

UPDATE 3 LUANNAN COAST 2025

“The Luannan Coast is an important staging site of international significance for two subspecies of Red Knot in the EAAF.” This is the statement we emphasize in our report every year. It probably sounds like the “same old story” when you just read the sentence, scanning in the field everyday we feel this statement is so true. Not only for the fact that we can find marked Red Knot of the two subspecies from at least 15 banding sites along the EAAF (plus India in the Central Asian Flyway), as the season goes by, we see both subspecies of the Knots become fatter and prettier (also more “vocal”, all getting ready for their next leg of migration.



Happy, pretty and fat Red Knots in telescope view. 2025 06 02

K. Leung

In the last week of this field season, Katherine and Liu Yang were holding the fort as Chris had to depart China within the 30-day visa free period (just like some of the Red Knots, some stay longer, some for a shorter period!).

Since 10-May, we have had 20,000 to 30,000 Red Knots on the Nanpu mudflats every day, which is a good proof of our colleague's, Dr. Hebo Peng's finding that the food of the Red Knots (*Potamocorbula laevis*) on the Nanpu mudflat has further recovered this year. Many of these birds were also spreading along and feeding close by the seawall after the tide fall, so that we can spend up to 6 hours scanning many small flocks along the 7km seawall (see [Update 2](#)).

Usually at the end of the season we will have to spend more time scanning in the ponds rather than on the seawall (mudflat) because the birds often stay in one big flock away from the seawall, making it impossible to scan for marked birds. Our theories (pure guessing!!!) are that the “late-arriving, new comers”, which tend to stay for short period, are more “nervous”, they feel safer feeding in one big flock and do not want to spend time exploring other feeding areas on the mud. Or maybe there is some subtle change in the food with *Potamocorbula* getting less abundant and easy to access on the mudflats and the food availability in the ponds increasing so, this is when we have to move to the ponds to look for closer birds to scan.



"Un-scan-able" flock on the Nanpu mudflats. 2025 06 02

K Leung

Me and Yang had two very successful afternoon scanning at the roost in the salt ponds behind the seawall with about 10,000 Red Knot around and recorded quite a few newly-arrived colour banded birds from NW Australia each day. On 29-May, we were shocked to find only 800 Red Knot in the same area. It seemed that majority of the birds had departed on 28-May evening with the strong easterly wind.

Fortunately, we had a "spy" in the flock, 4BYLR, a satellite tagged Red Knot from NWA (see Report 2024) which gave us some hints where to find the roosting flocks. This year something different happened, compared to the previous few years, in that at the end of May, some of the ponds began to drop their water level. This creates good roosting and feeding opportunities for the birds. From studying 4BYLR's track, Katherine and Yang successfully found small flocks of hundreds to 1,400 Red Knot in various ponds. Some of them were too far to scan, some were close and "scannable."



A few inches difference in water level makes life much easier for the Knots and for us! Yang's scanning a flock by the road 2025 06 03

K. Leung

Even though the number of Red Knot had dropped significantly (see the table below for the counts of this season), we were still recording new arrivals each day, with around 50% of the colour band Red Knot individuals we recorded each day being new for the season. So, around this last week of the season, our field observations continue to support the hardcore analysis of (*Lok et al 2019*) that the Luannan coast is, for late arriving piersmai, a quick "pit stop" on the Red Knot highway to the Arctic.

Daily count/estimate of Red Knots in Nanpu spring 2025:

WEEK 1		WEEK 2		WEEK 3		WEEK 4		WEEK 5	
30-Apr	6000	7-May	10000	14-May	25000	21-May	30000	28-May	21000
1-May	7000	8-May	n/c	15-May	20000	22-May	25000	29-May	2332
2-May	6000	9-May	n/c	16-May	20300	23-May	17000	30-May	3950
3-May	8000	10-May	25000	17-May	20000	24-May	21000	31-May	3749
4-May	8000	11-May	n/c	18-May	20707	25-May	22000	1-Jun	2072
5-May	8000	12-May	25000	19-May	20000	26-May	15500	2-Jun	2050
6-May	12000	13-May	25000	20-May	27000	27-May	22000	3-Jun	2355
								4-Jun	2200

*n/c = not counted

It is always a hard feeling to wave Nanpu goodbye. We love the birds, the people, and this place! There were still 2,200 Red Knots counted on the last morning of our field work but of course we cannot keep going until the last bird is gone. Already we are seeing some returning Black-tailed Godwits (*bohail* subspecies) and Asian Dowitcher which may have failed to breed, so it won't be too long until we see the Red Knots again after they return from their breeding grounds. Until then, please still stay tuned as we will present more of this year finding in our final report.



Happy scanning team on the Nanpu Seawall. 2025 05 22

Thanks, as ever, to a range of people who were highlighted at the start of Update 1. And to a private donor who funded the flights for Chris. And once more particular thanks to the Liu family, who make us feel like Nanpu is our second home.

Katherine and Chris

04-06-2025