

Queensland Wader Study Group Newsletter No 8 December 1992

The Queensland Wader Study Group (QWSG) is a special interest group of the Queensland Ornithological Society Inc.

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QWSG NEWSLETTER

Contributions to the newsletter should be addressed to A. Geering and M. Bernard. Contributions can also be sent via fax (please forewarn us if you intend to use fax). Newsletters are published in March, June, September and December. Copy deadline for the next newsletter is May 31, 1993. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors and are not necessarily those of the QWSG, nor the Queensland Ornithological Society.

Editorial

In 1993, the QWSG has grown from strength to strength. Generally, the banding trips have run very smoothly. Our count program has continued to expand, with even more sites being monitored around Moreton Bay and Pumicestone Passage. There are still parts of Moreton Bay which are still inadequately covered, especially at the southern end. With the addition of AWSG counters to our list in 1994, we should be able to cover more of the Queensland coastline.

A major conservation issue that is currently being contested, and will continue to be contested in 1994, is mining of the intertidal areas around Green Island for limestone. Unlike the neighbouring islands of St. Helena and Mud Island, Green Island remains relatively pristine, untouched by the dredgers. As most of you are aware, Moreton Bay has been listed as a Ramsar site, based on its national and international significance for many species of wader. As a signatory to the Ramsar Convention, the Australian and Queensland Governments are required to, act to preserve wader habitat in Moreton Bay. The coral reefs around Green, St. Helena, and Mud islands are rare features in Moreton Bay, and support the largest populations of Ruddy Turnstone and Pied Oystercatchers in the region. The populations of Pied Oystercatcher and Ruddy Turnstone in Moreton Bay are considered to be nationally significant ie. 1% or more of the Australia-wide population is found in the Bay. Count data that has been collected by the QWSG in the last couple of years indicates that the data used to assess the importance of Moreton Bay as wader habitat may need to be revised upwards.

On 5th February 1994 there will be a public meeting to raise objections to the dredging of the Green Island intertidal area (see flier sent with this newsletter). It is attended that there will be extensive media coverage of this meeting, so it is important that the QWSG, with its obvious interest in the future of the area, show its concern by strongly supporting the meeting. It is important to have as many feet on the pavement as possible. We strongly urge you to put this date in your diary.

On behalf of the Management Committee, we would like to wish you a merry Christmas and a happy new year. We hope to see you out at the first QWSG activity in the new year - the talk by Nial Moors at Nudgee Beach Environment Centre on 16th January.

Andrew Geering and Margaret Bernard

Erratum. In QWSG Newsletter No. 7, we inadvertently neglected to acknowledge David Stewart for his article entitled Tattler Identification. Our apologies to David.

Greater cooperation between QWSG and AWSG

The Australasian Wader Studies Group has run a count since 1981. Nationwide program, counts are done twice a year - once in summer to estimate the total migratory population, and once in winter to estimate the population of over-wintering juveniles. Historically northern Australia has been much less well covered than southern Australia, mainly because the instigators of the AWSG live in the southern states. With the recent advent of the QWSG and the NSW WSG, the count program along the eastern coastline has greatly expanded. The AWSG has therefore approached the state-based wader study groups to take over coordination of the count programs in their states. All count data will be passed on to the AWSG. This increased cooperation between the AWSG and the QWSG has obvious benefits: replication will be avoided; organisation of counters will be more efficient; the local network of bird-watchers will be better utilised; and there will be less work-load for the national count coordinator.

The QWSG will continue our regular program of counts to monitor temporal changes in wader numbers. However, on the designated national count days, we will attempt to muster as many troops as possible to get the greatest possible coverage. The next national count days are 5-6 February. Unfortunately, in Queensland, times of high tide on these days are very inconvenient (c. 7:00 am). The relative earliness of the high tides makes it very difficult to get counters out to the more remote places like Moreton Island. We have therefore decided to make the count days on the following weekend. On 12-13 February, the high tides are around the middle of the day, and the tides are much fuller.

We would like as many people as possible to take part in this count. Ivell Whyte can be contacted if you need information on what sites are covered, and what sites need to be counted.

NB. Counters, please provide a map of the site that you count.

Banding in 1993

As the year comes to a close, it is an appropriate time to review our banding efforts. The numbers and species of waders banded, and the locations at which these waders were banded, are given in Table 1. In total, 1574 waders were banded in Moreton Bay, which is 53% more than that banded in 1992. This is quite some achievement, as there were 3 less trips in 1993 than in 1992, and the banding was done without the assistance of an Earthwatch expedition. For the first time, we banded at Dux Creek. Dux Creek was a particularly hard place to net birds. The future of this site is uncertain, as it is ear-marked for development as a residential estate, but the developers have made some commitment to, provide an artificial roost.

In addition to the to the banding trips to Moreton Bay, there was one trip to Yamba in northern NSW, which was run in association with the NSW WSG. This trip was very successful in many ways: a good total of birds were banded; we were able to exchange ideas on cannon-netting and banding; and many locals attended, and got good 'hands on' experience. We are planning to make this trip an annual event.

As in 1992, the species most commonly trapped in Moreton Bay were Bar-tailed Godwits (32.2% of the total) and Great Knot (39.5% of the total). 8.1% of the Bar-tailed Godwits, and 12.3% of the Great Knots, were recaptures, and all but one of these recaptures were banded in Moreton Bay by the QWSG. The exception was a Bar-tailed Godwit that was banded in Alaska and recaptured at Reeders Point, Moreton Island, on 3rd May 1993. We had 4 other international recaptures in 1993: a Curlew Sandpiper banded in Taiwan and recaptured at Bishop Island on 10th January; a Red Knot banded in New Zealand and recaptured at Nudgee Beach on 3rd May; another Red Knot, banded in New Zealand and recaptured at Dux Creek on 17th October; and a Ruddy Turnstone banded in New Zealand and recaptured at St. Helena Island on 19th September.

From the count data that we have collected, it is becoming clear that Moreton Bay is an, important staging post for a number of species during migration. In spring 1992, large numbers of Red and Great Knot were observed at Nudgee Beach, and likewise, large numbers of -Ruddy Turnstone and Grey-tailed Tattler were observed at St. Helena Island and Reeders Point. It may therefore be worthwhile targeting these species for banding at the times of active migration.

Andrew Geering

Table 1. Waders from Moreton Bay which were banded by QWSG during 1993. The dates and results of all field activities are given using the following site abbreviations: BI (Bishop Is.); AM (Amity Spit); NB (Nudgee Beach); MI (Mirapool Lagoon); RP (Reeders Point); SH (St. Helena Island); DC (Dux Creek). The number of recaptures on each occasion and for each species is given in brackets

Species	Site-->	BI	NB	MI	BI	AM	NB	RP	NB	SH	DC	Total
	Date -->	10/1	2/2	21/2	20/3	10/4	3/5	24/7	4/9	19/9	17/10	
Pied Oystercatcher				7								7
Black-winged Stilt							6					6
Mongolian Plover		4									10	14
Large Sand Plover											1	1
Grey Plover					3						8	3
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper											5	8
Curlew Sandpiper		18(2)			1	2		2	9		36	37(2)
Red-necked Stint		29			8		43(4)		42(2)		29(1)	65
Red Knot		1			151(19)		218(19)		136(27)		79	103(7)
Great Knot		17(2)	3		7(2)		46(4)		37(5)		29(1)	554(68)
Bar-tailed Godwit			51(9)	15(2)		60(5)	174(11)				79	469(38)
Eastern Curlew				17		4						21
Whimbrel						4		1				17
Grey-tailed Tattler						16		44	1	22		77
Ruddy Turnstone						10				32(1)		32(2)
Crested Tern			2									2
Little Tern									5			35
Gull-billed Tern												2
Total banded		69	56	39	170	92	313	221	230	54	214	1457
Total recaptures		(4)	(9)	(2)	(21)	(5)	(27)	(11)	(34)	(1)	(2)	(117)
Overall total		73	65	41	191	97	340	232	264	55	216	1574

The latest from our man in Siberia

We should expect a good season for Siberian migrants after a good breeding season, according to the information received by Pavel Tomkovich. The Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service has again assisted Pavel with studies on the breeding biology of the Great Knot. Pavel has managed, to colour-flag 29 chicks and 13 adult Great Knots for individual recognition next breeding season. This is a small number of birds, but considering the very low density of breeding birds in very difficult terrain, Pavel has done remarkably well. Other species banded in small numbers were Terek Sandpipers and Pacific Golden Plovers. So keep your eyes peeled for coloured flags!!

Pavel's message was sent from Moscow on a cold and rainy autumn day, while he was dreaming of the paradise he calls Australia! We should think ourselves lucky!! The type-written message got through to Phil Straw (*NSW WSG Chairperson*) through tortuous channels, of dubious identity, via Holland!

(This article is reproduced in part from the *NSW Wader Study Group Newsletter 4(3)*)

QWSG Library

An initiative of the present QWSG Management Committee is establishment of a library. Greg Nye has taken on the responsibility of being the first librarian. The library will house a number of items: journals, books, newsletters, official QWSG correspondence, and photographs (slides are the preferred format).

It is hoped that the slide library will not be restricted to pictures of birds, but will cover a wide range of subjects. For example, if someone has to give a talk to a community or school group on waders and the activities of the QWSG, we could provide slides of waders, their habitat and food, threats to survival (clearing of mangroves, pollution etc.), and techniques used to study their biology (cannon netting, banding etc.). Similarly, we could use such photographs to illustrate posters, press releases, or demonstrate points to relevant organisations.

Photographs are also important scientific records. Counters are encouraged to take photographs of the sites they are monitoring, preferably at high tide when the birds are roosting. It is recommended that photographs are taken from a reference point eg. a fence post, tree, sign, pier etc. By doing this, you can take a photograph from an identical position several years later. Photographs of roost sites are useful in many ways:

1. It is the simplest way of viewing an accurate description of the site, and helps other people find the site at a later time.
2. If you visit a site regularly, it is sometimes difficult to recognise gradual change. These changes become more obvious when photographs taken several years apart are compared.

For similar reasons, we also need photographs of important feeding areas. So please take your camera with you on all your wader-watching trips, and send copies of photographs to the QWSG library.

We would also appreciate copies of all letters sent either on behalf of the QWSG or concerning QWSG matters, and copies of all replies. In this way, we can remain updated on issues, and have records of responses from people or organisations to inquiries.

Worms, worms, worms.....

Sometimes waders suffer a stress-induced disease called capture myopathy which arises during banding. The effects of, capture myopathy, immobility from degeneration of muscles in the legs and wings, are reversible with appropriate care. To care for the birds, we need a continual supply of food, namely earthworms and mealworms. If you consider that a wader may eat as much as a third of their body weight in food a day, that's a lot of worms - more than what one person can easily raise. We therefore need volunteers to help farm worms. Earthworms and mealworms are easy to raise, requiring only sphagnum moss and bran, respectively to feed upon, and they don't smell. Starter cultures can be obtained from David Stewart and Natasha Taylor. David and Natasha are our experts on care of injured waders, so if you are interested in helping with this important activity, please contact them.,

Shorebirds and wetlands in Japan

Mr. Nial Moors, International Co-ordinator for Japan Wetlands Action Network (Jawan), is visiting Brisbane in early 1994, and will present a talk on shorebirds and their habitats in Japan, and the many serious threats to their existence. In this country (see Activities for further details). He has worked with Jawan for the last three years to preserve and protect four key intertidal habitats threatened with reclamation on the Japanese coast. He is keen to develop cooperation between Australian and Japanese bird groups to put pressure on the Japanese governments to protect critical shorebird habitats.

North-West Australia Wader Expedition 1994

The latest information on the Broome expedition is available for prospective participants. The dates for the expedition are from Tuesday, 1 March to Saturday 30 April.

The fieldwork program will consist of banding, counting, and visible migration departure, watches at three different locations:

- (2) Roebuck Bay, Broome
- (3) 80 Mile Beach - Anna Plains Station (250km SW of Broome)
- (4) Port Hedland Saltworks (600km SW of Broome)

People are encouraged to go for as long as they wish and whatever dates suit them best. Participants will be responsible for arranging travel to and from Broome, otherwise bookings can also be made by contacting Clive Minton.

Costs include:

1. \$16 per day for food (including gas, laundry etc.)
2. \$100 per week (with a maximum of \$300 per person) for local transport (hire of 4WD).
3. camping fees are \$5 per day
4. or accommodation at the Broome Bird Observatory costs \$15 - 20 per day.

If you wish to participate, please contact Clive Minton as soon as possible to advise him of your arrangements. If you require more detailed information, a circular on the trip is available by contacting *Andrew Geering*.

Trip reports

St. Helena Island, 19 September

On Saturday, - Andrew Geering, Sam Driscoll, and Margaret Bernard made a reconnaissance trip to St. Helena Island with the proposal of cannon netting there the next day. I gather they walked virtually around, the whole island and felt they had made the acquaintance of every mosquito, if not every bird. The north-western corner of the island has a pebble/shell beach which Ruddy Turnstones, among other birds, were using as a roost and it was here that two cannon nets were set up.

Only five people could participate on Sunday due to the limitations in transport. Peter Driscoll and Dave Stewart made it to the island in the rubber ducky, whilst Andrew, Margaret, and myself had the luxury of being transported in the National Parks and Wildlife boat, *Cormorant*. The NPWS further assisted by offering the use of one of their vehicles for the day. This made transportation of equipment (and people) from the southern end of the island simple, and many thanks go to the NPWS personnel for their help with this, and for delaying the departure of *Cormorant* for the mainland in the afternoon to accommodate us.

A large part of St. Helena is not open to the public, so it was quite a privilege to have access to an area of this picturesque and bird abundant island that would normally not be available. Adding to the interest of the day were the activities of a Willie Wagtail that had built its nest on a large piece of exposed drift wood immediately adjacent to the net. It determinedly stayed put, except for brief periods, during the afternoon of the netting, despite many close approaches on my way to and from the holding cages. As well, a pair of Ospreys spent most of the day perched on top of a radio aerial immediately behind us.

The firing of the cannons was delayed due to an uncooperative pair of Pied Oystercatchers which insisted on roosting on the net. Peter spent a painfully long time waist deep in water while trying to encourage the birds to move, but eventually his and Dave's efforts paid off, the birds moved and the cannons were fired.

We had a clean catch of 33 Ruddy Turnstones, including one of only thirteen ever banded in New Zealand. We also caught 22 Grey-tailed Tattlers. These were banded, flagged, weighed, and moult-scored by the team

in another of Peter's architectural and engineering masterpieces. This proved the perfect opportunity to pick the finer points of tattler and Turnstone non-breeding plumage variations, as well as learn about the moult scoring process.

It was a very successful day which, although long, progressed at an easy pace. For Margaret and myself, however, the edge was taken off when we found ourselves, tired, at the wrong end of the day, and at the wrong end of an increasingly long jetty, transporting the gear, including cannons, to the right end.

Fiona Johnson

Dux Creek, Bribie Island, 17 October

This was a new cannon netting site for the group and as the events of the weekend unfolded, some uncomfortable shortcomings in our operations were revealed. Work began on Saturday afternoon once Peter, Frank, Fiona, Andrew and I had ceased getting lost while trying to find each other the intricate manoeuvres baffled all involved. It was at this early stage that we encountered our first problem. Lack of knowledge about the site and its unusual topography made it difficult to determine where the previous high tide mark was. Even when this was determined to the best of our ability, it was difficult to determine how much further the water would rise on the next day when the tide was much higher because of the flatness of the site. All this meant that progress was much slower than hoped for, and those of us who were new and didn't have much of an idea of what we were doing, had even less of a clue in the dark, so work was abandoned until the morning.

Now I learned why Peter was so willing to provide me with transport. and overnight accommodation. I got to be chief assistant when the two of us arrived back at 6:00 am; early enough to learn that Pied Oystercatchers don't mind doing it first thing in the morning, even if they are being watched. All of the late risers started to appear at the incredibly late hour of 8:00 am. and even then made sure that Peter and I had completed all the tricky tasks before venturing across the water (the fact that that the canoe was on our side of the canal till then is irrelevant). If you still wanted to avoid doing anything and become the centre of attention, as was demonstrated, you could always aggravate an old back injury and this would entitle you to an exert massage.

Then came the relaxing part of the day. During lunch we watched the birds fly in, not just the northern shorebirds, but a small group of Sooty Oystercatchers, a couple of Avocets, and an early flock of White-throated Needletails, who considered themselves somewhat above the others and declined an invitation to join them at the roost site.

We were now to learn more of the complicated nature of the site. The entry of water into the main roost area is severely constricted. This results in the water level in the canal rising much faster than inside. It also means that even when the tide has turned in the canal, it is still rising in the roost area and from our vantage point it was not easy to see if the water had reached its peak. To put it mildly - we got it wrong.

The cannons fired, no doubt causing a few of the nearby residents to spill their beer onto the BBQ plate. As if the continually rising water wasn't enough to cope with, requiring us to move the net twice, the unusual noise attracted a few of the local lads, who didn't immediately appreciate why we were less than pleased to see their canine friends. Once these had been banished, we had a few much needed extra hands for a while. Meanwhile, a major re-organisation had taken place inside my brain. Suddenly extracting entangled birds from the net no longer seemed as difficult as riding a monocycle on a rotating helicopter blade while blind-folded. Ivell wished she had forgotten to put her watch back on after the morning shower. It was hard enough finding large items like the cannons, which had disappeared a metre into the mud.

Eventually we had the birds safely in the holding cages: 79 Bar-tailed Godwits, 29 Great Knots, 9 Red Knots, 5 Curlew and 8 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, 2 Gulf-billed Terns, plus 35 Little Terns, who carried on their political discussions as if nothing had happened. It was then. that we noticed another group of birds had assembled perfectly, in front of one of the other nets, impatiently waiting for their chance to become famous. Not wishing to disappoint them, BOOM, and another splash of beer on the BBQ. This catch was a different cast, a good opportunity to, compare a lone Large Sand-Plover with its Mongolian cousins, both with their wonderful big eyes, and the adventure of trying to catch Red-necked Stints fluttering around like canaries in holding cages more suited to Eastern Curlews.

We completed the long recovery and clean up of equipment just before the sun withdrew the last of its rays. Despite what I might have implied previously, thanks to all those who willingly assisted Peter Beck, Frank Bigg, Polly Cutcliffe, Jill Denning, Peter Driscoll, Andrew Geering, Fiona Johnson, Raelee McKay, David Stewart and Ivell Whyte. I apologise if there is anyone I have forgotten.

Greg Nye

Yamba, 13-15 November (a joint exercise with the NSW WSG)

The Whytes are always late! Not this time we said, as we rose bright and early Saturday morning, and headed off to pick up the "tinnie" from Gary Harch's. The tinnie was bigger and heavier than we imagined, but we connected it up and headed off to pick up Greg Nye and Andrew Geering.

Guess what? We couldn't open the back of the Landcruiser with the boat attached, and no names will be mentioned as to who ripped all the wiring out of the trailer connection. There were some great bird identifiers on hand, but could they tell which wire went where? Even the RACQ man could not help with this one. The original wiring was a homemade job, but trial and error won the day, and we were off just two hours late. The Whytes strike again.

Yes, we were the last to arrive. The NSW group led by David Geering, Phillip Straw and Fred Van Gessel, and the rest of our group were already there. Fun and games when booking in at the caravan park. A "Geering" from Qld, and a "Geering" from NSW was too much for the proprietor to handle.

We missed the first firing by the NSW group on the island, but we only missed catching one bird. The "late boat" was used to check out the main firing site for the next day. Would you believe it - a pair of Pied Oystercatchers also chose the site to deposit their egg? Top marks to the youngsters from the NSW group. They protected that egg for the two days.

Saturday night, a meeting was held at the recreation area (the Whytes were late - they missed it) to plan the next day's activities. Early rise at 5:00 am. NSW time on Sunday morning (that's 4:00 am. proper Queensland time). Three nets were set on the mainland as a joint effort, and one on the island by the NSW group. No luck on the island, however, the joint operation on the mainland was highly successful. Two nets were fired - our large net and the NSW net. The result was a total of 263 birds – 213 Bar-tailed Godwits, 30 Whimbrels, 2 Grey-tailed Tattlers, 2 Silver Gulls, and 16 Great Knots.

With seven groups working, the birds were processed very quickly. This allowed our people to relax and use the time as a training session. Peter Driscoll released the birds (a change for him), and Greg Nye, Andrew Geering, Dianna O'Connor, Karen Wright, Tony Rowland and Ivell and Jim Whyte took turns with other areas of the processing. Our newest member, Edward Kleiber from Tweed Heads, also joined us, and his assistance was appreciated. We only processed 15 birds, but we had a damn good look at them.

The NSW group was pleased with the result, especially with the number of Whimbrels, and were delighted to be able to leave on Sunday afternoon instead of Monday morning, as rain was threatening. But they said that one thing is for sure - this should be a yearly event.

We stayed for a while and were rewarded with being able to study two Beach Thick-knees on the island. Greg Nye was over the moon because this was his first sighting. We also took time to check out the sights of the Yamba prior to heading back to Brisbane.

Yes we got home late - but the Whytes are always late.

Jim and Ivell, Whyte

Activities

For netting activities, please confirm with Peter Driscoll (xxx xxxx) three days in advance for confirmation of time and place. In the case of weekend trips please confirm at least 1 week, in advance. For the wader counts, please ring Ivell Whyte, the count coordinator on 07 xxx xxxx. All completed count forms must be returned to Ivell Whyte. at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, Qld xxxx.

Wader Counts (general monitoring)

Sat. 15th Jan	High of 2.37 m at 11:39 am.
Sat. 12th Feb	High of 2.38 m at 10:38 am.
Sat. 12th Mar	High of 2.29 m at 9:37 am.
Sat. 9th Apr	High of 2.15 in at 8:30 am.
Sat. 23rd Apr	High of 2.28 m at 7:04 am.
Sat. 7th May	High of 1.99 m at 7:12 am.

Cannon Netting

Sat 15 th Jan	Fisherman Island. High of 2.37 at 11:39 am.
Fri 28 th - Sun 30 th Jan	Moreton Island. High of 2.59 m at 10:45 am on Saturday

27th Feb - 14th Mar 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.

Sun 10th April St Helena Island High of 2.12 m at 9:04 am

Clean Up Australia Day

call Andrew Geering (870 9362)

Sun. Mar. 6 Clean up Nudgee Beach roost and Boondall Wetlands. Meet at 8:30 am at boat ramp in Frank Doyle Park, Shornecliffe (Shornecliffe Pde). Bring garden gloves and picnic lunch. Opportunity to do some birdwatching

Wader identification days

call David Stewart or Mike Lewis

Sat 26th Feb 1:30 pm - 4 pm. - Oyster Point (Wynnum) low tide feeding area.

Special Meeting for a talk by Nial Moors (Japan Wetlands Action Network).

call Andrew Geering

Sun 16th Jan 3:00 pm - Nudgee Beach Environment Education Centre.