am doing what I can!"

Last, but certainly not least, we remember the people who have put their faith and trust in us, be they individuals, families, clubs or businesses, and we are reminded that we are not alone in this fight.

Encouraged by these three factors we buck

up our ideas, roll up our sleeves and rejoin the fray in our attempt to make life just a little bit easier for our little friends if we can.

We have now reached the stage where some of you will have already received an email asking you to renew your sponsorship for another year. We have decided to keep the rate the same; the gamble being that the low rate will attract a higher uptake. I'm glad to say that up to now we have had a 100% renewal rate. The continued support of every individual sponsor is of great importance to us and to our efforts to make a significant difference to wader conservation in the future, so please, if you can, when you receive your renewal request stay with us for another year and release your drop of water into the flames.

As a last entreaty, perhaps we could ask that each of you try to recruit at least one sponsor for us in the coming year, in that way we are guaranteed to double our sponsorship and therefore income through it. Remember that it is this that we use to help finance wader conservation around the world.

Dee Estuary Volunteer Wardens — Dr Karen Leeming



Wader flock at Hoylake — Lynn Greenstreet

The beautiful Dee estuary lies on the North Wales/North West of England border with the Clwydian mountain range and coast of North Wales on one shore and the large, award winning, sandy beaches of the Wirral peninsula on the other. It is also one of the largest and most important areas in the world for wetland birds and it regularly holds over 110,000 waders and 20,000 wildfowl in winter. It is internationally important for ten species including passage ringed plover and nationally important for a further 8 species and so is covered by a number of environmental protection directives. On high tides it is possible to view many of the wading birds very closely at sites such as Hoylake and West

sporting and leisure activities, and Wirral Council actively promotes Wirral as 'the Leisure Peninsular' producing booklets, leaflets and maps that highlight the leisure and sporting possibilities; and as more people



Dog chasing waders on Hoylake shore — Roy Lowry

take part in these activities then the greater the possibility of disturbance to the estuary's birds.

In the mid-1980s numbers of several wader species plummeted. Bar-Tailed Godwit numbers fell by 99%, Dunlin by 81% and Knots by 79%. Although the Dunlin decline was part of a national decline, for the other species it was due to disturbance by walkers, dogs and horse-riders, especially in the Red Rocks/West Kirby area.

In 1986, as a response to this decline, and due to the expansion of the Marine Lake, The Nature Conservancy Council (as was), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and

local ornithologists collaborated to organise a voluntary warding scheme over the winter high tides in the Red Rocks/West Kirby area. The Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens (DEVW) scheme is still in place today making it the longest running of its type in the UK.

Between the end of September and the beginning of March, on tides of 8.9 metres and above, two to five wardens are on the beach. Essentially, if necessary, the wardens 'close off' sections of the beach to the public and guide them to alternative paths. They also intercept and talk to people who are about to disturb the birds, show the birds through their telescopes, give out information and organise high tide birdwatching events.

The DEVW also monitor not just actual disturbances but also sources of potential disturbances, and the numbers of each bird species and their movements during each warding period. As the sources of potential disturbance comprise every walker, dog, raptor etc. this also gives a measure of the intensity of beach usage on the day. As this has been collected from the very beginning of the scheme it means that it is the only source of long term data on the correlation between bird numbers, beach usage and disturbance.

Over the years that the scheme has been in place, the wardens have had to accommodate new sports and leisure activities and have worked with a number of people and organisations to ensure that the potential of these activities to disturb the birds is minimised. This has led to a wide variety of tools such as specialised leaflets for particular user groups like horse-riders or wind-surfers, using buoys to give designated routes for watercraft, portable signs, permanent educational signs and a pack for schools. All of these activities are supported and co-ordinated by the Wirral Borough Council Ranger Service.

If you are interested in learning more about the Dee Estuary please visit www.deeestuary.co.uk; www.visitwirral.com



Karen Leeming (right) talking to local beach goers and dog walkers — Sheila Ryde



Waders on the Hoylake foreshore — Sheila Ryde

Kirby as they roost, waiting for their feeding grounds to reappear on the ebbing tide.

The estuary is also extremely attractive to people taking part in a wide variety of

Inland wader watching UK; news from 'The Farm' — Simon Nichols



Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* — Elis Simpson

It's been just under a year since I wrote about the Spotted Redshank gracing Manor Farm which has become Buckinghamshire's answer to Titchwell. So what's been happening?

A lot as it happens; even as I sit here typing this update in deepest, darkest Wales, there is news that a Pied Avocet dropped in this afternoon. This is a first for 'The Farm' leaving the author and Manor Farm's keenest birder, Rob Hill, gnashing our teeth as we cannot get there to see it. It has a healthy supporting cast of 3 Little Ringed Plovers, 3 Common Redshanks and a Green Sandpiper; so spring 2015 is already off to a flying start.

But I am racing ahead of myself here. Late autumn and the winter months also had a few surprises and in the same way that we see Manor Farm becoming quite critical for spring and autumn overshoots, its importance for overwintering species is also becoming apparent.

16th October 2014 saw the last Dunlin of the season appear along with a Green Sandpiper and 58 Eurasian Golden Plovers were the first of the autumn, in fact this site now regularly harbours a wintering flock along with the 2-3000 strong Northern Lapwing flock that take wing at a moment's notice and seemingly fill the sky with their



Northern Lapwings in flight *Vanellus vanellus* — Elis Simpson



Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* — Elis Simpson

"peewit" calls.

Common Snipe are also noted during the winter months with at least 3 on site on 3rd February.

Whilst it's obvious from these reports that this plays a major part in the county's wader cycle, let's not forget the fact that many other wildfowl and passerines also call this site home. Goosanders are a regular feature during December to February and at least 9 of this elegant species were seen on the main lake at dusk one evening, they use the river during the day while flying up and down river to feed at Linford and Foxcote.

6 Brambling were also new to the "Farm" List in February as well as large numbers of Redwings and Fieldfares pushed in from surrounding farmland as the temperatures plummeted.

And so we arrive in March and the first sign of spring (or maybe a late overwinterer) was when a pair of Shelduck

arrive on 6th March and the spring's first Common Ringed Plover stops over, it's this date that 3 Eurasian Oystercatchers also make their appearance and are very vocal in display. 9th March see the first Sand Martins scudding through and a lovely surprise, was a male Ruff that arrived on 14th March, it was also joined by 5 Common Redshanks, which is quite a large gathering this early in the season.

It's unusual to see Manor Farm hitting the headlines early in the month, but an email entitled "8 species of wader at Manor Farm today" on the 16th really sums up this site, the roll call of Ruff, Common Ringed Plover, winter plumaged Dunlin, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Redshank, Common Snipe, Eurasian Golden Plover



Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* — Elis Simpson

and Northern Lapwing make this an oasis for early wader movement in the home counties.

Even better was the 17th when a very early Black-tailed Godwit graced the main lake, it was gone the following day, as was the Ruff.

The first returning Little Ringed Plovers were on 20th March and today was a day of quantity with 3 of this migratory species present along with 2 Common Ringed Plovers, 2 Green Sandpipers, 4 Common Redshanks and 5 Common Snipe.

A Peregrine Falcon that flew through on



Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* — Elis Simpson

27th, while not strictly a wader, certainly alarmed the local Lapwings.

So here we are, up to date, with Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit and Pied Avocet under the belt before the first week of April and the Farm looking amazing, we can only hope for a cracking spring.

Elis Simpson, Wader Quest's photographer, wins 4th prize in international photo competition — Rick Simpson

I like to point out at every talk we give that however interesting or otherwise the audience may find my words, they would certainly be far less entertained were it not for Elis' often stunning photographs that illustrate every talk.

Well, all this brilliance goes largely unrewarded until last year that is when Elis decided to celebrate World Migratory Bird Day by entering a photo competition called "Destination Flyways: Migratory Birds and Tourism".

This was her entry; but it was not simply a case of sending in a photo, the photo had to have a story behind it with a sustainable tourism message and I am pleased to tell you she gained 4th Prize.

The prize was a generous discount for two people on a Birding Ecotours trip to a destination of the prizewinner's choice. Sadly we felt unable to take advantage of this and asked the company if instead they would consider becoming Corporate Sponsors of Wader Quest. Fortunately owner Chris Lotz agreed bringing the whole process to a very satisfying conclusion.

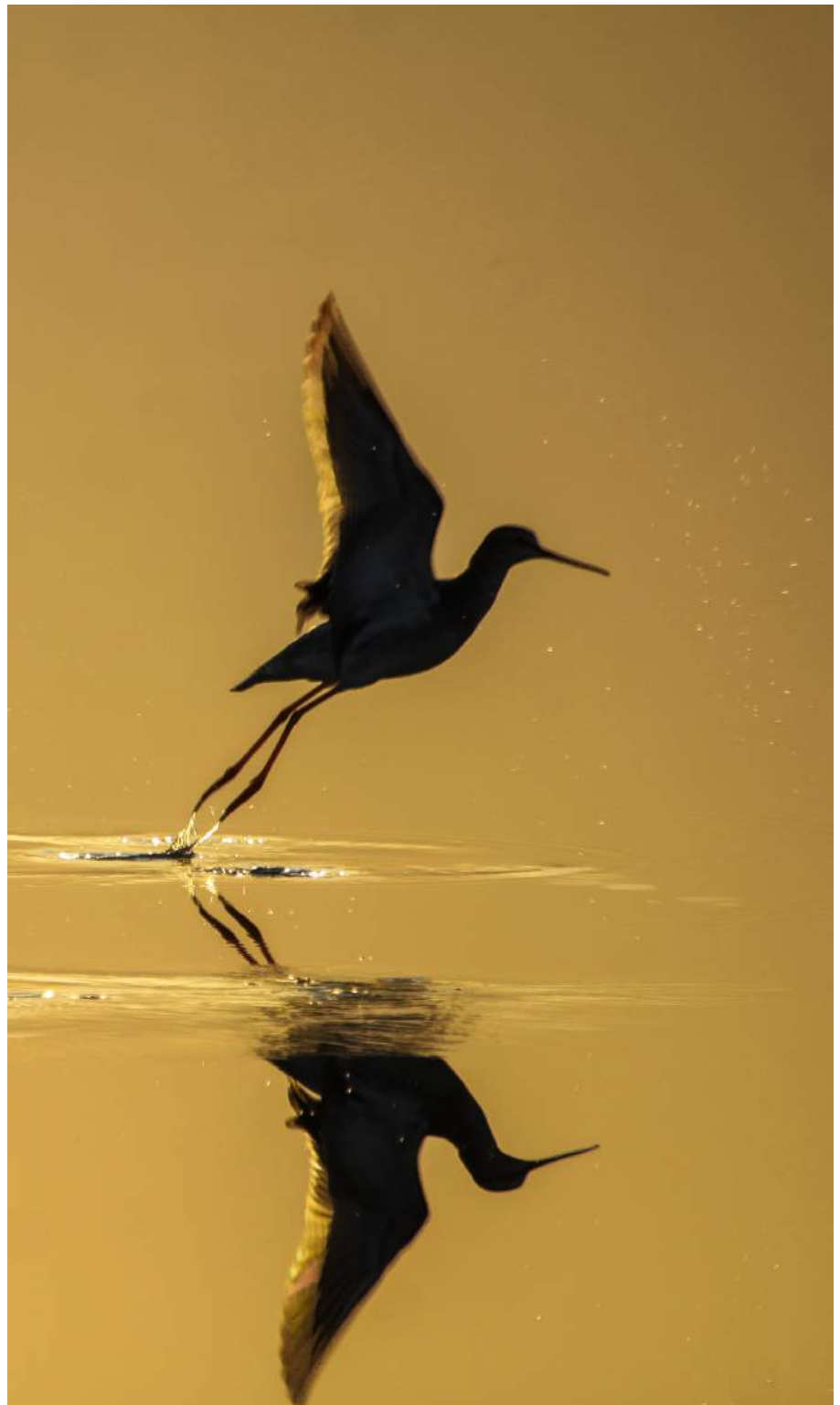
'The departure' Pak Thale, Phetchaburi, Thailand; Spotted Redshank.

We have been quietly watching a Spotted Redshank feed on the salt pans of Pak Thale in Thailand on a late January afternoon; finally it takes off as the sun sets. Where it is going we cannot tell; perhaps to roost, or to feed, or maybe it is embarking on that long slog back to its breeding grounds far to the north.

These salt pans have recently become synonymous with a birding tourist's best chance to see the enigmatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper, small numbers of which pass the northern winter in the area, but at the same time it provides a valuable stop-over point and wintering grounds for many thousands of other migratory waders, a place crucial to these birds' very survival.

As a result of this avian wealth it is likely that more and more birders will want to visit the area and in so doing they will highlight the importance of these pans, and the birds they hold, to the local community which will benefit from the increased economy that the visitors will bring. This in turn will increase the chances of the habitat being preserved by the local population and not destroyed or developed in an unsustainable manner.

At the same time though there is a real danger that unfettered access to the pans by



'The departure' — Prize winning photo; World Migratory Bird Day photo competition "Destination Flyways: Migratory Birds and Tourism" — Elis Simpson

many birders could compromise the area. closer and more intrusive interest in them; Birds may be increasingly disturbed by the often pursuing them relentlessly in search of greater human presence which is taking a the hidden rarity. - Elis Simpson

Fuente de Piedra, Andalusia, Spain — Peter Jones

The lagoon of Fuente de Piedra is located in the north of the province of Malaga, Spain. It is 50km from the Mediterranean coast and 410m above sea level. The lagoon is a seasonal salt lake with high salinity in winter and a salt shell in summer. The lake has a maximum width of 2.5km and a length of 6.5km, the maximum water surface area reaches up to 14km².

Forming one of many wader hotspots in southern Spain, the lagoon is perhaps best known for being the largest breeding site for Greater Flamingo in Spain; in fact it has been since Roman times! The importance of this lake and the surrounding marshlands was recognised and listed as RAMSAR site in 1982, the listing triggered further steps to protect the area with the Andalusia Parliament pronouncing it a 'Integral Reserve' in 1984, followed by planning as a 'Nature Reserve' in 1989. In addition the EU selected it as a Special Protection Area under the Bird Directive of the EEC during 1988. The nature reserve occupies 1,554 hectares and its Peripheral Protection Zone covers an area of 6,689 hectares.

For waders, and many other species of birds, the period from March through to May is a time when there is more intense activity and a time when both wintering and migratory birds show at the same time. Not surprising as the water level and vegetation are most stable during the wet season. Wintering and migratory waders are also joined by breeding birds during this period. Most common breeding waders are Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Little Ringed and Kentish Plover, with Eurasian Thick-knee breeding in the surrounding area. Depending on water levels, spring migration can be spectacular, particularly for waders in their summer plumage. Collared Pratincole, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Common Ringed Plover, Little Stint and Dunlin pass through in large numbers, whilst Temminck's Stint is recorded each year. Wood Sandpiper is another that can be



Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*
— Peter Jones



Fuente de Piedra — Peter Jones



Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*
— Peter Jones

common along with its close relative the Green Sandpiper wintering as well as increasing during migration in the spring period. Common Sandpiper is almost ever present, with Northern Lapwing also surprisingly common at times. Other species such as Grey Plover, Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank, Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit and Eurasian Whimbrel are regular but scarcer migrants.

Of course wintering birds, such as Eurasian Golden Plover, Northern Lapwing, Common Snipe and the odd Ruddy Turnstone, overlap with migratory waders. Also the area can attract the occasional rarity or two with Pectoral Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper and others being recorded.

So the area is hugely important on a broad basis for not just migration staging, but also wintering and breeding waders. The dramatic decline of many waterbird species throughout Europe can be attributed largely to wetland loss and degradation, with the expansion and irrigation of olive plantations one important reason for this in Andalusia and most likely

Spain in general.

Note: A global biodiversity hotspot, the wetlands around the Mediterranean are important for over 100 species of waterbirds represented in the Palearctic, North Africa and Middle-East regions. 150 species of migratory birds are estimated to use these wetlands as seasonal or stopover locations, this represents bird populations of 2 billion (IUCN, 2005)! As part of the most threatened aquatic ecosystems, more than 50% of Mediterranean wetlands have been destroyed by human activities. It needs urgent attention and study to see what impact irrigated crops, and particularly olive plantations, are having on the water level in wetlands.



Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
— Peter Jones

Record breeding season for kakī/Black Stilt — Liz Brown: Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai, New Zealand.

The 2014 breeding season has been record breaking for the team working to protect kakī/black stilt, one of New Zealand's rarest



Kakī/Black Stilt *Himantopus novaezelandiae* in captivity — Liz Brown

birds.

Kakī/Black Stilt are one of the world's rarest wading birds, with the wild adult population estimated to number between 70-80 individuals. Inhabiting the Mackenzie basin of New Zealand's South Island, they are non-migratory and spend their lives in often difficult climatic conditions. The species was at an all time low in the early 1980's, numbering only 23 birds. The main cause of decline for this species has been predation by introduced mammals (feral cats, stoats, ferrets, hedgehogs etc). Habitat loss through hydroelectric development and invasive weeds has also impacted on the population.



Releasing sub-adult Kakī/Black Stilt — Liz Brown

The Department of Conservation (DOC - a NZ government department) began a programme to save this endemic species when surveys in the 1980's showed a severe decline in the population. Over the past 30 years varying techniques have been utilised, and the management strategy has adapted to utilise new technology. DOC now operates a large scale captive breeding programme for the species, and aims to produce over 100 birds each breeding season, for release back in to the wild population. A sizeable predator trapping programme covering 23,000ha in the

Tasman Valley (a stronghold area for kakī) is providing protection for not only kakī but also other braided river species. These include Wrybill, Double-banded Plover, Black-fronted Tern, Black-billed Gull as well as several lizard and invertebrate species. Of the bird species, kakī are the only species that do not migrate to coastal or warmer climates for the winter.

The captive breeding programme revolves around seven captive breeding pairs, two of which are situated in large flight aviaries in Twizel in the heart of the Mackenzie basin, and five of which reside in aviaries at the Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust in Christchurch. During the breeding season eggs are collected from the captive breeding pairs, and also from all pairs found through monitoring the population in the wild. Both



Freshly hatched Kakī/Black Stilt getting a temporary band — Liz Brown

captive and wild pairs are multi-clutched to maximise the number of eggs collected. Between three – four clutches are usually collected from captive pairs, with the last clutch of eggs being replaced with artificial eggs to keep the pairs incubating. This means we can foster freshly hatched chicks, or pipping eggs to the pair so they retain their parenting skills by rearing chicks each season. On occasion we will also foster freshly hatched chicks to wild pairs. For eggs left in wild nests, 17% will hatch, and from this 17% only 4% will recruit into the adult population.

Eggs are artificially incubated and hatched at the DOC facility in Twizel, and hand-reared in groups of up to six chicks. Staff are vigilant about keeping as "hands-off" as possible, as the birds are destined for release into the wild. Model adults play kakī alarm calls every time the chicks are handled, so there is no chance of them imprinting on humans. At 30 days of age the chicks are fitted with permanent colour bands/rings and feather samples are taken for future genetic analysis. Then at 35 days of age they are moved to a large flight aviary outside.

Kakī are usually released into the wild at sub-adult age (around 9 months) at the end of their first winter. However some are released as juveniles (around 3 months of



Released sub-adult Kakī/Black Stilt — Liz Brown

age) when the capacity of the aviaries has been reached and there is a need to create room for the remaining hand reared chicks. Releases take place at several sites around the Mackenzie Basin, in areas where we are trying to "re-stock" the population. Released birds are supplementary fed on the captive diet for 6-8 weeks to ensure they have a chance to adapt to feeding on a natural diet and fending for themselves.

In the 2014 breeding season, we reached a major milestone by collecting over 200 eggs from wild and captive pairs. We collected 219 eggs in total, and hatched 170 chicks (not all eggs are fertile/viable). A large juvenile release was held in January, where we released 43 juvenile birds into the Tasman Valley. This is a huge achievement for the programme, and saw a number of changes needed to accommodate this number of birds. For the first time this season the team at the Isaac Conservation and Wildlife Trust in Christchurch were involved in hand-rearing chicks, rearing 25 of the chicks this season.

Kakī are "recruited" into the adult population at the age of two, and survival rates of released birds to recruitment are 24% for those released as juveniles, and 29% for those released as sub-adults. Unfortunately adult mortality can range from 20-25% per annum, so the population increase is very slow.

In the long term, we aim to recover this species to a level where we no longer need to use captive breeding and artificial rearing as a tool. However this goal is still a long way off, and for the immediate future we will continue to raise large number of birds for release. Advances in predator control are coming, and we are eagerly awaiting the chance to be able to reduce the predation rates and increase survival percentages.



Releasing sub-adult Kakī/Black Stilt — Liz Brown

A Patch in the Sun; Salinas, Tavira Portugal — Tony Bannister

Tucked between the fishing town of Tavira and neighbouring Cabanas, at the eastern extremity of the Ria Formosa in Portugal's Eastern Algarve, lies a narrow area of mixed salt marsh and salt pans, which is a haven for wintering waders and seabirds. The existence of a recent (2005) estate – 'Urbanizacao' of small and very reasonably priced terraced houses gave us the opportunity to spend a few of our remaining years not only in winter warmth and sun, but in close proximity to as good a birding patch as it is possible to find in Europe.

Most of the area is divided up into salt pans containing differing depths of salty or brackish water, or, since the site was damaged several years ago and is still being reconstructed for the manufacture of the famous Tavira 'Flor de Sal', basins filled alternately with rainwater and the mud which remains after evaporation. A perfect combination for the more than satisfying array both of wading birds and others who either pass through the area on migration or stay longer to rest or overwinter.

The Salinas, as they are called, are known to tourists principally for the permanent flocks of Greater Flamingo, which attract visitors looking for colourful and exotic holiday snaps to excite envy when they return, and some of these non-birding short term residents may notice at the same time the conspicuous large groups of Pied Avocets and Black Winged Stilts present in the same lagoons. What they probably overlook, though, are the hordes of smaller or less brightly plumaged birds feeding around them.



Pied Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*
— Elis Simpson

Present for the whole of the winter, at least from October to late March when we are in residence here, are Ruddy Turnstone, Little Egret, Black-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Common Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover and Dunlin in good numbers as well as lots of Common Redshank, which seem shy and tend to spook the other birds, Common Greenshank and Grey Plover, the latter often in large groups. Less dependable but still very frequent are Spoonbill, Eurasian Curlew and Eurasian Whimbrel, all of which can in any



A favourite roost of the Eurasian Stone Curlew — Tony Bannister

case be easily found in other parts of the Ria Formosa Natural Park. Regular solitary appearances by Green and Common Sandpipers and single Ruff also occur.



Ria Formosa — Tony Bannister

The Salinas are bounded on three sides by rivers and the tidal water which constitutes the Ria Formosa, so that on its outskirts it has a pronounced estuarine character. This means that at low tide many of the birds leave the salt pans to feed on the newly exposed mud. Although meaning that they are a little more difficult to see, this has the advantage that in these feeding zones they are joined by extremely choice coastal seabirds like Audouin's Gull, Slender-Billed Gull, Mediterranean Gull and Sandwich and Caspian Terns. As many as 5 examples of the latter have been seen roosting together on the beaches adjoining the mudflats.

Also worth a mention are the passerines which also abound in the taller vegetation

around the salt pans and the marsh. The most splendid of these has to be Bluethroat, which start to appear in late December and reach significant numbers by the end of February, before moving on further North and East. As well as these stunning chats there are flocks of finches together with numbers of pipits and buntings alongside the resident Sardinian Warblers, Zitting Cisticola and Crested Larks.

One of the most charming aspects of the area for someone who is present here for half the year is the great opportunity to really get to grips with the details of the plumage of these often very confiding birds and to distinguish with certainty between birds with similar features. I've certainly never had such constant excellent views of birds anywhere else in my life.

And on top of it all, the weather is excellent, if changeable, and the local produce, meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, of supremely good quality as well as being, by the standards in the rest of Europe at least, remarkably cheap. Couldn't be better, really.



The saltmarsh at half flood — Tony Bannister

Norwegian Eurasian Oystercatchers on the Wash — Ruth Walker

The Wash Wader Ringing Group (WWRG) undertakes colour-marking projects on four species (Grey Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit and Ruddy Turnstone) and also contributes to other colour-marking projects (e.g. Black-tailed Godwit and Common Greenshank). Colour marks allow individual birds to be tracked throughout their lifetime without needing to catch them more than once, allowing information about survival and movements to be collected more easily.



Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* with yellow flag AK — Ruth Walker

It is always exciting to see birds that have been ringed elsewhere, particularly when they come from another country. Colour ring re-sightings provide valuable information about where populations breed and spend the winter, where juveniles disperse to and by what route, how long birds live for and how these factors are changing over time. When this information is studied, it can reveal changes (declines or increases) at the population level; this can help scientists to

understand how birds adapt (or might be able to adapt) to changes in climate or land use for example.

In order to maximise the value of the colour ringing we do, members of WWRG usually spend one morning tide per fieldwork weekend looking for birds with colour rings and flags on the beaches along the Norfolk



Sandneset, Nordland in Norway where AK was ringed — Jim Wilson

side of The Wash estuary on the east coast of England. In February 2015, a small team of WWRG members visited Heacham Beach. Whilst reading Ruddy Turnstone colour rings, a small flock of Eurasian Oystercatchers landed close by and on scanning the group, we noticed one wearing a yellow flag engraved with the letters 'AK'. As WWRG does not put flags on Eurasian Oystercatchers, we knew that this bird hadn't been ringed locally.

After a little bit of searching, we found that this bird had been flagged in Norway by Jim Wilson, a former member of WWRG. 'AK' was caught during a cannon net catch close to Jim's home in the first season of a new colour marking project. Jim and his team flagged 18 birds in 2014 but intend to flag 50 birds a year over the next 10-20 years. Jim thinks that 'AK' is part of their breeding population and is looking forward to seeing if it returns this year. They haven't seen 'AK' yet,

but they have seen three other birds that were flagged as adults last year, including 'AL' that was caught at the same time as 'AK'. All three have been found defending breeding territories.

During the March 2015 WWRG trip, we were amazed to see another yellow-flagged Eurasian Oystercatcher on Snettisham Beach, which is adjacent to Heacham Beach. This time, the bird was 'AJ'. It turned out that this bird was ringed as a chick, about 1km away from the where 'AK' was ringed. As juveniles don't return to breed in their first year, Jim isn't expecting to see this individual back in Norway this summer.

It will be interesting to see how many more of Jim's birds we see over the next few years. One day we may even see a bird that WWRG ringed in Norfolk return wearing one of Jim's colour rings!

STOP PRESS: 'AK' FLOWN HOME!

Jim Wilson writes; *AK is back. It is in a flock of 140 in a fjord round the corner. It probably arrived sometime after 26 March because I flagged the whole flock 3 times before that date. It is in the middle of the picture below on the mudflat on the far side of the water.*



Flakstadpollen, Nordland, Norway where AK has recently been seen — Jim Wilson

Recent Wader Quest events and news

The winter period is the indoor meeting season and we have done 5 talks since the January newsletter to the East Berks RSPB local group, the Cheltenham Bird Club, the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society, The Parks Trust) and the Worcs and Malvern RSPB local group.

The last of these was our second visit to the group, so we must have done something right! The other talk that was a little different was for The Parks Trust in Milton Keynes. This was the first time we had given a talk to the paying public and, thankfully, we had a



Talking to The Parks Trust, Milton Keynes — Elis Simpson

full house, not a single seat was left unoccupied leaving Elis having to stand at the back.

The summer is when the car booting resumes. We found ourselves actually looking forward to the first of them. Sadly we were only able to get one in before the end of the financial year but it was a great success raising nearly £60.00. It was worth the effort of dragging ourselves out of a cosy bed at 5 o'clock in the morning on a cold and dark day that felt much more like winter than spring. In slightly better weather our second on Easter Monday raised a similar amount.

Wader Conservation World Watch — 7th & 8th November 2015

Following the success of last year's *Wader Quest Anniversary World Watch* we were much heartened by the response we got. However, we felt that we wanted the event to be about more than simply appreciating waders in all their glory, fantastic as they are.

We also wanted it to reflect the esteem in which we hold wader conservationists all of whom are working hard in their respective projects to make a positive impact on the successful outcomes of many waders' chances of survival.

Some may be professional, being paid (usually not enough) to do research or as a ranger or warden guarding precious wetlands, but many too are amateurs, volunteers who give their time freely for no reward other than the knowledge that they are making a difference.

We recognise the connection between research and conservation so they are all working to the same end and are therefore equally deserving of our gratitude.

It was therefore decided that the focus of future World Watches would be a celebration of wader conservation and conservationists around the world and to reflect that it would be renamed *Wader Conservation World Watch*.

We hope that people will want to take part not just because it is fun to go out and see waders, but also to show their solidarity and gratitude to wader conservationists everywhere, be they professionals or volunteers.



Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* Kotu sewage works, Western Division, The Gambia
— Elis Simpson



Some wader and shorebird festivals planned for spring 2015.

21 Mar-19 Apr **Farewell Shorebirds.** BirdLife Australia, Australia-wide participation.

15- 1 Apr **Godwit Days spring Migration Bird Festival.** Arcata, California, USA.

24-25 Apr **Wings 'n' Wetlands Festival.** Great Bend, Kansas USA.

24-26 Apr **Mountain Plover Festival.** Karval, Colorado, USA.

29 Apr-05 May **Waders in Working Wetlands: Shorebird Extravaganza.** Jennings, Louisiana USA.

01-03 May **Grays Harbor Shorebird & Nature Festival.** Hoquiam, Washington, USA.

01-03 May **Tofino Shorebird Festival.** Tofino, British Colombia, Canada.

03 May **Wader Watch.** 04.30, Rye Harbour

Nature Reserve. Rye, E.Sussex, UK.

07-10 May **Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival.** Cordova, Alaska, USA.

07-10 May **Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival.** Homer, Alaska, USA.

09 May **World Migratory Bird Day.** 23 May **Horseshoe Crab & Shorebird Festival.** Milton, Delaware, USA.



Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*, Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*, American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* and Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda* — Donna Dittmann



Magellanic Plover Project update; first birds ringed— Rick Simpson

Ricardo Matus who is leading the Wader Quest Magellanic Plover project team in Punta Arenas has given us the details of the first birds to be ringed for the project.

Back in January we posted a blog about this and introduced the team for the first time. Working alongside Ricardo we have his wife Olivia Blank who is a vet with Antarctic Experience where she is investigating diseases among seals. They have worked together on several projects including sampling of Red Knots, and currently a Ruddy-headed Goose captive breeding project as well. Alongside them will be Fernando Diaz.

The team went to Laguna Los Palos and found around 18 Magellanic Plovers including at least three juveniles. They set a couple of the new nets that Wader Quest had provided and captured a total of four birds including two fairly large juveniles.

The birds have been fitted with red flags with individual numbers. However sometimes reading these flags can be complicated and so the team are devising a combination of colour bands to identify the individuals in addition to the flag if this should prove difficult to see.

Initially the birds will receive the red flag on the left tibia and a metal ring on the right tibia. In addition they will have a colour band placed on one tarsus as per the picture below. In future as more birds are caught a combination of colour bands on both tarsi will be used.



Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis* a ringed and flagged juvenile ready for release
— Ricardo Matus

The team, having encountered large juveniles and seeing no evidence of nesting behaviour among the adults at the time of the capture, surmised that the breeding season was over and so no more young birds were likely to be ringed and certainly none in the nest. However they do hope to capture some more birds on Tierra del Fuego before



Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis*
— Elis Simpson



Fernando setting the Wader Quest nets on a blustery Patagonian evening — Ricardo Matus

they move off to the non-breeding grounds.

This is a promising start to the project. Clearly we have a very long way to go before we begin to get any meaningful results, but we have made some initial captures and now we have seven Magellanic Plovers ringed with hopefully more to follow soon as numbers increase in pre-migratory concentrations.

One of our aims is to fit geolocators to a number of birds with a view to tracking their movements away from the breeding areas; this we expect to start next breeding season but of course some research into suitable equipment and then purchasing will have to be done. Initially we want to locate at least four units, but we would dearly love to add more as these units have to be retrieved to

give up the data they contain which is much more haphazard and open to failure than fitting satellite transmitters. Our budget does not run to the high levels of funding that these transmitters would require.

At the moment the main funding for this project comes from donations that we receive at events and talks and also through the donate button on the website. If you would like to help us boost this sum and increase the number of geolocators we can purchase get your friends to donate, hold a coffee morning, run a marathon, fling yourself out of a perfectly good aeroplane or simply go to the website and make a donation in order to raise funds to help us finance this project.



Magellanic Plover *Pluvianellus socialis* wing detail — Ricardo Matus

New Zealand Dotterel, Tūturiwhatu — Mikey Watson: Gems of Aotearoa



New Zealand Dotterel, Tūturiwhatu, *Charadrius obscurus aquilonius* — Elis Simpson

Off-white chests are consumed by deep orange-red tones, post-breeding flocks deplete as pairs retreat and reappear in some familiar place. The time for distraction displays and alert fearless parenthood is upon them, the largest dotterel of 31 in its genus has held on another year.

Tūturiwhatu occurs as two subspecies - one in the north and one in the south. Together their total population has increased in the past 23 years by almost 1000 birds from an estimated 1500 in 1991. The southern form *C. o. obscurus*, however remains critically endangered and post breeding counts indicate fluctuations of around 250 birds. This is refreshing if compared to 22 years ago when they hit rock bottom at only 18

breeding pairs. They are still however, confined to Stewart Island, where they have access to their preferred breeding habitat, on exposed subalpine herbfields and rocky platforms above the tree-line.

The northern subspecies *C. o. aquilonius*, was estimated to stand at 2,175 individuals during a 2011 census. Although this number encourages hope in comparison to their southern cousins, historic records have revealed a significantly wider range. In fact both dotterels once ranged over most coastal areas of the country. Their rapidly declining distribution has informed experts of their vulnerability to human development. The highest concentrations can be found from North Cape to East Cape. Ironically and unfortunately a large chunk of this population has been restricted through the harbors of the Auckland isthmus, where grassy verges next to air-strips, roads and motorways a short-distance inland are all that remain for many.

Coastal development, increasing recreational activity and the presence of domestic cats and dogs in previously inaccessible areas have experts extremely worried about the persistence of the northern sub-species and an imminent decline seems inevitable. When adults are scared off the nest, eggs are vulnerable to overheating and

chicks are vulnerable to exhaustion when chased or frightened. Low breeding success is often the outcome at unmanaged sites which applies to around 75% of the population. Sadly the remaining 25% which are managed



New Zealand Dotterel *Charadrius obscurus aquilonius* — Elis Simpson

are the only birds showing signs of increasing. Their future hangs in the balance and for now the scales are tipping in favour of coastal development...for now.

Editor's note:

The two forms have now been split into separate species.

The southern form has the scientific name *Charadrius obscurus* and the English name Southern Red-breasted Plover and the northern form has the scientific name *Charadrius aquilonius* and the English name Northern Red-breasted Plover.



New Zealand Dotterel *Charadrius obscurus obscurus* — James T. Reardon

Opticron comes to the rescue — Rick Simpson

Opticron is a Founder Corporate Sponsor of Wader Quest. They have been very supportive sending us four pairs of binoculars last year and again this year and for that of course we are very grateful. These binoculars are put up as prizes in competitions or draws and have been very effective in encouraging the recruitment of sponsors.

Recently we identified two projects that would benefit from some additional optical equipment, sadly our funds do not allow us to make such generous donations yet but once again Opticron stepped up to the plate.

We met Grace Maglio when we were in Australia in 2013, she was assisting Chris Hassell with his recording of re-sightings of waders with flags and colour rings. We were struck by her enthusiasm and since then that enthusiasm has not diminished and she spends every possible moment working with waders and their conservation under the guidance of Clive Minton and Danny Rogers. She is now embarking on a project of her own for which the optics she owned were not adequate. Opticron has sent Grace a pair of binoculars and a telescope.



Grace Maglio using her Opticron binoculars and telescope on a Broome beach — Grace Maglio

We first came across the Dee Estuary Volunteer Wardens (DEVW) at the Martin Mere Birdwatching Festival in 2013 and earlier this year visited the Wirral to meet them at a high tide roost watch. As we talked we were struck by the volunteers' dedication and keenness to enlighten the general public about the trials and tribulations of being a wader. One of the things which Karen Leeming (Chair of DEVW) identified having a shortage of was optical equipment that they could use to show the public the waders in better detail. Opticron have sent DEVW a telescope.



The DEVW Opticron scope will be used to show waders to the public — Sheila Ryde

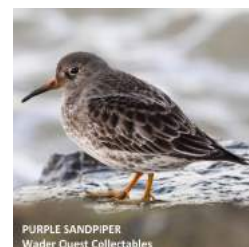
New Wader Quest Collectables and other items for sale



New Jabebo earrings; Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Eurasian Oystercatcher.



New Wader Quest Collectables pin badges; N°7 Dunlin and N°8 Black Stilt. The first consignment has not yet arrived; these are the artworks used to create them to give you an idea of what they will look like.



Wader Quest Collectables fridge magnets

New feature for Baird's and White-rumped Sandpiper ID?

—Rick Simpson



White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
— Elis Simpson



Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*
— Elis Simpson

We recently published this observation about a possible identification feature of these two species as a blog on the website. Some of you may not be accustomed to looking at the website so we thought it would be worth repeating here for your interest.

Having spent many hours looking at photographs, both our own and on the internet, and more recently at skins at the Natural History Museum in Tring, Elis and I noticed that there was a tendency for the feathering at the base of the bill and nostril position of White-rumped and Baird's Sandpipers to be distinctive and thought that perhaps this could be used as an additional feature to help ID a lone bird in a strange place.

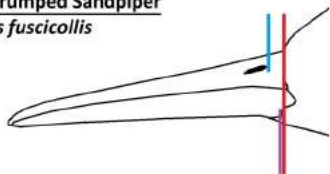
We do not claim that this is 100% across the board with all individuals and on its own would not be reliable (wear and tear and

moult should always be considered in any assessment of feather features), but here is what we have observed.

In the photos and artwork you will note that the shape of the feathering at the base of the bill on Baird's shows a distinct step because the feathering along the lower mandible extends much further forward than on the upper mandible giving the appearance that the bird has a protruding 'lower lip'. The feathering on the White-rumped is less visibly stepped in this way.

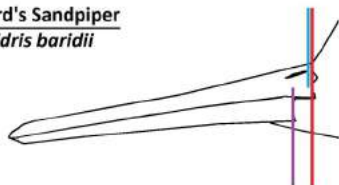
Note also the respective positioning of the nostrils. On Baird's they are very close to the feathering on the base of the upper mandible and the step on the lower mandible overlaps them. On White-rumped the nostrils are further from the feather base and the lower mandible feathering extends only as far as the start of the nostril.

White-rumped Sandpiper
Calidris fuscicollis



Extent of feathering on upper mandible

Baird's Sandpiper
Calidris bairdii



Nearest point of nostril to upper mandible feathering

Extent of feathering on lower mandible

On Museum specimens that we examined (118 Baird's Sandpipers from North, Central and South America and 145 White-rumped Sandpipers from North, Central and South America including the Falkland Islands and Caribbean Islands) this feature was consistent in the vast majority of cases. Some skins had been damaged in the facial area and it was not possible to determine the structure, others did not show the feature to such a degree as that shown here. We also took into account the position of the lower mandible in relation to the upper mandible. However we felt that the feature was consistent enough to mention as a possible aid to identifying these two cryptic waders when some doubt arises in the field.



Above; White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Below Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii*
— Elis Simpson. © BNHM Tring

If you look at the webpages of photographs for Baird's & White-rumped Sandpiper or look at your own photographs if you have them you can judge for yourself if we are onto something or not. Whether these small differences will be useful in the field we cannot tell but if you are lucky enough to be able to see both whilebirding, then we'd be pleased to hear from you.

Relative positions of feather edge and nostrils on the base of the bill on White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis* and Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* — Rick Simpson

Tell us your wader or shorebird story and send us your photographs to share with other sponsors in your newsletter.

We greatly enjoy sharing our own wader experiences whether they are personal or as Wader Quest representatives, and we also love sharing and showcasing the work of others, professional and volunteers alike. So we would also really love to hear more of your stories. If you have a wader related tale to tell, then please feel free to let us know and we will share it with other sponsors in future newsletters. It could be tips about

overcoming an identification conundrum, or a trip you made to see a certain wader or waders or maybe a strange tale of waders turning up where you would least expect them to. It could even simply be about a patch that you particularly adore or rate, as you have seen from Peter Jones and Tony Bannister in this very issue. Perhaps you have found a rare wader and wish to tell the tale of how it came about or how a tricky

identification was nailed. Just so long as the story has a wader theme, we would love to include your contributions to this newsletter.

If you don't feel that you are up to writing anything, then how about sending us your photographs, paintings or drawings that we can post in a photo gallery. Below we have set the ball rolling with some we have been given permission to use on the website in the past by friends.

Photo gallery



American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*
— Annette Cuniffe; USA.



Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*
— Tommy Pedersen; UAE.



Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
— Peter Sharland; South Africa.



Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Tryngites subruficollis*
— Lars Olsson, Sweden.



White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*
— The late Frank van der Kallen RIP, Brazil.



African Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini* — Owen Oertli; South Africa.



African Jacana *Actophilornis africana*
— Sue Oertli; South Africa.



Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
— Astrid Kant; Netherlands.



Water Thick-knee *Burhinus vermiculatus*
— Megan Sharland; South Africa.

Wader Quest Trustee news.

Wader Quest currently has nine Trustees:

- Chair: Rick Simpson
- Secretary: Rachel Walls
- Treasurer: Elis Simpson
- Board members: Allan Archer, Lee Dingain, Sue Healey, Chris Lamsdell, David Lindo, Oliver Simms
- Membership secretary (non Trustee): Debbie Armstrong

We are very pleased to welcome two new members of the team. Sue Healey who has joined us as a Trustee and Debbie Armstrong who has volunteered to help us in the capacity of Membership Secretary.

Next Trustees meeting and AGM 26th April 2015 — Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust London Wetlands Centre, London. See page 1 for details of AGM date change.

Wader Quest Contacts

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<https://www.facebook.com/WaderQuest?fref=ts>



<https://twitter.com/waderquest>



Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
— Elis Simpson

Recent funding and donations

- Waders in Working Wetlands - Shorebird Extravaganza, Louisiana, USA. £34.41 (\$50.00) 24/03/15
- STOP shorebirds from dying - BirdLife Australia: £53.02 (AUD100.00) - 26/03/15
- Wader Quest Magellanic Plover project. Latest: £1,338.71 / £2,000 - 15/04/15

Total raised and donated to wader conservation by Wader Quest: £6,514.36



Gay Birders' Club



Enabling contact between LGBT birders

