

Forthcoming talks:

11/10/2016 Macclesfield RSPB local group. 19.45 Macclesfield Methodist Church, Westminster Road, Macclesfield, SK10 1BX

25/10/2016 Huddersfield Birdwatchers Club. 19.30 The Old Courtroom, Huddersfield Town Hall, Corporation Street, Huddersfield, HD1 2TA (Confessions of a Bird Guide)

06/12/2016 Wigan RSPB local group. 19.45 St. Anne's Parish Hall, Church Lane, Shevington, Wigan. WN6 8BD

14/12/2016 Watford RSPB local group 20.00 Stanborough Centre, 609 St. Albans Road, Watford, Herts. WD25 9JL

09/01/2017 Stockport RSPB local group 19.30 Stockport Masonic Guildhall 169-171 Wellington Road South, Stockport, SK1 3UA

11/01/2017 Worcester and Malvern RSPB local group. Powick Parish Hall, Powick, Worcester, Worcs. WR2 4RT (Plover Lover's World of Delights)

18/01/2017 Leeds RSPB local group. 19.30 Friends Meeting House, 188 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds, LS2 9DX

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Welcome to the 10th edition of Wader Quest the newsletter — Editor

So here we are reaching double figures of the newsletter and we hope that you feel that it continues to be interesting and varied. Don't forget that if you have something you'd like to contribute, be it artwork, a photo or an article, feel free to get in touch.

We have some excellent articles again in this issue with Devin Griffiths writing about the Red Knots *Calidris canutus* and Piping Plovers *Charadrius melodus* in North America and their conservation from a personal perspective. Enjoy his delicious descriptive prose as well as the thought provoking sentiments which lay behind the words.

Andrew Whitelee writes a summary of the 2016 Norfolk Bird Race, from which our coffers benefitted to the tune of £1,664.10 which was quite something while I try to give a little of the flavour of what it was like taking part from a very personal point of view.

Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* have been much in the news of late, mostly for the wrong reasons, ie that their population is falling at an alarming rate. However Dan



Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Galveston, Texas, USA — Elis simpson

Brown here talks about what is being done in an attempt to halt the decline and perhaps reverse it in the future.

We have an update about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* situation outlining the latest from the captive breeding team in the UK, the headstarting team in Russia and from observations in the field.

Wader Quest has had a strong connection with Australia and New Zealand, and here we find out about the waders to be found on the third biggest Island of New Zealand, Stewart Island and its most distinguished

resident, the Southern New Zealand or Red-breasted Dotterel *Charadrius obscurus*.

We also bring you an update from Selena Flores of the Garden Route Shorebird Conservation Research project in South Africa keeping us up to date with the comings and goings of the White-fronted Plovers *Charadrius marginatus* along the Garden Route shoreline.

We introduce you too to Alicia Mottur, who tells us about one of her favourite wader spots in Belgium and illustrates the piece with some of her captivating wader artworks.

If you need more thought provoking stuff, then look no further than Sonny Whitelaw's account about what will happen to the estuaries as seas rise and development of these areas increases at the same time.

Poole Harbour is a well-established wader hotspot on the Dorset coast of England, here Neil Gartshore tells us all about it and its waders.

We finish as usual with the impressive display of photos in the Gallery with some mouth-watering species beautifully captured on camera by a number of photographers.



White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* Mauritz Bay, Western Cape, South Africa, USA — Elis simpson

Wader Quest news

Norfolk Bird And Wildlife Fair — 21st & 22nd May

Following the Norfolk Bird Race the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair, with which it is associated, took place. As in the last two years the numbers attending have been disappointing, but from our point of view it was a friendly and relaxing weekend which we thoroughly enjoyed and which has become a firm fixture in our annual calendar of events.

Apart from seeing old friends like Chris Galvin from Opticron, Matt Merritt of Birdwatching Magazine and Duncan McDonald from Wildsounds it was good to meet new faces. One of those was Gary Prescott, better known to most as the *Biking Birder* bikingbirder2016.blogspot.co.uk, who is determined to do all his birding in a green way; on his bike. His latest year total for birds seen in the UK by bike is 267 and he is determined to hit 300. Lovely fellow with a big heart, good luck to him.

As always we were happy to give a talk at the fair, in fact we ended up doing two. The



David Tomlinson and The Biking Birder
— Elis Simpson

first was on the subject of a *Wader Quest* favourite, the Lapwing, asking the question as to how the bird ever got the terrible collective noun of a 'deceit of lapwings'? The title was The Deceitful Lapwing. If you want to know more or less what it was about take a look at this blog: How did the Lapwing get such a bad reputation?

The second talk was about the endemic waders of New Zealand, it is surprising how many there are when you look. From the iconic Wrybill and Black Stilt, through

oystercatchers and plovers to the lesser known New Zealand snipes, some of which are now sadly extinct.

British Birdwatching Fair — 19th to 21st August

We will once again be at the BBF, as you would expect since this is a great opportunity for us to reach new people and meet up with old friends. Details are few at the moment but we will have a competition, a raffle and all the usual goodies for sale.

We will be giving a talk again this year on Saturday afternoon at 5PM in lecture marquee 2. It will be the perfect opportunity for you to have a rest and relax at the end of a busy day; but do try to resist the temptation to fall asleep. The title this year will be *An Inspiration of Waders* looking at how waders have inspired humanity over the years and suggesting a collective noun for a mixed aggregation of waders pulsing over an estuary. If you are going to be at the fair please come along and support us, there is nothing quite as disheartening as an empty auditorium.

We hope that in any case you will have time to visit the stand and say hello. We will be in the same place as last year, which was Marquee 7 Stand 67.

Items for sale — new pin badges and earrings.

We are pleased to announce that we have produced the next two species in the *Wader Quest* Collectables pin badges; N°9 Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* and N°10 Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. They are available in all the usual ways via email or at

events.

In the same style as the pin we also



produced a new set of earrings of Northern Lapwing which are available at £12.00 a pair. + p&p.

Falsterbo Bird Show

— 2nd to 4th September

In the previous two years we have visited Sweden to attend the Falsterbo Bird Show. We were first invited when Anna and Eva (aka the two lovely ladies) saw a talk we gave at the British Bird Fair. Over the two years we have attended Anna and Eva have become good friends and Anna has even generously become a Life Friend of *Wader Quest*.

We plan to attend again this year, if for no other reason, than to get another stock of the much admired and sought after Lars Jonsson posters signed by the great man himself. Lars has always been very generous to us in these negotiations, so we look forward to seeing what we may be able to bring back this year.

Plover Appreciation Day — 16th September

Plover Appreciation Day is the brainchild of BirdLife Australia who work hard to protect the Hooded and Red-capped Plover populations and which we have supported in the past maintaining a good relationship with the people in this splendid organisation.

As there are only four species of plover which would normally be around in the UK in September (namely; Grey *Pluvialis squatarola*, Eurasian Golden *Pluvialis apricaria* and Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula* and of course Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*), we should be able to see them all quite easily on that day and it is our intention to attempt do so at Titchwell RSPB reserve as we did last year (although we ended up having to go to Snettisham for the Eurasian Golden Plovers then). So, if you are free, come along to Titchwell and join us in our great plover hunt.



Wader Quest news — cont'd

Wirral Wader Festival — 1st & 2nd October



Plans are well under way for this year's Wirral Wader Festival with the working group comprising *Wader Quest*, Dee Estuary Volunteer Wardens, RSPB, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Wirral Council Coastal Rangers meeting monthly. This year the venue will be the same as last year but with the addition of a marquee that will give us more space.

Watch this space for details as they emerge.



'Waderfest' visitors inspect Creatures in the mud exhibit — Elis Simpson

Wader Conservation World Watch — 5th & 6th November

This year sees our third event of this kind; WWCW3.

Originally created to celebrate *Wader*

Quest's birthday, on the 1st of November 2012, we celebrate by having an event on the first full weekend of November in each year.

The next newsletter will be published just prior to the event, so make a note in your diaries now.

All that we ask is that wherever you happen to be in the world that weekend, that you go out and look at some waders and then tell us what you have seen and where.

This is not a scientifically motivated event, but one instead to celebrate the work being carried out by conservationists the world over who make life a little easier for the beleaguered waders of the world. It is a show of solidarity, a way of saying thank you to all of those involved in protecting waders or their habitat, be it where they breed, where they pass the non-breeding season or along the flyways in between.

If you have ever watched over roost sites or breeding beaches, if you have taken part in beach cleaning, if you have done work at a reserve that caters for waders, if you have been part of a ringing or tracking programme or if you have ever raised money or donated it to advance any one of these causes, whether as a volunteer, intern or professional then this weekend is all about you. It is a way of us all getting together and showing the world that we care.

Massive Book sale

We have been very lucky in receiving a large number of books from various sources. Bird, wildlife and conservation books from the BTO and BirdLife International libraries when they downsized due to a move and non-wildlife books that we have received as donations to the Mobile Charity Shop. The number of books we have may be as many as

2,000 but we haven't counted!

On the 16th of October we are planning a huge book sale at the local nature reserve Linford Lakes owned by the Parks Trust in conjunction with the Friends of Linford Lakes group. If you are within travelling distance of Milton Keynes pop along and pick up a bargain or two, we will have a broad selection of books and even some in languages other than English!

AGM November

Due to unforeseen circumstances the AGM scheduled for 29th May did not take place. As we must hold an AGM to comply with our constitution, we have re-scheduled the AGM for November and think that it is likely that this will be the permanent calendar slot for the meeting as it is a much less busy time of year, for everyone connected with birds, than May.

Recent talks given

Since the last newsletter in April we have given just two talks, the season ends around May with most groups using the warmer months for field trips rather than indoor talks. The last two talks were given in Gravesend in April and York in May. Both were very enjoyable and the audience was both receptive and friendly, not to mention generous, resulting in eight new Friends of *Wader Quest* being signed up.

The indoor meeting season starts again in October for us with a trip to Macclesfield and another to Huddersfield where we have been before and are delighted to be visiting again.

These talks are vital to the development of *Wader Quest* both to raise much needed funds and more importantly, to introduce the organisation to those who have yet to hear about us.

World's oldest Terek Sandpiper

A Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinerea* was captured in Belarus in May of this year. To the surprise and delight of the ornithologists involved it was sporting a ring that showed that it had been ringed as a chick in 1999 making it 17 years old, the oldest ever recorded.

The previous longevity record for the species was 16 years.

In its lifetime this record breaking bird has probably travelled in excess of 200,000 kilometres having been previously re-caught in 2005 and 2011. It looks like it's getting careless in its old age.



Terek Sandpiper — Elis Simpson

Introducing Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper: by Rick and Elis Simpson, illustrated by Megan Tadden

Eury The Spoon-billed Sandpiper children's story book is finally being printed and will be available soon.

The story behind this little book has been long in the making.

Some time ago, at some point during a bottle of Malbec (or two), Elis and I decided that what the world was lacking was a story book about the struggles that a Spoon-billed Sandpiper faces in its hazardous life.

We started collating our thoughts and once we had a germ of an idea we tried to imagine all the hazards that could befall a young sandpiper in its first year of life and wrote them down. Eventually we had our story tracing the life of a young Spoon-billed Sandpiper called Eury from inside his egg to breeding for the first time himself.

The name Eury came from the first part of the erstwhile scientific name that prevailed at the time, *Eurynorhynchus*. We felt that Eury had a sort of Russian feel to it. We despaired when the name got changed to *Calidris*; 'Cali' didn't have the same ring to it, nor indeed the exclusivity, so we stuck with Eury.

Despite having both been children, albeit in my case a very long time ago, neither of us had ever written a children's story before so we thought we should get some help. We sent our story to a local teacher who teaches the age for which we thought we were writing; 6—11 years. She loved the story and said that she would be more than happy to read such a story to her children, except that she had recently retired! She then passed the book on to her daughter who was still teaching that age range and she too gave it the thumbs up.

All well and good so far, but we knew that writing for children was not the same as writing for adults. We therefore sought some



Eury struggles out of his shell — Megan Tadden



advice from local children's poet Richard Tysoe who pointed out many mistakes and things that didn't work for small children. After a re-write, following Richard's pointers, we now needed an artist to illustrate it.

On a visit to our landlords' abode, to show them a photo of a European Badger *Meles meles* that we had seen in the garden, we were introduced to their daughter's artistic talent. We were much impressed and so asked her what she planned to do with this talent. She told us that it was her ambition to become a children's book illustrator! You could have knocked us down with a feather, what a stroke of luck. We outlined our idea to her and before we knew it we had our illustrator.

The long term plan for the book is to have it translated into the languages of the countries that exist along the Spoon-billed Sandpiper's migration route and then distributed to schools in areas where the bird occurs, the idea being to raise awareness among the youngsters as to how vulnerable these birds are.

This of course we knew would be beyond our means and capabilities but we decided to go ahead and print the book in English first, so we had something to show for our plan.

At many events we have attended we have met up with a lady called Nanette Roland who works for Leica Camera AG. We wrote to her with the idea and she agreed that Leica would sponsor the first printing of the book.

So that is where we are today, the work is done, the copy is at the printers and within a

week or so we should have the first of our books.

We are now looking to move the project on to the next phase and for that we are going to need some help. The good people of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) have expressed an interest in helping as has Nanette, but nothing has yet been decided. We hope that



Eury finds a territory of his own — Megan Tadden

our idea will be followed through and that Eury can be introduced to the children of Asia.

Whilst this project was never intended as a fundraising project, any profit would be used to further Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation, so we have set the price of the A5 size 74 page book at £7.99. Initially they will only be available through *Wader Quest* by application via email or at events such as the British Birdwatching Fair.

Norfolk Bird Race — Andrew Whitelee

On 30th April 2016, five teams took part in the second Norfolk Bird Race, all intent on seeing or hearing as many species of birds as they could in the allotted 24-hour period. The Norfolk Bird Race which is held in conjunction with the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair was the idea of Andrew Whitelee and Ian Dearing and draws its inspiration from the original Big Bird Races held in the 1980s between two teams led by David Tomlinson and Bill Oddie. The basic premise is the same, spend 24-hours getting tired and frustrated trying to see or hear birds, all in the name of charity. This year the organisation benefitting from any money raised would be the wonderful *Wader Quest*.

This year's event had five teams entered, with some old faces returning along with new and keen first timers. Some teams, namely the Northern Raiders (led by Andrew Whitelee), Fellowship of the Wing (led by Jack Baddams) and Norfolk Home Guard (led by Ian Dearing) decided on a midnight start, whereas the students of Tit Flock (led by Jake Gearty) decided to start a little later. *Wader Quest* (led by Dan Bradbury), also entered a team and went for an even more leisurely start.

Although the race was held two weeks earlier than in the previous year, the weather on the day was much better so hopes were high of some respectable scores. By midday the Northern Raiders had a clear lead with 117 species, second were Tit Flock (103), then Norfolk Home Guard (88) closely followed by Fellowship of the Wing (86) and *Wader Quest* (77) bringing up the rear. The Norfolk Home Guard captain Ian Dearing was feeling unwell so their team finished early, but not as early as *Wader Quest* who enjoyed their day and put in what can only be described as a matinee performance. A lack of local knowledge (of the traffic not the birds) caused the Northern Raiders some mighty problems in the afternoon and Tit Flock caught up and came past by late afternoon, leading until the end.

The final scores were Tit Flock (142), Northern Raiders (136), Fellowship of the Wing (127), Norfolk Home Guard (124) and *Wader Quest* (105). Congratulations to Jake Gearty, Drew Lyness, Alex Berryman and Michael Murphy on their well-deserved win.

On a sad note, two days before the race Chris White's dad (David White) died, meaning Chris had to withdraw from the



Rick Simpson, Andrew Whitelee (holding the original trophy) and David Tomlinson — Elis Simpson

Norfolk Home Guard team, with Nigel Packer stepping in as a late replacement. Chris and his sponsors still kindly donated their money even though Chris couldn't take part, and this year race is dedicated to his father, our thoughts are with him, friends and family.

Even though *Wader Quest* came last on the day, they were the biggest winners in the end with total funds raised by the Norfolk Bird Race 2016 being £1664.10.

Rick and Elis Simpson of *Wader Quest* were presented with a cheque by race organiser Andrew Whitelee on Sunday 22nd May at the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair.

As a bonus, David Tomlinson was also present at the Bird Fair and has kindly donated the original Big Bird Race Trophy complete with Hawaiian Goose egg signed by Sir Peter Scott to the Norfolk Bird Race team. We are proud to have such a wonderful endorsement and aim to take the trophy on a

tour at some point to help raise money and awareness of conservation issues – if you have any thoughts or ideas on this, or would like us to bring it to see you or your group then please get in touch.

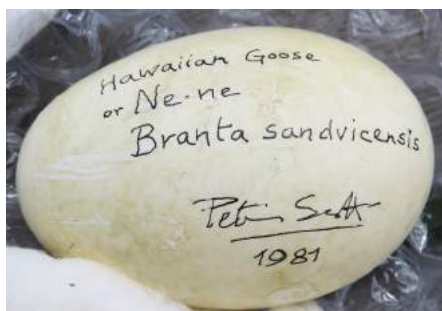
Thank you to everyone who took part, raised money, donated money, tweeted, liked, followed and promoted, without you this wouldn't have happened. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Rick and Elis from *Wader Quest*, they really got what we were trying to achieve and without their support and enthusiasm for the event it would not have been anywhere near as successful as it was.

Next year's race will be in aid of the Bird Observatories Council, and will take place on Saturday 13th May 2017, so we will see you all there!!!!

Andrew Whitelee is the Norfolk Bird Race Organiser and can be contacted on info@norfolkbirdrace.com if you require information about the bird race or wish to partake next year to help raise funds for a good conservation cause.

Andrew also runs his own business called Verdant Wildlife which is a wildlife tour company that also deals with ecological training and consultancy work. He also carries out freelance survey work and is currently working in Scotland.

On top of all that he is now a *Wader Quest* Trustee too. —Ed.



Hawaiian Goose egg signed by Sir Peter Scott — Elis Simpson

Norfolk Bird Race, a personal perspective — Rick Simpson

Now, when I signed up for this malarkey, I thought it was all about sitting in a car all day, whizzing around Norfolk, jumping out to tick off birds with a constant supply of peanut butter sandwiches and bottles of ginger beer, interspersed by All-day Breakfasts and piping hot tea. Little did I suspect that you needed the stamina of a marathon runner to survive such an event.

Fortunately for me, our team was fairly laid back about the whole affair and decided that a midnight start was not necessary, captian Dan Bradbury (nicknamed 'Lt. Dan' for the day) said that the nailed-on night birds would be calling just as well at 05.00hrs as they would at midnight.

The day didn't get off to an auspicious start. Elis' new shoes, which we purchased especially for the race, once removed from their box, turned out to comprise two left feet (a bit like my dancing she postulated at the time). Bird-wise the nailed-on Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* and Little Owl *Athene noctua* sites near to the start point in Heathersett drew blanks - despite the Tawny owl calling the night before and again after we had finished! Team captian 'Lt. Dan' commented that a former bird racer had said to him. "My one bit of advice - don't rely on Tawny Owls!"

The team then drove, slightly miffed but still full of optimism for a bird-filled day of excitement, over to the 'Brecks'. A brief stop to listen for Eurasian Stone-Curlews *Burhinus oedicnemus* failed, although we were pleased to pick up our first waders; Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* both calling beautifully.

Next stop, RSPB Lakenheath. This is where it seems I had not put in the requisite amount of preparation, both physically and mentally. With a certain amount of curmudgeonly grumbling about distances to be walked (and that was just from the car



Dawn at Lakenheath — Elis Simpson



The Wader Quest team L to R:

Dan (Lt. Dan) Bradbury Cpt, Oliver (Fido) Simms, the Wader Quest mobile, Elis (I can't see over the hedge!) Simpson and Rick (How far?!) Simpson — Elis Simpson

park to the reserve visitor centre), the team set off around the track with young Oliver Simms scampering off in front.

Occasionally Oliver would look back and, noticing the rest of us were miles behind, he'd come bounding back, tongue lolling, like an energy fuelled spaniel puppy being exercised by a decidedly dodderly and elderly owner; his frustration was palpable and his nickname for the day, 'Fido', was coined.

By the time we returned to the car, I had been crippled by the yomp but the list was mounting and we had what we thought to be a couple of goodies under the belt; Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* and Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*. We later discovered that the owl had done the unthinkable and performed for the other team that we had met at Lakenheath that morning and we also discovered that one team member, namely 'Fido', hadn't quite got the competitive edge that it takes to win a bird race. He is the caring, sharing type and allowed this benevolence to spill over in his over informative tweets about what the team had seen, and WHERE!

You are beginning then, I hope, to get a picture of how this all went wrong for team Wader Quest although we all, it can only be hoped, had a spiffing day. The weather played a blinder bathing any bird we did manage to see in glorious sunlight showing it off to its maximum beauty. Our captain 'Lt.

Dan' tried his best to chivvy us all along, but many birds that were encountered were missed by the incompetence, lack of concentration or diminutive stature, of one or other of the team. As the rules clearly stipulate that every team member has to see or hear every bird, we felt we were letting them slip away (as it happens we got them all back later), confidence started to dissolve like sweetex in a cup of tea (one of which would have been very welcome at any point in the day).



Whinchat at Lakenheath — Elis Simpson

We were given precise directions for a singing Common Grasshopper Warbler *Lousstella naevia* and a Common Nightingale. *Luscinia megarhynchos* by a helpful passer by. The former we failed to locate but we did get the Common Nightingale by slowing the car down enough, as we left, to hear it sing as we drove by on our way back to tick off the Eurasian Stone-Curlews at Weeting. This brought us to having four wader species on

Norfolk Bird Race, a personal perspective — Cont'd

on the list with Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* also being added at Lakenheath.

Next stop was a 'secret' location that is probably not all that secret but we don't want any misunderstandings with divulging locations for rare breeding birds do we? Lt. Dan said we would pop along a track for a 'five minute' stroll for the much prized Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*. This was to be one of the highlights of the day. On the way down the track, which turned out to be a little further than Lt. Dan had remembered, we passed a rival team leaving the site. Awkward silence and mumbled niceties made up the conversation, but as we left a hint of chivalry emerged when team leader Ian Dearing nodded in the direction we were going, smiled and said "It's nice down there" an indication perhaps that we were not going to be disappointed? We were not. Fido and Lt. Dan arrived long before the already fading veteran and his patient wife, both of whom heard the drumming long before catching up with smiling team mates with an exuberant Fido bouncing around like Tigger. More signs that the 'secret' site isn't that secret at all were manifested in there being a number of other birders there, none of whom were involved with the race.

Flitcham was where we were supposed to catch up with the Little Owl missed earlier, it wasn't to be, but we did get a Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*, a most handsome bird sitting in the spring sunshine, and Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* apparently on a nest in the middle of a ploughed field.



Eurasian Oystercatcher at Flitcham
— Elis Simpson

As we ate some of the delicious sandwiches provided by our captain another team arrived, one that we had not hitherto encountered led by Jake Gearty. They were looking smug and playing their cards very close to their chests, as is the way of such



On the beach at Titchwell — Elis Simpson

events (please note Oli). We left, while they went to the hide and photographed a Little Owl!

Next came the long march up the bank at Titchwell. Already broken (in my case anyway), but cheered by the chances of seeing waders, team *Wader Quest* set off. Search as we might we couldn't find the promised Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, but a Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* made up for it rather nicely along with Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina* bringing our wader total to fourteen.

From then on it was site hopping, thankfully with minimum walking requirements, adding the odd bird here and there. We were on 99 when we drove into the harbour at Wells. Fido barked from the back with glee "Species number 100!" We had all been speculating as to what this might be as we were driving along; none of us though had hoped, or feared, it would be Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*!

Lovely views of a Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* at Morston Quay were enjoyed taking the wader tally to fifteen.

We more or less ended the day at Cley. There were splendid Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* and a stunning Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* at the beach car park. We also took a look at Pat's pool where we added Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (wader number sixteen), watched two Black-tailed Godwits bashing seven bells out of each other and felt rather self-conscious about watching Common Redshanks making love.

A dash to another site got cancelled when we realised we'd have to walk miles in consideration of one team member's

temporary lameness (at least I hoped it was temporary) and then we had fun trying to find the finishing line (in common with a number of teams; maybe this was Andrew Whitelee's ruse to get us all disqualified for not turning up on time). We found the venue which was, not surprisingly, deserted; no-one else was likely to finish for several more hours yet.

It is often said that it is not the winning that counts, but the participation, and in this case that was certainly true. Many people had put themselves out, Andrew Whitelee and Ian Dearing in particular to make the bird race happen, and it was they that decided it would be for the benefit of *Wader Quest*, so we thank them very much for thinking of us. In addition the teams have raised some serious money on our behalf and we are delighted with the total of £1,664.10 that was raised. We are of course also grateful to all those who made the donations, be it through participating team members or on the JustGiving site.



Common Greenshank at Morston Quay
— Elis Simpson

As we were to benefit from this year's event, it was only right and fitting that we should enter a team, entering into the spirit of things. We felt we should show willing and so a big thank you from Elis and me to Dan Bradbury and Oliver Simms for agreeing to join us, for all the hard work they put into planning, for turning up and especially putting up with us (me) all day. We had a great day out for sure and the camaraderie and sense of humour was maintained throughout. In addition we'd like to thank Dan for his generous hospitality and delicious sandwiches.

So, am I going to do it all again next year? Well, based on the above, what do you think?

This article has been adapted from a blog posted on the Wader Quest website www.waderquest.org — Ed.

Knots and plovers — Devin Griffiths

Cape May, New Jersey. Reed's Beach. Morning. Under an overcast late May sky, the surf rises and falls gently with the incoming tide, drawn up the sand by an ancient, inexorable force. It carries the scent and taste of the sea and pushes before it the raucous chorus of a multitude of winged voices: the cries of gulls, the scolding of terns, and the peeps and chatters of many hundreds of shorebirds. For the second time in my life, I've travelled 300 miles (<482> kms) from home to bear witness to one of North America's great avian spectacles: the annual procession of shorebirds through Delaware Bay. Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres*, Dunlins *Caldiris alpina*, willets *Tringa semipalmata/inornata*, Least *Calidris minutilla* and Semipalmated sandpipers *Calidris pusilla*, all descend on the bay to feed and gather strength before making the final push to their summer homes. All are delightful, every one a thrill to see. But there's one bird here which surpasses all others, whose arrival is as eagerly awaited as the return of a long-travelling lover, and



Red Knots and Laughing Gulls — Devin Griffiths

whose reappearance on these sandy shores each year is cause for grand celebration. Spring migration has just kicked into high gear; the Red Knots *Calidris canutus* have returned.

I fell in love with Red Knots two years ago, on my first pilgrimage to Reed's Beach. It was a trip I'd been meaning to take for some time, but in a typical year I only get to Cape May once, for fall raptor migration (something for which Cape May is justifiably famous). As a group, shorebirds have long been one of my favourites, though. There's something particularly engaging in watching them work the beach, probing the wet sand enthusiastically for a meal, skittering away from the surf and back again with each succession of waves, legs moving in double-time. They seem to truly enjoy life; only a cold heart could fail to be charmed by them.



Red Knots and Laughing Gulls *Leucophaeus atricilla* — Devin Griffiths

But among these wonderful birds, Red Knots are extraordinary. Cast in deep russet from face through belly, backs and wings elegantly patterned in black, white, and tan, they are exquisite. Watching hundreds of these gorgeous sandpipers move along the sand eagerly devouring horseshoe crab eggs was spellbinding, and I was captivated.

When talking about Red Knots, it's common to speak in superlatives. This is, after all, a bird that travels from pole to pole twice a year, a round-trip distance of some 18,000 miles (one of the longest migrations in the animal kingdom)—often in non-stop stretches of 1500 miles or more. When they hit the Delaware Bay, they're nearly starved. But their timing is impeccable: with precision that puts a Swiss watchmaker to shame, they arrive at the peak of the spawning of horseshoe crabs—upon whose eggs the knots



Red Knots — Devin Griffiths

double their weight, ensuring that they have the reserves to finish their epic journey to breeding grounds in the high Arctic.

As I sat watching these birds, I thought about that journey—the vast distance, the critical timing, the reliance on a singular food source. North America's Red Knots face a litany of threats, among them overfishing of

horseshoe crabs and loss of habitat through both development and the ravages of a changing climate. So much could go wrong, could push an already struggling bird over the edge. And yet here they were, still hanging on. For how much longer was anyone guess, but for the moment I could let the future be and simply enjoy my time in their company.

Though I could easily have spent the balance of the day with the knots, I eventually took my leave of them, thanking the birds for including me, however briefly, in their lives. I wished them Godspeed and we went our separate ways. With luck, we'd meet on this beach again next year.

Closer to home, on the northeast coast of Massachusetts, rests another haven that, over the course of a year, gives shelter to a great panoply of avian life: Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. Waterfowl, marsh birds, alcids, songbirds, raptors, shorebirds... wherever they come from, whatever they are, all who reach the refuge find succour and sustenance. A few months before my visit with the knots, I'd taken a trip to Parker River with a group of friends and family. It's a favourite spot of ours, and venturing here at the uneasy junction of winter and spring has become a tradition.



Piping Plover — Devin Griffiths

Knots and Plover — cont'd

The day had grown late and we were scanning the ocean for sea ducks when seven tiny white birds flew in low across the sand, set down on the beach and began the busy work of securing dinner. We shifted to the new arrivals, and drew in a collective breath as we brought them into focus. These were not the Sanderlings *Calidris alba* we expected, but a much rarer bird, one that engenders love at first sight, and which holds a special place in my heart. To the delight of all, the season's first Piping Plovers *Charadrius melodus* had just dropped in.

Over the years, I've spent countless hours with these wonderful plovers, and they never fail to charm me—but as with the most rewarding relationships, their appeal lies in more than just the physical. True, they are beautiful birds, and their plump little bodies and namesake piping calls make them almost impossibly endearing. But it's their spirit, their irrepressible *joie de vivre* that moves me. Faced with threats as great as those of the Red Knot—and perhaps greater, for the Piping Plover is at once equally beloved and reviled—they steadfastly embrace life, refusing to go quietly into the dark. That they provoke such hatred is heart-breaking, but alas they live where we play, and there are those of us unwilling to set aside our wants



Piping Plover — Devin Griffiths

and desires for the greater good of these imperilled birds. A sad state of affairs indeed. And yet the plovers, like the knots, are still with us, and there are many who value them and who both desire and work for their survival.

As the sun set behind us, we took our final looks and I bid the plovers a silent farewell. I reminded myself that this was just the beginning: several months from now, on beaches up and down the coast, the next generation of plovers will emerge and take their first steps into their new world. What they'll find is up to us.

Red Knots and Piping Plovers are bound by shared calamity, linked by the unkindest of threads: we conducted their descent to the edge of oblivion. Through our actions—and perhaps more accurately our inactions—we are engineering their doom. Their conjoined fate is in our hands.

But perhaps that's a good thing. If we can bring about their destruction, could we not vouchsafe their survival? We are the only species that can bring about another's

extinction, but we're also the only ones who can pull it out of the abyss. Perhaps that is our true function, our reason for being. And perhaps I continue to seek these birds out not just out of love, but because they embody hope. As long as we can still find Red Knots and Piping Plovers, all is not lost. Seeing them each year is, for me, a renewal, another chance. It closes another year in which we did not lose these wonderful birds, and brings a new opportunity for their protection, and for a wider understanding of what those who love them already know: the loss of either the knots or the plovers would drain a little more colour from the world, would cast us a little farther into shadow.

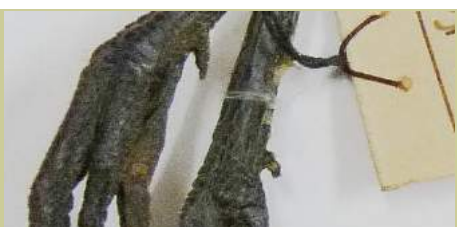
There is still time. All the Red Knots and Piping Plovers ask is that we allow them space to live. If we can find it in our hearts to make room for them, then there is, perhaps, a chance—for them and for us. Our folly or our wisdom will be written in their fates. For myself, I hold fast to hope, and to a vision of future beaches alive with these marvellous, spectacular birds.



Piping Plover — Devin Griffiths

Did you know?

Sanderlings *Calidris alba* are the only *Calidris* sandpiper not to possess a hind toe. Conversely the Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* is the only *Pluvialis* plover to possess a hind toe, albeit a very small one. In both cases, with a good view of the bird this can be a clincher in identification with similar confusion species.



Grey Plover showing hind toe — BNHM



Sanderling showing no hind toe — Elis Simpson

Conservation efforts get underway for Eurasian Curlew; a priority species for UK conservation — Dan Brown

Over the last year, numerous publications and news stories have honed in on the current plight facing the Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*. And this is for good reason, as the last 12 months were a potentially important year for Europe's largest wader. It was a year in which its adverse UK status was confirmed, but also a year in which several new conservation initiatives commenced.

In December, we had verification of just how much the curlew is struggling at home, with the latest Birds of Conservation Concern report (Eaton *et al.* 2015) confirming that breeding declines are now precipitous enough to warrant uplisting from the amber to the red-list.

Importantly, the curlew's deteriorating domestic conservation status has implications for its prospects beyond UK shores: what is happening here has ramifications for the curlew's global conservation prospects, as another paper last year (Brown *et al.* 2015) estimated that the UK may host up to 27% of the global breeding population.

With a similarly important wintering population as well (up to 20% of the global wintering population), it is clear the UK has a particularly important role to play in global conservation efforts: especially since the curlew of global conservation concern (in 2007, it was put on the globally Near Threatened (NT) category of the IUCN Red List).



Eurasian Curlew — Elis Simpson

So, the UK supports internationally important wintering and breeding populations, yet the breeding population is declining rapidly and the bird is of global conservation concern. It was the combination of these three factors that led a group of UK conservation organisations to suggest that the curlew be considered as the highest avian



Eurasian Curlew — Elis Simpson

conservation priority in the UK, and that conservation attention and resources should be aligned accordingly (Brown *et al.* 2015).

Encouragingly, alongside the awareness raising of media articles and scientific journals, has been the commencement of two important conservation initiatives.

The first was the completion of an international conservation plan (Brown 2015). This plan was coordinated by RSPB and was developed under the framework of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). The international plan collates all known research - alongside expert input from across Europe, Russia, Africa and the Middle East - to assess the threats facing the global population and prioritise conservation and research actions for different countries to implement.

This international plan provides the blueprint for a coordinated drive over the next decade to start recovering populations of the three subspecies: *arquata*, which breeds to the west of the Urals and comprises over 90% of the population; *orientalis*, one of two eastern subspecies that is found to the east of the Urals; and the poorly-understood *suschkini*, which breeds in the steppes of Kazakhstan and whose wintering grounds are largely unknown.

The second important development was the launch of the RSPB's Curlew Recovery Programme. This ambitious, five-year programme of work aims to improve the

conservation prospects for curlew across the UK.

A key part of this programme is a five-year research project (the 'Curlew Trial Management Project') which will attempt to increase breeding success and population size of local curlew populations at six sites across the UK.

Each site will undertake a combination of habitat management (primarily focussed on changing the vegetation structure of grassland and wetland habitats, through changes in grazing and cutting regimes) alongside the control of key predators of curlew nests and chicks (red fox *Vulpes vulpes* and carrion crow *Corvus corone*). Both interventions are being trialled as evidence from across European breeding grounds has shown that breeding populations are declining principally due to (1) the loss, degradation and fragmentation of breeding habitats alongside (2) high levels of nest and chick predation (Berg 1992; Grant 1997; Grant *et al.* 1999; Valkama & Currie 1999). Last year, baseline survey data was collected at all six sites.

The RSPB's recovery programme will also look to build further partnerships so that 'curlew-friendly' land management can increasingly be delivered across larger areas of its range. This area of work includes reviewing the suitability of current UK agri-environment scheme options for curlew, as well as collaborating with individuals and

Conservation efforts get underway for Eurasian Curlew; a priority species for UK conservation — cont'd

other organisations that are working to conserve the species.

Internationally, a network of ornithologists from BirdLife partners, government departments and academic institutions are furthering our understanding of curlew ecology and conservation management requirements. For example, recent GPS studies in both the Wadden Sea (Schwemmer *et al.* 2016) and Estonia (Januus Elts pers. comm.) have provided new data on migration routes and site fidelity.

This network of passionate advocates for the curlew will be crucial in attempts to improve the species' conservation status in future years. The need is urgent and we shouldn't be complacent. As many readers will be aware, sadly, it increasingly looks like only six of the world's eight species of curlew are left. Last seen in 1963, the Eskimo curlew *Numenius borealis* was thought to be one of the most abundant shorebirds in North America prior to its rapid decline towards extinction. This was thought to be due to a combination of hunting, the near total loss of the prairies to agriculture, and the suppression of prairie wildfires, in turn lead to



Eurasian Curlew— Elis Simpson

the extinction of key prey item the Rocky Mountain locust *Melanoplus spretus*.

Similarly, there have been no verified sightings of the slender-billed curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* since 1995 in Morocco. Little was known about its breeding grounds, except for breeding records in the 1920s near Omsk in southwest Siberia. It wintered around the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East, and its decline has been attributed to hunting pressure and habitat loss on wintering grounds. Whilst hope remains that birds may yet be found, even if this was the case the remaining population must be tiny.

Action is being taken to help ensure the Eurasian Curlew does not slip further towards the fate of its two closest relatives.

Dan is Senior Conservation Advisor with RSPB Scotland. I'm based in Edinburgh and work across southern Scotland. My role is to build relationships with farming communities – I undertake species and habitats surveys on farmland, provide conservation advice, and assist farms with entering agri-environment schemes. I also coordinated the international curlew plan for AEWA, and will be coordinating the implementation of the plan.

Become a Wader Quest volunteer fundraiser — Rick Simpson

When Elis and I started fundraising we thought it would all be so easy, after all the idea of saving waders is a good and noble one, is it not? Needless to say we have found that the relentless need to keep coming up with ideas, and executing them, challenging to say the least.

It was with great delight then that we accepted the very kind offer from Andrew Whitelee and Ian Dearing to run the 2016 Norfolk Bird Race to raise money for *Wader Quest*. It was their idea, they did all the leg

work, we did our part of course, but the driving force and energy all came from them. The result was a resounding success as far as we were concerned with a total of £1,664.10 raised for Wader Quest.

Fundraising is a never ending process, and one that gets harder and harder all the time, so, if you have a good idea for a fundraising event and are simply looking for a good cause to dedicate it to, then look no further.

Maybe you are a fit and healthy entrant to a marathon or half marathon unsure of which charity to support? If so *Wader Quest* would be honoured to be that charity. Or maybe you like baking cakes and wish to do a cake sale? There are countless ways in which you can put your skills and passions to work to raise money for a good cause.

... if you have a good idea for a fundraising event and are simply looking for a good cause to dedicate it to, then look no further.

Elis and I can do only so much, so we need more good people like Andrew and Ian to help us in order for *Wader Quest* to grow and increase the effectiveness of our conservation efforts.

Remember, when choosing the charity for which you are going to dedicate your time and talents, what better choice is there than to raise money for a charity where your donation will be greatly appreciated, significant and will genuinely make a difference. Moreover, we guarantee that every penny you donate will be used for wader conservation with not a single penny being syphoned off for any other purpose.

... your donation will be greatly appreciated, significant and will genuinely make a difference...

Wader Quest is an entirely voluntary organization where every person working or volunteering for the charity is giving their time freely, no salaries and no expenses are paid from our precious funds.



Wader Quest Quiz Night fundraiser - Elis Simpson

Spoon-billed Sandpiper species survival update— Rick Simpson



Spoon-billed Sandpiper T8; headstarted in 2014 back on the breeding grounds 2016
— Egor Loktionov Birds Russia.

It has been a few years now since conservationists raised concern about the population decline of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, at one stage it was thought they only had five more years on this earth if nothing was done. Those five years have passed so how well are they doing?

In the wild their numbers seem to have held up, indeed there may even be more than we at first thought, especially now that an entirely new breeding ground has been discovered by a recent Heritage Expedition in north-eastern Russia. Also, extensive searches on the staging areas have uncovered previously unsuspected numbers on migration in areas previously unstudied.

Apart from habitat loss, one of the biggest concerns for the species was that it was being hunted, albeit collaterally, in its south-east Asian wintering ground. Great efforts have been made to reduce this attrition by encouraging hunters to take up other occupations such as fishing. This part of the process has been largely successful in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

All of this then is encouraging and the fact that they are still with us, is tremendously good news.

In captivity they have not fared quite as

well as we had perhaps hoped. Finally, this year the captive breeding team at Slimbridge WWT have encouraged their charges to breed with seven eggs being laid from two pairs. From these only two hatched and both chicks died within sixty hours of doing so. Although this is a setback, the fact that the birds have bred at all is a massive achievement and bodes well for the future of the scheme.



One of the Slimbridge eggs hatching
— Ben Cheery WWT

Rather more successful has been the headstarting programme in Russia where eggs are taken from nests, incubated and then chicks fledged before their eventual release back into the wild. This season thirty six eggs were collected, twenty three have

already hatched, one chick has died, and ten are looking good to hatch any time soon. The fact that all the eggs are due to hatch at more or less the same time is good news as this means that there need to be just one release operation since they can all be released at the same time.

Birds from previous seasons that have started their life this way have successfully migrated south and returned to breed, indeed some of their offspring are included in this year's collection of eggs. If the numbers quoted above all fledge, there is a chance that by the end of the season there will have been a total of over one hundred headstarted birds returned to the wild. Together with those that were reared simultaneously in the wild by the adults that went on to have second clutches, this is sizeable percentage of the birds thought to be in the wild and clearly a tremendous boost to the wild stock.

The latest global population estimate is around 200 pairs double what it was in 2013



The 36 eggs collected this year by the headstarting team — Roland Digby WWT

when we started our involvement with the fundraising when it was thought there were less than one hundred pairs. For a population that size the eighty one already released birds and whatever this season adds to that the number of headstarted fledglings is a significant percentage of all the fledglings produced by the entire global population.

For the latest updates and news about the Saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper project: www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com

Did you know?

Following research carried out (del Hoyo & Collar 2014) on the relationships between some of the smaller sandpipers, it was decided that the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

should lose its single species genus of *Eurynorhynchus* and instead become part of the *Calidris* group. Its specific name also changed from *pygmeus* to *pygmaea* so the

scientific name is now *Calidris pygmaea*. The same study suggested that Ruff, *Philomachus pugnax* should also join the *Calidris* as *Calidris pugnax*.

The Waders of Stewart Island, New Zealand — Matt Jones

When you imagine New Zealand, you could be forgiven for thinking it's all Hobbits, stunning vistas and All Blacks rugby. When your thoughts turn to New Zealand birds, kiwis and penguins might come to mind. But when you narrow your mental search engine to New Zealand waders, three special birds are top of the list:

Shore Plover *Thinornis novaeseelandiae* are mainly found on the Chatham Islands although a few birds can be seen on the mainland as a result of pretty unsuccessful translocation projects.



Shore Plover — Elis Simpson

The quirky Wrybill *Anarhynchus frontalis* is the only wader in the world that has a bill which turns to the right. This charming small sandpiper feeds on invertebrates in the braided rivers of New Zealand's South Island, where it breeds. It can also be found fairly easily at its over-wintering grounds in the North Island.



Wrybill — Elis Simpson

Then there's the classy delicate looking Black Stilt *Himantopus novaezelandiae*, breeding only in McKenzie country in the central South Island with the Southern Alps as a backdrop. A true world rarity with only 200 birds left in the wild, they are slowly recovering thanks to a captive breeding programme run by the Department of Conservation (DOC).



Black Stilt — Elis Simpson

Birders visiting New Zealand will inevitably add the country's third island - Stewart Island - to their itinerary. Located about 20 miles off the southern tip of the South Island, Stewart Island is known as the bird watching capital of New Zealand. 85% of the island's 600 square miles is national park and has less mammalian predator species than the two main islands. Rakiura National Park has lush green temperate rainforest that comes right down to the sea and offers the perfect habitat for the 17-20,000 Stewart Island Brown Kiwi *Apteryx australis lawryi*. This diurnal kiwi is the only kiwi species that is not endangered.

At latitude 47 degrees south (the roaring forties!) Stewart Island is the gateway to the Southern Ocean - pelagics in the area can be highly rewarding if your stomach can cope with the challenging seas. And then there is Ulva Island, a predator-free forested island that lies within Paterson Inlet. Open to the general public, it is home to rare land endemics such as South Island Saddleback, *Philesturnus carunculatus*, Yellowhead *Mohoua ochrocephala*, Pipipi (Brown Creeper) *Mohoua novaeseelandiae* and Kaka *Nestor meridionalis* to name a few.



Variable Oystercatcher — Matt Jones

Visiting birders may not consider my home of Stewart Island as a place to view waders,

given that on most New Zealand beaches it's almost guaranteed that a pair of Variable Oystercatchers *Haematopus unicolor* will be feeding or scrapping over territory.

But in the centre of Oban, the only township on Stewart Island, two pairs of Variable Oystercatcher share Halfmoon Bay Beach with the 400 permanent human residents. In the busy summer season, each pair of birds will quite happily raise one or two chicks right under the noses of visiting tourists while chasing off opportunistic Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus*.

The Variable Oystercatchers here are quite often joined by their smaller cousin, the South Island Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus finschi* which has a more uniform black and white plumage. Look a bit harder and there are other waders present. On the island's golf course the lush greens attract Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles novaehollandiae* although you'll usually hear them before you see them.



South Island Pied Oystercatcher — Elis Simpson

Logistics come into play if you want to get more waders onto your Stewart Island list - a fair bit of walking, boats, and even planes to get you out to the more remote areas.

From November to March two migrant species spend summer in the deep south; Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* can be seen on the rocky shores and Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* on tidal mudflats.

The Bar-tailed Godwits breed in Alaska and make their epic journey across the Pacific to New Zealand. Most stay in the North Island, but about 200 birds continue their journey south and travel the whole length of New Zealand to come to Stewart Island. They often join the Double-banded Plovers *Charadrius bicinctus bicinctus* gathering at low tide on the mudflats at the head of Paterson Inlet and can only really be seen by boat.

The Waders of Stewart Island, New Zealand — cont'd



Bar-tailed Godwit — Matt Jones

Double-banded Plovers are pretty common throughout mainland New Zealand but their stronghold on Stewart Island tends to be on the south western side of the island at Mason Bay. If you walk along the bay during breeding season this small wader performs the classic diversion tactic of faking a broken wing luring the intruder away from the nests, eggs or even young.



Double-banded Plover — Matt Jones

If you put the time and effort into getting to Mason Bay you may be rewarded with seeing one of the rarest waders in the world, the Southern New Zealand Dotterel, also known as the Red-breasted Plover *Charadrius obscurus obscurus*.



Southern New Zealand Dotterel (breeding plumage) — Matt Jones

Birdlife International and other bodies see this bird as a full species but ironically in New Zealand it is classed as a sub-species of the New Zealand Dotterel *Charadrius obscurus aquilonius*, particularly in the eyes of DOC.

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand (OSNZ) and DOC recently began work to prove that the southern bird is a separate species to its more common North Island cousin, if successful this could significantly affect the conservation status of these birds.



Northern New Zealand Dotterel — Elis Simpson

A bit smaller and darker in plumage than the birds found in the North Island, the Southern New Zealand Dotterel breeds only on Stewart Island. Occasionally up to 30% of the population will over-winter in the southernmost part of the South Island. Unlike its North Island cousin which breeds on beaches and is reasonably easy to see, the Southern New Zealand Dotterel breeds on the hills of Stewart Island but will come down to local beaches to feed.



Southern New Zealand Dotterel (non-breeding plumage) — Matt Jones

At the time of writing, there are 126 Southern New Zealand Dotterel; rarer than the Kakapo *Strigops habroptilus* or any kiwi species. In 1992 when efforts first began to save this species the population was down to a shocking 62 individuals. By 2009 it had climbed to 290.

The main problem seems to be adults and

chicks being taken by feral cats which DOC are working to eradicate from the breeding grounds. Eggs also get taken by Kelp Gulls and even Masked Lapwings. If the Southern New Zealand Dotterel becomes a separate species in New Zealand, the hope is that it gains a higher profile and more funds become available to protect this bird and its breeding grounds.

A few years ago I was lucky enough to join DOC Ranger, Paul Jacques, helping him to conduct Dotterel counts at Mason Bay. We were pleasantly surprised at how trusting these birds were, often running towards us and sitting beneath our scopes. These stunning little birds could so easily slip under the radar and if the spiralling decline in their numbers continues this bird could be extinct in the next few years.

Stewart Island is a stunning part of the world and its remote wilderness means that rare waders may well go undetected. In the past, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* and Sanderling *Calidris alba* (both rarities in New Zealand) have been recorded. In March 2013 I found Stewart Island's first Far-eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*.



Far Eastern Curlew — Matt Jones

So if your wader quest brings you to Stewart Island, look beyond the shoreline and search for something precious, as Gollum might say!

Matt Jones is a professional bird watching guide working throughout New Zealand and lives on Stewart Island — Ed.

www.mattjoneswildlifeimages.com

Update from The Garden Route Shorebird Conservation Research project — Selena Flores

The Garden Route Shorebird Conservation Research project with the Nature's Valley Trust (NVT) continued through its second year over the past austral summer in South Africa.



Selena Flores measuring a female White-fronted Plover caught for ringing. Rings have been useful in tracking breeding territories and survival — Gilles Raye

Project leader Selena Flores and supervisors Dr. Mark Brown (NVT) and Prof. Peter Ryan (Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the Univ. of Cape Town) were joined by 6 international interns, to carry out 8 months of monitoring, observing, and conducting disturbance experiments with breeding White-fronted Plovers *Charadrius marginatus* in Plettenberg Bay and Nature's Valley.



Breeding White-fronted Plover doing a display where it feigns a broken wing, to distract perceived threats — Selena Flores

Hiking more than 1500km at beach field sites, and gaining 500 hours of behavioural observations, the team collected an incredible amount of data to investigate the impact of tourism on the survival of over 80 plover nests.



NVT shorebird interns walking down one of the lovely beach field sites while conducting a survey — Selena Flores

This information will also be of great help to properly inform the planned protection and awareness programme the team will be piloting next year!



British intern Chloe Brookes conducts egg temperature trials, part of the project that investigates the effects of egg exposure due to disturbance — Mark Brown

In addition to forming their proud partnership with *Wader Quest*, Selena & NVT have also been collaborating with UK universities on a conservation genetics study,



White-fronted Plovers mainly nest on sandy beaches with vegetated hummocks, and prefer camouflaged areas among debris — Selena Flores

filmed a documentary segment on White-fronted Plovers with Cape Town's Homebrew Films, and hosted events highlighting this shorebird research for the very first Hi-Tec Garden Route Walking Festival!



A White-fronted Plover egg that has just been pipped by the chick inside! — Selena Flores

They also continue to be directly involved with the community to further this and other coastal conservation initiatives.

NVT has planned to ramp up their efforts in the upcoming breeding season — testing out beach habitat management methods to hopefully reduce disturbance of these sensitive shorebirds, creating an effective community education programme from the ground up, and encouraging residents to serve as local coastal stewards, taking responsibility of their favourite stretches of beach. The research team will then evaluate the effectiveness of these techniques, to create conservation management recommendations that can be applied elsewhere.



A two-day old plover chick stands among a very disturbed beach area — Selena Flores

We look very forward to sharing our results with the *Wader Quest* community as the project progresses!

Mud and tides – April in IJzermunding — Alicia Mottur

The 130 hectare IJzermunding Nature Reserve sits on the estuary of the river IJzer by the seaside town of Nieuwpoort, on the Belgian coast. Handy to reach from Nieuwpoort, you can make the quick jump across the inlet with a free ferry service



Pied Avocet — Alicia Mottur

operated throughout the day, which lands you at the start of the trails leading into the Reserve. Especially during the tourist season it's best to get an early start, since the paths become busy with bikers and walkers, and other birders (identifiable even at a distance by their state-of-the-art optics). There are three observation spots along the paths. My all-time favourite is the "Zeehond" hide named after the Harbour Seals *Phoca vitulina* that are famous visitors to the estuary. The marked trails lead among the dunes, sheep meadows, and along the tidal mudflats, as well as by the harbour.

In total, at least 25 species of wader have been recorded at the Reserve. In spring and summer, watch out for Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata*, Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus* and Pied Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*, along with passage Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* and Sanderlings *Calidris alba* on the jetty. On the mudflats there can be huge congregations of Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus*. Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* and Ruff *Calidris pugnax* have been recorded, and Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* hang out in the meadows.

During late summer/fall migration, and in winter, Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* and Common Redshanks share the scene with Eurasian Curlews, along with an occasional Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* or Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Spotted Redshank

Tringa erythropus, Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*.

Like the birds, you can take your pick of the habitats on offer in and around IJzermunding, including tidal mudflats, grassy dunes, sheep meadows, the harbour and inlet, jetties, sandy beaches, breakwaters, and even a small wood in the town of Nieuwpoort. Waders can even turn up where you least expect them – I encountered a Ruddy Turnstone picking up insects beside a bike rack just outside my hotel!

When you disembark from the ferry on the IJzermunding side of the inlet, it's worth making a quick right-hand detour to the abandoned-looking concrete platform



Ruddy Turnstone — Alicia Mottur

overlooking the inlet (in between the harbour proper and the piers), since the mudflats there are a favourite hangout for many kinds of birds throughout the year. In April I counted flocks of Eurasian Oystercatchers, Eurasian Curlews, Northern Lapwings, Pied Avocets, gulls and terns, Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* and Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Needless to say, don't forget your spotting scope. It's a handy place to set it up on the platform and scan the distant reaches of the mudflats. That's how I spotted the little group of six Sandwich Terns *Sterna sandvicensis* and five Pied Avocets.

Once you finally manage to tear yourself



Northern Lapwing — Alicia Mottur

away from this first location, strike off into the Reserve proper, along the main trail leading between scrubby dunes and sheep meadows. Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* are everywhere, singing from fence posts or bushes along the path, or performing their little parachuting song flight. You don't have to be a female Meadow Pipit to enjoy the spectacle. And you can't miss the European Stonechats *Saxicola torquatus*, alert and perky on the tops of bushes. Don't forget to keep an ear open for calling Eurasian Curlews and Northern Lapwings, Common Redshanks and Eurasian Oystercatchers from over the fields.

About halfway through the Reserve, turn right onto a narrow sandy track which will lead you between high banks to the "Zeehond" hide. With shutters opening on three sides, you can have an almost 360° view from the tidal mudflats on the one hand, with the harbour and pilings in the distance, right round to the sheep meadows and scrub land on the other side. A network



Common Sandpiper — Alicia Mottur

Mud and tides – April in IJzermonding – cont'd

of ditches runs through the meadow, where Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* like to feed, along with Eurasian Curlews, Eurasian Oystercatchers and Common Redshanks. Sheep graze here too, and have been known to wander right up to the windows of the hide and peek in, as they chew thoughtfully on salty grass. “No need for fancy telescopes to see us,” they seem to say.

If you've gotten an early start in the Reserve, you'll probably reach the “Zeehond” by mid-day, so it's the perfect place to rest a bit and enjoy lunch while keeping an eye on the activity out the window, before pushing off for the rest of the Reserve and the hike back to Nieuwpoort.

While waiting for the ferry on the return trip across the inlet, pay attention to goings-on in and around the water; I've spotted a Common Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* surfacing just in front of the pier, and once enjoyed the odd sight of a Stock Dove *Columba oenas* sharing a perch on a piling with a Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*. There are crowds of rabbits in the fields around IJzermonding, with consequently numerous disused burrows, which apparently interest the Stock Doves as nesting sites.



Sanderling — Alicia Mottur



Eurasian Oystercatcher — Alicia Mottur

If you have time, it's also worth taking a walk out to the end of the pier by Nieuwpoort harbour. When I was there in April, there were scores of Ruddy Turnstones resting all along the barriers of the pier and feeding down below on the exposed rocks at low tide. I happened to notice one lone Sanderling perched on the rocks amidst its Turnstone colleagues. The Turnstones are very tame, allowing you to get to within two metres before looking nervous – a great photo opportunity! From the end of the pier you can scan the watery expanse for fishing gulls and cormorants, and there's always that hope at the right time of year for a pelagic bird. At high tide, you may have to negotiate a gauntlet of fishermen on your way out and back along the pier, apparently after halibut. Crabs are an unfortunate by-catch of these sportsmen, who callously dump them on the pier to fend for themselves rather than taking the trouble to throw them back in the sea. I caught all I saw and tossed them back, as gently as possible.

Anyone with a passion for waders is already aware that places like IJzermonding are facing a future underwater due to global warming and rising sea levels. The Belgian region of Flanders, where the Reserve is located, could see most of its territory become submerged if climate change prognostications are realised. Which is a bit ironic, considering that the Flemish are great bike riders and you see solar panels and wind farms everywhere in Flanders. Anyway, enjoy IJzermonding's spectacle of waders, waves and water while you can...and please, take the train to get there.



Eurasian Curlews — Alicia Mottur

Did you know?

Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* have bills that are constantly growing. They can grow by about 15cm a year which is about twice the length of the average oystercatcher bill.

So why don't they all have grotesquely long bills?

The answer is that they get worn down by the constant feeding; it is also interesting to

note that the shape of the bill can indicate the food preferences of the individual. A pointed bill as in the picture indicates the bird feeds mainly on worms from the soil and blunt tipped bills indicate bivalve predation.

The prey type is not therefore determined by the bill shape, but the bill shape by the diet preference.



Eurasian Oystercatcher — Elis Simpson

Where will estuaries be allowed to go? — Sonny Whitelaw

A threat to our estuaries and to the wading birds that depend upon them is looming. And yet, like the proverbial elephant in the room, it's an issue that everyone is trying very hard to avoid.

Like most countries, New Zealand has a fistful of environmental laws and policies regarding wildlife, biodiversity, freshwater (rivers, lakes and wetlands) and estuaries, the latter being covered under the New Zealand 2010 Coastal Policy Statement.

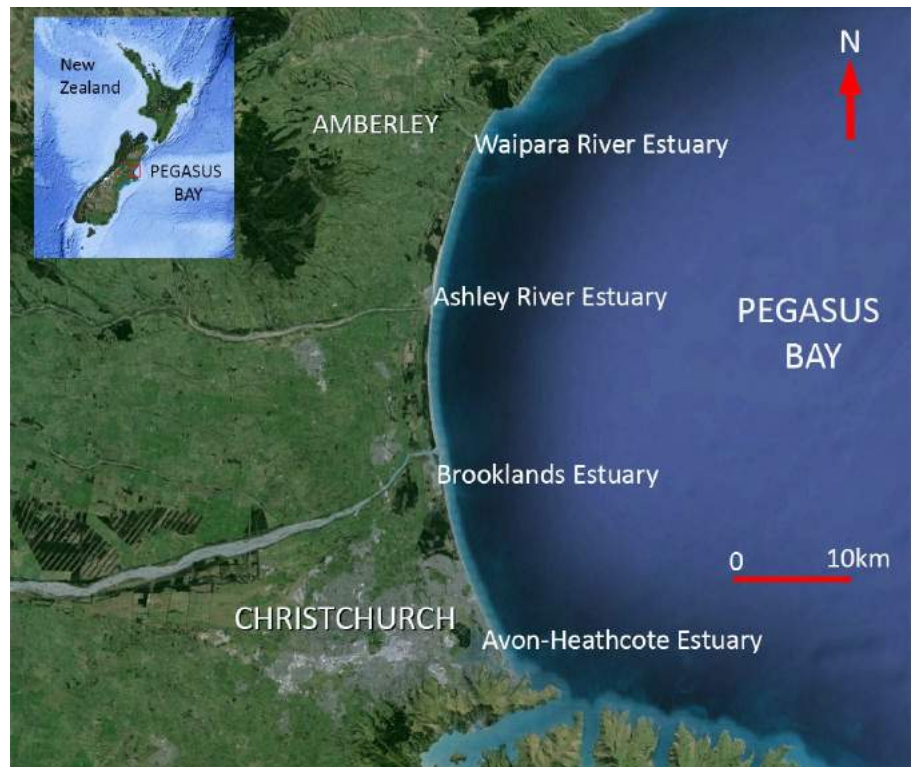
In 2008, the Ministry for the Environment issued policy statements requiring local and regional councils to prepare for the impacts of rising sea levels and guidelines to this effect. In 2014, one of my jobs as Biodiversity Adviser for a local council was to report on how rising sea levels would affect the biodiversity of the Waipara River Estuary in Pegasus Bay near Christchurch. (See map)

My report would be based in part on postgraduate research work I'd undertaken in 2011 on the coastal margins near the Ashley River estuary, just to the south. Both unmodified estuaries are important bird habitats, but for this discussion, I'll focus on the Ashley because the shorebird values of the Ashley are internationally recognised. In fact it's included in a list of wetland sites that meet criteria prescribed to be of international importance by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It is host to over a hundred species of birds, including the Wrybill *Anarhynchus frontalis*, the only bird in the world with an asymmetrically bent bill; the Black-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus bulleri*, the most endangered gull in the world, and the critically endangered and extremely rare (just 60 known birds in the wild) Black Stilt *Himantopus novaezelandiae*.

Migratory wading birds including Bar-



Wrybill — Elis Simpson



tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica*, Red Knots *Calidris canutus*, Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*. Native birds include Shags - Pied Shag *varius*, Little Shag *sulcirostris*, Black Shag (Great Cormorant) *carbo* and Spotted Shag *Stictocarbo punctatus*; large water birds - Australasian Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilus*, Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia*, White Heron (Great Egret) *Ardea alba* and White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*; intermediate-sized waders - Spur-winged (Masked) Lapwing *Vanellus miles*, South Island Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus finschi* and Variable Oystercatcher *Haematopus unicolor* and oystercatcher hybrids *Haematopus finschi* X *unicolor*; waterfowl - Black Swan, *Cygnus atratus*, Grey Teal *Anas gracilis*, New Zealand Shoveler *Anas rhynchos*, Paradise Shelduck *Tadorna variegata*, New Zealand Scaup *Aythya novaeseelandiae* and Australian (Eurasian) Coot *Fulica atra*; terns - White-fronted *Sterna striata*, Caspian *Hydroprogne caspia*, and endangered Black-fronted *Chlidonias albostratus*; and other gulls - Red-billed *Larus scopulinus* and Southern Black-backed (Kelp) *Larus dominicanus*. Plus forest and riverbank birds - Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*, Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*, Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus*

sanctus, Grey Warbler *Gerygone igata*, Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis*, and New Zealand Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*.

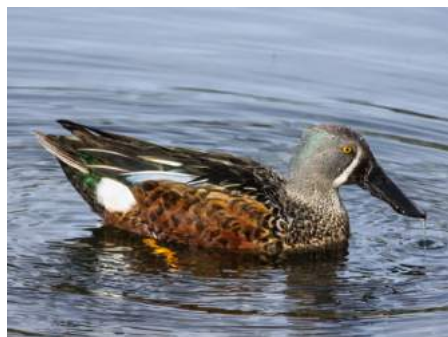
So how do estuaries normally deal with rising sea levels? Where coastlines are undeveloped, soft shore ecosystems including estuaries adjust naturally through spatial reconfiguration. Simply put, they migrate inland ahead of the rising seas, inundating and/or eroding the land (and everything on the land) as they go.

That may seem blindingly obvious, and probably acceptable (unless you're trying to protect rare, and about to be drowned, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems), until you realise that in New Zealand most estuaries are not on undeveloped coastlines. They're surrounded by a few remnant dune systems made largely unstable by exotic forestry. The rest of the land has been converted to agricultural and commercial use, with high value private and public properties and critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and wastewater treatment plants constructed and maintained through rates and taxes. I mention rates and taxes because in a moment, I'll be talking about economic drivers.

In some places in the world, like the eastern seaboard of the US, as sea levels rise and erode beaches and dunes, mobilised

Where will estuaries be allowed to go? — cont'd

sediment enters estuaries, effectively elevating them. This allows them to keep pace with rising sea levels in situ, rather than migrating inland. However, given the most recent predictions for the speed and scale of sea level rise, this dynamic equilibrium will be a temporary truce at best.



New Zealand Shoveler – Elis Simpson

In any case, the estuaries in the Pegasus Bay are already overflowing into developed areas when storms coincide with high tides. They are trying to 'spacially reconfigure' by migrating inland. This is not just based on observations following a few recent storms. The National Institute of Water and Atmospheric (NIWA) scores coastal environments with a coastal sensitivity index (CSI) for inundation (from the sea) and erosion. The stretch of Pegasus Bay coastline where the Ashley estuary is located, is in the CSI inundation red zone—one of the most vulnerable in New Zealand. It's a 'soft shore' environment comprised of a few unstable remnant dunes planted with exotic forestry, agricultural lands and houses, and critical infrastructure including State Highway 1, the only road linking the north and south of the island. And between the Ashley and Waipara estuaries, sitting barely above sea level a few hundred metres from the beach, is the wastewater treatment plant for the nearby



Black Stilt juvenile – Elis Simpson

town of Amberley. The town and coastal settlements between the Waipara and Ashley estuaries have been rapidly growing since people fled from Christchurch following the 2011 earthquakes. Following a 2014 storm, low-lying properties around Ashley estuary were flooded, and State Highway 1 - critical infrastructure - was closed. Ratepayers criticised engineers for not ensuring that stormwater drains, which discharge into the ocean, were adequate. The drains were built decades before anyone had a clue that the sea levels were rising. As this stretch of the coastline was prograding until 1992, estuaries were indeed keeping pace with sea level rise during the twentieth century. Today, the drain outlets are barely above high tide. Soon, they'll be permanently submerged. Valves and pumps (presumably powered by generators mounted above floodwaters and inundation zones) might help, but there's an added wrinkle: the drains were never designed for the volume of rainwater that storms turbocharged by climate change are now delivering. So the

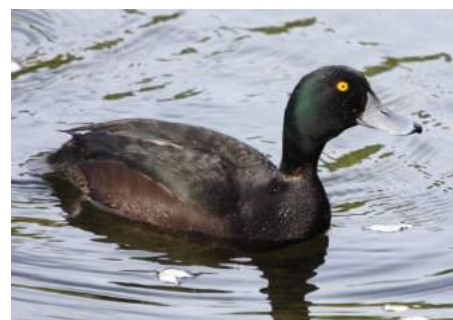


Bar-tailed Godwit – Elis Simpson

estuaries are flooding surrounding lands, 'spacially reconfiguring' as they begin their migration inland.

In New Zealand, when it comes to natural hazards, protecting critical infrastructure is a first priority. And any time public and private property is lost or damaged by natural hazards, our rates and insurance premiums hike up another notch. So one way or another, we're all affected by the economics of natural hazards.

By the Ministry for the Environment's definition, sea level rise is a natural coastal hazard. Policy 26 of The New Zealand 2010 Coastal Policy Statement, recognises the value of natural defences against coastal hazards, stating that it is necessary to: *'Provide where appropriate for the protection, restoration or enhancement of natural defences that protect coastal land*



New Zealand Scaup – Elis Simpson

uses, or sites of significant biodiversity, cultural or historic heritage or geological value, from coastal hazards.'

Since rising sea levels are the biggest hazard for coastal regions and estuaries respond by migrating inland, the only way to protect their extraordinary biodiversity is to allow, indeed assist this movement. Yet in every policy statement and plan, both national and regional, the focus is entirely on protecting property and infrastructure against flooding and inundation (from the sea). Even the most recent reports from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr. Jan Wright, explicitly excludes the impacts on the environment from sea level rise, and instead focus entirely on the impacts to property and infrastructure. Where the precautionary principal is applied to rising sea levels, the contradiction becomes self-evident. In the 2010 Coastal Policy Statement, Policy 3: Precautionary Approach 2 states that steps should be taken: *2(a), to ensure that, avoidable social and economic loss and harm to communities does not occur. 2(b), natural adjustments for coastal processes, natural defences, ecosystems, habitat and species are allowed to occur.*

When it comes to estuarine ecosystems and habitats and the species that depend upon them, you can either allow them to migrate inland, i.e., flood critical infrastructure and property, or stop them moving inland, leaving them to be inundated by rising sea level. We can't have it both ways. As to the birds and other species that inhabit them...well, you get the picture.

In the government's defence, it's hard to keep up to date or devise acceptable adaptation strategies when it comes to rising sea levels. Because of the staggering implications, peer-review research is being published at a breath-taking pace, with the latest paper published March 22 of this

Where will estuaries be allowed to go? — cont'd

year by Hansen *et al*, making the IPCC AR4 'worst case' sea level rise scenarios that underpin both the Ministry's 2008 Guidance Manual and the 2010 Coastal Policy Statement seem wildly, even dangerously optimistic.



Spur-winged (Masked) Lapwing – Elis Simpson

So what does this all mean? For starters, my report to the district council on the impacts to biodiversity was hidden away. Not because of the effects on ecosystems and habitats, but because of the economic implications for coastal property values. This small district council had reason to be concerned. Subsequent engineering reports from Tonkin and Taylor, commissioned by

Christchurch City Council, include inundation maps that painted such a grim picture for 18,000 coastal properties that ratepayers rebelled and demanded the Council order a peer review of the 'uncertain science' used in the report. These property owners further demanded that the Council entirely remove the inundation/ flooding information attached to their property LIMS (Land and Information Report). This would protect current owners from the economic hit they would take when trying to sell off at-risk properties to future buyers kept ignorant of the risks. The Council agreed to some wording changes to LIMS, and is currently in negotiations with ratepayers. As for allowing estuaries to migrate, as McGlone *et al* point out:

'It is unlikely that people will readily allow new areas of dunes, marshland or estuary to form behind those now present. The most probable response to sea level rise will be to protect assets and infrastructure by erecting new hard barriers to prevent erosion, planting sand dunes to stabilise them, and infilling encroaching wetlands and installing new drainage. This scenario (often termed 'coastal squeeze' in the international literature), means that rising sea levels will

probably remove large areas of the rich biological habitat'.

If they're right, and angry ratepayers demand that the Precautionary Approach 2(a) 'avoidable social and economic costs' trumps Precautionary Approach 2(b) 'natural adjustments for coastal processes', can anyone explain to me where the estuaries, and the extraordinary bird life that currently inhabits them, will be allowed to go



Variable Oystercatcher — Elis Simpson

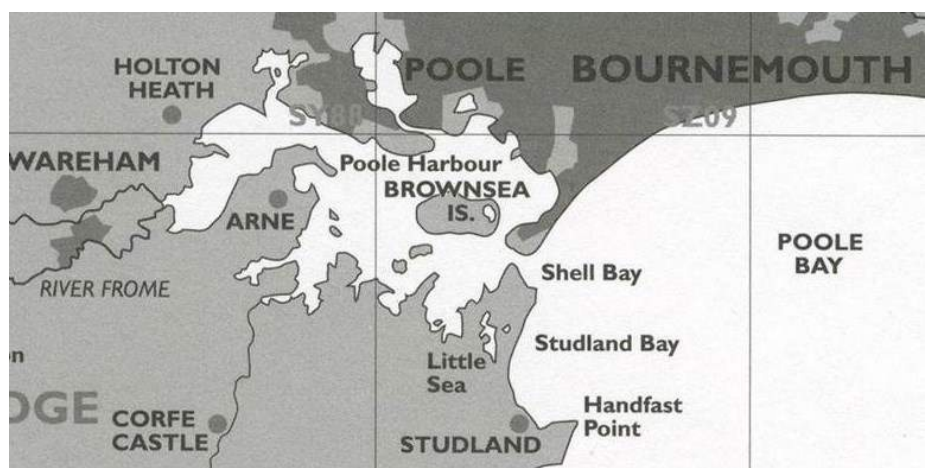
Sonny Whitelaw - Manager Braid
www.braid.org.nz

Poole Harbour, Dorset: a South Coast Winter Wader Experience — Neil Gartshore

An Overview

Often quoted as being the second largest natural harbour in the world (not strictly true), Poole Harbour covers ca.3600 hectares (on a high spring tide) and has a shoreline of 100km. The harbour is tidal as far up river as Wareham and consists of open water/mudflats, reed fringes, saltmarsh and five large islands (four inhabited). Adjacent to the harbour are extensive areas of internationally important heathland as well as reed beds, wet grassland, farmland, woodland, two freshwater lakes and the conurbation of Poole. This mosaic of habitats within the Poole Harbour recording area (defined by local birdwatchers) attracts a wide variety of species - this article will concentrate on the waders.

The harbour falls within important designations including RAMSAR, SPA, SAC, SSSI and AONB. Leisure activities in the



Map of Poole Harbour from *The Birds of Dorset* (Helm) by kind permission of the author George Green.

harbour include yachting, canoeing, wind/kite surfing, jet skiing, wildfowling and angling. Commercially there is a small working port, a small-scale fishery and a number of pleasure trip boat companies. There is also a Royal

Marine base. In with this mix is a natural resource with important national and international assemblages of waders and wildfowl (monitored by WeBS counts). Conflicts between users and wildlife

Poole Harbour, Dorset: a South Coast Winter Wader Experience — cont'd

can occur but large stretches of the harbour's shoreline and adjacent land are protected under the ownership and/or management of conservation bodies - RSPB, National Trust, Dorset Wildlife Trust, Natural England and Poole Borough Council.

Waders in Poole Harbour

From the early 1990's numbers of some wader species were relatively low compared to today, others have seen a decline from previous highs. It wasn't until the mid-1990s that Poole Harbour became internationally important for its wintering wader (and wildfowl) numbers... first reaching the 20,000 threshold by one bird (20,001!) Fluctuations in the numbers of individual species are always going to occur but since the mid-1990's the overall number of birds has continued to rise.

Poole Harbour offers many sites from which waders can be viewed and to cover them thoroughly two, or preferably three days, should be allowed. Together with the other sites and birds that Dorset has to offer, a week in the county makes an interesting birding destination. Waders are present all year round with the peak numbers found during the winter months (October-February). March through May is a time of spring passage, with the high winter numbers dropping off into March as birds leave for their breeding grounds. By July autumn passage can be underway, by September the numbers of the main wintering species begin to build up. Waders are thin on the ground in the summer (late May-early July), usually restricted to a few pairs of breeding Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* and small numbers of non-breeding Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*.



Dunlin - pack on to the Brownsea lagoon islands at high water — Neil Gartshore

The Sites and Their Birds

Starting at the narrow harbour mouth, with less than 400m of water between Sandbanks and Studland, some of the harbours less numerous species are found: Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Sanderling *Calidris alba* and Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima*. Despite being a heavily disturbed area they somehow co-exist with people and dogs - a particular favourite spot are the groynes near the Haven Hotel on the north (Sandbanks) side. Continuing west along the developed north shore, toward Poole Quay, birds are scarce: once the tide falls, Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica* and Red Knots *Calidris canutus* favour Whitley Lake (Shore Road) whilst Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* and Eurasian Oystercatchers can usually be expected around Parkstone Bay/Baiter.

Once past Poole Quay the harbour opens out into Holes Bay and, further west, into Lytchett Bay. Just a road width from Poole railway station a path along the east shore of Holes Bay leads into Upton Country Park. Good numbers of Black-tailed Godwits can often be seen at close quarters from the Park (look out for colour-ringed birds), Pied Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* have increased in the bay over the years and Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* can regularly be found here.

Lytchett Bay has been well watched for many years and often turns up a good selection of waders. Recent improvements to access, on land managed by the RSPB, has increased the likelihood of more being found. The new viewing area overlooking flooded fields on the west side of the bay has given better opportunities to see waders, especially at passage time - Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*, Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* and Common Sandpipers, Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Ruff *Calidris pugnax*, Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* have recently been seen alongside small numbers of the regular species.

The remaining stretch of the north shore, and the south shore of the Wareham Channel, have no public access but just set back from where the rivers of Fome and Piddle



Brownsea Island - the jewel of Poole Harbour — Neil Gartshore

Poole Harbour, Dorset: a South Coast Winter Wader Experience — cont'd

flow into the harbour - east of Wareham - is Swineham Gravel Pit. Few waders use the pit, but Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* has made an appearance in the past (July), and Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyrtus minimus* are in the area (but not often seen).

The south shore of the harbour is undeveloped and has three main access points (1-3). The RSPB's reserve at Arne (1) overlooks a large part of the harbour. The spit in Arne Bay can hold good numbers of Eurasian Curlew and Eurasian Oystercatcher at high water. The reserve looks over the Middlebere Channel, which can be viewed from the Middlebere (2) side of the channel as well. Numbers of Pied Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits often reach into the high hundreds and are joined by Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* and Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, the latter one of the harbours declining species, and occasionally Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* (now a very scarce visitor).

From Middlebere around to Studland access to the harbour is either restricted or possible only on footpaths and bridleways through Rempstone Forest (no car access) - the Purbeck & South Dorset OS map (OL15) will help here. These quieter backwaters will have a good selection of waders but, apart from the unexpected, nothing that can't be found elsewhere. The Studland peninsula (3) brings the journey around Poole Harbour back to the south side of the harbour mouth. On Studland, Brand's Bay can be viewed from a hide - on falling/rising tides this is a good spot for waders as they leave/return to Brownsea Island. If there is a jewel in the crown it has to be Brownsea, or more specifically the lagoon. Wader movements around the harbour are greatly influenced by the double high tide system with birds spreading out to feed at falling-low-rising tides and then roosting at high tides - working out where to go at the different



Common Redshank — Elis Simpson

states of the tide takes a little getting used to. Brownsea though is a magnet for waders, especially on the spring tides when birds will often return there to roost on the high tide. Numbers of Pied Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits can reach close to the harbour maximums (1500-1800 of each), the small islands on the lagoon can be crammed full of Dunlin with Red Knot and Grey Plover mixed in amongst them.

Eurasian Oystercatcher, Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank and Eurasian Curlew can reach into three figures, and small numbers of Spotted Redshank and Common Greenshank overwinter. In the autumn the lagoon is a good place to find scarcer waders such as Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* and Ruff and rarities also turn up - Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* and White-rumped Sandpipers *Calidris fuscicollis* to name but two recent visitors.

Brownsea closes at the end of October but visits are possible on winter boat trips around the harbour, some of which land on the island.

For those who enjoy wader watching at its

best, a visit to Poole Harbour should be on the birding 'to do' list.



Avocet - one of the UK's largest wintering populations — Neil Gartshore



Black-tailed Godwit - winters in internationally important numbers — Neil Gartshore

Neil has been involved with the harbour since 1991, first as a warden at the RSPB's Arne reserve and, since 2006, as a freelance bird surveyor and bird guide. He is the author of the 'Best Birdwatching Sites: Dorset' in which the harbour and its surrounds feature heavily. He runs Calluna Books, buying and selling natural history books, and is the editor/publisher of the Birdwatcher's Yearbook. For further information: www.callunabooks.co.uk — Ed.

Wader Photo Gallery — send us your favourite wader photos



Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
- Knut Hansen; Norway



Beach Stone-Curlew *Esacus magnirostris*
- Matt Jones; Australia



Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
- Martin Eayrs; UK



Snowy Plover *Charadrius nevosus*
- John Walker; USA



Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*
- Sue Oertli; South Africa



Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*
- Elis Simpson; UK



Black-headed Lapwing *Vanellus tectus*
- Tommy Pedersen; Ethiopia



Little Stint *Calidris minuta*
- Juian Bhalerao; UK

Julian Bhalerao — Rick Simpson

At the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair, Elis and I were shocked and saddened to hear about the sudden illness of old friend Julian Bhalerao.

Julian suffered a stroke on May 12th while he was watching the European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* at Winterton, in Norfolk, UK.

The *Wader Quest* team wish Julian, a speedy and full recovery and to Sarah and the rest of the family much strength to get through this very tough time.

The good news is that the latest we heard is that Julian is doing well and recovering slowly, he was overjoyed I'm sure, to be able to resume eating normally recently. Apparently he celebrated with a burger and chips, not to mention chocolate buttons... and why not? Get well soon old friend.



Eurasian Woodcock on Cley beach - Julian Bhalerao

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Last meeting: 17 April 2016

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