



## NSW Wader Study Group

e-newsletter March 2011

<http://www.awsg.org.au/groups-nsw.php>

Welcome to the first NSW WSG Newsletter since 2004. In the interim, the NSW Wader Study Group has continued working for shorebird conservation with other groups. In particular we have co-operated with the Australasian Wader Study Group in the Shorebirds 2020 Project initiated in 2007 and administered by Birds Australia in Melbourne.

Most recently we held a workshop and seminar on 6<sup>th</sup> February this year to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World Wetlands Day. The free Shorebird Workshop/Seminar was held at the Education Centre in Bicentennial Park, Sydney, and the response was so enthusiastic that we have decided to make it an annual event. The following letter encapsulates the content and impact of the event:

“Hello Phil, Thank you for the wonderful Bicentennial Park Workshop on Australian Shorebirds - Residents and Migratory Birds on Sunday 6th February.

I learnt about migratory shorebirds including Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Red-necked Stint, Sanderling, Red Knot, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Pacific Golden Plover, Double-banded Plover, as well as Sooty Oystercatcher and even Penguins at Long Reef.

‘Physical Features and Identifying Characteristics’ include bill shape and length, breeding and non-breeding plumage, colour, size and foraging behaviours. The variety and beauty astounded me. I made drawings of some of the Photoshop photos during the seminar.

I discovered that shorebird habitats included tidal flats, saltmarsh and rocky and sandy shorelines at:

1. Local Sydney areas such as Long Reef, Boat Harbour, Botany Bay (Penrhyn Estuary) and Parramatta Estuary.
2. NSW South coast, including the Illawarra beaches and Bateman's Bay.
3. Further afield places such as Broome, Cairns and \*Yellow Sea stopover areas.

\*These are important to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway for migratory birds. This ranges from Siberia to northern China and Alaska to Australia and New Zealand. These migratory shorebirds are found in Australia and New Zealand during the southern summer.

I understood the importance of informing and enrolling local volunteers in conservation approaches. The South-coast Shorebird Recovery Program is currently working hard conserving four species on the endangered list - Little Tern, Hooded Plover, Pied Oystercatcher and Sooty Oystercatcher. Conservation techniques prioritize breeding protective measures including threats to nests, eggs, and fledglings from birds including seagulls and ravens, foxes and off-leash dogs, human activity including four-wheel drivers. See [www.southcoastshorebirds.com.au](http://www.southcoastshorebirds.com.au).

I met and listened to interesting professional and volunteer Shorebird Enthusiasts, one Latino-American, now living in Australia has assisted and continue on the work from another enthusiast; Ricki Coughlan, to present Shorebird Monitoring data collection measures in Long Reef, another, employed with National Parks and Wildlife Service, had travelled up from the South Coast to present the South-coast Conservation Project while an English researcher had migrated to complete her PhD project associated with Birds Australia and the Australian Wildlife and Rivers Centre at the University of NSW named "Against the Tide". This included data collection studies and measuring impact on shorebirds for the Port Botany Expansion (land reclamation) Project. Finally a long-term resident who had worked for many years with shorebirds of the Parramatta Estuary including during the Sydney 2000 Olympics presented beautiful photographs and information on shorebirds in highly urbanised areas of the Waterbird Refuge in Sydney Olympic Park, Newington Armory, Mason Park and Hen and Chicken Bay.

Thank you again to you all for an informative and uplifting day!  
Sincerely, Rachel Granter”

### **Brief history of the NSW Wader Study Group.**

The NSW Wader Study Group was formed in February 1990. It arose out of a workshop (conducted on behalf of the Australian Bird Study Association) on the recommended procedures for capture, banding and documentation of shorebirds. Initially the Group focused on trapping and banding shorebirds but the last major banding and leg-flagging event was in 1996. However our trapping and banding expertise is still applied when there is need for intense monitoring of a species for conservation purposes. Recently we caught half a dozen birds to which engraved leg flags were fitted so their movements around Sydney could be tracked for a PhD project.

Thirty years of intense trapping and banding of tens of thousands of shorebirds, carried out by the wader study groups around Australia as well as overseas, has contributed greatly to identifying and helping protect the migration routes and staging areas throughout the East Asian Australasian Flyway. However, the methods for studying shorebird movements have changed with the introduction of modern tracking technology. Tiny data-loggers weighing little more than half a gram now make it possible to track individual small shorebirds across the globe. The data-loggers are being fitted to some of the world's most endangered species, to quickly identify areas along their migration route that present the greatest threats to their survival.

Since 1996 the focus of the NSW Wader Study Group has shifted towards population monitoring and conservation actions for both migratory and non-migratory shorebirds. In ten years from 1996 we completed five beach-nesting bird surveys of the entire NSW coastline (an extension of the Hooded Plover surveys of south-eastern Australia) and encouraged regular counts of important sites along the NSW coast.

A newsletter 'NSW Wader News' was printed until the end of 2004, when the last beach-nesting bird survey was conducted. Now that most people have access to the Internet, it is more cost-effective to produce an electronic newsletter. The NSW WSG has no formal membership list but everyone on our email mailing list is considered a member and we endeavour to notify you of all our activities. The status of NSW WSG as a registered organisation is important for the administration of regional management and funding for the Shorebirds 2020 program.

Although we are closely associated with the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) of Birds Australia, NSW WSG plays an important role in conservation of shorebirds at a state level. Within NSW it works closely with other bird groups, especially the Hunter Bird Observers' Club which has been very active in responding to threats to shorebird habitat by industrial developments.

Most states and some regions have wader (shorebird) study groups - Victoria WSG (established 1978) <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~vwsg/>, Queensland WSG (1992) <http://www.waders.org.au/>, Western Australia (including the Broome Bird Observatory local group <http://www.broomebirdobservatory.com/>), Tasmania and Northern Territory. Most recently formed is the Friends of SE (South Australia). In addition, many unaffiliated individuals contribute each year to research projects on shorebirds.

### **Shorebirds 2020 Project**

Why do we need to count shorebirds?

Shorebirds are in decline largely due to the loss or disturbance of habitat throughout their migratory flyways - from their breeding grounds, through major staging areas, to their wintering grounds in Australia. Staging areas and breeding grounds were discussed at the recent World Wetlands Day Seminar on 6<sup>th</sup> February (see letter above).

In Australia, counts of wintering shorebirds span 30 years. From this data we have been able to trace the population trends of many species and unfortunately many are in serious decline. The decline in shorebird populations in the East Asian Australasian Flyway is largely a result of

impacts on staging areas during migration - many of you will be aware of the incredible loss of shorebird habitat in South Korea and along the Chinese coast.

However the decline in shorebird populations is also occurring locally, as observed in some species of shorebirds in Botany Bay, Parramatta River estuary and Hunter River estuary. All three areas have been subject to major development and/or changes in land management. Each year the approval of more development applications results in the incremental loss of estuarine shorebird habitat. Collectively it is having a huge impact on shorebird populations.

A very pleasing and positive outcome of the Shorebird 2020 Project has been a greater number of people counting shorebirds, at many more sites, and on a more regular basis, than ever before. In NSW we have conducted monthly counts at key sites for over ten years. This information has proved very useful in demonstrating the need for site remediation or the creation of shorebird habitat to offset major development projects. The next step is to consolidate this information and make it available to land managers, including local and state governments.

### ***Why is it important to count several times a year?***

Single counts provide an idea of the number of birds using a particular site at a particular time, but the numbers present could be influenced by weather, the height of the tide on a particular day, and arrival dates of migratory species in a particular year. Repeated counts throughout the season add immensely to the value of the data set. For example, they can identify the dates when migratory birds are moving through an area - a large number of shorebirds pass through NSW coastal sites on their migration routes to Victoria and New Zealand. Regular counts also increase the likelihood of recording birds with uniquely coloured leg flags that identify the specific sites where they were banded.

Join us in looking after shorebirds, whether you are able to take part in our annual or twice annual surveys, or on a more frequent basis.

### ***The future of the Shorebirds 2020 Project***

The Shorebirds 2020 Project run by Birds Australia was initiated with funding from the Commonwealth Government, with assistance from WWF Australia. However future funding of the project is very uncertain. It is therefore important to demonstrate the value of this project for shorebird conservation in Australia as well as throughout the Flyway.

The current Shorebirds 2020 Project Manager, Golo Maurer, has sent out a questionnaire to people who have been involved in the project (if you missed out please contact Golo at [g.maurer@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:g.maurer@birdsaustralia.com.au) or phone him at Birds Australia on 1300 730 075 ext. 234).

If you were not been directly involved in the Shorebirds 2020 Project but have enjoyed one of the shorebird workshops, you might like to submit your comments on the value of these workshops.

### ***Beach-nesting shorebirds***

Over a ten-year period starting in 1994, up to 200 volunteers including members of the NSW Wader Study Group completed a survey of the entire NSW coast for nesting shorebirds, including Hooded Plovers, Pied Oystercatchers, Sooty Oystercatchers, Beach Stone-curlews, Red-capped Plovers and Little Terns. Soon we will be repeating those surveys, to measure changes in populations. We hope you will participate in this enjoyable and rewarding exercise.

We will advertise the dates soon, but if you would like to book 'your' beach ahead of time, please contact Phil Straw at [philip.straw@awsq.org.au](mailto:philip.straw@awsq.org.au) to let us know which area you would like to help with.

### ***Shoalhaven Pied Oystercatcher success at last!***



The Pied Oystercatchers at the Shoalhaven have had a poor breeding success rate in recent years despite the deployment of electric fences to ward off predators.

We were lucky this year to record a Pied Oystercatcher fledgling; the first in three years and only the 5th in the 13 years that I have been following this pair! During the first nesting this season the eggs were taken by a young person on day 10 of incubation. During the second nesting attempt the eggs were taken by Ravens on day 18. On the third attempt, the two eggs hatched on day 32 of incubation. Unfortunately one

of the chicks went missing on the 4<sup>th</sup> day after hatching. The remaining juvenile finally fledged 36 days after hatching. Rex Worrell.

### ***Bush Stone Curlew Window Shopping In Double Bay?***

In the morning of 17<sup>th</sup> January 2011 a member of the public called the Wildlife Rescue Service (WIRES) to say that a water bird of some sort was running up and down Cross Street in Double Bay, Sydney (a very exclusive shopping area). At times it paused to check out the shop windows (in actual fact more likely to admire its reflection in the plate glass window of the delicatessen!). A WIRES rescuer caught the bird without much trouble and took it to Joan Dawes, a WIRES carer and the NSW Conservation Officer of the Australasian Wader Studies Group.

The bird was a juvenile Bush Stone-curlew, a species listed as endangered in NSW. It was uninjured and had probably simply ended up in the wrong place during dispersal from its nesting site. With the invaluable input of Alan Morris and Catherine Price the bird was rapidly moved out of its temporary lodging in an aviary (which it did not appreciate), banded with a metal numbered band on the left leg and a pink metal colour band on the right leg, and released in the Saratoga Wetlands on Broken Bay at 7.30 pm the same evening. Bush Stone-curlews are resident at the release site and a single male is known to be present. A feather has been taken from the bird before release for DNA analysis and it is hoped that the bird will turn out to be a female!

### **Update**

Less than 2 weeks later the bird was back in Sydney. It obviously finds wetlands dull, and hankers for the bright lights.... It spent the hot weekend of 29-30<sup>th</sup> January wandering the streets of Pyrmont and Ultimo, where it was finally captured by a WIRES rescuer (again). By this time it was thin and seriously dehydrated, and was taken to Taronga Zoo's Wildlife Hospital for intensive rehabilitation. It recovered, and was re-released at Pioneer Dairy Wetlands, Tuggerah on February 14.

### **Second Update**

On the morning of 3<sup>rd</sup> March the same bird was captured by the wildlife group Seabird Rescue in a suburban yard in Mardi, near Wyong on the Central Coast, not far from Pioneer Dairy Wetlands. It was only two streets away from where another banded bush stone curlew was seen two weeks before. It was re-released back to Pioneer Dairy Wetlands that evening. Watch this space!

**Please send any comments or requests for information to [philip.straw@awsg.org.au](mailto:philip.straw@awsg.org.au)**