

Forthcoming talks: Wader Quest unless otherwise stated.

05/09/2017 East Lancashire Ornithologists' Club.

30/10/2017 Lancaster and District Birdwatching Society

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

11/01/2018 North Bucks local group (Confessions of Bird Guide)

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.

08/05/2018 Lichfield RSPB local group.

06/06/2018 Northamptonshire Bird Club (Plover Lover's World of Delights)

Talking about waders — Rick Simpson

Two-banded Plover *Charadrius falklandicus* — Elis Simpson

I have a conviction that our mission is of vital importance to the waders of this world and that it is crucial to communicate the issues surrounding waders and their conservation to as many individuals as possible. The more people that know about the subject, the greater the number of people there are who will potentially care and the greater that number, the more influence we will collectively be able to exert on decision makers. Apathy, lack of understanding and the misconception that we can't change things are the arch enemies of conservation.

Some of you may be relaxed about, and well-versed in, the gentle art of giving talks to groups, clubs and societies. Others may tremble at the very thought of standing in front of a room full of people, finding the whole idea simply terrifying. For my part I have to say that I look forward to each and every time I have the privilege to do so with both excitement and anticipation.

Maybe it is because I am an abject show off, desperate to re-live my pantomime dame years or maybe (and I prefer this explanation) it is because I feel so passionately about what we do at Wader Quest. Whatever the reason, talking to an audience is always an important opportunity for us to promote waders and their conservation.

Elis and I try to make the talks we give entertaining. Too much gloom and doom and

people feel uncomfortable and get turned off, but temper that with a little mirth and some wonderful photos and the balance works, or at least we hope it does. But you see that is the rub. What works for one group may not work for another.

Audiences can surprise you. Sometimes it is hard to raise a laugh, the group just isn't on your wavelength and you feel that the evening is going to bomb, but, at the end of the talk people flock to the table to sign up, make donations and buy merchandising. On other occasions the talk is received like a riotous romp and yet at the end the people file out of the door with nary a glance backwards in our direction. You just can't call it.

Sometimes completely unexpected things happen, for instance the leader of a group in the Midlands, at the end of the talk suggested a plate should be placed at the exit for donations neatly earning Wader Quest an extra eighty odd pounds that it would not have done otherwise.

On another occasion, also in the Midlands, one group spontaneously conducted a vote there and then on joining as Club Sponsors, which they unanimously were in favour of, a humbling experience.

We have, since we started giving talks, spoken to 2,932 people (yes we count them) and in doing so raised £2,208.20 through donations and sales. We have also achieved 46 sign ups of Friends or Sponsors of Wader Quest, so we must be doing something right; particularly as we often get invited back to talk again!

Whatever the outcome, we are always met with warm friendship and are really pleased when people want to tell us their wader stories and share their experiences. We never fail to be impressed by the number of genuinely lovely, caring people there are out there and wonder why it is together we are unable to exert a greater influence on decision makers than those set on destruction for their own, short term, selfish, gain.

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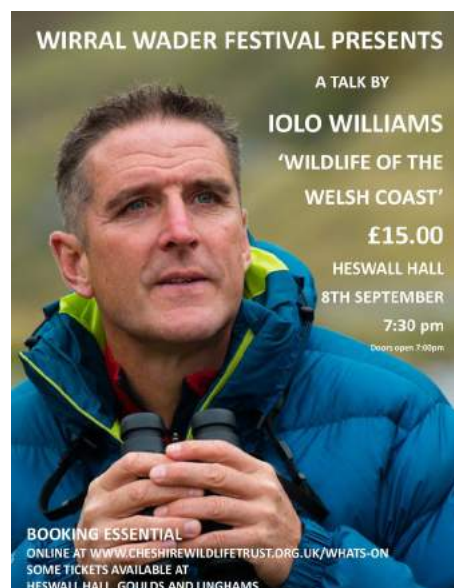
Wader Quest news

Wader Festivals

This year there will be three wader festivals in the UK, something that we are very proud of since the very first was initiated after a discussion in the Wader Quest office (our living room) wondering why there were no UK festivals to celebrate our waders as there are in North America, where shorebird festivals are quite common.

Wirral Wader Festival 8th-10th September

The original UK wader festival, excellently run by a fantastic team of local people who took the idea on board and made it their own. The tireless work of a small group of people has resulted in two successful festivals already and we are very happy that plans for the third year are well under way.



This year the event will start with a bang on the Friday night with a celebrity talk given by TV presenter and environmentalist Iolo Williams who we're sure you will be familiar with from his appearances on Spring and Autumn Watch. He will be giving a talk about the *Wildlife of the Welsh Coast* at 7:30pm on the 8th at Heswall Hall on the Wirral. It will be a ticket only event so do make sure you book in advance. Tickets are available online at CWT and a small number of tickets will also be available locally at Heswall Hall, Gould's and Lingham's, well known local vendors of tickets.

This year the weekend will be concentrating more on the birding venues with no activities at Thurstaston. However we will have Wader Quest personnel at Hoylake and RedRocks helping people to find and identify waders with Andrew Whitelee a

Wader Quest Trustee, Penny Insole plus Phil and Gail Pickett, long time supporters of Wader Quest.

WIRRAL WADER FESTIVAL ACTIVITIES

High Tide Wader Watches

Hoylake and Red Rocks/West Kiby

Saturday 12:30—3:00pm

Sunday 1:00—3:30pm

Live Wader Roost webcam at Wirral Sailing Centre car park both days

Guided wildlife Walks

starting 3:00 Saturday or 3:30 Sunday from Wirral Sailing Centre car park CH48 0QG

Saturday Sunset Walk to Hilbre Island

5:30-8:00 booking essential £3.00 fee

wcp@wirral.gov.uk for details

Sunday family activities

Red rocks reserve 1:00—4:00

S Severn Wader Festival 9th-10th September

This year, for the first time, Wader Quest will be joining forces with the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, to bring you the Severn Wader Festival which will take place at the WWT wetland reserve in Slimbridge, Gloucestershire.



Slimbridge is the home of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper captive breeding programme which is where Wader Quest started out, raising funds for the programme,

so we hope to find out more about what progress has been made with this ambitious project.

Jenny Gill will be on hand to tell us all about Black-tailed Godwits, another species that WWT have been assisting with a headstarting project for the UK breeding population this year.

In addition we will be giving two talks; *An Inspiration of Waders* and *A Deceit of Lapwings*.

SEVERN WADER FESTIVAL ACTIVITIES

High Tide Safari

Saturday 10:30am — Sunday 11:00 am

Fee £5.00

Bird Watching Morning - Wader Special

Saturday, 7:30am - 10am

Sunday, 8am — 10:30am

Includes birding and breakfast £15.95

Meet the Experts—talks

Saturday

2.00pm — *An Inspiration of Waders* with Wader Quest

3.00pm — *Black-tailed Godwits* with Jenny Gill

Sunday

2.00pm — *A Deceit of Lapwings* with Wader Quest

3.00pm — *Spoon-billed Sandpipers* with WWT

Walney Wader Festival 21st– 22nd October

Taking place for its second year, the Walney Wader Festival will be held at the South Walney Cumbria Wildlife Trust reserve. There will be wader walks and talks from Wader Quest, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and the RSPB. Details to be announced.



Wader Quest news — cont'd

Help us decide?

Are you a bird pin badge collector? Do you have the full set of twelve pins from the Wader Quest Collectables range? If not see all our products in the [Wader Quest website shop](#).

There are so many wonderful waders to choose from that we cannot decide which pair of species we should produce next, so we are asking for suggestions from you as to which we should do. If there is any species you'd particularly like to see send us an email waderquest@gmail.com with your idea and we'll see which are the most popular suggestions.



Wader Quest Collectable pin badges number 1—4, there are 8 others in the collection

Magellanic Plover project plans

There are few Magellanic Plovers which Ricardo Matus can work with and we discovered this past year that using GPS gadgets was not terribly effective with this species. Apart from being rare they are also very difficult to catch once, let alone twice. It has been decided therefore that we will not place any GPS trackers on the birds this year but instead Ricardo will be concentrating on getting as many of his population flagged as he can. This alone will go a long way to helping us know how faithful they are to sites and each other and also give some indication as to their survival rates and longevity. We saw this year that some pairs did not stick together, we would now like to find out if this is the norm or not.



Magellanic Plovers bearing red flags with white inscriptions, we hope that a few more will be added to their number this year — Ricardo Matus

Renew your subs at the BBF

Are you one of the Friends of Wader Quest or a Sponsor who has yet to pay their subs this year?

If you are overdue you will have received a reminder with this newsletter. If you are attending the British Birdwatching Fair at Rutland this year we will once again be there in Marquee 7 Stand 67 and we will be happy to take your subs there; whether they are overdue, due, or in advance.

We hope to have a competition for you to win fabulous prizes and of course a selection of goodies for you to buy to help us keep Wader Quest going long into the future in order that we can raise even more money for wader conservation than the current total which you'll find on page 28.



Last year's Wader Quest stand. Hopefully it'll look much the same this year with plenty to do and buy.

- Eli s Simpson

Technology coming to the aid of Spoonie: finding the unknown — Nigel Clark on behalf of the satellite tagging team

In 2009 Rhys Green and I were tasked with assessing how we could use new technology to track Spoon-billed Sandpipers. We thought that this would be an easy task but the more we looked into how we could safely attach any tag the more concerned we became. With a bird as rare as a spoonie we would not be prepared to risk putting on anything that might adversely affect their chances of survival or their normal behaviour. We initially thought that geolocators attached to a leg ring or a harness to attach a device to the back would be the perfect solution. Such a device would have to stay on for a year for us to get any information so we decided to trial leg loop harnesses on a group of Sanderling on the Wash.

The Wash was the perfect place as there was a detailed study of their movements and feeding behaviour being conducted by Chris Kelly at the time so we would be sure that the birds would be seen regularly. Sanderling migration is very complex and there is a lot that we don't know so we hoped to fill some gaps in our knowledge of Sanderling as well as trial the attachment of the tags for future use on spoonies. The Wash Wader Ringing Group made a special catch of Sanderling and we selected six birds that had been caught previously in mid-winter on the Wash so we could be sure that they were resident there in winter. We had decided that the most promising attachment method would be to



One of the captive bred Dunlin which had been tagged with a dummy in March 2016 while in winter plumage. The photo was taken in early June © Nigel Clark.

use a 'leg loop' harness which would hold the one gram geocator on the bird's lower back. All went well with the tagging and we released the birds with high hopes. Chris soon reported that some of the tagged birds were behaving abnormally and it was clear the leg loops were having an effect. It was not long before they started to shed their harnesses. The aim was to re-catch the birds

when they returned from their breeding locations in the Arctic. Despite lots of searching only two returned and only one had a tag. The next day the bird was re-caught but to our dismay it had lost its tag overnight!

With results like this we could not risk putting tags on the rarest wader in the world so we had to rely on individually



The Spoon-billed Sandpiper catching and tagging team at Yangkou in Jiangsu, China on 6 October 2016.

Technology coming to the aid of Spoonie: finding the unknown — cont'd

marking spoonies with engraved leg flags and hoping that they would be seen in autumn and winter. The results have been fantastic but they will not inform us of any places that spoonies go where there are not birdwatchers searching for them.

In the summer of 2015 Paul Howey from Microwave Telemetry, Inc. announced that he had successfully developed a two gram satellite tag that was powered by sunlight and would give frequent locations via satellite. This was a game changer as we would learn more about the bird's movements even if the tags only stayed on a short while. Rhys and I discussed the possibilities and thought that gluing the tag to their back would give us info for a few weeks at least. Only a small number of these tags could be produced each year so Paul asked for people with conservation needs for these tags to make a case to him. Forty teams of conservationists applied and Paul selected spoonie. We were uncertain how well a bird the size of a Spoonie would take a tag of 2 grams so we needed to do another trial.

We considered that the best thing to do was to trial dummy and real tags on Dunlin in captivity and, as luck would have it, there were some captive bred Dunlin for sale in Europe. The trial would need a very special



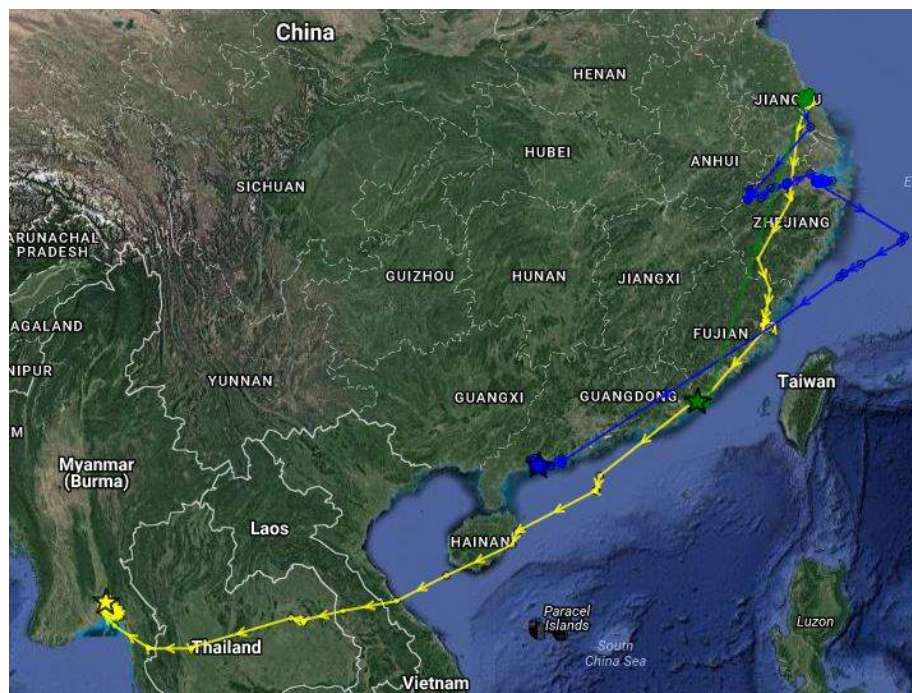
Yellow ET at the Minjiang Estuary, Fujian, China on 29 October 2016. © Du Feng-luan / Fujian Bird Watching Society.

aviary as it could not have metal mesh as this would mask any signal from the real tag. This was going to be costly but as luck would have it the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust had just received a generous gift in memory of a lifelong supporter, which it was agreed would go towards the cost of the trial. In November 2015 the captive flock of 15 birds arrived at

the WWT's quarantine station where they went through a rigorous disease screening protocol. To our dismay they could not be given the all clear so could not go into an area where there were other captive birds.

All looked dismal until our neighbours Reg and Rowena Langston said that we could build the aviary in the field they owned at the side of their house. The aviary was built over a two day period by Nige and Roland from WWT and in February 2016 the Dunlin moved in. On the third of March we glued six dummy 2 gram tags on the back of half the birds. In the following days we watched intently to see if the tagged birds behaved unusually. We could see no effect at all. The only way to distinguish the tagged from the control group was by seeing the tag or reading the colour rings. It was as if they were unaware of their presence. After 46 days one tag came off but the rest stayed on for over 100 days and only fell off when the birds went through their annual moult. Paul and his wife Julia brought us a real tag on 19 April and we glued it on wondering if it would work and when we would know. It did not take long! The next day Paul sent an email to say that we had had a good fix so finally after six years we had a method of remotely tracking spoonies.

So where was the best place to put on our first tags? There are many things that



The tracks of the three tagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers: ET coloured yellow, HU coloured blue and CT coloured green. Stars indicate the last 'fix' for each bird.

Technology coming to the aid of Spoonie: finding the unknown

— cont'd

we do not know about spoonie migration wintering and breeding sites but there are few places that we know that we could safely



Spoon-billed Sandpiper—Elis Simpson

catch spoonies. The two realistic options were either in Jiangsu China where, working with Professor Chang Qing from Nanjing Normal University, we had caught 10 in autumn 2015 or on the breeding grounds where is possible to catch them on the nest. We opted to put three tags on in China and BTO, RSPB and WWT each agreed to put in £7,000 to the project.

The problems did not end there. Getting all the necessary permits to ring birds and to put on tags in China is a long process that takes a lot of time and the autumn catching window was coming very rapidly. We decided that we had to book flights without all the permissions in place and thanks to the British Airways Community and Conservation Programme, we were given Business Class free flights which was great to take all the equipment out. Professor Chang Qing came to the rescue and sorted all the permits two weeks before we were due to fly.

We arrived at Heathrow Airport thinking that it would be straightforward from here, we just had to get an export permit stamped for us to claim back the import tax for the tags. I went to the counter with the form, only to be told it was not filled in correctly and that I should go and get another one signed by the WWT office and come back another day! We had been told by HM Customs that they would help us if anything was not correct but the supervisor was not going to help at all! We were at a point of despair after all the work that had gone in to getting this far when someone further back in the queue said "maybe I could help you" Jon Dew of Five Star Freight Systems was waiting for a client to help them through the process and quickly modified the form and then returned with me to the desk.

As I handed it over he said that it WAS all in order now and clearly they were not going to argue with him and duly signed and stamped the form. It was one of those days that your faith in human nature is restored!

We arrived at Rudong ready to hit the ground running only to be told that the edge of a cyclone was due there for the next three days - it was going to be windy and rain a lot. We had two hours of daylight left and the weather was calm so we decided to test fire the cannon netting equipment that Prof Chang had expertly made to the specification that we had sent over from the Wash Wader Ringing Group's designs. We fired the net four times, each time with a bit more gunpowder until we had got the right amount to take the net out. So we were all ready to go but hoped that the forecast was wrong. It was not! For the next few days we got soaked observing flocks huddled behind any shelter they could find. In these weather conditions there was no way we could use any of the



Spoon-billed Sandpiper—Elis Simpson

catching methods that we had available. We did try dazzling but only caught a couple of plovers as there was too much ambient light from the nearby factories. Finally the wind abated enough for us to set a net where there were 3,000 small waders and three spoonies. It was going to be like finding, or more accurately catching (!), a needle in a haystack. To add to the problems the birds were used to lots of rubbish on the site but had never been caught with cannon nets so they just saw them as rubbish and ran all over them (we obviously couldn't fire the nets if there was any danger to the spoonies or any of the other waders). We eventually caught 80 waders but no spoonie. That evening we discussed the way forward and decided that we would have to build a netting wall round the net to keep them off. Normally we try to hide cannon nets as much as possible but this was just making it very obvious!

It worked and next day we couldn't wait until a spoonie walked into the catching area before we fired. When we examined the

spoonie it was still growing the back feathers that we needed to glue the tag to so it was unsuitable for tagging. A real blow as time was running out. After a couple more fruitless days we caught a juvenile spoonie but again we were not going to tag juveniles as they are not necessarily going to migrate to the same sites as the adults. We had found another flock of 8,000 Dunlin with three spoonies in it so we tried to cannon net them the next day. The birds duly arrived and 400 Dunlin were in the catching area but the only spoonie was at the other end of the flock a long way from the net. David Melville was dispatched to try to move the spoonie into the catching area. We did not have much hope but slowly it got closer and closer. Then we lost it in the flock when there was a fly round. After a few minutes there it was in the catching area! As soon as we had double checked that it was safe to fire we made the catch and rushed to get it out - we looked at the birds caught under the net but it was not there. Then Guy Anderson saw it. This time it was suitable to tag. Being the first satellite tagged spoonie we had to give it a distinctive tag so it had to be ET. From this time on we all hoped ET would call home!

Although we had all put on many tags in the past and had practised tagging birds the size of spoonies, we were incredibly nervous of tagging a real one. The practice meant that it all went like clockwork and we released ET who flew 200 metres and then fed on the edge of a ditch for a bit before returning to the mudflats. As soon as we had caught Guy went in search of other sites to



Spoon-billed Sandpiper—Elis Simpson

Technology coming to the aid of Spoonie: finding the unknown — cont'd



Spoon-billed Sandpiper—Elis Simpson

catch and came back with a lagoon with at least 30 spoonies on it. We had two days until we had to leave and it was not suitable to mist net that night so the next day we set the cannon net and an elastic powered 'whoosh' net on the pools that the birds had been seen on the day before. By the time that the birds arrived, the pools had dried out a lot and it took a lot of time to get spoonies in the right place. We were exhausted by this point and, in our checking of the set nets, we were over cautious and so failed to catch the spoonies that we thought were in front of both nets. We were gutted! We had 24 hours left so decided to mist net on the lagoon all night.

It paid off - we caught three spoonies - the first was a juvenile but then we caught two spoonies in the same net! One

was perfect for tagging and was duly tagged (HU). With 12 hours left we cannon netted on one lagoon and whoosh netted on a second. Remarkably we caught three more spoonies and managed to put on our last tag (CT) with just enough time to rush back to pack and have a celebratory meal with Prof Qing and his students before leaving for the airport.

The tags just needed to do their thing and they have. Six months on all three have just fallen off after transmitting data, sometimes three fixes in a day. They have enabled us to find new stopover and wintering sites and one (CT) has enabled us to find an area in southern China with at least four other wintering spoonies that was not known about before. This site was visited by Jonathan Martinez who was horrified to find large numbers of mist nets set to catch waders. The State Forestry Administration was

alerted and the next day the nets were removed giving these spoonies a better chance of surviving the winter. HU also wintered in China and the mayor of the local village put up signs saying that there is no hunting here and that the birds are safe. The third bird, ET, wintered in the largest known wintering site in the Bay of Mottama in Myanmar. It gave regular fixes which enabled us to understand where it moved to on neap tides at a time that we cannot follow the spoonies there as the water levels in the estuary are not high enough to use boats to get around the massive mudflats.

In the coming years we hope to learn more of the secrets of spoonie movement patterns thanks to the developments that Paul has made and the many dedicated volunteers who have worked tirelessly to make this happen.

A few key facts

The tags weigh less than two grams each and are glued to the back feathers using superglue.

Each tag costs \$4,450 plus the costs of downloading data and the costs of getting experts to the sites where it is

possible to catch them.

They fall off when the birds next moult their back feathers.

The first three tags lasted five, five and a half and six months before they fell off.

The longest single migratory hop has been 2,450 km and took 49 hours.

Latest news from the Russian Spoonie headstarting team

The WWT / Birds Russia 'headstarting' team, have successfully hatched thirty Spoon-billed Sandpiper chicks. They expect all but one to go on to be released back into the wild bolstering the population of this Critically Endangered wader.



Brooder with chicks of various ages after hatching, 8 July 2017 — Roland Digby/WWT.

There has been much success in previous years with a number of the 'headstarted' birds being seen on their wintering grounds at the same resighting rate as flagged wild chicks, and some have

returned to breed themselves. This gives us much hope that the wild population will not become extinct due to a lack of breeding success. Of course there are many other obstacles standing in the path of a successful recovery of the species, as outlined by Nigel Clark, above, but breeding success is absolutely key to any species' survival and so what is being done in Russia by the 'headstarting' team is absolutely crucial.

This year has presented many unforeseen challenges to the team in the form of flooding and adverse weather conditions, but, thanks to some diligent and dedicated hard work, often late into the night, the release aviary has also been successfully constructed in the nick of time. This means the birds will soon be able to get on with the serious business of getting bigger and stronger ready for their migration south.

We wish all the team good luck for the rest of the project this year and of course we'll be rooting for these amazing little birds

which will very soon be flying south to face who knows what? They will have to be strong and lucky to get through their first winter and hopefully return next year or the year after to provide the next generation of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, many of which might be given a helping hand by the 'headstarting' team.

The 'headstarting' programme is part of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding programme which is a collaboration between Birds Russia and the WWT working with colleagues from the RSPB, BTO, BirdLife International and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force.



The release aviary, 10 July 2017 — Roland Digby/WWT.

Breeding waders in Milton Keynes; 2017 — Martin Kincaid

The Ouse Valley in Milton Keynes is notable for a series of former gravel pits which have been flooded and restored for wildlife since the 1970s. In the past, these sites and in particular the gravel islands found therein, have provided excellent habitat for breeding waders, notably Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Little Ringed Plovers *C. dubius*.

However, in the past 15-20 years nesting waders have been rare with regional declines a factor, but limited or ineffective management, resulting in diminished conditions has also occurred. Islands have been allowed to scrub over and wet grassland has either dried out or been over-managed. A number of these sites are now owned and managed by The Parks Trust, the charity that looks after the parkland and green spaces of Milton Keynes, and The Trust's Biodiversity Action Plan prioritises wetland birds and wet grassland.

Stony Stratford Nature Reserve was the result of gravel extraction in the late 1970s. It is situated immediately west of the old coaching town of Stony Stratford. Since 2010, The Trust has invested a great deal of time and effort in returning this site to a condition favourable for waders. Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* has nested here since 2007 and they have been remarkably consistent, fledging three young virtually every year.

Between 3-6 pairs of Lapwing nest each spring. In 2017, five nests were identified and four young lapwings have fledged — a good result and above the average survival rate! One of the bird hides on site gives a great view of these birds in early spring, and their glorious courtship flight can be watched as the males twist and wheel above the nesting island.

In recent springs, Little Ringed Plover has bred but sadly no young have been successfully fledged here in the past two years. Efforts to encourage Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* to breed here continue and a series of shallow scrapes and ditches will be created over the winter of 2017-18.



Northern Lapwing — Peter Wood



Little Ringed Plover — Chris Ward

Two miles to the west of Stony Stratford is the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve, a 48 hectare site which The Parks Trust opened to the public in August 2017. This ambitious project aims to restore a variety of habitats in the Ouse floodplain, with elements of species rich meadows, wet woodland, scrub as well as sand and gravel islands and bars. Wader passage in Spring is impressive here. Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Ringed and Little Ringed Plover all breed here. Redshank bred whilst the site was still a



Mating pair of Little Ringed Plovers at the Flood Plain Forest reserve
— Harry Appleyard

working quarry but no evidence of breeding was observed in 2016. However, a pair that appeared in late April seemed to linger and at the end of June, a single well grown chick was finally observed, nervously appearing from the dense undergrowth! There is a large quantity of self-set willow on site which makes physical observation of nests difficult. The plan is to remove much of this willow scrub and conservation grazing has been introduced with the intention of keeping the many islands clear of scrub. At the time of writing, no fewer than six Little Ringed Plover are giving good views from the well

appointed Viaduct Hide at this site, of which two are clearly juveniles.

The Parks Trust's quarrying partner, Hanson, is now working an area immediately to the west of the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve. This new site will be known as Stonebridge Lake and it will be restored very much with waders in mind. Two gravel islands in the lake should provide good nesting sites for Lapwing, plovers as well as Common Terns *Sterna hirundo*. Much of the remainder of this site will be managed as marsh land and should therefore draw in good numbers of Lapwing and perhaps Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* in winter, as well as providing habitat for passage and breeding wading birds.

But it is the Oystercatcher, with its striking black and white plumage and piercing call, which is very much the Milton Keynes wader! As well as the sites mentioned above, Oystercatcher breeds at other well watched sites in MK such as Willen Lake (on a muddy island), Linford Lakes Nature Reserve and Gayhurst Quarry. With so many of our British waders having fared badly in recent decades, it has been some consolation to see this species exploiting these man made habitats successfully.



Eurasian Oystercatcher — Elis Simpson

Featured wader photo: Black-winged Lapwing — Melissa Groo

Black-winged Lapwing *Vanellus melanopterus* is a native of Africa having a disjunct trans-equatorial distribution occurring from Eritrea in the north to South Africa in the south.

There are currently two subspecies recognised *V. m. melanopterus* which occurs mainly in Ethiopia and Eritrea in a distinct northern population. This same subspecies is also found in south-west Kenya and north-central Tanzania. The slightly smaller *V. m. minor*, which was not described until 1908 by Zedlitz, occurs in north-east Transvaal to Eastern Cape Province in South Africa, Swaziland and the southern tip of Mozambique.

Black-winged Lapwing was first described by Cretzsmar in 1829 with a specimen taken in 'Djedda, Arabia' to which he gave the name *Charadrius melanopterus*. This location is likely to be erroneous as there have been no further records from there. What is more, as the nearest known population is non migratory, it is unlikely to have been a fortunate find of a vagrant.

The two subspecies occur on plains, grasslands and dry savanna but they differ in that *melanopterus* breeds mainly above 2,000m and *minor* at lower altitudes. Outside the breeding season they are all found mainly at lower altitudes on cultivated land and wasteland in addition to coastal flats.

As with all lapwings invertebrates make up much of its diet with maybe small fish and molluscs included. They can often be encountered in proximity of animals as they are wild or domestic.

The different populations, being spread over such a large range have a variety of breeding times. Those in the northernmost population nest from April to July and those in the south from July to October while those to be found in the central population near the equator will breed year round whilst avoiding the rains.

As with many lapwing species Black-winged Lapwings are monogamous holding a territory which can be solitary or sometimes in small loose colonies.

Northern birds are resident but they are migratory elsewhere. Kenyan birds migrate to the lowlands and South African birds descend to coastal plains once breeding is complete. Migration can take place at night or during the day and sometimes flocks of many thousands come together before departure.

Black-winged Lapwing is, in conservation terms, considered to be of Least Concern as it has no major threats except loss of habitat due to afforestation.



Species: Black-winged Lapwing *Vanellus melanopterus melanopterus*

Photographer: Melissa Groo - web site; melissagroo.com - email; melgroo@gmail.com

Location: Serengeti Tanzania

Date: August 9, 2015

Equipment: Canon 1D-X, 500mm f/4 Canon I IS lens, 1.4x teleconverter

Details: Handheld. 1/1250 sec; f/5.6; ISO 2000

Melissa Groo is the wildlife photography columnist for Outdoor Photographer magazine and a contributing editor to Audubon magazine. She is the Chair of the Ethics Committee for NANPA (North American Nature Photography Association—

www.nanpa.org) and recently received NANPA's 2017 Vision Award. She believes that photography can be both fine art and a

powerful vehicle for storytelling, and is passionate about nature photography that furthers conservation.

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Downloaded; www.birdlife.org 10/07/2017

Wader migration through Eilat, Israel — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

Driving south from Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv, and a few hours into the Negev Desert, it becomes very clear why Eilat is such an important stop off for waders on their way north. Once out of the Eilat region, opportunities for a chance to feed, drink and rest up are few and far between, with the exception of a few sewage ponds around the various kibbutzim.

Our visit to support Eilat ringing station in late March to early April just happened to coincide with peak passage time for many migrants. Large numbers of White Storks *Ciconia ciconia* could be seen spiralling up on thermals and drifting north with thousands of raptors mainly Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis*, Black Kites *Milvus migrans* and Steppe Buzzards *Buteo buteo vulinus* with less frequent sightings of twenty other raptor species. A few White Storks stopped at the reservoirs, salt ponds or irrigated fields to the east of route 90 but most sailed straight through.

Wader sites.

North Beach.

North Beach has limited habitat for waders and the beach can be quite busy with locals that frequently camp right on the beach front. But it's location at the north end of the Red Sea makes it a good site to see White-eyed Gulls *Ichthyaeetus leucophthalmus* coming into roost at dusk and it usually has one or two Western Reef Herons *Egretta gularis* present. It also frequently gets some very good birds for the Western Palearctic in the form of seabirds with Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* and White-cheeked, Tern *Sterna repressa* among others terns, Skuas (Jaegers), Shearwaters, and migrating



Greater Sandplover — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

waders, with odd birds dropping onto the small single ridge in front of the drainage canal outflow, where Greater Sand Plovers *Charadrius leschenaultii* can often be seen. Odd waders can be seen in the canal if water remains in any of the sections.



Marsh Sandpiper — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

Salt Pans and IBRCE Eilat.

The best places to view waders are the salt ponds. The salt evaporation ponds just 1Km north of Eilat are 40cm deep and cover an area of 700,000 square metres. Water from the Red Sea is streamed into the ponds and when it evaporates the salt is recovered by a local salt company. There is open access and it is possible to drive on the raised track between the lagoons viewing the birds with minimal disturbance. At The International Birdwatching and Research Centre Eilat there are hides (essential for birding as the temperature rises) located by the north salt pans and Anita's Lake, which is only viewable from within the centre and has fresh water, therefore frequently attracts migrating crakes. We saw a broad variety of wading birds here, predominately Little Ringed,



Little Ringed Plover — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

Ringed *Charadrius dubius* and Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Black-winged Stilts, *Himantopus himantopus* many Ruff *Calidris pugnax* and Little Stint *C. minutus*, Dunlin *C. alpina*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Common Redshank *T. totanus*, Marsh *T. stagnatilis*, Green *T. ochropus* and



White-tailed Lapwings — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

Wood Sandpipers *T. glareola*. Anything can turn up with a few Broad-billed Sandpipers *Calidris falcinellus* and Temminck's Stints *C. temminckii* frequently being seen, along with Collared Pratincole, *Glareola pratincola* but rarer waders can turn up in the form of Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Caspian *Charadrius asiaticus* and White-tailed Lapwings *Vanellus leucurus*. A White-tailed Lapwing was present one afternoon during our visit. In addition the low shrubby bushes within the IBRCE also hold many passerines and is where the ringing station is based.

Wader migration through Eilat, Israel — cont'd

KM 19 lagoons.

These are deeper lagoons and famous for the Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii* that come in to the pool to drink at dusk. The pool is reed fringed, but when low has exposed areas that can attract waders. It holds the same species of waders found at the salt works and the lagoons just 1km further north, but in lower numbers. The reeds can hide crakes and rails, and the less salty water can attract some interesting waterfowl and has held geese and ducks in some numbers. There are fish in the lagoons which often attracted Ospreys *Pandion haliaetus*.



Broad-billed Sandpiper
— Chris and Denise Lamsdell

KM 20 lagoons

There is an extensive set of lagoons at KM20 which we found to be very productive, and are probably the best site in the area for waders. They held Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, Black-winged Stilt, Spur-winged Lapwings *Vanellus spinosus*, Ruff, Dunlin and Little Stint daily. Other species are represented in lower numbers with, during our time here, Collared Pratincole, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Greater Sand Plover, Temminck's Stint and Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* all seen. Particularly special for us were three White-tailed Lapwings, but in late April the site held Israel's second Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Kibbutzim sewage works.

Several can found as you head along route 90 north from Eilat to the dead sea, with ponds at Samar, Yotava, Quetura, and at Hazeva. In



Ruff — Chris and Denise Lamsdell



Collared Pratincole — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

addition just off route 90, east along route 40 is Shizzafon sewage ponds. These small ponds usually only hold Spur-winged Plover, Black-winged Stilt and Little Ringed Plover, but due to their location in the middle of the desert can turn anything up. The Dead Sea area due



Black-winged Stilt — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

to the high salt levels is devoid of life apart from the Neot Hakikkar fish ponds, pools at KM188 and Lots reservoir, which hold similar birds to the smaller sewage ponds, but again can attract anything, and hold the southern population of Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* and are also good locations for Dead Sea Sparrow *Passer moabiticus*.

Eilat certainly is a wonderful place to view migrating waders and there are sights I shall never forget, the Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* on the round-a-bout being just one of these. If you ever get the chance to visit Eilat during spring migration don't think twice. This place is a must for all birders.



Black-tailed Godwit — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

Recommend site guides:

A Guide to the Birding Hot-spots of Southern Israel by H Shirihai, James Smith, Guy Kirwan and Dan Alon



Spur-winged Lapwing — Chris and Denise Lamsdell

Death traps in the Dutch polders — Eddie van Marum

On the map below a prime meadow bird area is shown which is located in between the triangle of Winsum, Baflo and Onderdendam in the Netherlands. About 25—30 years ago a land consolidation took place here and the waterways running across the meadows were boarded with 30 cm high timbering on both sides.

The first disastrous effects of this timbering was shown in the huge number of drowned Brown Hares *Lepus europaeus* that were found. In a stretch of 1.5 km we found 67, 34 and 27 in years following the construction of the timbering. The Polder Board Noorderzijlvest (PDN) were contacted and they have put in some wooden stairs but didn't do the necessary maintenance so the stairs have since disappeared and the hares kept drowning.



Drowned Brown Hare — Eddie van Marum

One day I was working as a muskrat trapper along this water and I found 4 newly hatched Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* chicks in the water unable to get out. I realized then that this was a disaster for the meadow bird population here. From that moment on I have put lots of effort into lobbying for removal of the timbering.

Within the blue lines of the map is prime meadow bird breeding ground. In red the waterways with the timbering. In green the waterways where farmer Matthijs Veenland has removed the timbering by pushing it down with a crane and where the banks are made shallow. In the light blue squares artificial marshland is created by pumping water in. Within the blue lines almost every farmer is active in the meadow bird protection program of the agricultural nature association Collectief West. Every necessary measurement is taken in favour of the meadow birds in grassland management and harvesting.

This year we did a project where Lapwing chicks have been banded with colour flags with markings for individual recognition. The chicks were followed to get a better



Northern Lapwing chick in the water
— Anne Jan Staal

understanding of family survival. A substantial percentage, up to 50/60% of all clutches, were seen on the opposite side of the waterway to that where they were hatched. This indicated that the parents lead the chicks across fairly broad waterways to the best foraging places. For this particular stretch of about 500 metres at the green waterway about 20 families have



Death traps in the Dutch polders — cont'd

crossed. This means $20 \times 4 = 80$ chicks.

The same was seen in another survey area where Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* and their chicks were fitted with radio transmitters glued to their back feathers. The project's aim was to follow their movements to study predation from egg to fledgling but the same water hazards were encountered by the birds there too.



Drowned Black-tailed Godwit chick
— Anne Jan Staal

Bearing in mind that only about 500 metres are suitable for crossing and more than 10000 metres are an absolute death trap for crossing chicks. If densities of the population would be as high as in the survey area (they were 30 years ago) simple calculation shows that potentially up to 1600 chicks drown every year. Even when we calculate with half



Drowned Northern Lapwing chick with flag
— Anne Jan Staal



Colour flagged Northern Lapwing chick — Anne Jan Staal

of that number $800 \text{ deaths} \times 30 \text{ years}$ still shows a figure of 24000... No wonder the population has dropped dramatically over in that time.

High predation rates by a long list of protected predators have done the rest. I

still think it's not too late. Shared goals in biodiversity can be achieved by working together. But it's about time the PDN listened to Collectief West and yake action NOW! And save the remaining population from extinction.

Did you know?

The nest and eggs of the Surfbird were a mystery until discovered in 1926 by George Wright. He and his companion Joseph Dixon were on Mount McKinley in Alaska when, at 4pm on the 28th of May, Wright located a Surfbird nest. He alerted Dixon and

they then spent the night observing the nest.

This discovery of the Surfbird's nest and breeding habitat is considered to be the last discovery made of any North American nesting species of bird.



Waders in art — Nik Borrow



Spoon-billed Sandpiper — Nik Borrow

I have been painting birds for longer than I remember and would not only sketch the rarities that I saw in the field but I was always on the lookout for fresh corpses that I could take home and with dividers and a ruler, complete carefully measured drawings. These were wonderful lessons in bird topography

and anatomy from which much was learned. Often the drawings would take many days and it was fortunately more amusement than horror when friends and family discovered what it was besides the groceries that I kept in the fridge!

My formal Fine Art training was undertaken at Wimbledon School of Art and subsequently I taught art for some years at Pimlico School. Always a keen birdwatcher, my two main interests merged when I turned professional bird artist. My birding travels have taken me all over the world, but my major interest is in sub-Saharan Africa and I currently lead tours there for the specialist birding holiday company BirdQuest. I have travelled very extensively throughout Africa, spending years in the field, and am co-author and sole illustrator of the definitive Birds of Western Africa (2001), Birds of Ghana (2010) and Birds of Senegal and The Gambia (2012). The fully revised and revamped second edition of Birds of Western Africa was published in August 2014.

Of all the African bird species the waders were one of the most challenging groups of birds to illustrate due to the vast complexity of plumages and the limited space in the book, it was not easy to fit in all of the information needed to identify these species onto the pages. The measured drawings that I had made in earlier years were a clue as to how to proceed and over the years many visits were made to the amazing collection of bird skins in the Natural History Museum at Tring in order to research the same precise information for each and every species of shorebird occurring in Western Africa. I made extensive notes and detailed drawings of individual feathers and feather tracts for each species so that I could develop the information into the plates for the book back at home.

Since the field guide work, which spanned 24 years I have had more time to create pictures and some of my favourite commissions have been of waders. For these more pictorial compositions I rely not only on



Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* — Nik Borrow

Waders in art — cont'd



Dunlin *Calidris alpina* — Nik Borrow



Red Knot *Calidris canutus* — Nik Borrow

the intimate knowledge that I have accrued from the museum work but I also glean information from my own field experience, the photographs that I have managed to take on my travels all mixed with my imagination to create paintings and drawings that are stylised and decorative and attempt to evoke a sense of place and a moment in time. I want my paintings to act as little spy-holes into a super-real world of staged frozen beauty and my field guide illustrations to be detailed maps of creatures that need to be

explored.

Pictured here are some examples of my measured drawings of Common Redshank (page 18—bottom left), Dunlin, and Red Knot (above); a page of notes from museum visits for the plate of Plovers, Godwits and Curlews from *Birds of Western Africa* (page 20—right); sketches of Egyptian Plovers that led to the cover work for the *Birds of Senegal* and *The Gambia* (right); recent commissions of Spoon-billed Sandpipers (pages 18—top & 20—top).

Egyptian Plover *Pluvianus aegyptius*— Nik Borrow

Waders in art — cont'd



Spoon-billed Sandpipers — Nik Borrow

Nik is available should anyone want to commission any artwork.
He can be contacted on:

nik.borrow@me.com

To see more of Nik's superb work visit his website:

www.nikborrow.com



Museum notes for the Godwits & Plovers plate for the
Birds of Western Africa — Nik Borrow

A visit to the Wirral and Hilbre Island — Rick Simpson

Ten o'clock, what a reasonable time to meet I thought, and it was. The weather was a little overcast and the wind made it cold, but waiting for us as we pulled up in the West Kirby Marine Lake car park was Matt Thomas, Wirral Ranger and wader enthusiast extraordinaire. His love for waders shines through as his eyes go misty and twinkle when talking about them, which he does... a lot. Matt had some jobs to do on Hilbre Island and offered to take Elis and me along to introduce us to this precious isle.

The first surprise was to find that on neap tides the island is barely cut off at all, even at high tide, and this allows free access to the general public (if they are energetic enough to walk the distance from the shore to the island).

Regardless it felt exclusive to be whisked past these doughty folk in the Land Rover.

As we approached, a small gang of Eurasian Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* suddenly flew into view and then, just as suddenly, dropped down out of sight behind the island known as Middle Eye. As we passed between this island and Hilbre itself the vehicle track veered closer to the feeding



Dunlin in breeding plumage — Elis Simpson

Dunlins *Calidris alpina* along the closest edge of the channel, one of many that could catch out the unwary on a self-propelled crossing.

Many, if not most, of the Dunlins were in breeding plumage or something closely approaching it. These were likely to be

of the smallest races of Dunlin, *alpina* and *schinzii* while others appeared to still be in their non-breeding plumage which would indicate perhaps that they were of the race *alpina* which moults into breeding plumage four to six weeks later than the other two

A visit to the Wirral and Hilbre Island — cont'd

subspecies which complete their moult into breeding garb by the end of March to mid-April.

In amongst the Dunlin were scattered a few Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* which were on passage here as none stop to breed, lack of suitable habitat and human disturbance preventing them from doing so.

Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* were of course in evidence, hard to ignore really with their striking plumage which, at this time of year, looked stunning, and their volatile, noisy displays. There were still good numbers of these birds on the Dee but soon these flocks would break up with the birds heading for breeding grounds either further north or perhaps inland.



Dunlin still in non-breeding plumage
— Elis Simpson

Arriving on the island we stopped outside the Bird observatory and sought refuge from the wind inside. Here we had the privilege to meet Steve, Alan, Tony and Andrea, who were mostly lamenting the wind direction and lack of migrants to catch and



Eurasian Oystercatchers and Herring Gulls — Elis Simpson

ring. After explaining a little about what Wader Quest is, and does, we took our leave to explore the island. The vast areas of sand and mud around us made one think that there ought to be plenty of Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* about, but it seemed they had already left, as had the Purple Sandpipers *Calidris maritima* as we discovered when we checked out the rocks at the north end of the island by the old lifeboat station. A couple of passing Sandwich Terns *Thalasseus sandvicensis* reminded us that the season was changing and looking for winter visitors was perhaps a forlorn hope despite the chill in the air and two straggling Light-bellied Brent Geese *Branta (bernicla) hrota*.

That chill however didn't last long, as we walked back along the eastern edge of the island we paused for some time to watch the many Dunlins in the newly revealed sunshine, they looked absolutely glorious,

the rufous/orange of their upperparts gleaming in the new sharp light. At the same time the Oystercatcher bands that had gathered on the mud, which now reflected some blue from the sky, stood out and made an attractive spectacle. Occasionally the Dunlins would take flight and perform mini inspirations for us and during one such flight more incoming Whimbrels drew our attention. They alighted on the shoreline and began to feed in amongst the rocks and seaweed, some turning their head completely upside down to search nooks and crannies out of the reach to straight-billed predators.

I have often seen it written that Whimbrels do not seek out the company of Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata*, even if they are alone and the latter are numerous, and wondered if the opposite were true too. We were about to find out and perhaps also



Dunlins performing a mini inspiraton — Elis Simpson

A visit to the Wirral and Hilbre Island — cont'd

discover why Whimbrels don't pal-up with Curlews. While the eight assembled Whimbrels searched diligently among the rocks, in no particular formation, apparently in no cohesive order, a Eurasian Curlew flew in and alighted nearby; from the bill length it was probably a male. The moment he set eyes on the Whimbrels he headed directly for the nearest and, far from integrating himself within the group, he chased the Whimbrel off, pursuing it some distance on foot. Once he had decided that individual had been sufficiently put in its place, he looked around and found the next nearest which became his next victim. We have not seen such aggression by Curlews towards other wader species before so we supposed that the bill shape rendered these birds some sort of rival in terms of feeding resources and, of course, they were newcomers, perhaps only arriving that morning to threaten his personal larder.



Eurasian Curlew advancing on an innocent Eurasian Whimbrel — Elis Simpson



Hoylake from Hilbre Island — Elis Simpson

As we sat and watched this unfold, with the vast expanse of mud now in front of Hoylake across from where we stood, many folk were out exercising their dogs. One of those, rather more ambitious than the others, had come over to the island and his dogs were having a high old time rushing around. Suddenly one of them spotted the Dunlins and thought they would make good sport. He careered headlong towards them causing them to flee. These birds are on migration and every bit of energy used unnecessarily can have a knock on effect with their chances of breeding success or even survival. I was about to become incandescent when I saw the man call his dog. It obeyed immediately

and stood patiently while he attached the lead, as did the other dog that was hitherto off leash. I remained open mouthed in amazement for a moment, and then found myself impressed by his actions and thought how the local Dee Estuary Voluntary Wardens (DEVW) were obviously getting their message across. Awareness raising is essential and the key to growing recognition of the needs of waders, and the DEVW are an example of how this can be done within local communities without vast budgets and very little confrontation and bad feeling.

Sadly our time on the island was winding up; we would willingly have stayed there for eternity listening to the distinctive

calls of the Common Redshanks *Tringa totanus*, one of which appeared to be leading a group of Dunlins astray at the head of a formation flying along the shoreline. His qualities of leadership however obviously showed much to be desired as the Dunlins suddenly peeled away leaving him to speed on alone.

The afternoon stretched ahead of us with plenty of time to kill before heading to Warrington to give a talk, so we decided to visit the RSPB Dee Estuary reserve site at Burton Mere Wetlands.

The Wirral seems to attract Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* that rest at small inland pools. The situation surrounding the draining of the famous Gilroy scrape has yet to be resolved to the benefit of the Godwits, but along the main A520 road there is another pool, in a garden no less, that is the home of some exotic wildfowl and it is here that we made our next stop to gaze upon two hundred and thirty Black-tailed Godwits resting on the grassy bank of a duck pond.



The wild godwits and the downright furious Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* — Elis Simpson

A visit to the Wirral and Hilbre Island — cont'd

Upon arrival at Burton Mere we were greeted by volunteer Karen (also leading light in the DEVW) and RSPB staff member Katy, both of whom we know from the Wirral Wader Festival.

The scrape was covered with birds. Many of them were Black-tailed Godwits in both breeding plumage and non-breeding plumage and there was also a goodly number of courting pairs of Pied Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Their mating ritual is amusing. The male preens and primps himself with much head twitching and splashing of water as he strides around behind his mate who indicates her readiness by stretching out her neck in front of her with her chin close to or in the water. The male then mounts, and after disembarking, places his wing over the back of the female and they seem to have a loving embrace before they then separate and, leaning slightly away from each other in mirrored unison, quickly move away on a diverging course. It was quite the loveliest of pairing rituals on the marsh that day.



A pair of Pied Avocets — Elis Simpson

We were delighted to come across some of our first spring migrants that day; Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenante*, Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* and Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* stood out together with a fantastic twelve examples of that exotic passage wader, the Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*. From the Inner Marsh Farm hide they stood a fair way off in a



Spotted Redshanks and Black-tailed Godwits — Elis Simpson



Black-tailed Godwits and Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* — Elis Simpson

row, sleeping, looking much like a lumps of coal on sticks against the dull grey water. When the sun emerged from behind a cloud they took on a very different form. The black became varying shades of charcoal grey, some very dark birds and others with much white barring. The sun caught their bills as they raised their heads from the sleeping position, the tiny flash of red on the lower mandible was clear to see. For a short time they all woke up and began to wander around feeding with a lacklustre attitude, but they did not venture any closer and soon they were back to charcoal on sticks.

In the Island Mere hide we were also presented with perhaps another five hundred Black-tailed Godwits. The vast majority were asleep on the right hand end of one of the islands and they comprised mainly adult plumaged birds and were quite a sight to behold. Dotted around the pool were various groups of godwits feeding. In the main these feeding birds were in non-breeding plumage and many squabbles broke out between them some becoming quite vicious indeed.



Grappling Godwits — Elis Simpson

Just as we were deciding that our time was up there was a swansong in the offing for us when a dapper Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* teetered its way along the edge of the pool right in front of the hide giving us excellent views of its intricate summer costume before whistling off low over the water to what it assumed would be happier hunting grounds.



Common Sandpiper — Elis Simpson

We left Burton Mere and headed for Warrington, tired and wind beaten, but immensely happy to have had the opportunity to spend some time in the company of our favourite birds, the waders.

Colour ringed Black-tailed Godwits on the Wirral — Rick Simpson

During our April visit to the Wirral for a Wirral Wader Festival planning meeting as described on the previous pages, we saw many spring migrant Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa islandica*.

We have become accustomed now to look for colour rings on the legs of waders that we see in order to report them and possibly, to find out a little about their life histories. On this occasion we saw a great many Black-tailed Godwits with colour rings and spent a bit of time checking out the combinations and where possible photographing the birds with reasonable success, even though the birds were fairly distant.

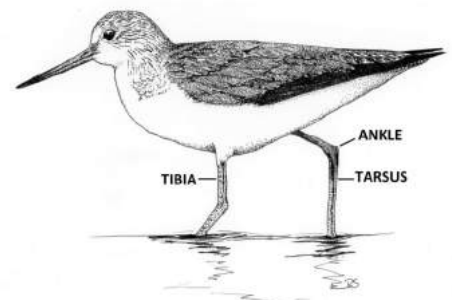
We did succeed in gathering the ring combinations on ten birds, of which Elis managed to procure photographs of eight individuals. Those photographs are displayed here for your interest.

It is interesting to note that not only are different colour combinations used, but there are different ring sizes and the position on the leg is also vital to note if you are hoping to report the rings to the appropriate authorities.

Leg rings are read starting with the bird's left leg first. The colours and sizes of

each ring should be noted reading from top to bottom. Then logically the right leg should be read in the same manner. It is important to note if the ring is on the tarsus (below the ankle joint), or the tibia (above the ankle joint).

On p.25 you will see the details of where and when all of the birds we saw were ringed. The oldest bird of the group was GL-L/W (below) which was photographed at the Caldý Wildfowl Collection. It was ringed in 1998 making at least eighteen years old when seen, a good age for a Godwit.



Common Greenshank — Rick Simpson



GL-L/W Caldý — Elis Simpson



YW-LYf Caldý — Elis Simpson



L//R-RN Burton Mere — Elis Simpson



GW-OYf Burton Mere — Elis Simpson



YOG-GYG Burton Mere — Elis Simpson



GO-OfR Burton Mere — Elis Simpson



OLY-GYG Burton Mere — Elis Simpson



YOG-GYG Burton Mere — Elis Simpson

Colour ringed Black-tailed Godwits on the Wirral — cont'd

Key: R = Red; Y = Yellow; B = Blue; W = White; L = Lime green; O = Orange; G = Green; N = Niger (black).

f = flag of the preceeding colour code; // = separated by the ankle; - separates left and right leg

26-04-17 **Caldy Wildfowl Collection, Caldy, Merseyside, England** **England**

GL-L//W Ringed at Holbeach, the Wash estuary, Lincolnshire, E England. 07-09-1998

YW-LYf Ringed at Skagafjarðarsýsla, Fljót, N Iceland - 12-07-2012 (chick)

26-04-17 **Burton Mere Wetlands, Cheshire, England**

GW-OYf Ringed at Eyjafjarðarsýsla, Svarfaðardalur, N Iceland, Iceland. 13-7-2012 (chick)

GO-OfR Ringed at Les Portes-en-Ré, Charente Maritime, SW France. 11-12-2015 (1+ years)

L//R-RN Farlington Marshes LNR, Langstone Harbour, Portsmouth, Hampshire, S England. 10-10-08

YOG-GYG Hazelwood Marshes NR, River Alde, Suffolk, E England. 26-08-11

OLY-GYG Ringed at Iken, River Alde, Suffolk, E England. 24-10-2008 (1+years)

YOG-GYG Ringed at Hazelwood Marshes NR, River Alde, Suffolk, E England. 26-08-2011 (1+ years)

Not photographed

LY-RYf Ringed at Skagafjarðarsýsla, Fljót, N Iceland, Iceland. 13-07-2013 (chick)



Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits at Caldy Wildfowl Collection, Wirral — Elis Simpson

AWSG Eurasian Whimbrel satellite transmitter project; a summary of the northward journey — Katherine Leung



LA fitted with transmitter at Eighty Mile Beach — Prue Wright

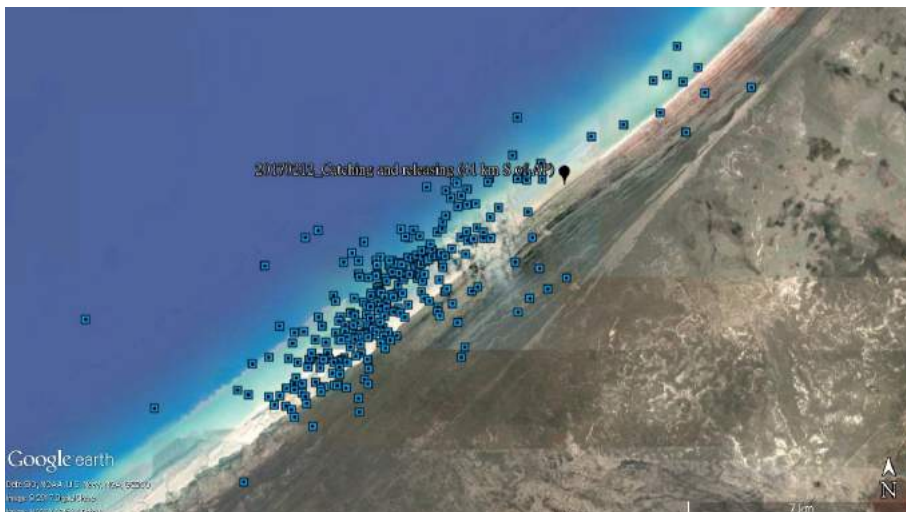
Now that two of our Eurasian Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* are busy breeding, it is a good time for us to look back at the magnificent journeys that they have made.

In February and March 2017, satellite transmitters were fitted on Whimbrels at two sites in North-west Australia: Eighty Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay. Whimbrel LA is a 2nd-year bird (born in 2015 Arctic breeding season) and was the first to receive the transmitter. One of the questions we were interested to know when

we decided to deploy transmitter on a 2nd-year Whimbrel was whether it will migrate north or stay in Australia for the breeding season. LA not only gave us the answer that it has decided to stay, it also shows us that Eighty Mile Beach is one of the most ideal destination for foraging waders as it doesn't need to move around much. Over the past 5 months, LA's movement has been limited to less than 20km along the shoreline, with most time spent at 43-52km south of the beach entrance from Anna Plain Station.

The next two birds were caught in the same cannon net catch at Roebuck Bay on 24-Feb-17. They were both adult birds (>2 years old) which were expected to migrate to the breeding ground which they did successfully!

KS took forty-four days in total to migrate from Broome to its breeding ground in Sakha Republic, Russia. The total distance travelled is 10,412km. KU took seven days longer than KS to travel from Broome to its breeding ground, also in Sakha Republic (fifty-one days) but travelled 508km less than KS, the total distance travelled is 9,904km.



LA's movement at Eighty Mile Beach since transmitter deployment on 12-Feb-17.



KU being fitted with satellite transmitter at Roebuck Bay, Broome — David Chang

AWSG Eurasian Whimbrel satellite transmitter project; a summary of the northward journey — cont'd

	KS	KU
MIGRATION: BROOME → NORTHERN HEMISPHERE		
Date of Departing Broome	16th Apr	17th Apr
Date arriving northern hemisphere	22nd Apr	23rd Apr
STOP-OVER SITES:		
1st stop-over (time spent)	Tainan, Taiwan (2 days)	Fujian Province, China (11 days)
2nd stop-over (time spent)	Yilan, Taiwan (4 days)	Qingdao, China (0.5 day)
3rd stop-over (time spent)	Liaoning Province, China (1 day)	Panjin, China (11.5 days)
4th stop-over (time spent)	Panjin, China (10 days)	Qiqihar, China (0.5 days)
Total stop-over time	31 days	34 days
Total stop-over time in Yellow Sea	27 days (87% total stop-over)	17 days (50% total stop-over)
MIGRATION to BREEDING SITE		
Date of Departing China	19th May	23rd May
No. of stops	5	2
Date arriving breeding site	30th May	7th Jun
FUN FACTS:		
Total time from Broome to Breeding site	44 days	51 days
Total distance travelled	10,412 km	9,904 km
Total displacement from Broome	9,611 km	9,824 km
Max. speed recorded	Panjin, China to Sakhalin (45.1kph)	Qiqihar, China to Sakha (35.1kph)
Longest stopover	Panjin, China (10 days)	Panjin, China (11.5 days)
Longest non-stop flight distance	Broome to Taiwan (4,539km)	Broome to China (4,814km)
Longest non-stop flight time	Broome to Taiwan (6 days)	Broome to China (6 days)

Both KS and KU took six days to migrate from Broome to their first stop in the northern hemisphere, non-stop. KS covered 4,539km with average speed of 31.5kph while KU covered 4,814km with average speed of 33.4kph.

Although they departed Broome on similar dates, they migrated north using very different tactics. KS made two stops in Taiwan and two stops in China before entering Russia for another five very brief stops before

nesting, while KU made four stops in China and two stops in Russia before nesting. Both KS and KU chose paddy fields in Panjin, Liaoning Province as their “longest stay” stop-over sites and were just 50km apart from each other when they were there in May.

Yet, the most remarkable story during the northward migration of these two Whimbrels must be the discovery of KS in Yilan, Taiwan even before the satellite signal had been received. KS was found and



Paddy fields in Panjin, Liaoning Province which were used by KS and KU — David Li

photographed foraging together with a flock of seven other Whimbrels in one of the river channels in the Xiapu wetland on the north-east coast of Taiwan. We do hope to meet KS along the flyway again on its southward migration.



KS photographed in Taiwan on 26-Apr-17 — LIN Jer An

Another satellite transmitter was fitted on Whimbrel JX on 25-Mar-17 at Roebuck Bay, Broome. JX departed Broome slightly later than KS and KU on 20-Apr-17. Unexpectedly, JX stopped migrating soon after it crossed the equator. After a continuous four day flight for 3,049km, JX stopped and remained at Malanut Bay in Palawan, the Philippines.

Over the past eighty-six days, JX has mainly utilized estuarine areas and two off-shore reefs 5-10km away from the coast.

We are now all waiting for the next move of our Whimbrels when southward migration kick start.



JX photographed in Roebuck Bay on 26 March 2017 — Jack Winterbottom

AWSG Eurasian Whimbrel satellite transmitter project; a summary of the northward journey — cont'd



As of 19 July 2017:
Migration tracks of
our Whimbrels:

Did you know
that *Numenius*
means new
moon and
phaeopus
means grey
foot?



JX's movement in Palawan, the Philippines since 24-Apr-17

Leg Flag (track colour)	No. of days since deployment	No. of days since migration started	Distance travelled
LA (blue)	157 days	0 days	0km
KS (purple)	145 days	94 days	10,412km
KU (yellow)	145 days	93 days	9,904km
JX (pink)	116 days	90 days	3,049km

Migration summary of our Whimbrels

Delaware Bay; New Jersey — Denise Lamsdell

Every year Red Knots *Calidris canutus* accompanied by Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Sanderling *Calidris alba* and other waders make the northward journey up the Eastern coast of South and North America. This year my husband Chris a Wader Quest Trustee, and I have been involved with the monitoring process at one of their spring migration stop overs. The birds converge on Delaware Bay and time their stay to capitalise on the food available from spawning Horseshoe Crabs *Limulus polyphemus*. Just as the Horseshoe Crab eggs draw the birds, the migrating waders attract a large team of scientists, environmental workers and volunteers from across the world to participate in a study that has spanned over 20 years.

The first studies began in 1997 at which time the unregulated collection of spawning Horseshoe Crabs for medical purposes and bait was commonplace. Following media coverage of this, the work being done on the beaches and reports of wader population decline, the practise of Horseshoe Crab harvesting was banned on New Jersey beaches.

Since that time fencing off key areas at key times of year also worked to protect the waders and crabs and there are now various community projects such as 'return the favour' where volunteers turn



The lives and deaths of Red Knots and Horseshoe Crabs are intricately intertwined — Chris Lamsdell

over stranded crabs at night, allowing them to return to the sea and spawn again, and beach stewards who protect the beaches by working to ensure that the restrictions are upheld.

The people at the core of these studies were instrumental in organising beach restoration after Hurricane Sandy in October 2012. Key beaches had been left without sand, leaving a layer of peat exposed, rendering them unsuitable for spawning, but the scientists worked with local people to coordinate an intervention to

source sand involving a range of people from experts on Horseshoe Crabs and preferred sand grain size, to local business men organising local companies to donate sand, making it possible to restore 2.6 miles of beaches to date, recreating the correct conditions so that crabs could spawn successfully and birds have eggs to forage on. Work was also undertaken to clear beaches of structures such as concrete and other debris, used in the past to control shifting sands, but that would also inadvertently trap Horseshoe crabs, preventing their return to

Delaware Bay; New Jersey — cont'd

the sea, leading to stranding and death.

Delaware Studies have focused on both Horseshoe Crabs and birds. Collected data on birds is being used to inform on population numbers and environmental changes that effect these, timings of migration of short, medium and long distance migrants (Red Knots are all three depending on where they winter in the United States, Brazil, Peru, Chile or Argentina) and general biometric indicators, in particular weight that provides an indicator of the likelihood that a bird can realistically complete the journey successfully and also informs on the quality of feeding available in the bay area.



Red Knot with blue Brazil flag A8E plus geolocator — Chris and Denise Lamsdell



Red Knot with orange Argentina flag M1K — Chris and Denise Lamsdell



Red Knot with red Chile flag HKU — Chris and Denise Lamsdell



Red Knot with Dark Green US flag HAY — Chris and Denise Lamsdell



Red Knots and Sanderling feast on Horseshoe Crab eggs — Denise Lamsdell

Delaware Bay is affected by economic pressures, with Horseshoe Crabs taken to be bled for Lysate production. Horseshoe crabs are bled each year to produce a substance called Limulus Amebocyte Lysate (LAL). LAL is used to test intravenous drugs and medical equipment for the presence of bacteria and endotoxin, a poison found in many bacteria. Endotoxin can survive heat sterilization and even very small amounts can cause serious and even deadly reactions in people when introduced into the blood stream with an intravenous drug. Harvesting of crabs is now banned on the New Jersey beaches but past collecting has contributed to an alteration in male to female ratios observed – the normal rate of 4:1 is now closer to 7:1 as females have been targeted in the past being so much larger than males. The Horseshoe Crabs take up to ten years to reach maturity and breed so it is too early to say how successful conservation measures have been.

In addition, moves to expand the aquaculture for production of oysters is a concern, as siting of oyster racks on the intertidal mud flats poses a threat, not only from disturbance, but also to waders foraging in that these areas are avoided by the birds and structures may also affect Horseshoe Crab movements. This is a major new area of study in 2017.

There are other studies along the Atlantic flyway and birds from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and SE USA can be identified from their coloured flags. Some birds have also been fitted with geo-locators, but the data can only be retrieved when the bird is recaptured and the equipment removed.

Chris and I worked on just two of the catches, marking in excess of 350 Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling in the first two days of the study. All birds were flagged and released to build up reserves for the next stage of their migration.

As the study progressed, we switched to our primary role of field observers and apart from recording intertidal use by birds two hours either side of low tide, flagged to unflagged ratios of Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling as well as individual flag identifying codes, it became clear that large scale spawning was not taking place on any of the beaches. This was believed to be due to temperatures remaining low with strong onshore winds. Water temperatures were lower than necessary to encourage mass spawning and



Beach restriction sign — Denise Lamsdell

rough water on the tide line made conditions difficult for crabs. Many were overturned and unable to right themselves.

Egg availability appeared to be low with no layer of loose eggs on the surface and birds relying on reaching buried egg masses. These were most often excavated by Ruddy Turnstone that defended their pits aggressively or disturbed by wave action as the tide rose and fell. All captured birds of

Delaware Bay; New Jersey — cont'd



Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, Dunlin, Semipalmated Sandpipers *Calidris pusilla* and Laughing Gulls *Leucophaeus atricilla*
— Denise Lamsdell

the 12th and 16th showed normal weight progression, but those captured on the 19th and 23rd were achieving a much reduced rate of gain.

A coordinated effort to assess numbers at all beaches in conjunction with an aerial survey on 21st May confirmed only 4000 Red Knots present with well over half of the birds unaccounted for. It is unclear where the additional birds were, whether delayed further south or elsewhere looking for food. It seems that some birds may have deserted the area, the expected feeding bonanza having failed to materialise. A bird processed by the team on the Delaware side of the bay on the 16th was resighted at Cape Cod just a few days later. It is usual for Red Knots to feed up over two to three weeks, as short,

medium and long distance migrants converge then leave en masse – clearly that bird had changed from the usual behaviour. Another theory was that the long distance migrants were yet to arrive. We know from flag sightings that several birds with orange flags fitted at Tierra del Fuego were present so clearly that was not the full story either. These birds are of particular concern as they always have the shortest time available to fatten up and arriving at Delaware late leaves little time for refuelling, even under normal circumstances.

movements from beach to beach, presence of birds that winter short, medium or long distances from the breeding grounds, which birds were present at the start of the season, were present later, notable population absences or potentially whether and which birds left before the anticipated time.



Aerial survey aeroplane — Chris Lamsdell



'Return the favor' sign — Denise Lamsdell



Semipalmated Sandpipers
— Denise Lamsdell

It is hoped that all the ringing and observational data collected will provide clear insight as to how birds have responded to the challenges of spring migration 2017. Chris and I alone have over 1000 resighting records and the combined efforts of the team should contribute much data that will indicate bird

This has been a fantastic experience, both to participate in such a worthwhile project protecting and conserving shorebirds and the environment, with a committed team of academics and volunteers both local and from around the globe. It's a shining example of what can be achieved when people come together.

Thanks to Opticron for optics support. We used an Opticron HR80 scope (product code 41006) with SDL eyepiece (product code 40936). In addition the Universal tele-adapter UTS (product code 40951) provided additional zoom capabilities to read rings at a greater distance.

Special thanks to Larry Niles and his team for allowing us the opportunity to contribute to the project.

Forthcoming wader events in which Wader Quest will be involved in 2017

British Birdwatching Fair

18th-20th August
Rutland Water

Falsterbo Bird Show

1st-3rd September
Falsterbo, Sweden

Wirral Wader Festival

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

Severn Wader Festival

9th-10th September
Slimbridge Wetland Centre

Plover Appreciation Day

16th September
Titchwell Marsh RSPB reserve

SOC Annual Conference

20th-22nd October
Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry

Wader Conservation World Watch 4

4th-5th November
Wherever you are in the world

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



Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*
- Knut Hansen; USA



White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*
- Selena Flores; South Africa



Sanderling *Calidris alba*
- John Walker; USA



Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater*
- Martin Eayrs; Argentina

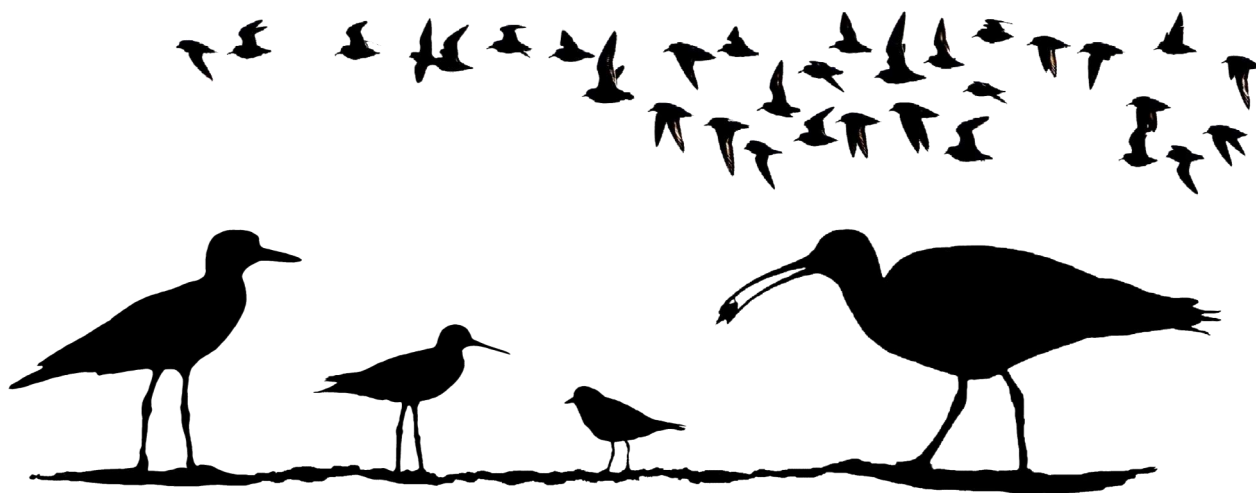


Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*
- Elis Simpson; The Gambia



Southern Red-breasted Plover *Charadrius obscurus*
- Glenda Rees; New Zealand

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Last meeting: 16th July 2017

Next Meeting: AGM 10:30 26th November: venue to be arranged.

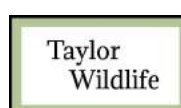
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