

Forthcoming talks:

14/04/2016 Gravesend RSPB local group. 19.30 North Fleet School for Girls, Hall Road, Gravesend, DA11 8AQ.

17/05/2016 York RSPB local group. 19.30 Temple Hall, York St John University, Lord Mayors Walk, York. YO31 7EL

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

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.

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Funds raised for wader conservation
Wader Quest hits landmark figure of £10k
Since November 2012 together we have raised :

£10,260.81



Species that your subscriptions and donations have enabled us to help:

Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Hooded plover

Magellanic Plover

Snowy Plover

St. Helena's Plover

Javan Plover

White-headed Stilt

African Black Oystercatcher

White-fronted Plover

Projects you have supported along the way:

Spoon-billed Sandpiper captive breeding programme: WWT

Beach-nesting Birds Programme: BirdLife Australia

Galveston Oil Spill Appeal: Audubon Texas

Western Snowy Plover Appeal: Audubon California

Waders in Working Wetlands - Shorebird Extravaganza

STOP Shorebirds from Dying: BirdLife Australia

Silent Shorebird Crisis: BirdLife Australia

South Island Wildlife Hospital New Zealand

Conectando os Pontos Brazil

Anak Burung Birdbanding Club Indonesia

CORBIDI (Centro de Ornitología y Biodiversidad) Peru

Nature's Valley Trust South Africa

Pukorokoro Miranda Trust New Zealand

WADER QUEST IS WHEREVER THE WADERS ARE

A very big **THANK YOU** from us, the projects and of course the waders.

Wader Quest news

Norfolk Bird Race 2016

— 30th April



Last year Andrew Whitelee of Norfolk, as part of the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair, decided to organise a Norfolk Bird Race (teams competing to see who can see the most species in a day) in order to raise money for a bird related charity. He enjoyed it so much that he decided that it should happen every year and each year the recipient of the funds raised would be different.

In 2015 the beneficiaries of this event were the BTO, a just cause indeed, but this year, we were humbled to be asked if we would like to be the recipients. It didn't take long for us to snap up this fantastic offer.

To show willing, we decided that we should also enter a team and this year we will be one of five taking part. The Wader Quest team comprises: Dan Bradbury (Cpt), Rick and Elis Simpson and Oliver Simms. Dan was chosen as the captain as he has the greatest knowledge of Norfolk as a resident of that county, and Oliver has been full of super suggestions too. Between them they will, I'm sure, do a great job on the itinerary, while Rick will provide the transport and Elis some much needed encouragement to keep him awake for more than an hour at a time.

Our adversaries include previous racers including Andrew Whitelee himself who is determined to win this year as last year he came second to Ian Dearing's team. Both of these stalwarts have been nominated as Wader Quest Trustees and will hopefully both be voted onto the Board at the April meeting. Andrew also runs a birding company called Verdant Wildlife and has offered to give 10% of his profits this year to Wader Quest. He also foolishly offered to double it if he doesn't win! Now there's a challenge; although he's probably quite safe with us.

As far as fund raising is concerned there are two methods that people can use to sponsor the event and therefore Wader Quest. The first is through the teams directly

who will pass on the money in person to Wader Quest or through a JustGiving site that has been set up by Andrew (see link below). Andrew has created a Thunderclap to promote the Bird Race, so if you are au fait with these things please sign up to it to help us increase our coverage on the day. <https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/40230-norfolk-bird-race-wader-love?locale=en>

For our part we are asking anyone not quick enough to avoid us to stump up hard earned cash, but if we don't catch up with you in person you can still sponsor us through our website using the PayPal donate button on the top right hand side of the page, www.waderquest.org or you can pay through the Norfolk Bird Race JustGiving site. <https://crowdfunding.justgiving.com/Norfolk-Bird-Race-2016> Dan Bradbury is also auctioning a painting he executed at RSPB Titchwell during the Wash Wader Festival in 2015 of an Avocet. [Link here.](#)

For anyone who donates £5.00 or more Wader Quest will sign them up for a free year as a Friend of Wader Quest and their name will be entered into a draw to win a magnificent Lars Jonsson poster of winter birds in Sweden.



For more details on this offer follow this link to the Wader Quest website <http://www.waderquest.org/2016/03/win-signed-lars-jonsson-poster.html>

We're not entirely sure how well we will do in the face of such fierce opposition, with Andrew and Ian having a grudge race and two teams of young, enthusiastic and very much fitter than us (I have no doubt) teams from the ranks of the

Next Generation Birders. Whatever the outcome of the race itself, the greatest winner will be Wader Quest so a big thank you to Andrew and all those taking part or sponsoring the event.

Norfolk Bird And Wildlife Fair

— 21st & 22nd May

This brings us neatly on to the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair which will take place at Mannington Hall in Norfolk as in previous years. We will be attending as usual and giving two talks; *The Deceitful Lapwing* which tells you everything you ever wanted or needed to know about the Northern Lapwing (12:45 21st); *Endemic Waders of New Zealand* is about just that, the unusual number of endemic waders to be found, or not found, in New Zealand (13:45 22nd). We will have our usual merchandising to sell and hope that we will see many Friends, Sponsors and other supporters there.

Wader Quest AGM 2016

— 29th May

This year's AGM will take place at the London Wetland Centre starting at 10:30 on May 29th. Would any Friend or Sponsor wishing to attend please let us know by the 1st of May as the venue only has limited space and an alternative venue may need to be sought if necessary.

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 have applied to give a talk again this year and, if we are successful, the title on this occasion will be *An Inspiration of Waders*. If you are going to be at the BBF this year, keep an eye out for time and place and come along and lend your support; there are few things more disheartening than talking to an empty room.

We hope that in any case you will have time to visit the stand and say hello. We expect to be in the same place as last year, which was Marquee 7 Stand 67, but if we are, for any reason, moved to another spot we will be sure to make everyone aware in the July newsletter.

Wader Quest news — cont'd

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 after 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 hope to be able 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 see what we may be able to bring back this year.

International Wader Study Group Conference

— 9th to 12th September



Rick and Elis Simpson will be attending this exciting event in their capacity as joint Membership Secretaries of the IWSG. As

such, they will of course be concentrating on the business at hand for the group but the IWSG has kindly agreed that they will also be able to represent Wader Quest at the event.

The two organisations both have the conservation and preservation of waders at their heart, the IWSG approaches it from a scientific angle while Wader Quest concentrates its efforts on raising awareness and funding. As such they sit neatly in tandem catering between them for all tastes and interests for those among us who have a particular interest in waders and their conservation.

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 through their Beach Nesting Birds Programme 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 likely to be around in the UK in September namely Grey, Eurasian Golden and Ringed Plovers and of course Northern Lapwing, we should be able to see them all quite easily on that day.

Wirral Wader Festival

— 1st & 2nd October



Following on from last year's success, despite

the terrible weather that befell us the good folk of the Wirral and our partners in the event have decided that they wish to make this an annual affair. Of course we are delighted by this prospect and look forward to the meetings that take us up to that lovely part of the country every couple of months.

The date is secure, we are holding it early to try to avoid the maelstrom that we endured last year, but the venue has not yet been finalised as last year's venue will not be fully available to us this year due to building improvements.

However, we are greatly looking forward to planning the event once again with the highly motivated partnership team drawn from the Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens, Wirral Country Park Rangers, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the RSPB and ourselves.

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.

2015 saw a large increase in people getting involved, with some organisations holding their own events to celebrate the day with us across the world. We hope that more people and organisations will join us this year and that we can even improve on the marvellous success increasing the number of species seen between us.

Did you know?

African Black Oystercatchers are endemic to the South African and Namibian coast. They have bucked the trend in that their population is thought to be increasing. This is probably mainly due to better coastal protection and an invasion by alien mussel species improving their food supply.

Many South African juveniles migrate north to nursery areas in central and northern Namibia and will remain there for 2—3 years until it is their time to breed. Then they will return to the place where they were hatched. After this they will never return north to Namibia again.



African Black Oystercatcher - Elis Simpson

The Island at the Centre of the World — Matt Thomas



Eurasian Oystercatcher high tide roost on Middle Eye with Hilbre Island in the background - Matt Thomas

The River Dee rises in the hills of Snowdonia, meanders through ancient oak woodlands, passes by the historic Roman city of Chester before widening and slowing to form the gloopy mudflats of the Dee estuary. At the head of this internationally important wetland lies Hilbre - the island at the centre of the world.

The Hilbre Islands Local Nature Reserve comprises three tidal islands, Little Eye, Middle Eye and the largest island from where the reserve gets its name. They lie around a kilometre and a half from the busy seaside village of West Kirby on the north west tip of the Wirral peninsula – where I live and work. Accessible on foot at low tide they become cut off from the mainland when the tide reaches its peak. People visit for peace and quiet and the fine views towards the mountains of its source but they are also the most fantastic place to spend a few hours among migratory shorebirds, which is my favourite thing to do.

It's mid-March and I'm loading up the kit early in the morning ready for a day on the island, staying over high tide. Camera, telephoto lens, binoculars and plenty of snacks weigh me down as I trek across the sands. The incoming tide is hot on my heels, pushing me and the birds towards our high tide haven, the main island of Hilbre itself. The sun rises steadily over my shoulder, my

shadow stretches out before me, pointing compass-like to my destination.

I dawdle a little around Middle Eye, my attention diverted from the tide by a group of Common Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) feeding at the water's edge. In the distance some Grey Seals hoot to each other and shuffle off their sandbank as the tide engulfs it. This reminds me that I too have to get a shuffle on if I'm not to get stranded on Middle Eye for the duration of high tide. I



Ruddy Turnstone - Matt Thomas

have left it late and for the last few steps I'm sloshing through ankle deep turbid water with a rush/push of adrenaline seeing me safely on to the beach. I catch my breath before I peel off my wet socks and leave them to dry in the weak sunshine on the eastern slopes. It is early spring so there isn't much heat in the sun, I doubt they will dry

much. I don't mind the low temperature today, I like a big coat and a woolly hat. I pad around the island barefoot for a while, feeling a little foolish. Luckily I have the island to myself today so nobody but the birds can see me looking odd, wrapped up in winter clothes but naked about the feet.

The Eurasian Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*) are piling in to the roost on Middle Eye, noisily jostling for the best position on the sandstone reefs that surround the island. A few Eurasian Curlews (*Numenius arquata*) serenely glide in and take up position on the grassy slopes above their boisterous neighbours. Around two thousand 'Oycs' are crowding together. It is a wonder these birds aren't more solitary; they seem to really dislike each other. There is much raucous debate and many squabbles between the members of the flock, it doesn't look at all restful in the roost.

Away from the disputes on Middle Eye, at the south end of the Hilbre, where the waves are breaking on the sandstone reefs, a party of Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) are grazing the heavily seaweeded rocks, picking careless crabs and other tasty morsels from the shiny brown fronds of bladder wrack. Used to having the island to themselves for the winter, they have become rather bold and wander reasonably close as I sit quietly on the rocks. They are feeding

The Island at the Centre of the World — cont'd

quickly so they can make the weight for a mammoth trip north. The Hilbre Turnstones will soon be departing for arctic Canada via Iceland.

As the tide is covering the mudflats the birds that were feeding there must seek shelter for the hours around high tide. The Ringed Plovers that delayed my progress to the island have flown up to the cliffs above where the Turnstones are feeding. Here they start to preen, fussing over feathers that have brought them to Hilbre from African coasts and will soon carry them far away from here, to treeless tundra in the far north.

Having been sat still for a while thinking about shorebirds, imagining their arctic breeding grounds and photographing

Turnstones and Ringed Plovers I have become a little chilly. I drink some of my coffee from the flask; it warms my stomach but the heat doesn't spread to my frigid toes. I head from here to the northern end of Hilbre, here there is always water, even at low tide. I take up a vantage point by the old derelict lifeboat slipway. The station has long since moved to the mainland and the crumbling building that once housed the boat now provides good cover for watching waders on the shore.

Almost as soon as I arrive a squadron of Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) comes winging into view. In tight formation they whiz by and then swing back on themselves before alighting on the edge of



Red Knot - Matt Thomas

the tide. Straight away their heads go down, bills pecking at the barnacles opening up with the flooding tide. No doubt they are preparing for their imminent departure to northern breeding grounds. These are Knots from the *islandica* subspecies so they will be heading for north east Greenland and Canada.

A single Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) has attached itself to this flock of Knot. The 'Barwit' will not be following the Knot, from here it will drift east to Scandinavia or Russia. Hilbre really is at a crossroads for migrating waders. I sit and wonder about all the different journeys these birds make, their origins and destinations. The amount of miles travelled in so many directions is mind boggling.

I have really come to the north end of Hilbre for one species. A real favourite of mine, the Purple Sandpiper (*Calidris maritima*). A small group of these little waders can be found here during the winter months, eking out a precarious living right on the edge of the crashing waves. They are remarkably well camouflaged and take some time to spot. However, I soon spy them having a final feed before the rocks are completely submerged by the rising waters. The 'Purps' fly to the western cliff face to find a suitably sunny spot to see out the tide. I creep around and peer over the cliffs to the turbulent waters below. I soon spot them roosting on a ledge about halfway down the cliffs. This is what I have been waiting for. With the sun arcing around to the west, the light is in a perfect position to catch the subtle purple iridescence on their feathers as the birds sit quietly on the rocks. For so much of their time on Hilbre they appear grey and rather plain, easy to miss amongst the silt spattered, seaweed spangled rocks they patrol. But if you get them in the right light you will see them shine, shine with a soft purple sheen - not too flashy - understated brilliance. My winter is not complete without a few visits to the island to see and photograph these waders.



Purple Sandpiper - Matt Thomas

The Island at the Centre of the World — cont'd

I find a spot close to them, but not so close that I disturb their rest and take some pictures. After a while, with memory cards full, batteries flattened and snacks munched, I sit daydreaming about the birds. I imagine the tundra of Greenland and Canada, birds on the nest, serene silence, the perpetual light of an arctic summer. Here though, the light is limited and as the tide recedes and the sun starts to lower in the western sky I put on my damp socks and start my journey home.

When the sun sets, its light has to travel through more of the earth's atmosphere to reach Hilbre. As this happens light from the blue end of the light spectrum is filtered out by particles in the atmosphere leaving mainly red and yellow wavelengths in the light. This is what makes sunsets appear orange, it also makes the red legs of a Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) look even more awesome than usual.

Common Redshanks are almost ever present on the island, I can't think of a time I have visited and not seen one. As I head off the island a Redshank is pootling around the rock pools in the lengthening shadows. Its legs burn bright in the setting sun and I am transfixed for a while. Watching it work its way across the sandstone reefs in the beautiful light is a truly wonderful sight, it hammers home how much I love this tiny island, these craggy rocks that guard the mouth of the estuary.

As I walk on, leaving the Redshank



Common Redshank - Matt Thomas

behind, a flock of Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) zoom over my head. I hear the hundred or so pairs of wings ripping the evening air before I see them, high above, heading out of the estuary to who knows where. Thinking of the myriad journeys that pass through and over Hilbre to destinations across the globe I feel tiny and insignificant, but lucky that I get to meet just a few of the birds travelling those routes.

My shadow, that pointed the way to the island this morning, is now pointing

homewards, it's as if the sun is circling Hilbre, this and those migrating 'Dunnies' briefly make me believe that everything revolves around Hilbre, making it the island at the centre of the world.

Ed: Matt Thomas writes a thoroughly entertaining blog about the waders of the Dee estuary called *From the muddy banks of the Dee*.

www.fromthemuddybanksofthede.com

Wader Quest Grants Fund updates: *Conectando os pontos* (Connecting the dots?) — Community Conservation in action

Along the Brazilian coast, there are several wintering sites (northern hemisphere winter), which are extremely important for the maintenance and conservation of various Nearctic wader species. These species include; Grey (Black-bellied) Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*), Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*), Red Knot (*Calidris Canutus*), Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) and Hudsonian Whimbrel (*Numenius hudsonicus*).

The equipment that Wader Quest agreed to fund was the entire range of leg flags for the species mentioned above. The flags were to be in the Brazilian code, blue

base with white letters, and the letters and numbers themselves issued by CEMAVE-ICMBio through the SNA (*Sistema Nacional de Anilhamento de Aves Silvestris*—National wild bird ringing system).

The project was approved and we sent the coloured flags at a cost to the Grants Fund of £350.00. This was in addition to the £199.85 donation we had earlier made to the project. The flags should have arrived by the time you read this which will give the project a little time to deploy some of the flags on birds before they head north.

The project aims to study the birds that use *Ilha da Restinga* to rest and feed.



Semipalmated Plover- Elis Simpson

This island can be found in the *Paraíba do Norte* river estuary located in Cabedelo, Paraíba State, northeastern Brazil. Cont'd...

Wader Quest Grants Fund updates: *Conectando os pontos* (Connecting the dots?) — Community Conservation in action — cont'd

The idea behind the project is two fold. Firstly the scientific research into finding out routes taken and breeding positions of the birds that winter in, or pass through, Brazil. Hence the leg flags which we hope our North American friends will keep an eye out for.

The second is to engage with the local community to help them to understand these birds better and to engender a sense of pride in the fact that they have chosen those beaches to pass their time. At present a majority of the people who live or frequent the area have little or no knowledge about the fantastic challenges that these birds face and the hardships they have endured simply to be there.

The project aims to show aspects of the biology of migratory birds to students



Aves limícolas (waders) on Ilha da Restinga - Roberta Rodrigues



Grey or Black-bellied Plover
- Elis Simpson

from both public and private schools in the city.

The project ethos is to connect people, connect knowledge and engender respect for, and pride in, the birds. All this coming together in important environments to further the cause of the global conservation of migratory waders.

Dr. Roberta Costa Rodrigues
Universidade Federal da Paraíba - UFPB,
Centro de Ciências Agrárias, Campus II
Rod. 79, Areia, Paraíba, Brazil 58397-000



Leg flags sent to Conectando os Pontos
- Elis Simpson

Did you know?

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) is a relatively recent newcomer to the UK. The first known nesting was in 1938 at Tring Reservoirs, Hertfordshire, before that it was just a rare vagrant. There was then a gap of 6 years before 2 pairs bred at Tring again and another pair was discovered in Middlesex. By 1951, in and around London, there were about 12 pairs with others outside London in the south-east region. In 1962, 158 pairs were found in 24 counties, by 1967 there were 230 pairs. By 2007, there were 1,200 pairs.



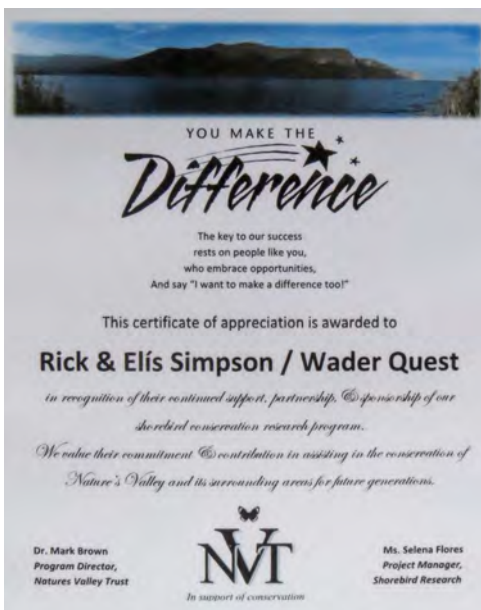
Little Ringed Plover - Ronald Messemaker

Wader Quest Grants Fund updates; Nature's Valley Trust, South Africa

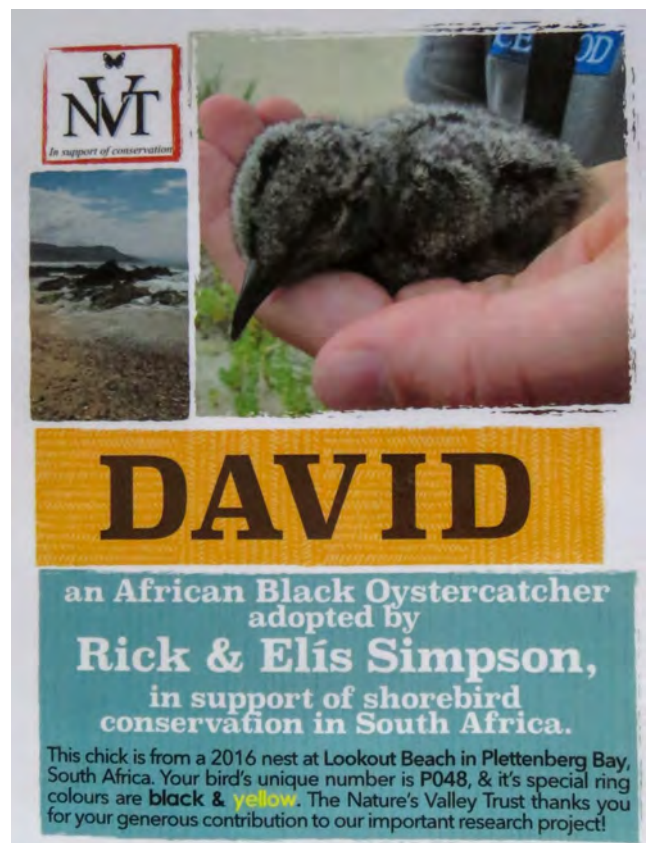
As a consequence of our contribution (with the kind help of our sponsors Opticron), of a pair of binoculars and a telescope to assist in the fieldwork of the Nature's Valley Trust we received the following items in the post; a *You make the difference* certificate in recognition of the contribution from NVT Director Mark Brown and Manager Selena Flores, a print of an artwork by local artist Dawn Pearce and two certificates pertaining

to the two chicks we were invited to name. One is a White-fronted Plover (*Charadrius marginatus*) which we named Dinah in honour of Rick's late Godmother Dinah Dean (the prolific Mills and Boon Historical Romance author) and the other an African Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus moquini*) after Rick's late brother David Simpson who was a great supporter of Wader Quest in its early days.

We also received a Nature's Valley Trust car sticker which we believe has undergone the most northerly migration ever recorded for its kind.



African Black Oystercatcher—Dawn Pearce



New Zealand Braided Rivers Partnership Project — Sonny Whitelaw

Community Wader Conservation in action

Globally, there is an increasing demand for sustainable and environmentally friendly products. Businesses that can meet this demand have a competitive market edge. Hence, gaining accreditation for environmental stewardship is simply good business.

As Nick Ledgard pointed out in a previous newsletter (Vol 2 Issue 4 pp 13-14), braided rivers, while globally rare ecosystems, are common in New Zealand. They are formed through a combination of rapid mountain building, glaciation, and high precipitation — as much as 12 metres a year at high altitudes — stripping some 10,000 tonnes/km² annually from the mountains and depositing it in intermontane valleys and coastal plains, such as the Canterbury Plains, where Christchurch is located. Between floods, or ‘freshes’ following storms and springtime snow melt, many shallow channels or ‘braids’ flow around islands of loose shingle



Braided River Potts River, Canterbury, New Zealand. Mt Sunday (‘Edoras’ in Lord of the Rings) is the smallish hummock to the left of the centre just beyond the row of pines — Steve Attwood



Wrybill — Steve Attwood

— the perfect environment for wading birds to nest and feed. In fact, it’s so ideal that several species unique to New Zealand evolved to breed exclusively on braided rivers. These include Wrybill (*Anarhynchus frontalis*), the only bird in the world with an asymmetrically bent bill; Black-billed Gull (*Larus bulleri*), the most endangered gull in the world; Black Stilt (*Himantopus novaezelandiae*), only 70 left in the wild;

South Island Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus finschi*); and Black-fronted Tern (*Chlidonias albostratus*), whose numbers are also in decline (see the 3.5 min. videos on braided river birds — link 1 below)

BRaid — braided river aid, explains the reasons for the decline of these unique species on its website (see link 2 below). For the past ten years BRaid, a charitable trust, has been working to raise the profile of braided rivers and draw attention to the plight of their unique birds. While the rivers were once taken for granted, recognition of their importance is growing, and there is now a government-led mandate to improve both water quality and bird habitats in braided rivers. With this mandate in hand, in January this year, BRaid embarked on a new Partnerships Programme, to actively work with commercial and recreational braided

river users to protect the birds and restore their habitats.

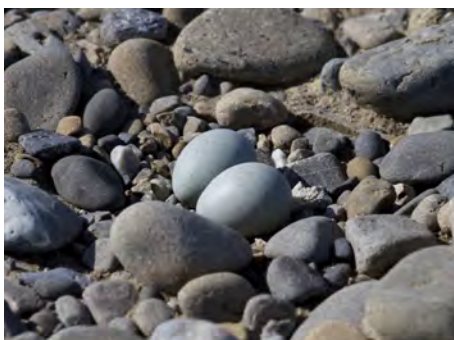
The strategy behind the project is based on a couple of key facts. Firstly, while some nesting birds such as Wrybill are site faithful, colony nesting Black-billed Gulls and



Black-fronted Tern — Steve Attwood

Black-fronted Terns do not always return to the same location, even the same rivers, from year to year. Moreover, if disturbed, some colonies abandon nests and move elsewhere. While nesting colonies of Black-billed Gulls are generally visible from the air — which is how we know their numbers are plummeting — other birds, even colony nesting Black-fronted Terns, are too well-camouflaged.

Secondly, while finding birds and following up on fledgling success is a relatively straightforward task in many countries, the situation in New Zealand is entirely different. Aerial surveys to count Black-billed Gull



Wrybill nest with eggs — Steve Attwood

New Zealand Braided Rivers Partnership Project — Sonny Whitelaw

Community Wader Conservation in action

colonies are undertaken just once annually, at the beginning of the season. The only way to determine whether the colonies stay in the same location, or what sort of fledgling success they might have, is by ground-truthing. But we simply don't have the human and financial resources to implement strategies to protect them. To put it in perspective, the population of New Zealand is just 7% of Great Britain's and we're spread over an area some 40,000km sq. larger — much of it patterned by braided rivers in remote mountainous areas.

So, the first aim of the Partnerships Project is to develop a network of citizen scientists, by enlisting recreational and commercial river users, particularly tourism operators and high country farmers, to report sightings of nesting colonies. We're focussing just on colony birds because they're easy to locate if you're rafting or kayaking down a river, leading a fishing or hunting expedition, or mustering livestock. And they don't require bird-watching skills. It's also easier to develop and implement management strategies to protect colonies against invasive predators such as mustelids, rats, hedgehogs, and feral cats through a trapping programme, and through signage alerting other river users to the presence of the birds.

The hope is that once river users start to learn about the birds and follow their progress through hatching and fledgling, they will develop an emotional investment in them



Black Stilt — Steve Attwood

and want to help protect them through a range of strategies and tools that BRAID can provide.

And it's not just about developing an emotional investment. BRAID is developing a marketing and education strategy with tools for tour operators to enhance visitor experience through 'value added' components. Clarence River Rafting, for example, involved their guests in a bird count on their 5-day rafting trips down the Clarence River, revealing the existence of two previously unknown colonies of Black-fronted Terns. This kind of 'conservation tourism' is great for business on multiple levels, and also ensures that tour operators will strive to

protect and enhance one of the key assets — the bird life — on which their businesses depend.



Black-billed Gull — Steve Attwood

The Braided Rivers Partnership Project is still in its early stages, but the wider community, including irrigation companies and jetboat users as well as tourism operators are beginning to show interest in the programme. We're now aiming to have at least one colony of birds protected by a community-led trapping programme this coming spring. If it's successful in reducing predator numbers, other braided river birds should also benefit. It also gives us a fantastic 'proof-of-concept' for future partnership projects.

Full details of the Braided River Partnerships Programme: <http://braid.org.nz/brpp>.

Links in text:

1 <http://braid.org.nz/ecology/birds>

2 <http://braid.org.nz/ecology/threats>.

Sonny Whitelaw Manager BRAID

www.braid.org.nz



South Island Pied Oystercatchers—Steve Attwood

Essex in all its glory — Rick Simpson

The Essex coast holds a special place in my heart as it was there that I encountered Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*), Sanderlings (*Calidris alba*) and Grey Plovers (*Pluvialis squatarola*) for the first time, on a memorable day at Clear Point near St Osyth's, initiating a lifelong passion for waders of all kinds. The day was memorable for two reasons; firstly of course for those inspirational birds that captured my young imagination and also because it might well have turned out to be my last day on earth since my feet became inextricably embedded in the cloying mud as I ventured ever closer to better see these new and stunning birds. My boots were left to be consumed by the mire and I discovered that being a wader was not as easy as it looked; it was also the day I resolved to buy a telescope when I could afford one.

Later in life as a feckless teenager my father thought that I might enjoy a birdwatching holiday upon a Thames sailing barge. The truth was that he was desperate to sail on one of those majestic vessels and my birdwatching provided him with just the excuse he needed. Although not initially keen as we wound our way through the estuaries and creeks of Essex I found myself subsumed into a magical combination of sail, estuary and birds that few are privileged to experience.

I recently ventured back to the Essex coast and visited Two Tree Island near Leigh-on-Sea, a 257 hectare reserve managed by Essex Wildlife Trust which is composed mainly of scrub, grassland, reed beds and lagoons. The glory of the place though is that



Ruddy Turnstone — Elis Simpson

it is an island in an estuary and therefore surrounded by tidal waters. In mid-afternoon on a sunny July day the sun seemed to hang still as though deciding whether or not to let inevitability drag it towards the horizon. The tide had just started to ebb, the silence and stillness of the scene lent it the appearance of a desert, save for the rippling waters and the odd Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) that threaded its way through the warm afternoon breeze in pursuit of winged packets of protein.

From the hide that overlooks the scrape at the western extremity of the island four Pied Avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) were immediately apparent loafing ankle-deep in the placid lagoon, mostly sleeping with their elegant upturned bills nestled

among the feathers along their back. At the far end of the scrape was a mixed flock of waders, mainly Common Redshanks (*Tringa totanus*) and Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*), almost silhouetted with their colours all but washed away by back lighting from the sun. With the accelerating ebb, the redshanks started to leave rather furtively, fluttering on their moulting wings and skimming just over the sea wall to the emerging mud. They went singly and so stealthily that they resembled a jail break, each making its headlong dash for freedom when the guard's back was turned.

Leaving the scrape too, in favour of the hide on the southern edge of the island that looks out over the water called Hadleigh Ray and the network of channels between Two Tree and Canvey Islands, allowed witness to a spectacular natural show.

As the water slipped away, the edges of the saltmarsh began to give up their secrets and the fugitive redshanks started to almost imperceptibly appear, working their way down the edges of the channels that were tipping their contents back into the sea. First there was one, then two, then slowly and without their arrival being noticed they increased in numbers until they spread like a myriad tiny brown ants busily criss-crossing the recently exposed mud. Then in flew zig-zagging Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius hiaticula*) flashing first this way and then the other on stiff wings as though being pursued by some invisible predator. Small groups of Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) also skittered by rasping their wheezy call, still in their summer garb looking like they had mistakenly stopped for a paddle



Common Redshank — Elis Simpson

Essex in all its glory — cont'd

in a pool of ink leaving their belly feathers stained black.

The crescendo of melodic calls from the redshanks as their numbers swelled was punctuated by the Eurasian Oystercatchers' (*Haematopus ostralegus*) urgent piping, sometimes in flight but mostly in noisy parties dashing around in a whirling flurry of adrenalin-fuelled excitement. Eurasian Curlews (*Numenius arquatus*) appeared adding to the symphony, warbling their fluting call as they flew heavily upstream, intent on finding a productive piece of mud to probe. The evocative beauty of this soundscape brought a poignant feeling of well-being tinged with a sensation of untamed solitude.

A single Eurasian Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) stumbled around in the saltmarsh vegetation, eventually flying off to a preferred patch of seemingly identical saltmarsh presumably superior to the one which it had just vacated. As the water retreated to become a sliver of blue meandering through the broad swathes of brown mud, a number of Common Greenshanks (*Tringa nebularia*) darted and pirouetted finding some delicious morsel to satisfy their urgent need to fatten up for the long flights they were yet to undertake to Europe or exotic Africa beyond.



Eurasian Whimbrel
- Elis Simpson

Emerging from behind a bank at the edge of the saltings, a Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) slowly revealed itself inch by tantalising inch, joined by another that stole out behind it. They were adult birds that had done with breeding for the year and were moving through, in all probability, to meet up with others of their kind to decorate desolate winter fields somewhere later in the year. They were losing their breeding plumage and looked as though they were being viewed



Eurasian Oystercatchers - Elis Simpson

through a snow storm, the black being flecked with white. They were edgy, and suddenly taking flight they swung wildly from side to side in a great arc as though getting their bearings. The sun now firmly committed to its downward glide glinted on the gold of their upperparts as they turned. Finally apparently oriented, they headed out with a final, single, plaintive cry of farewell.

If you have never witnessed a river transmogrify in this way and wish to do so then you should take the time to visit Two Tree Island. In the winter numbers of birds can be particularly spectacular and once you have experienced this transformation for yourself, you may never look back; you too may become entranced by the ephemeral world that is the throbbing heart of the moon.

To wader lovers experiences such as this unfolding, twice-daily miracle are the very essence of their existence. We must be grateful that locations such as Two Tree Island can still readily be found around our coastline. However two members of the local community, with whom I briefly shared the viewing of a single stunning, racing-green and plumed Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) paddling around at the water's edge, lamented that they had noticed a decline in this bird's numbers in recent years. This truth, significant as it is, sadly pales in the face of the devastation that is being wrought upon the intertidal zone in some

other parts of the world. The needs and well-being of the natural denizens of this fragile environment are being callously cast aside where economically driven 'reclamation' denies them the life-sustaining benthos secreted within it. In this age of modernisation, transition and climate change, conservation and preservation surely warrant our passionate efforts to protect these fascinating environments where the fine line between land and sea becomes so splendidly blurred.



Eurasian Golden Plover
- Elis Simpson

Previously published in Birdwatching Magazine November 2015.

Burry Inlet Oystercatchers — Dan Rouse

The Burry Inlet is a beautiful stretch of estuary situated between the Gower and Carmarthenshire in South Wales. This estuary has four RAMSAR species which thrive here but the one that is close to my heart is the Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*).

Eurasian Oystercatchers have been on the inlet since the 1950's where they thrived in large numbers, however, due to cockle pickers having to compete for food with around 10,000+ Oystercatchers, in 1970 a cull was authorised and the population was reduced to almost extinction on the estuary. Since then, the numbers have recovered somewhat and the estuary is once again a roosting and feeding site for over 5,000 Oystercatchers!

In the 1990's a project was set up on the roosting site to ring these birds to monitor the growth in the population and in October 2015 I attended an annual cannon net catch in which 501 birds were caught and ringed. I carry out the WeBS count for part of the estuary monitoring the numbers and can usually spot the patterns in numbers from one count to the next. However being able to physically see the data and witness the longevity of some of the birds was outstanding. We caught a couple of retraps which were previously ringed on the roosting



The River Loughor or Afon Llŵchwr; aka Burry Inlet - Google Earth.

site but I took a particular shine to one bird which was ringed on my birthday making this bird at least 19 years old, since it stretched back further than that! The majority were ringed at 8 (see key in box to right) making them fully adult, a couple were ringed as 5, 6 and 7 making them almost adults but we only caught a couple of 3's which would be juvenile birds. We were fortunate enough to control [a bird originally ringed elsewhere, or during a previous migration, and subsequently re-caught] a bird which was ringed in Sweden. Birds from all over the estuary typically roost in this one spot and then divide into their feeding groups to feed during the day.

wool which was causing all the issues. The Burry holds the Flounder Festival where a great number of fishermen come to fish. It could therefore reasonably be expected that fishing line would be a greater problem but strangely, wool seemed to be the cause of the deformities which we found on a couple of birds that still had the substances on them but didn't have toes missing.



View over the inlet from my WeBS counting site
- Dan Rouse



Dan holding an oystercatcher demonstrating the dangers of handling large nervous birds
- Dan Rouse



Swedish leg ring - Dan Rouse

Looking closely at these birds really made my love for them grow, but there was one concern that kept cropping up every so often - there were a couple with toes missing. Oystercatchers do suffer occasionally with feet/toe deformation due to them feeding along tidal lines and getting strings and wires caught in their feet. The substance which cropped up the most was wool, I was expecting there to be a lot of fishing line caught around their feet but instead it was

After being that close up to a species which I regularly see and monitor through counting, my love and drive to protect the species on the Burry has only gotten stronger and I will continue to admire these gentle giants of the wader world.

Ageing key for ringers

- 1 = Pullus (i.e. a chick in the nest)
- 1J = Fledged, but flying so weakly it is obvious it hasn't gone far from the nest.
- 2 = Fully grown bird but we don't know what year it hatched (including this one)
- 3 = Definitely hatched this year
- 3J = Definitely hatched this year and still in juvenile plumage
- 4 = Hatched last year or before
- 5 = Definitely hatched last year (also 2CY = 2nd calendar year)
- 6 = Hatched 2 years ago or before
- 7 = Definitely hatched two years ago
- 8 = Hatched 3 years ago or before
- 9 = Definitely hatched 3 years ago

Volunteering at 80 Mile Beach and Broome; Western Australia — Josie Hewitt



Wader spectacle Western Australia style — Josie Hewitt

I recently took part in the 2016 North West Australia Wader and Tern Banding (ringing) Expedition. For the first part of the expedition we were based at Anna Plains Station, which is around 270km South of Broome. We were there for 11 nights and had 9 catching days on Eighty Mile Beach, all of which proved successful and we caught a wide variety of species, including Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*), Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*), Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa*

brevipes), Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris falcinellus*), Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*), Little Curlew (*Numenius minutus*) and Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*).

It was really interesting to get involved with ringing in a different country because different schemes and people do things differently, plus I'd not really had much experience of cannon netting or ringing shorebirds before I went, so that was



Red-necked Stint — Josie Hewitt



Looking north at 80 mile beach — Josie Hewitt

quite a learning experience! Eighty Mile Beach is a Ramsar designated wetland because of the vast numbers of shorebirds that use the site before migrating to their breeding grounds further north.

Volunteering at 80 Mile Beach and Broome; Western Australia — cont'd

While we were there we witnessed some incredible spectacles, from White-bellied Sea Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) & Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) putting thousands of shorebirds up into the air, to one particular day where there were estimated to be 300,000 Oriental Pratincoles in view on the beach at one time. This was just insane and is an experience that will stick with me forever!

After our superb time at Anna Plains & Eighty Mile Beach, we travelled back North, to Broome Bird Observatory (BBO), which was our base for the remainder of the expedition. I have thoroughly enjoyed my previous experiences staying at Bird Observatories in the UK, and Broome was no different - the birds, the location and the people all combined to make the experience truly memorable!



Oriental Plover — Josie Hewitt

We stayed at BBO for 10 nights, with 8 catching days. Quite remarkably, we managed to keep up our 100% catch success rate and for the most part were successful with targeting specific species as well. While based at BBO we were catching at different points in Roebuck Bay. The catching was more targeted this time so it was a case of quality over quantity, but we still caught a good variety of species, including Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*), Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*) and Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*), Far Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Pied Oystercatcher (*Haematopus longirostris*) and Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*).

Whilst at BBO we also had the



Processing at 80 Mile Beach - Josie Hewitt

chance to operate some mist nets outside the 'Shadehouse' (the communal kitchen and dining building) next to the water baths. These proved to be worth the effort and meant that we also got experience of banding some bush birds such as Bar-shouldered Dove (*Geopelia humeralis*), Rainbow Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*), Rufous-throated Honeyeater (*Conopophila rufogularis*), Peaceful Dove (*Geopelia placida*), Double-barred Finch (*Taeniopygia*

with plenty of re-trap birds over 10 years old and a good number that were the same age as me (17) or older which is just mind-boggling. There was even a Black-winged Stilt re-trap that we found out was 22 years old, which I think is just fantastic!

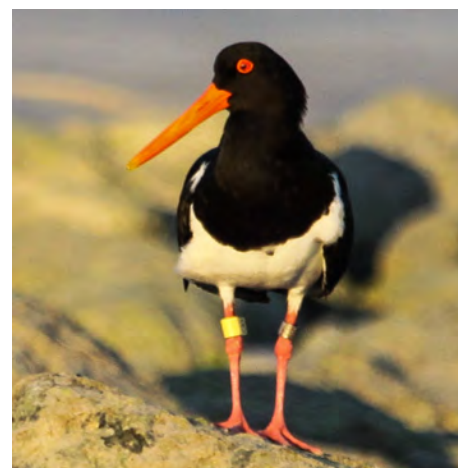
For anyone thinking about attending next year's expedition, my advice would be: do it! It is an absolutely incredible experience and one that I am sure you won't regret. The locations you visit are amazing, the people you meet are brilliant and so knowledgeable and the shorebird spectacles you are fortunate enough to witness are truly breathtaking. I know that if time and finances permit, I will definitely be returning next year for some more sun, sand and shorebirds.



Red Knot — Josie Hewitt

bichenovii) and Brown Honeyeater (*Lichmera indistincta*).

It was fascinating to find out that some of the birds we caught at Eighty Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay had originally been ringed at different points on the East-Asian Australian Flyway, with quite a few birds from China, one or two from Japan and at least one from Russia!! As well as that, there were a number of rather long-lived birds,



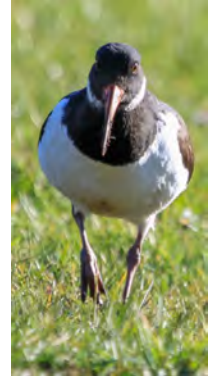
Pied Oystercatcher — Elis Simpson

Wash Wader Ringing Group controls & recoveries highlights from 2015

— Steve Wakeham

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Adult	21.08.05	Holbeach, Lincolnshire			
Dead (not fresh)	15.06.13	Meland, Hordaland, Norway	60 34'N 05 02'E	906 KM	NNE
Adult	30.03.91	Terrington Bund, Norfolk			
Freshly dead (Shot)	07.06.15	Langnes Airport, Tromsø, Troms, Norway	69 41'N 18 55'E	2109 KM	NNE
Adult	14.08.10	Wainfleet, Lincolnshire			
Freshly dead	25.06.15	Sorreisa, Troms, Norway	69 09'N 18 10'E	2015 KM	NNE
Nestling	26.06.07	Eidkjosen, Tromsø, Troms, Norway	69 40'N 18 45'E		
Caught by ringer	07.03.15	Heacham, Norfolk		2093 KM	SSW



Elis Simpson

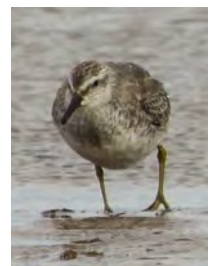
Whilst most come from southern Norway, some venture twice as far further north to breed, and these are the northern-most examples in 2015. The first example shown here was shot for public safety reasons and now forms part of the collection at Tromsø Museum.

Adult	31.01.93	Heacham, Norfolk			
Freshly dead	15.07.15	Sugar Factory, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk		75 KM	SSE

Not all Oystercatchers wintering on the Wash arrive from the continent; indeed, previous recoveries have regularly shown a small percentage breed on farmland around East Anglia. This particular individual was taken – presumably locally – by a Peregrine, with the ring (and leg) being found under its nest.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Adult	16.05.14	Fannarkrokur, Kollafjörður, Strandasýsla, Iceland	65 35'N 21 27'W		
Caught by ringer	13.09.14	Terrington, Norfolk		1874 KM	SE
Adult	26.05.13	Indre Brenna, Porsanger, Finnmark, Norway	70 32'N 25 43'E		
Caught by ringer	28.11.15	Snettisham, Norfolk		2346 KM	SW



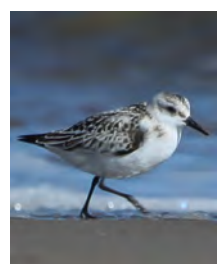
Elis Simpson

By far the majority of Knot occurring in Britain are from the *islandica* race which breed in the high Arctic of northern Greenland and NE Canada. A good proportion of these stage their migration through Iceland, but others stage via northern Norway, which is, in fact, the shortest route for this migration. Note both these birds were still on passage in mid to late May, and yet they go on to complete their breeding and return to The Wash within two months.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

It is known that Sanderlings breeding in NE Greenland pass through The Wash, migrating southwards as far as South Africa. This individual is the 4th Mauritanian-ringed Sanderling to be found on The Wash.

First Year	09.09.10	Snettisham, Norfolk			
Caught by ringer	16.05.15	Ebb of The Riv, Orkney		737 KM	NNW



Elis Simpson

The first Wash-ringed Sanderling to be found in Orkney will have been on its northward spring migration.

Wash Wader Ringing Group controls & recoveries highlights from 2015 — cont'd

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Adult	02.03.13	Terrington, Norfolk					
Ring read in field	09.07.14	Siglufjardarbaer, Eyjafjardar, Eyjafjarðarsýsla, Iceland	66 09'N 18 55'W	1828 KM	NW		
Adult	08.08.98	Terrington, Norfolk					
Found dead	26.07.15	Heidarbrun, Holt, Rangarvalla, Rangárvallasýsla, Iceland	63 51'N 20 23'W	1715 KM	NW		



Elis Simpson

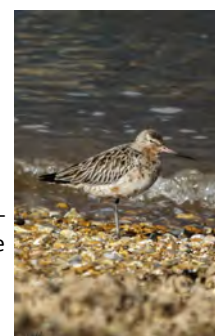
Colour-ringing has shown that the majority of Black-tailed Godwit using the Wash originate from the Icelandic breeding grounds; these being typical examples.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Adult	12.08.10	Friskney, Lincolnshire					
Freshly dead	08.06.15	Sevettijarvi, Ukonpaa, Inari, Lappi, Finland	69 33'N 28 45'E	2355 KM	NE		

Bar-Tailed Godwit occurring on the Wash are mostly of the nominate *lapponica* race which breed from northern Scandinavia eastwards across western Siberia to the Taimyr Peninsula. This bird, was found within the breeding grounds in the northernmost part of Finland, and is only second Wash-ringed Bar-Tailed Godwit to be found in Finland.

First year	16.10.99	Bardsey Island, Gwynedd					
Caught by ringer	05.08.15	Snettisham, Norfolk		352 KM	E		



Elis Simpson

Although spending the winter on estuaries around northwest Europe, relatively few Bar-tailed Godwits are ringed in Wales, and this is the first-ever recorded exchange with the Wash.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Adult	14.08.06	Heacham, Norfolk					
Freshly dead	01.05.15	Kaartunen, Alajarvi, Vaasa, Finland	63 03'N 23 47'E	1771 KM	NE		
Adult	13.09.14	Terrington, Norfolk					
Found dead	15.08.15	Levijoki, Vaasa, Finland	62 59'N 23 55'E	1787 KM	NE		
Nestling	30.06.01	Tervola, Lappi, Finland	66 00'N 24 44'E				
Caught by ringer	02.09.15	Terrington, Norfolk		1991 KM	SW		



Elis Simpson

The majority of Curlew controls from overseas involve records from the main breeding grounds in Finland, and in most years there has been at least one exchange with The Wash, with that number having risen with increased Curlew catching success in recent years – these all being typical examples.

Adult	21.07.05	Terrington, Norfolk					
Ring read in field	22.03.12	Bergfeiner Moor, Damme, Weser-Ems, Germany	52 33'N 08 19'E	540 KM	E		
Ring read in field	22.03.13	Bergfeiner Moor, Damme, Weser-Ems, Germany					
Caught by ringer	23.05.15	Bergfeiner Moor, Damme, Weser-Ems, Germany					
Adult	14.08.14	Wrangle, Lincolnshire					
Caught by ringer	25.05.15	Bergfeiner Moor, Damme, Weser-Ems, Germany	52 33'N 08 19'E	550 KM	E		

Wash Wader Ringing Group controls & recoveries highlights from 2015 — cont'd

Of course, not all the Curlew occurring on the Wash venture as far as Scandinavia and Russia to breed; these two having been observed and caught on their breeding grounds in marshlands north of Osnabrück in Germany. Note the site faithfulness of the first example.

Adult	18.09.85	Leverton, Lincolnshire	
Caught by ringer	01.09.07	Friskney, Lincolnshire	
Caught by ringer	01.09.15	Friskney, Lincolnshire	LOCAL

This Curlew is still going strong, having been recaptured just 17 days short of 30 years after having first been ringed – when it was already in adult plumage – and it sets a new Wash longevity record for the species. The national record for Curlew is 32 years 7 months.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

First year	19.09.12	Terrington, Norfolk			
Found dead	23.06.15	Grundarfirdi, Snæfellsnes, Snæfellsnessýsla, Iceland	64 55'N 23 15'W	1898 KM	NW

It has long been established that Icelandic Redshank winter in Britain – this bird is the 33rd Wash-ringed Redshank to have been found in Iceland.

First year	22.08.14	Meikle Tarty, near Ellon, Aberdeenshire			
Caught by ringer	13.09.14	Terrington, Norfolk	526 KM	SSE	
First year	15.08.15	Meikle Tarty, near Ellon, Aberdeenshire			
Caught by ringer	02.10.15	Terrington, Norfolk	523 KM	SSE	



Elis Simpson

These two Redshank, ringed whilst on passage returning to their wintering grounds, are the first such Aberdeenshire-ringed birds to be found on the Wash. Note the relatively rapid movement – particularly of the first highlighted.

First year	13.09.14	Terrington, Norfolk			
Freshly dead (shot)	20.11.14	Marck, Pas-de-Calais, France	50 56'N 01 56'E	236 KM	SSE

Sadly, the onward migration of this particular Redshank ended at the hands of French hunters – unfortunately still an all-too-common outcome.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Adult	20.03.11	Heacham, Norfolk			
Caught by ringer	16.05.15	Ebb of The Riv, Orkney	734 KM	NNW	



Elis Simpson

This bird, only the second Wash-ringed Turnstone to be found on Orkney, will have been making final preparation feeding up for its onward migration to its breeding grounds in Greenland or NE Canada. It had originally weighed in at 104.6g when it was caught on the Wash, but when caught on Orkney it topped the scales at an impressive 148.3g! Note that this bird was caught alongside a Sanderling – preparing to make a similar journey – also highlighted in this report.



Waders over the Wash – Elis Simpson

Special waders in the Gambia and some hints on where to find them

— Modou Saidy

The Gambia is a great birding destination, this much is well known, but few think of it as a wader destination outside of the fact that Egyptian Plovers (*Pluvianus aegypticus*) can be seen there.



Egyptian Plover – Elis Simpson

Not far from Kotu beach are the Kotu sewage ponds, not perhaps the first place you'd think of spending your exotic tropical holiday but a great place for common waders such as Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*) Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), and Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*) during the northern winter months. For those who have not been to Africa before, it is also the chance for you to get acquainted with the African Jacana (*Actophilornis africana*) and the noisy Spur-winged Lapwing (*Vanellus spinosus*). The latter you may well become better acquainted with than you had hoped as they sometimes dive bomb you as you walk around the ponds.

Between December and May is the dry season and, if you are fortunate, that is when you stand the best chance of finding the elusive Greater Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) in the Kotu rice fields.



Black-headed Lapwing – Elis Simpson

Kotu creek itself is good for waders as you'd expect, Eurasian Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) and Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) are often to be seen picking their way through the mud and at Kotu Bridge you have a very good chance of picking up some more of The Gambia's special waders.

Skulking beneath the mangrove branches, escaping the sun, if you look carefully into the dappled shade you may be able to make out Senegal Thick-knees (*Burhinus senegalensis*). They stand motionless and their spotted plumage is a great disguise, but if they move, which they do infrequently, they give themselves away. Once you have found one by careful observation you may well find there are a number of them lurking there. Spotted Thick-knee (*Burhinus capensis*) is less easy to find but can be looked for at Duwasu village on the Senegal border to the south during the dry season



Senegal Thick-knee – Elis Simpson

A big attraction to visitors are the lapwings. African Wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus senegallus*) will be easy enough to find at Kotu and at the Mandinaba wetland where they are resident. Perhaps the best lapwing prize, at least in the dry season when most visitors come, is the Black-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus tectus*) which is resident on Fajara golf course and can sometimes be seen in the mixed lapwing groups at Kotu as well. In the wet season the lapwing star has to be the White-crowned Lapwing (*Vanellus albiceps*) which can be seen from July to October at the Kau-ur wetland on the north bank of the river.

Kittlitz Plover (*Charadrius pecuarius*) is tough to find but does occur at the Barra wetland from October to April and the resident White-fronted Plover (*Charadrius marginatus*) can be located at Tanji beach.



Modou Saidy and Rick Simpson, Tanji (they're behind you!) – Elis Simpson

Coursers are much more difficult to locate but careful searching at Tendaba Wurankang groundnut fields from December until June may produce Temminck's Courser (*Cursorius temminckii*) and the even more difficult Bronze-winged Courser (*Rhinoptilus chalcopterus*) may be found at the Tendaba school field from November to March.

Of course it is the Egyptian Plovers that are the real prize for visitors to The Gambia and they can only be seen from when they appear in June to February when they return to Senegal. Up to January they can be found as close to the coast as the Kau-ur wetlands, but often a trip inland to Basse is needed later in the season.



Spur-winged Lapwing – Elis Simpson

Ed: Modou Saidy very kindly volunteered his time to help Wader Quest when we were in The Gambia helping us to find most of the species that we were seeking. This was an incredibly generous act considering how hard it is to earn a living as a guide in The Gambia.

If you are heading to the Gambia and are in need of a guide, you could do very much worse than to contact Modou who I know would be happy to show you around and would be very glad of the work.

Email: modousaidy11@hotmail.com
Gambia and Senegal Birdtours:
<http://www.gambia-and-senegal-birdtours.com/index.html>

Curlew Walk to raise funds for Eurasian Curlew conservation

— Mary Colwell-Hector

We British like the understated, look down any high street and most of us dress in muted colours. Standing out and making a fuss isn't what we do naturally. We are, however, a people of culture. Our love of stories, music and art is recognised throughout the world and it stretches back through generations; we carry it as part of our make up. Perhaps that is why there is a ground swell of love for curlews. Not a flashy bird, some might even say a little dull, brown, grey and cream plumage requires a tutored eye to see the intricate beauty. But the understated can be powerfully emotional. The call of the curlew is exquisite. Haunting and evocative, it trills with delight or pierces the air with yearning. The places they inhabit, moors, wetlands and mountain slopes, are particularly suggestive landscapes. Curlews have inspired many to write, paint, compose and pray.

I can't remember when I first realised they were magical. Growing up in the Staffordshire Moorlands I saw them everyday on our rubbish bins – the logo of the council is a curlew rising out of heather. I must have heard them calling over the moors when I walked there, but not consciously. I think curlews crept (or flew) into my life unbidden and unnoticed - I wasn't even very interested in birds as a child and teenager. But like the best advertising, they entered my brain without my even noticing. Now, rarely a day



Eurasian Curlew — Elis Simpson

goes by when I don't replay their call in my head, even though I live in the centre of Bristol.

Over the last few years I have been increasingly aware of the alarming figures showing their numbers plummet year on year. Press releases began arriving in the office a few years back, and as a producer of wildlife programmes on Radio 4, I brought the shocking facts into the Natural History Programme, Saving Species and Shared Planet whenever I could, but it would be fair to say there wasn't much excitement about what was happening. Then suddenly, it seemed that curlew decline was everywhere. They were placed on the Red List and declared a species of top-level conservation concern at the end of last year, generating column inches and a spotlight of attention. This is of course very welcome, if that is the right way to put it.

A dangerous mixture of habitat loss, drainage of wetlands, afforestation, intensification of farmland, increased predation (particularly foxes and crows) and even disturbance by dogs and walkers all combine to make the British Isles increasingly



Eurasian Curlew — Elis Simpson

Curlew Walk to raise funds for Eurasian Curlew conservation — cont'd



Eurasian Curlew — Elis Simpson

unsuitable for a bird that likes open, peaceful places to nest. The main reasons for decline differ from place to place, there is no single solution, and recovery projects have to be tailored to each location. Many fine minds are working on it, but it will require both public and political will to bring about the changes needed – and there will be hard decisions to make about predator control. There is no doubt curlews, and other ground nesting birds, do well in areas where predator numbers are kept low. Making this a management tool however may prove highly controversial.

All this complexity coincided with a natural break in broadcasting, and so I decided, in December 2015, to walk 500 miles to raise awareness about their plight. A line from Sligo to the Wash, routing through N Wales and the Peaks, seemed like a good plan. It also takes in some good curlew country, including my home area of the Roaches in the North Staffordshire Moorlands. April 21st is day 1, where I set off from the shores of Lough Erne in Northern Ireland and head for the Republic before turning east to Dublin. Along the way I hope to meet farmers, walkers, writer, poets, artists, musicians – in fact anyone anywhere who is inspired by the curlew and wants to see them return to their former glory. I'm travelling as light as possible, and so if anyone can offer me a bed on one of my stop off points I would be very grateful.

It is hard to imagine what a moor or marsh would be like without the sound of the curlew. It would be like looking at a painting with no highlights or eating a curry without spice. Something essential and inspiring will disappear from our cultural, natural and spiritual heritage. Like turning down a dimmer switch, the wilds will seem less vibrant. We are not there yet, in England and Scotland at least, there is still time to turn things around. I hope this walk will raise cash



For more details on Mary's route visit: www.curlewmedia.com/current-projects/

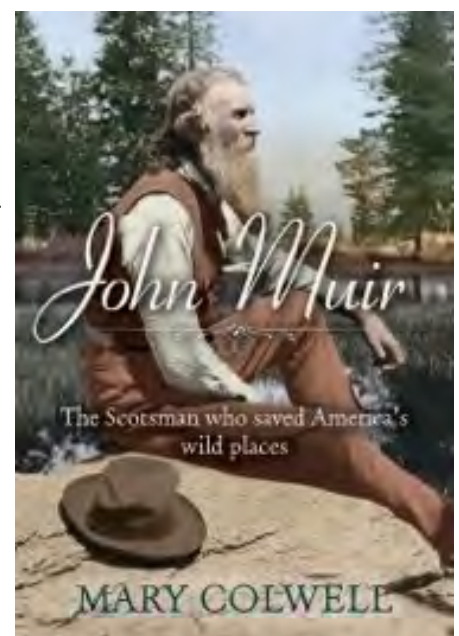
for the recovery projects underway and spread the word about the dangers curlews, and so many other species, are facing. I hope to see some of you on the way.

Mary Colwell-Hector — Voted in top 30 most influential conservationists in the UK by BBC Wildlife Magazine.

Author of: *John Muir The Scotsman Who Saved America's Wild Places*.

Available Now

<https://www.bookdepository.com/John-Muir-Mary-Colwell/9780745956664>



The Campbell Island Snipe: A Remarkable Wader Conservation Success Story — Oliver Simms

In recent years, wader conservation news has tended to be a procession of bad news stories; whether it be the admission of the Eurasian Curlew on to the British Red List, the desperate plight of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper or the near certain extinction of the Slender-billed Curlew. Today, however, I am going to talk about a real and remarkable wader conservation success – that of the Campbell Island Snipe.

The Campbell Island Snipe is currently treated as a subspecies of Subantarctic Snipe. Another subspecies survives on the Auckland Islands but the Stewart Island form is almost certainly extinct.

Campbell Island, located 700km south of New Zealand's South Island, was first discovered in 1810 and soon became a sealers' base. The settlers brought with them rats, cattle and sheep, which all decimated the native wildlife. The majority of whatever land birds or waders there might have been is not known but it is believed that several species went extinct. That was believed to be the fate of the island's endemic flightless teal, while the snipe was not even known to science.

However, some offshore islands remained predator free. A scientific expedition led to Rodney Russ, now the owner of Heritage Expeditions, rediscovering the teal on nearby Dent Island in 1975. A further search for surviving teal led to the



View of Campbell Island (Six Foot Lake) with nesting Southern Royal Albatross – Oliver Simms

chance discovery of the Campbell Island Snipe in 1997 on the tiny, rocky Jacquemart Island.

A monumental conservation effort was launched by the New Zealand Department of Conservation that cleared the vast 11,300 hectare island of all introduced pests, with the island finally declared rat free in 2003. This cleared the way for the reintroduction of Campbell Island Teal, which had been taken in to captivity to breed and, therefore, save the species. The Campbell Island Snipe however can fly and repopulated the main island themselves. A population of 30 was discovered in 2006 and

they are now thriving.

I was fortunate enough to have the chance to visit Campbell Island this winter as I was awarded an Enderby Trust Scholarship (aimed at 18-30s) to join a Heritage Expeditions voyage to Campbell Island as well as Snares Island, Auckland Island and Macquarie Island.

We found the Snipe within ten metres of the end of a 12 kilometre walk round Campbell Island, which was a huge relief to us birdwatchers who were desperate to see the enigmatic subspecies! Our excitement meant that "snipe moment" was a phrase we used for the rest of the trip. The next morning I must have seen at least ten during my walk up Mount Honey. It was a great way to spend New Year's Day with some superb views over the stunning Six Foot Lake and Jacquemart Island.

It was also fantastic to see the other wildlife making a comeback with flocks of the feisty Campbell Island Teal swimming in the bays and the majestic Southern Royal Albatross nesting amongst the plentiful megaherbs on this beautiful island.

It is so rare for there to be conservation success stories like Campbell Island. It is even rarer for there to be wader conservation success stories like the Campbell Island Snipe. The story of Campbell Island's tremendous success inspired other governments to attempt something similar on other islands and I only hope that it continues to inspire.



Campbell Island Snipe — Edin Whitehead

Wader Photo Gallery — send us your favourite wader photos



Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus*
- John Walker; USA



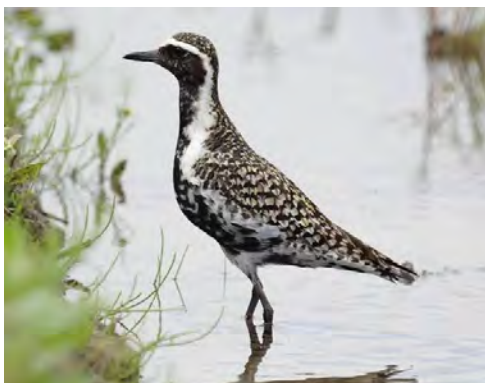
Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*
- Josie Hewitt; Australia



Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes*
- Grace Maglio; Australia



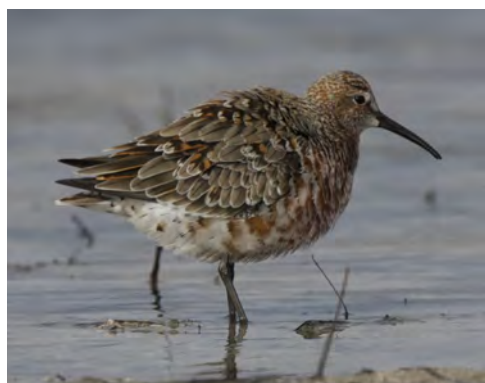
Southern Lapwing *Vanellus chilensis*
- Martin Eayrs; Argentina



Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
- Tomomi Kawasumi; Japan



Three-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus cinctus*
- Sue Oertli; South Africa



Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
- David Tytherleigh; Australia



Ruff *Calidris pugnax*
- Jim Dickson; Scotland

The Eurasian Curlew — Rick Simpson

Eurasian Curlews (*Numenius arquata*) are sometimes known as 'Whaups' in Scotland. They tease invertebrates from their hiding places deep in the mud, using their elongated and scimitar-shaped bills that have evolved perfectly to execute such a function.

The females average a little larger than the males and their bills a little longer.

The Curlew's call is very distinctive, once heard it is never forgotten often being used to describe desolate places and a feeling of melancholy in poems old and new. Since the UK population is in such a downward spiral this mournful cry could now perhaps be indicative of the bird's sorrow at its own impending demise; like an elderly man awaiting the grim reaper.



© Kai Helge Andersen

Eurasian Curlew in the snow, Hustadvika in Norway - Kai Helge Andersen.

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