

There is nothing like a rainy day to catch up on emails, enter data, sort photos and to write an update. Despite the rain we spent almost 6 hours in the field this morning although as far as scanning is concerned it was unproductive. Visibility was poor and the birds were late coming off the roost which is understandable as we stood getting soaking wet we thought they had the right idea! Having said that, the trip was well worth it for the passerine migration alone but more on that later...

We actually wrote the above and most of this update a while ago but we have since been busy and it has taken a while to finish this and send it out. However, with the exception of the last couple of days, cloudy, foggy and dull conditions have been a continuing theme of the last week. Scanning has been tough and observations have been down despite the good tides.

The period leading into mid-May has traditionally been the peak in Red Knot numbers although this year the bang was more of a fizzle as the mudflats seemed emptier than we remember from previous years. There were still decent numbers although not the 60 000+ that was expected. Searching the salt pans and surrounding areas produced small feeding groups of mixed migrant shorebirds here and there but the big numbers were still unaccounted for. Ratios of *rogersi* and *piersmai* subspecies evened out to around 50-50 and records of birds marked in NWA increased. Some birds have been looking very fat recently so perhaps early arriving birds are starting to depart already? Presumably the *rogersi* birds heading north to Chukotka. Great Knot numbers continued to decline with just under 1500 still present feeding mostly at Zuidong but roosting at Nanpu. However there has been a spike in numbers again with up to 3000 now present and new Engraved Leg Flags (ELF) being recorded. The highest single count of Nordmann's Greenshank was 10 but with birds scattered and mobile it is hard to say exactly how many there are here. Tens of thousands of Curlew Sandpiper now frequent the salt pans replacing the Marsh Sandpipers which have reduced to just a few scattered individuals, the rest having continued their journey north to the breeding grounds.

Scanning continues unabated come rain or shine, tide high or low, Knot or not. Old friends continue to be seen with the Thai Godwits, 'JE' the Victorian ELF Godwit and the Japanese Grey Plover all occasionally recorded. A Ruddy Turnstone with an ELF flag from Taiwan was the first bird from there recorded here in 4 years of scanning. It was initially seen in the afternoon in a Saltpan near the Prison but the following morning it was one of the first birds onto the mud as the tide receded. This shows how some birds wander around the area although this movement of just over 10km is nothing for a bird which can easily fly 1000s! We have collected more colour-band sightings, particularly from our primary target, Red Knot, although with the overall poor weather conditions our totals have suffered a little. We have now seen Red Knots from 14 different banding regions with birds from Thailand, Queensland, Hong Kong and Sumatra all recorded recently.



Left: An Orange leg flag shows this Red-necked Stint was caught in Victoria, Australia. Right: Blue over yellow Flags are birds from Bohai Bay although the fact that the lower flag on this Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is cut off at an angle indicate that this individual was caught at a different site in the south of the bay (Adrian Boyle)

With all the attention the Bohai study site has been getting this season, from various visitors from varied organisations, hopes are high of a permanent solution to the threat of the site becoming another industrial zone. However, exploration of a former favourite scanning area at the east-end of Zuidong brought home the reality of how quickly and radically the coastline can be changed. In previous years we have recorded thousands of birds and many flags on the Zuidong mudflats but over just a few years most of the mudflats have gone, a 6-lane highway has been built and preparation of the area for construction is well underway. Zuidong, the small fishing village, is being systematically destroyed as a series of apartment blocks take shape behind. As things stand at the moment it seems this is the destiny of the rest of the coastline in this area. So let's hope that the super-biodiverse mudflats at Nanpu can escape that fate. A pay dispute has temporarily halted work at Beipu and all the mud-pumping boats, pipes, trucks, cranes and workmen of last year have gone. However with much of the ground work done plans are highly likely to go ahead in the future. With conflicting rumours among the locals it is hard to be sure what will happen.



5 Years at Zuidong ... Top Left: 2007, Nicky introduces some fishermen to the shorebirds. Top Right: 2010, The walls are built and the pipes and mud pumping boats arrive. Middle Left: 2012, Ground work begins. Middle Right: 2012, Zuidong village is reduced to rubble. Bottom: 2012, a brand new 6-lane highway ends abruptly in the in the desert-like waste ground (*Chris Hassel & Matt Slaymaker*). With the exception of the Zuidong village photo, all these were taken within a few hundred metres of each other!

A rather sad and dramatic event occurred last week out on the mudflats when a local man died while on the mud during the night at Nanpu. Although we don't know the full circumstances surrounding the event, Ginny was surprisingly calm a couple of days later when she took a few steps off the sea wall at Beipu, promptly sunk to her waist and became completely stuck! Luckily the tide was still dropping so there was plenty of time to take photographs before launching a rescue attempt. It was Ady who braved the perilous mud although if it wasn't for a passer-by with a plank of wood she could still be there now. While they were messing around Chris and Matt were on hand to do some work and scored 20 colour-bands on the mud nearby.



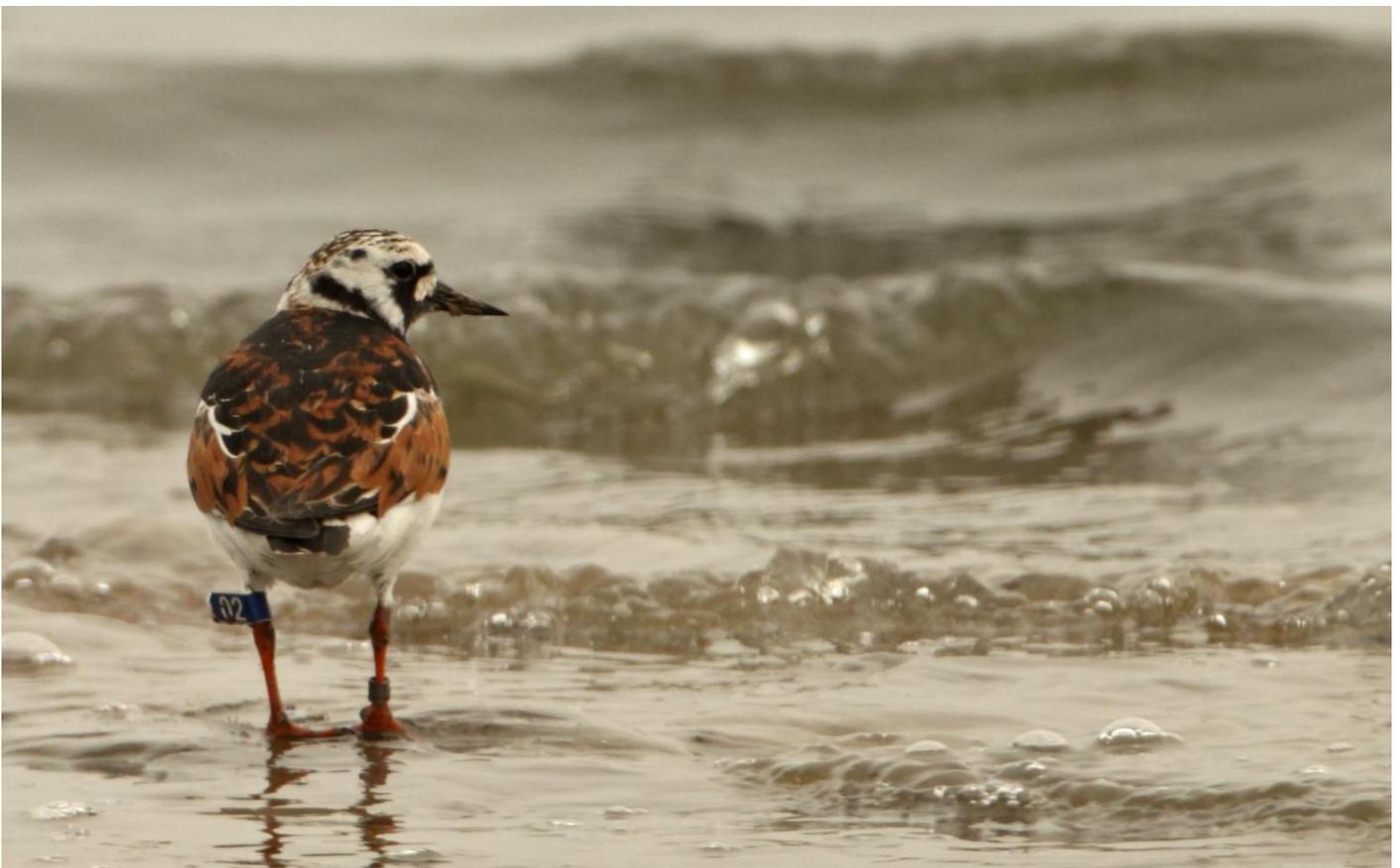
A well and truly stuck Ginny ... still smiling! (*Adrian Boyle*)

A southerly airflow and good weather to the south followed by overnight rain over the bay is perfect for stopping migrating passerines in their tracks. This week these conditions produced a small fall along the scrubby seawall at Nanpu. We only covered a small section of the area but numbers seen and heard overhead suggested we were only scratching the surface. Along a 1km stretch containing little more than some half grown reeds, some dead grass and a bush we recorded over 30 migrant species. These included 50+ Dusky, 30+ Yellow-browed Warblers, over 150 Yellow Wagtails, numerous Siberian Rubythroat, Bluethroat, Flycatchers, Pipits and Buntings and several unusual species such as Forest Wagtail and Hair-crested Drongo. The park that evening produced Chinese Sparrowhawk, Grey Nightjar and Chinese Grosbeak among the commoner migrants.

Now we are back to clear skies and early morning incoming tides we are hoping for a flood of new colour-band sightings. We have two weeks left and more Broome birds are on the way so it's time to put in the hours and make up for those lost foggy days.



Two north-west Australian colour banded Red Knots roosting in the saltpans. The bird on the left, known as 3LLRY, was originally caught at 80 mile beach on the 23rd Feb 2011. It was seen briefly in the bay in April and then twice here in Bohai during May. It was back at 80 mile beach in December and has been seen 3 times here in Bohai during early May. The bird on the right, 3LRYL, was banded just 3 days later, again at 80 mile beach. Unlike the other bird it has not been seen again in Australia but has been recorded in 2011 and 2012 here in Bohai Bay. (*Adrian Boyle*)



Ruddy Turnstone, individually identifiable as '02', was banded in Taiwan although we are still waiting to find out exactly where and when (*Adrian Boyle*)



Above: A Little Tern fishing (*Adrian Boyle*)



Above: Cuckoo species ... *cuculus* Cuckoos are incredibly difficult to identify and in many cases it is not possible on sight alone. This bird was in the Town Park and, although the whitish undertail and thinly barred underparts suggest Common Cuckoo rather than Oriental, we would have to hear it singing to be sure (*Adrian Boyle*)

Ginny Chan is pictured a few pages back playing in the mud, here is the rest of the 2012 Bohai Team ...



Above: The boys ... left to right, Ady, Chris and Matt (*Ginny Chan*)

Below left: Yang Hongyan, AKA Nicky, who has almost finished her PhD on the site. Although not part of the scanning team our visits would be so much harder without the ever-helpful Nicky (*Adrian Boyle*)

Below right: Our driver, Zhao, doesn't look this happy when we want to leave at 5am (*Ginny Chan*)



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