

Forthcoming talks:

01/10/2015 Buckinghamshire Bird Club. 19.45
Wendover Memorial Hall, Wharf Road, Wendover, Aylesbury Vale, HP22 6HF

19/10/2015 Preston Natural History Society. 19.30
St. Mary's Church Hall, Cop Lane, Penworthan. PR1 0SR.

20/10/2015 Huddersfield Birdwatchers Club. 19.30
The Old Courtroom, Huddersfield Town Hall, Ramsden Street, Huddersfield. HD1 2TA.

13/11/2015 Potters Bar and Barnet RSPB local group. 19.45
Tilbury Hall, United Reform Church, Darles Lane, Potters Bar. EN6 1BZ.

07/12/2015 Hemel Hempstead RSPB local group. 20.00
The Cavendish School, Warners End Road, Hemel Hempstead. HP1 3DW

Announcing Wader Conservation November; a celebration of wader conservation and conservationists.

This is going to be an exciting year for us as we plan a number of events throughout the year starting with the British Birdwatching Fair in August at which we will launch a joint kid's competition with Birdwatching Magazine, followed swiftly by the Falsterbo Bird Show in Sweden.

November though will be the busiest month for us this year or indeed so far, as we plan, with the help of many other organisations, a series of events that will run on each of the weekends in November this year to celebrate wader conservation and conservationists and welcome back waders to our shores in the UK.

We will kick off with our newly named **Wader Conservation**

World Watch which is a follow on from last year's successful **Wader Quest World Watch**. Once again we will be asking friends, supporters and sponsors around the world to help us amass a large weekend total of wader species sightings across all nine flyways.

This will be followed the next weekend by the **Wirral Wader Festival**, the first of its kind in the UK. The USA, Canada and some Central and South American countries plus Australia have led the way by celebrating waders (shorebirds) with local festivals and it seemed to us that it was high time we did the same here in the UK. The main event will be at Thurstaston Country

Park with satellite events at Hoylake, Red Rocks, West Kirby, New Brighton Marina and the RSPB Dee Estuary reserve.

The third weekend in November is the **WWT Northwest Birdwatching Festival** at Martin Mere. Our involvement here, apart from having a stand as usual, is that we will be exhibiting some of the artwork from the kid's competition.

The last weekend will be the second UK wader festival to be held jointly with the RSPB and Wash Wader Ringing Group in Northwest Norfolk at Titchwell and Snettisham RSPB reserves called the **Wash Wader Festival**.

More details inside on pages 2 and 3.

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presents:

Wader Conservation November

Planned events for November 2015

7th — 8th Wader Conservation World Watch

Venue: Worldwide, wherever you happen to be.

14th — 15th Wirral Wader Festival

Venue: Thurstaston Country Park

21st — 22nd WWT Birdwatching Festival

Venue: Martin Mere WWT Centre

28th — 29th Wash Wader Festival

Venue: Titchwell RSPB reserve



Wader Conservation World Watch

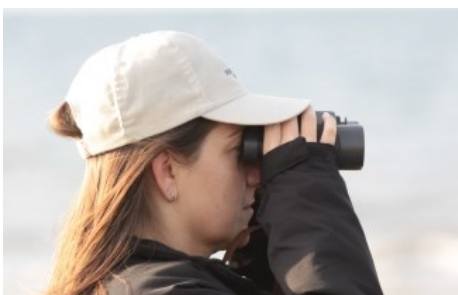


Wader Conservation World Watch 7th - 8th November 2015

Last year we held our first *Wader Quest World Watch*, we were very pleasantly surprised by the response we got having people send us their lists from each of the 9 flyways of the world resulting in 118 species of wader being recorded between us from 14 different countries.

It was pointed out to us that as there was also a World Shorebirds Day we needed to differentiate our celebration from that one. After some thought we felt that rather than simply celebrate waders we should be celebrating those that give their time, whether professionally or voluntarily, to their conservation hence the change of title to **Wader Conservation World Watch**.

The basic idea has not changed and we hope that all of our sponsors will feel that they would like to participate along with others around the world showing solidarity with those who carry out this often soul destroying work to protect our waders whether they are on their breeding grounds, on their wintering grounds or at their migration stop-over points. Indeed it is this



What waders will you find for **Wader Conservation World Watch?** - Elis Simpson

last area that is of the greatest concern these days with the events that are unfolding in the Yellow Sea area, a eco-clamity in the making and inexorably heading our way.

So, what we would like you to do is simple. On the weekend of the 7th and 8th of November, on either or both days, go out and look for as many wader species as you can find and let us know what you see. Your records will be added to the list and your name to the role of honour of participants.

We also suggest that you might like to add your sightings to eBird or BirdTrack in order to participate in citizen science, all sightings are of value in the collection of population and migration data. There is no requirement from our point of view to count the numbers of bird you see, but if you do so, your sightings will be of even more value.

If you know people who live in other parts of the world then tell them about the weekend and the event too, they may well be able to add a few vital species to our list, you never know.

We are counting on your support to make this even better than last year, hopefully we'll add a few species to the list beating last year's total and who knows, you may be the first to add Jack Snipe or Rock Sandpiper to the list, both of which were among the species that we missed last year!

So, make a note in your diary now, decide where you want to go to look for waders and start planning your **Wader Conservation World Watch** weekend, we look forward to hearing about what you have seen.

The Wirral Wader Festival; the UK's first dedicated wader festival

We had noticed a plethora of wader (shorebird) festivals across the USA and Canada, found a few more scattered around other parts of the Americas and we came across wader festivities too in Australia. We started to look for such things in the UK in which we could become actively involved; we found none.

It occurred to us that this was a situation that we should do something about and we contacted Karen Leeming of the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens (who wrote an article in the last e-newsletter) to see if she would be interested in participating in such an event. Happily for us she was greatly enthusiastic about the idea and so too were almost everyone she contacted as a result and we now have a fantastic group of people led by

Karen who are planning some wonderful activities for this event.

Among the things that look on the cards to be happening are a beach clean and mobile information units to be placed strategically at venues across The Wirral with live webcams at wader roosts which will be exciting to watch.

The main event will take place at Thurston Country Park and hosted by the resident rangers together with Shore Cottage Studio and a host of volunteers from all of the participating organisations. There will be stalls and information stands, including our own Wader Quest stand of course, along with a couple of second hand book sellers (I must get my list of desired book ready).

Those involved so far are Thurston

Country Park, Birdwatching Magazine, RSPB Dee Estuary reserve, Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Shore Cottage Studio, Dee Estuary Conservation Group and Destination-Wirral Council.



The Wirral is one of the most important wintering sites for Eurasian Oystercatcher in the UK

**Bird
Watching**



DEE ESTUARY
VOLUNTARY
WARDENS



**Cheshire
Wildlife Trust**



giving
nature
a home



WIRRAL



Volunteers required for the Wirral Wader Festival

The Wirral Wader Festival is being run jointly between various organisations, Wader Quest of course being one of them. Each organisation is going to provide as many volunteers as they can to help make the event run smoothly, so we should be no different. If you are free and would like to be

involved in some way with this event on either or both days, please get in touch initially with Rick and Elis Simpson to register your interest. We will need to have people to help run the raffle, organise the general public and generally help with organisation of the event. Elis and Rick will not be able to

attend the venue on the day prior to the festival as they will be giving a talk in London on the Friday night, however it is hoped that Sue Healey (Wader Quest events co-ordinator) will be able to be present and she may well require some help with setting things up.

Wader Quest & Birdwatching Magazine kid's drawing competition

When we first thought about the idea of having events to celebrate waders and their conservation in November we contacted Matt Merritt of Birdwatching Magazine to see if he would be interested in supporting the project. Happily for us he was and one of the ideas to come from our discussions was to perhaps hold a drawing competition for kids to mark the event.

The current plan is to jointly launch the competition in August at the British Birdwatching Fair on our respective stands and have judging in late September or early October to allow schools to participate.

Both Wader Quest and Birdwatching Magazine have stands at the **Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Northwest Birdwatching Festival** at Martin Mere each year and we wondered how we could incorporate our attendance at this super event this year into our **Wader Conservation November** programme.

The answer came after speaking to the event organiser Victoria Fellowes at Martin Mere WWT when she kindly agreed that we could display some, if not all (depending on volume) of the submissions to the competition at the festival. She then went further, above and beyond the call of duty, offering to display the competition entries during the whole month of November at the Martin Mere centre.

Details about categories, age groups, prizes and how to enter the competition will be announced very shortly once they have been finalised.

If you have a child in your family, get them started drawing waders now, as one thing is for sure, this competition will certainly have a wader theme to it.

If you work in education and think your school or organisation may be interested in participating get in touch with Wader Quest.



- Elis Simpson

The Wash Wader Festival

When we decided to try and organise the UK's first wader festival we contacted two potentially interested parties, the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens and the Wash Wader Ringing Group. To our delight both organisations expressed an interest. The latter also suggested we should contact the Northwest Norfolk RSPB staff which turned out to be a great call.

We did just that, and after a meeting at Snettisham with Carrie Carey, and Jim Scott of the RSPB and Matt Merritt of Birdwatching Magazine it was decided that the best way forward was to hold the event at Titchwell RSPB reserve and feature Snettisham RSPB reserve as a satellite venue.

Titchwell has always been one of our favourite wader watching spots as you can get so close to some of the birds in the first hide and the beach in winter is alive with waders of all shapes and sizes, it is also of course the first place we visited on our worldwide search for waders on day one of our adventure.

Snettisham is of course justly famous for



High tide roost gathering at Snettisham RSPB reserve - Elis Simpson

the fantastic spectacle of thousands of waders flying in unison in what looks like a sky dance over the water as the tide rises and falls each side of its height.

The main event will be held at the Titchwell reserve and it is hoped that we will be able to take people to enjoy the

spectacle of the Snettisham wader flocks in a pre-booked excursion when the high tide roost is taking place.

It may also be possible to arrange a ringing demonstration with the WWRG; however that will depend entirely on weather, tide times and of course the birds.

Bad news from the Little Curlew tracking team — Inka Veltheim and Clive Minton; Australian Wader Study Group

I am afraid this is a 'bad news' story. All four satellite transmitters on Little Curlew which were sending out regular signals until mid-May have now stopped transmitting. From elation just a few weeks ago when five birds carrying transmitters set off from north-west Australia we are now extremely disappointed that everything seems to have come to a complete halt.



Little Curlews - Ric Else

We were hoping (against hope) that some of the transmitters might start up again if part of the problem has been overcast weather conditions the birds have encountered in China, thereby causing a lack of solar recharging of the batteries. But it is now six weeks since the last transmission and I fear that we really have to accept that we are not going to obtain any further information from these transmitters.



Little Curlew fitted with transmitter - Tz-Yu Liao

At the moment we really have no clue to the cause/s of this sudden demise of the units. Are there possibly technical difficulties in this batch of units, which have resulted in unusually short transmission lives (meant to be 1 + years)? Evidence from other users of the same MTI product (Reece Pedler and in Alaska) has not revealed any significant problems with performance or longevity of these satellite transmitters so far. It seems hard to believe that all birds have, almost simultaneously, been predated by animals or captured by hunters. Perhaps the most likely cause is that the birds have shed their transmitter harnesses. It may be significant that the timing of most losses coincided with periods of migration when significant distances were being traversed. It is just possible that the loss of accumulated fat used up in these journeys allowed the

harnesses to become too loose.

We are continuing to seek comparable satellite transmitter information from other researchers around the world, particularly those who have used satellite transmitters on shorebirds, to help us work out what may have gone wrong.

Whilst the disappointment of the failures is at the forefront of our minds, we should recognise that we have still learned a great deal about Little Curlew behaviour from these satellite transmitters over the last three months. This includes new knowledge about: local, non-breeding, movements in Australia; migratory departure locations in Australia; and northward migration routes and stop over sites.

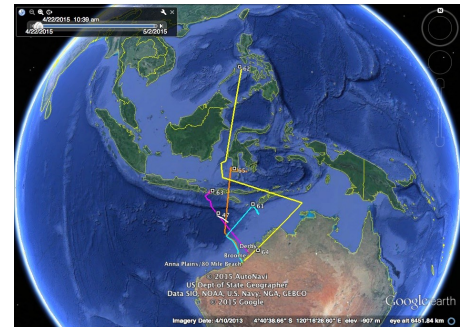
All five birds, which had transmitters put on at Anna Plains and 80 Mile Beach in mid



March 2015 - map supplied by Inka Veltheim

-February continued to roam around the grasslands of Anna Plains station until the end of March. With them was the sole remaining Little Curlew with a satellite transmitter from the Roebuck Plains, Broome, November 2013 deployment. This bird moved back and forth between Roebuck Plains and Anna Plains before setting off again on this year's northward migration (from Roebuck Plains). One of the Anna Plains/80 Mile Beach birds, from the 2015 deployment, also moved to Roebuck Plains before northward migration. Another one spent several weeks in the Fitzroy River estuary near Derby before its transmitter stopped around the time the first two Little Curlew left on migration from Anna Plains/80 Mile Beach. We therefore have strong evidence that Little Curlew depart on northward migration from a variety of locations in North West Australia.

All birds confirmed the migration strategy, which first became apparent during the 2014 northward migration. Most birds stopped in the Indonesian region (1000-2000 km) for between 1-2 weeks. Most then moved on to some part of the Philippines for another short stop-over. The Chinese coast was the next destination and it was at this stage where most of the transmissions from the Little Curlew units

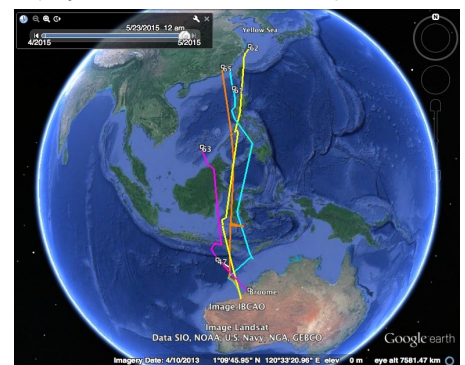


May 2015 - map supplied by Inka Veltheim

ceased – we had fixes from two birds, which had reached the coast. This project has shown that Little Curlew seem to be different to most other wader species leaving NWA on northward migration. Most other species put on large quantities of fat (up to 100% addition to their fat-free weight) and many complete their journey (5000-6000 kilometres) to the Chinese coast (including the Yellow Sea) in a non-stop flight. Little Curlew on the other hand seem to put on much less weight (40-60%) before departure and make several stops on the journey before reaching China. Late departure and several stop overs prior to reaching China also correlates well with (maybe a consequence of?) Little Curlew not completing their wing-moult until early March, whereas most other waders complete it in January or early in February. Energy resources are not normally devoted to weight accumulation until the main moult of the primary feathers is complete.

At this stage, it appears likely that there will be no further emails this year concerning the movements of Little Curlew carrying satellite transmitters.

We will be carrying out a thorough investigation to try to be sure that the performance of satellite transmitters we deploy in the future is much improved. This



July 2015 - map supplied by Inka Veltheim

will include exploring different harness design options.

Meanwhile thanks for everyone's interest and support.

Waders with the power to inspire — Oliver Simms



Black-tailed Godwits - Elis Simpson

When people ask me how I got in to birdwatching, the honest answer is I don't really know. I sort of started for the sake of it when I was 13. I had always had an interest in animals and enjoyed seeing the large, more spectacular birds but, struggling for things to keep me occupied in the summer holiday, I seem to remember starting to write down all the birds that I saw. One thing though is certain, two different days watching waders helped cement my passion for birds.

A few weeks after I started listing the birds, a family holiday in the Peak District gave me the opportunity to enhance my ever growing list. I can't remember how but somehow I had heard that Old Moor RSPB near Barnsley was the best site in the area and I managed to persuade my family to stop "briefly" as we drove back from a trip to York. The "brief" stop lasted over two hours and the only reason I was dragged away was because the reserve was closing. I wrote down 83 species for these two hours, no doubt some of them farcical (Marsh Warbler certainly!), but it was the waders that really stood out for me.

Up until this point, I only recall seeing three species of wader (Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew and Eurasian Oystercatcher) in my life and all before I started properly birdwatching. For whatever reason, waders were a family that I had seen in my field guide that caught the imagination and I was desperate to see more of them. Indeed, I had

hoped that I would kickstart my wader list at Old Moor but nothing prepared me for the sheer variety of species. In the first hide, some local birder helpfully explained to me how to separate Common and Green Sandpipers, as these became the first new wader species of the day for me.

We then walked round to the "Wader Scrape Hide", the name alone causing me excitement, and I was blown away. Amongst the thousands of Lapwing (exciting enough itself for me at the time) were Eurasian Golden Plovers, Dunlin, Common Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, Common Greenshank and, the real prize, a full summer plumaged Spotted Redshank, which an RSPB volunteer had helpfully pointed out to me. I seem to remember being quite disappointed when I was told it was a Spotted Redshank as I had been desperate to see a Common Redshank not a Spotted Redshank! It was only last year, almost 8 years later, that I saw my next pristine summer plumaged Spotted Redshank.



Spotted Redshank - Elis Simpson

7 months later and my birdwatching obsession was still growing but I had not had a comparable experience with waders. I had been to several sites that I thought would be good for waders including Rainham Marshes RSPB, Rutland Water and WWT Slimbridge but only seen 3 or 4 species each time, though I had seen Common Redshank on each occasion! I had a free day in the Easter Holidays and decided that I was going to go somewhere by train. I decided on Rainham Marshes and I called them up to see if a 14 year old could join the RSPB without his parents present. An hour later they phoned back to say that I could but I would not be allowed in the reserve unaccompanied due to "open water". Furious, I set about finding somewhere else to go and I heard that Two Tree Island in Leigh was good for waders so I

decided to go there.

I had never birdwatched in a saltmarsh or estuary habitat so I did not quite know what to expect but I was hopeful of a couple of wader species. As I walked up towards the hide, I saw what I initially took to be a gull mobbing a buzzard. I raised my binoculars and realised it wasn't a buzzard but a Carrion Crow so I was confused as why the "gull" was so small. The penny soon dropped, this was my first Pied Avocet! As I got in to the hide, the excitement continued as the saltmarsh was packed with waders. There must have been 12 or so species of wader, I'd never seen anything like it! Highlights for me included my first Ruddy Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Whimbrel and Grey Plover. Looking back, if I had the same day now, the highlight would have probably been the Eurasian Cuckoo singing outside the hide but, at the time, all I cared about was the waders.

Almost eight years since these first experiences with waders, they still capture the imagination. Whether the excitement of finding a Common Sandpiper on my generally waderless patch, a day on the Norfolk coast watching swirling flocks, twitching a transatlantic vagrant or enjoying Blacksmith Plovers in South Africa, I still take pleasure in these wonderful birds. Although I have seen rarities including Greater Yellowlegs, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Short-billed Dowitcher, one breeding species still eludes me; the Eurasian Dotterel. I am determined this year to track them down!

My story highlights the importance of protecting waders. It is essential not only so that future generations can enjoy them as much as I have but also because they have a special power to inspire a love for all birds and, as a result, a determination to conserve them.



Sanderling - Elis Simpson

Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve, Portbury, Avon, UK — Bernie D'Arcy

Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve is an extremely special wetland reserve that offers connectivity, acting as a gateway for wildlife into the Gordano Valley. It is situated between Portishead and the Royal Portbury Docks and its management was taken over by Avon Wildlife Trust in 2010. The reserve contains a mosaic of habitats including grazing marsh, large open pools, nesting islands, rhynes, hay meadows and secluded ponds.

The most significant factor in the decision to create Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve is its proximity to the both highly designated and internationally important Severn Estuary. It is well known that the estuary acts as an important flyway for migrating birds of many species, both in Autumn and Spring as they journey to and from their breeding areas in the north. In Autumn in particular, many Scandinavian and Russian birds pass through our area to escape their severe winters and some will stay to overwinter. What is less well-known (and documented) is that some of these birds will veer away from hugging the coastline and take a shortcut inland through the Gordano Valley on the Portbury Wharf to Clevedon axis. The Gordano Valley has a rich concentration of nature reserves with 10 AWT reserves and a National Nature Reserve. Portbury Wharf has been surveyed regularly by bird enthusiasts and experts since its establishment with good numbers and diversity being recorded. A personal highlight for myself is watching the owls thrive on the reserve. We keep a continuous cover of long grass in strategic locations to provide hunting grounds for our resident barn owls. We also support several resident Little Owls, and the reserve has been used by Short-eared and Long-eared Owls. Furthermore, there is a ringing station in a secluded area of the reserve



Eurasian Oystercatcher - Pete Evans

Highlights have included a Eurasian Wryneck and a European Nightjar. This monitoring is a vital part of reserve management as it informs us of what birds are using the reserve and changes over time, which in turn informs practical management.

A great deal of habitat management work



Common Snipe at Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve - Pete Evans

has been carried out by volunteers and contractors to enhance the reserve for waders and wildfowl. An existing large nesting island was levelled and covered in stone in the Autumn of 2010 and to our delight has provided an over wintering home for 80-120+ Northern Lapwings each year, in a location that they previously didn't use in



Northern Lapwing - Pete Evans

such numbers. Other birds regularly using the pools include Common Snipe, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank and breeding Eurasian Oystercatcher and we've also been visited by a Eurasian Spoonbill, a Eurasian Bittern, a Grey (Red) Phalarope and Little Ringed Plovers. The thrill of being adjacent to the Severn Estuary is that you never know what may drop in and make use of this valuable staging area. Avon Wildlife Trust has also carried out major improvements to the network of Pools. Large deep ponds which were originally designed to be scrapes were adjoined resulting in the creation of a larger water body more appealing for waders. A new nesting island was also created in 2013 and has had breeding Eurasian Oystercatchers both summers since its creation. Furthermore, the reserve has a conservation grazing regime to achieve suitable breeding and feeding grounds for the bird population.

Of course it is not just birds that find the area so valuable. The variety of habitats within Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve support a wide range of plants and animals. The large

pools, ponds and extensive rhyne (watery ditch) network provide an invaluable wetland habitat for rare species such as the European Water Vole and European Otters. The rhyne network within the reserve is a small part of a much larger network that passes through our other wetland reserves within the Gordano Valley thus providing a corridor for the movement of wildlife around the region. The open water at Portbury Wharf also provides a haven for invertebrates like dragonflies and damselflies e.g. the rare Hairy Dragonfly. Mammals such as the European Hare have found refuge here and over 10 species of bat can be found hunting for insects across the reserve, including the rare Lesser Horseshoe and Nathusius' Pipistrelle.

More information about Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve is available at: www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/ Ringing records along with an impressive photo gallery can be viewed at: www.portbury-wharf-ringing.co.uk.



Barn Owl - Rod Holbrook

The amazing tale of the third Hudsonian Godwit for the UK and its US counterpart — Rick Simpson / Gregg Gorton.

The fact that the UK's third ever Hudsonian Godwit turned up in April of this year was a story worth relating here in itself, especially as we got to go and see it, but it was made all the more interesting when I read again one of the guest blogs that Wader Quest has featured earlier this year.



Hudsonian Godwit (dark bird in centre of picture) with Black-tailed Godwits - Elis Simpson

Back in March the Wader Quest blog had a riveting guest blog: *Tinicum's Most Famous Bird, 35 years Later (Homage to Johnny Miller, 1939-2009)* - Guest blog by Gregg Gorton in which he told us tales of the Black-tailed Godwits that have strayed across the Atlantic.

I looked at the details he gave for the third record of the species and found that he told a fascinating story about a unique, probably never to be repeated, situation and that also involved a birding legend when he was still a young college boy (but only just).

"Then, lo and behold, yet another Black-tailed Godwit (the third in the mainland U.S.) was spotted by a New Yorker named John Yrizzary barely three months later, on May 22nd, in the West Pool at Brigantine (now Forsythe) National Wildlife Refuge on the coast of New Jersey. And how could this not have been that same Pea Island bird moving expectantly northward, hoping in its earnestly birdish way to find its breeding grounds, even if from the wrong side of the Atlantic Ocean? Frantic alerts about this astonishing discovery went out quickly, mostly by phone, but sometimes

even by means of that old-fashioned form of communication, a postcard. One of the birders who received such a card in his mail was the young Ted Parker, who lived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and was nearly done with his senior year in High School: "Black-tailed Godwit seen at Brigantine May 22nd. Good authority," the card read, though the signature is unfortunately illegible. This incredible find was the first of what turned out to be a remarkable run of godwit discoveries encompassing all four of the world's species between May and mid-Fall on the New Jersey coast that year. In fact, that is still believed to be the only known occasion when all four godwit species were present together in a single location, allowing some incredibly lucky birders to check off a godwit "grand slam" in a single day! This rarest of phenomena was a special boon for young Ted, since 1971 was also the year he had chosen for what turned out to be his record-breaking Big Year in the lower 48 states (626 species, smashing both Stuart Keith's North American record of 598 and also the 600 "barrier"). Ted would later go on to become one of the acknowledged authorities on the birds of South America before his tragic death in an air crash in Ecuador in 1993.



Birders looking for the USA's 3rd Black-tailed Godwit: Tinicum 1979 - John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge; via Gregg Gorton

However, when that unlikely postcard arrived at his house, Ted, having gotten permission to work on a "special senior project" instead of having to attend classes, was in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Texas) chasing birds with his friend Harold Morrin. We can presume that he would have read the card upon his return at the end of May, along with a second card telling him about two Curlew Sandpipers and a Bar-tailed Godwit, also at "the Brig." But he and Harold took off straightaway for their long-planned visit to

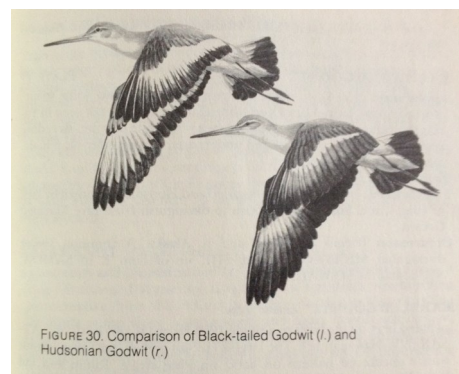


FIGURE 30. Comparison of Black-tailed Godwit (l.) and Hudsonian Godwit (r.)

Douglas Pratt; via Gregg Gorton

the northwestern U.S. to tally as many species as possible there. The first actual record we have of Ted's seeing the Black-tailed Godwit at the "Brig" was on July 9th, one week after the dynamic duo of Parker and Morrin had hopped on board a "pelagic" trip on the old Bluenose Ferry from Bar Harbor, Maine, to Nova Scotia, Canada. While waiting to board, Ted had met Jon Dunn and Lee Jones—young birders, both of whom would later become well-known experts and field guide writers—and they struck up an immediate friendship. After the ferry trip, they all stayed at Ted's house in Lancaster and then he took them for a visit to the "Brig" on July 9th, where the trio saw the rare blackwit, along with a Ruff and a Reeve. Later in the summer, Ted was able to rack up the other three godwit species, and that special quartet of birds thus became part of the remarkable listing achievement that rocketed him to fame as a birding prodigy."

For us here of course the news was disseminated via social media and emails not the trusty old postcard from days of yore and rather than sharing the bird with a couple of mates as Ted did, we shared our bird with hundreds of other twitchers.



The Godtwitchers - Elis Simpson

See Oliver Simms' round-up featuring the Hudsonian Godwit and many other waders that have been reported in the UK this spring on page 18

Community Wader Conservation in action: The Birds Count; And So Do We — Becky Bowen: Save Our Shorebirds



Western Snowy Plover, Ten Mile Beach,
- Becky Bowen

Shorebirds are in trouble — even our shorebirds in this remote, quiet corner of the Northern California coast.

The plight of the Western Snowy Plovers brought it home: Global population was estimated at 2,100 adult breeding birds when the National Audubon/American Bird Conservancy watchlist was published in 2007. The tiny shorebird's habitat had been chewed up by coastal development. Only 28 major nesting places were left on the North American Pacific Coast, the only place on earth where the bird is found.



Ten Mile Beach, Mackerricher State Park
- Becky Bowen

One of those 28 remaining nesting sites was Ten Mile Beach in Mendocino County, CA., a 6.4 km stretch of lonely open beach in Mackerricher State Park, about 16 km north of the town of Fort Bragg, CA (pop. 6,000).

The fact that the beach had been declared part of a 1,285 acre natural preserve did not prevent an invasion of human pleasure seekers equipped with off-road vehicles, shotguns, alcohol and other drugs, galloping horses, low-flying private aircraft, and off-

leash dogs on the beach. A significant number of Western Snowy Plovers had settled on the beach only to find it loaded with human and predator disturbance. A chick didn't have a chance of surviving the 28 days it took to learn how to fly. To make matters worse, non-native invasive European beach grass had destroyed fore dunes and turned sand berms into solid high walls; nesting space on the open sand was disappearing into "king" tides fed by rising sea levels. Predictably, Western Snowy Plover nests disappeared from Ten Mile Beach from 2007-2013.



Western Sandpipers, Virgin Creek Beach
- Becky Bowen

Then a nest was found on the beach in May, 2013. Three chicks hatched but survived only a few days. Dog, raven and human tracks were found at the abandoned nest.

We hated what we saw when we birded on Ten Mile Beach. We were parents, grandparents, business people, scientists, a retired ABC television production manager, an attorney, teachers, artists, writers, a nurse and a retired United Airlines flight attendant. We cared deeply about shorebird protection, but were at a loss. "What," we asked, "could we do with a small number of people and no budget?"

It turns out what we could do very well is count. And we had birding skills to contribute to State Parks resources restoration work and federal shorebird recovery programs. Volunteers began to count shorebirds on the beaches of Mackerricher State Park, including



Black Turnstone, Ten Mile Beach
- Becky Bowen



Wandering Tattler - Becky Bowen

Ten Mile Beach. Now, nine years into the project, we continue to collect data and make it available to scientists.

What we do:

Practice citizen science: The project, named Save Our Shorebirds, is an on-going year round Mendocino Coast Audubon shorebird conservation program in partnership with California State Parks. Every year, 12 to 20 twenty volunteers gather shorebird data in Mackerricher State Park. We have spent more than 7,800 in the field since the inception of Save Our Shorebirds in 2007. Some time in the near future, we will have



Marbled Godwits, Ten Mile Beach
- Becky Bowen

counted and recorded 500,000 birds. Volunteers are supervised by State Parks environmental scientists. The youngest volunteer was 9 years old, the oldest was 80-something.

Collect data: Five contiguous sites along 15.7 kilometers of Mackerricher State Park coastline are surveyed on foot. Data include bird censuses and records of human and predator disturbance to shorebirds. Data are shared with United States Fish & Wildlife Service, California State Parks, and Cornell University's international e-Bird database, and are available at no charge to agencies, institutions, and schools.

Provide public education and outreach: We'll talk to anybody about shorebird protection—on the beach, in the classroom, at public hearings about wildlife protection, in court, or on the air. (cont'd)

The Birds Count; And So Do We — cont'd

What we found:

More than 60 per cent of shorebirds we survey are on the National Audubon/American Bird Conservancy watchlist, described as shorebirds in decline. The list was prepared in 2007. [Cont'd on P9]

Common Ravens have moved into shorebird habitat on Ten Mile Beach in Mackerricher State Park and have learned how to forage alongside shorebirds. They have been observed digging up sand crabs and foraging with Black Oystercatchers on mussel beds.



Common Raven - Becky Bowen

Major disturbances to shorebirds on Mackerricher State Park beaches are the result of human activity on foot, on horseback, or from above in the form of small private aircraft, radio-controlled model airplanes, or kites (perceived by shorebirds as winged predators). Dogs, on-leash or off-leash, trigger severe stress to shorebirds that are nesting—or trying to rest and refuel on heroic migratory journeys. Park regulations prohibit dogs on two beaches where shorebirds rest and forage, but people come with dogs anyway, because of ignorance of regulations or disregard for local enforcement authorities, often unavailable to come to the remote location.

Only four species of shorebirds are year-round residents of the area: Western Snowy Plovers, Spotted Sandpipers, Black Oystercatchers and Killdeer. All other shorebirds on



Red Knot with Sanderlings at Mackerricher State Park's Ten Mile Beach in May, 2015. Red Knots are listed in county records as extremely rare in spring - Becky Bowen

our survey routes are either migrating to and from Arctic breeding grounds and points south—or wintering here. Monthly data summaries for the two key shorebird survey sites indicate delineation of separate fall and spring shorebird migration is blurring. Good numbers of shorebirds are found on those beaches for 11 months a year (almost no watchlisted shorebirds are found here during the month of June).

Help comes from unexpected places: With the support of a former county judge and a mandated community service system, some SOS surveyors can work off fines for non-violent crimes (especially off-leash dog citations) by serving as Save Our Shorebirds "volunteers." This is a powerful educational tool in a community where word of mouth is a major source of local news. A total of 1,354.50 hours of mandated volunteer SOS time has been served with only two failures (one person disappeared and one was overwhelmed with "too many life problems"). Generally, after an initial period of strongly-expressed anger, there is a sudden and complete epiphany on the part of miscreants. They "get it." Some become skilled birders.

We could not do this by ourselves. We have help from biologists, environmental scientists and law enforcement at California State Parks. We also have enjoyed the complete and continuing support of Audubon

California and National Audubon Society, non-profit organizations that have helped us obtain grant funding to work with local community college marine science students.

Not everything is perfect for shorebirds on the Mendocino Coast. There are good years and not-so-good-years for watchlisted birds. Our instincts tell us when the watchlist is updated, many shorebirds we count may move from the non-watch list to the watchlist. The non-watch list includes Black-bellied (Grey) Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Black Oystercatcher, Willet, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Least Sandpiper, Long and Short-billed Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope, Red (Grey) Phalarope, Dunlin, Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, American Avocet and Pacific Golden Plover.

Good news has come for Western Snowy Plovers in the last two years thanks in large part to a major State Parks habitat restoration project in Mackerricher State Park. Western Snowy Plover numbers are higher and some birds are staying on Ten Mile beach during breeding season from March to September.

Our data are available on the Mendocino Coast Audubon website at www.mendocinocoastaudubon.org Click on the Conservation tab, then SOS.

Save Our Shorebirds Western Snowy Plover Yearly High Count Mackerricher State Park 2007-2014

Source: SOS data sheets and
SOS e-Bird High Counts

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2007	0	0	0	0	0	1	12	21	24	42	8	32
2008	25	31	5	7	0	1	5	14	16	34	29	31
2009	33	31	14	1	2	0	8	23	24	33	38	38
2010	41	31	34	11	2	0	10	23	28	38	31	42
2011	27	32	16	13	1	0	14	22	34	45	53	55
2012	55	49	35	2	2	0	18	28	45	37	53	48
2013	36	38	23	13	3	1	14	30	41	53	53	48
2014	48	42	41	28	0	2	31	47	52	63	70	63

The Birds Count; And So Do We — cont'd

Watchlisted Shorebirds Recorded On Save Our Shorebirds Surveys Mackerricher State Park 2007-2014

Rock Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ptilocnemis</i>
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	<i>Tryngites subruficollis</i> **
American Golden-Plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i> *
Western Snowy Plover	<i>Charadrius nivosus nivosus</i>
Wandering Tattler	<i>Tringa incana</i>
Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>
Hudsonian Godwit	<i>Limosa haemastica</i> **
Marbled Godwit	<i>Limosa fedoa</i>
Black Turnstone	<i>Arenaria melanocephala</i>
Surfbird	<i>Aphriza virgata</i>
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i> *
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Semipalmated Sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i> *
Western Sandpiper	<i>Calidris mauri</i>

*rare **accidental

Save Our Shorebirds Average Shorebird Sightings Per Year 2007-2014

	Watchlisted	Non-watchlisted	Total Sightings
2007	14,064	7,016	21,080
2008	10,007	6,170	16,177
2009	12,487	6,388	18,875
2010	8,139	4,709	12,848
2011	24,237	7,346	31,583
2012	16,103	6,982	23,085
2013	11,744	6,547	18,291
2014	20,211	9,990	30,201
Total	116,992	55,148	172,140



Western Snowy Plovers, Ten Mile Beach, Mackerricher State Park - Becky Bowen



Angela M. Liebenberg
- Becky Bowen



Becky Bowen
- Andrea Jones

"The reason I like shorebirds so much is they are beautiful, funny, precious, graceful, entertaining, picturesque and charming. They didn't do anything to deserve the fate dealt to them by humans. And I'm on their side," says Becky Bowen (left). Becky Bowen is volunteer data compiler for Save Our Shorebirds. She and Angela M. Liebenberg (far left), Environmental Scientist, founded Save Our Shorebirds in 2007. Ms. Liebenberg formerly was an Environmental Scientist at California State Parks and now is an Environmental Scientist at California Fish & Wildlife.



Save Our Shorebird volunteers conducted a shorebird art contest in 2007 in Mendocino Coast elementary schools. Everybody won a prize and the kidart was made into shorebird protection posters installed at Mackerricher State Park beaches. The art also illustrated a children's book called "The Life and Times of Pink Lady," the autobiography of a Western Snowy Plover. The book was funded by a grant from the Mendocino County Community Foundation. It was presented to every coastal elementary school child on the Mendocino County coast.

Eurasian Curlews in the Peak District, UK — Kim Leyland

The Eurasian curlew has been classified as vulnerable in the recently published European Red List of Birds (Birdlife International, 2015), due to severe population declines in its European range, and is classified as near threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. In the UK it is an amber-listed species (Birds of Conservation Concern 3) with population declines of over 30% recorded since the 1970s. As such it has been the subject of recent and ongoing studies, including by the RSPB.

The Peak District's Eastern Moors have, since 2010, been under the management of the Eastern Moors Partnership, a joint venture between the National Trust and the RSPB. The Eastern Moors support a small population of curlew, and 2015 is the fourth year of targeted monitoring of the curlew population. Previous survey work has indicated a breeding population of around 20 pairs, remaining relatively stable over the last decade or so.

In 2012 and 2013 some limited nest finding work was undertaken, with three and four nests found in each year respectively. In all seven cases the nests were predated at the egg stage – with the evidence suggesting a mix of corvid and mammalian predators. In light of the known declines, this was particularly worrying for a small population, and it was decided that some more detailed work was necessary.

I was employed as a research assistant for spring 2014 and together with Rachel Bennett, the Project Officer at the Eastern Moors Partnership, we aimed to survey the curlew population, increase the number of nests found and, with the help of some nest

cameras supplied by the RSPB Conservation Science team, try and establish productivity rates and which predators were involved.

Finding curlew nests is notoriously difficult and, numerically, we had only a little more success than in previous years, however with the addition of the nest cameras, and combined with Brown & Shepherd-style upland surveys (walking defined transects across 1km survey squares recording bird breeding activity) along with lots of extra days in the field, we were able to build up a picture of the curlew population of the area. We located and monitored seven nests from six pairs of birds and found an additional three pairs with recently hatched young from the population, which we also re-established to be around 20 pairs in total. We recorded three predation events at the egg stage (one badger and two fox) and one of recently hatched chicks (fox), all of which occurred at night.



Recently hatched chick - Rachel Bennett

In all, of the six pairs where nests were located, 10 chicks hatched giving a hatching rate of 1.67 chicks per pair. Fledging rates proved almost impossible to determine – once the young leave the nest they range a considerable distance with the adults. Using a typical value of 40% fledging success (we already knew three chicks had been lost without leaving the nest) gave a productivity rate of 0.67 chicks fledged per pair.

This is around the value known to be required to maintain a stable population and, though admittedly from a small sample size, supports the similarly stable population estimates over the years. This was tentatively good news considering the widely reported decline in curlew populations across much of the country and further afield.

Fast forward one year, and the breeding season is drawing to a close once more. While not targeting curlew to the same extent this year (I have been carrying out a wider upland bird survey of the Eastern Moors, and Rachel has been fitting in nest finding around much other work) we

managed to find and monitor five nests which hatched a total of 17 chicks – double the hatching rate of last year – and none of the nests were predated. This is obviously good news, and the upland surveys indicate the population is remaining stable too.



Nest cam; adult with chick

- Eastern Moors Partnership

It is difficult to draw conclusions as to whether this is a genuine sustained increase in productivity, and as to what might be responsible. Between 2013 and 2014 some trees and bushes, which provided carrion crow perches and lookouts, were removed in areas favoured by curlew. This may be significant in that no apparent corvid predation has been recorded since 2013, but this was not a factor in the last year's increase. The grazing regime across the estate has been changed under the current management plan, from mainly sheep to mainly cattle, partly to help reduce *Molinia* grass dominance and improve sward diversity, which should benefit species such as curlew, but no specific work to reduce potential predation has been undertaken. Further work is planned for future years, to continue both monitoring and habitat improvement, and the Eastern Moors is also part of a wider nationwide curlew study by the RSPB Conservation Science team, which began this year.

Kim Leyland is a Freelance Bird Surveyor & Ecologist currently working for the Eastern Moors Partnership.



Eurasian Curlew chicks - Rachel Bennett



Brooding Eurasian Curlew with nest camera

- Kim Leyland

The Legend of the Hakawai — Mikey Watson: Gems of Aotearoa



Campbell Island Snipe - Kyle Morrison.

Campbell Island Snipe (*Coenocorypha aucklandica perseverance*) is a subspecies of Subantarctic Snipe.

In Māori mythology it is believed that one of the eleven sacred birds of Raka Maomao (God of the winds) known as the Hakawai will impart from the heavens where it resides and descend towards the earth each night. Interestingly, although little-known, this is more than just a myth.

The Muttonbird Islands are a group of



Campbell Island Snipe (adult below, chick above) - Kyle Morrison.

unoccupied islands located in Foveaux strait; they were visited only during months of sooty shearwater harvesting for meat and oil. They were also the first and last places where Europeans claim to have heard the Hakawai. The sound was said to mimic a "shell passing overhead" or "a cable chain being lowered into a boat" and would only stir once darkness had crept in.

Dr Colin Miskelly put the lens of science over the stories and decided to investigate the phenomenon. His findings revealed that small birds known as snipe perform nocturnal aerial displays which consist of vocal and non-vocal components. It was discovered that the Hakawai sound of legend is made by air currents causing

vibrations in the tail feathers of diving male snipe. This would appear to be an accurate description of the observations made by Polynesians all those centuries ago.

Beyond these islands, the vast southern ocean extends towards the most inhospitable land on earth; Antarctica. Hidden and isolated within this world of water are mysterious lands which endure the relentless swells thrust upon their walls of sheer rock. Amidst these lands of ancient harmony is Motu Ihupuku, a.k.a. Campbell Island (11,300 ha). One km further south is where New Zealand's southern most extremity resides - the 19 ha Jacquemart Island.

Europeans first contact with Motu Ihupuku occurred in 1810, and it's believed that the Island's ancient harmony was cursed from this day forward. Norway rats almost certainly ran amok after the wreck of the *Perseverance* in 1828 and over time their population grew to such an extent that hardly any place on earth could rival their density. After the removal of cattle and the subsequent die off of cats annual fluctuations hovered between 50,000 and 200,000 rats.

After decades of discovering, classifying and naming birds, it was thought that all members of the New Zealand bird brethren had been accounted for. This was the consensus for 50 years until one morning in November 1997 when a survey team consisting of three men and two dogs landed on Jacquemart Island in search of an already named species and the world's rarest duck - the Campbell Island Teal. However, Fiddich one of the bird-tracking dogs had other plans and within minutes of their arrival had chased a bird some 20

meters around the base of a bluff, where the frightened bird was flushed landing close by. Acknowledging the importance of Fiddich's discovery, the goal became to capture and I.D this mysterious bird. Fiddich led the team 50 meters down a slope and pointed towards their bounty. The small bird was surrounded, captured and photographed. Fiddich and his team had stumbled upon a previously unknown subspecies of snipe.

It remains a mystery as to why snipe weren't sighted on the main Campbell Island before this day. Mysterious because Campbell Island is the most studied of the Sub-Antarctic islands and snipe are more than capable of strong flight, willingly crossing short distances across water. Maybe they had attempted to land on Campbell only to be met by an untimely death at the hands of a plague of hungry rats. This would suggest that the small island of Jacquemart had hosted a population estimated at less than 30 individuals and been their place of exile for 170 years!

After many years of planning and trialling, the world's largest, most ambitious pest eradication scheme was carried out. 120 tonnes of brodifacoum was dropped strategically by three helicopters over a matter of days aiming to put an end to the Campbell Island rats' reign of terror. This unprecedented undertaking killed every last rat occupying the entire area of almost 113 square km.

New Zealand Snipe are among the least known of our birds, the average New Zealander won't have heard of them, let alone seen them. Even researchers have a tough time understanding much of their ecology; this is ironic because snipe are the most characteristic birds of New Zealand's biogeography.

In May 2003 snipe footprints were found on Campbell Island near monument harbor, opposite Jacquemart. The species has been conserved and their escape from exile has restored a legend.

[Gems of Aotearoa](#) is a facebook page showcasing New Zealand's natural world and native animals.



Campbell Island Snipe footprints - Kyle Morrison.

Drone donation goes to a new home in the Netherlands — Rick Simpson

Earlier this year Wader Quest Founder Sponsors Gail and Phil Pickett from Lancashire, UK, very kindly contacted us to say they had a micro drone that they wanted to donate in the hope that it would be used for wader conservation.



Micro Drone - Gail and Phil Pickett

We put out some feelers and had a few applications from projects who thought that they might be able to put the drone, which has a camera attached to it, to good use.

After looking at the various projects we decided to send the drone to Jan van Gils of NIOZ Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research for his project in Mauritania and Oman where he is studying habitat use and prey choice in tropically wintering shorebirds particularly looking at Red Knot *Calidris canutus* and Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*.

Their research in Mauritania is focused on Red Knots in which they recently found inter-individual variation in diet relating to body size, with smaller individuals consuming more seagrass and larger individuals consuming more molluscs.

Every year they colour band more than 100 Red Knots in Mauritania enabling them to find these individuals while they feed during low tide. Once the birds have been located the drone will be used to take a picture from above, enabling them to identify the habitat (i.e. percentage seagrass coverage) in which the bird is feeding. Then by getting closer to the ground with the drone video footage could reveal the bird's diet (seagrass or molluscs) which could then be related to its body size using the measurements taken when it was ringed.

In Oman they are interested in the role that Crab Plovers play in the intertidal community specifically looking at whether the feeding habits of these birds, eating and displacing crabs, affects the impact these crabs have on the seagrass using a drone in a similar way that used for Red Knots.

Seagrasses are globally threatened and play important roles in coastal systems supporting much marine biodiversity. It is important to discover the impact that Red Knots and Crab Plovers are having in order to manage this valuable ecosystem.



Jan flying the Micro Drone - Jort van Gils

Waders : A poem by Mya-Rose “Birdgirl” Craig

Long legs
lots of different colours:
brown, grey, black
many species of waders.

They wade into the water
for bugs in the muddy marshes.
The beetles are their favourite!
Beady black eyes,
long bills,
pointy bills,
curly bills,
to probe the mud for lunch!

Long, thin or fat bodies,
waders vary,
their call is theirs
no sound bite to copy.
Humans drain the wet
lands to reclaim
land for themselves.
So your habitat
is in danger, waders
Yes, you are endangered!



- Elis Simpson

Dedicated to Wader Quest
By Mya-Rose Craig, Birdgirl In collaboration with Ita O'Donnell

Waders Of Cudmore Grove, Essex, UK — Dougal Urquhart



View over Cudmore Grove fields
- Dougal Urquhart

A perfect location for enjoying waders can be found on the Essex coast on Mersea Island. At the eastern end of the Island is Cudmore Grove Country Park, which sits at the mouth of the Colne estuary with commanding views over a big expanse of mudflats at low tide – a haven for waders.

Cudmore Grove is celebrating this year being a country park for forty years, a 25ha site owned and managed by Essex County Council. The park includes amenity grassland, beach, grazing fields and saltmarsh all adjacent to intertidal mudflats.

The richness for wildlife of the area has been recognised by a variety of important international designations. The country park's intertidal habitats and grazing fields are part of the Colne Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest and as a result are internationally recognised as a Ramsar site and Special Protection Area under the European Birds Directive. The park's intertidal beach and saltmarsh are also part of the Colne Estuary National Nature Reserve. Nationally important waders of the estuary include Common Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Sanderling, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit and Eurasian Curlew.

In 1989 the country park acquired some 14ha of adjacent coastal grazing marsh which had just been designated as an SSSI for its wintering flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese. These two fields have continued to be grazed each summer by a local farmer, allowing the grass to be kept short for the Brent Geese. In 1993 some ditching works were undertaken to raise the water levels to improve the site for breeding waders as well as for wintering waders and wildfowl. The local waders soon discovered the richness of invertebrate life in the newly flooded fields. Currently the fields are managed in a ten year agreement with

Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme to help breeding waders as well as providing a favourable site for wintering waders.

Since 1993 the fields have become a favourite feeding and roosting site for many species of wader with 28 species now recorded over the years as using the site. The usage by certain species has changed during that time with some species using it less while others have grown to like it in ever increasing numbers.

Greatest usage is in mid winter when there are high spring tides which cover every inch of the saltmarsh in the nearby estuary. Waders are also attracted onto the fields if recent heavy rains have saturated the grassland. Mix in some big flocks of wintering ducks and geese too and the site becomes a fantastic spectacle. The fields are easily watched along three sides of the perimeter



Wader field - Dougal Urquhart

from the seawall and other local paths. The country park can get lots of public even in mid winter but there is no access onto the fields, so the birds can happily roost or feed up with no disturbance.

Over the years there have been some big flocks of waders recorded on the fields with peak counts at times of 3000 Eurasian Golden Plover, 2500 Dunlin, 2000 Black-tailed Godwits, 450 Common Redshank, 400 Common Ringed Plover, 200 Northern Lapwing, 200 Eurasian Curlew, 110 Common Snipe and 120 Ruddy Turnstones. Several other wader species are regularly noted in smaller numbers too and when you throw into the mix 2000 Dark-bellied Brent Geese, 2000 Eurasian Wigeon and 1000 Eurasian Teal, then the site can get very overcrowded at times!

No two days are ever the same for waders noted on the fields and even a morning visit will be different from an afternoon visit. Over the years I've got in the habit of trying to look

at the birds on the fields at least once a day throughout the seasons, logging notable wader flocks as well as any uncommon species. At times it feels like an addiction, but then each walk always throws up something different to marvel at. Even just the quickest of glances at the fields during a high tide roost gives me that daily wader-fix I crave!

All these birds on the fields attracts passing raptors such as Peregrine, Merlin, Marsh Harrier and Sparrowhawk while others such as Common Buzzard, Hobby, Kestrel and Hen harrier have played their own havoc with the birds here. For anyone birdwatching here, there can be some memorable displays of twisting and turning acrobatics from wader and wildfowl flocks when something like a Peregrine flies across the fields. Godwits one way, Eurasian Golden Plovers another way, Dunlin off to the left, Common Redshank to the right, Common Snipe zig-zagging away while the Eurasian Curlews rise mournfully off and away. It all happens quickly as your eyes try to find the reason for the chaos. Visitors walking the seawall are stopped in their tracks and no-one can fail to look up to watch the dispersing flocks. Of course the big noisy blanket of the Brent Geese flock passing overhead provide the goose-bumps down the back of the neck

Aside from the familiar waders such as Northern Lapwings and Common Redshank, the one that has really taken to the fields over the years has been the Black-tailed Godwit. In the early days it was notable seeing 300 roost in the fields but numbers have since increased and now we have marvelled at 2000 birds that gathered during October 2014.

Numbers of waders trying to breed in the spring have always been low, probably due to the predation by foxes and Carrion Crows.

However a handful of Northern Lapwings continue to nest each spring, (cont'd)



Godwit roost - Dougal Urquhart

Waders Of Cudmore Grove, Essex, UK — cont'd

Common Redshank have raised chicks in while a pair of Eurasian Oystercatchers try and go through the motions without success. However the biggest breeding wader surprise happened in 2014 when two Pied Avocet chicks appeared from the thick cover of rushes in a flooded corner of the fields and successfully fledged a few weeks later. There had been no indication that the Pied Avocets were even nesting here prior to the chicks appearing. This spring there were two failed attempts by up to nine pairs of Pied Avocets to nest on a nearby saltmarsh lagoon at the park, high tides being one of the causes of failure.

Over the years local birdwatchers have enjoyed the sight of a Grey Phalarope spinning around for ten days a few autumns back, one or two Jack Snipe hiding amongst



Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
- Dougal Urquhart

the rushes in recent winters, the occasional Wood Sandpiper stopping off on passage while even a Common Greenshank, Spotted Redshank or a Ruff can still generate some local excitement.

Of course if there aren't enough waders on the fields to generate any excitement, then there's always the huge expanse of mudflats on the other side of the seawall to look at with waders in winter dotted about as far as the eye can see. But that's another story.

Any birdwatcher wanting to visit the site can do so at any time of the year, by parking in the main car park of the country park. There is a bird hide overlooking a pond on the west side of the grazing fields. The fields are only a five minute walk from the car park. Wrap up warm if you're coming in the winter and check the tides.

You can also follow what birds and other wildlife has been seen at the country park by reading the blog – merseawildlife@blogspot.com – Dougal Urquhart; Country Park Ranger .

Finding the feeding grounds of Giant Snipe in Brazil — Lee Dingain

Many waders are associated with some of our most beautiful, remote and untouched environments such as arctic tundra and even the high Andes. But one of the world's most dramatic and poorly known species makes its home in degraded lowland cattle pasture in South America – the Giant Snipe *Gallinago undulata*.

Two main populations comprising two subspecies are known – the nominate *G. u. undulata* of northern South America, and *G. u. gigantea* of south-east Brazil, eastern Paraguay and eastern Bolivia. . Very little is known about their ecology and population status. As well as pasture they inhabit wet grasslands, swamps and even dry savannah, and in Brazil they nest during the austral summer. Although the population is believed to be declining, most likely as a result of habitat loss (especially cerrado in Brazil) and some hunting pressure, they are categorised as Least Concern under the IUCN Red List due to their large range.

Some authorities suggest the two races may be separate species. Plumage and vocalisations don't support this, however, as the scientific name suggests, the southern race is much larger reaching 45 cm in length and weighing up to 500g—that's 20% larger than a Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and 16% heavier. Along with a heavy broad-based bill, the birds look huge, especially in flight..



Giant Snipe *Gallinago undulata gigantea* REGUA, Brazil - Lee Dingain

Despite their size, Giant Snipe remained one of South America's true avian enigmas. Nocturnal and highly secretive, few were fortunate enough to have seen one – mostly as poor flight views of birds displaying high overhead at dusk. Even as recently as five years ago Giant Snipe were described as "almost impossible to observe on the ground", *Honkala and Niiranen* (2010).

However, over the last few years a reserve in the Atlantic Forest of south-east Brazil, Reserva Ecológica de Guapiaçu (REGUA), located just a couple of hours from Rio de

Janeiro, has become known amongst birders as one of the most reliable sites (if not *the* most reliable) to see this notoriously difficult species. The visitor lodge at REGUA even began to offer guided excursions to see Giant Snipe - not to catch a glimpse of one in flight in gloomy high-light, but to watch them at close range feeding at night on the ground by torchlight.

These fortunate birders have the determination of REGUA's excellent bird guide, Adilei Carvalho da Cunha, to thank. Adilei, an ex-hunter who has long (cont'd)

Finding the feeding grounds of Giant Snipe in Brazil — cont'd



Giant Snipe - Leonardo Pimental

abandoned the gun for a pair of binoculars, has become a very well respected South American bird guide and has a particular passion for night-birding. A decade ago the strange call of the Giant Snipe was frequently heard from the lodge as birds displayed overhead at night. As with other known sites, Giant Snipe sightings at REGUA most often

constituted poor flight views at dusk. Then in 2007, Adilei decided to attempt to track the birds to find out where they went.

He knew that Giant Snipe were roosting in the REGUA wetland by day, flying out of the reserve at dusk, presumably to feed, but other than minimal knowledge of their ecology gleaned from the literature and some downloaded calls, had little else to go on. He decided to concentrate on searching the large areas of rough wet cattle pasture located adjacent to REGUA as this is where many Brazilian Teal *Amazonetta brasiliensis* headed to feed at night.

After many hours in the field, over a period of months, searching suitable looking wet grassland and listening for the distinctive croak-like call that Giant Snipe make on the ground, Adilei eventually located a few birds feeding in the long grass. Rather like the Jack

Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus* of Europe, Giant Snipe seldom flush from a distance, and instead squat lower in the grass and freeze to avoid detection. Moving very slowly, Adilei found he could approach to within close range of the birds and watch them feeding in his torch light.

Several feeding areas have now been identified at REGUA, and nowadays many visiting birders come away having experienced incredible views of this secretive bird just a few metres from their feet. On occasions, up to four individuals are seen in a couple of hours! However, REGUA is aware of the impact such activities may have on the birds. Playback is used as sparingly as possible and excursions are limited in frequency to keep disturbance to a minimum.

For details on visiting REGUA go to www.regua.org.

Global Flyway Network; 2015 season in China — Adrian Boyle

Our study site on the Luannan Coast is split in to a number of different areas for our recording purposes.

Mostly we write about 'Nanpu' (north Village). This stretch of mud and seawall gets most of our attention. Why? Simple, it gets most of the birds, probably as it has had the least reclamation work done on it and has been able to keep its ecological character more intact than Zuidong and Beipu (south Village). However, between May 21 and May 24 this season it was 'going off' (Australian saying meaning it was very good)! Over those five mornings of scanning, we read 328 individually marked Red Knot and of those 89 of those were 'new' - we had not recorded them before during this season. Great data and well worth those 3am alarms?

The mudflats at Beipu are 4.5km long and approximately 4km wide at the lowest tide. The flats have undergone many changes since our first visit in 2009. When we first surveyed Beipu, we could only drive to the end of the seawall from the Nanpu / Beipu creek and the road was a 'dead-end'. Now with the reclamation of more mudflat area, there is a road that allows us to continue on and round to the area we call 'North Beipu'. The scanning we do at this site is on shrimp ponds where birds roost and feed. This site only seems to have birds there from about mid-May onwards. There is possibly no suitable



Red Knot *Calidris canutus* - Adrian Boyle

food before then.

During our field work in 2009 and 2010 we were regularly scanning at Beipu with thousands, or tens of thousands of Red Knots frequenting the site. However, soon after our field work season finished in 2010, work started. This was the 'usual' method of many large industrial mud-pumping ships, pumping mud out of the mudflats and over the seawall in to the adjacent salt ponds. So it damages two shorebird habitats in the one process. The mud is extracted to a depth of 15m. This brings up anaerobic sediments. The heavy sediments settle and remain in the ponds while the finer sediment and water run back out of sluice gates placed in the seawall for this purpose. As the fine black water and

sediments run back over the mudflats we think they smother it and cause and the benthos to 'suffocate'. This is what we saw happen at our southern-most study site of Zuidong. Luckily for the birds (and our studies!) there was a commercial dispute and the destruction stopped after a year and only about 25% of the Beipu stretch of mudflats had some pumping done on it. However, the run-off of the fine anaerobic sediments covered a far greater area and in 2011, 2012 and 2013 shorebirds were only found in very small numbers there. In 2014 occasionally we saw medium sized flocks there, but we did very little scanning at the site.

This year on May 20 this all changed rather dramatically. On May 20 we looked across

Global Flyway Network; 2015 season in China — Adrian Boyle



Intertidal reclamation in progress - Adrian Boyle

onto the mudflats of Beipu from the Nanpu / Beipu Creek (as we always do but never really expect to see much) but there in the distance we saw thousands of Red Knots feeding on the mud.

Will they be there the next day? Would they turn up as soon as the tide recedes? Do we put all three scanners in this area and risk missing out on Nanpu (which we know will have birds)? We have learnt over the years at this study site that when something is just right for birds, in terms of tide, wind and light conditions on the coast, or water depth and wind in the ponds, it rarely lasts so it was decided to risk all three scanners. A 3am alarm start so we would arrive just as the mud was exposed on an out- going tide. At the seawall we split up and positioned ourselves where we thought the birds would land. The wind was light and the sun was just lifting through the smog as the mud became exposed. Then came the birds and the gamble had paid off. The birds landed right in front of all three of the chosen positions and we 'cleaned up'. It was our biggest day for the season with no less than 84 different Broome colour-banded Red Knots being recorded that morning.

It has taken a few years for the Beipu mudflat to be suitable for birds again, but this season shows it can really be great. It would seem mudflat habitat can cope with small amounts of change and rehabilitate itself to a degree. However, it was only luck that saw

the development at Beipu stop and if it had gone under concrete we wouldn't have this story to tell. However, as with all our sites there is still no protection for this area and each year we visit, we are unsure if this habitat will exist.

Further north, adjacent to Beipu a 2sq km area of mudflat is currently being destroyed for aquaculture ponds.

Our main target when we are here is to collect sightings of colour-banded birds from NWA (northern Western Australia) but we

don't allow any flag or band to go past our telescopes un-recorded. It is too good an opportunity to collect data for other banding studies throughout the EAAF.

This was our best ever season for records from the GFN colour marking project in NWA, total sightings (1,221) and individuals (437), remarkable when these birds are caught and marked 6,400km away. One of the Red Knots we sighted is a minimum of 26 years old. It was first caught and given a metal band in Roebuck Bay, Broome on October 10th 1992 when it was already a minimum age of 3. It was then re-trapped on September 16th 2007, then a minimum age of 18 and given the colour-bands combination 1RLLB. It has been seen twice this season here on the Nanpu mudflats. This is the oldest Red Knot known to us in Australia.

And in addition to the colour-bands we have recorded 3,264 flags and bands for other projects!

It is now time for us to leave the Luannan Coast for another year. We hope to be back again next year (if funding can be found) to follow the fate of the enormous numbers of migratory shorebirds that flow through here each spring season.

Thanks to everyone who has assisted us this season. And particular thanks to Leiming who is a constant help to us day in and day out.



A flock of Red Knots - Adrian Boyle

UK Wader Summary April-June 2015 — Oliver Simms



Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica* at Mere Heath - James Packer

Spring is not usually the time for rare American waders but this spring proved to be exceptional. The headline discovery was Britain's third Hudsonian Godwit at the superb Meare Heath nature reserve in the Avalon Marshes in Somerset on 25th April. This species has been hotly anticipated since a confusing bird at Frodsham Marsh in August 2012 that eventually turned out to be an atypical Black-tailed Godwit. The bird was unsurprisingly popular, which surely must have been helped by the supporting cast of Great White Egret, Bittern and Garganey in the stunning surrounding area. It did initially frustrate many twitchers as it went missing between 26th and 29th April before settling down until it was last seen on 3rd April.

The period certainly had a "Hudsonian" theme as, remarkably, a Hudsonian Whimbrel was superbly found by George Kinnard at Pagham Harbour in West Sussex on the 9th June. This is only the ninth record for Britain and certainly the most co-operative individual as it was still present at the end of the month. The site put in a claim as the best wader watching spot of the spring as the Hudsonian Whimbrel was joined by a Terek Sandpiper for 2 days from the 22nd June. In addition, a Black-winged Stilt was on the adjacent Sidelsham Ferry Pool intermittently from 13th April – 7th June, briefly joined by a Red-necked Phalarope on 30th May. Those making



Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus* at Church Norton - Dorian Mason

the trip to Pagham had the added incentive of the long-staying Greater Yellowlegs just over the border in Hampshire at Titchfield Haven NNR. The bird was initially found on 11th January but went missing until it was re-found on 11th April.

The only possible challenger to Pagham's title of the best wader site of the period was the RSPB's Frampton Marsh in Lincolnshire. The 11th and 12th June were particularly spectacular with Broad-billed Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper and Red-necked Phalarope on the same pool! Other highlights in the period were two Black-winged Stilts on several dates and a couple of Temminck's



Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* at Titchfield Haven - Peter Moore

Stints. The site also proved one of the best for more regular passage waders like Wood Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Little Stint.

Other rare wader sightings included a Black-winged Pratincole at Bothal Pond in Northumberland from 29th May to 1st June before it reappeared at Loch of Skene in Aberdeenshire two days later. This bird was presumably the unidentified pratincole species photographed at North Gare in Durham on 26th May. The period's only Collared Pratincole was an unpredictable individual at Lakenheath Fen RSPB in Suffolk from the 7th to 11th June.

A Pacific Golden Plover was a typical midsummer find at Breydon Water in Norfolk on 28th June. A popular Broad-billed Sandpiper was at Tinker's Marshes in Suffolk from 22nd-23rd May, while another was at Findhorn Bay in Moray on 29th May. American waders were represented by an American Golden Plover at Exminster Marshes RSPB in Devon on 23rd May, 2 Lesser Yellowlegs (at Wheldrake Ings in North Yorkshire on 15th April and at Low Newton in Northumberland 11th-13th May), a suppressed Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Lincolnshire and 2 Spotted Sandpipers (at



Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* at Bothal Pond - Dave Dack

Wellington Gravel Pits in Herefordshire on 24th May and on Arran on 21st May). There were totals of 4 White-rumped Sandpipers and 13 Pectoral Sandpipers.

One of the most extraordinary sightings of the period was a superb full summer plumaged female Grey Phalarope at Brandon Marsh in Warwickshire on 2nd June, while there were a handful of more typical winter-plumaged ones. Also highly unusual was a Stone Curlew on the main lake at London Wetlands Centre on 8th April, one of a good number away from breeding locations.

It was an excellent spring for Red-necked Phalaropes with sightings at over 50 sites, while it was also a decent April in particular for Black-winged Stilt. Hopes are high that there is a pair nesting quietly somewhere in the country. It was also a decent spring for Temminck's Stint and Dotterel, with a long-



Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* at Church Norton - Jason Ward

staying flock (or flocks) of the latter at Choseley in Norfolk particularly well twitched. There was a total of 6 Kentish Plovers though none were particularly easy to catch up with.

It has been a spectacular spring for waders in the UK and, with the first presumed returning Wood Sandpipers and Spotted Redshanks already being seen, I look forward to seeing what the next three months bring. Summer and early autumn tends to be an exciting time for waders so I guess it is time to play the pointless prediction game. Mongolian Sandplover anyone?

Volunteer fundraisers needed — help us to fund wader conservation

As we hope you are all aware by now *Wader Quest* is an entirely voluntary organisation that relies on the generosity and involvement of people who share our passion for waders and their conservation.

Almost every weekend throughout the summer months Rick and Elis attend car boot sales with the *Mobile Charity Shop* to sell donated items that they have collected to raise money for the organisation. We also rely very heavily on you, our sponsors and your sponsorship payments, plus a little bit of profit from sales of such items as pin badges etc in the *Wader Quest Collectables* range

and of course donations.

However, as the organisation grows we are going to need a greater ability to fund projects and so we need very much to increase our income in order to fulfil our aims.

With this in mind we are asking if any of you would like to become volunteer fundraisers for us, either with a one off event or on an ongoing basis to help us fund our work.

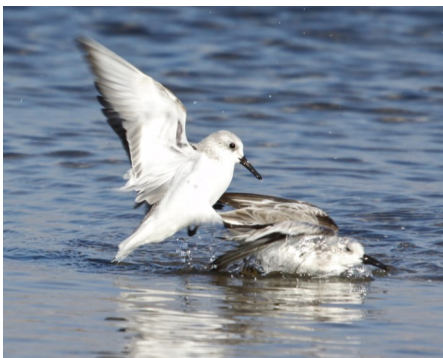
Maybe you are thinking of running a marathon and looking for a good cause to help, or maybe you fancy throwing yourself

out of a perfectly good aeroplane, shaving half your beard, cycling from A to B or any other kind of insane activity? Alternatively you may simply wish to run a coffee morning, quiz night, a cream tea party or carry out your own car boot sale?

Whatever you feel you are willing and able to do to help us raise money and have fun at the same time we would love to hear from you about your ideas and plans.

We guarantee that every single penny that you raise and send to us will be used exclusively to fund wader conservation projects.

Wader Photo Gallery — send us you favourite wader photos



Sanderling *Calidris alba*
- Annette Cuniffe; USA



Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis*
- Tommy Pedersen; USA



Red-necked Phalarope
- Antero Topp; Norway



Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*
- Mike Milicia; USA



Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*
- Yingtao Song; Thailand



Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*
- Sue Oertli; South Africa



Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
- Neil Soloman; Norway



Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*
- Devaram Thiru; China



Andean Avocet *Recurvirostra andina*
- Elis Simpson; Chile

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 (Events), Chris Lamsdell (Ringing), David Lindo, Oliver Simms
- Membership secretary (non Trustee): Debbie Armstrong

Next Trustees meeting 10:30 26th July 2015 — Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust London Wetlands Centre, London.

Letters to the Editor

Thank you very much for April's excellent and very detailed newsletter. The new logo and tagline are outstanding and I want to send massive congratulations from both of us to Elis for her *World Migratory Bird Day* prize because the photograph she entered is magical. The combination of silhouette, reflection and gentle movement on the surface of the water has been captured to perfection and the shallow depth of field has beautifully diffused the background to fully emphasise her main point of focus. The award is very much deserved and I am sure she is delighted.

Please keep up the wonderful and vital work that you do. Here's hoping that every one of your supporters continues to "release their drop of water into the flames....."

Mark and Michelle Cornfield: Cornwall, UK.
Via email.

Hi Mark and Michelle

Thank you for your thoughtful message.

Elis was indeed thrilled to have been selected among the winners; she gets precious little recognition for the enormous

contribution she makes not just in terms of photos, but her constant work on the social media without which we'd still be completely unknown outside our own front room!

We do indeed mean to keep working hard to do what we can for wader conservation and hope that those who share in our passion will feel that they are part of a growing community of like-minded people who have the best interests of waders in mind.

Anyone who does share this passion can now get even more involved by becoming a voluntary fundraiser (see p19) —Ed.

Website: www.waderquest.org



waderquest@gmail.com



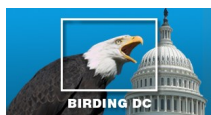
<https://www.facebook.com/WaderQuest?fref=ts>



<https://twitter.com/waderquest>



Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
- Elis Simpson



Gay Birders' Club



Enabling contact between LGBT birders



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