

Grey-tailed Tattler - an Australia-Japan connection

In February 2012, Lois Wooding and Alan Stuart began investigating the status of Grey-tailed Tattlers in Port Stephens on the NSW central coast. During the preparation of their first paper about their study (*The Whistler* 7: 38)¹, the scarcity of published information on this species became apparent. They decided to use the relatively small Port Stephens population as a basis for studying behavioural aspects of the species including roosting, foraging and intra/inter-species interactions.

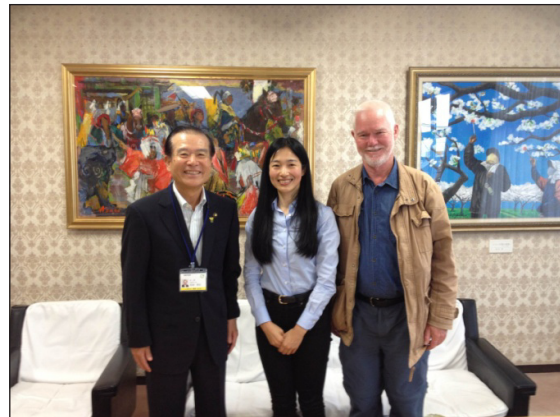
The ongoing project has accumulated data not previously documented, and observations of characteristics that appear to distinguish Grey-tailed Tattlers from most other shorebirds. Those observations will become the subject of a second paper. The species is also unusual in that it enjoys relative population stability compared to the decline in numbers of so many other shorebird species. Branson *et al.* (*Stilt* 57: 50-58)² provides at least a partial explanation by establishing that Grey-tailed Tattlers avoid the rapidly depleting resources of the Yellow Sea by migrating through Taiwan and Japan. Definition of the migratory route gave rise to the possibility of extending the study to include a comparative behavioural study with staging migratory Grey-tailed Tattlers in Japan.

Alan Stuart visited Japan in July 2013, during the tattlers' southern migration, establishing local contacts at several sites where the birds were known to stage. In May 2014 Alan returned to Japan to observe the birds in northern migration, spending extended periods of time at three sites in Kyushu (Kumagawa Estuary, Arao-higata and Najima Bay in Hakata Bay) and two sites on Tokyo Bay (Sanbanze and Yatsu-higata). Yatsu-higata and Arao-higata are both Ramsar sites. Arao, only listed in 2012, was particularly remarkable for both the number of shorebirds, including tattlers, and the number of enthusiastic observers documenting their presence. Yatsu, an oasis surrounded by intensive development, proved to be another excellent site, and a tribute to the ability of local communities to influence conservation outcomes.

At all sites Alan worked closely with local shorebird experts, also enlisting their help with data collection. He also gave presentations on shorebird migration (including Grey-tailed Tattlers) to local community groups in Yatsushiro (on the Kumagawa Estuary), Arao and Najima Bay. He discussed shorebird conservation and the management of Ramsar sites in a meeting with the Mayor of Arao, and an interview with a reporter from a major Fukuoka newspaper led to a half-page article.

The degree of interest and community involvement that Alan experienced in Japan was very noteworthy. His Grey-tailed Tattler observations were productive noting several behavioural differences, some of which appear to contradict the published literature. It is expected that the exchange of information will continue, and more Japanese visits may eventuate. The possibility of a future visit to the tattler breeding grounds in Siberia is also of interest.

Alan Stuart



Alan Stuart (R) at Arai Town Hall with the Mayor Junji Maehata (L) and Dr Hiromi Yamashita of Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.



At a community forum in Arai.



Watching shorebirds at Sanbanze (Tokyo Bay); L to R: Mr Kei Itou, Mr Yutaka Matsukawa and Mr Hitoshi Akatsu. Photo: Alan Stuart

¹<http://www.hboc.org.au/index.cfm?menukey=11>

²<http://www.aws.org.au/stilt.php>