

QUEENSLAND WADER

Newsletter of the Queensland Wader Study Group (QWSG), a special interest group
of the Queensland Ornithological Society Incorporated.

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About Queensland Wader.....

Queensland Wader is a quarterly publication of the Queensland Wader Study Group. Contributions should be addressed to The Editors, #####. Contributions can also be sent via fax number (#####) (please forewarn the Editors if you intend to use fax). Opinions expressed in Queensland Wader are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily those of the Queensland Wader Study Group, nor the Queensland Ornithological Society.

Advertising rates are \$15.00 for one quarter column, and \$20.00 for a third of a column.

Annual General Meeting

When?: 6 September What time?: 7.30 pm*

Where?: Queensland Museum Theatre (entry is via the Dinosaur Garden in Grey Street).

Agenda: Reports from the incumbent Management Committee Election of a new Management Committee

Guest talk by Adrian Riegen: 'The waders of New Zealand and the activities of the New Zealand Wader Study Group

Supper

*Gates open at 7.00 pm. It is important to be punctual as the gates will be locked by the museum security soon after 7.30 pm. If the gates are locked, security can be contacted by using the wall phone to the right of the glass doors - dial 6 and ask to be let in.

Exciting research ahead for the QWSG

The QWSG has been awarded nearly \$ 10,000 by the Department of Environment and Heritage to do radio-tracking of Eastern Curlew in Moreton Bay. Peter Driscoll is listed as primary investigator of the project. With this money, it is anticipated that we will be able to buy 12 VHF transmitters and harnesses. Remaining money will be spent on a receiver, aerials, and limited hire of a light aircraft for tracking purposes. The aims of the project are:

- to devise appropriate methods of attaching radio and satellite transmitters to Eastern Curlews.
- to track local movements of Eastern Curlews in Moreton Bay during summer.
- to establish key feeding and roosting sites used by Eastern Curlews in Moreton Bay.

It is hoped that we will have acquired the radio transmitters by the time of the Earthwatch expedition in October this year, and this will be the first opportunity to test them. Moreton Island will be the main trapping site. If this project is successful, then we may be able to upgrade to satellite tracking. Satellite tracking of waders has not been done before.

Brisbane 1996 Ramsar Conference

by Andrew Geering

The 1996 Ramsar Conference is to be held in Brisbane (19-27th March). Great news for the QWSG! The time leading up to and during the conference should be a busy and rewarding time for us. This should be a great opportunity for QWSG members to meet people from around the nation and from around the globe who are involved with wetland management, protection and research. It is also an opportune time for the QWSG and AWSG to lobby for inclusion of more sites in Queensland for listing as Ramsar sites (eg. the Gulf of Carpentaria, Great Sandy Straits, and the Cairns foreshore).

How are you and I going to be involved? Unfortunately, attendance at the official conference is going to be, fairly restricted to the general public as delegates will have to be accredited by the Australian Government. At most, it seems that the QWS G may only be able have one or two representatives at the conference. However, at night, there will be forums devoted to non-government organisations (NGO's), in which many issues, including those related to the flyway, will be discussed. For example, it is hoped that a program analogous to 'Wetlands for America' will be initiated. Each morning of the Conference, there will be short tours for delegates to wetlands close to Brisbane, and it is expected that QWSG members will be heavily involved in leading these tours. In addition, there will be 3-4 day post-conference tours to places like the Great Barrier Reef and Fraser Island. There may also be a billeting system where QWSG members will be asked to open up their homes for international and national visitors to stay. Stay tune for more information!

The operation and effectiveness of two major international conservation agreements concerning Australia.

by Barney Hines

The following paper examines two international conservation agreements to which Australia is a member. These are the 'Ramsar' and the 'JAMBA' agreements. The aims of these agreements and their effectiveness are discussed.

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, was ratified at Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. It is the only international convention which is dedicated to the protection of one specific ecotype and all the species that depend on it. Since its inception, it has been known colloquially as the 'Ramsar Convention'.

Australia played a leading role in the creation of the convention and is currently the standing representative for the Oceanic region. This region includes PNG and New Zealand. Over 70 countries are signatories to the convention, with the number expected to reach around 100 within five years.

The convention's aims are to promote the conservation of wetlands of all types. This is achieved by:

- 1) promoting the nomination of important wetland sites. Monitoring and maintaining the ecological characters in the sites is then encouraged.
- 2) promoting the training of personnel expert in wetland management. In Australia, this has led to the establishment of the Asian Wetland Bureau.
- 3) developing national frameworks and policies for 'Ramsar' wetlands and for other wetlands and to co-operate with countries with respect to shared wetland systems.
- 4) The implementation of these initiatives in a ecologically sustainable way.

The clause " especially as waterfowl habitat has been deleted from the title of the convention as recognition of the fact that wetlands can be important for reasons other than waterfowl habitat.

Wetlands are selected on the basis of any of three criteria. These are:

- 1) The wetlands are representative or unique
- 2) Their flora and fauna composition.
- 3) Specific criteria based on waterfowl (See Phillips, 1993 for details)

Five hundred and sixty seven sites are currently listed in the convention, of which 40 are in Australia (Phillips, 1993). Two more sites have been recently nominated in Australia, both in Queensland. These are Moreton Bay and Bowling Green Bay. In total, 36 million hectares have been nominated, of which 4.5 million hectares is within Australia (Phillips, 1993)

In Australia, the implementation of the convention guidelines is primarily carried out by State/Territory officers under the auspices of ANZECC (the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council). The Federal Government is responsible for the sites within areas that it manages. These include the Kakadu and Christmas Island wetlands.

Effectiveness

The fact that Ramsar is an international agreement, and hence involves international co-operation is very important. This enables a better system of management, especially of migratory birds. The agreement can

be reinforced by bi-lateral agreements, such as the China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA), which can also broaden the conservation issue to non-wetland migratory birds.

There are a number of problems with Ramsar. The first is the need for the identification and nomination of important wetlands. This will enable better conservation strategies to be developed, and has led to the formation of "A Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia", by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. Only 7% of the sites that are listed in the *Directory* have been nominated. Likewise, the "National Plan for Shorebird Conservation in Australia", found that only 14% of the areas of international importance for shorebird conservation were protected by the agreement (Watkins, 1993).

Another problem with the convention is the lack of sufficient active management of the registered wetlands. Wetlands are under increasing pressures from development and human impact (see McComb and Lake, 1988 for a discussion). In third world countries such as in south-east Asia, these two problems are of a greater magnitude (Lane, 1986)

The Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Japan for the Protection of Migratory Birds and Birds in Danger of Extinction and Their Environment (JAMBA)

JAMBA is a bilateral agreement between Japan and Australia, designed to protect endangered birds and birds which migrate between the two countries. It involves co-operation between the two governments to protect the birds, and to manage and protect the habitats they depend upon. The agreement was signed in 1974, but did not come into force until April, 1981.

In the agreement emphasis is placed on both the protection of species and also sub-species. The taking of migratory birds or their eggs is prohibited except in specific cases (eg. scientific research). Special protective measures are also undertaken to preserve endangered birds, including the formation of sanctuaries.

The two countries have agreed to exchange relevant research data and publications, as well as to establish joint research programs. These include projects on the Little Tern (genetics and taxonomy), Latham's Snipe, Short-tailed Shearwater and the National Wader Studies Program (coordinated by the RAOU) (Anon. 1988, 1991, 1992).

Consultative meetings are held between the two countries biannually. Currently 76 species are listed in the agreement, 35 of which are identified as endangered in Australia, and 34 in Japan. The implementation of the agreement is similar to Ramsar, carried out by State/Territory bodies with the ANCA acting as the coordinating and funding body.

Problems with the Agreement

There are many problems with the JAMBA agreement. Greatest of these is the current lack of co-operation between the two countries (pers. comm. J. Thompson). The agreement lacks the 'peer pressure' of the multilateral conventions (such as the C.I.T.E.S. convention or Ramsar) to enforce agreements and policies.

Many of the objectives are the same or similar to that of other international conventions, such as the Bonn Convention or Ramsar, or to National or State policies. This makes much of the agreement redundant. The meetings of the JAMBA committee are expensive to run and are often ineffective (pers comm. J. Thompson).

Another problem with the agreement is that the conservation of the birds that live in the two countries may depend on the countries of the Asian region which are not in the agreement. Ramsar is thought to be a much more powerful agreement than JAMBA for the protection of water birds in this region because of this (pers. comm. J. Thompson)

Conclusion

International agreements can and will play a major role in the conservation of biota and ecosystems. They are necessary for the preservation of many species, particularly migratory species. However, much work needs to be done to increase their effectiveness. Habitats of importance need to be identified and managed.

Multilateral agreements have much greater power than bilateral agreements. It must be noted however that international agreements will not replace domestic conservation policies, but are instead a method of enhancing them.

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Conservation priorities of the QWSG

by Sandra Harding

In relation to Federal Government:

1. Seek additional funding through ADAB for wetland conservation projects in Oceania including for delegates to attend the Ramsar Conference.

In relation to the State Government

1. Promote the action plan recommendations in the National Plan for Shorebird Conservation in Australia with regard to Queensland.
2. Request that the Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) release results of the Qld wetland inventory program.
3. Raise the priority of coastal catchment management issues.
 - * DEH to prepare conservation management plans for waders and to fund wader population monitoring.
 - * Regional coastal management plans under the Coastal Protection Act be prepared.
 - * Greater levels of funding be provided for regulation of the Moreton Bay Zoning Plan, in particular for the control of bait digging.
 - * Regional planning outcomes to recognise coastal wetlands and include in the regional open space system for south-east Queensland.
 - * Land use management practices to recognise the use of retention and detention basins use of wetlands (natural or artificial) for storm water purification purposes.
4. Support rural catchment management programs.
 - * Greater priority be given to the problem of blue-green algae.
5. DEH should prepare a policy on wetlands which integrates the activities of other government departments.
6. DEH should recognise the need for investigation into the restoration of roost sites in Moreton Bay - processes, funding and techniques.

In relation to Local Government:

1. The Lord Mayor's (BCC) environmental vision includes no nett loss of wetlands and protection of our forested foothill and waterways vegetation. Encourage similar visions in other Local Governments, but the statement should include both quality and area of wetlands
2. Promote importance of the 1996 Ramsar convention and conference and inform Local Government.
3. Urban planning to recognise multiple use of wetlands in accordance with the principles of "Wise Use". An EIS to be required where wetlands will be impacted upon and the EIS to incorporate a monitoring process.

In relation to other non-government organisations:

1. Support the QOSI to help to build awareness of the public on wetland protection.
2. Promote and support the Australian Wetland Alliance.

(Congratulations, to Sandra who has been elected Conservation Officer for the Australasian Wader Studies Group. Eds.)

Leg-flags for terns

Are you just coming to terms with identifying waders? Well it's now time to turn your attention to terns (yet another challenge!). The Victorian Wader Study is leg-flagging Common Terns and Little Terns. Like the majority of waders, Common Terns are summer visitors to Australia, and leave our shores to breed in northern Eurasia during the austral winter. Common Terns are being fitted with orange leg-flags. Movements of Little Terns are quite complex. There appears to be some migration of resident birds along the eastern and southern coasts, and Asian migrants filter across the northern coast. Little Terns are being fitted with three colour bands. Sightings of leg-flags will help unravel some of the migratory paths of these two species of terns. Please report your sightings to the QWSG and we will pass on the information to the relevant people.

1994 NW Australia Wader Expedition

by Iain Patterson

The fifteenth Australasian Wader Studies Group wader study expedition to NW Australia took place in March and April this year. The expedition was the longest to date and the first to cover the entire period of northbound migration. Activities included counting, banding, colour flagging, and recording migration departures. As in previous years, fieldwork was undertaken at Broome, Eighty Mile Beach and the Port Hedland Saltworks.

The principal objective of the 1994 expedition was to collect data on departure periods, and migratory departure weights for each of the main species of wader over the course of a single departure period.

A total of thirty six people from 8 countries took part during the two months but the team size (12-20) was smaller than in previous years and at times this curtailed activities to some extent. Two NSWWSG members, Margaret Piefke and Iain Paterson, joined the expedition for varying periods during April.

The expedition achieved most of its objectives although unfortunately it was not able to catch worthwhile samples of Eastern Curlew, Little Curlew, Oriental Plover, or Oriental Pratincole. A total of 6105 waders consisting of 36 species were banded and almost all of these were banded with yellow leg-flags (the locality code of NW Australia). In addition, 151 terns, of seven species, were banded. Sample catches of more than 100 birds were made of 12 species, the largest numbers being Bar-tailed Godwit (1196), Great Knot (969) and Large Sand Plover (722). One Pintail Snipe and 4 Australian Pratincole were the first of these species to be banded by a NW Australian expedition.

Almost 10% of the birds caught were retraps, some dating back to the early eighties. Two Curlew Sandpipers banded in Hong Kong were caught at Broome and Port Hedland, respectively. An orange leg-flagged Red-necked Stint (from Victoria) was caught at Broome and two more were sighted in a small flock on an ephemeral wetland at Anna Plains (Eighty Mile Beach). In addition, an orange leg-flagged Curlew Sandpiper was seen at Port Hedland saltwork.

Samples of most of the main target species were obtained at weekly intervals over the whole nine week period providing valuable information on the pattern and rate of weight gain prior to migration. Rates of weight increase of up to 3% per day were recorded and estimated departure weights were 40 to 80% above fat free weight depending on the species.

The proportions of juveniles in the populations of the main species were determined before migration commenced and appeared indicative of a moderately successful breeding season for northern hemisphere waders in 1993. The proportion of juveniles was generally 10 to 15% with the notable exception of Large Sand Plover where it was twice as high.

Regular watches for departures of migrating birds were maintained throughout the period of the expedition at Broome and wherever possible at Eighty Mile Beach and Port Hedland. A total of 19,326 birds in 285 flocks were seen departing for Broome; 12,674 waders in 122 flocks from Eighty Mile Beach; and 207 in 8 flocks from Port Hedland Saltworks. The peak of departures occurred in the first two weeks of April. However the main departure of Great Knot occurred on 24th March while many Large Sand Plover left in the last week of March, and Grey-tailed Tattler and Terek Sandpiper migration continued until almost the end of April.

Following the large migration of Great Knot on March 24th, three birds with yellow leg-flags were seen in Hong Kong on 26th March. Two yellow flagged Bar-tailed Godwits were seen in South Korea on 26th April.

Prior to the commencement of migration, counts of waders were made off the northern shores of Roebuck Bay between Crab and Dampier Creek (22,600), Bush Point/Sandy Point (on the southern side of Roebuck Bay) (38,508). A count was also made at Bush Point on 27th April, after migration had virtually ceased. On this occasion 18,441 waders were recorded, including 350 Eastern Curlew, a dramatic increase on the two birds seen during the earlier pre-migration count held on the 2nd March. This number far exceeds the normal peak population in NW Australia and suggests an arrival of over-wintering birds from elsewhere in Australia.

Other interesting results from the April Bush Point count included 800 Little Terns and 1970 Red-capped Plovers. The counts conducted at Eighty Mile Beach and Port Hedland also produced some interesting results: in particular, the virtual absence of Oriental Plover (only 10 birds) at Eighty Mile Beach compared to the count for the same period in 1993 when 14073 were recorded; and at least 145 Asian Dowitchers at the Port Hedland Saltworks (the largest number recorded there) on 10th April.

In March, the team was joined for two weeks by Professor Allan Baker and Mark Peck from Toronto University who are the leading world experts on DNA classification of waders and its use in assisting in the delineation of migratory movements. They collected blood samples from 27 species of waders plus some other species. Samples from an additional 8 wader species were collected on their behalf after they returned to Canada. The results of the DNA analyses of these samples will be reported in due course in the *Stilt*. As in 1992, officers of the WA Department of Agriculture joined the expedition periodically to collect blood samples and cloacal swabs to test for the possible presence of avian-borne viruses, particularly Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease. (The work undertaken in 1992 has shown an extremely low incidence of these disease carrying).

As "relaxation" from the daily grind of cannon netting, counting and migration watches, and to assist with the ongoing passerine studies being undertaken by the Broome Bird Observatory, mist netting of passerines was undertaken where possible at various sites in the vicinity of Broome and Anna Plains Station. A total of 764 birds were banded, the most commonly caught species being Diamond Dove, Yellow White-eyes and Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters.

Priorities for future study cannot be fully assessed until the recently generated data has been analysed in more detail and hence the timing of the next major expedition to the north-west is uncertain. However at this stage the most likely date appears to be March/April 1996. Possible objectives for an expedition at this time include filling gaps in the data collected this year (eg Little Curlew, Oriental Pratincole, Oriental Plover, and Eastern Curlew) and, in particular to target the banding of some of the less frequently caught species such as Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel and Greenshank.

[This article is reproduced from *NSW Wader News* 5(2)]

A New Group For The Port Curtis Coastline

by Andrew Geering

The waders of Gladstone are now covered by a new group called the Port Curtis Wader Study Group (PCWSG). The PCWSG is not formally affiliated with the QWSG, but of course, we plan to closely cooperate with them, and many PCWSG members are also QWSG members. Welcome to these new members.

On 28/29 May, a representation from the QWSG Management Committee met with the PCWSG. Ivell and Jim Whyte were passing through at the end of a holiday to North Queensland, Peter Driscoll was at the beginning of an extended field trip, and I just went up for the weekend.

On Saturday night, Peter, Ivell and I gave short talks at the Department of Environment and Heritage offices on identification of waders and the activities of the QWSG. Then on Sunday we went with the group on a field trip around the southern end of Curtis Island and Facing Island. The group split in three, with Peter Driscoll leading a group to Chinaman Island and Pelican Banks, Don Arnold leading a group to Farmer's Point on Facing Island, and yours truly leading a group to Rat Island and The Oaks on Facing Island. The day was very enjoyable and we were impressed with the number and diversity of waders to be found in that part of the world. Good numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit, Grey-tailed Tattler, Great Knot and Pied Oystercatcher were seen. I also saw more Reef Herons than I have ever seen in one day before.

It is true that I got motion sick looking through the telescope for an extended period. I think that I may develop a reputation for this ailment (further enhanced by a recent pelagic seabird trip), but believe me, I usually have a cast iron stomach. Ask Margaret.

The PCWSG has got off to a flying start with a good core of enthusiastic people. I wish them well for the future.

New T-shirts

As a means of fund-raising, and raising the public profile of waders, the QWSG is selling T-shirts. The T-shirt feature a logo designed by Queensland artist David Sheffield, which is screen printed in bottle-green ink onto unbleached cotton. The cotton is from Goondiwindi and the T-shirts are made in Newcastle. I think you'll agree that the logo is very attractive, and the QWSG Management Committee thanks David for his efforts with the design. The T-shirts are available in sizes S, M, L, XL, and XXL, and cost \$20.00. Long-sleeved versions of the T-shirt are available (only sizes S, M, and L) and cost \$25.00. All profits go to the QWSG. If you would like to purchase a T-shirt, please contact Andrew Geering #####



Ugly Ignorance!

It is disappointing to see that ignorance of the value of wetlands still pervades sections of the government and broader community. Cairns mayor, Kevin Byrne, asked by the *The Bulletin* (July 5) to comment on the mudflats along the Cairns foreshore, is quoted as saying "They're dreadful, a real put-off to visitors. I don't intend to stand for any nonsense from radical greens". According to the article by Greg Roberts, a proposal to develop the mudflats was turned down in the late 80s after 6000 residents attended a protest rally, but Kevin Byrne is floating the idea again. Perhaps Byrne should be reminded that the Cairns foreshore is an area of national importance for Common Sandpiper, Whimbrel and Lesser Golden Plover (Watkins, 1993).

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Australian Wetland Alliance

In late April, a meeting in Melbourne of ten of Australia's leading non-government organisations (NGOs) led to the formation of the Australian Wetland Alliance.

The Alliance's prime objectives are the promotion and support of the Ramsar Convention's '96 conference in Brisbane, and the strongest possible encouragement of Federal and State agencies to develop and implement positive wetland policies and action plans. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance was adopted at Ramsar, Iran, in 1971 and has provided the framework for international cooperation on

wetlands between the governments of signatory countries. Australia was the first country to ratify the Convention.

Subsidiary objectives of the Alliance are the exchange of information among groups, the coordination of wetland conservation action, and the improvement of public (and political) awareness of the value of wetlands.

The alliance is particularly significant in that it will allow NGOs concerned with the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands to speak with a unified voice.

Although Australia is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention, we have a continuing history of destruction of Australian coastal wetlands for agriculture, canal estates, industrial land, marinas, resorts, etc., as well as extensive damage to our inland wetlands through agriculture and drainage schemes.

It is to be hoped that the combined 'muscle!' of the allied NGOS, and the enhanced profile of wetlands in Australia as a result of Ramsar'96 coming here will together be sufficient to motivate both Federal and State governments to allocate increased resources toward wetland conservation.

[This article is reproduced from *Waves* 1(3)]

A sign of the times

Our near new outboard motor was stolen from its storage place recently. Thankfully, insurance has covered all but \$350.00 required to replace it.

A new shelter for the QWSG

Old blue tarpaulin flaps in the breeze, tenuously tied down with knotted rope and flotsam and jetsam. Suddenly a gust of wind flings the wreckage down the beach, exposing a small group of people with banding pliers, clip-boards and leg-flags. Does this sound familiar? Yes, I have experienced it many times on cannon netting trips. From now on, no more. Wayne Kuliszer, the Manager of Rocklea Canvas, is donating a hide to us. The hide will be 1.8 x 1.8 x 1.6 m., and will have a roof, and slots to allow telescopes to be used from within. There should be room for three people to comfortably fit inside the hide. The hide will be convertible into a processing shelter by joining two of the walls together to form one long side.

On behalf of the QWSG, I would like to thank Wayne and Rocklea Canvas for their donation. They are receiving very little promotional benefit in return from the QWSG, as their main business is in transport (covers for trucks). His main motivation for the donation is a concern about the environment.

The Godwits

by David Stewart

One of the most commonly asked questions on the wader identification days held by the Queensland Wader Study Group is ... which godwit is that? There are in fact four species of godwit found throughout much of the world, two of which are regular migrants to Australia - the Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits. A third species, the Hudsonian Godwit has been recorded on a few occasions in New South Wales, Tasmania and South Australia, and the fourth species is mainly a New World bird, that breeds in the central North America and migrates to central America during the northern winter. In this wader identification review only the first two species will be discussed, and only the major points will be covered. More specific descriptions of aging and sexing details of both species will be covered later.

Both godwits are moderately large waders, with predominantly brown, grey and white basic plumage and long bills which are pinkish at the base and becomes darker towards the tip. In flight these two species are unmistakable. As the name suggests, the tail of the Black-tailed Godwit is black with a narrow pale tip (usually difficult to see under field conditions) and white upper tail-coverts (the feathers overlaying the tail feathers that are often referred to as "rump" feathers). The underwing of the Black-tailed Godwit is white with a narrow dark border and the upperwing has a conspicuous white stripe across the bases of the flight feathers and tips of the primary and secondary coverts. The Bar-tailed Godwit, on the other hand, has a white tail, uppertail-coverts and rump with dark bands across the tail. The upper wings are much more uniform with inconspicuous pale tips to the secondary coverts and a whitish underwing with dark grey-brown barring. Although these differences are very obvious when the birds are in flight, they are not much help when the birds are standing in a tight flock at a high tide roost or out on the mud-flats.

To distinguish these godwits when they are roosting or feeding there are a number of key points to look for. The Black-tailed Godwit is generally a smaller bird than the Bar-tailed Godwit with a more delicate appearance and a gently sloping forehead. Their bill also appears finer and usually less upcurved (often appearing straight). The Bar-tailed Godwit is a large bulky godwit with a steep forehead and a conspicuously upturned bill.

Apart from the differences in structure between the two godwits, there are a few plumage differences. The Black-tailed Godwit has "warm" brown upperparts with narrow and indistinct pale edges to the feathers producing a uniform brown plumage. The supercilium is white and confined mainly to the area in front of the eye, becoming a fine indistinct line behind. The Bar-tailed Godwit, however, is grey-brown in colour with broad pale edges to the feathers giving them a bold contrasting pattern, especially on the wings and back. Their supercilium is conspicuous behind the eye as well as in front of the eye and usually faintly streaked darker.

Both species develop reddish alternate plumage which is often seen prior to the birds departure in April or May. In both species the males are more extensively and deeply coloured than the respective females. The male Black-tailed Godwit has a chestnut face, neck, and breast and shading to white on the abdomen and under tail-coverts. The upper abdomen and flanks are barred brown and often with irregular shaped pale chestnut blotches. The mantle, scapulars and tertials are black with pale golden-brown blotches. The females are similar though generally paler in colour. The male Bar-tailed Godwit is similar to that of the black-tails except the chestnut colour extends down to the undertail coverts and there is no brown barring on the abdomen and flanks. The scapulars and mantle feathers are black with chestnut edges. Most females do not have a brightly coloured alternate plumage, with most birds appearing similar to that of the basic plumage of at best a reddish tinge on the face, neck and breast.

Trip Reports

Fisherman Islands (8 May)

by Meg Mulligan

Looking for any excuse to leave the Saturday afternoon household chores, I headed off to Fisherman Islands with Peter Driscoll, Fred Ambrust and Tony Rowlands to help set up the cannon nets for Sunday's early morning high tide. We set the large net up near a tidal lagoon where Pied Oystercatchers had been seen to be roosting on previous days. I had never been on a netting day when Pied Oystercatchers had been banded so I was really looking forward to Sunday's catch!

We then headed around to the next site Peter had chosen on the edge of the Brisbane River and almost at the mouth of the river. Here Grey-tailed Tattlers had been seen to be roosting on a bit of a rocky site. With the setting up completed by early dusk we were rewarded with seeing a beautiful sunset over the river and saw the planet Venus setting just after the sun in the west and Jupiter rising in the east.

Sunday dawned and it was Mothers Day. Normal mothers lay in and await the arrival of breakfast in bed and a bunch of flowers but as they still had not arrived by 5.30 am, I got up and dressed warmly for the cool morning and headed off to Fisherman Islands where I joined the group of faithful folk who too had deserted their warm bed for a day of cannon netting. We were greeted cheerfully by the gateman at the Terminal entrance and sent on our way to the nets. We drove straight out to the smaller net on the banks of the river and there to our surprise we found a lovely group of waders placed nicely in front of the net. Almost with no delay the net was fired and without undue delay we carefully extracted 73 Red-necked Stints, 2 Curlew Sandpipers, 1 Ruddy Turnstone, 27 Mongolian Plovers and 4 Large Sand Plovers and placed them into the holding cages.

Before moving onto process these birds, we decided to drive around to the large net and see if the Pied Oystercatchers would be as obliging as their friends and be standing in front of the net. But alas after much patience displayed by Peter, Dianna and Don, as they tried to encourage the Oystercatchers to stand in front of the net. We finally gave up when they were disturbed for the second time by a circling Brahminy Kite.

Back to the first site and we settled down to the process of banding, weighing and recording the details. It is just wonderful to have the privilege of holding such a tiny bird as the Red-necked Stint in the hand and to know this bird migrates an incredible distance each year. It more than makes up for the early morning rise. I always enjoy the atmosphere of these days where everyone works as a team and we have the common bond of knowing that we are taking part in a special event. We were also entertained by the passing parade of ships and aircraft that passed close by, as you would expect from a bustling city like Brisbane.

I had to leave before all the work was completed so that I could go back to being a normal mother and be taken out to a BBQ by my four children for Mothers Day. On my arrival home they were all pretending to be tapping their feet in a sign of impatience at my being away nearly all of Mothers Day but of course they saw the glow of contentment in my face and they are happy with that. A happy mother is not a nagging mother!!

Thanks to Peter Driscoll, Fred Ambrust, Dianna O'Connor, Tony Rowlands, Maree Hayward, John Bernard, Don Arnold and Andrew Geering for making it such a pleasant day. David Stewart tried his best to join us for the day but found that trying to track us down on the edge of the river and keep his car out of the deep sandy patches at the same time, an impossible job!

Amity Spit (25/26 June)

by Fiona Johnson

Brett Lane, Paul Finn and I arrived on North Stradbroke Island late Saturday afternoon in time to set up camp, have a look at Jupiter and some of her accompanying moons through a telescope before heading off to the pub for dinner with the rest of the crew.

During the day Jeremy Thompson and Meg Mulligan had spent several hours with members of the Royal Geographic Society (who were to participate in Sunday's netting) looking at birds, whilst Peter Driscoll prepared the cannons and went to Moreton Island to count Reeders Point roost with Fred Ambrust. Paul had come from Townsville to learn what he could about cannon netting birds as he plans to do similar work with water birds in his area.

Sunday started early with the QWSG crew on the Amity Point sand spit by 5.30 am to commence the final preparations for the day. As always, the process was long, tedious and cold, and again, as always, the same questions were asked: this is what we do in our leisure time? We volunteer for this? However, after the cool start, the day turned into a beautiful mild sunny day.

One net was set about half way along the sand spit and the other two nets were set adjacent to each other further toward the end of the spit, all set to fire west. The day's primary targets were to be Eastern Curlew and Double-banded Plovers. The Eastern Curlew would be young birds over-wintering in the Southern Hemisphere whilst the Double-banded Plovers breed in New Zealand and (some) migrate to Australia for the winter.

The spit is frequently used by people which created the following concerns: firstly, the danger of people walking where "live" cannons were buried and secondly, the possibility of the roosting birds being flushed and not returning. Jeremy elected to stay on the beach to ensure people did not stray along the spit while the rest of us, returned to camp for a belated breakfast and to pack our gear before the day's events.

We were just settling down for the break when word came for us to return to the beach and return quickly. Surprised, because it was only about 9:00am and high tide wasn't until 11:00am, we headed back to the beach and found that a flock of Double-banded Plovers had settled down right in the catchment area of the first net. There was no point in delaying - the cannons were fired and we had a clean catch of 31 Double-banded Plovers and 2 Red-capped Plovers. These were quickly moved into holding cages, and we then settled down with the Royal Geographic Society members to wait for high tide and see what success we would have with the remaining nets.

And the wait was long. A number of birds were roosting on a small island off the main spit and Peter left in the rubber dinghy to try to manoeuvre them back to the spit. He put them up with the result that a mixed flock of birds settled at the end of the beach including Australian Pelican, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Pied Oystercatchers, a variety of Terns and Eastern Curlew - too far from the catchment areas though. Peter then approached the birds at ground level to move them into position, looking for all the world like a sleepy sea-lion with his slow and graceful barrel rolls and the occasionally gently moving flipper, sorry, arm.

A number of holiday-makers started walking and cycling along the beach during this time, and by appealing to their good nature and curiosity, we gained their support in what we were doing. In fact, we succeeded in stirring their interest so much that they too patiently waited it out until the action started.

Eventually, the cannons were fired, the nets shot out and we had another clean catch of 29 Eastern Curlews, 3 Bar-tailed Godwits, 2 Whimbrel and 1 Caspian Tern. The members of the general public were fascinated by the retrieval of birds from the net, the transfer into holding cages, the knowledge of what happened next, where the data was sent and how it could be used. Afterwards one young teenage boy told me excitedly how he'd "even got to carry one of them big birds with the big beaks". Now that's successful public relations.

Two teams were set up to band, flag, weigh and measure the birds which gave all the Royal Geographic Society members plenty of opportunity for close contact with and photographic sessions of the birds. And, for those of us with limited knowledge of such things, it was interesting to listen to the discussions between Peter, Jeremy and Brett on details of plumage and aging of birds etc.

One of the highlights of the day was the Caspian Tern. Most of us had never seen one so closely and it was magnificent - a huge bright red powerful bill had nearly everyone drawing straws to see who wouldn't handle it.

Once everyone was packed away, there was still time enough for some gannet and whale watching from Point Lookout before catching the ferry back to Brisbane while a fading sunset produced quiet serene images over Moreton Bay.

And at the end of the day, once again, our answer to our question of the morning is yes, we do volunteer for this, and we're glad that we do.

Activities

For netting activities, please confirm with Peter Driscoll (#####) three days in advance for confirmation of time and place. In the case of weekend trips please confirm at least one week in advance. For the wader counts, please ring Ivell Whyte, the count coordinator on #####. All completed count forms must be returned to Ivell Whyte at #####.

Wader Counts (general monitoring)

Sat. 13th August	High of 2.05 m at 1:55 pm.
Sat 10th September	High of 2.21 m at 12:43 pm.
Sat. 8th October	High of 2.42 m at 11:38 am.
Sat. 22nd October	High of 2.25 m at 10:52 am.
Sat. 19th November	High of 2.34 m at 9:58 am.
Sat. 17th December	High of 2.36 m at 9:03 am.

Cannon Netting

Sat 27th August	Cabbage Tree Creek mouth. High of 1.94 m at 1:05 pm.
Sat 25th September	St Helena Island. High of 2.05 m at 12.30 pm.
1st Oct. 16th Oct.	During this two week period an Earthwatch team will be helping QWSG with wader studies in the Bay. Anyone interested in helping out should ring Peter Driscoll. Netting sites will include Fisherman Islands, Amity Point, Cabbage Tree Creek and Moreton Island. We will also be concentrating on radio tracking Eastern Curlews on the eastern side of the Bay. Birds captured on Moreton Island will be fitted with transmitters
Fri 18th - Sun 20th Nov	Moreton Island. High of 2.34 m at 9.38 am on Saturday. This will be a follow up trip to the Earthwatch program and may involve radio tracking Eastern Curlew and catching Bar-tailed Godwits.
Sun 4th December	Dux Creek, Bribie Island. High of 2.66 m at 10.22 am.

Annual General Meeting

Tues 6th September	7.30 pm at the Queensland Museum - guest speaker Adrian Riegen from the New Zealand Wader Study Group.
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Special outing to survey Green Island birds, with QOSI and the Australian Littoral Society

Sun 30th October	Meet at 8.30 am at the Wellington Point boat ramp, bring binoculars, lunch and dive boots or old sandshoes, and telescope if possible. Return to boat ramp by 4 pm (possibly earlier) and there may be a limit on numbers so please contact Andrew Geering (#####).
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