

EAST GREENLAND WADERS 1977

by Jeremy J. D. Greenwood.

As a result of work done on the Dundee University N.E. Greenland Expedition 1972 and on the Joint Biological Expedition to N.E. Greenland 1974, we have some sound information on the waders of those areas of north-east Greenland within 100km of the outer coast. Much less is known of the inner fjord region, since this is accessible only during the winter, by sledge, or during August, by small boat. In 1977 a six-man team from Dundee University, including D.J. Fletcher and I as biologists, spent August in the inner parts of the Kong Oscars Fjord/Kaiser Franz Joseph Fjord complex, between about 72° 50' and 73° 50' N.

The recently-published report of the 1974 expedition contains considerable information on the habitats and general ecology of the outer fjord region, as well as on the waders. The inner fjords turned out to be quite different. In general, the mountains are higher and steeper, plunging straight into the fjords, and there is very little flat ground. The climate is much drier. Tarns and lakes are very infrequent and boggy ground not common. The vegetation is generally sparse, mostly made up of sparse heaths of sedges and grasses.

This would not seem to add up to much in the way of wader habitat. First impressions turned out to be right. Only Ringed Plovers were widespread and even these were less common than in the outer fjords. Most were living close to the fjord shores, though we saw a few inland, on the gravelly flood-plains of rivers in broad valleys. We ringed only 5 chicks but one has already been controlled: ringed at Mestersvig on 1st August, weight 20.2gm, and controlled at Fawley (Hants) England on 25th September, weight 65gm, wing 132mm.

Turnstones were seen in many places but all gave the impression of being passage birds, except those near Mestersvig, which is the outer fjord region. There they were abundant, compared with 1974 and other recent years and appear to have bred, consistent with the early clearance of the snow in 1977 (see Green, Greenwood and Lloyd 1977). Sanderlings also seem to have bred at Mestersvig in larger numbers than in 1974 and we saw the usual good numbers of small parties on passage there in late August and early September. However, we saw none but a single "possible" in the inner fjords.

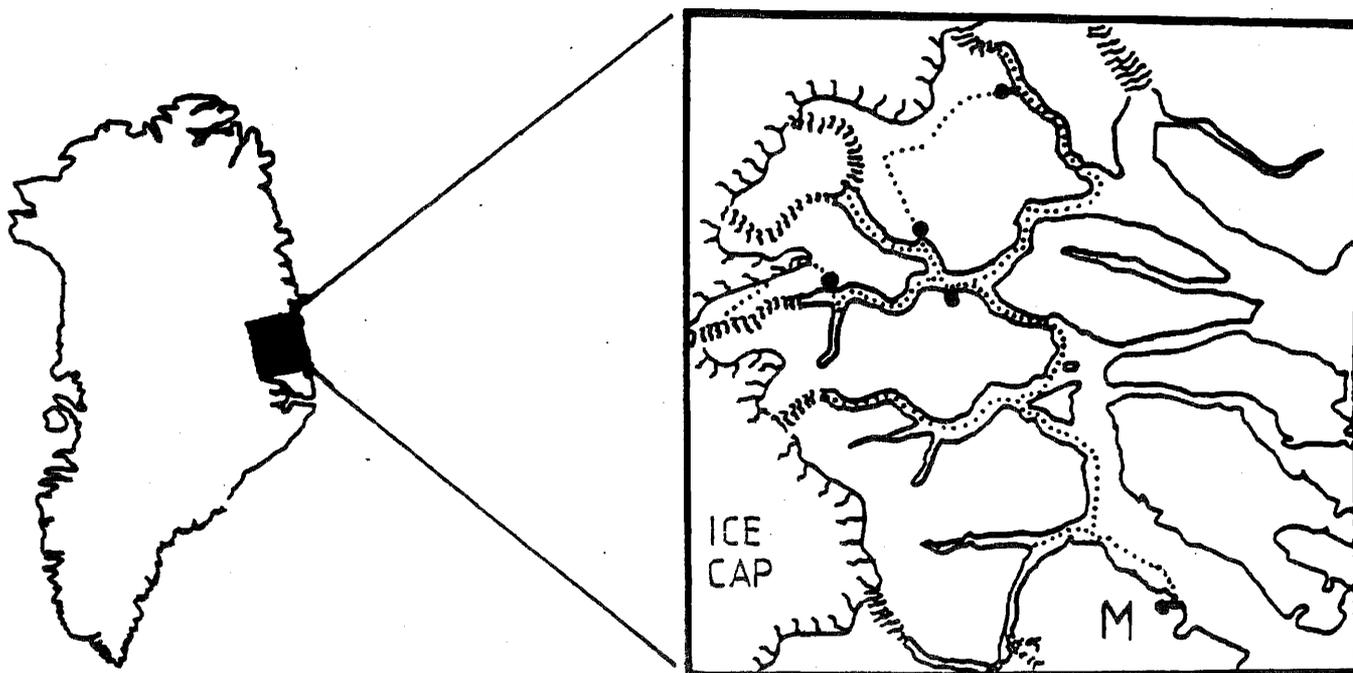
Dunlins were breeding in small numbers in the inner fjords. We caught a female on 5th August on Ella Ø, dropping a mist-net on her from a distance of half a metre, as she came to brood her 4 chicks (6.5 - 7.3gm - about 2 days old) that we had rounded up. We caught a 24.5gm chick on a river delta on 9th August and one almost able to fly by a lake far inland (35km from the fjord) on 12th August.

We saw two other species on passage only - a pair of Rednecked Phalaropes at Ella Ø on 5th August and a single Knot only 40km north-west of Mestersvig on 30th August. The apparent absence of Knots from the inner fjords might be a result of them having bred and moved out completely. However, one would have expected to see a few stragglers if the population was at all high.

It seems, therefore, that if one wishes to speculate about areas that hold large numbers of high arctic waders, one must exclude the inner fjord region from our thoughts. But there are some interesting-looking areas further north on the coast.....

Reference

Green, G.H., Greenwood, J.J.D. and Lloyd, C.S. 1977. The influence of snow conditions on the date of breeding in N.E.Greenland. J.Zool.London.183:311-32



Maps indicating where the expedition worked. In the larger map large dots indicate base camps (M = Mestersvig), dotted lines major journeys, rows of irregular lines major glaciers. The main ice-cap is indicated but subsidiary ones are not. The scale is approximately 1 : 2750000.

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