

# Wader Olympics

Wader Quest Article number 23: 31/07/2021

Rick and Elis Simpson



Eurasian Golden Plover © Andy Walker/EcoBirding Tours; Grey Plover © Elis Simpson; American Golden Plover © Kevin J. Zimmer



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As we write this storm Evert is thundering its way across southern England and our ears echo with the sound of rain lashing against the window of the house. In some ways this is quite appropriate as the birds that mainly feature in the initial part of this article are the *Pluvialis* plovers, the tundra plovers. These birds have been traditionally connected to the coming of rain, the genus name *Pluvialis* coming from the Latin *pluvia* meaning rain.

Whilst Evert is thrashing our shores, on distant shores in the Pacific Ocean, athletes from across the world are kicking up a storm of their own as the delayed 2020 Olympics take place in Japan. Newscasters from countries across the world will be reporting back each day on their national team's successes and failures and the tally of accolades will be proudly (it is to be hoped) totted up. These accolades are the traditional Gold, Silver and Bronze medals that we bestow upon the best athlete's we can produce stretching the abilities of the human body to ever greater excesses.

This got us to wondering what events a team of waders may excel at if there were an Wader Olympics.

Firstly we considered what the accolades to be conferred on the elites would be. Naturally they would need to be gold silver and bronze, and so we thought about birds with those adjectives in their name.



We obviously immediately thought of Golden Plover, and specifically the European Golden Plover . So first prize would be the Golden Plover medallion, that was easy.

Silver appears in a number of bird names; Silver Gull; Silver Pheasant; Silvereye; Silver-eared Mesia for example, but a wader was not obvious. But you know us by now, we love to delve into the obscure, and doing so we found that an old name for the Grey or Black-bellied Plover is Silver Plover and, as we do like a thread in our articles we decided that this would be the runner-up accolade, the Silver Plover medallion. Actually this is not as obscure as it might seem



Eurasian Golden Plover © Andy Walker/EcoBirding Tours



at first glance, the current name for this species in Dutch is *Zilverplevier*, the French version is *Pluvier argenté*, the Romanian name is *Ploier argintiu* and perhaps our favourite is the Bulgarian *Сребриста булка* which charmingly means silver bride.

So that brings us to the third placed finisher in each discipline, the Bronze medallion. Of course there are birds with bronze in their name, mostly bronze-winged something or other and that includes two waders; Bronze-winged Jacana and Bronze-winged Courser. However, as stated, we are definitely ones for themes, so how could we make this Bronze medallion associated to the *pluvialis* plovers? Well, once again we turn to our friends across the English Channel, or as they prefer to call it, *La Manche*, the French. Lo and behold, the French name for the American Golden Plover is... drum roll... *Pluvier Bronzé*. Now, we have to come clean here as this is a little bit of a stretch. That acute accent over the final e changed the meaning of the word from bronze, without an accent, to bronzed, that is to say tanned, with it, but we are comfortable with stretching a point to fit our purposes now



Grey Plover © Elis Simpson



American Golden Plover © Kevin J. Zimmer



The opening ceremony would be performed by the Massed Inspirations of the Snettisham Formation Flying Team © Elis Simpson



and then so it stands in our book. Therefore the third place accolade is the Bronze Plover medallion. We have always thought that the three birds should be known by these names in English anyway, the slight problem being that this now leaves out the only remaining *Pluvialis* plover, the Pacific Golden Plover. However, with our penchant for dwelling in nostalgia, in the past, where we find ourselves more comfortable and happy, distanced from this new and confusing world we find ourselves in now, the American and Pacific Golden Plovers were once considered subspecies of the species then known as Lesser Golden Plover, so we will harp back to those halcyon days and close this rather spurious thread.

If therefore the waders were to get together for the Wader Olympics, how would the medallions be shared and what disciplines would form the games?

We humans use boats of various shapes and sizes to get across water, so the equivalent may be a rafting event, where surely the jacanas would be great contenders for all three medallions, there's not much that can walk over flimsy lily leaves and not get wet, although Long-toed Lapwings also do a fair job, but not with quite the same pernach as the jacanas it has to be said.



Comb-crested Jacana © Elis Simpson



African Jacana © Elis Simpson



Wattled Jacana © Elis Simpson

Whilst on the water sports, there must be a swimming award and, although many species of wader can, and do, swim, particularly the avocets, the three accolades in this case must all go to the phalaropes and we would place the Grey with the Gold medallion as they are the most truly pelagic of the three, the Red-necked with Silver medallion and Wilson's, the least pelagic, and a bird often seen walking rather than swimming even away from its breeding grounds, with the Bronze medallion.



Grey Phalarope © Tone & Stein Ø Nilsen



Red-necked Phalarope © Tone & Stein Ø Nilsen



Wilson's Phalarope © Elis Simpson

Diving would be included, with Common Sandpiper being a real contender as they can dive into the water and remain submerged if an avian predator threatens. This is one of the reasons they fly so low and close to the water with shallow wingbeats. The jacanas too have this ability, even when young.



Common Sandpiper © Elis Simpson



Bronze-winged Jacana © Sunhil Singhal



Lesser Jacana © Derek Keats

Track events like sprinting would be covered in our team perhaps by the Sanderling, and any one of the coursers along with perhaps the plovers. The latter two though do have a propensity to run very fast and then stop dead for a bit to look around, which might prove a bit of a hindrance in a race for the finish line. The Sanderling however just doesn't seem to tire when it is on the move, so would probably rock in



in first place for the Gold medallion.



Sanderling © Elis Simpson



Cream-coloured Courser © Elis Simpson



Malaysian Plover © Elis Simpson

There would be one clear winner in the Migration Marathon. If you consider non-stop flights, there are no waders that can beat the Bar-tailed Godwit. If you consider distances travelled on migration with stops, the Bar-tailed Godwit would still be on top, with Red Knot snapping at their heels and also in our leaders would be Hudsonian Godwit.



Bar-tailed Godwit © Elis Simpson



Red Knot © Elis Simpson



Hudsonian Godwit © Elis Simpson

In the high jump our champions may include Great Snipe, Pectoral Sandpiper and Buff-breasted Sandpiper, all of which jump as part of their display.



Great Snipe — Åke Lindström

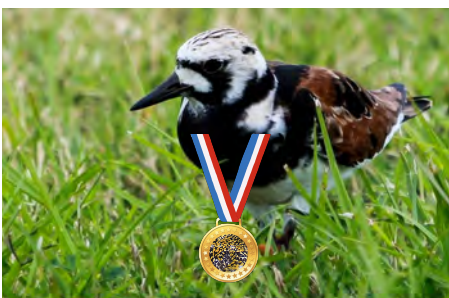


Pectoral Sandpiper © Elis Simpson



Buff-breasted Sandpiper © Elis Simpson

A power sport is weightlifting, and a couple of contenders spring to mind here. Ruddy Turnstones can shift some surprisingly large objects by getting their entire body behind the shove. They have also been known to team up to shift particularly large items, but weightlifting is not designed as a team sport, so probably not in the spirit of the Olympics. Another potential in this category, although this is a contentious entry as there is no proof that it actually happens, is the Eurasian Woodcock which some observers swear they have seen carrying their young in flight. Jacanas of course often do walk carrying their young under their wings, the entire brood at once sometimes, with specially adapted wing bones to aid them.



Ruddy Turnstone © Elis Simpson



Eurasian Woodcock © Julian Bhalerao



Northern Jacana © Juan Zamora



As far as wader pugilists go, the Ruff is a real contender, and some Pied Avocets can get pretty feisty as well, along with the ,shanks,, which would definitely find their way into the podium.



Ruffs — Elis Simpson



Pied Avocets© Elis Simpson



Common Redshank © Elis Simpson

Another form of combat is fencing, the long bills of some waders lending themselves very much to this activity. When Black-tailed Godwits or even dowitchers get to jostling, the thrusting and parrying is a wonder to witness. It is sometimes a wonder that they do not do each other a serious injury, poking out and eye or worse.



Black-tailed Godwit © Elis Simpson



Short-billed Dowitcher © Elis Simpson



Lesser Yellowlegs © Elis Simpson

The art of gymnastics is to look elegant and contorted at the same time. It is a specialist discipline in which waders excel. They are naturally curvaceous and sleek, for the most part, and with a variety of balancing acts are able to scratch and preen every part of their body, despite having such disproportionately enormous bills in many cases.



Puna Plover © Elis Simpson



Great Thick-knee © Elis Simpson



Grey Plover © Elis Simpson

For terrestrial birds, balancing on the high beam may seem like an unexpected category to enter, but think of some of the *Tringa* sandpipers; Nordmann's Greenshank builds a nest in trees, Solitary and Green Sandpipers nest in disused nests of other arboreal species and Willets Common Redshanks, Lesser Yellowlegs and others often sit atop posts, trees and fences to guard their territory or to draw attention to themselves when seeking a mate.



Nordmann's Greenshank © Elis Simpson



Willet © Konstantin Maslovsky



Lesser Yellowlegs © Walter Cejas

**Join us for our Wader Watching Weekend to  
celebrate the conservation of waders or  
shorebirds around the world.**

**WCWW8  
6th—7th Nov  
2021**

**For more details email**

**[wcww@waderquest.net](mailto:wcww@waderquest.net)**



**Why not join in? It's simple to take part, no registration, no counting (unless you wish to).**

- **Simply go out and look for waders or shorebirds (suborder Charadrii) wherever you happen to be.**
- **Tell us what you saw, where and with whom you saw it, (send us photos if you have them) via email: [wcww@waderquest.net](mailto:wcww@waderquest.net)**
- **We will then prepare a newsletter special with the list of species seen, and where, plus a roll of honour of all those who took part.**

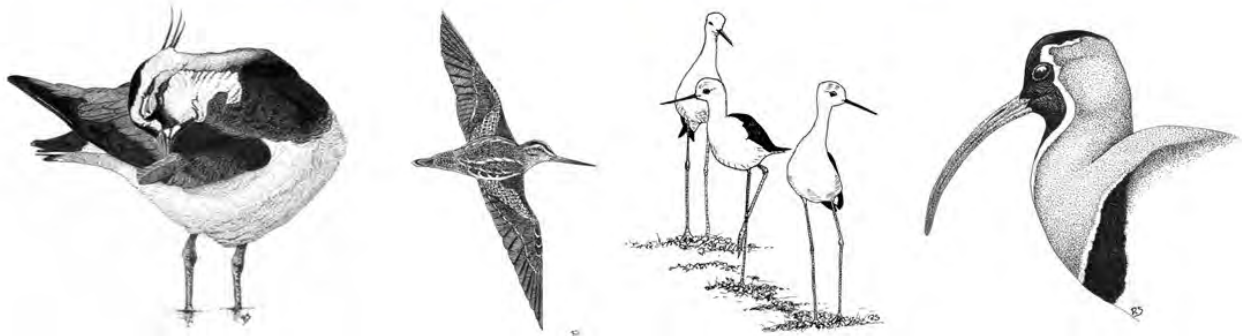
**If you would like to help organise and develop this event on an International, national, regional or local scale, then please get in touch.**

**[wcww@waderquest.net](mailto:wcww@waderquest.net)**



# New Wader Quest book - *A Quest for Waders* by Rick and Elis Simpson

A new book from Wader Quest Publishing by Rick and Elis Simpson. This book chronicles the journeys they made to see waders around the world, and the parallel journey of Wader Quest from fundraiser to Registered Charity - all proceeds go to Wader Quest.



## Foreword by Dominic Couzens

*'This is a cracking read whether you're a waderphile or not. Ticking, dipping, ducking, diving, it's all here as Rick and Elis go through their version of a mid-life crisis to set up Wader Quest. A must-read for all birders.'*

- Iolo Williams: Naturalist and T. V. presenter.

*'Rick and Elis' enthusiasm nipples through this book. what they have achieved, bringing waders to the forefront of peoples minds alongside their conservation is second to none. A brilliant read which, like their beloved waders, will have you probing deeper into this amazing family.'*

- Tim Appleton MBE: Founder of Birdfair Rutland Water and Creator of Rutland Water Nature Reserve.

*'I was hooked by the prologue. The tragedy of extinction was brought home to me on seeing, in Morocco in 1990, three of the last few slender-billed curlews to exist. Thanks to the commitment of conservation organisations from around the world and support of people like Rick and Elis the spoon-billed sandpiper has a fighting chance of making it.'*

- Debbie Pain: Conservationist and scientist.

*'Waders are one of the most threatened groups of birds, with several species on the brink of extinction and many more suffering serious declines. This makes Rick and Elis Simpson's Wader Quest - a charity dedicated to protecting waders and highlighting their plight - important and necessary. This fascinating book tells the story of how the organisation grew from their quest to see all the world's waders, before it was too late.'*

- Rebecca Armstrong: Editor of Birdwatch magazine.

orders - [sales@waderquest.net](mailto:sales@waderquest.net)



*'Breathtakingly excellent - like a birding Michael Palin. The photographs and drawings are fantastic, and the text is fast-moving, endlessly entertaining and amusing.'* - Jim Wright.

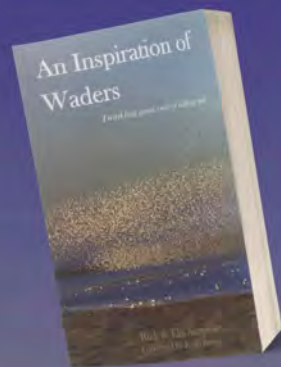
*'This book is all of the things that the reviews on the back cover [above], and the excellent Foreword by Dominic Couzens, promise.'* - Mike and Rose Clear.



# An Inspiration of Waders

A Wader Quest Publishing book  
by Rick and Elis Simpson

## An Inspiration of Waders



*Twinkling gems over a falling tide*

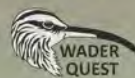
The foreword is by Keith Betton



Discover our cultural connection to  
waders and how they have inspired us.



BY RICK AND ELIS SIMPSON



Find out how waders have inspired careers,  
myths, legends, art, music, poetry, theatre, books,  
discovery and much more besides.



WADER QUEST PUBLISHING

All profits will go to Wader Quest