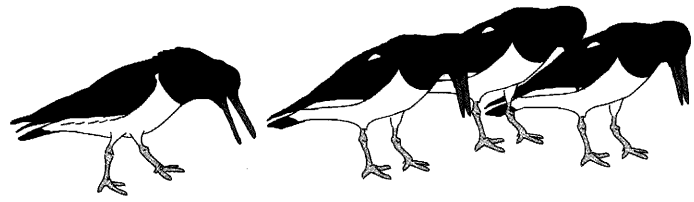
NOTES & *NEWS*



Notes & *News* is compiled by Silke Nebel to whom contributions should be sent.
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PROJECT NEWS

Report on the first AFRING Waterbird Ringing Course, Watamu, Kenya

The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement provided funding to establish AFRING (African Waterbird Ringing Scheme). Spearheaded by the Avian Demography Unit, the initial focus of the five-year project will be to kick-start waterbird ringing in Africa with the goal to sustain and coordinate waterbird ringing programmes in the long-term. A large component of this includes training waterbird ringers throughout Africa and in September 2004 the first AFRING waterbird training course was held in East Africa.

Eight delegates from four African countries participated in this first training course which was held on the central Kenyan coast. The course focussed on East Africa, as the ringing scheme in the region is relatively well established, providing a useful platform from which to launch waterbird ringing initiatives in Africa. The course involved both theoretical and practical sessions, with emphasis being placed on practical training. Lectures and discussions on the ethics and responsibilities of being a ringer, catching techniques, mapping, data recording and the use of data took up much of the theoretical component. Most of the practical sessions took place in the field and consisted mainly of mistnetting at two wetland sites. The trainees were shown how to extract birds from nets and how to ring, measure, age and record moult correctly. Passerine mistnetting was also carried out around the field study centre to provide delegates with extra opportunities in handling birds and practising ringing, recording biometrics and moult.

The week ended with a goat barbeque – a traditional celebration meal in Kenya – and the handing out of attendance certificates to all the delegates. Overall, the course was a great success and we hope that this will be the start of many more AFRING waterbird ringing courses and so fill the gaps that lie within waterbird ringing programmes and activities in Africa. The next course is planned for Ghana in 2005, which will be hosted by the Ghana Ringing Scheme and the Centre for African Wetlands. This will have a West African focus, but will include some representation from East Africa.

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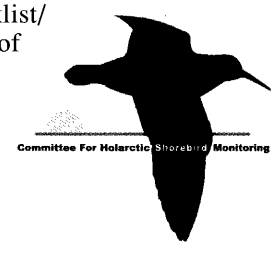
Committee for Holarctic Shorebird Monitoring (CHASM)

The Committee for Holarctic Shorebird Monitoring (CHASM) was created during the Pan-Arctic Shorebird/Wader Monitoring and Research Workshop held in Karrebäksminde, Denmark from 3–6 December 2003 (see conclusions published in *Wader Study Group Bull.* 103: 2–5). CHASM was formed as the essential first step for guiding the implementation of an effective circumpolar program for monitoring Arctic-nesting shorebirds. CHASM is a "project" within the International Wader Study Group and is one of seven networks within the Circumpolar Flora and Fauna's Circumpolar Biodiversity Monitoring Program. The vision of CHASM is to coordinate and integrate monitoring of Arctic-nesting shorebirds at a global scale by collecting and synthesizing information on the population status and trends of all populations of Arctic-nesting shorebirds at all stages of their life-cycles, and to make that information available in a timely manner to policy-makers, managers, the scientific community, educators, and the general public.

Since the creation of CHASM, efforts have been underway to first advertise the creation and goals of the group. Rick Lanctot, Co-chairmen of the group with Mikhail Soloviev, gave such a presentation at the *Waterbirds Around the World* conference in Edinburgh in April 2004. CHASM members also held a formal meeting in Edinburgh to discuss where we should go from here. It was decided to hold a two-day workshop during the International Wader Study Group conference to be held in Papenburg, Germany, in November 2004.

The workshops proved to be a big success. Both days had high attendance and led to lengthy discussions surrounding how to improve and coordinate existing programs. The first day of the workshop focused on monitoring shorebirds IN their arctic habitats, including measuring population and demographic parameters of shorebirds, habitat use, prey and predator abundances, and environmental factors. The morning session included a number of speakers who described the geographic and logistical constraints faced by arctic shorebird biologists around the world, and methods for conducting intensive demographic/ecological studies and less intensive checklist/density studies. The remainder of the day was spent on developing protocols and standardizing parameters to be recorded in arctic field situations. These protocols are scheduled for publication in



the April 2005 issue of the *Wader Study Group Bulletin*. The second day of the workshop focused on methods for monitoring recruitment and survival of waders OUTSIDE the breeding season. The morning session featured a number of speakers who discussed monitoring recruitment at stopover and flyway termini. These presentations were followed by a discussion that emphasized (1) the need to monitor a population throughout its range to accurately assess the absolute level of recruitment rather than just an index of relative recruitment from a few sites, and (2) the importance of considering the effect of changes in the local environment when assessing long-term trends in recruitment. The afternoon session began with a number of speakers discussing survival and population monitoring. Participants addressed the merits and requirements of using individual colour marks and retrapping of individuals during ringing operations to monitor survival. Protocols for monitoring recruitment and survival at staging and nonbreeding sites are being developed and are scheduled for publication in the April 2005 issue of the *Wader Study Group Bulletin*.

The next steps for CHASM may include identifying priority species for study, determining the best location to monitor species (i.e., breeding, migration, or non-breeding), and updating the status and trends of individual shorebird species. We anticipate meeting informally at the next International Wader Study Group conference in Ireland to discuss these and other issues.

Rick Lanctot, Mikhail Soloviev & Nigel Clark

Wader studies in Delaware Bay, USA

Each May, teams of wader researchers congregate in Delaware Bay from all over the world to help scientists from the states of New Jersey and Delaware to study the spring staging of shorebirds. Evidence from throughout the West Atlantic Flyway indicates a substantial decline in numbers of Red Knots *Calidris canutus* both wintering in Tierra del Fuego and on passage through Delaware Bay. A significant decrease has also been noted in Semi-palmated Sandpipers *C. pusilla*. The status of other shorebirds using the flyway is less clear but of concern because many species rely to varying degrees on the eggs of spawning Horseshoe Crabs *Limulus polyphemus*. Declines in spawning numbers of crabs have prompted fears that the egg-resource on which shorebirds subsist may be reaching critically low levels. Current work aims to better identify the mechanisms of the shorebird declines and propose effective and sustainable management options. Work is taking place throughout the flyway, with nest seaching and ringing in Arctic breeding grounds, adult:juvenile ratios on autumn passage and surveys and colour-marking in south-eastern USA and South American wintering grounds. In Delaware Bay itself, work continues on several complementary levels:

- Weekly land-, boat- and aircraft-based surveys of shorebird populations around the entire bay shore;
- Targeted cannon net catches (every 3–5 days) of Red Knot, Turnstone and Sanderling to:
  - monitor weights as birds arrive and gain weight prior to departure;
  - fit unique inscribed leg flags to allow field identification of individuals in the current season and future years (Fig. 1);
- Intensive resighting efforts to monitor return rates of individuals to assess survival and to monitor stopover duration and assess the extent of turnover;
- Radio telemetry work to provide information on stopover, individual movements and to aid in the identification and importance of roost sites;
- Feather sampling from each individual Red Knot for stable isotope analysis and molecular sexing;
- Field and laboratory experiments to obtain foraging parameters such as intake and depletion rates and competition/interference with other species, especially gulls;
- Observational studies to determine how natural and human disturbance affects shorebird distribution and foraging behaviour.

These studies are highly complementary. For example, intensive resighting observations in spring 2004 comprised daily scans of shorebird flocks and resulted in over 4,000 records of colour-marked Red Knots. These included 8 records from the Arctic (Figs 2 & 3), 683 from Argentina, 47 from Brazil and 2,980 from the USA. Of the US-banded birds, a large proportion was individually marked. For instance, of 1,385 birds indi-

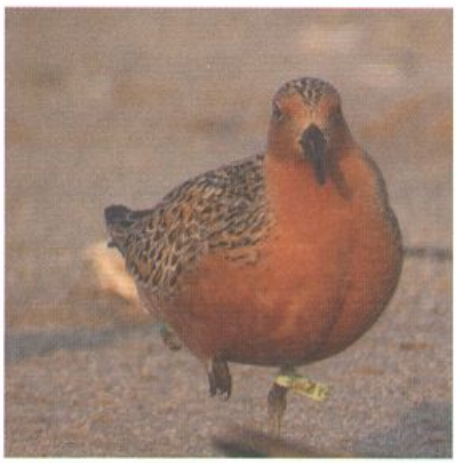


Fig. 1. Red Knot bearing individually-inscribed lime flag 8Y, banded in Delaware Bay in May 2003 and photographed back in Delaware in May 2004 (S. Gillings).

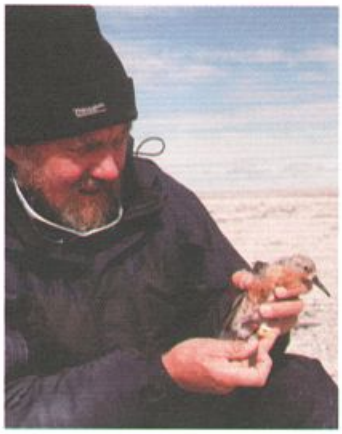


Fig. 2. Roger Swinfen with a Red Knot caught on the nest on Southampton Island, Arctic Canada, in July 2003 and fitted with individually-inscribed yellow flag AC.

Fig. 3. Red Knot bearing individually-inscribed yellow flag AC staging in Delaware Bay on 17 May 2004, presumably on route back to Southampton Island (S. Gillings).

vidually marked with inscribed flags in 2003, 585 (42%) were resighted in Delaware Bay in spring 2004 with birds seen on average 2.3 times during staging (range 1–8). Stable isotope analysis of a feather from each of these birds will identify individuals to different moulting areas in south-eastern USA or Tierra del Fuego. It is likely that these birds with markedly differing migration strategies will have different staging patterns. Thus arrival, duration of stopover and annual survival can be separately evaluated for birds from differing wintering areas. This will be invaluable in further identifying the critical zones along the flyway now and in the future.

Research teams include fieldworkers and analysts from Argentina, USA, Canada, Australia and Europe. Bird work is coordinated with researchers of Horseshoe Crab ecology. Plans for a bay-wide survey of egg availability will provide essential information on the egg resource, which along with wader foraging and egg depletion information will feed into a behaviour-based model to predict the consequences of different management scenarios. This will help to reach an understanding of annual variations. For instance, 2003 was a very poor year with cold temperatures and low spawning crab and egg abundance and birds struggled to gain weight. In contrast, 2004 recorded high egg densities and shorebirds fared better. Restrictions on crab harvesting are currently in place and it is hoped that the ongoing research will identify sustainable management options for crab and shorebird conservation, recreational disturbance and coastal management.

Simon Gillings, Larry Niles, Karen Bennett & Amanda Dey

Bar-tailed Godwits and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers share the focus of international shorebird research on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta

Guided by northern lights, a starlit sky, and, admittedly, a GPS, nine intrepid waderologists (of questionable intelligence) left the coast of the central Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta at three in the morning and headed out into the Bering Sea in two small boats. Our destination was a sand island six kilometres offshore, where we hoped to be the first to trap post-breeding Bar-tailed Godwits on the delta. Eight hours earlier, as the sun crept toward the horizon, we had set lines of mist nets on the island. Having returned in the vaguely illuminated darkness of the subarctic night, we began playing taped calls of godwits in the hopes of luring birds into the nets as they flew to their high-tide roost. Indeed, to our great excitement and satisfaction, we trapped five juveniles. Each was duly greeted, processed, and given a leg-flag with a personal alphanumeric code. It was a proud and cheerful crew that returned to the camp at dawn. Mission completed!

Our adventure occurred during September 2004 as part of a two-week reconnaissance trip. Wader biologists from around the world convened on the delta in anticipation of a major international shorebird expedition scheduled for August and September 2005. The scientific focus of the expedition was two-fold. First, we wanted to evaluate options for capturing Bar-tailed Godwits to facilitate our 2005 investigation of their apparent non-stop trans-Pacific flights between Alaska and New Zealand/Australia. Besides capturing the juvenile godwits, our field efforts produced several other rewards. Phil Battley and Martin Green paid a short overnight visit to a site ten kilometres south of our camp where, in a flock containing about 3,000 adult godwits, they located ten leg-flagged birds. Five were ringed in New Zealand, three in Australia, and two in China. As if that wasn't exciting enough, Phil spotted two birds that he had personally ringed only six months earlier in New Zealand. But wait, it gets better. One of those two birds was Phil's "poster bird", the individual godwit illustrated in his correspondence describing his project and illustrating its banding scheme.

The second target of our preliminary investigation was the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. This species has a unique life history pattern. Adults fly from their central Siberian breeding grounds southward across Asia to Australia, but the juveniles make a long detour east to western Alaska before they, too, head south for Australia. Our efforts with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were in some ways even more successful than with the godwits. Using foldable "Ottenby" walk-in traps, as well as mist-nets and tape recorders, we captured and ringed 128 birds in nine days. Not bad considering that prior to this, only 128 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers had *ever* been ringed in North America! By the end of our 11-day stay, we had captured 230 waders of nine species. From most of them, we collected blood and feather samples that will provide the baseline data for developing studies on food choice, genetic population structure, and geographical origins.

Our reconnaissance trip in 2004 turned out to be a truly international effort, with representatives from Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States. Our field work was carried out in the cheerful spirit typical of people "raised" in the International Wader Study Group family. Our preliminary accomplishments in 2004 give us great hopes for a successful expedition in 2005.

We are most grateful for the generous support provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat, and the Ymer-80 Foundation.

Åke Lindström, Bob Gill & Brian McCaffery

Wash Wader Ringing Group: Report for 2002–2003

Just published, the latest WWRG report summarises this most active group's activities during 2002 and 2003. Apart from the usual lists of waders ringed and interesting recoveries, there are articles on gull ringing, assessing the group's scientific progress, shorebirds and shellfish, the effects of severe weather on wintering waders and the story of the capture in 2002 of the famous 35-year-old oystercatcher originally ringed in 1967 as a juvenile. The report is available from the WWRG group leader, Phil Ireland, 27 Hainfield Drive, Solihull, West Midlands B91 2PL, UK at £2.50 to UK addresses and £5 to other countries. (Cheques payable to Wash Wader Ringing Group).

REQUEST FOR RESIGHTINGS

Sociable Lapwing colour-ringing scheme: request for resightings

During May–July 2004, 22 adult Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* and 94 chicks were fitted with colour rings from breeding areas east of Lake Tengiz near Korgalzhin

(50°35'N, 70°01'E), Central Kazakhstan. The birds were marked with four coloured plastic rings above the tibio-tarsal joint according to standard protocols for waders. The year marker was red and the other colours were blue, yellow, noir (black) and white. Five juveniles were also fitted with Russian metal rings on the left tarsus. This scheme is part of a new long-term study on this rapidly declining steppe species, sponsored by a consortium headed by BirdLife International. We would be grateful for any resightings to help us record survival, and especially movements, during the non-breeding season. Point of contact is Dr Will Cresswell, email: *will.cresswell@st-andrews.ac.uk*; tel. 44 (0)1334 463010.

East Atlantic Flyway Greenshank migration project

A new project on Greenshank called *The Migration Story* has just started in southern England with a catch of over 60 birds. It aims to use observations of the birds to track their migration and form links between people and communities. The project is organised by the Chichester Harbour Conservancy and the Farlington Ringing Group, building on existing FRG work, and is funded by the UK Heritage Lottery Fund. The website *www.greenshank.info* is being developed as part of the project.

We need to find out more about migration routes and the places the birds visit, and would like to meet the people who live there. We want to involve as many people as possible, and are looking forward to twinned schools, internet links and lasting relationships between communities.

Anyone who sees a ringed Greenshank should send details to Peter Potts at Solent Court Cottage, Chilling Lane, Warsash, SO31 9HF, UK; email: *ppotts@compuserve.com.*

The WSG Colour-Marking Register: Recent developments

The Wader Study Group Colour-marking Register is a vital resource for today's wader ecologist. The number of colour-marking projects on shorebirds continues to increase and with it the likelihood of duplicate schemes. Such duplications are, unfortunately, not uncommon and these can potentially invalidate all the studies concerned.

The WSG Colour-marking Register is entering an exciting new phase as computerisation of the database begins. One of the greatest problems, however, is the uncertainty of information about past and current schemes. It is vital that the electronic database is as accurate as possible to avoid the potential for duplication and to ensure that as many sightings as possible are traced to the appropriate scheme.

I would like to appeal to ALL ringers who have EVER colour-marked a wader (in the East-Atlantic flyway) to email me with details of the scheme. Even if your scheme has already been registered or the scheme is not currently active I would be grateful to receive details to add to the database. Furthermore, it is up to all of us to spread the word about the Register. If you are involved with a University or Research Institute then please help by encouraging schemes to register. Please email: *wsg@bto.org*

Mark Collier
Wader Study Group Colour-marking Register,
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Thetford,
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UK.

WSG Colour-marking Register update: new schemes registered in 2004

Species	New schemes in 2004	Species	New schemes in 2004
Ringed Plover	4	Black-tailed Godwit	2
Lapwing	3	Bar-tailed Godwit	1
Sociable Lapwing	1	Whimbrel	1
Knot	1	Curlew	1
Sanderling	3	Redshank	4
Little Stint	1	Green Sandpiper	2
Dunlin	4	Red-necked Phalarope	1
Broad-billed Sandpiper	1	Grey Phalarope	1
Ruff	1	**Total**	**32**

CONSERVATION NEWS

Mechanical cockle fisheries banned from the Dutch Wadden Sea

A long struggle by nature conservation groups to have mechanical cockle fisheries banned from the Wadden Sea has come to an end. The Dutch government has decided that mechanical cockle fisheries will be banned from the Dutch Wadden Sea from 1 January 2005 onwards. The mechanical dredging of cockles by large boats has always been a thorn in the side of nature conservationists because the fisheries harvested too many shellfish, leading to starvation and lack of reproduction in Eurasian Oystercatchers and Eider Ducks. More importantly, the suction-dredging in the soft sediment of the Wadden Sea also led to changes in sediment characteristics with drastic negative side-effects on bivalves other than the targeted Cockles *Cerastoderma edule* and to a long-lasting negative effect on recruitment of bivalves such as the Baltic Tellin *Macoma balthica.*

The European Court recently made clear that according to the European Habitat Directive, mechanical cockle dredging should be seen as a 'plan' or 'project' and that therefore a 'suitable judgement' is needed. This verdict and the official advice by a committee that shellfisheries are more harmful than the exploitation of gas (the latter being much more economically profitable) made the Ministry of Agriculture decide to ban mechanical cockle fisheries from the Wadden Sea. However, the Minister did not mention the scientific evidence on the harmful ecological effects of suction dredging as a factor of importance that had led to this decision. The Minister therefore did not consider there was a reason not to grant a licence for mechanical cockle fishing for autumn 2004. The last season of mechanical cockle fisheries that was licensed, officially started on 20 September 2004, but was substantially delayed because nature conservationists took legal action against the license. The final decision whether the cockle-industry will harvest cockles in the protected Wadden Sea for the last few weeks of 2004 will be made on 9 December, when the High Court will look at the case again.

Jeroen Renerkeens

P.S. We just received a final bit of good news: the court decision taken on 9 December put an end to the mechanical cockle-harvesting in the Wadden Sea for the final weeks of 2004!

[See also the tribute to Theunis Piersma on page 38. – Ed.]

Australian Important Birds Areas project under way

At long last Australia has declared its first Important Bird Areas (IBA) as part of the BirdLife International worldwide program. A pilot study has been carried out in far north Queensland which recently resulted in declaration of the first 12 IBAs for Australia. In September, the project coordinator for Australia, Stephen Garnett, attended meetings at the Birds Interest Group Network (an association of bird groups, including all New South Wales bird clubs) meeting in Sydney and the Birds Australia Congress in southern Queensland. Several workshops are planned for the near future when individuals and bird clubs will be able to put forward areas that they consider could meet the IBA criteria. Further work will then be carried out to verify the scientific validity of the data available for these sites and determine whether any more work needs to be done to collect additional information, including visiting some of the more remote sites. Most of the coastal shorebirds sites are reasonably well documented but we know very little about the use of inland sites in Australia by migratory species. Up to 37,000 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers were recorded at a single inland wetland in 1996 when the estimated population for the whole of Australia during the non-breeding season was thought to be only 40,000. The recent observation of 2.88 million Oriental Pratincoles reported in the April 2004 issue of the *Wader Study Group Bulletin* is another indication of how little we know about some species and wetland systems of Australia.

The IBA program is being administered by Birds Australia (BildLife Partner in Australia) in cooperation with other national and regional bird groups. It should be noted that the IBA program in Australia operates entirely on a volunteer basis (including the coordinator) but is getting wide support because bird club members can see such obvious advantages in the project. Contact Stephen Garnett: email: *Stephen.Garnett@cdu.edu.au*

Source: *Tattler* 42.

Three new Ramsar sites in Niger

In recent years, the government of Niger has been taking vigorous steps to designate a number of extremely valuable wetland areas along the Niger River and in the Lake Chad Basin for the Ramsar List, with the energetic assistance of WWF International's Living Waters Programme. Recently, it has listed three new sites, totalling over 750,000 hectares along the Niger and two of its former tributary valleys from the north. The three sites are Dallol Bosso (376,162 ha), Dallol Maouri (318,977 ha), and Zone humide du moyen Niger II (65,580 ha) in the Niger floodplain. The designation of these three new sites contributes enormously to patch together the mosaic of the Niger River Basin and its vital wetland resources under the Ramsar umbrella.

The Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA)

In November 2004, the 'compact edition' of the ACIA report was published in Reykjavik, Iceland, in connection with a four-day scientific symposium on this highly topical issue. The report is a super illustrated version of the 1,200 page report expected some time after February 2005 presenting the scientific material on all aspects of arctic climate change and its consequences.

The ACIA report is based on a downscaling of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) world report presenting a range of scenarios on future climate change as a result of greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change is expected to be significantly amplified in the Arctic due to feed back mechanisms such as vanishing snow and ice reducing the albedo and hence, giving increased absorption of solar radiation on land and sea, which further increases melt of snow and ice and so on. In certain parts of the Arctic an increase in annual mean temperatures of about 10°C is expected (with the biggest increase in winter), concomitantly with increased precipitation, a longer growing season etc. The polar pack ice cover is expected to be reduced by at least 50% in summer – according to some models it may disappear altogether – to freeze over again in winter.

The expected result is that about half the tundra may change into sub-arctic scrub and further into boreal forest in the long term. The high arctic tundra may be particularly at risk, since it already constitutes a relatively narrow fringe along the coasts of the Arctic Ocean, and hence may be 'pushed' out into the ocean by expanding low arctic tundra from the south.

If the models are right, these changes will have profound impacts on arctic wader populations. In the short term (decades) they may benefit from earlier snow melt and more favourable weather during the breeding season with larger amounts of invertebrate food for adults as well as young. But in the longer term they may suffer from all kinds of problems like more unpredictable weather during migration and breeding, mismatch of their phenology and availability of resources, increased sea levels reducing intertidal flats, and not the least disappearance of large areas of arctic tundra. Here high arctic species and populations may be particularly at risk, since both their breeding areas and intertidal flats may be severely reduced. A talk on this was given at the symposium in Reykjavik, based on wader research and monitoring throughout the circum-polar Arctic.

See more about the ACIA report on *http://www.acia.uaf.edu*

Hans Meltofte
National Environmental Research Institute,
Department of Arctic Environment, Denmark

Saemangeum to become the world's largest golf complex?

The catastrophic Saemangeum Reclamation Project – involving the loss of 40,000 ha of key intertidal habitat on the shore of the Yellow Sea – has always been defended in some quarters as necessary to "increase rice production". In turn, WBKEnglish has repeatedly pointed out that there is actually a rice surplus in South Korea, and that the water that was supposed to be used to irrigate the new rice fields is far too polluted: it is apparent that there is now an old-fashioned land-grab in process.

After months of official silence, the following editorial has recently appeared in *The Korea Times*. Everyone who cares about the environment they live in, and about the 400,000 shorebirds that currently use the hugely important Saemangeum tidal-flats and shallows, must let the Korean Government know that there can be no justification for this latest plan.

***The Korea Times* (18 September 2004)**

"Change of Saemangeum Project: Construction of Golf Range Should Be Prohibited!

"The Saemangeum reclamation project is again drawing concern because its original purpose is likely to change, to the apparent detriment of the environment surrounding the region.

"Holding jurisdiction over the area being reclaimed, North Cholla Province plans to build the world's largest golf complex there with 540 holes in order to increase its tourism revenues. The provincial government, which has already forwarded the plan to the central government, is confident in its ability to increase its wealth with the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai Expo. But the construction of the golf complex is certain to invite strong resistance from not merely environmental activists but also an increasing number of the general populace as the entire reclaimed area will be polluted from toxic chemicals used to protect the golf course lawns.

"Environmental and other civic activists have resisted the Saemangeum project as the construction of a 33-kilometre breakwater connecting the two counties in the province will destroy nature around the area. Because of their protests, the project was suspended in July last year by a lower court's ruling. But the Seoul High Court allowed the project to resume in January.

"The government launched the mammoth reclamation project in 1991 in a bid to create a large amount of arable land and a huge reservoir to help increase the incomes of residents living in the two countries and their surrounding areas. The project is scheduled for completion by 2011 at what the government estimates will cost some 3.5 trillion won. But many critics of the project contend that the total expenses will reach more than 6 trillion won.

"The provincial government is set to start building the golf complex as soon as the entire dyke is constructed in 2006. Less than 3 kilometres are now being built for the completion of the world's longest breakwater.

"As situations have changed from the start of the project, the central government is considering using the reclaimed land for purposes other than the original one such as building an environmentally friendly high-tech industrial estate which will further increase the incomes of the people in and around the region. Strictly speaking, taxpayers have more of a right to decide how to use the reclaimed tidal land than the provincial government because the project is being financed with their precious money.

"There is no reason to construct the golf complex, which will further destruct the environment around the region. Against this backdrop, the provincial government ought to drop the controversial plan immediately."

Please – help us protest!

Charlie and Nial Moores, Kim SuKyung
wbkenglish@aol.com
Source: *Tattler* 41.

OBITUARY

Professor Dr. Eugeny E. Syroechkovsky, Sr

It is with deep regret that we inform you that after long illness Professor Dr Eugeny E. Syroechkovsky, Sr passed away during the night of 29 November 2004. He was a well-known arctic researcher, as well as initiator and organizer of numerous large scale regional, national and international projects, expeditions and affairs. Prof. Syroechkovsky was the key person in opening a new era of international ornithological research in the Russian Arctic in the late 1980s after a long information blackout, which had covered that part of the world for many decades.

It was due largely to his efforts that the largest *Tundra Ecology-1994* Russian–Swedish icebreaker biological expedition along the Northern Passage became possible. This became a milestone in both understanding of natural processes in the Arctic and nature conservation in that region, as well as along global flyways of birds. It was the abilities and influence of Prof. Syroechkovsky that ensured the creation of a number of *zapovedniks* (strict Nature Reserves) in the former USSR and in Russia, including the Great Arctic Nature Reserve at Taimyr, one of the largest reserves in the world.

A public funeral service took place on the morning of 2 December at the Zoological Museum of Moscow State University.

Dr Pavel Tomkovich
pst@zmmu.msu.ru
Source: *Tattler* 42.

CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENTS

Joint Meeting of the Waterbird Society and Pacific Seabird Group

The Waterbird Society will hold its 28th annual meeting, 19–23 January 2005, at the Hilton Portland and Executive Tower, Portland, Oregon, USA. This meeting will be held jointly with the Pacific Seabird Group. Pre- and post-meeting field trips will include: a pelagic birding cruise; birding trips to Oregon coastal habitats and Willamette Valley; and a wine-tasting trip to Willamette Valley. Check the Waterbird Society web site (*www.waterbirds.org*) or Pacific Seabird Group web site (*www.pacificseabirdgroup.org*), for up-to-date news and information about the meeting.

Status and ecology of passage and wintering Eurasian Golden Plovers – a workshop at the annual conference of the International Wader Study Group in Ireland, October 2005

Reflecting increased interest in Eurasian Golden Plovers, there will be a one-day workshop at the 2005 IWSG Conference to be held in Ireland. Following the completion of a north-west Europe survey of passage Golden Plovers in October 2003, the main aim of the workshop will be to continue working towards a flyway approach to studies and in particular the need for a large-scale internationally-coordinated passage and winter survey. Current plans in Britain are for a national survey (in coordination with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee), probably in winters 2006/07 and 2007/08. Therefore the aims of the workshop will be fourfold:

1. bring together researchers from throughout the Eurasian Golden Plover's passage and wintering range;
2. review current studies of status and ecology in passage and wintering localities;

3. discuss the need for flyway-wide studies, especially a European survey;
4. discuss the formation of a Golden Plover study group to facilitate exchange of ideas, experiences and future collaborations.

Though the workshop will concentrate on Golden Plovers, owing to their close associations it will be sensible to also include Northern Lapwing status and ecology in these discussions. Participation by researchers from as many relevant countries as possible throughout the plover flyway will make this a real success. I am looking for potential speakers for this workshop and would welcome comments, suggestions for talks and agenda items.

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International Ornithological Congress 2006

The 24th IOC Congress will be held in Hamburg, Germany, over 13–19 August, 2006. The scientific program committee has been formed and a web page is in place:
http://www.i-o-c.org

Australasian Shorebirds Conference 2005

The Ornithological Society of New Zealand, in association with the Australasian Wader Study Group and the New Zealand Wader Study Group, is hosting the Australasian Shorebird Conference 2005 in Nelson, New Zealand in December 2005. The meeting will run over 11–13 December, with an optional field trip to the Farewell Spit Ramsar Site on 14/15 December. The Conference follows the Australasian Ornithological Conference which will be held in Blenheim, New Zealand, 6–10 December 2005.

The provisional conference programme is:

11 December – registration and public lecture
12 December – opening, papers
13 December – papers
14/15 December – field trip to Farewell Spit

Farewell Spit, a 30-km long sand spit with spectacular barchan dunes, and 11,000 ha of intertidal sand flats with extensive *Zostera* beds, is one of New Zealand's most important shorebird sites. With 65 flights a day, Nelson is easily reached from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. It is planned that there will be ground transport available for those attending the Australasian Ornithological Conference immediately prior to the AWC (in Blenheim). Nelson, at the top of the South Island, offers long sunny days, easy access to three national parks, alfresco dining, famous wines and much more! A wide range of accommodation is available ranging from simple backpackers to 5-star lodges. For further information about Nelson and available accommodation see: *http://www.nelsonnz.com*

To register interest in the ASC visit *http://osnz.org.nz/conference.htm* or write to: Sue Bell, 35 Selmes Road, RD 3, Blenheim, New Zealand. If you wish to contact the organisers of the shorebird conference, please do so to David Melville (*david.melville@xtra.co.nz*) for general conference issues, and to Phil Battley (*philbattley@quicksilver.net.nz*) about the programme.

VACANCIES

Graduate Research Position on Shorebird Ecotoxicology

A graduate assistantship will be available at Kansas State University to investigate the possible impacts of environmental contaminants upon Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Upland Sandpipers and other migratory shorebirds. Field research will involve sampling birds at stopover sites in Texas, Kansas and Nebraska. Opportunities for sampling of shorebirds at wintering sites in South America are anticipated. Lab analyses will conducted in collaboration with Dr. Michael Hooper at Texas Tech University and Dr. Kevin Johnson at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. The responsibilities of the graduate student will include locating suitable study sites, capture of birds and collection of blood and other tissue samples, lab analyses, completing permit reports and coordination of a research network of collaborating partners. Qualified applicants should have a Bachelor of Science in Biology and competitive GPA and GRE scores. Previous experience with avian field research techniques, contaminant analyses, statistical software and organization of field projects is desirable. Funding for this project is pending approval of the federal budget but we anticipate a possible start date of May 2005. The minimum annual stipend will be $18,000 per year plus a tuition-waiver.

Information on graduate programs at K-State and current projects is available at: *www.ksu.edu/bsanderc*. Interested individuals should send a cover letter outlining experience and research interests, a curriculum vitae, unofficial copies of university transcripts and GRE scores, and contact information for three references to Dr Brett K. Sandercock, Division of Biology, 232 Ackert Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506-4901, USA (ph: 785-532-0120, fax: 785-532-6653, email: *bsanderc@ksu.edu*). Applications by email are welcome, and will be accepted until the position is filled.

. . . AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST!

Congratulations, Theunis!

Theunis Piersma has been awarded the first triennial Luc Hoffmann Medal 'For Excellence in Wetland Science and Conservation' by Wetlands International. His work has been of fundamental importance to the conservation of wetland habitats. He has helped to unravel the ecological and physiological mysteries of wader migrations, and has been instrumental in justifying and promoting the conservation of key wetland 'stepping stones' on which these migrants depend. Theunis is committed to bringing the implications of his work to the widest possible audiences. An example is his work in the Dutch Wadden Sea, where his collaborative research has highlighted the negative ecological consequences of dredging for cockles. The details of these impacts, documented in reputable research publications, were submitted as evidence to the European Court of Justice in a recent legal case. The findings of the Court ended mechanical cockle dredging in the Dutch Wadden Sea. The implications of this case throughout the European Union and the world will be enormous – a clear case where scientific knowledge has contributed to a landmark conservation decision.

The remarkable journey of Bolshoy Ulit DN86741

The British Trust for Ornithology has just received news of the unfortunate end of a Greenshank (Bolshoy Ulit in Russian). First ringed in Hampshire, England, in 1991, it was last seen in April 2004, only one month before its death. This is the first BTO-ringed Greenshank to be reported from Russia.

Greenshank DN86741 was first ringed at Farlington Marshes Local Nature Reserve, Portsmouth on 6 October 1991. Some 11 years later, it was recaught and colour-ringed at nearby Thorney Island, West Sussex. This is where the story really starts!

Since this bird was colour-ringed it has been seen at least 20 times, and has allowed Farlington Ringing Group to really understand its annual movements. It generally arrived in the Solent in August and stayed there while it undertook its annual moult. By October it had moved 30 km to the River Hamble, near Southampton, where it spent its winters until leaving in early April.

Sadly though, this bird was recently shot (on 10 May 2004) at Chupa, Kandalaksha Bay, by a researcher from St Petersburg University. This is in the White Sea in north-west Russia, near the border with Finland, 2,610 km from where it was originally ringed!

The Farlington Ringing Group has ringed over 650 Greenshanks, but this is their first movement to Russia. In fact, after over 95 years of bird ringing in Britain & Ireland, there have been relatively few recoveries of Greenshanks, with only 49 from other countries. Most of these have come from France, but there have been several from wintering areas in West Africa.

For further information contact: Mark Grantham (BTO Ringing Unit) *mark.grantham@bto.org*

Sixty-five years of Blacksmith Plovers in the Western Cape

On 26 September 1939, a klinking call alerted Professor Gerry Broekhuysen to the presence of a single Blacksmith Plover at Zeekoeivlei, a wetland which was then on the outskirts of the suburbs of Cape Town. Thus 26 September 2004 was the 65th anniversary of the first sighting of the Blacksmith Plover in the Western Cape.

Gerry Broekhuysen's bird had disappeared by the following day. This was one of the first records of this species anywhere south of the Orange River. In a large data collection of bird data for the Western Cape, made between 1982 and 1986, the Blacksmith Plover was the eighth most frequently encountered bird species. Its metallic *klink klink klink* is one of the characteristic bird calls of open places of the Western Cape. So it is hard to believe that this species was encountered in this area for the first time as recently as 1939.

It was next seen near Cape Town seven years later, in October 1946, and in the following year the first nest was found, at Eersterivier, on the Cape Flats, on 29 August 1947. Gerry Broekhuysen and Jack MacLeod, who reported this first nest, commented: "As the species has now been found breeding it is very likely that it will stay and that its numbers for the neighbourhood of Cape Town will gradually increase. It will be interesting to follow the future behaviour of this species." Their prediction of a gradual increase was certainly correct, but it is unlikely that they could have envisaged that, within 40 years, it would increase to become the eighth most frequently encountered species in the region!

About 10 years after the first breeding record, Professor K.R.L. Hall undertook a review of the records of Blacksmith Plover in the region. All the early records were from vleis. He estimated that the maximum number in 1958 in the Greater Cape Town region was 150 birds. At this time, regular counts of waterbirds were being made at most of the vleis in the region, and he was confident that "no large flock is likely to have been overlooked in 1958, the bird being so conspicuous both in plumage and call-notes."

Hall has a graph showing the number of nests recorded in the vicinity of Cape Town each year. Until 1954, no more than three nests were found in a year. In both 1955 and 1956, five nests were found. In 1957 the count was eight, with a sharp increase to 21 in 1958. Hall argued that the increase cannot be argued away as simply a consequence of better observers, but was a genuine increase. For example, the number of nests at the Athlone Sewage Works, a site that had been carefully watched, doubled in 1958 from the total for the previous three years. So it seems that 1958 was an important year in the evolution of the population in the Western Cape.

From 1958 onwards, the rapid range expansion and the remarkable increase in abundance of the Blacksmith Plover in the Western Cape are incredibly poorly documented. We have no insight into how the Blacksmith Plover went from 150 birds in 1958 to being present on 69% of the 9,300 birdlists submitted for the bird atlas project of the Cape Bird Club in the mid 1980s. The nest record cards, the bird ringing files, and other databases curated at the Avian Demography Unit will be the best starting point for doing this detective work. At some point in this period, it was discovered that the Blacksmith Plover was not limited to damp habitats such as the vleis to which it was initially confined in the Western Cape. It had moved into relatively dry habitats such as sportsfields, golf courses and pastures, which were traditionally owned by Crowned Plovers. It is quite likely that Crowned Plovers are being quietly ousted by Blacksmith Plovers from these places.

The 65th anniversary of the arrival of the Blacksmith Plover to the Cape Peninsula provides a reminder that bird distributions are not static, but are on the move. There is a continuous need to monitor bird populations, and to monitor as many species as possible, because the nature and direction of changes are unpredictable, as are the interactions between species that occur.

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