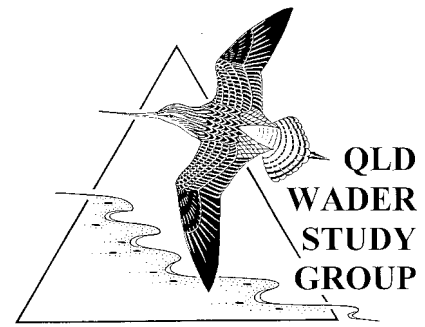


# QUEENSLAND WADER



Issue number 25

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

## EASTERN CURLEW STUDY—WE NEED YOUR HELP

Paul Finn

When I first attended the regular cannon netting trips in 1993 as a member of the QWSG while also studying environmental science at Griffith University I never imagined that five years later I would be starting a PhD in this area. I enjoyed these outings because they broadened my field skills, and also appreciated the experience of holding waders in my hands. After having some time off from cannon netting and university life in general I am now starting a PhD on that delightful wader species, the Eastern Curlew.

While a lot has been learned in recent years about roost sites around Moreton Bay, the importance of different intertidal areas as feeding grounds is not well understood, and this lack of knowledge makes it difficult to even guess at the effects on curlews of factors such as bait harvesting, pollution, disturbance and development. My PhD research will first investigate choice of foraging habitat and feeding ecology in Eastern Curlews, specifically, the question "what is a key feeding site, and why?", extending possibly into also looking at movement patterns later on, and supervised by Peter Driscoll and Carla Catterall. I will initially be researching how the feeding curlews distribute themselves amongst and within tidal flats. This requires low-tide counts of curlews in a large number of areas, within different sections of Moreton Bay, and spanning a variety of different characteristics (i.e. size, substrate, slope, etc.). To get a large enough number of areas for the results to be statistically valid, I need the help of QWSG members.

The selected areas need to be surveyed during one low tide period and then repeated the next day, with a further survey (another weekend) about 6 weeks later. To do this we need to put together teams of 2-3 people who can spend about 4 hours counting birds at low tide for two weekends. Weekends that have a good low tide during the day are scarce, and the dates selected are 28th-29th November (lows at 10:06, 11:21 am) and 30th-31st January (lows at 3:19, 4:05 pm). Several people have already volunteered thanks to an introduction by Linda Cross at the last QOSI meeting. During each survey, each team will make a count of the numbers of curlews at several adjacent intertidal flats. One bonus is that Eastern Curlews aren't difficult to see or identify.

If you can help (either as an individual or a group), please contact either Linda or myself

If you are able to help, can you also let us know if you own a telescope and/or a boat.

Thank you in advance.

## QWSG CONTACTS

All correspondence to: The Chairperson QWSG.

**CHAIRPERSON:**

Peter Driscoll

**TREASURER:**

Sheryl Keates

**NEWSLETTER EDITORS:**

Leanne Bowden & G Miller

**COUNT COORDINATORS:**

Linda & Phil Cross

**CONSERVATION OFFICER:**

Greg Miller (

**LIBRARIAN:**

Dave Stewart 07 3378 8605

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS:**

Lindsay Agnew

Margaret Bernard

Joyce Harding

Sandra Harding

Eddie Hegerl

Arthur Keats

Rob Mancini

Stuart Pell

Karen Welsh

Ivell & Jim Whye

Members are reminded their membership expires on the date shown on the newsletter address label.

## NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members who have joined since the winter edition of the newsletter was printed.

Maree Burke, Gary Cox, Elisabeth Drew and John Staples, Mark Free, Peter Irish, Peter Main, Lynn Roberts and Angela Wardell-Johnson

Many thanks too to those who have included a donation with their renewal or membership fee. This is greatly appreciated as such donations make on-going work possible.

## EASTERN CURLEW SATELLITE TRACKING

Peter Driscoll

The third and final year of satellite tracking of Eastern Curlews from Queensland during their northward migration will be undertaken next year, once again with support from the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ).

During an exciting first year when, and despite the disruption of, Cyclone Justin, we had some startling results.

This year was somewhat of a disappointment since we assumed things would work even better. Despite the recorded feats of one bird making it to Japan and beyond, for one reason or another (probably technical), the results for this year did not reach expectations. We were spoilt by the results for the first year. We will be more reserved in our expectations for the year ahead. Once again, we will be deploying more than ten transmitters. Watch this space.

## SOUTH EAST GULF WORK CONTINUES

Peter Driscoll

For the first three weeks in September and the first week in October, aerial and ground counts of waders were undertaken as a part of the continuing study of wader numbers and distribution in the South East Gulf of Carpentaria.

A larger scale operation was undertaken in March this year and an even bigger effort will be made next March and April when birds will be banded and radio tracked. Ultimately, we will have far better knowledge of numbers, preferred sites, and the roosting and feeding behaviour of waders using this important region in the East Asia-Australasian Flyway.

Results from the fieldwork in March were confounded by the influence of Cyclone Ted with huge volumes of reshwater washing out onto the Gulf coast. At sites where birds were completely lacking in March, thousands have returned during the southward migration with very large numbers of Red Knot using the extensive mudflats that occur between the Nassau River north of Karumba and Tarrant Point, north west of Burketown.

The coastline is isolated, difficult to access and the birds spread out over large areas and roost in seemingly unpredictable patterns. They are responding to peculiar tidal regimes that are a feature of the Gulf and due partly to vagaries of winds that influence tide heights dramatically.

The latest fieldwork has involved regular aerial assessment of numbers and ground counts at selected sites within 50 km of Karumba. The Department of Environment and Heritage Crocodile Research unit has co-ordinated its efforts with the latest wader survey to better utilise resources and to act as back up support to what is an otherwise a single person effort. This has allowed costs to be kept to a minimum for a field trip that was not originally intended but became necessary to help sort out what impact Cyclone Ted had on the results for last March. The next major field trip will be in March and April next year and then at the same time in the year 2000.

## WADER WATCH

Linda and Phil Cross, Peter Driscoll and Joyce Harding

### *Errata from winter edition of Queensland Wader*

Under green leg flag sightings, the date for the Eastern Curlew sighting with transmitter at Caboolture River Mouth site by Ivan Fien should have been 25-5-98.

The sighting of the immature Hooded Plover has been confirmed by photographs. Details of the sighting have since appeared in Wingspan published by Birds Australia.

Leg flag banding legend (colour = where banded)

green = Brisbane/Queensland,

orange = Victoria

yellow = North Western Australia

white = New Zealand (some species banded in New South Wales)

blue = Japan

### **Green leg flag sightings - Queensland**

3 Eastern Curlew—Arthur & Sheryl Keates, Trish Alexander at Manly Boat Harbour and Lytton, 9-8-98 to

17-9-98 |

7 Bar-tailed Godwit—Martin Waugh, Arthur & Sheryl Keates, Jim & Ivell Whyte, John Cummings at Amity Point, Manly Boat Harbour, Cabbage Tree Creek and Scarborough, 11-7-98 to 26-9-98

1 Grey-tailed Tattler—Arthur & Sheryl Keates at Manly Boat Harbour on 23-8-98

2 Great Knot—Fred Armbrust at Sandgate on 17-9-98

1 Red Knot—Arthur & Sheryl Keates at Manly Boat Harbour on 12-9-98

1 Lesser Sand Plover—Trevor Ford at Dux Creek on 9-4-98

### **Green leg flag sightings - outside Queensland**

1 Grey-tailed Tattler—Eriko Fujioka at Shiokawa Tidal flats Japan on 9-5-98.

### **Other leg flag sightings and banded birds**

Eastern Curlew—2 with orange flag seen by Trevor Ford at Dux Creek on 11-8-98 and 1 with orange flag seen by David Edwards at Pine Rivers Wetlands Reserve on 15-8-98

Great Knot—1 with orange flag seen by Fred Armbrust at Sandgate on 17-9-98

Red Knot—1 with orange flag seen by Arthur & Sheryl Keates at Manly Boat Harbour on 12-9-98, 1 with orange flag seen by David Edwards at Manly Boat Harbour on 13-9-98 and 1 with orange flag seen by Fred Armbrust at Sandgate on 17-9-98

Pied Oystercatcher—2 with metal band seen by Edward Kleiber at Manly Boat Harbour on 11-7-98, and 1 with metal band seen by Sandra Harding, David Milton & Peter Rothlisberg at St Helena Island Pier on 12.9.98

**Interesting sightings**

- 7 Sanderling. —Paul O'Neill at Sandy Point on 29-3-98
- 44 Red-kneed Dotterel—David Edwards at Pine Rivers Northside on 13-6-98
- 33 Red-kneed Dotterel—Arthur & Sheryl Keates at Lytton I on 13-6-98
- 2 Banded Lapwing—Paul O'Neill & Russell Watson at Sandy Point on 14-6-98
- 48 Double-banded Plover—Edward Kleiber at Manly Boat Harbour on 1-7-98
- 17 Black-fronted Dotterel—Ian Watson at Tugun -Sewage Works on 20-7-98

**Not waders —but of interest anyway**

- 8 Lesser Crested Tern—Arthur & Sheryl Keates at Manly Boat Harbour on 9-8-98
- 34 Brolga—John Thomson & Maree Burke at Young Avenue Kinka Beach on 15-8-98
- Caspian Tern—I with metal band seen by Edward Kleiber at Manly Boat Harbour on 11-7-98

**COUNT PROGRAMME I**

Phil and Linda Cross

By the time you receive this newsletter wader numbers should have increased with the return of the adult birds and their young from the northern hemisphere.

Information from your 15.8.98 count sheets shows some birds returning early August. Good numbers of Eastern Curlew were recorded at a number of sites and other sightings recorded breeding plumage evident in a number of species.

Some Red Knots had full breeding plumage while others such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Great Knot and Curlew Sandpiper had varying amounts. The first sight for the season of 4 Lesser and 2 Greater Sand Plover was at Manly Boat Harbour on 23.8.98.

On your count sheets for 12.9.98 saw the return of Black-tailed Godwits at a number of sights and more numbers of the smaller waders such as Lesser Sand Plover and Red-necked Stint.

Of interest was the number of orange leg flag sightings which are detailed under wader watch in the newsletter. Particularly note the sighting dates of the Eastern Curlew compared to the Knots.

During the winter months we have had good numbers of Double-banded Plover at a number of sites. The last sighting recorded at Manly Boat Harbour on 6.9.98 and Caboolture River Mouth on 12.9.98, one bird in breeding plumage at each site.

With regard to breeding information on our sedentary waders we have Red-capped Plover chicks at Dux Creek on 6.9.98 and a Pied Oystercatcher on a nest with one egg at Dux Creek on 12.9.98. A pair of Pied Oystercatchers successfully fledged 2 young at this site in 1997.

We warmly welcome John Thomson to the count programme. John has taken over the two Kinka Beach sites from Molly Crawford.

**WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO REMIND OUR MEMBERS THAT WE ARE STILL IN DESPERATE NEED OF MORE COUNTERS TO JOIN THE PROGRAMME ON A PERMANENT OR STANDBY BASIS. IF YOU CAN HELP PLEASE LET US KNOW.**

**EXTRACTS FROM WETLANDS (JULY 1998), THE NEWSLETTER OF WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL****News from Argentina's Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network  
Red Knots at Bahia, San Antonio International Reserve**

An international campaign to study Red Knots migration was developed at this WHSRN reserve, in March, where more than 1,000 knots were banded and measured. Some individuals were equipped with radio transmitters as well so that their movements and departure schedules could be studied. The success of this campaign was hugely evident when in the beginning of April many banded shorebirds covered the beaches of San Antonio including knots arriving from Tierra del Fuego, Punta Rasa and the United States.

### Shorebird Working Group Meeting in China

The Shorebird Working Group (SWG) met at the mouth of the Yangtze River, north-east of Shanghai, China, this April to further encourage regional ownership of the Shorebird Action Plan (East Asian-Australian Shorebird Reserve Network) as well as endorse the annual work plan. The "plan" establishes the priorities and oversight for conservation activities which support specific sites on which migratory shorebirds depend.

[Postscript: QWSG member, Mark Barter, was re-elected chair of SWG.]

## BEACH STONE-CURLEWS—A BRIEF STATUS REPORT

Louise Hardman

A study is currently underway looking at the behaviour and life cycle of the Beach Stone-curlew (*Esacus neglectus* Mathews 1912). Sponsored by Australian Geographic, Louise Hardman is undertaking a literature review and a behavioural study. Margot Warnett (Department of Environment, Townsville) is also involved with the planning and study.

A pair of nesting birds have been observed and photographed for over 40 hours from September to November (1997), near Townsville. Another nesting pair was briefly observed at Oyster Point, Cardwell, amidst full-scale insensitive development. Further audio-visual recordings are planned for this year's breeding season (1998) at Shoalwater Bay and Whitsunday Is.

Beach stone-curlews are rare (possibly endangered) coastal waders. They are found scattered at extremely low densities throughout northern Australia, and from New Caledonia to the Andaman Islands. The majority of reported sightings are of a pair or a single bird. Most of the smaller southeast Asian countries have only one or two reported sightings.

These birds are exclusively coastal dwellers, found in areas with sandy beaches, mud/reef flats and mangroves; for nesting, feeding and protection, respectively. They are often found at the mouths of estuaries where there are extensive mud flats.

These birds are non-migratory, occupying a regular home territory and nesting site for many years, possibly for life, although the movements of these birds are poorly understood.

The pair bonding between these birds appears extremely strong, as these birds are not gregarious, occurring in small groups of one to three (occasionally four - two seasons offspring).

When nesting the beach stone-curlews lay a single egg on or above the king-tide line, mostly on sandy beaches. The egg is laid in a shallow depression, often with the adjacent tidal debris surrounding the crude nest. As such the egg is extremely camouflaged and difficult to find due to its mottled appearance. They may lay under a bush or in the open.

During the nesting period one bird sits on the nest while the other will keep a sharp look out for any predators, sending an alarm call to the nesting bird. When disturbed, the parent birds will quickly leave the nest to avoid drawing attention to it. The pair will run or walk along the mud flats or beach emitting a soft 'peep' call to each other. The nesting period is a very vulnerable time, particularly to human encroachment.

Mangroves and small bushes are used by the juvenile flightless 'runner' to hide in and avoid detection - which works extremely well. They lay close to the ground amongst roots and debris with their neck and body flat against the ground.

The Beach Stone-curlews feed on the extensive mud or reef flats, seeking out crustaceans, particularly small crabs. Their feeding technique is to watch for movements, quickly run and stab at the prey, sometimes hammering or smashing the prey on rocks before swallowing. Young birds have been found with whole soldier crabs filling their long throats. Feeding takes place during the low tide, day or night.

From the literature available it appears the range of these birds is quite extensive, but the density and occurrence are extremely low. In Australia the population has been estimated at 1000 birds, but this was by aerial survey and maybe questionable.

Closely related to the Great Stone-curlew (*Esacus recurvirostris*) from the Indian subcontinent, the Beach stone-curlew is a unique and special bird of our shoreline. One which could easily disappear without our notice - *Esacus neglectus*.

## ACTIVITY REPORTS |

### Wader ID day at Manly Boat Harbour 9<sup>th</sup> August 1998 Sheryl and Arthur Keates

Fortunately, the westerly winds that had been blowing had eased and a fine sunny morning greeted the 24 people, mostly QOSI or QWSG members, who attended the wader identification morning at Manly Boat Harbour.

Observers had good views of 24 species of waders, waterbirds and raptors. For most, the highlight of the morning was the Double-banded Plovers, many of which were in breeding plumage as their stay in the bay neared an end. Almost everyone saw the Eastern Curlew with a green leg flag. A Bar-tailed Godwit with a green leg flag, also a Caspian Tern and 2 Pied Oystercatchers wearing metal leg bands were also seen by some.

Species recorded at last year's August outing to this site, but absent this year, were Pacific Golden Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Whimbrel, Common Greenshank and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper.

#### Species recorded were:

Chestnut Teal, Pied Cormorant, Australian Pelican, Great Egret, Whistling Kite, Brahminy Kite, Osprey, Pied Oystercatcher, Black-winged Stilt, Red-capped Plover, Double-banded Plover, Masked Lapwing, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eastern Curlew, Grey-tailed Tattler, Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Silver Gull, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Crested Tern.

### Other meetings and events Linda Cross

Phil & Linda Cross attended a Bird Workshop with Caboolture Region Environmental Education Centre on 5.9.98. We took a small display and gave a talk on waders.

Sheryl Keates and Linda Cross addressed a group of twenty ladies at Acacia Street Wellington Point on 25.9.98. We took a small display, gave a talk on waders and showed them a few species of waders at the Acacia Street Wellington Point count site.

### Wader Counts (general monitoring)

Sat 21 November High Tide of 2.28m at 10.41am  
Sat 19 December High Tide of 2.35m at 9.49am.  
Contact: Phil & Linda Cross

### Cannon Netting

Sun 22 November Fisherman Island or Dynah Island. High Tide at 11:16am of 2.25 m  
Sun 6 December Moreton Island - High Tide at 11:26am of 2.55 m.  
Plan to spend the weekend 4th - 6th December.

Contact: Peter Driscoll three days in advance to confirm time and place. For weekend trips, please confirm at least one week in advance. As well as listed activities, netting outings are mounted "opportunistically" when it appears there may be a good chance of success.

# NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



The 7th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the  
QUEENSLAND WADER STUDY GROUP

will be held at 7:00 pm on

TUESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 1998 at

the ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY HALL

112 BROOKES STREET

FORTITUDE VALLEY

(car parking available at rear of hall)

The meeting will be followed by a

## **SPECIAL SLIDE PRESENTATION**

by Rob Mancini,

well-known award-winning artist and QWSG committee member  
featuring breeding birds in Scandinavia.

### NOMINATION FOR POSITION ON QWSG MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

(Please post to:, Treasurer, QWSG,)

Name of nominee: .....

Position: .....

Name of proposer: .....

Name of seconder: .....

(NOTE: Nominees, proposers and seconders must have current QWSG membership). \_

I accept the nomination for the position on the management committee of the Queensland Wader Study Group as indicated above.

Signature of nominee: ..... Date: .....

(A signature is only required if the nominee cannot attend the annual general meeting).