

Shorebirds surveys at Península Valdés, Patagonia, Argentina: Report for the years 2001 and 2002

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We report observations of shorebirds stopping over during northward migration on the beaches of Península Valdés, Chubut, Argentina (42°30'S, 64°00'W), in 2001 and 2002. This follows previous reports for 1999 and 2000, which covered three sites (Fig. 1): Fracasso Beach, Punta Norte and Caleta Valdés (Bala *et al.* 2001, Bala *et al.* 2002).

In 2001, only one census was carried out (at Fracasso beach), while in 2002 weekly counts were made at four sites: Fracasso beach, Caleta Valdés, Punta Norte and Colombo Beach (Fig. 1). The latter is a new site included in our studies for the first time. In both seasons, Red Knots *Calidris canutus rufa* were scanned for colour-bands attached at various sites throughout the West Atlantic flyway.

Fracasso beach is a 3.5 km² marine wetland in San José Gulf. It is sandy with fine and medium sediments. Caleta Valdés is on the east coast of Península Valdés and our study site there is the northern part, which is 5 km² at low water. There are many islands covered with salt-tolerant vegetation

and the sediments comprise fine sand and mud. Punta Norte is at the northeast extremity of the peninsula and is characterized by boulder beaches and rocky shores. Colombo beach is in Nuevo Gulf, on the south coast of the peninsula and is sandy with fine and medium sediments, like Fracasso beach.

The main shorebird foods available at Fracasso beach and Colombo beach are polychaetes and clams, at Caleta Valdés, polychaetes, and at Punta Norte, crustaceans and mussels.

In 2001, 350 Red Knots were counted at Fracasso Beach in mid-April. This was the only species recorded there.

During the 2002 season, the only record of more than a few Red Knots on Fracasso Beach occurred on 22 March when a flock of 86 stopped there for just 30 minutes before flying north (Table 1). These numbers are very much reduced compared to previous years when Red Knots were the most abundant shorebirds at this site on northward migration (e.g. 3,000 in April 2000 (Bala *et al.* 2002)).

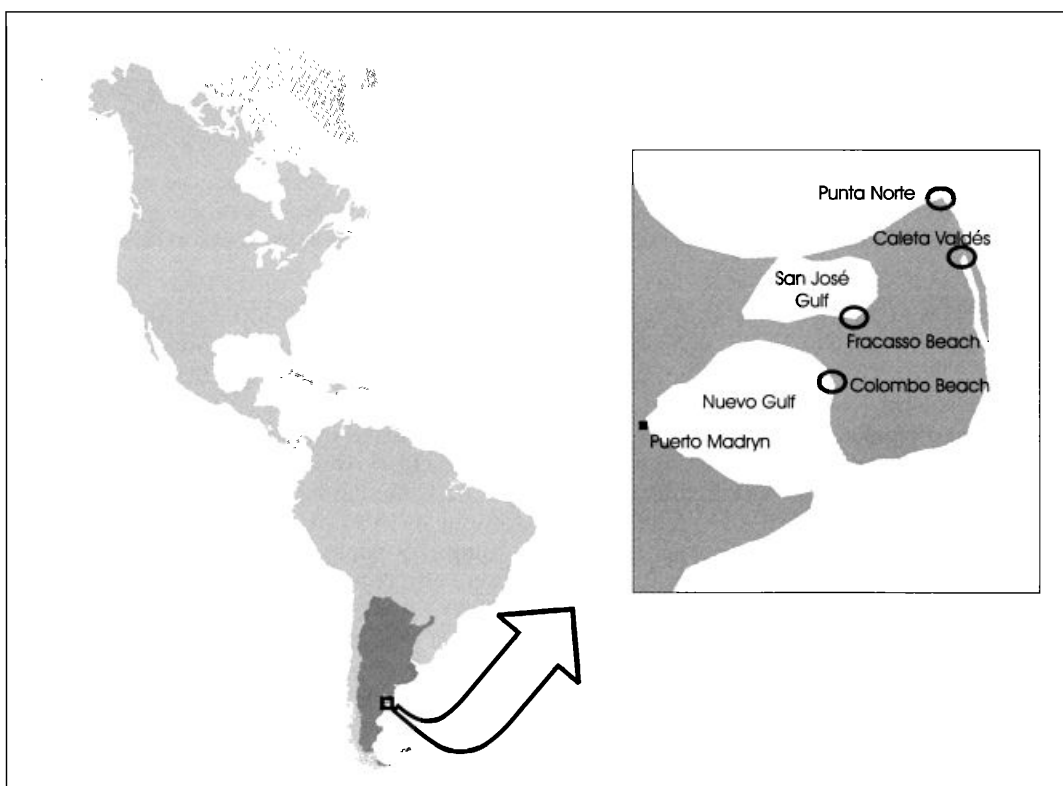


Fig.1. Location map showing the study sites at Península Valdés, Argentina.



Table 1. Weekly counts of migrant shorebirds during March–May 2002 at four study sites on Península Valdés, Patagonia, Argentina.

Study site	Week	Count dates	Red Knot	White-rumped Sandpiper	Sanderling	Hudsonian Godwit	Two-banded Plover
Fracasso Beach	1	March 7	–	200	–	–	150
	2	March 18	–	30	–	–	25
	3	March 22–23	80	23	–	1	15
	4	March 27–29	–	0	–	–	1
	5	April 4–5	1	10	–	–	1
	6	April 12	5	–	–	–	2
	7	April 17–18	–	–	–	–	–
	8	April 24	–	–	–	–	–
	9	May 4–5	–	–	–	–	–
Fracasso Beach bird/weeks			86	263	–	1	194
Caleta Valdés	5	April 4–7	–	–	–	–	2,500
	8	April 24	–	–	–	–	–
	9	May 4–5	–	–	–	–	–
Caleta Valdés bird/weeks			–	–	–	–	2,500
Punta Norte	2	March 18	–	–	300	–	–
	5	April 4–7	–	–	300	–	–
Punta Norte bird/weeks			–	–	600	–	–
Colombo Beach	5	April 4–7	500	10	100	–	30
	6	April 11	250	55	49	–	62
	7	April 19	1,500	100	0	–	200
	8	April 25	–	3	3	–	200
Colombo Beach bird/weeks			2,250	168	152	–	492
Península Valdés:							
Total bird/weeks all sites			2,336	431	742	1	3,186

Table 2. Individual colour-banded Red knots recorded at Colombo beach during March–May 2002.

Date	Flock size	Total colour-banded birds	% colour-banded birds	Country in which banded				
				U.S.A.	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Unknown
April 4–7	500	18	3.2	6	8	1	1	2
April 11	250	14	5.6	4	6	2	1	1
April 19	1,500	4	0.3	2	2			
Aggregate sightings of banded birds		36	1.6	12	16	3	2	3
Minimum individual banded birds*		24		8	8	3	2	3

* The minimum number of individual banded birds is the aggregate of the maximum number of birds with each band combination recorded in a single scan.

White-rumped Sandpipers *C. fuscicollis* peaked at Fracasso at 200 in the first week of March with only a few individuals recorded later. The 200 peak is the same as in 2000, but in that season they were recorded over a longer period. Similarly Two-banded Plovers *Charadrius falklandicus* also peaked in the early March at 150 with only small numbers recorded later. Again these figures are much less than those for 2000 when up to 316 were recorded regularly from early March to early May (Bala *et al.* 2002). As in previous years, a few Hudsonian Godwits *Limosa haemastica* were recorded, but unexpectedly, there were no Sanderlings *Calidris alba* or Magellanic Plovers *Pluvianellus socialis*.

In three visits to Caleta Valdés, the only shorebirds counted were 2,500 Two-banded Plovers in the first week of April. This is unlike 2000 when the peak was in the first week of March and substantial numbers were recorded from early March to early May. Surprisingly, no White-rumped Sandpipers were found at Caleta Valdés in 2002. This contrasts

with 2000 when 50–500 were recorded throughout northward passage from early March to early May.

Only Sanderlings *Calidris alba* were recorded on the rocky beaches of Punta Norte with the same number, 300, being counted on two occasions: week 2 (18 March) and week 5 (4–5 April).

At Colombo beach, the new site, Red Knots occurred during 4–19 April with a peak of 1,900 on 19 April. White-rumped Sandpipers, Two-banded Plovers and Sanderlings were also regularly recorded there.

As a result of the International Shorebird Banding Project's sustained effort to colour-band Red Knots throughout the West Atlantic flyway since 1994, a substantial proportion of the population was banded by 2001–2002. The knot flocks at Fracasso Beach (2001 season, no data for 2002 season) and Colombo beach (2002 season) were systematically scanned in order to establish their origins.

In 2001 at Fracasso beach, we observed 14 individual colour-banded knots, 16% of the 86 birds scanned. Of these,

