

Oriental Pratincole - History in the making (report prepared by Grace Maglio)

Prior to 2004, it was thought that the population of Oriental Pratincole in the East Asian Australasian Flyway was around 75,000 birds. In February 2004 during the annual NWA expedition, participants observed an unprecedented, extraordinary number of this species along Eighty Mile Beach and the surrounding plains and as result a formal count was organised. Through ground and aerial based counts, it was estimated that 2.88 million Oriental Pratincole inhabited the area that year. This was probably due to the plague proportions of grasshoppers occurring at the time and unfavourable weather conditions in other parts of northern Australia.



Photo by Bob Brinkman

Catching and banding has been regularly undertaken on Eighty Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay since 1981. Oriental Pratincole have been banded in the hope that some insight into their movements both in Australia and during their migrations and breeding may be revealed. Yet despite over 620 Oriental Pratincoles being marked in Australia over the years, there has only been one recorded resighting made by Chien-Hua CHEN from the Taiwan Wader Study Group, of a marked bird (plain yellow flag) breeding in Taiwan. The ecology and movements of this species are therefore still largely unknown. As a result of this knowledge gap, we have prioritised studying the movements of Oriental Pratincole using Solar 2-gram Platform Terminal Transmitters (PTTs) produced by Microwave Telemetry Inc.

AWSG Satellite Tracking Project 2019 UPDATES ~ #1

On the 8th February, we caught 14 Oriental Pratincole with a cannon net, on Eighty Mile Beach, 42 kilometres south of Anna Plains Station, (GPS coordinates Lat.-19.482245° Long.121.190040°), and five PTTs were fitted.

The Oriental Pratincoles were banded, with a metal ID band and a yellow engraved flag (ELF), morphometrics taken and the PTTs were fitted to the birds using a leg loop harness. The identification details and weights are shown in the table below.

PTT ID	Metal ID	ELF	Weight (grams)
83590	052 81470	SEA	108
83591	052 81473	SUN	107
83593	052 81476	SEP	110
83595	052 81478	SHE	119
83596	052 81480	SEC	109

The birds were released at the catch location.



Photo by Pat Macwhirter

Unexpected and exciting results quickly emerged.

Exploring the outback.

SEP – 8/2 to 1/3/19.

11/2 Roebuck Plains

12/2 south of the Gibb River Rd, 36km south west of Lennard River Gorge

17/2 50km south of Fitzroy crossing

18/2 30km south of Purnululu National Park (approximately 800km from the release location)

20/2 returning west, 70km south west of Tunnel Creek National park (north of the Great Northern Highway).

23/2 25km north of Noonkanbah Airport

28/2 26km north of Camballin Airport.



Over state border.

SUN – 8/2 to 1/3/19

At the time of this report, SUN was located 1200km from the release site and has flown approximately 2100km in total.

The route taken with approximate distances;

12/2 37km south west of Camballin Airport.

19/2 40km south of Lake Argyle

20/2 10km east of Newcastle Waters, Northern Territory (off the Stuart Highway)

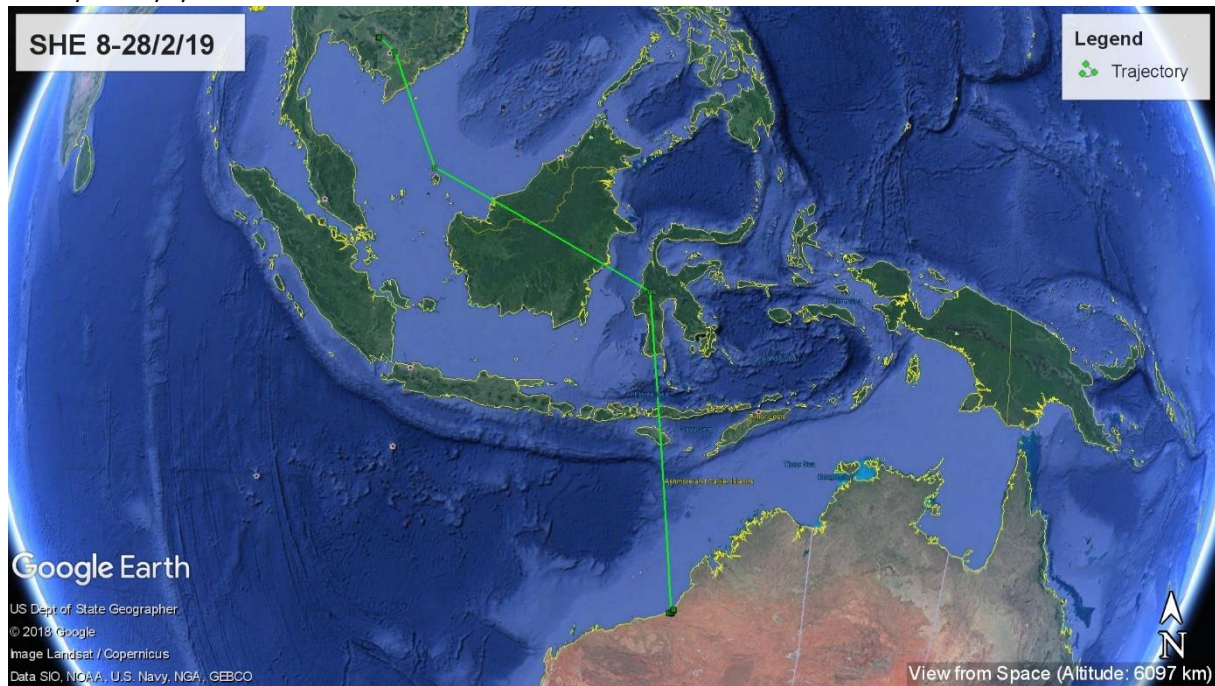
23/2 located 60km south west of Pine Creek, Northern Territory.

28/2 60km north west Legune Airport.



Our world traveller.

SHE 8/2 to 1/3/19

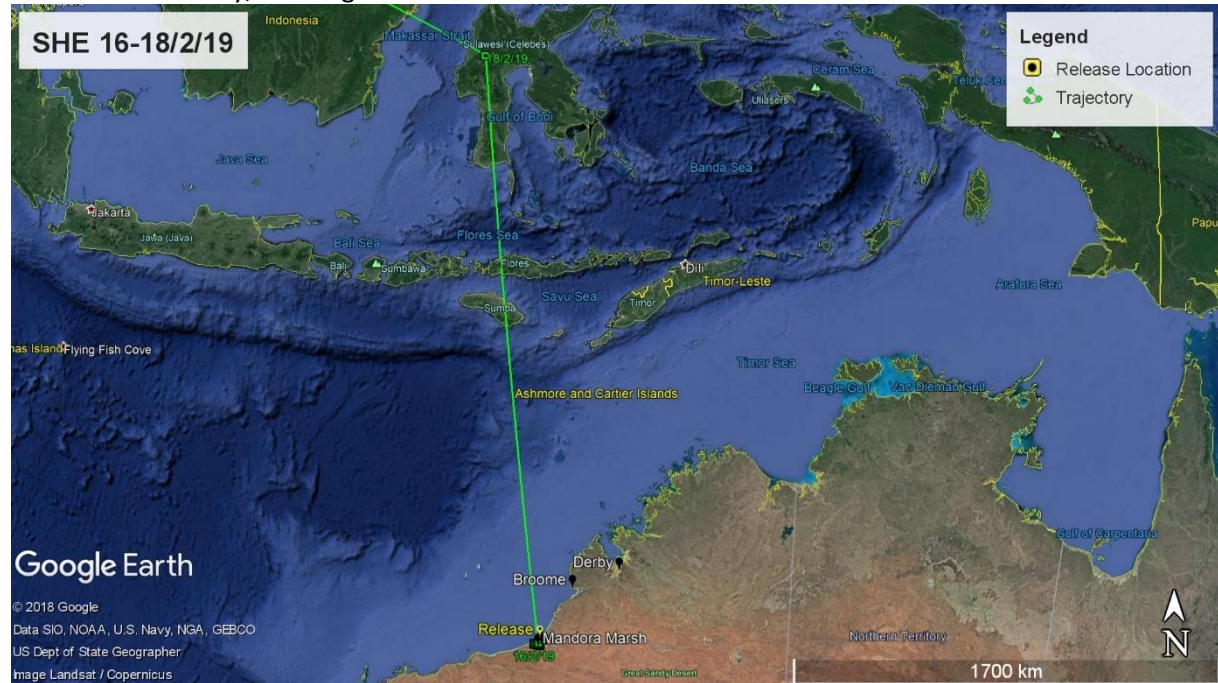


Between 8 and 16 February, this bird remained on the Plains within 25km of the release site. Around the 16th February SHE had left the mainland heading north over the sea from Eighty Mile Beach.

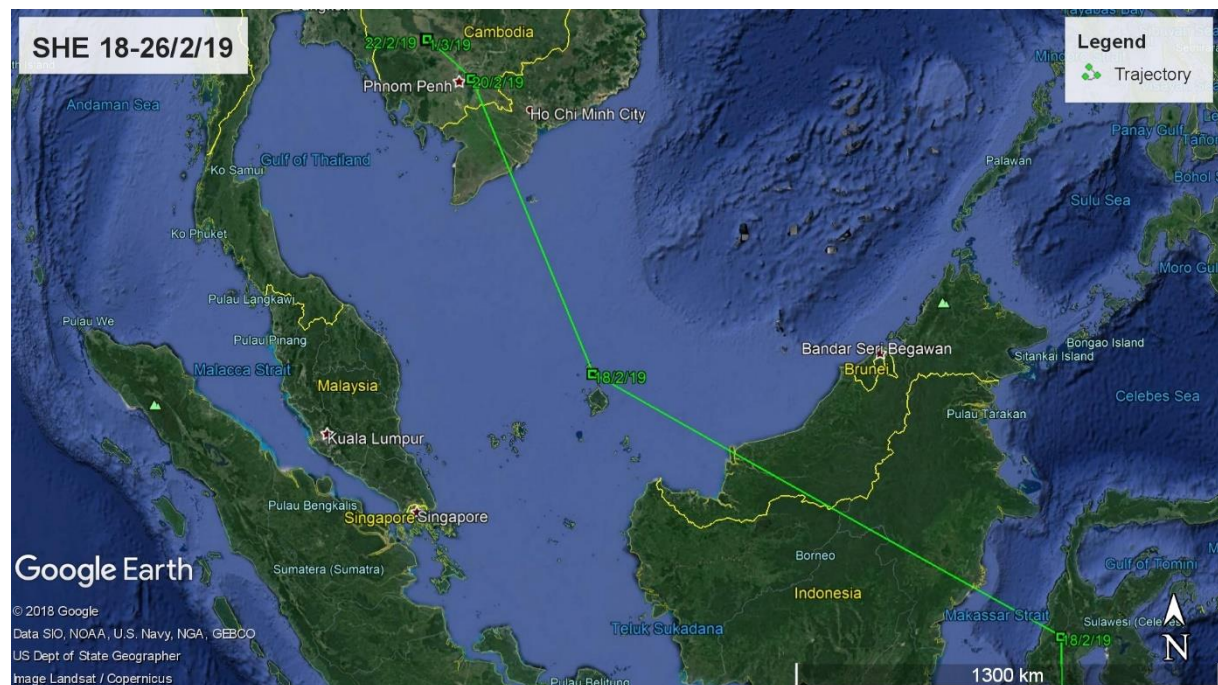
In the early hours of 18th February signals were picked up from Sulawesi (about 1900km from the release site), 3.5km north of Singkalong Province of South Sulawesi. Later the same day SHE was detected 21km south of Laut Island in the Riau Archipeligo, a further 1500km north west of its location earlier the same day.



SHE 16-18 February, heading north to Sulawesi.



On the 20th February and about 850km further north SHE was located 36km east of Phnom Penh, Cambodia. On the 22nd February SHE made a short hop to 20km north west of the town of Krakor, in the Pursat Province, SHE was still at this location on the 1 March.



SHE 23 – 27 February

SHE is now enjoying a lakeside view at the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia, on the floodplains of the Tonle Sap Lake. This is over 4000km from the release site. It will be interesting to see if she subsequently remains in this area to breed or moves on elsewhere in Southeast Asia.



Anna Plains and beyond with a quick flight over Roebuck Plains on its way to Indonesia

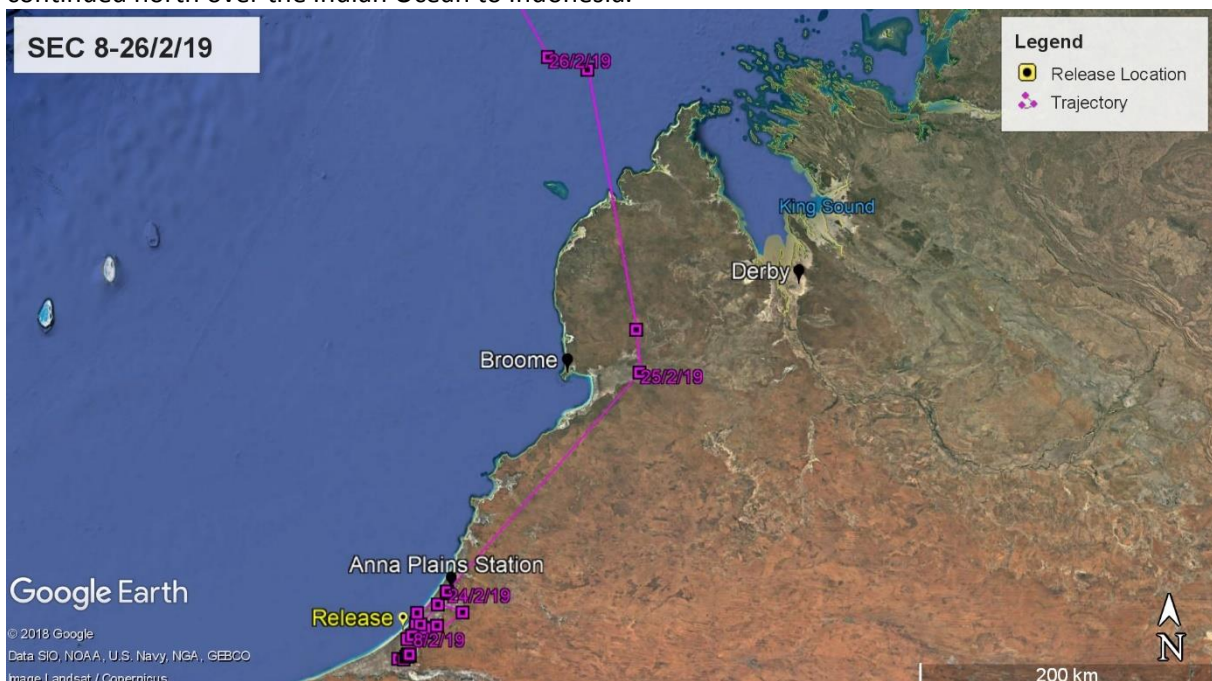
SEC 8/2 – 1/3/19

From the 8 to 23 February, SEC has remained within the boundaries of Anna Plains Station with location data showing the distances travelled:

20km south

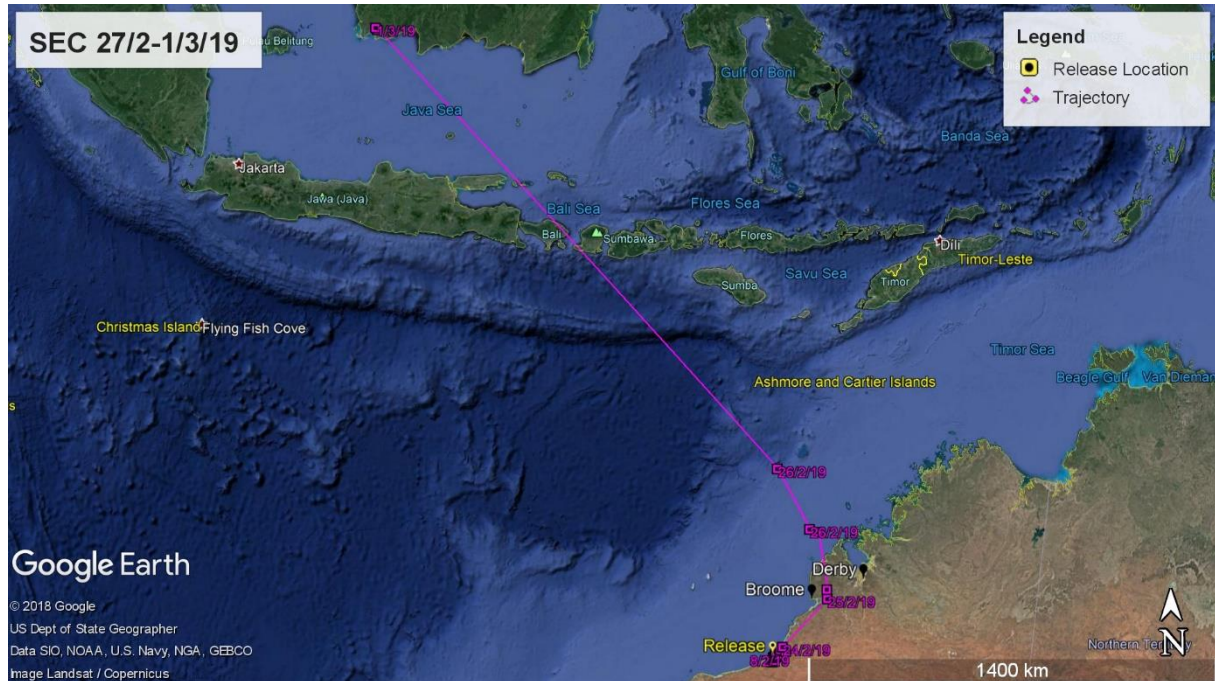
30km north and on one occasion venturing 40km north east (east of the Great Northern Highway).

In the early hours of 26 Feb SEC seems to have left Anna Plains, flown via Roebuck Plains and continued north over the Indian Ocean to Indonesia.



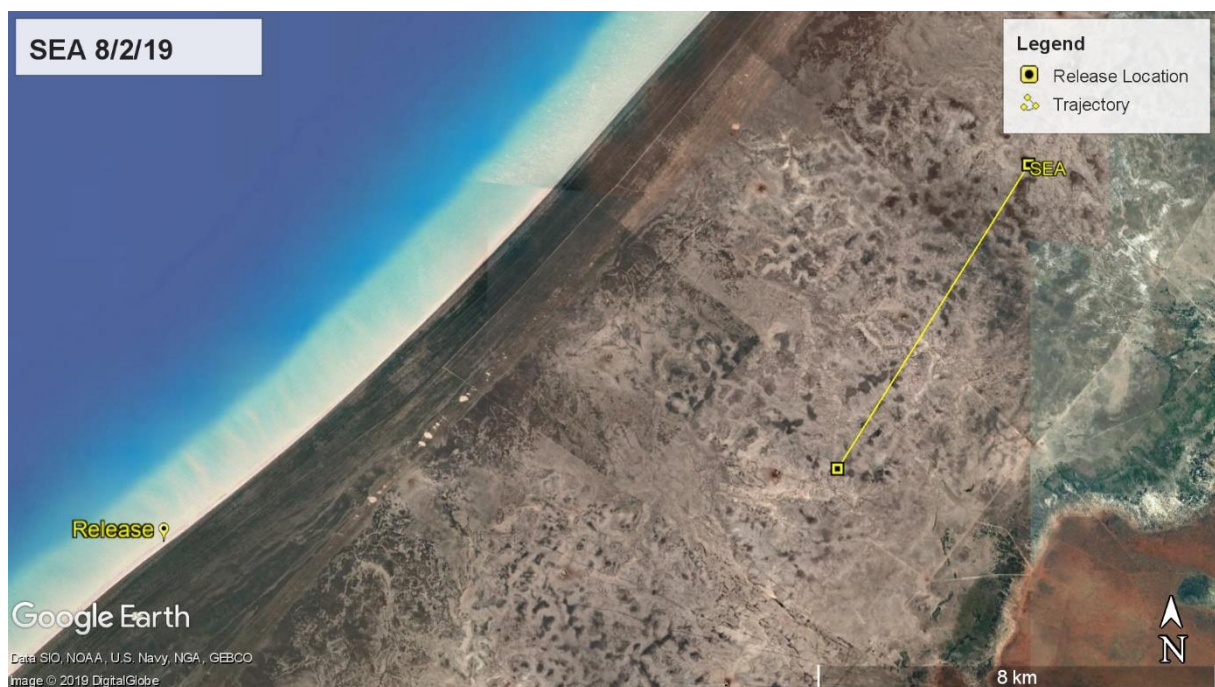
27/2 – 1/3/19

From the signals received, SEC has made its way north west, over Bali, and has landed in south west Indonesia, 5km north of Air Hitam Village. More recent signals, but of low accuracy suggests it may have resumed its northward movement towards Borneo.



Going nowhere

SEA 8/2/19 The transmitter on this bird ceased to transmit after the release on 8th February.



Little Curlew – Adding to our knowledge (report prepared by Inka Veltheim)

14/2/19 – 1/3/19

Little Curlew occur widely on grasslands across northern Australia, with their numbers and locations varying markedly from year to year, dependent on weather and feeding conditions. In February 2019 few were present in the Broome/Roeback Plains area, probably because January had been a relatively dry month.

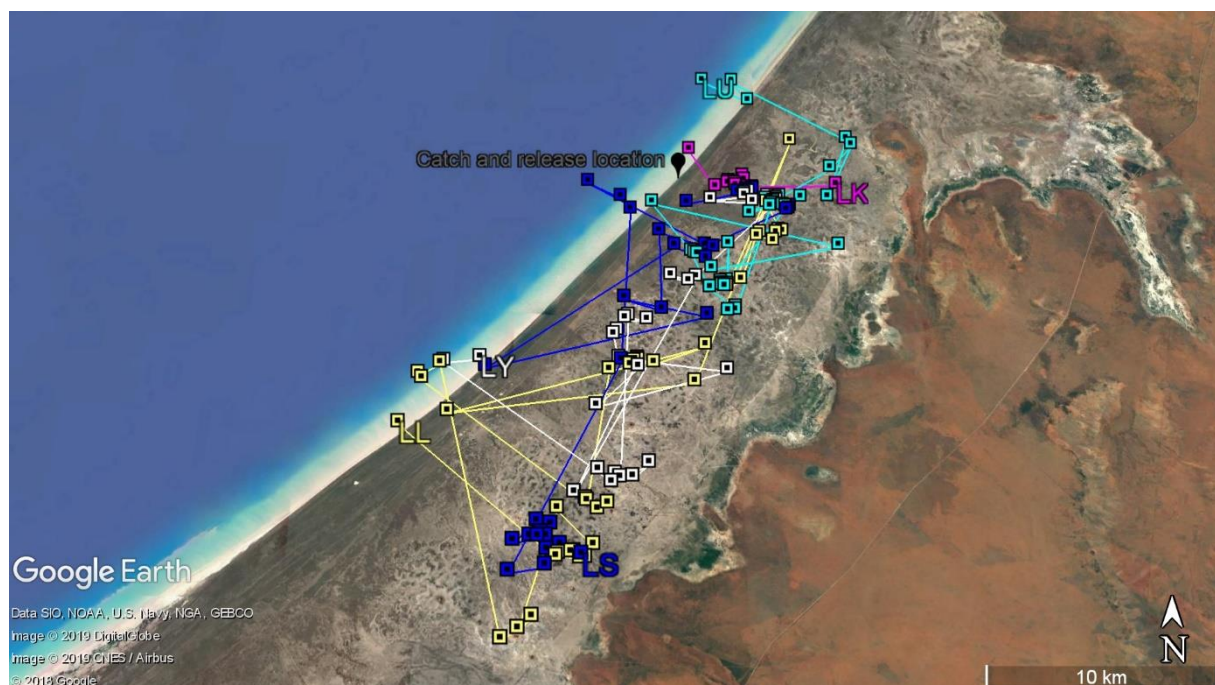
Photo by Pat Macwhirter



When we arrived in the Anna Plains area on the 3rd February few Little Curlew were present there or on the adjacent Eight Mile Beach. However, over the two-week period until we left on 16th February numbers of Little Curlew steadily built up with ten to fifteen thousand being eventually gathered together in the Plains/Beach area 20km south of Anna Plains Station (and probably many more elsewhere).

Fourteen Little Curlew were cannon netted as they roosted on the beach on the incoming tide on 14th February. Five were fitted with 5-gram Microwave Telemetry satellite transmitters. Since then all five Little Curlews have remained in the same general area of Anna Plains Station and 80 Mile Beach, some 20km south of the Anna Plains Station Homestead. All individuals are mostly feeding within the floodplain habitat, with occasional movements into the intertidal area. Variation in distances moved ranges between 18–30 km along the length of the beach and 12–15 km along the width of the beach between the edge of the floodplain and the intertidal area.

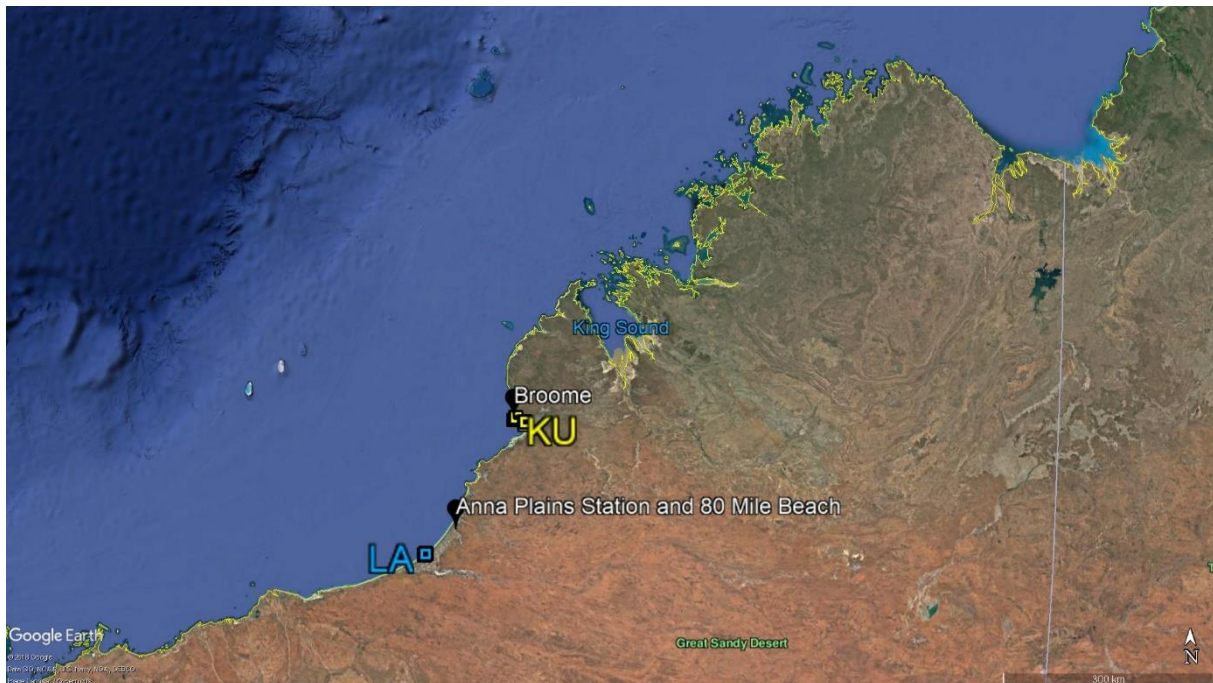
Little Curlew LK has not transmitted since 21st February and it appears we may have lost this transmitter or bird. Prior to transmissions ceasing, the movements were restricted to within 2 km for the length and 8 km for the width of the floodplain and intertidal area. The remaining four (LL, LU, LS, LY) last transmitted between 28th February and 3rd March.



Whimbrel – Still alive and transmitting

The two Whimbrel fitted with satellite transmitters in February 2017, LA at Eighty Mile Beach and KU at Roebuck Bay, Broome are both still transmitting. KU successfully migrated to the northern hemisphere breeding grounds in both 2017 and 2018. It is hoped that the transmitter will last sufficiently long to give us a third year of data on this bird. The second bird (LA) was in its second-year of life when fitted with transmitter in February 2017 and did not migrate back to the breeding ground in 2017 but subsequently migrated in 2018 without successfully breeding.

In February 2018 this is the bird which famously dodged the 'Anna Plains cyclone' by moving 145km south for a few days while the cyclone passed. It is to be hoped that the transmitter will last long enough to plot its track second time to the northern hemisphere this year.



Acknowledgements

The AWSG would like to thank Kate Gorringer-Smith and the Overwintering Project for their generous donation to cover some of the purchase cost of the satellite transmitters.

This project would not have been possible without the fieldwork efforts of the AWSG NWA2019 Expedition members

Considerable thanks are due to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions not only for providing two vehicles and trailers but also for financially assisting the participation of four Expedition members from the East Asian – Australasian Flyway.

We are again enormously grateful to the Stoate Family of Anna Plains Station for hosting the Expedition.

AWSG acknowledges the Karajarri and Nyangumarta people for permission to catch birds to be marked for this project on the shores of 80 Mile Beach, traditional lands of the Karajarri and Nyangumarta people.