

GFN NANPU 2026 – UPDATE 2

Well, whatever the situation, field work is better than office work.

But the truth is we are just starting to get a bit frustrated.



Sheltering from yet more rain 20-05-2026

K Leung

The first 3 days were great, but it has only got more difficult since then. Rain, and plenty of it, and mist, and thick bands of it have certainly made the scanning far from ideal. Scanners are like photographers and farmers; the light and weather are never right!



Far from perfect scanning conditions 12-05-2026

C Hassell

The other issue is that the Red Knots are, so far, in very low numbers this year. Low numbers are not unprecedented, and any regular readers will know we often speculate on why the numbers fluctuate so much year on year. We joined the Beijing Normal University Luannan Coast coordinated count day on May 19 and at Nanpu there were only 7,620 Red Knot. On the same day last year, while not a count day we estimated 20,000.

Table 1. Number of Red Knot on Nanpu mudflat, estimated or counted

	2025	2026
15-May	20000	3000
16-May	20300	no count
17-May	20000	2000
18-May	20707	no count
19-May	20000	7620
20-May	27000	2000
21-May	30000	2628

There are numerous reasons for migrating birds to visit different sites over different years, the most obvious being food availability and weather. And clearly something is happening this year. We do now have sites here that we cannot access but we know the area so well and we know how the birds use it that we can't believe that 13,000 Red Knots are hiding from us.

And while we are discussing low numbers, Asian Dowitchers at the Hangu site are about 1,000 birds down on some years. Remarkably similar in 2021, 2024 and 2025 with obvious dips in 2023 and this year 2026. Even though we don't know the Hangu site as well as Nanpu, where are 1,000 Dowitchers hiding? If of course, they are here at all.

Table 2. Counts of Asian Dowitcher on the Hangu mudflats

YEAR	COUNT
2021	1377
2022	no count
2023	214
2024	1351
2025	1387
2026	191

Another disappointment is that in the first week of fieldwork we haven't recorded any Nordmann's Greenshank at Nanpu. We usually see this species every day, albeit in

small numbers of less than 10, up until about May 14th or 15th every year. And even accepting the poor conditions it is a pity for this species to be missing.

There has been no change in the water levels in most of the ponds. Only the ponds immediately behind the first 3 km of the Nanpu seawall are shallow and suitable for birds to feed in. All the other ponds we see on our drive to Nanpu are deep and even too deep for avocets and stilts as has been the situation for years since the move from predominantly salt production to joint salt and aquaculture production.

We have had several visitors. Ms. Ziyu Yang from Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China organisation was with us in the field for a week. Assisting with scanning, when the weather has allowed. We also took Ziyu to Hangu as a major part of her role is coordinating the Asian Dowitcher count along the Yellow Sea coast. The site where Ziyu does her fieldwork in Lianyungang, Jiangsu had over 27,000 Asian Dowitchers on May 14 this year, 2026.

Another set of visitors were quite the famous birders, Magnus Robb, a world-renowned sound recordist, Killian Mullarney, world-renowned ornithologist and bird illustrator and world-renowned photographer, Rene Pop from Europe, and they were being escorted by Beijing resident and expert ornithologist Terry Townshend. We know Terry from his many visits over the years. He is very a very active birder and a leading light of the Beijing Birding scene. See <https://wildbeijing.org/>. The swift project is a particular highlight.

They did, of course, manage to grip us off with 2 rarities for Nanpu, indeed for Hebei Province. In terrible weather they got a Brown Booby flying off the seawall, while we were 3 km away diligently scanning.



Killian's award-winning shot of the booby 17-05-2026

K Mullarney

And later that day, after the weather cleared, they heard, saw, sound recorded, and photographed a stunning Chestnut Thrush. While we were diligently entering data at the apartment.



Terry's record shot of the thrush 17-05-2026

T Townshend

Despite this, Katherine and I thoroughly enjoyed their company! And while not in the same league as their sightings we reciprocated with sites for breeding Grey-headed Lapwings, complete with chicks. Mangus was very happy with those recordings



Distant lapwings 16-05-2026

K Leung

Other animals pass in front of our binoculars as we look for birds. Siberian Weasel, Tolai Hare and the Chinese Softshelled Turtle. The mammals are native, but the turtle is widely used for food and herbal medicine and is almost certainly released into Caofei Lake.



Enjoying the sun 09-05-2026

K Leung

The passerine birding has been good, for us, maybe not so much for the migrating passerines themselves as the poor weather slows them down.

Our main passerine site in the very early years used to be Nanyan Park (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5689048>) in Nanpu Town where we stay. It really was a tiny dot of green in a vast grey area of mudflats and salt ponds. But over the years huge numbers of trees have been planted, and reeds, grasses, and shrubs have established on seawalls, pond bunds, and roadsides. Consequently, the park is not nearly so good for birding as it was as there is much more available habitat for migrants to have a short stop in. But a site at Hangu, Hangu Coastal Woods (<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5852274>), still seems to be a magnet to birds, we have had some nice hours birding there.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler is an abundant migrant; it's close relative Chinese Leaf Warbler is much duller plumage wise, and we probably overlook some of them. But Kath's ear and sharp eyes picked this one out at Hangu Coastal Woods.



Chinese Leaf Warbler 13-05-2026

K Leung

Olive-backed Pipits are a common migrant and little skill is needed to pick them up, hence Chris gets to see them!



Olive-backed Pipit 19-05-2026

C Hassell

Chris and Katherine 23-05-2026