

Forthcoming talks:

22/02/2017 Friends of Linford Lakes Nature Reserve. 19:30 Linford Lakes Nature Reserve, Wolverton Rd, Milton Keynes MK14 5AH (Waders their Conservation and Ability to Inspire)

03/03/2017 West Midlands Bird Club (Solihull). 19:30 Guild House, Knowle, Solihull, West Midlands B93 0LN (Wader Quest)

21/04/2017 North Cheshire RSPB local group. 19:30 Appleton Parish Hall, Dudlow Green Road, Appleton, Warrington WA4 5EQ (Wader Quest)

03/05/2017 Northamptonshire Bird Club. 19:30 The Fishing Lodge, Pitsford Reservoir, Brixworth Road, Holcot, Northants. NN6 9SJ (Wader Quest)

17/05/2017 Walsall RSPB local group. 19:30 St. Mary's Primary School, Jesson Road, Walsall, WS1 3AY (Confessions of a Bird Guide)

05/09/2017 East Lancashire Ornithologists' Club. 19:30 St. Annes's Parish Hall, Wheatley Lane Road, Fence, Nelson BB12 9ED (Wader Quest)

05/12/2017 Wigan RSPB local group. 19:45 St. Anne's Church Hall, Church Lane, Shevington, Wigan WN6 8BD. (Subject TBA)

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Round up of Wader Quest's year 2016

Here are some of the highlights from what was, in the end, a frenetic but very successful year for Wader Quest.

We'd like to start by thanking everyone who has been a part of it; all the Trustees, all the Friends of Wader Quest, old and new, our wonderful Sponsors both Club and Corporate, all the volunteers who helped us out during the year, all fundraisers and everyone who made a donation.

Everything we have achieved so far is as a result of the faith you have all placed in us and we hope that we will be able to continue to make you proud to be associated with Wader Quest during 2017.

In February we were very pleased to pass the £10,000 fundraising mark. This figure includes everything we have raised as donations or subscriptions since we started raising money for the Spoon-billed Sandpipers in 2012. This is the part of our income that we continue to guarantee will only be used for wader conservation projects

May saw us taking part in the Norfolk Bird Race from which all funds raised were donated to Wader Quest. In the end it was a whopping £1,664.10. Sadly the Wader Quest team didn't do quite so well coming in fifth place (out of five teams).



Wader Quest Bird Race team.
L—R: Dan Bradbury, Oliver Simms,
Elis Simpson and Rick Simpson.

In May the Magellanic Plover Appeal reached its target of £3,000, our third successful, targeted fundraising effort, the previous two being for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Hooded Plover. We still hold some funds



Best wishes to you all from Wader Quest Founders Rick and Elis Simpson.

in reserve for this project and we are waiting to see how best to use it (see page 26 for an update on the project).

One of the highlights during the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair in May was receiving the cheque from Bird Race organiser Andrew Whitelee. For him though the highlight was being presented with the original trophy donated to the Bird Race by David Tomlinson one of the participants in the original Bird Race.

We also had a very enjoyable and successful British Bird Fair this year where we had a welcome surprise when Chris Packham visited the stand. We were very grateful to Andrew Whitelee, Penny Insole, Allan Archer and Chris and Denise Lamsdell for volunteering to help look after the stand allowing us to give our talk, have breaks and visit other stands.



Andrew Whitelee, Rick Simpson,
Chris Packham and Elis Simpson
— Tina Lindsay

**Wishing all our Friends,
Sponsors, volunteers and
supporters a successful
2017**

Probably the most significant event of the year was the publication of our children's book, Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper which we launched at the Bird Fair. Many thanks to Leica for funding the first 100 copies which have all but sold out already meaning we have purchased a further 100 copies.



Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

We also launched our next targeted fundraising scheme, once again for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper but specifically to assist in the Thai salt pan situation where the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) is trying to arrange a



Salt pans at Pak Thale, Thailand
- Elis Simpson.

Editors reflections — cont'd

permanent way to protect the wintering quarters of the few Spoon-billed Sandpipers that still frequent the salt pans that are in danger of being transformed into other things due to the unprofitability of salt farming in recent years. (See page 5)

Once again we attended the Falsterbo Bird Show in Sweden. It is always enjoyable and we were lucky to get Lars Jonsson to sign some more posters to help raise funds for Wader Quest. There were no wader posters but we brought back some delightful posters of some of the birds of Sweden in Spring and in Winter.



Lars Jonsson surrounded by his posters
— Elis Simpson

We were invited to attend the Spurn Migration Festival for the first time this year and although Elis and I could not attend due to previous commitments we were ably represented by Andrew Whitelee who in turn was assisted by Oliver Simms.

Plover Appreciation Day was passed at Titchwell RSPB reserve, we suffered once more from the weather and were beginning to think that Wader Quest field days were in some way cursed. We even considered hiring ourselves out to the drought stricken areas of the world to host an event as it would be sure to rain there if we did. Despite this we had a splendid day and had the pleasure of presenting Ali Hillyer with her prize of a pair of Opticron



Ali Hillyer receiving her prize — Elis Simpson

binoculars as winner of the Plover Competition that we held at the Bird Fair.

Once again Andrew Whitelee stepped into the breach along with Penny Insole to give Wader Quest a presence for the first time at the Scottish Ornithological Club (SOC) Conference. Now that Andrew is based in Scotland we hope this may become a regular event for us.

At the second Wirral Wader Festival the weather curse was lifted as we were blessed with better weather this year on the second day. The event was greatly enjoyed by all who attended both as



Penny Insole & Andrew Whitelee — Elis Simpson

exhibitors and visitors. Plans are already afoot for this year's event, the date of which is to be announced in due course.

That man Andrew Whitelee was once more in the frame when he took his Norfolk Bird Race brand on tour, the event attracting the somewhat unfortunate acronym NBROT (Norfolk Bird Race On Tour). Despite an unfortunate accident as reported in the last newsletter he completed the task.

From Gibraltar Point he cycled to Frampton Marsh in difficult conditions, where we met him and unsuccessfully searched for the Long-billed Dowitcher that had been previously reported there.

From there he made his way around to the Lincolnshire / Norfolk border for the night and then we met up with him again at Titchwell the following morning. After some birding at this fantastic wader reserve, we went on ahead and waited for him at the finishing line at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust centre at Cley.

In the end Andrew raised over £500 single handedly for us at great sacrifice to himself for which we were eternally grateful.

Wader Conservation World Watch (WCWW3) went into its third year and was a great success with many more participants from an increased number of countries although the bird total was the same as 2015. We hope that we will be

able to prepare better this year and increase all three totals in 2017. For our part we spent the weekend at the lovely South Walney reserve at the invite of the Cumbria Wildlife Trust and had a great time as reported in the WCWW3 special newsletter.



Andrew arrives at Cley and is justifiably pleased with himself — Elis Simpson

What has now become an annual fixture for us was the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust Martin Mere North-west Birdwatching Festival. It has been successful for us each year since we started going and is such an enjoyable event that we hope we will be able to attend for many years to come.

In November, due to the success of the year we managed to pass the £15,000 mark for money raised for wader conservation. Some of that is still in hand ready for disbursement to projects that meet our application criteria.

We also made contact with a Japanese teacher in Thailand called Kiyomi Marita who has been working with her children at Andrews International School in Bangkok creating a project about the plight of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, they even raised some money for the Spoonies at a school event. We sent a copy of Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper to her which she intends to translate into Japanese and to continue with her project about the spoonies using the book.

Editors reflections — cont'd

During the year we received two successful applications for disbursements from the Wader Quest Grants Fund both of which were in Brazil the second being disbursed in two parts. These two projects are looking at Nearctic migrants in Brazil, *Connectando os Pontos* and Migratory ecology of Charadriiforms in Brazil, both are engaging with local communities which is an important consideration when accessing applications (see page 4 for information about how the Grants Fund works).



Coded leg rings for the *Connectando os pontos* project in Brazil— Elis Simpson

Updates for WCWW3 — Rick Simpson

We thought we had finally put Wader Conservation World Watch 3 to bed when the e-newsletter special came out at the end of last year, but it seems we were wrong.

Somewhere along the line of communication there was a bit of a mix up and one, as it turns out, quite important set of results was not recorded in the final tallies. This report came from Labuan Island in Malaysia from Noralip Hassanuddin, Mohd Aswat and Mohd Sa'dan. Needless to say we added their results and names to the lists and in doing so discovered that a new species had been added, that of Malaysian Plover *Charadrius peronii*.

Even more of a mystery is the case of an email send from Zorica Komac from Sandgate Beach in Queensland on the 6th of November 2016. It arrived in my inbox on the 20th of January! It had been floating around in some virtual cosmos of its own all that time making the so called snail mail seem rather rapid!

So hopefully we really do have a the final numbers for the event.



Malaysian Plover — Elis Simpson

138 countries

125 species
6 continents

245 observers
9 flyways.

Wader Conservation World Watch 4

Join us wherever you happen to be in the world
4th & 5th November 2017

Waders need love too!

Wader Quest Grants Fund — Rick Simpson

As you will no doubt be aware, as we tend to remind people often enough, all the money raised by way of subscription for Friends or Sponsors of Wader Quest and cash donations will be directed to our ring-fenced Grants Fund. When we have a particular appeal, such as the recent Thai Salt Pan Appeal, donations will be directed there while subscriptions continue to swell the Grants Fund.

So what is this Grants Fund and how does it work?

The idea of the Grants Fund is to help small wader conservation projects that promote community conservation find funding for equipment that would be difficult to source from larger funds available.

We have a some guidelines that apply to all disbursements made from the Wader Quest Grants Fund;

- we do not send quantities of money to the projects, we will purchase the equipment needed and send it to the project;
- the funding must be a significant part of the project costs, we try to avoid assisting projects that have high levels of funding from elsewhere;
- the items purchased must have a tangeable and lasting benefit to the project.
- all projects must have an element of community engagement;

The process involves the project getting in touch with us and expressing a wish for us to provide some help. We will establish informally if the project fits our remit and if so invite the project to submit an application via the WADER QUEST CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH EQUIPMENT APPLICATION FORM.

If the application is successful we will then purchase whatever equipment is required and have it delivered to the project or a responsible person involved in the project.

Once the item has been received we ask that the project acknowledges its receipt with photographs that we can use for publicity. We especially like to see the equipment in use in the field being deployed. We also ask that the project supply us with follow up information about how the equipment was used and what results were obtained. If a paper is the final outcome of the project then we ask for a copy to be sent to Wader Quest when it is published.

Disbursements made from the Grants Fund.

Celluloid colour rings and measuring equipment purchased for use on Javan Plover and White-headed Stilt and sent to Anak Burung Birdbanding Club, Indonesia.



This sort of photo is always a pleasure to receive — Selena Flores



White-headed Stilt being ringed in Indonesia
— Iwan Londo

Five mist nets purchased to capture and monitor wintering waders and sent to CORBIDI (Centro de Ornitología y Biodiversidad) in Paracas National Reserve, Peru.



Mist nets being deployed in Peru
— Eveling Tavera

Opticron IS70 (18-54 eyepiece) telescope and Opticron 10x50 Discovery binoculars for monitoring human disturbance on South African beaches sent to Nature's Valley Trust, Western Cape, South Africa; see also photo at the top of the page.



Donated telescope in use — Selena Flores

Celluloid colour rings for use with Javan Plovers sent to Anak Burung Birdbanding Club, Indonesia.



Colour rings supplied to Indonesia
— Elis Simpson

Colour engraved leg flags purchased for use with Nearctic waders sent to Conectando os Pontos, Paraíba, Brazil.



Engraved rings for Conectando os Pontos
— Elis Simpson

Ringing pliers and weighing scales for use to study migrant wader habitat selection, sent to Migratory ecology of Charadriiforms project along the Brazilian coast.

Celluloid colour leg rings, various sizes. Migratory ecology of Charadriiforms project along the Brazilian coast..

To apply to the Wader Quest Grants Fund contact waderquest@gmail.com in the first instance.

On the website you might notice that we also make some donations to larger organisations when they have a special appeal running. This money does not come from the Grants Fund but from the revenue derived from sales and our Mobile Charity Shop—Ed.

WCWW3 Prize Draw winners

All three prizes that were awarded have now arrived safely with their recipients, the last being the first prize of a pair of Opticron Explorer WA 8x42 binoculars which were won by Beatriz Blauth. Beatriz tried out her new binoculars in Patagonia, she said; "Waders are always my favorites, there were many omnipresent Southern Lapwings *Vanellus chilensis*; wandering by Lake Grey in Torres del Paine, I came across a South American Snipe *Gallinago paraguaiiae*; on the shores of Lake Argentino a very active group of Baird's Sandpipers *Calidris bairdii*, Greater



Beatriz Blauth using her new Opticron binoculars on her local patch in Brazil — Luara Blauth



Natalie Forsdick — Rachel van Heugten.

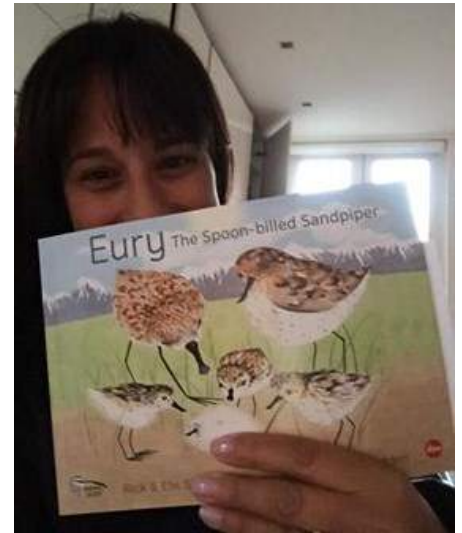
Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* and perhaps one single White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*; late afternoons, on the shores of Last Hope Sound, a couple of Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus* showed up in all 3 days I was there. "

Second prize, the Lars Jonsson poster is now safely in New Zealand in the proud possession of Natalie Forsdick.

The *Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper* book was our third prize and that went to Alexia Fishwick who said,

"I'll find some little, big minds to share the story with and hopefully nudge a

new love of our wildlife into someone's world".



Alexia Fishwick with her copy of Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper — Alexia Fishwick

First Prize 8 x 42 binoculars kindly donated by



Did you know?

In warm springs when the snow melts early Red Knots *Calidris canutus* nesting on the Russian tundra rear smaller juveniles.

This is thought to be because they are undernourished due the the hatching time of the eggs not being in synchronisation with the peak emergence of the all important insects that the Red Knot chicks need to develop fully.

This smaller size can impact on their survival even when they reach their wintering grounds as the smaller bill size means that young Red Knots are less able to reach the nutrient rich shellfish that they need. A normal bill of around 40mm can reach the prey which tends be at a depth of 35mm or more. Smaller billed birds, some as short as 30mm are unable to reach this crucial source of protein.



Juvenile Red Knot — Elis Simpson

STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS + STOP PRESS

THAI SALT PAN APPEAL—TARGET REACHED—£1,000 RAISED—THANK YOU!

You've done it again! In little more than five months you have helped us to raise £1,000 to help with the Thai Salt Pan Appeal. We will not be simply sending your money to Thailand though. We are looking for an opportunity for Wader Quest to fund a specific item so that we will all be able to see where the money that between us we have raised has gone.

Update on the Gilroy godwit Scrape in the Wirral — Richard Smith

It seems an awful long time since I wrote my "Observations of Black-tailed Godwits" article for the October 2016 *Wader Quest* newsletter and a lot has happened since. These observations were made at a small field which contains what has become known as the Gilroy Scrape (West Kirby, Merseyside, United Kingdom). This wader scrape just happens to be one of the most important sites in the UK for the Icelandic race of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa islandica* during the crucial post-breeding moult, typically holding 4% of this Icelandic population from August to October.

Unfortunately the news from Gilroy scrape is not good as it was drained by the land owner at the end of October. The land owner had been instructed to carry out his 'riparian duties' by the local council which included the clearance of some nearby ditches. He seems to have been over enthusiastic in his clearance which resulted in the draining of the scrape; at this stage it is not clear whether that was a deliberate act or due to the vague instructions given by the council. Whatever the case the council, being an easy target, bore the brunt of peoples' wrath and I was astonished just how many local people knew and cared about the scrape and its godwits. There was literally an email and social media storm and the likes of the RSPB, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Operation Godwit and, of course, Wader Quest also got involved. The upshot of all this was that the council, through some drainage regulation, managed to persuade the land owner to re-block the outlet of the scrape. Despite this, at the time of writing (mid-January) we are concerned that the scrape is not re-filling and an investigation is being carried out as to why that is. If it does not re-fill soon there is a danger that it will completely dry out this



Before the 'scrape' was drained 06/08/2015 — Elis Simpson



After the 'scrape' was drained 30/10/2016 — Richard Smith

summer. Whatever happens, it is going to be an anxious time this July waiting for the Black-tailed Godwits to return. I am hopeful that as long as there is some water and wet mud there they will return as they obviously love this site.



Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* and Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* using the Gilroy scrape in happier times — Richard Smith.

International Wader Study Group; an introduction — Yvonne Verkuil



As some of you may know Elis and I have the honour of being joint Membership Secretaries for the International Wader Study Group (IWSG). We invited IWSG Chair Yvonne Verkuil

to write a short introduction to the organisation explaining what IWSG is all about. We hope that some of you might wish to become members of that wader-orientated organisation in addition to being a Friend or Sponsor of Wader Quest. — Ed.

this allowed us to draw migratory flyways on maps for the first time.



IWSG Conference field excursion
- Triin Kaasiku

What is IWSG? - In short, the Group is a platform where professional and amateur researchers and bird watchers who are interested in waders, unite in their fascination for waders. IWSG members, who often conduct research or run ringing or monitoring projects, use the group to start collaborations, work jointly on conservation problems, or simply exchange information during our enjoyable and convivial Annual Conference.

In many cases our members jointly synthesise data and information; these data may come from institutional research programmes but often also from smaller-scale spare-time projects. This has resulted in landmark publications such as *Breeding Waders in Europe* (1986) and *Migration of Knots* (1992), both of which showed the power of an international compilation of data. This power has driven the group ever since.



IWSG Conference presentation in progress
- Triin Kaasiku

A brief history - The IWSG began its existence more than 45 years ago as the national meeting point for British wader ringing groups, but in the 1980s a group of young waderologists from continental Europe became involved and currently we are truly international, with members from all over the world. Initially the aim for many members was to exchange information about (re)captures of metal-ringed birds and

New frontiers - The type of work conducted by IWSG members also includes geolocator projects and breeding studies. A few months ago this resulted in an article in the renowned journal *Nature* on 'Unexpected diversity in socially synchronized rhythms of shorebirds' (2016), for which the young lead author Martin Bulla involved more than eighty wader researchers that included one of the founders of the IWSG. The next new frontier is joint analyses of satellite tracking data, which will allow us to keep track of the movements of waders along their flyways on our now rapidly changing planet.

Conservation - We also act as the Species Specialist Group for waders in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Wetlands International, where we also represent other wader and shorebird groups from Australia, Russia and the Americas. Our major contribution to these NGOs is scientific support to conservation, often related to monitoring waders, which for example culminated in the 2009 Wader Atlas published by Wetlands International. The data and information collected by the group have been (and continue to be) very influential in assisting the development of formal inter-governmental treaties for conservation of migratory waders and other waterbirds. This was recognised in 2012 by an international award by AEWA and is a demonstration of the contribution that interested individuals can make to conservation at the highest level, through working collectively together across borders.

The Colour Mark Police? - We are certainly not the police, but a major IWSG service to the community is the coordination and maintenance of the colour ring register for waders in the East-Atlantic Flyway on behalf of EURING (the coordinating organisation for European Bird Ringing Schemes). The aim is to have colour schemes of waders registered within a comprehensive database, the IWSG

Colour Mark Register. For these migratory species this is a necessity to avoid overlap in schemes. This large amount of work is carried out by an IWSG team of dedicated volunteers.

www.waderstudygroup.org/projects/colour-marking/



Colour-ringed Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
— Elis Simpson

Publisher - We occasionally publish a series called *International Wader Studies* and a regular journal that appears three times per year: *Wader Study*, which contains scientific papers but is also a forum for wader-related news, notices, advances in study techniques and conference report papers. In each issue we spotlight research and opinions from inside and outside *Wader Study* in our open access sections *Perspective*, *Spotlight* and *Wading through Literature*.

<http://www.waderstudygroup.org/publications/wader-study/>

We maintain a website and you can also find us on social media. If you are interested in becoming involved please go to www.waderstudygroup.org or contact me at chair@waderstudygroup.org.

Yvonne Verkuil; on behalf of The IWSG Executive Committee.



IWSG Executive Committee in session
- Triin Kaasiku

Celebrating Curlew — Karen Lloyd

In 2016 I was invited to join a small team, funded by The Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Landscape Partnership Ground Nesting Birds Recovery programme, to work in the quietly wonderful landscape of the Shropshire Welsh borders. Along with wildlife photographer Ben Osborne, sculptor Bill Sample and musician Mary Keith, our brief was to raise awareness through celebration. Why bring in a group of artists to do this? Project leader, Amanda Perkins, was clear – ‘It’s all about celebrating what we do have’ she said, ‘rather than continually bashing people over the head with the hard facts; it’s too depressing and a turn off.’ Over the past two nesting seasons in the partnership’s area, out of over 30 monitored curlew nests, all were predated – mainly, though not wholly, by foxes; nest cameras also recorded badgers.

Early in April I went with the project’s ornithologist, Tony Cross and his assistant David Tompkins, to meet dairy farmers Jill and Bob. Jill said ‘We really don’t want to lose the curlew from our land. We love hearing them – when they come back in in the spring it’s as if long lost friends have come back.’ A section of meadow had been cordoned off by an experimental electric fence. Unseen, out in the middle of that swathe of bright yellow and green, was a pair of Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, and a nest. We talked in whispers, but even that low level of intrusion was too much and a curlew flew up, rising into the sky casting out the two-note alarm call – *courlie! courlie!*

As Tony and I began walking towards the nest, the female’s head appeared amongst the grasses. With her head swivelling to keep us in sight, she walked away from the nest then rose into the air, adding her alarm to that of her mate. A black camera stood guard, orientating us to the



Eurasian Curlews — Tony Cross

nest.

As the curlew patrolled the field above its ash tree borders, calling and calling against the sky, we found a scrape of a nest, fashioned by nothing more than the birds walking the grass into a flattened circle. Inside, four pointed eggs, camouflaged in greens and browns. Pyriform, the experts say, but to me they were like pears in a dish, each pointed end orientated to the centre of the nest.

Tony weighed and measured each of them, numbering them with a waterproof pen before placing them back in the nest. He took the memory card from the camera, replaced it with another, and then we left.

Over mugs of tea and biscuits in the farmhouse kitchen, Tony played the camera recordings on his laptop. So far, all was well –

just eerie black and white images of the adult curlew changing shifts, hidden in the grass.

That incipient nest and its eggs were to me, startlingly, strangely beguiling – and deeply



Eurasian Curlew nest — Tony Cross

affecting.

At another field, a curlew flew up as we began to walk in. The nest camera came into sight. We slowed down. From 3 metres distance, David half-crouched and put out a hand towards me, indicating, ‘Stop!’ Something began to stir. Evolving out of the long grass, the female came up like a ground spirit. Here she was, so close, this ethereal creature, with that eccentrically long and elegantly decurved bill, the feathers dappled brown and cream, flecked with rivulets of umber, her sizeable body pushed upwards on stilt-like legs. Inside the surrounding sphere of a white ring her dark eye watched us, watching her. Then she unfolded her wings revealing the pale speckled underwings, and took to the air, and for me it was like watching in slow-motion. Travelling across the clouds she cast out her curlew spell, her voice a tone-poem.

That was the first nest to go. Raided



View from the Stiperstone — Ben Osborne

Celebrating Curlew — cont'd

by foxes, caught on CCTV.

Amanda kept us posted with developments. One by one, predators began paying nocturnal visits, and the numbers of viable nests began to fall, almost it seemed, by the hour. The nest at Jill and Bob's farm was hatched and the chicks developed into fledglings. Amongst us all was a sense of anticipation mixed with anxiety; were they going to make it? One morning Tony found an animal trail invading the grass, but the birds were still there. I don't think it's overstated to say I felt a sense of connection with that nest. Having been there and seen the eggs for myself, I kept the picture of it in my head over the weeks, and, however ineffective a method of support it was, I willed those curlew youngsters to survive.

With a choir of local people, we sang curlew songs and Mary set my curlew poems to music. Ben put up a hide at the edge of the field at Jill and Bob's farm for taking close-up shots. Bill ran curlew lantern-making workshops for families, and for our finale evening, he made a flight of seven curlew, uncannily like the real thing. Inside each one he'd placed tiny solar-powered LED's that lit up as darkness fell. Seven birds because of the Shropshire folk-tale of the Seven Whistlers; the story goes that when 6 curlew finally find the seventh they've been searching for, this will be the beginning of the end. Were it not for the dire situation curlew now face, the tale would easily be laughed off. Maybe not so now.

One day, a bunch of us – conservationists, ornithologists, people from the local wildlife trusts, from Natural England and the RSPB, walked along the Stiperstones ridge with Mary Colwell who was passing through on her 500 mile walk to highlight the



Eurasian Curlew — Tony Cross



Eurasian Curlew on its nest — Tony Cross

shocking decline in curlew numbers. We stopped for coffee at Blakemore Gate Cottages, and held a mini curlew-summit. What, if anything, was to be done?

We had our final celebration evening at Norbury village hall. Over a hundred people came from that highly scattered and rural community. The choir sang their curlew songs. People read poems they'd written about the landscape and talked about what curlew meant to them. Then, at dusk, we processed up the darkling lane, curlew lanterns held aloft and bats beating their aerial pathways overhead. We walked into a field where Bill's Seven Whistlers, seven ghostly white birds, were suspended above a small blackwater lake. They rose in perpetual take-off in a flowing line one above the other, whilst ethereal music and curlew calls played on into the

night. Postscript: Again in 2016, none of the monitored nests survived predation – mainly due to foxes.



Eurasian Curlew — Elis Simpson

Celebrating Curlew — cont'd

Numenius Arquata

Half Greek – named for
the new moon beak decurved
whilst on the Latin side,
curved like a sprung-bow.

I've seen them rowing all
franticled along an edge of mist.

That day at Foulshaw
beyond the flood bank
sixty or eighty souls
rose up and fell again,

speaking atonal chords
against Cumbrian rain;
a shape-shifting *courlie* anthology.

Then, in the spring,
four dappled eggs
in a putative nest
watched by a camera.

One night the fox came –
broke and lapped one egg
whilst the curlew climbed
the sky and wailed –
and fox took another egg away.

In June, close to,
something evolves silently
from the long grass,
rising like a ground spirit.

Watching us through her white-ringed eye,
unfolding her speckled wings
the female lifts against cumulus and blue.
Her cast-out spell is a tone-poem
sent arcing down the sky.

The curlew is made whole again by flight.

Karen Lloyd

Steppe Whimbrels in Mozambique in 2016 — Gary Allport

In early February 2016, Ross Hughes and I found a group of 12 Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* in Maputo, only our second record of the species in more than five years of birding in Mozambique. They were of the East Asian race *orientalis* and most had huge bills, but of interest were two much smaller, shorter-billed birds amongst them. We were sure these were Eurasian Curlews but any curlew with a small bill always arouses interest! So we checked-in with staff of BirdLife Partners running the project to search for the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* in order to make sure and as a result I was sent a copy of a recent paper on Slender-billed Curlew from British Birds by Corso et al. (2014), which made the identity of the birds in Maputo very clear; they were indeed males of the eastern subspecies of Eurasian Curlew.

However, that BB paper also flagged other little known and potentially



Part of a flock of 12 Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* of the eastern race *orientalis*. Note the clean white underwings and long bills. One of two smaller, relatively shorter-billed birds bottom left. Salina Zacharias, Matola, Mozambique. January 2016 — Gary Allport.



'Steppe' Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris* (R) with three Eurasian Whimbrel *N.p.phaeopus* — Callan Cohen

confusing forms of both Eurasian Curlew and Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* found in the Asian steppes. One bird I had never heard of was Steppe Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris* nicely illustrated in the article by Szabolcs Kókay. It was clearly very little known bird and I was geekily picking through the references when I found to my great surprise that the type specimen of Steppe Whimbrel was collected at Inhambane in Mozambique!

So I did a quick post online, asking if anyone knew anything about this bird or had photos of flocks of whimbrel from

Mozambique that I could check; unsurprisingly I got nothing back. I decided to repost with a nice photo of a Whimbrel to attract more peoples' attention but I found I had no good images of the species myself.

Two days later I happened upon a group of about ten whimbrel whilst I was on the way to the shops, so I stopped the car, ran onto the beach took some pictures without really looking at the birds (I had my camera but no binocs with me) jumped back in the car and went to the supermarket. That evening I got round to social media and idly put the memory card in the computer – and

Steppe Whimbrels in Mozambique in 2016 — cont'd

you can guess what's coming next – there was a perfect Steppe Whimbrel.

I couldn't quite believe it but I went through the rest of the shots and all the others were of normal *phaeopus* race. This bird was outstanding with clean white underwings and rump, larger in size and with greyer, cleaner colouration. I posted it online and sent it to my Slender-billed Curlew colleagues, and in the next 24 hours my inbox exploded. When I was finally able to get back down to the beach two days later with Ross, to our amazement we found another one – two together.

Some quick research showed that Steppe Whimbrel has always been little known. It was described in 1921 based on four specimens from coastal East and South-eastern Africa (Lowe 1921) with a further three records in Africa since then; the last was in southern Tanzania in 1965. In the 1960s it emerged (in the west) that there were records from the breeding areas of Kazakhstan and Russia going back to the mid-19th century (by Eversmann), but the last was seen in 1974, and it was declared extinct by a Russian expert in 1994. However, it was re-found in 1997, a tiny breeding population of six pairs in the Russian steppes at the south end of the Urals (Morozov 2000). There were also a small number of possible sightings in the Caspian Sea area but they've not been seen since. The Convention on Migratory Species recently estimated the global population to be 100 birds or fewer (CMS 2014).

The two Steppe Whimbrels in Maputo were thought to be a female – which only stayed for a fortnight and was last seen on 28th Feb 2016 – and a male, 'Waldo', which stayed longer, until 24th March. The male had a very well defined feeding territory



'Steppe' Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris* — Callan Cohen

which he defended aggressively and was very vocal. The female had a wider home range and remained mostly silent. A full report will be published in the next issue of the Bulletin of the African Bird Club (Allport 2017) and the finer points of the identification are covered in Allport & Cohen (2016) and a post to Birding Frontiers (see https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Gary_Allport for links).

A review of existing records and specimens has been undertaken and a new record of *alboaxillaris* was 'found' in the

public gallery of the Natural History Museum in Maputo (Allport et al. 2016), by climbing into the diorama when a piece of glass was removed for maintenance and lifting the wings of the dusty, old stuffed and mounted birds. There may well be others in museum collections.

Word spread and the first whimbrels returning south in August were scrutinised and photographed at key localities in Mozambique and this proved productive, especially in the type locality, the Bay of Inhambane where several birds showing the characters of *alboaxillaris* were photographed (see the post on Birding Frontiers for images) on three dates amongst several hundred birds at a tidal roost. There are 800-1500 whimbrels at this site and only 10-20% of the birds were photographed so it may be that the Bay of Inhambane holds double figures of these birds and maybe that amongst the 15,000 or so Eurasian Whimbrels that over-winter in Mozambique is a small but viable extant population.

The taxonomy of Steppe Whimbrel has been debated in the past but much of the concern of the validity of the taxon was based on the original supposition that *alboaxillaris* bred in the islands of the southern Indian Ocean (Lowe 1921) – a report which originated from Richard Meinertzhagen and hence a valid concern! But once the Russian literature became better known to western ornithologists in the



'Steppe' Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris* (R) with Eurasian Whimbrel *N.p.phaeopus* — Callan Cohen

Steppe Whimbrels in Mozambique in 2016 — cont'd

1950s and 60s, and the likely link to breeding birds in the steppes was established then *alboaxillaris* become an accepted form in the major reference works such as Cramp & Simmons (1983) and Van Gils et al. (2017). However, close examination of existing evidence shows that the link to the breeding areas is still to be conclusively shown, indeed the breeding area for Whimbrel in the region of Kazakhstan and the steppes region of bordering Russia is still very poorly known. Tracking data and DNA evidence is yet to be gathered and this is a priority if the full story of the Steppe Whimbrel is to be understood.

Finally, a question that comes to mind is the possibility that the recent re-finding of Steppe Whimbrels in Africa offers new hope for Slender-billed Curlew. Regrettably this seems unlikely. Slender-billed Curlew was not a trans-equatorial migrant and is very unlikely to have overwintered in eastern and southern Africa. Aside from a small number of possible



'Steppe' Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris* (R) with Eurasian Whimbrel *N.p.phaeopus* — Callan Cohen



'Steppe' Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris* — Callan Cohen

records in Seychelles and the southern Middle East — such as Yemen — the species migrated east-west across the Mediterranean from its breeding grounds somewhere in the steppes. It is worth noting that the only breeding record of Slender-billed Curlew is based on a single egg (the identity of which has not been confirmed with DNA evidence) so our best guess as to the breeding area — which was thought to be further east than Steppe Whimbrel — could have been wrong.

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Did you know?



Southern Lapwing on the nest — Elis Simpson

Obvious birds like the Southern Lapwing, when brooding, will change over more frequently (as much as 20 times a day) than species that have cryptic, well-camouflaged feathers where the nest is nearly invisible.

Cryptic nests are most vulnerable at parent changeover when the location is betrayed, so they do so less often, sometimes for up to 50 hour periods.

On the subject of the moratorium on wader shooting

The shooting of waders in the UK is an emotive and highly controversial subject that polarises views but it is highly topical making it hard to ignore.

Wader Quest tries to remain apolitical as an organisation, it is not our place to campaign one way or the other in such circumstances, preferring as we do to raise awareness about wader conservation and raise funds to support it, that is after all our remit.

We all have our own views within the ranks of the Board of Trustees and Friends of Wader Quest and we would encourage debate on the issue with understanding, drawing back from confrontational stances.

As this is a topical subject in the world of wader conservation we thought that it would be right to at least acknowledge its existence. As a result we have published here two articles by very different people expressing their views and, in order to give a balance of perspectives, there is one from a supporter of the moratorium and another from one opposed to it. Both we feel have taken a balanced view of the situation and explained their position without being antagonistic nor adversarial.

The views they express are personal and are not endorsed or otherwise by Wader Quest as an organisation — Ed.

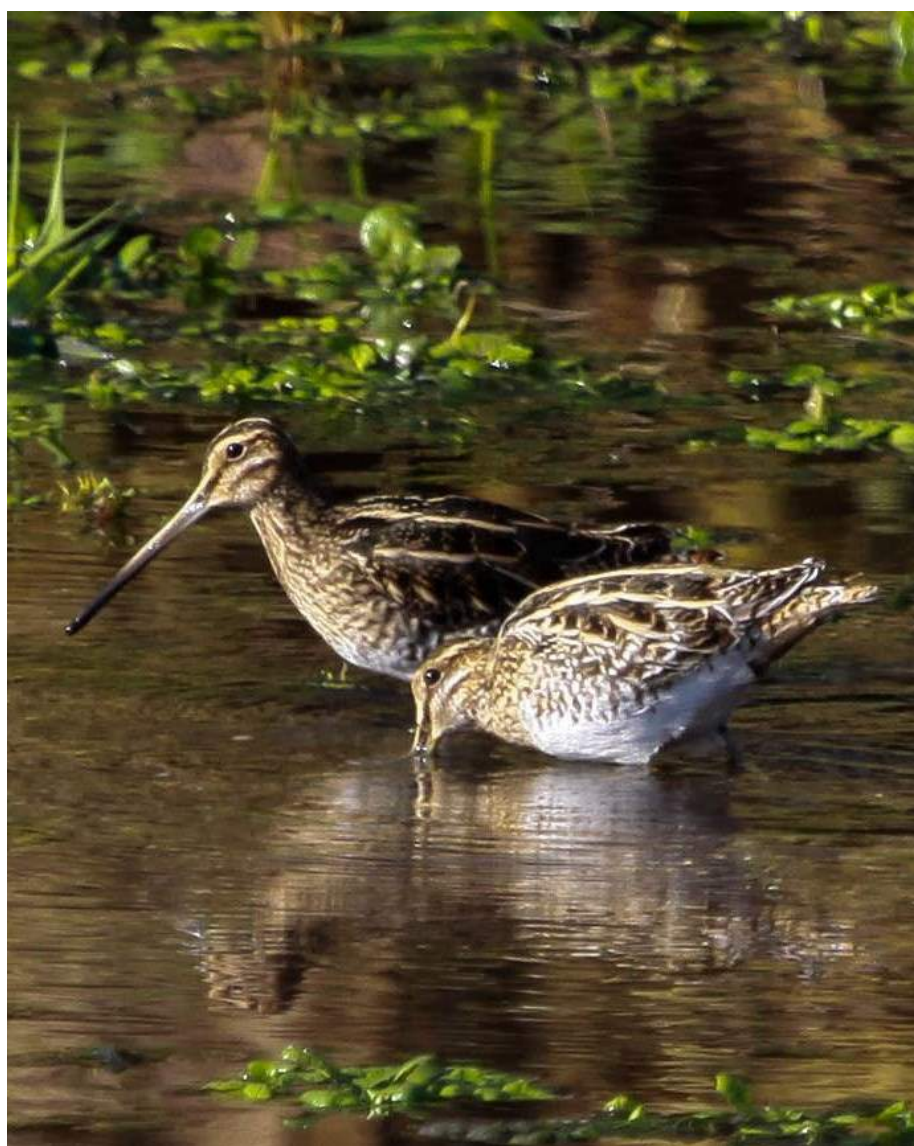


Common Snipe — Elis Simpson

Getting Serious about snipes — Dara McNulty

Some time ago I took a trip to one of my favourite places in Northern Ireland for viewing birds - RSPB Window on Wildlife (WoW). It's a fantastic urban oasis which gives great opportunities to see birds up close and personal – sometimes this can be difficult without disturbance in the countryside. We were treated to amazing views of the Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, they are frequenters of the Fermanagh uplands and Islands but are notoriously hard to see, their ability to blend and camouflage against the reeds and heath is exceptional. Their striking plumage was a joy to see so clearly and for such a long time too. I watched with sheer fascination and curiosity. Everyone at the reserve that day was excited, the views were incredible and I felt privileged and excited to be a part of that day. Experiencing other people's joy and wonder of nature makes me feel so incredibly happy. Then, my heart lurched. Sometime before, the last time I saw a snipe close-up, was for all the wrong reasons. It was lying abandoned in a field (not Fermanagh) lifeless, dead, shot. I held its tiny, lifeless body and through my tears, I was beyond confused as to how this minute 'game' bird could feed anyone if taken home. I was beyond contempt for the hunter who didn't retrieve it, discarded, its life ended, for nothing!! My heart cracked a little that day as I later found out that they are not always eaten but are killed for sport, because they challenge ones shooting skills.

Personally, I am not pro-wildfowling but I hold no animosity towards those who do it sustainably and respectfully. I follow Lough Erne Wildfowling Council as they do great conservation work for Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and on their website they have sharp rules and regulations,



Common Snipe — Elis Simpson

Getting Serious about snipes — cont'd

based on respect and conservation partnership. However, remembering the dead Snipe I held and the very alive pair that I watched for so long, I know where my own interests lie.

I decided to do some research (huge thanks to RSPB NI with their help with this) on breeding pairs of Common Snipe in Northern Ireland. It was estimated in 2013 that there were just over 1,100 pairs. This to me, seems too low to justify the continuation of wildfowling this bird, a thing of beauty and ecological importance. In Fermanagh this year so far, 212 Snipe were recorded on RSPB reserve Islands (refuges) this is a fantastic example of conservation and good partnership.

I have a huge amount of admiration and respect for Chris Packham. I feel his debates are based on scientific research, pragmatism and he is driven by his love and joy for the natural world. I stand by

personal attacks which, I can only imagine (as a person who also has Asperger's), must cause strain and anxiety!! Chris has issued a petition for a moratorium on shooting waders (including Common Snipe). It doesn't call for a ban and to me this seems a moderate and sensible approach to the future of our waders. He rightfully points out that wader declines are a result of drainage, changing agricultural practices and the devastating effects of climate change are also having an impact. Due to the fact, that all these factors aren't likely to change in the immediate future, surely for conservation purposes, the removal of declining waders from the quarry list would help re-establish breeding populations.

I know responsible shooters must realise the need to curb the shooting of birds in decline - BTO recorded an 87% decline over the last 25 years and RSPB have labelled the Common Snipe as an Amber List Species. For example, The Lough Erne Wildfowling Council have a code of conduct which prohibits the shooting of birds in 'refuges' and while this is a great thing, I have heard of

many people who shoot Common Snipe and Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* (a Red List species!) here in Fermanagh.

I never, ever want to see or hold a dead snipe (or any bird) in those circumstances, ever again. As a budding naturalist, my sole drive is to protect and conserve and although shooting is sometimes necessary, this is not the case for our wonderful waders.

I want to continue to hear that wonderful drumming sound of the male Common Snipe for many years to come. I want to see their amazing colours and flighty soaring in our skies for many generations.

I leave you with my favourite poem by William Blake:

Eternity

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.

Dara McNulty is a 12 year old budding naturalist and conservationist from County Fermanagh in Northern Ireland —Ed.
youngfermanaghnaturalist.wordpress.com



Common Snipe — Elis Simpson

him in that, as a young, aspiring conservationist it is incredibly important to have voices which are not driven by the individual or gain of any kind. He shrugs off



Common Snipe — Elis Simpson

Shooting Woodcock: why I believe a moratorium would be counter productive — Tom Orde-Powlett

Between five and ten years ago, I would have chosen a walked up day of shooting Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* over any other. I no longer shoot either species myself, but believe that a moratorium could, in the end, cause the loss of more woodcock than it would save if maintained over a protracted period, as is likely.

The call for a moratorium ignores the level of voluntary restraint shown by shooters in the UK and the fact that research

into the decline of our resident woodcock, by the GWCT and BTO, is already underway and has been largely funded by shooters.

Voluntary moratoriums are already in place on many estates — this provides the opportunity for scientists to study their effect, which in itself undermines the need for the petition. I am not aware of any estate that allows people to shoot woodcock before the migrants from Scandinavia and Russia have arrived, usually inland by mid-November. Woodcock seem to hate

disturbance and even if someone wanted to shoot them regularly, they would soon disappear — it is only successful when areas are left quiet and only shot infrequently. Many people who shoot other birds choose not to shoot woodcock, in the hope that the birds that they don't shoot will go on to breed successfully, recolonize areas of suitable habitat and contribute to recovery of the species. Sadly, it does not appear to be having any effect.

I entirely respect peoples' right to

Shooting Woodcock: why I believe a moratorium would be counter productive — cont'd

opinions and realise that to some, the idea of killing a bird is abhorrent, but I feel that the solutions to the often complex issues around management of our wildlife should be based on ecology and not just emotion. It is a very logical argument to make that by not shooting Woodcock, this will reduce pressure on the UK population, which has undeniably declined. However, would it actually reverse the decline?

Land use is complex and nowhere in the UK is truly wild, with the possible exception of mountain tops. Species exist because of the way the land is managed, whether deliberately or accidentally. If the land use changes, the habitat will also change and therefore which birds can exist there. Those who want to continue shooting Woodcock have an incentive to provide suitable habitat for them *ad infinitum*.

Owners and managers forego income that more commercial forestry (good in the early years, but not when the canopy is closed and there is no understory) or, in the case of Snipe increased drainage and 'improved' agriculture, would produce. Even in semi-commercial woodlands, the rides that are cut and a diversity of stands, including species like silver birch that are wonderful for Woodcock but otherwise not commercially viable, are encouraged. Sufficient light is allowed in to encourage the understory, with countless hours of work and money spent on equipment to maintain it, because they are enjoyed and protected by those who shoot there. I am sure that, despite a ban, most people who do shoot Woodcock would still strive to protect these areas in their own lifetimes, but future generations of managers



Eurasian Woodcock — Julian Bhalerao

will not have had the chance to acquire the knowledge of these places and when other more commercially lucrative opportunities arise, they will be taken.

It is known that predation is having a significant impact on the breeding success of many waders and recovery of other wader species does not appear to have happened anywhere that predation is not managed. Aside from shooting estates, where predator control is done routinely and funded by shooters, lethal predator control and/or exclusion is only carried out on land managed for wildlife by organisations with good funding streams, such as RSPB reserves and where it has shown impressive results. Although studying breeding success of Woodcock and Snipe is undoubtedly harder than Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* or Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, it is likely that these ground-nesting birds will be similarly susceptible to predation.

With a growing human population, it is inevitable that our countryside is and will continue to face increasing pressures,

whether for food production, recreation, housing and civil infrastructure. There are many conflicting objectives, even within the world of pure conservation. Re-wilding the uplands would be great for Woodcock and other woodland species, but disastrous for Curlew, Lapwing and Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, which currently thrive here, for example.

The really sad fact is that most shooters and most of those supporting a moratorium are conservationists, but will only succeed in protecting the wildlife we care about if we can get past the ideological differences which seem to drive us ever further apart and work together.

Tom Orde-Powlett left the Army in 2007 and has since lived and worked in Wensleydale with his wife and four children. He is involved in a colour marking study of curlew on their family's estate, where breeding and overwintering curlew are present, with local ringing groups and BTO licensed canon netters —Ed.

Did you know?

The world's rarest wader (that still has a known range and habitat), the Black Silt *Himantopus novaezelandiae* is the subject of an intensive captive breeding programme in New Zealand where it is a native endemic species.

In 1981 there were thought to be just 23 birds still in the wild and although since then the successful breeding programme has produced many hundreds of birds, around 70% of the released birds will be taken by predators before they reach adulthood. Currently, despite the releases the wild population is thought to be about 93 birds.

The Maori call the bird *kaki* and for them it is regarded as a *taonga* species — a living treasure.



A living treasure; Black Stilt — Elis Simpson

Waders in Art — Lars Fredholm



Pied Avocet and Common Ringed Plover — Lars Fredholm



Pied Avocet — Lars Fredholm

I have been a watercolour artist for more than 25 years but I have been watching, sketching and painting birds since I was very young. I'm currently living in southern Sweden and working from my studio there.

Waders have always appealed to me, in many ways.

When I'm out birdwatching I often find myself ending up by a lakeside or a seashore sketching these beautiful and interesting birds.

And then there is one bird in particular - the Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* - which has a tendency to often stick in my sketchbook. It is incredibly beautiful, graceful and its white plumage reflects light and colours from its surroundings in an amazing way.

It is always a struggle trying to capture its shape, character and "inner soul". When I manage to do so the satisfaction couldn't be greater and the way back home to the studio becomes a journey of pure joy!

Waders in Art — cont'd



Pied Avocet — Lars Fredholm



Ringed Plover — Lars Fredholm



Grey Plovers — Lars Fredholm

Homepage (under reconstruction):

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Pied Avocet — Lars Fredholm

This is the second in the series of articles for artists showcasing their work depicting waders.

We came across Lars Fredholm for the first time while exhibiting at the Falsterbo Bird Show in 2014. At that time all the stands were outside, despite this we found him working on one of his pictures; not surprisingly the subject matter was a Pied Avocet. Despite his obvious predilection for avocets he has produced some very fine work picturing many other waders with his Eurasian Dotterel and Eurasian Oystercatcher

being two that we particularly admired.

In 2015 the venue at the Falsterbo Bird Show changed and now Lars is able to work indoors. When we visited in 2016 he was working on the lovely picture of the Pied Avocet and Common Ringed Plovers at the top of this article. It was seeing this piece that inspired us to ask him if he'd be willing to let us show some of his work in this series about some of the very best artists and their love affair with the picturesque waders of the world that are simply crying out to be painted — Ed.



Lars Fredholm working on a Pied Avocet painting in 2014 — Elis Simpson

The Year of the Waders — Scott Petrec

The Year of the Waders. Doesn't that sound grand, and official?! The truth, however, is much more personal. I aim to spend 2017 immersing myself in all things waders, reconnecting with old favourites, seeing new species, documenting their behaviours and experiencing the spectacles they can create.

Out of all the groups of birds we see in the UK, or even around the world, wading birds are without question my favourites. Don't get me wrong, I love our warblers and our ducks, our raptors, our finches and I love watching hummingbirds in the US, but for me waders sit top of the pile. Their sheer variety of shapes, sizes and plumages can be enticing enough but for me the birds' behaviours are the real gems.

It is these behaviours that I find most captivating. Some birds within the wader families are exhibitionists, they want to be seen and they want to be heard, for at least part of their lifecycle. Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* will often loudly announce their presence when they see you coming, Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* will tumble about the skies to proclaim a territory and thousands of Red Knot *Calidris canutus* will pack together in a seemingly impenetrable living mass as they dance across the coastline. There are of course always exceptions to the rule. Many people would point to Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* as very secretive and hard to see birds, but given the right conditions and time of year even these masters of camouflage are out and about shouting about their presence as they display for a territory and a mate. If you've never been to hear a Eurasian Woodcock roding, set a reminder in your calendars now for the Summer!



Eurasian Oystercatcher — Elis Simpson



Dunlin — Elis Simpson

For me though, nothing does it better than the humble Northern Lapwing. The iridescent plumage, the funky crest, the high energy aerobatic display. Lapwings were one of the first waders I ever really watched, and I continue to be fascinated by them.



Northern Lapwing — Elis Simpson

Growing up on Doxey Marshes nature reserve, I was fortunate enough to encounter this sadly declining species on a regular basis throughout the year. The reserve was once an important breeding colony attracting some twenty or more pairs to raise young, and several thousand to

winter in this area of wet grassland nestled on the edge of Stafford town centre. Having once been Warden of the reserve for Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Northern Lapwings were also one of the main parts of my job and managing for them was a key feature.

It was only natural that closer observations of these fantastic plovers would develop into a minor obsession.

Nowadays in my new job as Reserve Warden at WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre, I get to enjoy great scenes of hundreds, if not thousands of Northern Lapwings gathering on a daily basis!



Red Knot and Eurasian Oystercatchers — Elis Simpson

The Year of the Waders — cont'd

So how does this fit in with a year of waders?

Once upon a time I used to head out most weekends twitching new species around the UK. I was relatively new to birding and newly mobile with my own car. I remember twitching birds including Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* and Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*. Some cracking species, but not necessarily mega rarities for some birders. There were waders to be twitched too, not least a Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus* in Gloucestershire, just a few miles from where I now live. Probably my most enjoyable twitch was for a Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatalis* in Yorkshire, accompanied by flocks of Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and even a Marsh Warbler *Acocephalus palustris* next to the visitor centre. That was a good day!



Spotted Redshank — Elis Simpson

For many of these twitches, I had a partner in crime, Pete. Since Pete moved to New York a few years ago (where I have also since enjoyed some amazing wader experiences) I've needed a bit of a push to get out and about, to see new things and revisit some memorable favourites. I've never been keen to revert back to twitching purely to build a list. Too many twitches are marred with dos and don'ts broadcast by the bird news services in a desperate hope to encourage the minority not to ruin it for the majority. Rather than blast around the country, seeing off-course rarities, worrying about continually growing my life list and feeling awkward when twitches go bad, I decided I'd take things slowly, focus on things I really enjoy, or have always wanted to see, and let the year unfold ahead of me.



Marsh Sandpiper — Elis Simpson

So, enter stage right, my 'Year of the Waders'.

The year is going to be all about getting out around the UK to see waders doing what they do best, and sharing the experiences. As I set out at the start, its not an attempt to tick off as many vagrants as I can that are missing from my British List, nor is it a challenge to see every species the UK has to offer. It is simply my way of indulging in a passion for this amazing group of sometimes under appreciated birds and hopefully introducing others to their wonderful world.

There's no reason others can't join

in with the appreciation too, so why not have you're own #YearoftheWaders? I may also do a little campaigning for their conservation, and help get an **Inspiration of Waders** recognised as the official collective noun for these inspirational birds.

I speak with absolutely no authority on waders. I have not studied them in detail, I merely watch and enjoy their antics. So come along for the ride on my Twitter feed and the hashtag **#YearoftheWaders**, and check back for blog updates over the coming months.

Originally published 3/1/2017 as a blog on <http://scottofthemarsh.blogspot.co.uk/>



Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and Black-tailed Godwit — Elis Simpson

Common Ringed Plovers on Mersea Island — Rick Simpson

In 2015 Elis and I had the opportunity to visit Mersea Island in Essex where we met Dougal Urquhart who is the Senior Ranger and Site Manager for Cudmore Grove Country Park at the eastern end of the island. The place is very popular with holiday makers throughout the summer and in the winter it is a good place to look for waders.

On that day as Elis and I explored we came across a pair of Common Ringed Plovers *Charadrius hiaticula*.

The manner in which the birds were behaving suggested to us that they were nesting, so we removed ourselves to a safe distance and watched them. Sure enough after a very short space of time one of the birds ran up the beach and, after a bit of toing and froing, it settled down onto its nest. We made another short incursion to establish



Common Ringed Plover — Elis Simpson



Adult Common Ringed Plover on the nest
— Elis Simpson

the state of play and to mark the nest. We discovered that four eggs were in the nest.



Common Ringed Plover nest — Elis Simpson

We were very worried about the nest as there were a lot of people walking their dogs and children playing nearby.

Later in the year we discovered that



One of 'our' chicks — Andy Field

at least two of the eggs produced a chick although we do not know if they fledged.

Late in 2016 we received news from Dougal that 'our' pair of Common Ringed Plovers had nested again and that they had managed to raise two chicks.



Adult Common Ringed Plover on the nest
— Dougal Urquhart

On finding the nest, which was quite close to the sea wall, Dougal roped off the nest area. This simple act has an amazing effect on people, despite the fact that it is easily breached, walkers tend to respect it and both parents and dog owners keep their charges from the sanctity of what lies within.

People though are not the only thing that plovers need to worry about and certain things, like gulls and other predators are not bound by the constraints a simple rope can afford. There too is another threat that a rope will not deter and that is an unusually high spring tide.

In this case the chicks timed their hatching perfectly and they were away from

the nest when just such a tide washed out the area where the nest had been located some four days later.



The nest area roped off — Dougal Urquhart

Dougal was amazed that the two chicks survived especially as the beach area had been particularly busy at that time, but survive they did, which just goes to show how incredibly determined plover parents can be and how little help they need to survive against all the odds that are stacked against them.



Common Ringed Plover Chick — Dougal Urquhart

Easyfundraising a new way to support Wader Quest — Rick Simpson

You may already have heard about Easyfundraising which is a simple way to raise money for your chosen charity simply by shopping on line.

If you already do this, perhaps we could persuade you to choose Wader Quest as your charity?

If you have not heard of this fundraising method here is what it is all about.

More and more of us choose to shop online now, it is easier and more convenient for many. If you are such a person and you shop online at any of the retailers in the list below then you can help Wader Quest to raise money.

In order to do so you need to register with Justfundraising, but don't worry it is dead simple (see below for details) and all you have to do is remember to log in to Justfundraising everytime you want to shop online.

To sign up takes just a few minutes and is easy:

First go to
<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/>

SEARCH FOR A CAUSE, type in Wader Quest and search

JOIN US click on this and a form will appear to register.

Once completed click on CREATE MY ACCOUNT



easyfundraising.org.uk
feel good shopping

It will then ask you if you are eligible for Gift Aid, to do this you must be a UK tax payer.

You can then decide if you want a reminder each time you shop online.

You will then see a list of shops that donate to Wader Quest whenever you shop online with them through Easyfundraising,

Each time you shop REMEMBER TO FIRST SIGN IN TO EASYFUNDRAISING and access your retailer through your account or no donation will be made.

There is a list of over 3,000 retailers which will donate to Wader Quest if you shop with them through Easyfundraising. To find out if your favourite online shops are partaking go to:

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/retailers/
Search for your retailer to find if your online shopping can help Wader Quest.

These include;

Amazon
Automobile Association
B&Q
Booking.com
British Airways
ClubMed
Debenhams

eBay
First Choice
GAP
Hertz
Interflora
John Lewis
Kwik-Fit
Lastminute.com
Moss Bros.
Nike
ONLY M&S
P&O Cruises
Petplan
Qatar Airways
RAC
Saga
Sainsbury
Tesco
uSwitch
Virgin
Waitrose
XBOX
Yves Saint Laurent
Zooplus

Just click on the retailer with which you wish to shop on the website and you will be taken to their website and you shop as normal the only difference being that Wader Quest will receive a small donation from the retailer at no additional cost to you.

Are you paying your Wader Quest subs by Standing order yet?

If you have a UK bank account you could simplify your life (and ours) by arranging for your Wader Quest annual subscription to be made via standing order.

This will prevent us from having to send you those emails reminding you that your subs are due and asking you to cough up for another year, which we really hate doing. There is nothing worse than asking friends for money is there?

If you do decide to make this change don't forget to let us know and tell us on which date we can expect the payment so we can make a note in our database and not send you that excruciating annual letter.

All you need to do is contact your

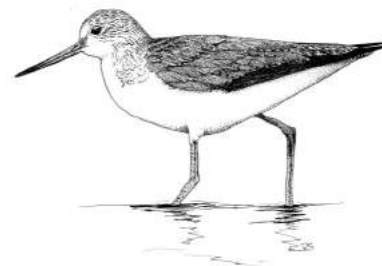
bank or, if you do online banking as so many of us do these days, you can set it up yourself. Here are the details you will need.

Bank: Barclays
Name: Wader Quest
Account number: 73469948
Sort code: 20 57 44

So don't delay,
Hasten away,
And get next year's subs paid today!

Thank you in advance to anyone who helps us out in this way, it really does save us an awful lot of time now that the numbers of

Friends and Sponsors is growing so fast.



Common Greenshank — Rick Simpson

A Deceit of Lapwings; A Fowl Calumny — Rick Simpson

A deceit of lapwings? That is a scandalous collective noun for such a wonderful and noble bird. How on earth did my favourite wader, and the favourite of so many it seems, become so badly slighted by this collective noun that if it were perpetrated today on the twittersphere would be a case of the worst kind of vicious trolling!

There are of course a number of theories about where this has come from, for example it is widely written that this deceit lay in the fact that Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* performs a broken wing display when you approach their nests. Whilst this is definitely true of many plovers, personally I have never seen this in Lapwings. Our friend Benny Middendorp in the Netherlands, who rings Lapwing chicks and therefore approaches many such nests on a regular basis, has never seen it. If you check, as I did, the subject on the internet and click on images, there is not a single piece of photographic evidence to support that this happens. Hundreds of photos of plovers and in particular Killdeers but just one or two photos show a lapwing in a strange position with one wing extended and held high while tipping the nearer wing downward. However, I believe this is more the bird trying to intimidate, making itself larger and more imposing by raising and spreading its wing than feigning injury. I cannot say categorically that they never do this, but clearly this is not an overt Lapwing trait so surely this is not the source of this reputation.



Northern Lapwing — Elis Simpson

Another contender that has been mooted as an explanation for this misnomer, albeit in a literary book from 1825 with the incredible title that seems longer than the book itself 'A glossary; or, a collection, of words, phrases, names and allusions to custom, proverbs &c. which have been thought to require illustration in the works of

English authors particularly Shakespeare and his contemporaries.' by Robert Mares, is that the closer you get to a Lapwing's nest, the less scandalous and loud it becomes. The idea presumably is that the bird is using subterfuge to make you think you are getting further from its nest. Again Benny, who approaches many nests every year, says this simply is not the case, the nearer you get the louder they get.

There is yet another proposed explanation suggesting that it is in fact a misinterpretation of a foreign word. In England the Northern Lapwing is commonly known as a 'peewit', after its call, in Dutch it is *kievit* and in parts of the country the French have a similar name, they call it '18' *dix-huit* (pronounced more or less desweet).

Some claim that the idea of deceit came from this word being used in days of yore suggesting that during the melding of French and English after 1066, the two meanings got mixed up. You can imagine a Norman Lord astride his horse, spotting a flock of lapwings, whipping out his ancient 10 x 30s and shouting 'Dix-huit! Dix-huit!' in his excitement and the Anglo Saxon surfs getting the wrong idea. Wishing to please their master, and no doubt spare their lives, they started referring to the 'flock of hleapewince', as they might have previously been calling them, as a 'deceit of hleapewince' instead.



Northern Lapwing — Elis Simpson

A Deceit of Lapwings; A Fowl Calumny — Rick Simpson

This latter is a lovely story, if a little fanciful, but it would not explain why the ancient Greeks had a mistrust of the Lapwing and considered it deceitful, after all France and the French and even the Men from the North (Normans) with their wonderful language did not exist in those days.

Here is another theory which is based on nothing more than a hunch.

In ancient times people were not very exact about what they called birds and misinterpretations easily occurred; especially in the translation of ancient texts. In the Holy Bible (*Leviticus XI 19*) for example when the animals that were to be considered unclean were being sorted by Moses the Lapwing's name came up. It was considered unclean as it ate insects from cow dung. However in another version of the same text, that same bird is referred to as the Hoopoe *Upapa epops* which almost certainly is more likely to have been seen in those areas, doing just that. So there you have one case of mistaken identity.

Furthermore, in Ancient Greece when Daedalus threw Talos from the Acropolis wall, legend has it that Talos was saved by the Goddess Athena who caught him and, according to some interpretations, turned him into a Lapwing. Others though believe the bird concerned was a Partridge, which much better fits the myth in that the resulting bird nested on the ground, was afraid of heights and never flew high as a result. (This is further endorsed by a synonym of Talos = *Perdix* which is now used as the genus name for partridges of course). Mistaken identity example number two, demonstrating that errors in translation or interpretation do happen.

Interestingly the Ancient Greek



Northern Lapwing — Elis Simpson

name for Lapwing is *Polyplagktos* which means, unsurprisingly, 'luring deceitfully.'

Could it be that there might have been some misunderstanding between plover and lapwing in those far off days. Lets face it our own Northern Lapwing has, in the past, often been referred to as Green Plover and many lapwing species were known as plovers until quite recently; I ticked a Sociable Plover not a Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, when I first saw one in 1985 for example.

So is it that the deceit was that perpetrated by plovers which, as we all know and can testify to, commonly feign injury, but it was the unfortunate lapwing that got the reputation despite the fact that it rarely, if ever, exhibits this behaviour? Let's face it once you have a reputation it is hard to shift it.

You may have noticed instances where errors in books have been 'borrowed' and regurgitated until they become fact.

Is it possible that the father of Ornithology, one Aristotle, might be at the bottom of all this and could be to blame, directly or indirectly? In his extensive writing about birds he could well have touched upon this issue. He then either confused the plover and the lapwing (which I doubt, he was a man of science after all) or was less than precise when he wrote about the feigning of injury (same applies) or, the most likely scenario is that the confusion happened when his works were translated from Ancient Greek to other languages and the scandalous calumny simply got repeated down through the ages; Chaucer '*False lapwyng, alle ful of treacherye!*'; Shakespeare '*Far from her nest the Lapwing cries away*'; Gower '*The bird falsest of all*' Caxton calls them '*foul and villainous*'.

But then maybe there is a more simple explanation when it come to the Ancient Greeks, maybe in the end it is all down to that cad Zeus!

Zues was supposed to have had the ability to turn himself in to other beings, which he did mostly it seems to seduce women with whom he should have had nothing to do. Legend has it that he turned himself into a Lapwing in order to seduce Lamia the beautiful Queen of Libya. Hera, his wife, the only thing apparently that of which Zeus was afraid, on finding out cursed por old Lamia and she became a child eating monster... lovely. So maybe the Greeks got the idea of the birds deception from this tale of seduction and woe.

Whatever the reason for this lovely bird having such a dreadful reputation that has stuck over the centuries, it is not prepared to plead guilty. You can hear the frustrated Lapwing's cry to this day as they pass over the spring meadows dipping and swerving, mad with indignity 'It wasn't me! It wasn't me!' Go on, go out and listen.



A 'deceit' of Lapwings — Elis Simpson

Where's Willet? — Rick Simpson

Where do the willets that breed in North America spend the winter? The fact is no-one has a definitive answer for sure, indeed there seems to be much confusion over the issue.

The problem is there are two distinct breeding populations which are referred to as 'Western' and 'Eastern' Willet. These are considered by most to be subspecies of the same species; Willet *Tringa semipalmata*. Additionally they are sometimes very difficult to tell apart and so, because they are subspecies, no-one tends to bother. At Wader Quest we have bucked the trend (as we tend to with taxonomy) and have decided, for our own purposes, to treat them as separate species Western Willet *Tringa inornata* and Eastern Willet *Tringa semipalmata* in the hope that this will encourage people to be more specific about what they have seen.

The reason we encourage this approach is that birders tend to like to put a name to a bird they have seen. If they are lumped together as Willet there is no incentive to look deeper into the bird's identity. However if they are considered species, few birders like to put willet sp. on their list and so they will make every effort to identify to Western or Eastern Willet if they can.

Whether you agree with the taxonomy or reasons behind our decision or not, it is still important to discover where each spends its winter months.

The two forms, when they leave the breeding grounds become a bit of an enigma as far as their whereabouts are concerned. Some say that the Eastern Willets leave the USA altogether while the Western Willets



Western Willet *Tringa inornata* — Elis Simpson

remain in some numbers. Some suggest the Eastern Willets winter down the Atlantic coast of South America while the Western Willets do so down the Pacific side.

We can definitely tell you that some Western Willets are to be found on the Atlantic coast as we have seen them, finding the first ever record of the species in the State of São Paulo.

We also played a very minor part in a paper on the subject of the willets' occurrence in south-eastern South America which showed that for those that could be assigned to one group or another roughly half were of each.

So, we decided that we could use

this as part of our Wader Conservation World Watch 4 planning to try to encourage people in the Americas to go and look specifically for willets (as well as all the other waders/shorebirds) during the WCWW4 weekend.

But we don't intend to stop there, that is just the start of a winter long project for people to find and identify the willets they see so that we can better understand exactly where they do go, a great chance to get involved in some serious citizen science.

There is a rub though (isn't there always?); which willet is which?

Even the experts agree that in some cases it just isn't possible to tell, but the point here is that we are looking for the 'normal' wintering grounds of a species and within the groups of birds there will certainly be many that are assignable to either Western or Eastern Willet and that is the all important data that we require.

Clearly we don't have the reach to do this on our own so we hope that we'll be able to enlist the help of the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network WHSRN to mobilise people in the region to see if we can't, once and for all, answer this question; where's Willet?

First documented record of Willet, *Tringa semipalmata* (Charadriiformes: Scolopacidae) for the state of São Paulo: Simpson R and Simpson E: *Atualidades ornitológicas* 160 2011.

Willet (*Tringa semipalmata*) status update in southeastern South America. Natalia S. Martínez-Curci, Adrián B. Azpiroz, Andros T. Gianuca, Dimas Gianuca, Rick E. Simpson, & Rafael A. Dias: *Ornitologia Neotropical* 25: 135–144, 2014.



Eastern Willet *Tringa semipalmata* — Elis Simpson

Wader Photo Gallery — send us your favourite wader photos



Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
- Roberta Goodall; UK



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



Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*
- Martin Eayrs; Argentina



Sanderling *Calidris alba*
- John Walker; USA



Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
- Astrid Kant; Netherlands



Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
- Scott Petrec; USK



Variable Oystercatchers *Haematopus unicolor*
- Brent Stephenson; New Zealand



Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*
- Julian Bhalerao; India

Magellanic Plover update — Rick Simpson

We have had news back from Ron Porter about what our GPS tagged Magellanic Plover was up to during its non breeding season and the answer is... Not very much really.

It was expected that this bird would do one of two things, migrate north into Argentina or perhaps simply move to the coast. It turns out it did neither.

The salinity readings show that it did not reach the sea and remained probably within fifty km of where it breeds.

At the same time two new birds were ringed and given the numbers 192 and 193. They were ringed as a breeding pair and in Decemebr of 2016. These two birds were seen with a third adult and two fledged juveniles. It would be very interesting to discover the relationship between all five birds.



Magellanic Plover on the nest — Ricardo Matus

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Life	£200.00

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Club	£10.00
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Wader Quest Trustee news.

Chair: Rick Simpson

Secretary: Rachel Walls

Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Elis Simpson

Board members: Allan Archer, Ian Dearing, Lee Dingain, Sue Healey (Events), Chris Lamsdell (Ringin), Oliver Simms and Andrew Whitelee.

Last meeting: 20th November 2016

Next Meeting: 10:30 29th January: London Wetland Centre.

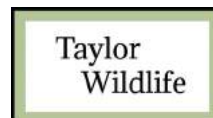
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