

**Forthcoming talks: All 'Wader Quest' unless otherwise stated.**

08/02/2018 Wokingham and Bracknell 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)

27/03/2018 Peterborough Bird Club

05/04/2018 Sheffield RSPB local group.

09/04/2018 Banbury Ornithological Society.

10/04/2018 Reading RSPB local group.

19/04/2018 Nuneaton Birdwatchers' Club

08/05/2018 Lichfield RSPB local Group

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

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## The Chair's thoughts — Rick Simpson

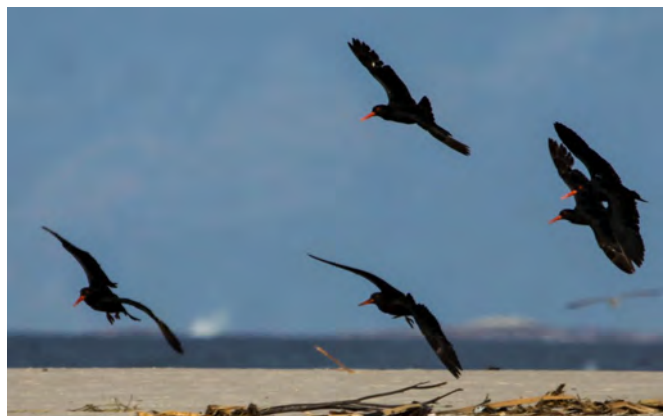
It doesn't get any easier does it? Being a conservationist I mean. Every day we hear new stories about economics trumping environmental issues, habitat destruction, ignoramuses doing indescribably cruel things to wildlife, pollution mounting up on beaches and elsewhere, species numbers dwindling and the climate in a parlous state due to our ever greater needs. And yet, somehow we that believe there is a better way keep going. Against all the odds we know that in our hearts this is the right thing to do; if not us then who will take on this task?

Despite all the doom and gloom that surrounds us every day there are stories out there to brighten our day, sometimes small triumphs like a pair of birds defying the challenges of a modern world and raising a chick to fledging for



African Black Oystercatcher  
— Elis Simpson

the first time on a certain beach. We hear about wonderful people rescuing birds and animals from precarious situations or from people intent on their harm and destruction. Others still may confront governing authorities to get them to change their plans successfully, David and Goliath confrontations that keep our hopes alive. These are the days



African Black Oystercatchers — Elis Simpson

we celebrate. Few and far between though they may be, they do exist and the reason all of us do what we do in this field.

Sometimes our joy is caused by hearing news that a species is doing particularly well, defying the trend and one such bird is the African Black Oystercatcher *Haematopus moquini* in South Africa.

This year it was named Bird of the Year by Birdlife South Africa and is something of a success story for the conservationists that have been its guardian angels.

Some of you may remember that *Wader Quest* sent equipment to Natures Valley Trust (NVT) to help with field work for the White-fronted Plovers *Charadrius marginatus* and Black Oystercatchers. We even adopted a chick of each species, so even though our contribution was miniscule, we feel that we have been a part of this bird's success.

Mark Brown of the NVT, with whom we often communicate and who with his colleagues is a great supporter of our Wader Conservation World Watch, wrote a piece for the Birdlife South Africa magazine *African Birdlife* celebrating the choice of the African Black Oystercatcher as bird of the year. In this article he wrote that the Oystercatcher was a great

example of what can be achieved by, as he put it, 'top-quality conservation action'. He goes on to say that the species is also an example of how easy it is for us, human beings, to have a negative impact of wildlife. The big message though is that its success shows how easy it can, and should, be for us to change things to remove the additional pressure that we create on birds.

The statistics say it all. Since 1980 the population of African Black Oystercatchers has risen (yes risen, that is not a typo) by thirty-seven per cent removing it from its IUCN Near Threatened status and placing it in the Least Concern category in 2015. The population now stands at approximately 6,700 individuals.

The reasons for this are varied but chief among them were the very welcome ban on vehicles on the beach in 2001, the spread of Mediterranean mussels along the coast and an enormous increase in public awareness.

So it can be done, a species' fortunes can be turned around. Our victories may be few, but the fact that changes can be made, and a difference can be achieved, means that however hard it may be, this is definitely a battle worth fighting. (See STOP PRESS on page three.)

**Total raised by Wader Quest to date: £20,105.73**

## Wader Quest news and events

Our last newsletter in October gave a run down of Wader Quest's 2017 events so we won't repeat them all now, we'll restrict ourselves to what has occurred since that publication. In truth there has been very little happening in terms of tangible events that we have attended although the backroom work continues unabated as always. It is surprising how much time doing accounts, keeping track of subscriptions, planning designing and ordering merchandising and stocks, receiving, picking, packing and posting orders, preparing for events well in advance and making sure we are ready for the almost weekly talks can take. (*Not to mention editing the newsletter :- Ed.*)

There was of course the Wader Conservation World Watch, but that too was amply covered in the *Wader Quest* newsletter special that we produced entirely focussing on that event. After that, towards the end of November we had our annual visit to WWT Martin Mere for their Northwest Birdwatching Festival. It is an event that we greatly enjoy attending, and this year was no exception. This festival marks the end of our outings for the year and is a very pleasant way to ease out of the event season.

We gave three more talks up to the end of the year, two in November and one in December. Remember, if your local group has not yet had *Wader Quest* over to give a talk, give them a nudge!



'Eastern' or 'Western' Willet? Can you tell? It is no simple task but if you are in the wintering zone of these birds, then please let us know which you have and send photos to help us. Details and identification hints can be obtained from [waderquest@gmail.com](mailto:waderquest@gmail.com). 'Western' Willet — Elis Simpson

The only other occasion of the year was the final Trustee meeting and AGM which was held at the WWT London wetland Centre. This year we, the Trustees, had the pleasure of David Broadly, a Life Friend of Wader Quest, attending the AGM. This is the first time, and hopefully not the last time a non Trustee has attended the AGM, and very welcome he was too.

While on the subject of Trustee meetings, this month, our first of the year, will be held at a new venue, WWT Welney which we are greatly looking forward to and really appreciate all the support that WWT gives us by allowing us to use their meeting rooms.

Current projects include *Where's Willet?*. We have been very lucky in securing the help of WHSRN, Audubon Panama and CALIDRIS in Colombia. We have also managed to arrange identification consultants of premium quality; Michael O'Brien and Kevin Karlson of *The Shorebirds Guide*, Richard Chandler whose most recent title is *Shorebirds in Action*, a must-have book for wader lovers. In addition Alvaro Jamarillo another wader expert has agreed to pitch in too. It is really important to have the help of these experts as telling the difference between 'Eastern' and 'Western' Willet *Tringa semipalmata semipalmata* and *T. S. inornata*, is not at all straightforward.

We hope that people in the wintering range of these birds will be able to get into the field and photograph as may as possible with a view to discovering exactly where the 'Eastern' Willet spends its time outside of the USA after breeding, something that is currently far from certain. It is hoped that the findings will help Joe Smith who is studying this very question with his investigations.

Although we do not live in the required region ourselves we are doing our bit by trawling through photos on various websites with a view to finding evidence of 'Eastern' Willets on the wintering grounds.



## WCWW5 - November 3rd and 4th 2018

### Make a note in your diaries now.

Make this year bigger and better than ever — Regional coordinators needed.



## STOP PRESS: Positive News From China (for a change) — Rick Simpson

This morning, as we prepared to publish the newsletter we had a message from Chris Hassell who is part of the Global Flyway Network (GFN), an organisation which has been studying the waders of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway for many years, recording the destruction of the intertidal zones and the declines in wader populations that this has brought about.

Today however Chris tells us we at last have some much welcome news to impart. The Chinese authorities have just announced a cessation in hostilities against the intertidal zone. Here is a quote from Lin Shanqing Deputy Director of the State Oceanic Administration (SOA):

*'Reclamation projects that have been approved but have not started and do not comply with the current policy will all be stopped... Using reclaimed land for commercial real estate development is prohibited and all reclamation activities in the Bohai Sea area will be banned... Reclaimed land that has remain deserted for a long time will be confiscated.'* he also said that the administration would cease to give annual land reclamation quotas to provinces.

All of this has come about, not because the Chinese authorities woke up one morning with feelings of remorse and angst at the terrible things that were happening, how could they? They don't know about wader declines or their biological need for these apparently useless areas, do they? Well, they didn't know, but they do now and that is due to the constant and vigilant work of people like Chris and the GFN, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper task force, Birdlife International and many others carrying out the great work and solid science that they have.

If you are not a fan of colour ringing birds and trapping them for scientific reasons,



Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, a species greatly affected and threatened by development in the Yellow Sea intertidal zones — Elis Simpson

then here is a perfect example of why this has to be done, ugly and intrusive as it may seem to the individual birds. If we don't know what is going on we cannot make a sensible and valid argument to promote conservation and habitat protection. Governments tend not to act on woolly ideas of sentimental claptrap, but they do (not always admittedly) follow science based advice.

As wader lovers who often lay awake at night worrying about where this will all end, this is fantastic news indeed and we offer a huge vote of thanks to all the many people who have been plugging away at this for so many years, without their efforts this could not, and would not have happened. Anyone who has been, even in the least bit involved in studying and or promoting awareness about what is happening, should feel that they have made a difference. Waderphiles such as ourselves and our supporters, and indeed the birding community in general should, all be greatly appreciative of what has been done.

It just goes to show that a few people that are determined and persistent can make a difference.

This is clearly not the end of the battle, the war is not over as it were, there is still much to do and we still need to be a little cautious in our celebrations, as this, at the moment is only words, but I have a feeling that if a Chinese government says certain things will happen, they generally do and they will also be very well policed, they do not take dissention lightly.

In our new book *An Inspiration of Waders* the dedication reads; *'Dedicated to the men and women that spend their lives striving to make the world a safer place for waders'* and this news is a testament to the effect that their work can have.

So, enjoy the news for what it is a forward step on a long journey, to quote Churchill, as we did at the end of our traveling at the outset of the Wader Quest project; *'This is not the end, it is not even the beginning of the end, but it is perhaps the end of the beginning'*.

Well done and thank you to all the tenacious conservationists, researchers, scientists, citizen scientists, volunteers and NGOs across the world; we are beginning to be heard.

## Omission:

Apologies to Gary Turnbull and Wild Islay Birding.

We noticed that we had omitted to include the Wild Islay Birding logo as promised in the *Wader Quest newsletter special* among the logos of organisations taking part in WCWW4 on the 4th and 5th November 2017, so we've done it here instead.

Gary has supported the event since 2015 and we greatly value his contribution.



## Featured Wader Photo: Northern Red-breasted Plover — Roger Smith

Words by Rick Simpson.

Without doubt the Northern Red-breasted Plover is one of the most beautiful, if understated, of waders. It is endemic to the North Island of New Zealand and is considered to be Near Threatened. It is the largest of the *Charadrius* plovers and until recently (2014) was considered a subspecies of what was known as the New Zealand Dotterel *Charadrius obscurus*. The other form, its southern counterpart, is now known as Southern Red-breasted Plover which is Critically Endangered and has retained the scientific name *Charadrius obscurus*.

Both forms were once more widespread across New Zealand. Southern Red-breasted Plover used to breed along the hills and plains of eastern South Island and in the 19th Century the Northern Red-breasted Plover occupied beaches on North Island. There was a steady contraction of these ranges which now means they are separated by around one thousand miles.

Northern Red-breasted Plover is doing however doing rather better than its southern counterpart and is gradually increasing its range again southward (see page 5). It is also becoming more adapted to human changes and can be seen nesting on grass verges on roadways, sports fields and even using roof tops on which to roost.

The Northern Red-breasted Plover numbers approximately 1,700 birds. At many breeding sites, community groups, other volunteers, contractors and Department of Conservation staff undertake predator control, public education, signage and roping off of breeding areas to protect breeding birds. Without these measures the bird would probably once again slump into a decline.

In 2011, there was a major threat to the whole population when a tanker, *C.V. Rena*, went aground on Astrolabe Reef in October of that year, at the beginning of the breeding season. The oil spill threatened a significant proportion of the plover population. At least 5% and perhaps as much as 15% of the whole global population of the Northern Red-breasted Plover was under direct threat. A plan was needed to save them in a hurry.

The authorities were faced with some choices; they could simply capture the birds and release them elsewhere, however this would most likely have resulted in the birds returning quickly to the polluted habitat as they are very site faithful; alternatively they could leave them in the wild until they became oiled and then treat them; or they could try a new and innovative effort to save the threatened birds. They chose the latter.

Sixty birds were caught and kept in captivity until the beaches could be cleaned



**Species:** Northern Red-breasted Plover  
*Charadrius aquilonius*

**Location:** Ngārimu Bay, Coromandel North Island, New Zealand.

**Photographer:** Roger Smith / Kapiti Birders  
**Equipment:** Canon 7D mk11, 100-400 IS USM 11  
**Details:** Handheld, 1/320 sec, f/10, ISO 100  
**Date:** 21st November 2016

and then they were released back into the wild. This captive population, much like that of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper today, was a safety net, should the wild population be wiped out or severely diminished, there would still be a healthy group of birds that could be released back to repopulate the area once it was safe to do so.

The gamble paid off and 90% of these birds were successfully released back into the wild some 7 weeks later.

As they were being released a local *Kaumātua* (Māori elder) was present to bless the birds and referred to them the "children of Tangaroa" (Māori god of the sea).

Now retired Roger is enjoying a wonderful relaxing lifestyle at Waikanae Beach on the beautiful Kapiti Coast of New Zealand's North Island. This is this an area of outstanding natural beauty between bush-clad hills and miles of golden beaches. Nearby are several locations covering his main interests - steam trains and birds! Most important is the predator-free Kapiti Island, which is home to several rare and endangered species, but local river estuaries at Waikanae and Peka Peka are especially good for their huge variety of species, including many waders. Roger is out most

days with his cameras capturing many aspects of nature in the region - ranging from the rarest birds, to native orchids, fungi and many others. Roger publishes his photographs in several Facebook Groups, with New Zealand Bird Image Share being his main one. He also has a Flickr account (rogerbee-fotografix) holding about 2500 of his best images.

Roger has been interested in bird photography for many years, but it was with his move to the coast that he became particularly interested in wading and estuarine birds. He just loves the "getting down low" approach to photographing waders - though his wife, Mavis, is not too impressed with the muddy garments he brings back from his expeditions! Daily visits have formed a good "safe" relationship with the local birds, to the point where they have become accepting of his presence - allowing for very close approaches and wonderful intimate close-ups. This has been especially the case with the local plovers; Double banded, Northern Red-breasted and Black-fronted - and he has documented their life closely over the last few years.

Roger is the founder member of Kapiti Birders.



## Unusual first breeding attempt by Northern Red-breasted Plover at Waikanae Beach, New Zealand — Rick Simpson



Talk about all you eggs in one basket; six Northern Red-breasted Plover *Charadrius aquilonius* eggs in the same nest — Roger Smith / Kapiti Birders

When Elis and I first read this story we thought it was interesting, a new breeding site for a bird that needs all the breeding sites it can get. Most of the current sites are at carrying capacity restricting the recovery of the population. Thus, any new breeding attempt is good news indeed to our conservation minded ears and good news in the field of wader conservation is naturally hard to come by.

However as the story unfolded it became ever more interesting. Not only was there a breeding attempt, but the nest had an amazing six egg in it!

The supposed pair turned out to be two females. Although both the birds did their bit by laying three eggs each, which is quite normal, placing them in the same nest was not and the lack of a male input meant that neither clutch was fertilised. Both the female birds took turns to incubate the mega clutch of eggs.



The dark breasted female  
— Roger Smith / Kapiti Birders

Local bird photographer Roger Smith, tells us that as the incubation went on the darker of the two females took on more and more of the sitting responsibilities and even started to chase the other female away from the nest.

When they got wind of it Department of Conservation officials installed four notices advising the public to keep well clear of the nesting birds and to keep dogs on a lead.

After ten weeks the eggs mysteriously disappeared only to be replaced by a second clutch of two eggs soon after.

The more dominant, darker-chested bird was the one that laid these replacement eggs, and she took over sitting on the nest from then on. In January 2018 she finally abandoned the nest.

Although there has been occasional sightings of Northern Red-breasted Plovers at Waikanae Beach over the years, this is the first recorded example of them attempting to nest. Over the summer there have been sightings of up to six Northern Red-breasted Plovers at the estuary, both male and female, so hopes are running high that they will return for next season, when they will perhaps adopt a more conventional breeding strategy and their protection will be more organised.

The sand spit area where the birds attempted to nest is a well-known nesting site for Double-banded Plovers *Charadrius bicinctus*. This year the spit has been hosting about six or seven pairs. Roger Smith who told us this story (see page 4) counted five of their chicks reaching maturity but, as is sadly par for the course, many nests, eggs and chicks were lost for a variety of reasons.



The pale breasted female  
— Roger Smith / Kapiti Birders



The two females together  
— Roger Smith / Kapiti Birders



## The saga of the Blue-egged Double-banded Plovers — Ailsa Howard

I research New Zealand's endemic Double Banded Plover, known to the scientific world as *Charadrius bicinctus* and the local birding world, and myself, as Banded Dotterel. My research is carried out on South Bay Beach, on the South side of the Kaikoura Peninsula, South Island. My studies are focussing on factors that are making breeding success negligible, and investigating possible mitigation strategies to help the birds along.

Double-banded Plovers are monogamous. During the breeding season the couple are tight-knit and, after observing close to one hundred nests, results seem to show that couples who work most effectively together have the greatest nesting success. The pair shares incubation duties, with the female primarily sitting during the daylight hours while the male is the territory patroller and prime deceiver in leading a visitor away from the nest. Both parents are usually very attentive at hatching and share the care of the chick family, but it is very common around three weeks into chick growth that the chicks are left in the protection of the male, and the female may be seldom seen.

I have observed that when an adult loses its partner though death during the breeding season, the surviving bird tends to lose interest in the nest, or chicks, and things generally. They seem lost. This points to the bond being very strong between the pair.

This season I witnessed an incidence of infidelity between a long term pair, and I was surprised both by the pair involved and by the timing of the event. I had not previously witnessed this behaviour with any pair.

The pair in question is easily distinguished by the laying of eggs with a



Ms & Mr Blue Egg creating those distinctive blue eggs — Ailsa Howard

strong blue hue (Double-banded Plover eggs are usually mottled greenish), and we refer to them as Ms and Mr Blue Eggs.

They have always appeared to be devoted to their nest and to each other, but with six nesting attempts, including one that was incubated for two weeks longer than term, hatching nothing, it was in my thoughts that the pair was infertile.

I was greatly surprised when after their many attempts, the seventh nest hatched a tiny chick which the parents devotedly attended.

The chick thrived under the watchful care of both parents. However on day eighteen there was a clear change in the demeanour of the female who stood on the side of the beach terrace showing no interest in her chick which was foraging quite some distance away.



Ms Blue Egg and chick — Ailsa Howard



The Blue Egg chick on the day it hatched — Ailsa Howard



Ms & Mr Blue Egg's nest (compare with egg on page 7) — Ailsa Howard



Mr Blue Egg with the interloper female — Ailsa Howard



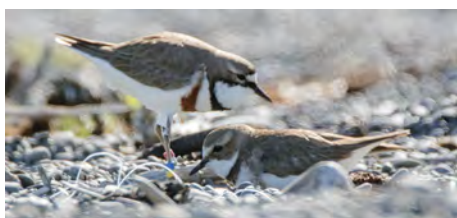
## The saga of the Blue-egged Double-banded Plovers — cont'd

There was no sign of her mate, and from her behaviour the first thing that came to mind was that he had been predated.

Several hours later I returned to their territory to look again, and found him, very much alive, but clearly scraping with a different female. I never saw their chick again and assume it was predated by one of the many Kelp Gulls *Larus dominicanus* in the area due to the females lack of care.

Three days later Mr Blue Eggs was back scraping with his long term partner Ms Blue Eggs and a week later their first egg was laid for another nest. This nest, and the next again failed despite diligent care. No eggs were ever found from the rogue female.

With the dedication that this pair have put into such a string of failed nests, I wonder what triggered the infidelity, when with all their efforts, a chick had finally hatched and seemed to be doing so well.



Mr & Ms Blue Egg scrape again three days later  
— Ailsa Howard



The unfaithful Mr Blue Egg — Ailsa Howard

## A good news story - in the making — Ailsa Howard

Related to the above story concerning Double-banded Plovers at Kaikora I was recently informed about a nest that had been found on the beach. We went up to check on it, and took a nest cage with a view to helping it along.

When we got there to our great disappointment it was obvious that the nest had been washed away in a storm surge.

Initially I didn't even spot the parent birds, then saw a female close to the area but she looked relaxed and not displaying the usual nesting behaviour.

We walked down the beach a little, away from the nest, and suddenly I noticed an egg on the sand.

Immediately I picked it up, and we hastened to put it back within the nesting sticks, securing a cage over the area, we then withdrew to see if anything would happen.

To our intense delight Ms Plover made her way back to the nest, fluffed out her front, and sat on the egg. We looked carefully around but didn't find another egg.

Here is a pic of the egg as we replaced it back in the nest area, and the pair

a little later, as the male turned up and they changed-over the nest. I wonder if they will manage to hatch it?

**STOP PRESS:** We have heard from Ailsa that unfortunately the story doesn't have a happy ending, a further storm surge took away the egg again and although Ailsa found it it was broken with a half grown chick inside. Ailsa said;

*'Disappointing for sure, but the willingness of the bird to sit on her egg made me aware of B dots and their great resilience to stress.'*



The wayward egg — Ailsa Howard



Parents attending the replaced egg — Ailsa Howard

## Fisheries in the North West: The Birds and the Bivalves — Anthony Graham

### About IFCA's

In 2011, ten Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) replaced Sea Fisheries Committees with extended responsibilities to not only achieve sustainable inshore fisheries but to also help achieve conservation objectives. All IFCAs share the same vision statement: "Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry."

### The North Western District

The North Western IFCA district spans from the English border in the Dee Estuary to the English border in the Solway Firth, up to six nautical miles from the coast and to the tidal extent of all estuaries. The District is covered by a number of designated conservation areas including Ramsar sites, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). These areas are designated to protect nationally and internationally important habitats and species. This includes many wading birds such as: Common Redshank, *Tringa totanus* Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Sanderling, *Calidris alba*, Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* and Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. As part of our duty to protect the conservation features within the District the Science Team work closely with Natural England to assess all fishing activity taking place within protected areas and implement management where necessary to protect the conservation features. Copies of the Habitats Regulations Assessments can be found on the NWIFCA Website at <https://www.nw-ifca.gov.uk/marine-protected-areas/hra/>.

### Fishing in the North West

A wide variety of fishing activity occurs within the District. It is activity on the Foreshore that wading birds have the most contact with. Foreshore potting, netting, and shrimping have minimal impact due to the seasonality, geography and limited amount of activity. The risk of entrapment in nets is limited by the disturbance caused by the fisher tending to them. Cockle *Cerastoderma edule* and

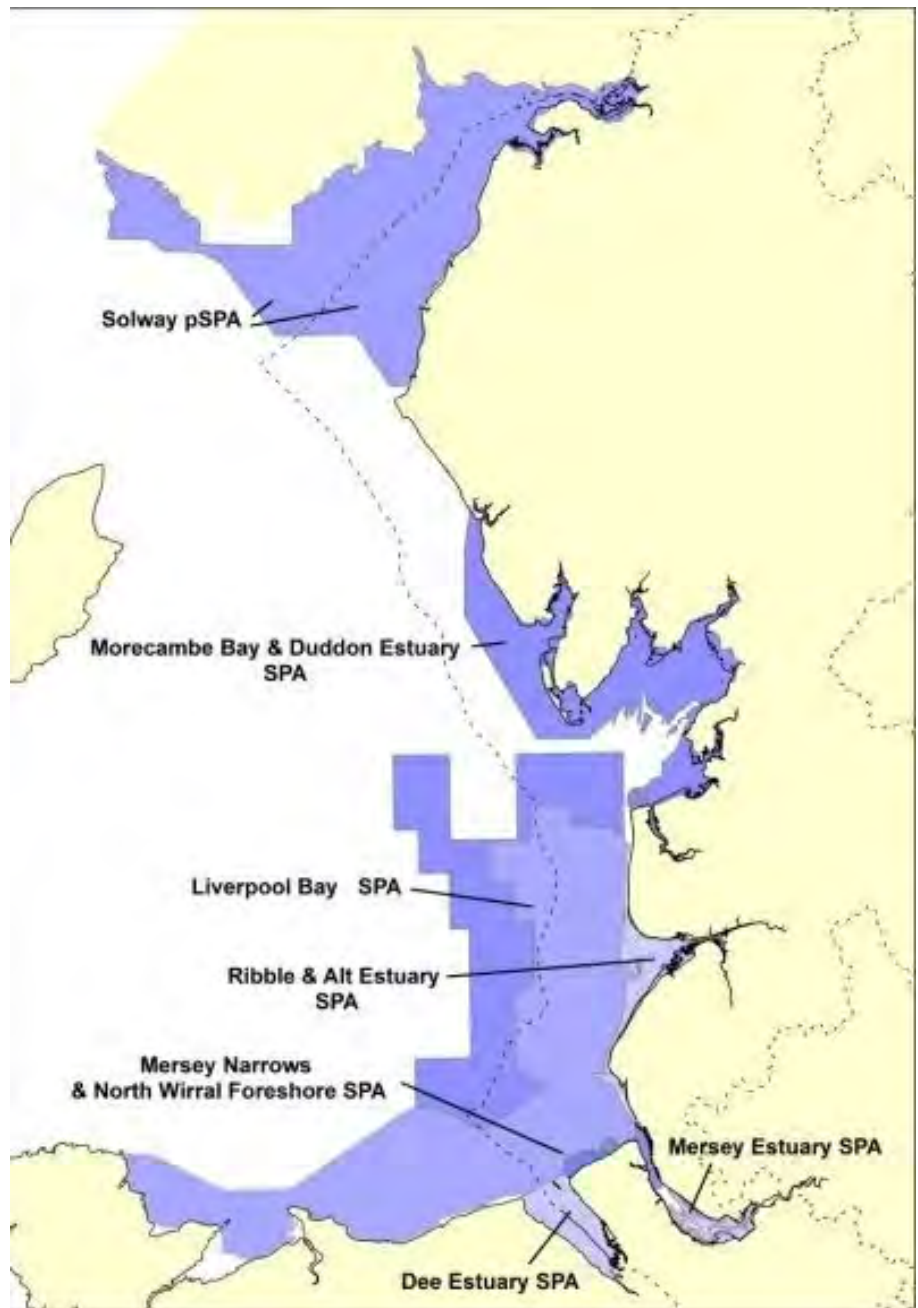


Figure 1: Map of Special Protection Areas (SPA) and potential SPAs (pSPA) in the District — NWIFCA.

mussel *Mytilus edulis* fisheries are the largest fisheries on the foreshore and interact most with wading bird communities.

### Cockle & Size Mussel Fisheries

Cockles are synonymous with the North West, especially Morecambe Bay. As a resource cockles are unreliable and unpredictable. Stocks may be high for a few years then decrease to low levels for several years and no one knows why. Due to the fluctuations in cockle stocks NWIFCA actively open and close cockle fisheries to ensure

sustainability. As nearly all cockle fisheries are located in a Special Protection Area an assessment is undertaken prior to opening to ensure that the protected features will not be impacted. Only hand gathering is permitted when fishing for cockles and the method has changed very little in hundreds of years. Fishers will rock a jumbo (see Fig. 2) back and forth to fluidise the sand causing the cockles to float to the surface. The fisher will then rake up the cockles, riddle them (pass through a mesh to remove small cockles) and then place them in a sack. The cockles are



## Fisheries in the North West: The Birds and the Bivalves — cont'd

then weighed (known as tonning up) and sold to a buyer at a nearby location.

Unlike cockles, mussels are a stable resource within the District with reliable stocks year on year. Again, only hand gathering is permitted. As with cockle gathering the method has changed very little over the past hundred years. Mussels are gathered up by hand or rake and deposited into a sack. In both cases, the only noticeable change is the horse and cart has been replaced by the quad bike and trailer!

Cockle and mussel beds are frequented by a wide range of overwintering birds. When fishers access beds, often by quad bike, there is initial visual and audible disturbance. The disturbance is only for a short period and once fishers are on the bed birds will often settle nearby. On cockle fisheries birds will take advantage of the softened fluidised sand from jumboing and the readily available surfaced cockles. Officers have even observed waders taking advantage of softer sand caused by quad bike tracks. Another risk associated with accessing these fisheries is damage to surrounding habitats such as salt marsh. To prevent this, officers work with Natural England and monitor the condition of the surrounding area before and during the fishery. The final potential for disturbance is when the shellfish are "tonned up" (see Fig. 3), to prevent disruption, the NWIFCA works closely with local councils to provide an area away from the foreshore for the industry to weigh up on.

Cockles and mussels are a key prey species for many wading birds. To ensure there is ample food for overwintering birds the NWIFCA monitors the available stocks across the entire district through regular biomass surveys. If necessary, when opening a fishery a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) will be applied. This sets a limit for the quantity of shellfish that may be removed from the bed. The quantity removed is monitored by catch returns submitted by fishers and officer's inspection reports. The bed will also be resurveyed before the TAC is reached and depending on the outcome the limit may be revised. During periods of cold weather the NWIFCA may close cockle and mussel beds to ensure that overwintering birds have ample opportunity to feed.

Both disturbance and the potential



Figure 2: Cockle fishers using jumbo's and gathering cockles into riddles — NWIFCA.



Figure 3: Toning up at Leasowe in 2017 — NWIFCA.



Figure 4: Birds feeding approximately 50m from a cockle fishery — NWIFCA.



## Fisheries in the North West: The Birds and the Bivalves — cont'd

for over fishing are further limited by the Byelaw 3 Permit scheme which has introduced controls on the numbers of people eligible to fish commercially for cockles and mussels. There are now only 120 people eligible for a permit in the year 2018 to 2019 compared to the free for all that occurred in the past.

### Seed Mussel

Seed mussel is undersized mussel and is only considered for opening as a fishery when it is acting ephemerally. To be acting ephemerally the mussel must be densely packed, laying down lots of mud (in cases this can reach over 2m deep—see Fig. 5) and not attached to the skears by thick hair-like threads known as byssus threads. As a result, the mussels end up sitting very loosely on top of the mud; this means that the mussel is incredibly vulnerable to being washed out by strong wave movement.

When the mussel is behaving ephemerally and is likely to get washed out or predated on by starfish (*Astroidea* see Fig. 7), the NWIFCA carries out Habitats Regulations Assessments in conjunction with Natural England, and if it can be shown that removal of the resource will not cause any risk or damage to the nature conservation features, including many wading birds, carefully controlled fisheries are allowed to go ahead. The NWIFCA derogates against its own minimum landing size and allows the harvest of the seed mussel by hand at Heysham Flat, and by dredge on beds known as South America and Falklands out in the north of Morecambe Bay (see Fig. 8). Both methods of fishing scoop the mussel and the top layer of mud up and have no contact with the underlying cobble and boulder substrate.

The seed mussel is shipped to aquaculture operations in places such as the Menai Strait, North Wales, and mussel farms in Northern Ireland where it is grown on in more stable environments until it reaches marketable size. This activity has been occurring for decades and some of the aquaculture operations, such as the Menai Strait businesses, are accredited as sustainable under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

Seed mussel fisheries differ from standard mussel fisheries as the resource is not immediately removed from nature. Instead it is stabilised and available as a food resource for birds until it has grown to a marketable size. The act of fishing the seed mussel can also increase the biomass available by thinning the density and allowing new mussel to grow.



Figure 5: Thick Mussel Mud — NWIFCA.



Figure 6: Loose Seed Mussel — NWIFCA.



Figure 7: Starfish Predating on Mussel — NWIFCA.



## Fisheries in the North West: The Birds and the Bivalves — cont'd



Figure 8: Dredged Seed Mussel — NWIFCA.

### The Future

Fisheries and the environment evolve over time; to ensure that management measures reflect this a process of reviewing and monitoring the Habitats Regulations Assessments has been put in place. Beyond

this the NWIFCA is currently reviewing Byelaw 3 Permit to Fish for Cockles and Mussels. As part of the review a flexible permit scheme is being worked on. This will allow the NWIFCA to tailor permit conditions to each fishery further increasing the ability

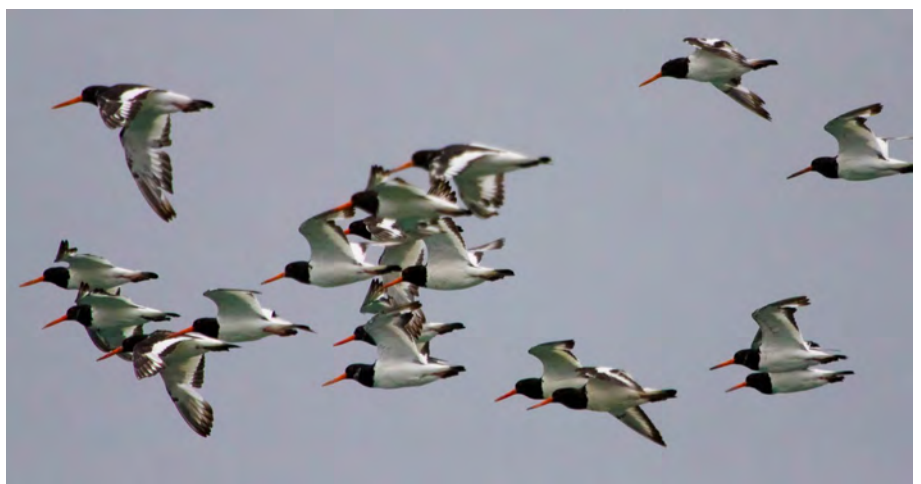
to protect the habitats and wildlife that cover the District.

Should you have any questions or wish for further information, please do not hesitate to send me an e-mail at: [a.graham@nw-ifca.gov.uk](mailto:a.graham@nw-ifca.gov.uk)

## Did you know?

### Oystercatcher Culling in the UK

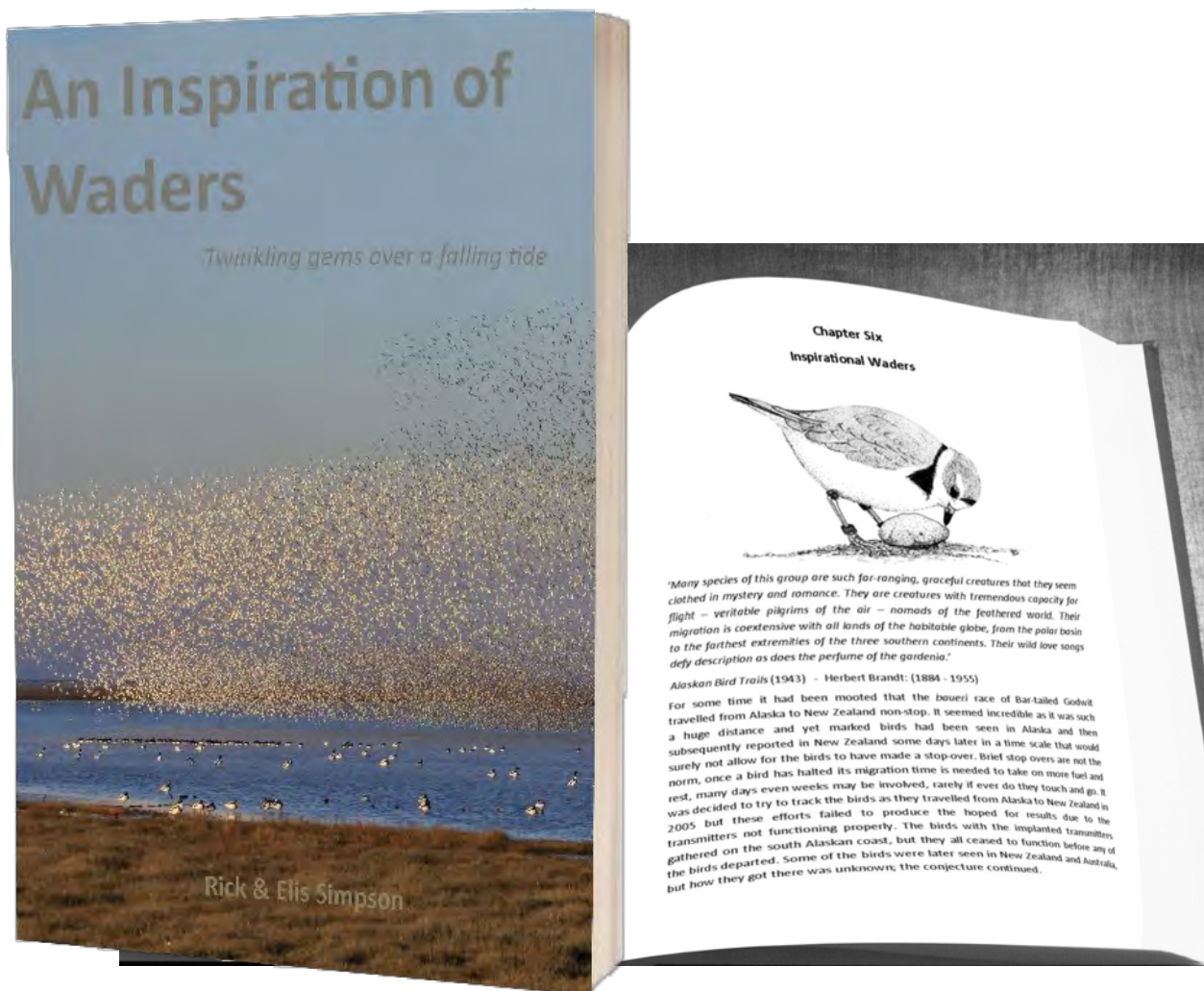
There was a cull of Eurasian Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* in 1973-4 in the Burry Inlet in Wales; 11,000 Oystercatchers were shot. This was not unprecedented as there had been an earlier, and larger, cull in Morecambe Bay, England between 1956 and 1969 when 16,300 birds were killed. The evidence showed that the Oystercatchers had in fact made little or no impact on the dwindling cockle beds for which they were blamed. I wonder if there is still any tangible threat that this could occur again given some of the controversial decisions being made these days concerning the culling of wildlife: - Ed.



Eurasian Oystercatchers — Elis Simpson

## Coming soon, a new *Wader Quest* book; *An Inspiration of Waders* by Rick and Elis Simpson.

*'There are few facets of human culture that have not been affected in some way by these incredible birds, we depict them in art, we write songs and poems about them, we study them and eulogise about them. We have created myths and legends to explain the unexplainable, drawing them into our lives and using them as foils, villains and heroes, some to be dismissed as gun fodder while others may be placed among the gods. They are beautiful, graceful and entertaining, but their status is not born purely of our imaginings, they have proved themselves to be among the most resilient and durable species in the world of birds with feats of endurance that make your eyes water.'*



The book is enhanced by Elis' fine photographs of waders and Rick's line drawings. It pulls together many facts, figures, myths and legends about waders that have inspired us throughout our history, culminating in a suggestion for a collective noun for the amazing spectacle that swirling masses of waders over an estuary provide: *An Inspiration of Waders* will be published by Wader Quest Publishing and will be available in Spring 2018

Illustrations above are mock ups of cover and page sample. ©Rick and Elis Simpson 2018.

## From the library

*'Waders are accommodating birds, and if the enthusiast doesn't like early rising, he may see a fair number of birds at any time of day if the tide is suitable'.*

*Field Observations On British Birds* - Fergus Menteith Ogilvie (1920)



## Divergent wader migration from Nunavut in Northern Canada — Rick Simpson

Nunavut is a huge territory in northern Canada, forming most of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. It is a rugged place, sparsely populated with only remote villages among the many islands. It is a region of Arctic Tundra and as such is an ideal breeding ground for waders. Its very remoteness means that it is inaccessible except by boat or plane unless, like Sanderling *Calidris alba* A52, you have your own set of wings.

A52 was ringed (banded) in Nanuit Itillinga (Polar Bear Pass) National Wildlife Refuge which is located on Bathurst Island, in the heart of the Canadian Arctic archipelago.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as all Nearctic breeding Sanderlings head south and remain within the Americas after breeding, A52 was relocated and photographed on Sanibel Island Florida, by Audrey Albrecht on April 28, 2016. Audrey contacted the Canadian Wildlife Service to find out more about the bird and received information that it had been captured and ringed on the 7th of July 2015 as a bird of at least two years of age.

Since Audrey's 2016 sighting A52 has also been seen on Sanibel Island in February 2017 and again in December 2017, suggesting that Sanibel is a regular wintering area for the bird. Audrey is keeping an eye out for A52 and hopes to see it again before it heads north once more.

What is perhaps more surprising is that birds that breed alongside the Sanderlings, take a completely different migration route.

A Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria*



Ruddy Turnstone 1372-46802, Cromer Pier, Norfolk, England — Rob Lee



Sanderling A52 on Sanibel Island Florida USA — Audrey Albrecht

*interpres* that was ringed on the 31st of May 2017 near Alert in Nunavut and was subsequently seen and photographed by Rob Lee on the pier at Cromer in Norfolk, England on the 3rd of September 2017.

Rob did well to get the identity of this bird as it wasn't conveniently colour ringed with a big identification flag, just a simple metal band which Rob managed to read by careful observation. Of course it helped that the bird, like many of its kind, is not only tame, allowing close approach, it could also be enticed to hang around by being fed chips!

This divergence of migration routes

among congeners is not new information of course, neither between species nor subspecies, but it is nonetheless interesting and perhaps not as widely appreciated as it might be.

For example, the two subspecies of Ruddy Turnstone that breed in Arctic Canada are the race *interpres*, which occurs furthest north on Axel Heiberg and Ellesmeres Islands and the race *morinellus* which occurs to the south and west across most of Arctic Canada. While *morinellus* birds head south and remain within the Americas, much as the Nearctic Sanderlings do, *interpres* birds head south and east to Europe and occasionally beyond.

In a similar way it often surprises people that the Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* breeds in Arctic Canada. It is often considered a Eurasian bird with the Semipalmated Plover taking its place in the Americas but the nominate race *hiaticula* breeds in a similar area to the *interpres* Ruddy Turnstones and they also pass this way on migration rather than heading directly south to remain within the Americas as the Semipalmated Plovers, which breed to the south and west of the Common Ringed Plovers, do.

In Vol 4 issue 1 April 2017 of *Wader Quest* the newsletter we reported on the Ruddy Turnstones at Scarborough, but their situation and behaviour is not unique, as the Ruddy Turnstones on Cromer Pier show. Places such as these, where birds have become accustomed to people and feed off scraps (whether this is desirable or not is another matter), are fantastic places to get acquainted with these endearing and interesting little waders: - Ed



## Unprecedented wild fledging of a clutch of Black Stilts — Rick Simpson



The photo of a pair of Kakī (Black Stilts) with four fledged young that appeared on the internet surprising us all — Jemma Welch

Searching through the internet, which is an important job that Elis carries out for Wader Quest with due diligence, she came across the photo above of a Black Stilt (Kakī) family *Himantopus novaezelandiae* on the Kakī Recovery Programme page @kakirecovery. At first it doesn't look terribly inspiring until you realise what it is. With the help of the text written alongside Elis soon discovered what an amazing picture it actually is. The text read as follows:

*'This photo doesn't look like much but it's a pretty big deal to us! One of our ever vigilant Rangers, Jemma Welch, snapped this pic near the Tasman Delta last week. It is an unknown pair, that has turned up with, not one, but four wild-fledged juvenile Kakī. Without any help from us (excluding intensive predator control on the Tasman river) they have successfully fledged their entire clutch. That is a pretty big deal in our world! Hopefully we will see more of this in the years to come.'*

Elis quickly drew my attention to the piece and I contacted Jemma for more information about how she discovered the birds, she replied;

*'I was dragging my feet back to my truck, walking about a 100m up from the Tasman delta, at the end of a long day checking Wrybill *Anarhynchus frontalis* and Black-fronted Tern *Chlidonias albobristatus* families when a group of six birds flew over*

*from the direction of the delta landing about 30m away from me. I immediately recognised one as a Kakī adult, a parent even, as it was yacking non-stop at me – classic chick behaviour. My initial assumption was that this Kakī had regrettably shackled up with a Pied Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus* and these were their fledglings (four young black and white birds I could see). It took me a moment to realise, with disbelief, that the sixth bird was in fact a second Kakī adult yacking away too. Taking a moment to process this information – as it's almost unheard of for a Kakī pair to fledge one chick in the wild let alone four (a full clutch!) – it slowly dawned on me that these four fledglings actually belonged to this pair of Kakī ! I spent about 20 minutes with the family in absolute awe of the incredible job this pair had done in fledging their four chicks. Though confident flyers the short up-wind flight from the delta must have taken its toll on the fledglings who sat down to rest while their parents diligently stood guard. After snapping up a few pictures for evidence I left the little family to it and continued my walk back to my truck with a bit more spring in my step.'*

Jemma also sent a couple more photographs she had taken of the family (see page 15).

I then contacted Cody Thyne at Jemma's suggestion and he was able to add

some background information, not just about the birds in this case, but also some other recent successes.

Cody told me that the male bird carrying the leg ring combination black,yellow,yellow/red,black was hatched in at the captive facility on the 27th of January 2014 where it was fledged and released as a sub adult on the Tasman river on the 4th of September 2014. This makes him nearly four years old and he has not been reported since the 31st of July 2017.

His mate, carries the leg ring combination of black,white,black/yellow,red and although the register does not record the sex of the bird I think we can safely assume it is a female. She hatched on the 12th November 2014 so is a little younger than her mate at just over three years old. She too was released on the Tasman river as a juvenile on the 7th of January 2015. Interestingly she too was last seen on the 31st of July 2017. Obviously since the birds were last reported they have been very busy.

These four youngsters are not however the only ones to have been found this year, another four fledged chicks have been located.

This additional four birds came from eggs incubated in captivity. On the day of hatching, complete with egg remnants to convince the adult birds they had just hatched, they were placed under the adults



## Unprecedented wild fledging of a clutch of Black Stilts — cont'd

which had been incubating dummy eggs. From that moment on they were as wild as any other bird facing the same risks and challenges on a daily basis.

Great efforts are made to maximise the survival of birds released, and for this reason most are raised in captivity and released only after they have fledged either as juveniles or sub adults getting them past the most vulnerable part of their lives. Generally chicks that are returned to their parents once they hatch do not survive, rearing just one of these is something of a miracle so these two pairs raising two each was something to write home about.

In captivity, with feeding and protection chicks will grow and fledge in just thirty-five days, in the wild this can take as long as sixty days prolonging their vulnerability considerably.

In order to see if there was anything that could be done to increase the speed of fledging in the chicks returned to the wild an experiment was carried out. Supplementary food was made available to the chicks to see if this would speed up the fledging process. This was not a great success as the birds did not use the supplements provided, however these four birds fledged in just fifty days anyway despite ignoring the additional food made available. Cody and Jemma both put this early fledging down to the incredibly productive season with amazing weather that's been experienced in the region this year.

In all ten newly hatched chicks were put back into the wild with five wild adult pairs and, at the time of writing, of those ten birds, four have fledged as we have seen and six are still unfledged but still alive. With any luck, these birds may all fledge which would be an amazing turn of events in the fragile and often tragic history of the *Kākī*.



Mum stands guard as the fledglings feed — Jemma Welch



Dad standing well off to the right keeping an eye out for trouble — Jemma Welch



Adult Black Stilt — Elis Simpson

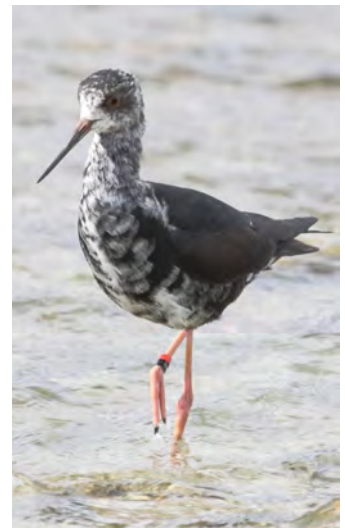
The *Kākī* / Black Stilt recovery programme is run by the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC). Founded in 1981 it aims to increase the wild Black Stilt population thereby ensuring this special bird is not lost for future generations.

There are around 100 wild living adults forming about twenty five pairs of which only nineteen are thought to be productive — although as we have seen in the previous article, keeping a track of them is not easy.

Each year many juveniles and sub-adults are reared from the captive breeding programme but they do not find it easy to survive, their main threats being habitat loss, predation, hybridisation (with White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus*, environmental problems and disturbance. Once released some go missing, some are known to have died killed by predators both natural such as falcons and gulls and introduced such as feral cats and introduced mammals.

More information can be found about the *Kākī* recovery programme at these websites:

[Kākī Recovery Programme fb page](#); [DOC Black Stilt Recovery Plan](#); [Braided River Aid \(BRAID\)](#); [Isaac Wildlife Conservation Trust fb page](#).



Sub adult Black Stilt — Elis Simpson



## Up close and personal with the Stone-Curlew — Keith Betton



Stone-Curlew — Chris Gomersall RSPB images.com

When asked to name my favourite group of waders, it is without doubt the Stone-Curlews – or Thick-knees or Dikkops, depending on where you live. The genus *Burhinus* consists of ten species that all have large eyes and look very similar with different combinations of sandy brown with stripes and spots.

In the United Kingdom, where I live, we have the Eurasian Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*, although to make it easy I'll drop the term "Eurasian". These are migrants to this country from southern Spain and North Africa. They are found right across the Palearctic to north-west India, and choose to live on open steppes with stony ground and sparse vegetation. Across their range they can be found up to 1000 metres above sea level, but where I live, in the county of Hampshire in southern England, they are found in the lowlands.

The Stone-Curlew was once widespread in the south and central United Kingdom from the counties of Dorset to Yorkshire. The population of around 1,000–2,000 pairs in the 1930s was already much reduced from that which had existed in the 19th century, but a more rapid decline followed with numbers hitting an all-time low of fewer than 170 pairs in the 1980s. This decline was largely due to the loss of suitable grassland habitat brought about by lack of grazing, both by sheep and rabbits, and the

conversion of permanent pasture to arable farmland. As a result, the birds were forced to nest within sparsely-vegetated, spring-sown arable crops where the eggs and young were vulnerable to agricultural machinery.

Since the 1980s work by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and others to protect the nests and young has led to a recent increase in numbers – and that is where I became involved. I saw my first Stone-Curlew in Hampshire about 30 years ago. It was at long range through a telescope, and of course the bird skulked away from view as soon as it realised it was being watched. Over the next 20 years I never really enjoyed anything other than distant views of birds, mostly on private land that was completely inaccessible to the public.

I knew the RSPB was doing a great job of advising farmers on the creation of plots for Stone-Curlews. So, in 2010 I decided to volunteer to help with watching them. The benefit would be two-fold: I would be monitoring the birds and enabling them to have the best chance of success, and I would also be able to enjoy watching them at the same time. I eventually ended up coordinating several volunteers across ten farms.

I share my Stone-Curlew year with two colleagues, Barry Stalker and Shane King. The first birds are usually back at their

breeding sites by mid-March and we are out and about trying to find them. They are often best detected at this time through their nocturnal calling.

Most of the Hampshire population of around 30 pairs now breeds on specially-prepared plots created to provide safe areas away from agricultural operations. These have the additional benefit of minimising the impact of disturbance by the public, since very few are visible from public footpaths.



Keith holding a Stone-Curlew chick  
— Barry Stalker



## Up close and personal with the Stone-Curlew — cont'd

These plots are managed by the farmers who are paid money by the Government to provide open stony ground for nesting plus buffer zones for chicks to hide in. Areas with trees and bushes are avoided as they provide opportunities for Carrion Crows *Corvus corone* and Buzzards *Buteo buteo* to predate the nests.

In April and May we locate nests and then alert the farmers to the birds' presence so that farming operations in those areas are carried out with extra care. These measures have allowed numbers to increase but without this level of intervention it has been estimated that the population would decline by about four per cent per year.

It is often quite a challenge to establish whether birds are breeding as they may travel up to three kilometres to feed and, to complicate matters, there are non-breeders that move between sites. A productivity of 0-61 chicks per breeding pair is



Stone-Curlew chick hiding in the weeds — Keith Betton



Keith holding a Stone-Curlew chick  
— Barry Stalker

the target figure set by the RSPB to achieve a stable population. In some recent years we have managed to achieve that although they are so secretive that their chicks are often hard to locate to prove fledging.

To understand whether the young survive and fledge I mark the chicks using a combination of plastic colour rings. I feel very privileged to be allowed to do that as this is still one of Britain's rarest and most threatened breeding birds, and most people only get to see them at long range through a telescope.

While Stone-Curlews continue to nest on working farmland the only way the population can be maintained is through proactive liaison with farmers. A sign of the success of 30 years of effort is that in 2009

the species was downgraded from Red to Amber in the list of Birds of Conservation Concern. Unless suitable areas of downland can be recreated and protected, such conservation action needs to be maintained at the current level. Currently the RSPB is working with over 200 farmers to make sure that the UK population of around 350 pairs is maintained and increased.

So, I have gone from watching this remarkable bird through a telescope at long range to holding it in my hand and getting up close and personal - which is an amazing feeling. But an equally amazing feeling comes from knowing that I and my colleagues are helping to save a species that would be

crushed under the wheels of tractors if we were not involved.

*Keith Betton is a media trainer, PR consultant and writer — his latest book Behind More Binoculars (co-authored with Mark Avery), was published in November by Pelagic. He is a keen world birder having seen over 8,200 species in more than 100 countries. Keith has a passion for Africa, having been Chairman of the African Bird Club for 7 years, and now its Vice President. In the UK he is heavily involved in bird monitoring in Hampshire, where he is County Recorder. He has been a Council Member of both the RSPB and the BTO, and is currently Vice President of the latter.*



Stone-Curlew nest very well camouflaged — Keith Betton



## A wetland in danger—Saswat Mishra

Dharasana Wetlands is a beautiful wetland between the two cities of Dharasana and Bilimora, on the coastal highway in Gujarat State, India.

From the onset of winter, generally around the end of September until March this particular wetland attracts several wader species.

Together with my colleague Pragnesh Patel, I started visiting the place in the winter of 2016, and I was astonished by the variety of birds we saw at one place in such a short period of time. However in mid 2017, the wetland was taken over by Shrimp Farming practices, the legal status of which is not clear.

At the peak of the season, December and January, a large number of migratory birds are drawn to the wetland. These include Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*, storks CICONIDAE and Cranes GRUIDAE, with more than fifty varieties of bird having been photographed; among them are more than



The Dharasana to Bilimora Highway  
—Saswat Mishra

twenty kinds of wader.

Unfortunately, as in many places around the world, these wetlands are under threat. This could have been made a conservation site for water birds by Gujarat Forest Department; they have after all developed in a locality known as Sultanpur in Navsari District. This productive site for waders is being destroyed and replaced by Prawn Farms. This place needs coverage, such a beautiful ecosystem must be saved but sadly we have observed that it is unlikely that Dharasana Wetland can't be protected at all. It's location on the main highway between two cities, carrying a huge number of vehicles results in the habitat being open to all and sundry resulting in much disturbance and possibly illegal construction.

As the shrimp farms trap and store



Dharasana Wetlands — Saswat Mishra

more and more water, other areas remain dry. One area that we used to watch waders in is now dry.



Dessicated area where once waders fed  
—Saswat Mishra

A number of locally rare birds have been seen at the site. Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* is a rarity in this part of Gujarat state, and was photographed in February 2016 where we sighted only one individual with a group of Common Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia* and Little Stints *Calidris minuta*. Sightings of Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* & Spotted Redshank are not rare in Eastern Gujarat, in wonderful places for watching migrant waders in Gujarat such as Jamnagar, but in South Gujarat, in winter, these have not been recorded before.

Another rarity which showed its



Spotted Redshank — Saswat Mishra



## A wetland in danger—cont'd

presence only for a month only was White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*, it was seen at the end of February 2016.

Notwithstanding the changes being made to the habitat our 2017 observations were even more fruitful despite a massive amount of shrimp farms having been established in March 2016. This however does not reflect that shrimp farming has improved the habitat and nesting opportunities, but rather the increased observation and effort that we were able to put in found the area to be even more productive than we had at first thought.

2017 started with sightings of rare species such as Eurasian Hobby and Marsh Sandpiper. From these new records a single Ruff in breeding plumage was a first record for South Gujarat Zone.

Another problem is the destruction of Common Snipe breeding habitat. Unusually Common Snipe breed here, although no nest nor any chicks have been seen the behaviour of the birds and their residential status suggest that they do. Common Snipe is unusual in that most of the population breed well north of here, but there is an isolated, resident population ranging from North-east Afghanistan to Northern India.

List of wader species at the Dharasana wetlands.

Eurasian Oystercatcher  
Haematopus ostralegus  
Black-winged Stilt  
Himantopus himantopus  
White tailed Lapwing  
Vanellus leucurus  
Red wattled Lapwing  
Vanellus indicus  
Pacific Golden Plover  
Pluvialis fulva  
Little Ringed Plover  
Charadrius dubius  
Greater Sand Plover  
Charadrius leschenaultii  
Eurasian Curlew  
Numenius arquata  
Eurasian Whimbrel  
Numenius phaeopus  
Spotted Redshank  
Tringa erythropus  
Common Redshank  
Tringa totanus



White-tailed Lapwing —Saswat Mishra

Marsh Sandpiper  
Tringa stagnatilis  
Common Greenshank  
Tringa nebularia  
Wood Sandpiper  
Tringa glareola  
Terek Sandpiper  
Xenus cinereus  
Common Sandpiper  
Actitis hypoleucos  
Common Snipe  
Gallinago gallinago  
Little Stint  
Calidris minuta  
Temminck's Stint  
Calidris temminckii  
Ruff  
Calidris pugnax



Common Snipe — Saswat Mishra



Newly constructed barriers preventing the free flow of water across the wetland — Saswat Mishra

## On finding the Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* — Rick Simpson

As we emerged from the trees onto the dry stony river bed in the foothills of the Himalayas, I was some way behind Elis and our guide Anil. I had stopped to enjoy the splendour of a Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*. Ahead of me I heard the familiar sound of Elis' excited voice rising with delight and thinking that they had found our bird I rushed to join them. Can you believe I was disappointed to see a Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*? Elis however was not underwhelmed, this finding was of great significance to her, she had wanted to see one ever since discovering their existence. We had been to the Pyrenees a couple of times but had not been lucky enough to see one. Here she was now in India and she had found her own Wallcreeper on a rocky river bed not half way up a craggy rock face as she had always expected to. She was understandably beside herself. I too was drawn to it, but not for long, it was not a prominent wished-for lifer for me as it was for her and I had another rather pressing agenda, to find our target



Wallcreeper — Elis Simpson

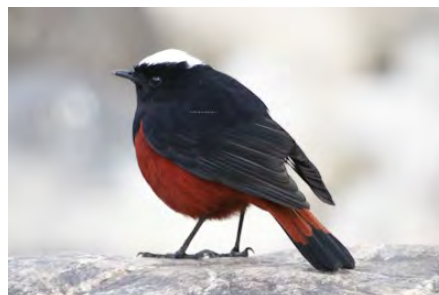
bird.

The three of us continued to walk together along the river bed. We admired the Red-billed Blue Magpies *Urocissa erythroryncha* as they chased one another around the canopy of the trees on the other bank of the Kosi River, gloriously illuminated by the clear morning sunlight. We gasped at the low level fly over of a Lesser Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis* and delighted at the White-capped Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* which stunned us as it flitted prettily between the boulders; but yet we were not satisfied. Only one thing would do that for us. The further we walked with no sign of our bird, the more anxious I became. I began to formulate the blog I would write explaining how we had tried but failed to see this bird. Every now and then I would stop



River Lapwing — Elis Simpson

and scan the river bed desperately, but saw nothing of interest. As we rounded the bend in the river a temple came into sight nestled atop a large rock in the middle of the river bed. As I admired it through my bins standing proudly upon its rocky throne a nearby movement in the river below drew my attention. My heart raced. Holding my breath I flicked the focus wheel on my binoculars and honed in on the place where I had detected this movement; it was a River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*. Although disappointed to a degree, I still spent some time looking at this bird, it was still one of my favourites even among the lapwings, of which I have a very high opinion generally. I watched the Lapwing move deftly among the boulders until it took off. I followed it as it flew across the water and landed again. I continued to watch this bird until it disappeared behind some rocks. My attention was then caught by another movement in my field of view. I casually glanced at the spot. I could see nothing, just



White-crowned Redstart — Elis Simpson

boulders. I thought this strange but assumed the racing water had flashed in the sun and caught my eye. I was about to search again for my Lapwing when one of the boulders lurched forward, turned its head and revealed a long curved red bill!

I could hear Anil and Elis in conversation close behind me and casually said,

"I can see an Ibisbill." This crucial news was lost on my companions who continued with their conversation, I spoke again, this time with a little more volume and urgency,

"I've got an Ibisbill!" That did the trick, the talking stopped and the directions started. I used the River Lapwing that had now reappeared as a point of reference. Elis was soon on the bird and as is now customary set off in its direction to get the desperately important record shot and then follow up shots of a better quality. Anil



Ibisbill — Elis Simpson



## On finding the Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* — cont'd



Ibisbill — Elis Simpson

however was struggling. He could not see the bird and kept repeating cautiously;

*"I can see a River Lapwing..."* as though subtly trying to soften the blow to tell me I had misidentified the bird. I repeatedly told him the Ibisbill was beside the River Lapwing, but he simply could not see it such is their ability to blend in. We stumbled across the boulders and rocks and soon we were really quite close to the bird. Eventually I heard Anil's now rather more animated voice gleefully announce.

*"I've got it, I've got it, and there are two of them, I have found a second bird, you found the first and I have found the second!"* he could not conceal his delight at this.

So there it was, our target bird and glorious swan song to our trip was in the bag. Looking more like an ibis, as its name suggests this beautiful, unique, grey wader blended well with its surroundings, only the red bill when it caught the sun stood out from the similarly grey environment in which it chose to dwell. I admit that I had always said that I thought it very unlikely that we would ever see this bird, or even try for it. It was not until I was making the arrangements

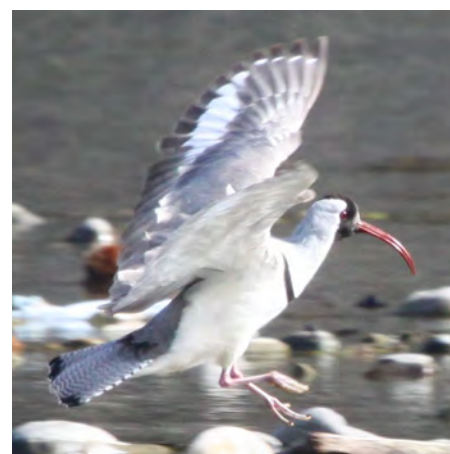
for this trip that it became clear that it was even possible, a bit of a long shot maybe, but surely worth the effort and extra expense, and even horror, of the night train to get there had been worth it.

As I sat and watched these birds it slowly dawned on me that this was it. This was almost certainly our last bird of the trip, always a sobering moment amid the euphoria of success. What's more this was likely to be the last trip for a very long time, family duties and being now in penury were stumbling blocks that would be hard to surmount.

Instead of sadness though I became overwhelmed by waves of peace and

tranquillity. I sat down, perhaps more relaxed than I had been at any time in the recent months, and simply looked around me. Apart from the obvious charms of the Ibisbill and the River Lapwing, both of which, until the day before, had been no more than pipe dreams, there was much to admire in my surroundings.

The merry gurgling of the river as it tumbled and tripped over the pebbles and splashed around the larger boulders instilled in me an almost Zen like inner calmness. I glanced across at the Garjiya Devi Temple and the sound of Hindu chants and music that emanated from it failed to spoil the ambience, indeed it probably added to this ancient and timeless tableau. In front of me a hill rose steeply from the water's edge with soft, pastel, winter hues in the colours of the trees catching the morning's rays through hazy skies. Left and right I could see hills beyond hills as the Himalayan foothills stretched away from me becoming ever more pallid until they were lost from sight altogether. The magnificence of the setting and the location itself could not have been more fitting for this poignant moment in a lifetime of birding.

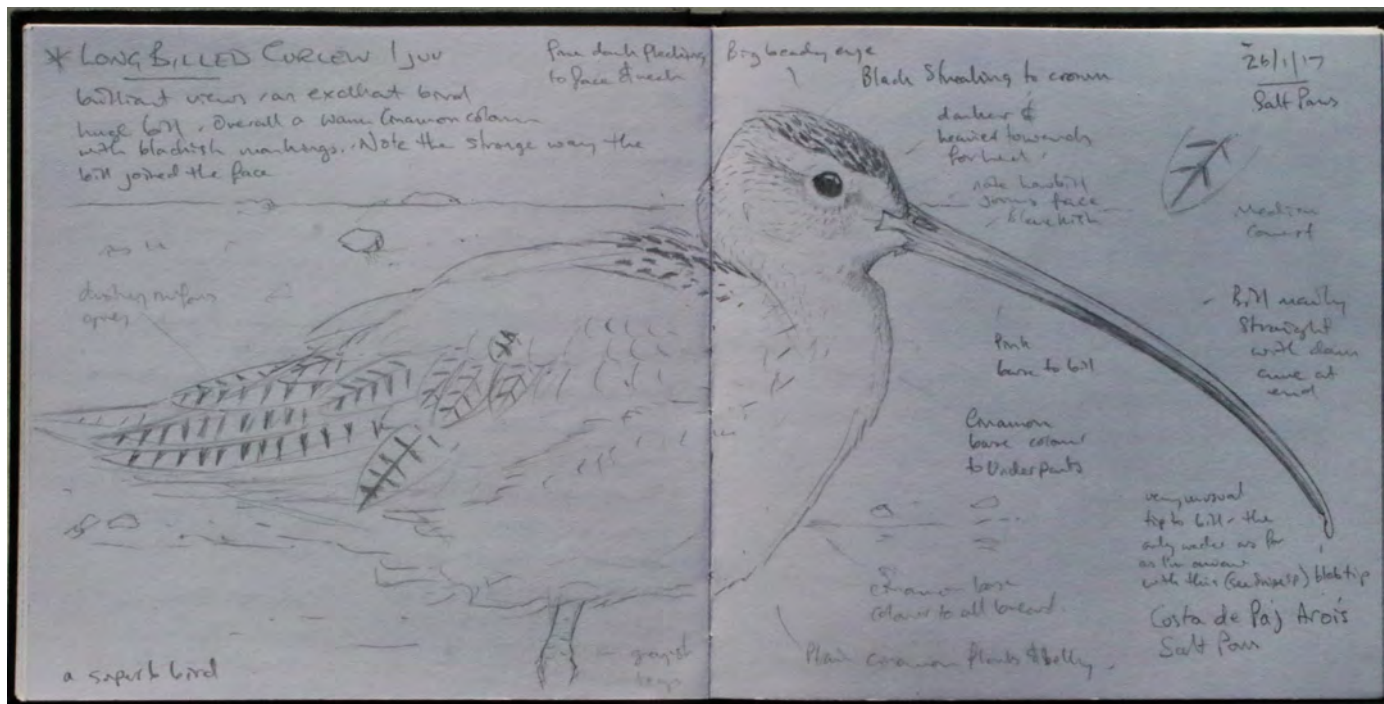


Ibisbill — Elis Simpson



Look closely, there are two Ibisbills in this photo— Elis Simpson

## Waders in art — Steve Cale



Long-billed Curlew sketch — Steve Cale

**As Hot Chocolate (almost) said; 'It Started with a Curlew - Never thought it would come to this'**

I've been birding and drawing birds almost all my life. I had a love and fascination for waders right from the beginning. In actual fact, it was waders that started me birding, Eurasian Curlews *Numenius arquata* to be precise. I was around twelve and my parents used to take us kids out walking with a rambling club every weekend. On one of our summer holidays, 1973 if I remember correctly, my parents took us walking in the Lake District. It was early summer and, as I recall, we stayed by the side of Bassenthwaite Lake. In the field next to where we stayed were these strange birds with huge down curved bills, coming and going and giving their haunting wailing, warbling cries; I was hooked. I remember driving my father crazy for a bird book. Eventually he gave in and bought me the old Hamlyn Guide which I still have to this day, although now in a very sorry state having been used and used almost until the print came of the pages.

Our mystery birds turned out to be Curlews and my passion was born. To this day Curlew is one of my favourites and I always stop to look at them whenever one crosses my path.

A recent trip to Costa Rica gave me

a very unexpected and very welcome sighting of a rare American Long-billed Curlew *Numenius americanus*, you'll see above a plate of my field sketches and below a photo..



Long-billed Curlew—Steve Cale

I love doing detailed sketches breaking down the components of a bird, really getting to grips with them and often this will give me information which I would otherwise miss. Look for instance at the tip of the bill on this Curlew. There is a strange blob shaped swollen tip which is an aid to finding invertebrate prey. Look also at the way the

bill joins the face at the lores. The shape is quite unique and appears to be an adaptation that strengthens this huge bill, making it less likely to break if the bird applies pressure when feeding, as leverage could be an issue with such a long bill. These are just my views and I may be proven wrong in my theories in time but in nature everything that evolves has a purpose.

This feature in different ways is present in Snipe *Gallinago* and Woodcock *Scolopax* species with the tip of the upper mandible being slightly swollen and, in the case of Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, hooked to help them grasp prey when foraging. You will see (top of page 23) some watercolour sketches I made of a Woodcock that was sadly a road casualty in the hard weather in February 2012.

My detailed field sketches I use as reference material for my larger finished paintings, although many of them do end up as paintings in their own right. When you draw you have to really study the birds you are watching and it's then that you begin to notice features in birds that you may not have seen before. Next time you're out, for instance, look at the difference in the mantle feathers between female Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* & Gadwall *Anas strepera*, at first glance they look the same but, look carefully.



## Waders in art — cont'd

Over the years I have seen our wildlife decline drastically and having changed from a birder into a conservationist as well as an artist. I began to feel I had to do more than just pay my subs, watch and draw our waders. So I came up with an idea for a small scrape; the only problem was that I did not own any land. I had noticed a spot on some private land where a straight drainage stream ran through a grassy field and down a shallow valley and so I drew out a very rough plan and went to see the local land owner. After a site meeting and getting a few friends involved he very kindly agreed we could build our scrape, which has now gone from strength to strength. I have to thank him greatly for this, especially as he does not charge us a rent, he is just happy we are trying to help our wildlife.

We dug a series of shallow pools and have tried to get as much variance of water depth, habitat and muddy edges as possible. We created three shingle islands and a purpose built Snipe marsh with graded shallow wet grassland and although they have not bred there yet we have Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* in attendance ten months of the year. In December last I did a count of Snipe in here and got thirteen Common and a single Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*.

On the 23rd of January I found a really quite rufous looking Snipe. The late great Martin Garner in his books goes into some detail on snipe ID and based on his work, in my opinion this bird, with its intricate markings in scapular feathers and overall colour tones, looks to probably be a Common Snipe of the race *G.g.faroensis*, a plate of my sketches of which you can see on page 24.

Our scrape has around an acre of water with the three shingle islands I mentioned along with a series of other Islands with varying amounts and types of vegetation (also see page 24). We built our reserve with donations and voluntary work, the only paid person has been a skilled digger driver who we paid to help us dig out and create the shapes of the pools, and to date we have recorded one hundred and forty-one species.

Avocets have attempted to breed and we have had a maximum count of six Green Sandpipiers *Tringa ochropus* in the autumn.

The point I make is that our waders are in deep trouble and anyone can create something like this to help our wildlife with



Eurasian Woodcock sketch — Steve Cale

some thought, effort and a sympathetic local land owner. The flip side of the coin from the active conservation work is that it gives me great opportunities to draw and paint our waders. The Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* image, again on page 24, is an example.

If you care about our birds why not try to get a group of friends together and see what you can create, and if, like me, you draw and paint, no matter what level your artwork is at, you will find great pleasure and inspiration in a project like this and at the same time increase your enjoyment of our wildlife.



The reserve hide — Steve Cale



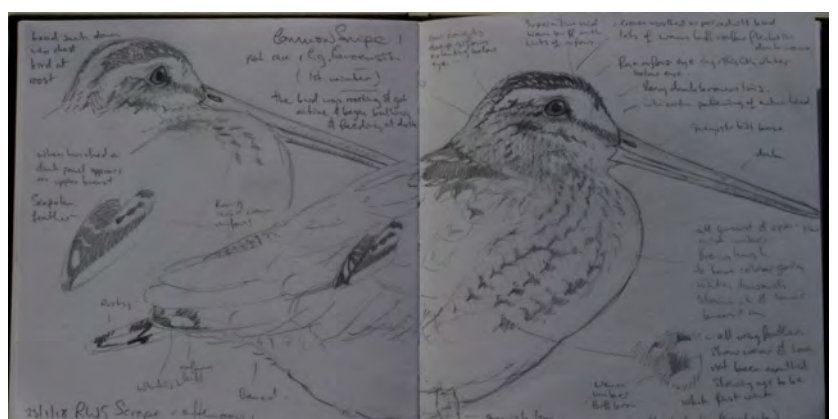
## Waders in art — cont'd



Changing the guard; Little Ringed Plover — Steve Cale



The scrape under snow — Steve Cale



Possible *faeroensis* Common Snipe — Steve Cale

**Steve has generously donated an oil painting to *Wader Quest* so that we can raffle it to raise funds for wader conservation. See page 25 for details:- Ed.**



## **GREAT WADER QUEST 5th ANNIVERSARY RAFFLE**



**An amazing opportunity to own one of Steve Cale's magnificent original oil paintings.**

**This incredible framed (94cm x 54cm) artwork could be yours for as little as**

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However you can also apply for tickets online to  
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**3 or more tickets post free (otherwise 76p)  
sorry, but we have to restrict the entrants to those with a UK  
address for delivery considerations.**

**Make payments using bank transfer, cheque or PayPal - email for all details  
and to send us your postal address; tickets will be posted to you.**

**Don't miss out on this wonderful opportunity to  
hang this glorious painting on your wall.**

## My Favourite Wader? — Dave Jackson



Breeding plumaged Sanderling - Titchwell beach, Norfolk, England — Dave Jackson

Waders have always been one of my favourite groups of bird but I'd be struggling to name my all-time favourite species. I could probably narrow it down to the Scolopacidae,

Maybe a phalarope while Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* has risen up the ranks the more I learn about them. I'm sure if I'd been more successful in India, Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* would be right up there vying for position alongside Crab Plover *Dromus ardeola* and Egyptian Plover *Pluvianus aegyptius* in world terms.

As a birder who carries a camera as well as binoculars I do like birds that are confiding and charismatic and comparatively easy to photograph, preferably without sitting in a hide for hours at a time.

One bird that fits this description that I've managed to photograph here in the UK and abroad is the Sanderling *Calidris alba*. A winter visitor and passage migrant occasionally inland but mostly around the coast. This cosmopolitan Calidrid is a joy to watch as it scampers along the tideline trying to snatch a meal - a real photographers' bird.

In October 2016 I visited Madeira on a last minute deal and decided to take the

ferry to Porto Santo in the hope of finding waders along its long, sandy beach. Apart from tourists the beach seemed empty. Not even a gull. I was just about to suggest to my partner that we find the nearest bar when she grabbed my arm.

"Stop!" "What?" "There!" "Where?"

Just a few steps ahead were two Sanderling sitting practically hidden on the sandy beach.

Even if pressed I still couldn't choose a favourite wader but Sanderling would be quietly staking its place in the top five for sure.



Juvenile Sanderlings on a Madeiran beach — Dave Jackson



## Oldest known Snowy Plover in Florida — Audrey Albrecht



Oldest Snowy Plover on Sanibel Island Florida— Audrey Albrecht

The photo above is of our oldest known Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus* here on Sanibel Island - orange/black.

She was captured and banded (ringed) as a breeding adult here in 2009 and has continued to nest each year on Sanibel Island. Since she was already an adult at the time of her capture, she is at least ten years old!

Unfortunately in 2017 her mate died of an unknown illness, so she opted to abandon her nest and did not attempt again

that year. I am however very hopeful that she will try again in 2018 with a new mate.

Each bird banded on Sanibel has a metal USGS service band, and a unique colour band combination. As we only have about ten nesting pairs here, we only capture and band a few individuals which allows us to keep track of them and follow their regional movements in the non-breeding season.

The previous banding project here ceased to function in 2009. When I started here in 2016 I resumed the project. I have

learned that facebook and ebird are great tools to help keep track of our banded plovers.

It has been very interesting seeing the movements that my few banded plovers have been making. I can't wait to see what will happen next year and I am very hopeful we will have more chicks make it to fledging in 2018. In 2017 we only fledged a single Snowy Plover which was banded and interestingly it flew one hundred and twenty miles north after fledging!

## Easyfundraising — Andrew Whitelee

As a new year begins, for many people thoughts turn to new year's resolutions. For some of those people, they may be wondering how they can do more to help the environment and environmental charities. In these cash strapped times, it isn't always easy to find extra money to give to your favourite charity, which is where EasyFundraising comes in.

The idea behind EasyFundraising is very simple, once you have set up your account and specified which charity you

would like to donate to, you are set. Each time you shop online you can find organisations that will give a percentage of what you spend to your cause, all at no extra cost to yourself.

If you install the EasyFundraising extension on your browser's toolbar you don't even need to remember to log into the EasyFundraising website as you will automatically be reminded of the potential to donate on each site. If you prefer to do your purchasing online via your mobile then there

is also an EasyFundraising app.

I have been using the site for about a year now. I am not a prolific online shopper but I have amassed £26 for *Wader Quest* at no extra time or cost to myself. So, if I have convinced you and you'd like to help us out, then we'd love it if you would join us.

Obviously, there are other causes you could support, but if you'd like to help *Wader Quest* then please follow [this link](#) and sign up (we'll get an extra £1 the first time you make a donation).

**It has come to our attention that Privacy Policy rules under the Data Protection Act will be changing. In future we will not be able to assume you are willing to be contacted by us simply because you have provided us with your email details. By May 28th this year we must have written consent (e-mail will suffice) from Friends and Sponsors to contact them (including the distribution of this newsletter) otherwise we will be considered to be spamming our subscribers.**

**Our current policy:**

**We do not share your personal details with any third party for any reason.**

**We do not sell your details to any third party for any reason.**

**We contact you only for the purposes of legitimate *Wader Quest* business.**

**That business includes; subscription reminders, appeals and the issue of e-newsletters.**

**The information we keep is as follows.**

**Name  
Email address  
Postal address (if supplied)  
Subscription amount  
Subscription method (cash, bank transfer, standing order, cheque, PayPal)  
Date joined  
Eligibility for Gift Aid  
Payments recieved**

**If anyone would like us to erase any of this information from our database then he or she can request that we do so.**

**We keep information on lapsed members for two calendar years from the expiry of their subscription.**

**Once we have formulated a sensible and convenient method to obtain permission from subscribers to contact them we will implement it before  
May 28th 2018.**

**In the meantime if you have not already done so and you wish to email us giving us consent to contact you before this is done, then your email expressing that permission will be kept on file.**



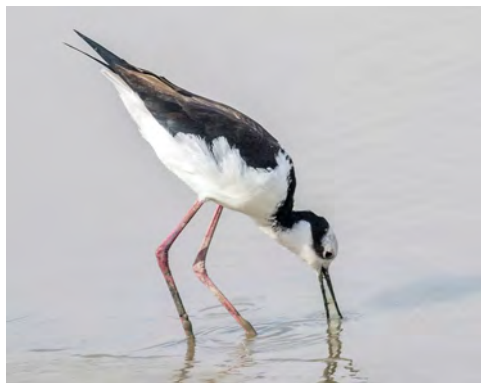
## Wader photo gallery — send us your favourite wader photos



Dunlin *Calidris alpina*  
- Alan S. Jack; UK



Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*  
- Dave Jackson; South Africa



White-backed Stilt *Himantopus melanurus*  
- Martin Eayrs; Argentina



Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*  
- Saswat Mishra; India



Shore Plover *Thinornis novaeseelandiae*  
- Elis Simpson; New Zealand



Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinerea*  
- Roger Smith / Kapiti Birders; NZ



Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*  
- Jaysukh Parekh; India



Sanderling *Calidris alba*  
- John Walker; USA



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**Waders need love too!**

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### Friends of Wader Quest:

Individual	£5.00
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Life	£200.00

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Club	£10.00
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## Wader Quest Trustee news.

Chair: Rick Simpson

Secretary: Rachel Walls

Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Elis Simpson

Board members: Allan Archer, Ian Dearing, Lee Dingain, Chris Lamsdell, Oliver Simms and Andrew Whitelee.

Last meeting: 28th January

Next Meeting: 10:30 29th April: venue tba.

AGM tba: — please advise if you wish to attend; waderquest@gmail.com

Email: [waderquest@gmail.com](mailto:waderquest@gmail.com)

Website: [www.waderquest.org](http://www.waderquest.org)

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*Wader Quest the newsletter*

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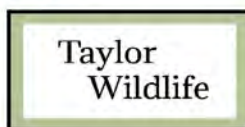
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