Volume 4 Issue 1

April 2017

Wader Quest the newsletter

SUPPORTING SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION

Forthcoming talks: Wader Quest unless otherwise stated.

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

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.

30/10/2017 Lancaster and District Birdwatching Society

05/12/2017 Wigan RSPB local group. (Subject TBA)

08/02/2018 Wokingham RSPB local group.

16/02/2018 Marylebone Birdwatching Society.

01/03/2018 Solihull RSPB local group.

08/03/2018 Stourbridge RSPB local group.

14/03/2018 Watford RSPB local group (Confessions of a Bird Guide)

05/04/2018 Sheffield RSPB local group.

10/04/2018 Reading RSPB local group.

Inside this issue:

Financial year ends...

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* — Elis Simpson

In 1752, some tinkering with the calendars took place and we British finally adopted the Julian calendar; replacing the Gregorian calendar (which had already been embraced by the Europeans in 1582). Due to the resulting uprisings by a British populace who lost 11 days of their lives but still had to pay a full year's tax, followed by a final adjustment for a lingering leap year that wasn't, in 1800 (it was a leap year for tax purposes only), the UK financial year runs from 6th April and not the 1st of January as it does in most of the world. This being the case it means that this issue is an opportunity to sum up how Wader Quest has been performing this financial year.

It has been a pretty solid year showing growth in all sectors of our activities. We have increased our Friends of Wader Quest membership and also signed up a couple of new Corporate Sponsors, improving our regular income all the time.

Our fundraising has gone well too as we have now reached the £16,000 landmark for total money raised for wader conservation causes since we began; some of which we still have in hand ready to pass on to worthy causes.

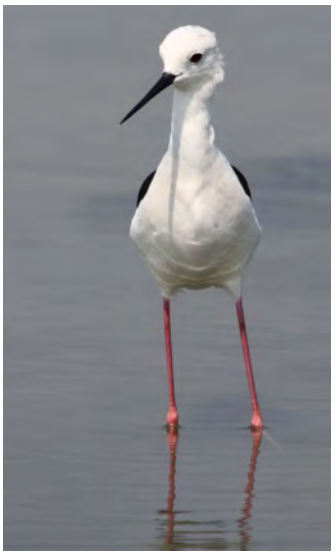
During the financial period we made donations to various wader conservation causes around the world to a total of £731.14. In addition disbursements from the Grants fund totalled £677.47, resulting in a grand total of £1,408.61 raised and sent to wader conservation causes. This is of course in addition to the money raised for the Magellanic Plover fund, the Thai Salt Pan fund and the new Humber 'phutt' net fund.

We have also recruited two new Trustees; Andrew Whitelee, more famous for his Bird Race Challenge (formerly known as the Norfolk Bird Race) together with his partner in crime, fellow bird racer and erstwhile rival, Ian Dearing.

In February 2017 we held our annual Quiz Night run for us by Pat Hodges who carries out a series of these events throughout the year, free of charge, to raise money for various charities. We are very lucky that she has agreed to help us too. This year we raised a very useful £373.27.

During the same period we gave 19 talks to a total audience of 829 people. These talks have become very useful vehicles for fundraising with just under £450 in sales, £370 in donations and the recruiting of 22 new members and sponsors. If you haven't had the chance to 'experience' one of our talks, then please look at the list of future talks and come along if there is one near you. Alternatively if you have a club or society that holds indoor meetings try to persuade your meeting organiser to get in touch. The talks have always been very well received with one group referring to Rick as a 'force of nature' so powerful was the impact of the talk he gave.

It should not be forgotten however that the talks would have much less impact without Elis' (and others) wonderful photographs to illustrate them.



Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*— Elis Simpson

… and migration begins.

It is also the time of year when birds are beginning to move across the planet. We recently read a delightful analogy of the temporary occupation of the Arctic region by breeding waders as being an inhalation, and their retreat after the short breeding season as being an exhalation. You can easily imagine the birds being drawn north by a soft intake of breath and then gently blown back south after a short pause. I'm sure many of them would think 'if only it were that easy!'

An April visit to Snettisham allowed us to enjoy thousands of waders congregating in the Wash, we were treated to many inspirations as the tide pushed the birds past us. These birds will very soon be heading north to see what their luck holds for them where they choose to breed. Some will stay within the British Isles while others will end up in Norway, Iceland or Arctic Canada. Wherever their instincts take them we hope they'll find what they need when they get there.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus* contemplating the long journey ahead — Elis Simpson

As we walked back to the car, from somewhere up above came the unmistakeable call of the Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* while the bird remained unseen. In the past these birds were often known as May Birds (as were a number of other species) due to the vast majority of them passing through the UK during that month. As a wader enthusiast, to hear your first Whimbrel is much akin to hearing your first cuckoo, a sure sign that better weather and the warmth of summer are on their way.

The first Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* start to arrive (it is hard to imagine that before 1938 they had never bred in the UK so familiar are they to us now), while the open fields and hilltops eagerly await the arrival of the Eurasian Dotterels *Charadrius morinellus* as they pause on their way north. Farmland and moorland come alive with the sounds of breeding waders. Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* and Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* in particular are very vocal as we discovered in North Yorkshire not long ago, but the more subtle, background sounds of Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* drumming and Eurasian Golden Plovers *Pluvialis apricaria* piping give an orchestral feel to the soundscape.

With all this exciting news heralding the season to come, there is a downside and that is that the wonderful spectacle that is an inspiration of waders, will dwindle and die until the end of the breeding season brings some of our itinerant wanderers back to our shores to delight us and decorate our estuaries once more.

Some of the migrating birds, particularly the Godwits *Limosa* were beginning to take on their beautiful breeding finery. There were so many different separate flocks of birds that at times the inspirations seemed to have tiers like a moving wedding cake.

The reason for us to be in Norfolk was to attend the April Trustees meeting which, this year, was held in Terrington St. Clement thanks to the generosity of the Wash Wader Ringing Group which allowed us access to their base there.

As the changing season takes hold there will be, no doubt, a steady stream of new projects tracking migrating waders. Indeed on pages 4—6 you'll see we have already been privileged to receive information concerning the Australian Wader Study Group's latest project involving Eurasian Whimbrels and Grey-tailed Tattlers *Tringa brevipes.*

Multi-layered wader cake; an inspiration of waders at RSPB Snettisham, Norfolk, UK — Elis Simpson

Snowy Plover killed by Ghost Crab — Marvin Friel

There was some debate whether ghost crabs *Ocypode sp.* were considered a predator on beach nesting birds in particular Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus* since 2006 when the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission conducted their first state-wide breeding population census. Although we had witness accounts of Snowy Plover adult, egg, and chick depredations by ghost crabs it was not until 2008 that we formally video recorded ghost crab/Snowy Plover agonistic behaviour on Flip cameras. At the same time we began including photo documentation of egg and chick predations at ghost crab burrows. The Flip camera technology was inexpensive and limited but provided verification of what University of Florida graduate, Raya Pruner, had hypothesized during her graduate study (Figures 1,2 & 3).

For the last three years, a recent grant, under the partnership of Florida Park Service & Audubon Florida, has provided the funds and capability to utilize Reconyx cameras to fully record the entire nest incubation phase on select Snowy Plover nests. So far the results of the footage have strengthened the notion that ghost crabs are indeed a common predator on Snowy Plover nests. Based on some of the collected footage ghost crabs are common neighbours to Snowy Plovers and small crabs can be merely be food to a snowy plover or if large enough be the potential food to the ghost crab. Although unknown how the ghost crab senses food what is observed on camera is that repeated movement of a potential food source, that being the adult plover first then the eggs at the nest, can trigger predator instincts (Figure 4; see page 4).

Recently while conducting a weekly nesting survey at St. Joseph State Park located in the Northwest Florida, our researchers uncovered the closest evidence of an adult depredation of a snowy plover at her nest site. Although we did not have any video documentation to piece the evidence completely, on the scene, what we did observe was a dead female snowy plover inches from her nest (Figure 5 & 6; pages 5 & 6).

Upon close investigation, the body had clearly been tampered with where puncture wounds at the neck and abdomen, including the twisting of the wing, suggested a crab had manipulated the body of the

Figure 1: Adult male Snowy Plover defending a nest at St. George State Park utilising a small Flip camera on a tripod — Raya Pruner & Marvin Friel

Figure 2: Plover pair relinquishes their eggs to a ghost crab at St. Andrews State Park-Shell Island, Florida taken with Flip camera. — Raya Pruner & Marvin Friel

Figure 3: Dead Snowy Plover chick found at ghost crab burrow on near hatch day in 2008 at Crooked Island East, Florida—Raya Pruner & Marvin Friel

Snowy Plover killed by Ghost Crab — cont'd

plover. In addition, one egg was clearly depredated in fashion indicative of ghost crab where the egg shell was cut, scissor-like, with their pincer to expose and extract the contents. A picture of the event was recently posted on Facebook which aroused many viewers to question why, if ghost crab was the predator, didn't it consumed the entire egg and why did it leave the adult? The most likely explanation is that our researchers were in the habitat when the ghost crab(s) retreated into their burrows interrupting their meal. Another comment that was raised was whether ghost crabs were strictly nocturnal? Although much of the literature might suggests this notion, in our experience and based on video footage, ghost crabs can also be active in the morning and evening when the sun is not so oppressive and especially before and after rain events when the air temperature is optimal, preventing desiccation.

Figure 4: Female Snowy Plover relinquishes last egg a week before hatching to a very large ghost crab taken with Reconyx camera — Raya Pruner & Marvin Friel

What is still in doubt is whether the ghost crab predated the adult directly or

Figure 5: A facebook post on 'Dead Birds (for science)' by researcher Caity Reiland-Smith, shows a female Snowy Plover discovered recently dead near her nest on 24th April 2017 while conducting a weekly monitoring survey at St. Joseph State Park, Florida — Caity Reiland-Smith

Snowy Plover killed by Ghost Crab — cont'd

came upon the body only afterwards scavenging the adult and eggs. There is the notion of feral cat *Felis catus i*n the habitat that perhaps stunned the victim, maybe a coyote *Canis latrans* swiped and injured but did not take the bird. Looking at the tracks in the sand indicated that coyote, feral cat, bobcat *Lynx rufus*, snake were not within 10 meters of the nest. Migrating raptors like Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* were indeed in the habitat this day and we discovered a pellet containing Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea* and tanager *Piranga sp.* feathers about three miles down the beach in a back dune. Perhaps a raptor's near kill caused only injury until she returned to her nest where she died. And of course we can't rule out disease of the adult. What was interesting is that the male parent was acting unconcerned; as if he was not aware of the predation suggesting the event happened within a few hours of our arrival.

Figure 6: Another view of recent predation focusing on the nest site.—Raya Pruner & Marvin Friel

Nevertheless, this incident, leads us to understanding more closely predator-prey relationships. By discovering the predators, as a state threatened species, managers and researchers can hopefully influence the betterment of the snowy plover population in Florida.

For more information on youtube enter ghost crab and snowy plover to find more neat videos or contact Marvin Friel at Florida Park Service- Audubon Florida Partnership Project mfriel@audubon.org or Raya Pruner at Raya.pruner@dep.state.fl.us.

Two new additions to the Wader Quest Collectables pins badge

Pin badges are exclusively available direct from Wader Quest

£2.00 each plus post and packing

To order email waderquest@gmail.com

There are now 12 pins in the set, for more details visit the shop page on the website.

www.waderquest.com

New Australian transmitter project under way — Clive Minton & Katherine Leung

Australian Wader Study Group (AWSG) Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* and Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* satellite transmitter projects 2017.

AWSG has been experimenting with the use of satellite transmitters for tracking the migration of shorebirds visiting North West Australia since November 2013 when five 5g satellite transmitters were deployed on Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* in Roebuck Bay, Broome. A further three transmitters were put onto Little Curlew at 80 Mile Beach in February 2015. The target species was then switched to Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* in February 2016, with five units again being deployed at Broome.

Some extremely useful new data has been generated on the migrations of both species, although the results have been mixed, with many transmitters ceasing to function when a bird was part way through migration.

It was decided to extend the satellite transmitter program to Whimbrel in 2017, with five 5g units being deployed at both 80 Mile Beach (one bird) and at Broome (four birds). In addition, recently released 2g transmitters, developed by Microwave Telemetry Inc. (MTI), were deployed on five Grey-tailed Tattler at 80 Mile Beach. This was carried out during the NWA 2017 Expedition, in February 2017.

It is exciting to track birds with satellite transmitters because up-to-date location data is received as the bird flies or rests after migration. This occurs either in real time or at a maximum of two days behind the recorded event. Unfortunately it has the disadvantage that technical or other failures (revealed extremely promptly) are often with no direct evidence on the cause of the cessation of transmissions being apparent.

Such is already the situation for our satellite transmitters in 2017. Four of the five Whimbrel with 5g transmitters is still giving regular signals from the area where the birds were originally caught. Only one has disappeared, either because it was predated or because of a technical failure of the equipment.

However all five of the satellite transmitters deployed on Grey-tailed Tattler have already ceased sending transmissions! This is a disastrous outcome for an outlay of $25,000 on these new super light-weight (2g) units. These units differ in a number of ways from the 5g units. In particular, the aerial doubles-up as the harness system to attach the transmitter to the bird via wing-loops and a neck-loop. The harnesses superficially appear very light-weight and potentially vulnerable to damage.

Deploying 5g transmitter on Whimbrel—David Chang

The fact that this is probably the cause of the premature failures is supported by the fact that one of the Tattlers was sighted and photographed in the field at 80 Mile Beach on 7-8 April still carrying its transmitter but with a part of the harness damaged and all of the aerial missing.

Such are the problems with working at the frontier of science with newly developed technology! We will be consulting with MTI on this apparent harness problem with their 2g units. Hopefully improvements can be made in the future which will enable this otherwise excellent step-forward in technology to be fully utilized.

A more detailed description of activities so far this year on these two wader satellite projects is given below. We will continue to circulate information, as in previous years, at regular intervals during the migration, hoping that we can record in detail the migration of Whimbrels to their breeding ground in Siberia.

The locations and tracks shown in the maps below are a "representation" of where the birds are. These locations consist of signals with various degree of accuracy and were not filtered or analysed yet.

Species	Leg Flag	Transmitter ID and track colour	Deployment location
Whimbrel (5g transmitter)	LA	164799 (blue)	Eighty Mile Beach
	KS	164798 (purple)	Roebuck Bay
	KU	164800 (yellow)	
	JZ	164801 (green)	
	JX	164802 (pink)	
Grey-tailed Tattler (2g transmitter)	HYC	168061 (yellow)	Eighty Mile Beach
	HYV	168062 (blue)	
	HVD	168063 (green)	
	HYP	168064 (white)	
	HVT	168065 (red)	

The transmitter numbers and their engraved flags

New Australian transmitter project under way — cont'd

Grey-tailed Tattler taking off after deployment of 2g transmitter— Robert Bush

Fig 1. Movement of the Whimbrel LA at Eighty Mile Beach

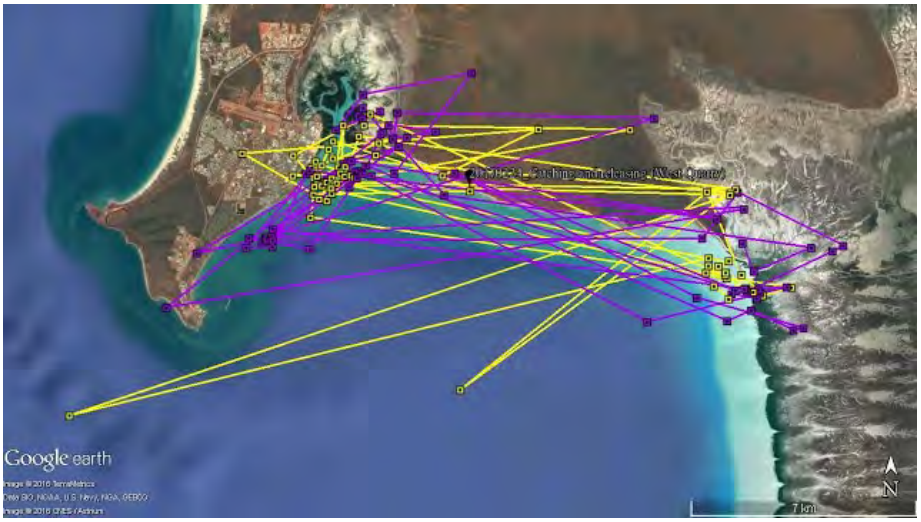


Fig 2. Movement of KS (purple) and KU (yellow) in Roebuck Bay

Fig 3. Movement of JZ (green) and JX (pink) in Roebuck Bay

The first bird to receive the transmitter was LA the Whimbrel on 12 February at Eighty Mile Beach. Since the deployment of the transmitter, LA has spent all time at the section of the beach from 40km to 50km south of the Anna Plain Station entrance at Eighty Mile Beach, near the area where it was captured and released. LA is a 2nd year bird (born in 2015 breeding season) so it will be interesting to see if it will migrate north this year.

Whimbrel KS and KU were captured on 24 February at West Quarry at Roebuck Bay. Unlike LA, these two birds have not spent much time around the catching site since they have been fitted with satellite transmitters. Most of the time they were at Dampier Creek at the western end of Roebuck Bay and occassionally visit Crab Creek and the salt marsh in the east or even beaches in Broome town at the west. Both KS and KU are mature bird (born in or before 2014 breeding season) and are expected to start migrating north in a few weeks' time.

Later on at the end of March, the local team in Broome set up mist nets for two consecutive nights at the salt marsh just north and east of the Broome Bird Observatory and successfully capture JX on 25 March and JZ on 26 March with the last two 5g transmitters deployed. Unfortunately, the transmission from JZ stopped a day after the deployment which could be a transmitter failure or due to the predation in Roebuck Bay. Similar to KS and KU, JX more often spent time at the western end of the Bay near Dampier Creek and occassionally visit Crab Creek and the salt marsh in the east.

New Australian transmitter project under way — cont'd

Catching and deployment of all the 2g transmitters were carried out at Eighty Mile Beach. All five birds were captured at the section of beach 40km south of the Anna Plain Station entrance of the beach and released the day after at the Anna Plain entrance (0km).

HYC, HYV, HVD and HYP were released on 14 February. HYC lingered at the release site for three days and then signals indicated the bird flew inland, which was unusual for a Tattler. The transmitter once stopped working on 25 February but then come back to send lower quality signals on 7 March until today. It is looking likely that the bird might be predated and the transmitter carried to an inland location by the predator, where the transmitter still occasionally receive solar energy for transmitting.

Since then, it looked like HYV, HVD and HYP moved southward along the beach as a group. Seven days after they were released, they were back to where they were first caught at 40 km south of the Anna Plain Station entrance. HYV stayed at 40km until mid-March and then moved to the beach section between 15km and 20km in late March. Unfortunately, we've lost signal from HVD on 11 March, HYP on 9 March and HVD on 21 March. HVD was sighted on 7-8 April, still carrying its transmitter but with a part of the harness damaged and all of the aerial missing.

Captured and released a day later, the fifth Tattler HVT behaved a bit different to the others. Upon releasing on 15 February, it first spent three days north of the 0km Anna Plain Station entrance, and then spent 3 days moving southward to where it was first caught at 40 km. HVT has been staying around that area since then until the last signal receive on 30 March.

Regardless of the early failure of these transmitters on the Tattlers, it is still very interesting to see the high site fidelity of these individuals to certain section of 80 Mile Beach.

The AWSG would like to thank Doris Graham for her generous donation to cover the purchase cost of five 5 gram satellite transmitters for Whimbrel.

These projects would not have been possible without the fieldwork efforts of the AWSG NWA2017 Expedition members and the local Broome volunteer (Adrian Boyle, Grace Maglio, Kerry Hadley, Chris Hassell, Jon Hall, Franky O'Connor and Jason Richardson).

Fig 4. Movement of HYC from 14 to 25 February

Fig 5. Tracks of HYV (blue), HVD (green) and HYP (white) along Eighty Mile Beach

Fig 6. Tracks of HVT moving along Eighty Mile Beach

WADER CONSERVATION WORLD WATCH 4: 4th & 5th NOVEMBER 2017

Wing Threads: Flight to the Tundra project update — Amellia Formby

I would like to say a special thanks to my marvellous colleagues in the School of Biological Sciences at UWA for helping us crack the $13K mark with their baking, BBQ-ing and beer-ing efforts to fundraise for Wing Threads: Flight to the Tundra over this past week. There was such an outrageous amount of cake at the morning tea, I only wished my pancreas were up to the task of allowing me to say 'thank you' to everyone by consuming a slice of everything on offer without putting me into a cake-induced sugar coma for several weeks. Goddammit pancreas!

Several people have also recently asked 'So what are you gonna do with the money if you don't reach your target, Milly?', which I believe to be an apt and valid question! Let me answer it for you with a riddle. Or how about I just answer it...

With the momentum gathered from the crowdfunding campaign, we now have several options to keep Wing Threads: Flight to the Tundra in the air. As mentioned in previous updates, all monies raised for Wing Threads: Flight to the Tundra we get to keep, which is totally awesome. If we don't reach our target by the end of the campaign, whatever funds we raise will be put aside for the microlight while we continue to apply for other grants and sponsorship. As a cheaper option, I'm also keeping my eye out for a suitable secondhand XT 912 microlight with low engine hours, which can go for $35-45K.

In the meantime, my flight instructor Gordon has kindly offered to allow me to wet hire his microlight - an exception he is making just for me and Wing Threads because Gordon is a pretty awesome dude! Wet-hire of the microlight is a more expensive option, but will allow me to keep training for my passenger and cross-country endorsements in the short-term until I have put together enough money to afford an aircraft of my own.

Speaking of Gordon and flying and such, it has been another pretty exciting week of exciting things - hence the late update. Over the past week, I have been training at Sky Sports Flying School in York and on Monday evening flew SOLO for the first time ever! Achieving this milestone was just THE best feeling! Becoming a pilot was something I would never have contemplated for myself a couple of years ago and now I am 1.2hrs of solo flying closer to obtaining my Recreational Pilot Certificate! I would also like to acknowledge the Amelia Earhart Fly Now Scholarship I received from The Ninety-Nines International Organization of Women Pilots and thank my 99's mentor, Jackie Milroy, for helping me to reach this point.

Last week I also had the lovely surprise to find myself & Gordon on the front cover of Recreational Aviation Australia's Sport Pilot magazine! Check us out! Special thanks to editor, Brian Bigg for the article and 2-page spread. If it so takes your fancy, you can peruse a digital copy of this month's issue of Sport Pilot for free online at the RAAus website. Thanks once again for all of your amazing support - especially to those who have sent words of encouragement through email and on social media. They are much appreciated :)

www.chuffed.org/project/wingthreads
Wing Threads: Flight to the Tundra.

Elkhorn Slough, California, USA — Andrew Whitelee

Elkhorn Slough (pronounced 'slew') is a wetland ecosystem in central California which is internationally important for many species including birds, mammals, invertebrates and plants. The Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve website states that the area provides critical habitat for more than 135 aquatic birds, 550 marine invertebrates and 102 fish species, while being home to Harbour Seals *Phoca vitulina*, Californis Sea Lions *Zalophus californianus* and Southern Sea Otters *Enhydra lutris nereis* too. Additionally, more than 200 species of bird have been recorded using the Slough as a stopover and refuelling spot on their annual migrations. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has designated parts of the reserve as a Wildlife Management Area, The National Audubon Society lists Elkhorn Slough in its Globally Important Bird Areas and the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network designated it a Site of Regional Importance. So, to say this place is an incredibly important wildlife haven would be to understate its case somewhat.

Western Willet — Andrew Whitelee

In February 2017 I was fortunate enough to be able to pay a visit to Elkhorn Slough and take a look at the wildlife for myself with a trip booked with the brilliant Elkhorn Slough Safaris based at Moss Landing. Prior to the trip we spent a bit of time at the estuary mouth and had views of American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*, dowitchers *Limnodromus sp. (*not sure which ones!),

Least Sandpiper — Andrew Whitelee

American Avocet — Andrew Whitelee

Sanderling — Andrew Whitelee

Dowitchers — Andrew Whitelee

Black-necked Stilts *Himantopus mexicanus*, Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*, Sanderling *Calidris alba* doing their usual clockwork dance amongst the waves breaking on the beach and very distant views of the iconic Western Willet *Tringa inornata*. While watching all these we also saw a Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata* diving in the surf (of course) and a Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodius* gliding past us overhead.

At the meeting point for the trip we were greeted by Austin, our tour guide for the day and an American Kestrel *Falco sparverius* sat on a telegraph wire (I've never seen one before and it was surprising how small they are in the flesh). Austin was a cheerful chap and passionate about his job, Elkhorn Slough and the wildlife within it. We boarded the small, flat bottomed boat captained by Joseph Mancino, owner of Elhorn Slough Safari, and set off through the harbour passing first the sea lions hauled out on the quayside. There were southern sea otters everywhere – in the water, laid up on jetties having a snooze, fishing, swimming, as I say, everywhere. OK, they aren't birds but they are very charismatic and have such expressive faces that it's hard not to look at them; but back to the birds. Austin's

American Kestrel — Andrew Whitelee

California Sea Lion — Andrew Whitelee

knowledge of the ecology of the Slough was excellent and he took us through the species

Elkhorn Slough, California, USA — cont'd

as we encountered them, telling us about their feeding habits, their lifestyle and most importantly I feel, their current conservation status. It soon became clear how important the region is for wildlife, and how much of the similar habitat in the region was being destroyed. Most of the habitat destruction came in the form of drainage so the land could be used for agriculture, but pollution (including agricultural runoff) and climate change are also threats, and threats that are difficult to mitigate on an individual reserve scale.

Marbled Godwits — Andrew Whitelee

Southern Sea Otter — Andrew Whitelee

I asked Joseph to give me a quote about the slough and how he viewed it in terms of shorebird conservation. "The cold, nutrient rich waters of the Monterey Bay are the source of the Elkhorn Slough's tidal waters. Twice daily, rising tides deposit a broad range of biota along the muddy banks of the slough for dozens of shorebird species to feed upon. With bills of varying lengths and shapes, these various species of shorebirds are specialized to probe at different layers in the mud, and can therefore coexist with minimal competition. This "niche partitioning" makes the Elkhorn Slough a rather harmonious ecosystem."

During the two and a half hour trip we had great views of Forster's Terns *Sterna forsteri* sat on posts, Marbled Godwits *Limosa fedoa*, feeding, Snowy Egrets *Egretta thula*, Red-tailed Hawks *Buteo jamaicensis* soaring above us, five species of gull Laridae, distant Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*, Western Willet and even a Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* asleep on a boat's mast. As all the guidebooks say, this area really is a haven for wildlife.

On a more sobering note, estuarine habitats such as Elkhorn Slough are amongst the most threatened habitats in California with habitat lose figures of between 75% and 90% being reported in the last decade. Furthermore, the upland areas of the site also contain three of the ten most threatened habitats in the United States, namely freshwater habitats, maritime chaparral and coast prairie, the latter being the most species-rich grassland habitat in North America. The Elkhorn Slough Safari company donate a percentage of their profits towards helping to protect the wildlife they so admirably show off to visitors and the Elkhorn Slough Foundation do great work in protecting, promoting and improving the area for wildlife and visitors alike. So if you are ever in the central California region, treat yourself to a visit to Elkhorn Slough, you won't regret it.

Snowy Egret — Andrew Whitelee

Surf Scoter — Andrew Whitelee

Elkhorn Slough Safaris
elkhornslough.com
Elkhorn Slough Foundation
www.elkhornslough.org

Andrew Whitelee is a Wader Quest Trustee and runs Verdant Wildlife;
He is currently working with Taylor Wildlife *a Wader Quest Corporate Sponsor* — Ed.

Forster's Tern — Andrew Whitelee

Peregrine Falcon — Andrew Whitelee

Curlew Country Update — Amanda Perkins

The Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* is one of our country's most loved and enigmatic waders, its haunting and easily recognisable call known by many across the UK. However, now listed as internationally threatened, the future of the Curlew is unclear. In Shropshire surveys suggest a 75% loss in the county and information across the UK indicates an overall decline of 46% between 1994 and 2010. It is clear that serious action must be taken to intervene to prevent the ongoing rapid decline of these beloved birds.

Curlew Country is a wader recovery project trying to do just that, based in Shropshire and the Welsh Marches, it is one of numerous other projects making up the Stiperstones and Corndon Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS), which is primarily Heritage Lottery funded. During the last two seasons with the help of farmers and landowners, over 30 nests have been closely monitored to help gain a picture of why curlew are failing to breed successfully. This included close observations by ornithologists, cameras placed at nests and heat sensitive buttons called thermacrons.

The results of this close monitoring revealed the startling fact that none of the nests produced any surviving curlew. The majority of nests were predated at the egg stage, with the main predator being the fox, but incidents involving badgers did take place and one occurrence of trampling by sheep was recorded.

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, one of Curlew Country's partners suggested contacting the NABU project in Schleswig Holstein where Natalie Meyer has introduced electric fencing to protect nests. In 2016 fencing was trialled on three curlew nests in the Shropshire area and all three reached egg hatching stage, a success not met by any of the other nests that were monitored. The fencing is not a long term solution to the plight of curlews, however there is an urgent need to achieve higher hatching rates from nests so that the project can try to discover what can be done to help chicks reach fledging stage.

Eurasian Curlew nest and eggs — Tony Cross

Eurasian Curlew — Tony Cross

The chicks from these nests were given radio tags, however all were lost before they could fledge and no determinable pattern of the main predators was evident. A couple of cases alluded to signs of fox and avian predation, but many chicks were taken out of radio signal leaving behind unsuccessful parent birds.

This coming season the project will be continuing to employ the use of electric fencing on a larger scale with the hopes of producing more chicks. Fox control is also being trialled this year at two sites, and with the Game and Wildife Conservation Trust (GWCT) and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) advising, a contract has been developed and fox controllers have been trained to try and ensure best practice that is as humane and effective as possible for implementation during the nesting season.

In addition, the project is hoping to use GPS tags to get more important information about the activities of locally nesting adult curlew to add to the migratory information returns coming in from colour ringing birds at a local migratory roost. Curlew Country is also exploring the possibility of incubating curlew eggs to give a boost to the race against time to save this iconic species. This activity is of course subject to strict regulation and can only be considered when a species is as vulnerable as curlews now are.

Curlew Country Update — cont'd

Another important strand of the project is the work with a farm business manager to establish the true costs of supporting breeding curlew on different farm enterprises. This information will be fed back to policy makers to try and ensure that realistic costs are taken into account when agri-environment decisions are made. In the long term neither fencing nor employing fox control contractors are likely to be sustainable indefinitely. Many of the farms with curlew present are part of an agri-environment scheme, but this has not helped halt their decline so far.

This year the project will produce a training film in collaboration with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to help volunteers and organisations identify behaviour that indicates different stages of breeding and nesting curlew. Curlew nests are notoriously difficult to find and monitoring population and nesting success are key to securing the future of adult curlew.

The project has been community orientated from the start. A local community wildlife group flagged up the dramatic decline in the curlew population, following their diligent ongoing surveys of adult wader populations using British Trust for Ornithology methodology. Arts projects have helped to raise awareness of the plight of the curlew in Shropshire [see newsletter Vol. 4 Issue 1 pp 8-10 – Ed.] and local people have set up various fundraising initiatives to help with the continuation of the project. A reminiscences project is just starting to record local people's memories of waders, and their place within the wider landscape, in case we lose curlew from the landscape altogether. This will hopefully provide insight into any changes and challenges that farmers have faced and may help the project to identify the ways in which this relates to curlew decline.

Anti predator electric fence — Tony Cross

Eurasian Curlew chick — Tony Cross

Mary Colwell-Hector's walk from Ireland to the Wash raised awareness on a larger scale, with her visits to different curlew populations across the UK and from knowledge and contacts accrued on her walk, it is now estimated that there remain just 230 pairs of curlew in the South and West of England. Whilst the RSPB is monitoring and trialling curlew intervention in moorland and upland areas and good populations still thrive on managed grouse moors, it has become clear that to reverse the decline of curlew in southern and lowland situations the need for more national projects with a specific lowland/southern curlew focus is crucial.

For more information about the Curlew Country Project please visit
http://www.stiperstonesandcorndon.co.uk/curlewcountry/
or contact
Amanda.Perkins@shropshire.gov.uk

Research on waders in one of the last under-surveyed areas of the Western Palearctic - satellite tracking Steppe Whimbrels and Black-tailed Godwits from the little known eastern population — Cristoph Himmel

The project idea was born during the Besh Barmag Bird Camp in September 2016, where some friends and I did migration counts at the recently discovered Besh Barmag bird migration bottleneck in Azerbaijan (HEISS & GAUGER 2011, HEISS 2013).

The Besh Barmag Bird Camp is in its current state a loose gathering of nature conservation organizations, ornithologist, researchers, students, tour operators and individuals all attracted by the bird migration site and its outstanding importance. The site has a great potential for promoting interest in birds, academic as well as popular learning, nature awareness and inspiring meetings between young people. The overall objective of this initiative is to create a facility like a bird observatory and visitors centre and to safeguard this this amazing place of bird migration.

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) — Kai Bratke

During the Besh Barmag Bird Camp I met Elchin Sultanov, director of the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS). We speculated about some possibilities to do research on waders and to contribute to their conservation in Azerbaijan. He came up with the idea to conduct a research project on waders in Gyzylagach State Reserve, the last comprehensive counts of waders of this area are from 1990. I was surprised that the latest data of such an important area are so outdated.

The western Caspian coast of Azerbaijan, especially the wetlands are important stop-over sites for migrating waders (SHUBIN 1998). The area with the highest concentration of waders is Gyzylagach State Reserve in Azerbaijan (SHUBIN 1998). Despite the importance of this area as a stop-over site it is unfortunately under-surveyed (SHUBIN 1998), especially during autumn migration period of waders (July- September). Since the last counts from 1990, 53% of wader species of the West Asia/ East Africa flyway have negative population trends (BOERE et al. 2006). A reasonable measure for the conservation of waders on this flyway is to provide recent data from this major-stop over site and subsequently to assess if the negative trends are also evident in this area.

Gyzylagach is also mentioned as a former stop-over sites for Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* (SULTANOV 2008) and Siberian Crane Leucogeranus leucogeranus (SULTANOV 2011) and a possible site for migrating Steppe Whimbrels Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris (MOROZOV 2000). All these species have a high international conservation status or data is deficient (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL. 2016 I; BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL. 2016 II; BROWN 2014). Hence the species that occur in Gyzylagach has a high international importance as a stop-over site.

Steppe Whimbrel *N. p. alboaxillaris* (right) probable male, and nominate *phaeopus* (left) Maputo, Mozambique, February 2016 — Callan Cohen & Gary Allport

Another visitor of the area is the Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* of the eastern population. Due to negative population trends and lack of knowledge of migration routes and stop-over sites of this population (JENSEN et al. 2008) it would be beneficial to collect data for this part of the population. Particularly for this population it is presumed that it is rapidly declining (AEWA n.y.) additionally there is also few information available so the assessment of size and trends is very difficult (Brown et al. 2014). Thus it is possible that this population is in greater risk than we assume.

Another target species of this project is the Steppe Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus alboaxillaris* (there are several questions about species limits, taxonomy, distribution and numbers of Steppe Whimbrels. Sightings and especially satellite tracking of individuals would help to get distribution and migration data to improve the knowledge and resulting that, the

Research on waders in one of the last under-surveyed areas of the Western Palearctic - satellite tracking Steppe Whimbrels and Black-tailed Godwits from the little known eastern population — cont'd

A mixed flock including Broad-billed Sandpipers (*Calidris falcinellus*) — Kai Gauger

conservation of this subspecies. The Convention on Migratory Species estimated the global population at 100 birds or fewer (BROWN et al. 2014). So it's high time to take action.

The research on these two species could be particularly useful for the West Asia/ East Africa flyway, due to the high degree of uncertainty in the assessment of threats of the breeding populations of Black-tailed Godwits and Steppe Whimbrels in this area (PEARCE-HIGGINS et al. 2017).

The first objective of this project is to reveal with the use of satellite telemetry wintering and breeding grounds and also migration routes of the eastern population of Black-tailed Godwits. This research contributes directly to at least two of the conservation priorities of the AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Black-tailed Godwit (JENSEN et al. 2008). So it has a direct conservation output for this species. Furthermore it would be possible, that with the use of the acquired telemetry data further research projects could be established to understand and protect the eastern population of Black-tailed Godwit in a better way. It would be also possible to identify and protect unknown important stop-over or wintering sites, which is also part of the conservation priorities of the AEWA Action Plan.

As a second objective, I want to use satellite telemetry to provide data about distribution, breeding- and wintering grounds of Steppe Whimbrels. The collected data could be a further step to protect migration routes, as well as breeding- and wintering sites. This contributes to two of the conservation priorities of the Conservation Statements for Numeniini species (BROWN et al. 2014). The third objective is to conduct several counts of resting waders in the Gyzylagach State Reserve, to bring the 20 year old data up to date and compare the amount and composition of species with the old data with regard to the global or flyway population trends. Furthermore acquire additional data of possible changes in species composition and data about small waders, which were due to former technical circumstances, maybe overlooked or unidentified by Shubin (1998).

The fourth objective I selected is the raise of environmental awareness for local people. It is not a direct conservation output for the species but surely the most rewarding way to protect an area or species. With this project interested local people, enthusiastic students and members of the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS) are invited to join the counts and the trapping of birds to introduce them in bird- and nature conservation. This provide the possibility of long-term conservation efforts for birds and their habitats in this region and show them that Azerbaijan has international importance for migrating birds and in particular the Gyzylagach State Reserve. During these events it is also planned to introduce the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society (AOS) in satellite telemetry as a new method for them of doing research on birds in this area.

The project should cover nearly the whole autumn migration period of waders from July until September 2017. This project covers several conservation approaches from standard wader counts over environmental education and introduction of new methods to species specific research tasks with direct conservation output.

If you are now keen to know more about this project and how it will continue or if you want to support this project, visit our crowdfunding website for further information and donations;

(https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/wader-research-azerbaijan)

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinerea*) — Kai Gauger

Research on waders in one of the last under-surveyed areas of the Western Palearctic - satellite tracking Steppe Whimbrels and Black-tailed Godwits from the little known eastern population — references

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Pak Thale Salt Pans Appeal update — Rick Simpson

You may recall last year that we were horrified to hear that part of the Khok Kham salt pan area near to Bangkok in Thailand had been converted into a solar farm, reducing the habitat available to Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmaea* and other waders in the region. The result of this was for the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) to set up an appeal to buy part of the salt pan area at Pak Thale before the same thing happened there.

Wader Quest supported this idea and pledged to raise £1,000 in support of the appeal. It transpires that a backer was found for the full amount and our £1,000 was not immediately required.

It is safe to say that the original plan of the BCST hasn't worked out as they had planned and they have been unable to secure the area they had hoped to. They are however still looking at all the options open to them working with stakeholders at the Pak Thale salt pan site, particularly with the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR), towards the ultimate goal of establishing a nature reserve for waders and especially the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Pak Thale — Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok

Wader Quest has raised, with your help, the £1,000 that we pledged and we are now waiting for a solid project in which to invest. One of the ideas is to fund, or partly fund, depending on the cost, a hide at the new reserve when it is finally established.

If all negotiations prove unsuccessful, the money you have rasied will be used to support a different Spoon-billed Sandpiper project in the future.

Call of the Curlew Workshop, Slimbridge, 2nd Feb 2017 — Mary Colwell

The Curlew workshop, looking at the status of Curlews in southern Britain, took place in February and was a great success attended by many interested parties including landowners, gamekeepers, conservation bodies, research bodies and students. During the presentations and discussions that took place a few main points were highlighted.

The first of these was that viable breeding populations of Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* still exist in Southern England. The main areas being concentrated in the New Forest, Salisbury Plain, Somerset Levels, Severn and Avon Vales, Upper Thames and Shropshire. Other remnant populations survive, notably on Dartmoor, in Herefordshire and Breckland. These Curlew hotspots are critical to maintaining the current range of the species and for their strong local, cultural connections.

Eurasian Curlew — Elis Simpson

David Stroud, of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) made an explicit statement with regard to our legal obligation as a signatory to the Birds Directive, and the Afro-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement Single Species Action Plan for Curlew. Specifically, the agreements require member states to take requisite, or special conservation measures to maintain [population] range and habitats, to ensure their survival and reproduction in their area of distribution. There is also a clear requirement for member states to take account of the cultural significance of a species in establishing ecological objectives. Southern Curlew are vital to the whole UK strategy.

There was unanimous agreement for urgent action to conserve breeding Curlew in southern England, to avoid the population crash experienced in Ireland (97% decline since 1980's). This action should comprise targeted research, conservation measures and public awareness activities

Fragmentation and loss of habitat through changes in land use and farming practices are a major feature in the decline in Ireland and southern England. The dispersed nature of Curlew breeding populations requires landscape scale solutions, not just solutions limited to nature reserves. Curlew conservation goes hand in hand with conservation of other features of the landscape, including flower-rich hay meadows, butterflies and other invertebrates.

Disturbance (by ramblers, joggers, dog-walkers) is potentially a major factor in causing nest failure in the south. New Forest work shows if people and dogs keep to existing paths, nesting birds may tolerate their presence. Awareness raising measures need to be incorporated in conservation implementation plans, e.g. signage

Existing study, monitoring and protection efforts must be continued and strengthened where Curlew still breed. It is known that Curlew respond well to conservation measures. Understanding the reasons for poor productivity in the remaining populations is vital. Financial support is required.

Research (RSPB, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust) shows Curlew breeding success increases when predators are controlled or excluded during the breeding season. Lethal predator control should be localised and targeted around breeding sites. Predator exclusion (fencing around nests as carried out in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany) improves hatching success, despite the risk of disturbance, and should be investigated further. Natalie Meyer of the Nature And Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), in Germany stressed this is not a sustainable, long-term solution.

It is imperative that solutions should be based within communities, including farmers, landowners and local people. There was general recognition that the Curlew, as a much-loved bird, provides unique outreach potential. Curlew have rich cultural connections, which can be re-discovered and re-invigorated. Wider public awareness needs to be increased. Specific Curlew conservation ideas emerged, e.g. establishing Curlew towns and villages near breeding areas, twinning between Curlew breeding and wintering grounds, finding local Curlew 'champions' to focus action.

More targeted financial support should be provided for farmers who already have, or want to encourage back, breeding Curlew on their land.

There was unanimous support for a forum / network / group to share knowledge and experience, and work for Curlew across southern England.

Call of the Curlew workshop delegates — Dave Parkinson

Waders in Art — Richard Allen

Alresford Creek — Richard Allen

One of the joys of being an artist and living near a wader filled estuary such as the Colne in Essex is that there is always something new to see and sketch.

River Colne — Richard Allen

The ever changing weather, seasons, and tides constantly present a new challenge, not to mention the waders and wildfowl that crowd the creeks and marsh.

The accompanying images were all painted from the same vantage point, Alresford Creek, and show the vastly varying conditions and colours, from bright sharp sun to misty gloom.

Alresford Creek — Richard Allen

Waders in Art — cont'd

Alresford Creek — Richard Allen

I also try to capture the movement of the different wader species, the flickering, scurrying Dunlin, the graceful, "cool" Avocets, alongside the stately, almost disdainful Curlews.

Alresford Creek — Richard Allen

I'll sometimes work these sketches up into larger paintings, such as Lapwings amongst the Sea Aster, combining sketches, notes and the knowledge gained by just watching, whilst still trying to retain the immediacy of the field sketch. Usually I do my best to capture the moment and leave it at that.

Lapwings amongst the sea aster — Richard Allen

Waders in Art — cont'd

Redshank for British Birds — Richard Allen

At the Norfolk Bird and Wildlife Fair in 2015 Richard Allen suggested that we might like to sell the original artwork of his plate of lapwings in flight, from Birds of The Western Palearctic consise edition, offering us a commission. We, sold the artwork to a mystery buyer and Wader Quest was presented with a very useful £100 commission as promised.

Lapwings in flight — Richard Allen

Original snipe plate — Richard Allen

The following year Richard offered to do the same with another original from the same tome, this time with snipes as the subject.

We still have not sold this, so, if you are interested this framed original artwork is available through Wader Quest for the bargain price of just £345.00. Email waderquest@gmail.com for details — Ed.

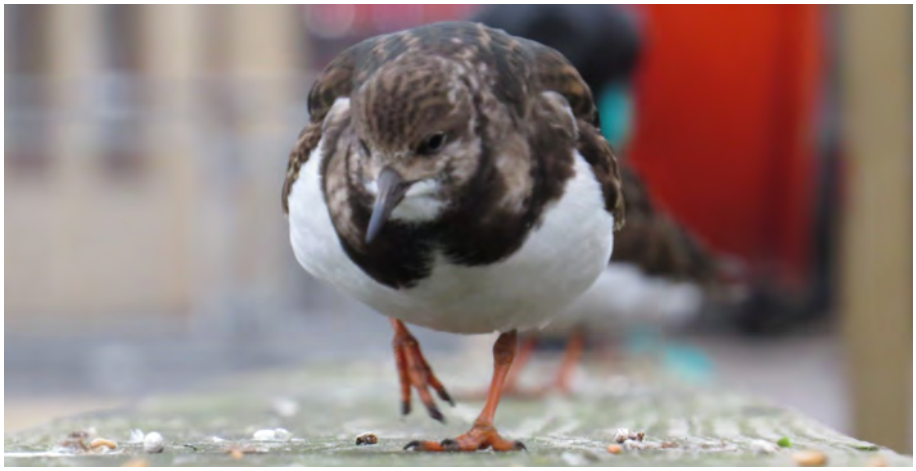
Richard can be reached on his website: www.richardallenillustrator.com or on twitter: richardallenart

Indulging your passion on St. Valentines Day — Rick Simpson

Where do a couple of wader lovers go for a short romantic break to celebrate St. Valentine's Day? Elis and I chose Scarborough in North Yorkshire.

February 14th dawned grey and a little misty over the town with a limp and watery sun barely breaking through the cloud. Not enough to add any warmth to the biting wind coming in from the North Sea, but enough to bathe everything in a soft light.

During a recent TV report about the thieving gulls to be found at UK holiday resorts such as Scarborough we noticed that the presenter, while talking about the gulls, had a number of Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* running around at her feet. Somehow she failed to notice them, or at least mention them, but Elis saw this as a golden opportunity for a photo shoot.



Ruddy Turnstone in Scarborough harbour — Elis Simpson

... eager, beady, black eyes... — Elis Simpson

We found the Turnstones easily enough, scampering along the quay just as they had been in the report; someone had obviously scattered some seed for them prior to our arrival. When they saw us stop the car they clearly suspected that they were about to receive more treats, or maybe they recognized the look of adoring wader fans (with the clue being the Wader Quest logo on the car door). Either way we found ourselves surrounded by eager, beady, black eyes and twinkling orange legs that blurred as latecomers to the party realised they were behind the game.

How could we resist? Out came the dried mealworms brought especially for the occasion. These were liberally strewn upon the floor and the hungry turnstones dived in like Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* at a freshly stocked bird feeder.

We sat back to enjoy their antics. They would bicker, boy would they bicker. What seemed like a peaceful scene would suddenly erupt into chaos at some unseen signal, the birds chasing each other and chittering excitedly. Then they would settle, just as suddenly, and resume their chipping and squeaking notes which gave the impression of contentment.

We noticed, to our surprise, that the whole mealworms we provided were not the major attraction. The birds seemed to go for the fragments of the brittle mealworms that had broken off into rice grain sized pieces. As a consequence they appeared to be ignoring the mealworms altogether pecking instead at the smaller tit-bits in between and, occasionally, selecting some of the previously scattered grain left from a previous, generous feeding frenzy.

We noted too that the dry nature of their fare was causing them to scurry periodically to a nearby rain puddle on which they would slake their thirst before returning to feed some more. Between feeding and drinking there was time needed to process their food and rest. Some of the group

Ruddy Turnstones... 'dived in like starlings at a freshly stocked bird feeder' — Elis Simpson

Indulging your passion on St. Valentines Day — cont'd

sheltered from the wind behind the curb stones along the edge of the car park, while others would return to the puddle to bathe a little to maintain their plumage in good order and still others lined up on the parapet wall posing like hopefuls in a beauty contest.

We found a whole crab left on the quayside being eyed up by a Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*. We reluctantly robbed the gull of its breakfast apologising profusely in doing so, broke up the crab and watched the Turnstones devour it with gusto. Sometimes a bird would think the meat available was not sufficient on the uppermost surface and flip the crab only to find there was no access on the other side to the flesh as the carapace was intact; frustrated it would flip it back, take a few beakfuls and move on. Another would arrive and then another and the process was repeated each time much to our amusement, it was as though they just couldn't resist turning things over, always curious to see what was on the other side.

... still others lined up on the parapet wall posing like hopefuls in a beauty contest — Elis Simpson

We made a note of the colour ring combinations that we saw, with a view to finding out more about these birds at a later date, and left our frenetic friends to spend the rest of the morning as they wished before the car park filled to push them away.

A very enjoyable and satisfying morning followed by lunch overlooking the sea; how do you top that? A spontaneous trip to Filey Brigg, a rocky outcrop a little to the south, seemed to suggest itself as a possible answer as it may just have one of our favourite waders in residence.

Arriving in early afternoon the clouds had dispersed and the Brigg was bathed in the soft, winter, afternoon sunshine. As we drove through the country park we stopped to admire the Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* probing the soil in the grassy car park for worms. I recalled that I had been there twice before; once to *not* see a White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* that had been carried away in a box to Scarborough Museum where I later caught up with it (still in the box in which it later expired). The second was a summer day when I came to see a Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*; the one that was allegedly caught by ringers and then released, rather bizarrely, presumably due to their excitement, without having been ringed!

Eurasian Oystercatcher in the car park — Elis Simpson

We strolled along the crest of the outcrop as I regaled Elis with these stories of twitching days far back in the mists of time. When we reached the end of the outcrop we could go no further safely so we retraced our steps. We stopped where a steep, rough path descends to the seaweed clad rocks exposed at low tide below the south face of the cliffs. I eyed this descent with suspicion and not a little trepidation, for every descent must, in the end, have an equal ascent, not something I was looking forward to. I pointed out the emergency telephone at the car park to Elis, just in case. We descended; we were on a mission.

At the bottom we paused to watch more Eurasian Oystercatchers, this time chipping away at small limpets that they chiselled from the rock. Having done so they sometimes cut the meat from the shell with much dexterity and ate it whilst on other occasions, when this proved too tricky, they simply swallowed the lot, shell and all. Alongside them were Ruddy Turnstones in a rather more picturesque environment than we had encountered them earlier. We

Chiselling limpets — Elis Simpson

Indulging your passion on St. Valentines Day — Cont'd

watched them with renewed pleasure as they flipped their way through the seaweed, one using a technique not unlike a bulldozer, shoving great mounds of the stuff aside with its beak and forehead to be rewarded it seemed, with many tasty snacks.

But, fascinating and lovely as these birds were, they were not our target. Suddenly from behind a large outcrop only a few metres from where we stood emerged the bird we were looking for, Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima.* This was followed by a second, the pair like a performing duo emerging from behind the stage curtain. We had seen the previous two species from the cliff top, so conspicuous were they, but these little beauties blended in so effectively with their surroundings that they were all but invisible from afar; even at close range it was easy to lose them in the background colour combination of rock and weed.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* at Filey Brigg — Elis Simpson

As we sat and watched I was taken back to the north-west coast of the USA where these birds would be Black Turnstones *Arenaria melonocephala* and Rock Sandpipers *Calidris ptilocnemis*; but where were the Surfbirds *Aphriza virgata*, the last in the trio of western US 'rockpipers'? Why are there no Surfbirds? Why don't we have Surfbirds? We should have Surfbirds, I wanted Surbirds, but no Surfbirds were likely to appear. Tearing myself away from these frustrating thoughts I relaxed and took in the atmosphere.

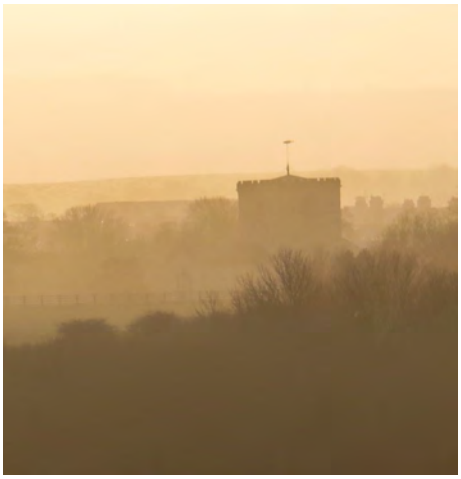
Purple Sandpipers blending into their surroundings — Elis Simpson

My nether regions slowly numbed as I sat upon a cold rock to watch the magical play being performed before me. The waves would come rushing in, full of energy that would slowly seep from them as they stumbled and tripped over the crevices and pools of the rock bed. They tried to reach ever higher, relentlessly surging forward dragged by the moon, little by little like a tenacious cavalry of small, white horses they gained their ground. Ahead of them were pushed our birds in retreat. The Oystercatchers seemed to chisel at a more frantic pace knowing their time was limited, the Turnstones whizzed about the scene flinging flotsam and jetsam in all directions like a shameless burglar in a hurry; but the Purple Sandpipers seemed to slow down and become ever more ponderous. At one point they simultaneously stopped and spun their head in unison to glare over their shoulder at some unseen object as though they had been called by name. There they stood apparently deep in thought until an intruding wave broke the moment by crashing over the rock upon which they were standing. They deftly flicked to safety just in time. This done they seemed to have a new lease of life, a renewed energy, and continued to feed.

The relentless push of the tide was now squeezing them. On and on came the waves in their two steps forward, one step back way that they do, but come they did. At the same time the hazy sun edged toward the hills behind Filey town.

The ascent was not to be taken lightly and certainly not in the dark, just as surely as the tide pushed the birds up the rocks, so the setting sun equally surely edged us back up the hill from where we had the impression that the imposing square tower of St. Oswald's apparently floated above the hilltop now silhouetted by the mist between us and it.

As I slumped behind the steering wheel of the car, finally out of the wind and cold, a warm glow surged through me as the blood rushed to swell the capillaries at the skin's surface. It dawned on me that all in all, taking everything into consideration, this had been one of the very best St. Valentine's Days I could ever remember: and all in the company of the only person with whom I wish, or shall ever wish, to spend it… the one who shares my passion.



St. Oswald's in the mist — Elis Simpson

The colour ringed Ruddy Turnstones of Scarborough harbour — Rick Simpson

When Elis and I got back from North Yorkshire we investigated the colour ring combinations we had seen on the Ruddy Turnstones *Arenaria interpres* and eventually heard back from local ringers of the EYRG (East Yorkshire Ringing Group); this is what they told us.

A total of thirty-three birds were ringed at Scarborough; eleven in 2012 and twenty-one in 2014. It turns out they were not a particularly adventurous bunch, none of the 2012 birds have ever been seen anywhere else and only four of the latter group have been seen elsewhere. Of these, one was seen at Seahouses in the UK (one hundred miles north) and another in Iceland (one thousand miles north-west), neither of those birds was present during our visit.

We did however meet RfR-YB yellow;blue who was seen in Bridlington displaying a marked preference for harbours. Bridlington is just a little under twenty miles

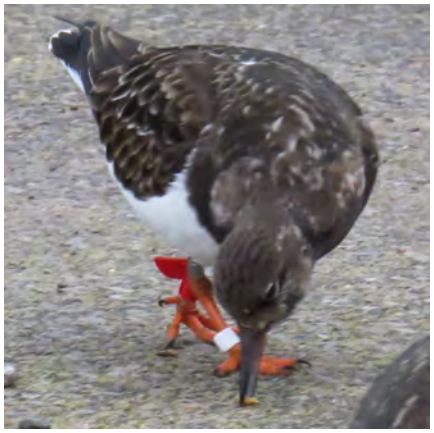
RfR-YB — Elis Simpson

to the south, just past Flamborough Head.

Rather more intrepid, but hardly a globe trotter, is RfR-WL. This individual at least made it out of the UK as far as Germany at a place called Eidersperrwerk, Schleswig-Holstein, some four hundred miles due east of Scarborough. It was seen there on the 19th of May 2014 having been seen previously in March, and afterward in July, back at Scarborough.

RfR-WL — Elis Simpson

RfR-BW — Elis Simpson



RfR-W — Elis Simpson

RfR-OW — Elis Simpson

RfR-OB — Elis Simpson

RfR-WB — Elis Simpson

RfR-ON — Elis Simpson

In the middle of this mass of legs lurks RfR-YL — Elis Simpson

Note; leg rings are read bird's left leg first, top to bottom followed by right leg, top to bottom.
Rf = Red flag; R = Red; Y = Yellow; B = Blue; W = White; L = Lime green; O = Orange; N = Niger (black).

North of England Curlew Festival — Karen Lloyd

The first North of England Curlew Festival will take place at Bolton Castle from 2nd to 4th of June 2017.

The event aims to celebrate our local curlew population and raise awareness for their plight throughout the UK. All ages and levels of interest and experience are welcome.

The weekend will include a series of optional family friendly activities, from guided curlew safaris to an art exhibition, poetry, music and also some talks and training for those with an interest in getting more in-

The weekend is being organised by environmental journalist and writer Karen Lloyd; Mary Colwell, who walked 500 miles to raise awareness for curlews and since helped set up the Irish Curlew Task Force and Slimbridge Curlew Conference and is hosted by Tom Orde-Powlett.

Charities including The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, British Trust for Ornithology, Wader Quest and independent conservationists will all be present to share their knowledge and experience.

To book places on any of the activities, please email Tom Orde-Powlett tom@boltoncastle.co.uk or call Bolton Castle on 01969 623981.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* on the brooding North Yorkshire Moors — Elis Simpson

For enquiries relating to the art exhibition please email Karen Lloyd at info@karenlloyd.co.uk.

Weekend Time Table

Friday 2nd	Saturday 3rd	Sunday 4th
0900 – 1630: Curlew Pulli Ringing **1000 – 1200**: Curlew Safari **1000 – 1200**: Children/Families writ- ing & curlew illustration workshop **1000 – 1630**: Photography of curlew and other wildlife	**0900 – 1630**: Curlew Pulli Ringing **1000 – 1200**: Curlew Safari **1000 – 1200**: Adults writing **1000 – 1200**: BTO Volunteer Survey Training **1000 – 1630**: Curlew & moorland bird Photography	**0800-1100**: Possible Curlew Sound Recording with Peter Cowdrey of Planet Birdsong. **1130-1330**: Ring Ouzel walk & talk
1400-1630 : River Walk **1400-1630**: NW/Cumbria Meeting	**1230-1430**: Adult Curlew Illustration **1300-1600**: Childrens Activities **1500-1730**: Afternoon Tea & Talks (Booking essential). **1500-1515**: Mary Colwell (UK & Ireland) **1515-1545**: TBA **1545-1600**: Wader Quest **1610-1625**: RSPB (Trial Projects) **1630-1645**: BTO (National Picture). **1645-1700**: Young Conservationists (3 Peaks Motiva- tion).	
1800-1930: Private Viewing of Wild-life Art, with drinks & Talk by GWCT (£10). Booking advised, but can turn up on the night. **From 2000** - CAMPING OPTIONAL (Numbers on moor limited, please book)	**1800–1900:** Poetry Recital & Planet Birdsong Music on moor (Meet West Moor Track (on map), 4x4's drive to lunch hut, shuttle runs in Boughton for others). **1900** Barbeque (£10) **From 2000** - CAMPING OPTIONAL (Numbers on moor limited, please book)	

Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper getting around the world — Rick Simpson

Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been making his mark all around the world with copies sold to people in places as far apart as Australia, Thailand, Sweden, Anguilla in the Caribbean and the United States of America. The first batch of one hundred have now all gone and we are into the second printing.

In addition a recent order came from, of all places, Gifu University in Japan where lecturer Rob Edmunds, who teaches Applied Biology, elected to use the Eury book as part of his course. This seemed very strange to us at first until we realised that the students were not English majors so the language in the book was suitable to introduce them to some of the ideas about which they would be learning.

The book will be used as part of a project called 'Farmers For *Shigi*' (*Shigi* is the Japanese word for waders Rob tells us) where farmers are persuaded to leave some of their rice paddies flooded for the waders. We are naturally enormously proud that Eury is being used for such a worthy conservation project.

Our niece Leila reads the story of Eury to Heloísa in a São Paulo hospital—Catarina Simpson

We are also very pleased to learn that *Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper* has been helping to cheer up a sick young lady in Brazil. Heloísa (Lolo to her friends) is very unwell and bravely fighting an auto-immune disease that is badly affecting her liver. Although she lives in Brazil and has never heard of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper before, Rick's sister-in-law Catarina decided to take a copy of Eury *the Spoon-billed Sandpiper* back to Brazil with her to cheer Heloísa up. Catarina further plans that, when Lolo is well enough, she will take her along with her mum Nilza, to Disneyworld for a very special treat.

In addition we are very proud that *Eury the Spoon-billed Sandpiper* books have gone on sale at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust centre shops at Slimbridge and the London Wetland Centre.

Eury book on the shelves at the Slimbridge WWT wetland centre shop— Scott Petrek

Students at Gifu University prepare to meet Eury as part of their Applied Biology course — Rob Edmunds

Events in which Wader Quest will be involved in 2017

North of England Curlew Festival
2nd-4th June
Bolton Castle

Wirral Wader Festival
9th-10th September
Hoylake and West Kirby, The Wirral

SOC Annual Conference
20th-22nd October
Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

British Birdwatching Fair
18th-20th August
Rutland Water

Severn Wader Festival
9th-10th September
Slimbridge Wetland Centre

Wader Conservation World Watch 4
4th-5th November
Wherever you are in the world

Falsterbo Bird Show
1st-3rd September
Falsterbo, Sweden

Plover Appreciation Day
16th September
Titchwell Marsh RSPB reserve

North-west Birdwatching Festival
18th-19th
Martin Mere Wetland Centre

WHERE'S WILLET? 4th November 2017 - 30th January 2018, North, Central and South America.

Wader Photo Gallery — send us your favourite wader photos

Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*
- David Jackson; Gambia

Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea*
- Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok; Thailand

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
- Astrid Kant; Netherlands

Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*
- Adrian Boyle; China

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*
- Elis Simpson; UK

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
- Julian Bhalerao; UK

Dutch Black-tailed Godwit conservation — Rick Simpson

Astrid Kant in the Netherlands has already found some 50 Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* nests this year which she will be able to save due to the co-operation of the farmers on whose land she has located them. She hopes in the end to find around 200 nests, all of which, without her effort and the farmers willingness to spare the godwits an untimely end, would otherwise have failed.

She has always been passionate about saving her godwits, even when the going was especially tough in the beginning, but she said to us "You should never give up on your dreams!" and of course she is right, that is exactly what we have believed with setting up Wader Quest and would urge any of you out there, who have a dream to be part of the wader conservation movement, to simply follow that dream; remember, Waders need love too!

Astrid Kant with one of her saved Black-tailed Godwit chicks and a rather bemused looking farmer Jan, with another, in front of the tractor from which they were spared — Ronald Messemaker

Friends of Wader Quest and Sponsorship Rates

Friends of Wader Quest:

Individual	**£5.00**
Family	**£7.50**
Life	**£200.00**

Sponsors:

Club	**£10.00**
Corporate	**£50.00**

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 (Ringing), Oliver Simms and Andrew Whitelee.
Last meeting: 9th April 2017
Next Meeting: 10:30 16th July: London Wetland Centre.

Email: waderquest@gmail.com
Website: www.waderquest.org
Twitter: https://twitter.com/waderquest
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/WaderQuest?fref=ts

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