



Wader Quest

Newsletter



Spring 2026

Cover Photo - Shore Plover © Brendan Tucker

Brendan writes:

"Reaching Shore Plovers on Motutapu Island is something of a commitment: a ferry crossing followed by an 8.5 km walk (one way!) that leaves only a narrow window with the birds before you risk missing the last boat of the day. But the effort is worth it. These birds are bold and curious, approaching on their own terms. With the sun at my back, I stayed still and waited until one began probing through the scattered beach debris."

From the Chair's Library

Rick Simpson

From Nicholson, E. M. Birds in England's (1926)

"There remain to be considered those species which have most conspicuously increased or decreased in recent times. It must be emphasised at the outset that these things are very much matters of opinion and individual experience, even if there were not the added complication that a bird may weaken or even vanish utterly in some parts of the country while simultaneously flourishing in others. Some of the fluctuations are plain enough, but most leave room for doubt. The limitations are too many to allow of meticulous accuracy; to mention another, it may be demonstrated conclusively that the redshank is much commoner (or at least more widespread) now than it was in 1860, but it does not by any means follow that it may not with some likelihood have been commoner in 1660 than it is at present. We must look upon these changes as fluctuations of very variable duration, sometimes lasting no more than seven years, like the blotting out of the British goldcrest and British long-tailed tit after the bitter winter of 1916–17, sometimes taking a century to recover the ancient balance..."



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Chair's Comments

Rick Simpson

So begins another year. In the Northern Hemisphere waders are on their way back to their breeding grounds. Some will be travelling alone, some in pairs and some in flocks, but whichever method they adopt, the imperative is the same... to reproduce. It is, after all, this single act that will determine if the species to which they belong will survive or not.

It is clear then, that making sure the breeding grounds are as ideal as they can be, in conjunction with the wintering quarters and stop-over points between the two, is crucial to this process, but in that regard, all is not well.

For example, the changes in the climate, in both timing and temperature are tipping balances out of kilter. Hatching dates in the Arctic, that have evolved over time to coincide with the timing of the mass emergence of invertebrates, determined by temperature, has become mismatched. Young birds are not benefitting from this glut of food to help them grow and thrive and be ready to migrate in a condition that will enable them to overwinter and return themselves to breed.

In other scenarios, dry plains that provide a harsh living for some species, especially lapwings and coursers in Africa, are becoming so arid that the chance of continued survival is on the brink.

Forests are being planted where once there were plains, beaches are being 'improved' to attract more tourists to the detriment of the species that need these strands to breed. Wetlands are being drained or degraded. The list goes on.

But there is always hope, and a great number of people around the world, both professionals and volunteers, who are determined and willing to give their time and skills to help mitigate some of these problems. This issue's front cover picture is of a Shore Plover *Thinornis novaeseelandiae*, a species almost driven to extinction by our thoughtless actions coupled with a lack of understanding of what those actions may lead to. Yet, here the Shore Plover is, still with us and, incredibly, increasing its population. This is no accident, this is the result of years of research, of conservation, of active hands-on intervention, the result of which is a way forward to creating a world where such problems are a thing of the past.

Also, within this issue, we see that incredibly not one, but three Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmaea* have been seen in West Bengal, India, a very rare bird there. The best part of this story is that one of the birds bears the green flag of a head-started bird, a sure sign that this work is paying dividends. There is a long way to go before the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is safe, but every success should be celebrated.

In addition, we also cover the return of the much-protected Piping Plovers *Charadrius melodus* in New York, USA. As a species that has come back and is now doing very well, but its continued survival still depends so much on what we do to help them.

It is stories like these that get Elis and me out of bed in the morning, the thought that what we, together with all our trustees and supporters are doing as Wader Quest, is somehow, in some small way contributing to this movement to make things better for our waders.

We understand that not everyone has the same fanatical passion that we possess, so all we ask is that you care, and care enough to help us funnel our enthusiasm into making small, but meaningful, differences. Remember that, as we always say, caring is the first step to conservation.

Breeding Green Sandpipers study in Scotland

Rick Simpson

Green Sandpipers *Tringa ochropus* are unusual among waders in that they lay their eggs in the unused nests of other birds, or squirrel dreys in trees.

A recent study (*Status and habitat associations of breeding Green Sandpipers in the Highlands – the role of wetland management British Birds Journal 2026 Vol.119: Pages 9-21*), looks into the habitat requirements and rare breeding ecology of the Green Sandpiper in Scotland, UK to see how wetland management is affecting the breeding chances of the species.

The study found that all nests were located in Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, either in natural areas or in conservation areas where Scots Pine plantations had been rewetted. It also concluded that some conservation sites may have altered the vegetation to make them no longer suitable as breeding sites. In addition it found that the introduced Eurasian Beaver *Castor fiber* may be of benefit to the Green Sandpiper as has been found in Finland.

Shore Plover

Rick Simpson

Thinornis novaeseelandiae

Gmelin 1789

IUCN Endangered



Scientific name explained:

The genus *Thinornis* is from the Greek *this* beach, sand: *ornis* bird. The specific *novaeseelandiae* means New Zealand.

Alternative English names:

Long-billed Plover, New Zealand Plover, New Zealand Shore Plover, Shore Dotterel.

Alternative New Zealand language names:

Māori: *tūturuatu*

Moriori: *tchūriwat'*

Order: CHARADRIIFORMES (Rafinesque 1815)

Suborder: Charadrii (Huxley 1867)

Family: Charadriidae (Rafinesque 1815)

Subfamily: Charadriinae (Reichenbach 1849)

Synonymy of genus:

- *Charadrius* (Linnaeus 1758)
- *Hiaticula* (Gray G. R. 1840)
- *Strepsilas* (Illiger 1811) (more commonly associated with *Arenaria* turnstones.)

Protonym:

Charadrius novae-Seelandiae [sic]. (Gmelin 1789)

Synonymy of species:

- *Charadrius dudoros* Wagler 1827
- *Charadrius torquatus* Lichtenstein 1844
- *Thinornis rossi* Gray 1843

Taxonomy:

Monotypic, no subspecies recognised.

Synonymy of subspecies:

No current subspecies recognised.

Systematic / Taxonomic history:

The Shore Plover was first officially described in 1789 by the German naturalist Johann Friedrich Gmelin in his revised and expanded edition of Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*. He placed the species under the genus *Charadrius*. Gmelin based his description on the description and illustration made by Latham in his *A General Synopsis of Birds* 1785 of a specimen collected near Queen Charlotte Sound.

Wagler described a species and named it *Charadrius dudoros* in 1827, this turned out to be a synonym of *C. novaeseelandiae*. The name *dudoros*, seems to be a variation of the name Dodo.

In 1845 Gray G. R. with Bowdler-Sharpe described in *The Zoology of the Voyage of HMS Erebus & HMS Terror* an expedition led by Rear-Admiral Sir James Clark Ross. Among those specimens was a Shore Plover collected on the Auckland Islands that appeared different to the known specimens from the main islands. Gray described this specimen as a new species and gave it a new genus *Thinornis rossii* (after the leader of the expedition).



Some discussion has taken place over this specimen since. One school of thought prevalent in the late 1800s is that this was simply an immature individual and, as it was the only specimen taken from the Auckland Islands, it was thought that perhaps a vagrant or its collection location was mislabelled. However, fossil evidence suggests that there was a previous population there and the dimensions of those remains perhaps suggest a subspecies, which would be *T. novaeseelandiae rossii*.

This theory has not been adopted in current taxonomy, so *rossii* remains a synonym of *novaeseelandiae*. Another suggestion that has been mooted is that this is a melanistic specimen. No other melanistic individuals have been reported but there are records of leucistic individuals



In 1844 Lichtenstein gave the species the name *torquatus* (Latin meaning collared) presumably referring to the extension from the face mask forming a band around the back of the neck, this too is a synonym of *novaeeseelandiae*.

In 1873 the genus for *Thinornis rossi* was rejected as the species was considered to be an immature bird as mentioned earlier. In the 1990s

some scientists started thinking that the Shore Plover was distinct enough to warrant a genus of its own. As a result, *Thinornis* was resurrected and in 2015 molecular evidence confirmed this to be true and *Thinornis* was officially adopted as the monotypic genus for this species, but no subspecies were recognised in this study.

First discovery:

Scientists on James Cook's second voyage to New Zealand in 1773 discovered Shore Plovers in Dusky Sound and Queen Charlotte Sound. Sadly, these seafarers were the harbingers of doom for the species as rats came ashore with the sailors and found the Shore Plovers easy pickings, whilst the birds had no innate defence against them as they were an unknown and cunning foe. The last Shore Plover was seen on the mainland in 1871.

Conservation status - IUCN Endangered;

Despite the population size increasing due to conservation efforts through translocation to predator free islands and captive breeding, the population remains extremely small with around 250 individuals in a very restricted range.

Threats:

Formally they were widespread on the coasts of the mainland islands of New Zealand. By the end of the 19th century, they were restricted to a single island in the Chatham group, Rangatira. Cats *Felis catus* and Brown Rats *Rattus norvegicus* are the major causes of mainland bird loss. Range reduction in the Chatham Islands is mainly due to cats. Removal of sheep also reduced available breeding habitat.

Other threats include:

- Rough seas and storms
- Expansion of Fur Seal *Arctocephalus forsteri* colonies

In 1999, 21 Shore Plovers were discovered on storm-exposed Western Reef off Chatham Island, 100 kilometres from the other surviving population on Rangatira Island. Their DNA suggests that this separate group existed in isolation for at least 100 years since rats had wiped out the birds on Chatham Island. Within a few years of their discovery, this sea-swamped but rat-free retreat had lost its charm – the reef was taken over by seals. The sole surviving Western Reef Shore Plover, named Westy, was taken into captivity, from where his offspring have been released at several secure sites.

- Human disturbance, including island visitors.
- In translocated populations juvenile dispersal to the mainland, where they are killed by predators - some individuals survive for several years before disappearing.
- Predation at by native birds such as:
 - Morepork *Ninox novaeseelandiae*
 - New Zealand Falcon *Falco novaeseelandiae*
 - Brown Skua *Catharacta antarctica*
 - Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*
 - Swamp Harrier *Circus approximans*
- Constant threats include arrival of:
 - Cats
 - Rats
 - Mustelids (stoats, weasels, ferrets)

These pests are widespread on mainland New Zealand, requiring strict biosecurity at all shore plover sites. Rat incursions on Waikawa / Portland Island and Mana Island demonstrate the threat from these introduced mammalian predators. Between March and May in 2007 the New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC) relocated a number of captive-reared juveniles to Mana Island, off Wellington's western coast. They successfully bred within months of their arrival, so in February 2008 twenty more were translocated. However, from a population high of 87 individuals, the number was reduced to just 10 from the effects of a single brown rat.

- Fire
- Disease

Outbreaks of avian pox in captive populations - causes deaths and delays release programmes.

Population:

Around 250 individuals. This is one of the rarest waders in the world being a rare endemic species of New Zealand. A captive breeding programme has been active since the 1990s and birds from there have been released onto predator free islands around the mainland of New Zealand. In 2013 there were fewer than 200 individuals in the wild, containing about 65 pairs with about 10 pairs in captivity. By 2020, with successive releases from the programme, that total was around 250 birds, about 100 breeding pairs including captive breeding stock.

Curiosities:**Cultural Connection:**

Shore Plovers or *tūturuatu* are considered *taonga* (treasured) species by Māori, particularly in areas like the Chatham Islands, which are their last stronghold. Conservation efforts, such as those on Waikawa, involve local Māori landowners and *mana whenua* (local Māori) who are closely involved in the stewardship and protection of the surviving populations.

The world's first 'homing plover'? An individual known affectionately as Orange/Green Yellow/Red (OG-YR) due to the combination of its leg rings, was hatched in a captive breeding centre near Christchurch on the South Island and was released onto Mana Island off the main North Island.

It seems that OG-YR was unimpressed by his new home and soon left, flying back to the mainland and, after a couple of brief stops at the Ashley River and Lake Ellesmere, incredibly, he was found running up and down the concrete strip alongside the aviary in which he was hatched, trying to get back in! The Peacock Springs staff duly obliged him and OG-YR, became the original homing plover, and returned once again to the captive breeding population.



Interestingly some wild Shore Plovers exhibited the same homing instinct when a number of adult birds were translocated from Rangatira to a new island in order to establish a new colony. The birds had other ideas and returned to Rangatira arriving back even before the scientists' boat did!

Hidden Nests: Many waders, with a few notable exceptions, lay their eggs in nests on open ground. The Shore Plover however prefers to hide its nest in vegetation or under beach debris or rocks and boulders. Despite this the egg is still intricately marked with squiggles and small blotches.

Long-Lived Individuals: The typical lifespan of the Shore Plover is around 10–15 years; the longevity record for a Shore Plover is 21 years.

Credits:

*Photo page 7 - The famous specimen *Thinornis rossii*, collected in the Auckland Islands, New Zealand, in late 1840 © The Natural History Museum, London.*

Photo page 8 - Leucistic Shore Plover © John Dowding

Photo page 10 - OG-YR © Elis Simpson

Wader Quest and the Shore Plover

Rick Simpson

A revised excerpt from Chapter 6 of A Quest for Waders by Rick and Elis Simpson

Introduction:

Towards the end of our trip to New Zealand Elis and I found ourselves with no new species to look for. However, we had been informed that a Shore Plover, which we had only seen in captivity thus far, had been seen at a place called Point England in Auckland. This was one of the birds released on a nearby island that had flown across to the mainland. Now, with not much else to do and the site being not too far away, we decided it might be worth a shot.

We arrived at Point England and started to search all the small pockets of sand, rock and mud left visible by the advancing tide, there was much human activity together with uncontrolled dogs, so we were not overly optimistic and soon gave up.



As we walked back to the car, we passed a field where we could see a high tide roost of waders with many birds already in situ. This was a possible photo opportunity for

Elis, so we entered the field and crept towards the roosting birds. The flock comprised Variable and South Island Pied Oystercatchers, White-headed Stilts, Masked Lapwings and New Zealand Dotterels. As we settled down to watch them, me by a pool and Elis closer to the roost having gone ahead alone so as not to create too much disturbance for the resting birds. Elis noticed a small bird fly towards her and more or less land at her feet. Looking down she was somewhat taken aback to find that it was our Shore Plover!

She felt in her pocket for her walkie-talkie radio to alert me, trying not to make any sudden movements for fear of scaring off the bird, although to be honest Elis later told me that it was looking at her with a 'Well? Are you going to feed me or not?' expression on its face (if birds' faces can have expressions that is, maybe it was the subtle tilt of the head that said so much to Elis?).

To Elis' dismay she discovered that the radio was no longer in her pocket, she must have dropped it. Looking around she noted that I was some distance away, a distance that would necessitate a rather loud shout in order for her voice to traverse the span to catch my attention and I, for my part, was laying on the grass with my back to her. She was now in the position of potentially gripping me off, a crime for which she has previous convictions. On numerous occasions she has wandered off when we have been birding and come back with some startling new bird that I have not seen proudly displayed on her camera screen. This is never a malicious grip, but one born of sweet innocence (so she would have me believe). So here she is now with the possibility of taking a photo of something so rare and precious that could at any moment fly off and I would never know until I saw the photos. There was nothing more she could do, she reasoned, than to take advantage of the incredible situation she found herself in and started taking photographs while I happily watched a pair of White-headed Stilts going about their business elsewhere, completely unaware of the situation developing behind me; she quite reasonably concluded that if I missed this bird then it was my own fault for being so dozy and not paying her enough attention.

Finally, I decided that since it was not raining, and we only get the chance to look for stray Shore Plovers but infrequently in our lives, I should go and look again for the bird on the sand and rocks while Elis enjoyed her photo session with the sleeping waders. I rolled over and looked over to where Elis sat surrounded by New Zealand Dotterels, which had approached her quite closely. I was quite relaxed and enjoying these quiet moments not suspecting anything untoward was occurring, after all she had a walkie-talkie, didn't she?

As I was speculating about the quality of the photos that would ensue from this golden opportunity Elis glanced up and was relieved to see that I was finally looking in her direction, she started jabbing her finger in a subdued way towards the ground just in front of her. I, imagining that she was indicating the proximity of the dotterels, smiled and gave her a cheerful thumbs-up. I saw her shoulders droop with frustration. I didn't know why, but I was clearly in trouble.

She beckoned me towards her, but as soon as I started in her direction, she indicated, by the up and down motions with her hand, palm down, that I should approach with stealth. Still believing that this was all about the dotterels I did so without much enthusiasm as I was sure they would wander off upon my approach. As I drew near, but still not near enough to talk, Elis pointed to a patch of grass a few metres from her. I could see nothing but grass. But suddenly a movement caught my eye, expecting a mouse or a small animal of some kind I raised my bins and was dumbfounded to find myself looking at a Shore Plover.



My legs went weak and I slumped to my knees. Continuing in that position I sidled forward and eventually settled down next to Elis. Now close enough to converse in whispers, I asked,

"Why the hell didn't you call me on the radio?"

"I can't find it!"

"What? Where is it then?"

"I don't know, I must have dropped it!"

Unsettling though this news was, it was not enough to detract from the next fifteen to twenty minutes of greedily soaking up not just the Shore Plover but the proximity of the beautiful, pastel peachy-coloured and confiding dotterels as well.

Finally, one of the dotterels chased off the Shore Plover and subsequently they all slowly drifted away from us. Elis and I, grinning like Cheshire cats, left the spot to which we had been rooted for so long. As we walked back towards the gate, incredibly we stumbled upon the missing walkie-talkie in the long grass thus removing the only obstacle to a feeling of sheer elation at having shared such intimate moments with such a rare and endangered bird.



To read more about Rick and Elis' adventures with waders, purchase *A Quest for Waders* from the [Wader Quest online shop](#)

Credits:

Photo page 12 - Captive Shore Plover © Elis Simpson

Photo page 14 - Spot the Shore Plover! © Rick Simpson

Photo page 15 - The Point England Shore Plover © Elis Simpson

First Shore Plover fledgling born on Pitt Island in 150 years

Rick Simpson

The Shore Plover Recovery Group has confirmed the first fledgling of the species from Pitt Island in the Chatham Island group in 150 years. This fledgling has been made possible by the control of feral cats involving the local community on living on the island.

Feral cats were largely responsible for the extinction of Shore Plovers on the island, and their control has enabled the species to return and breed successfully. The cats have not yet been eradicated, that would be the ultimate aim, as any future possibility of fledging depends greatly on the feral cat population.

The long-term aim of the project is to double the population of Shore Plovers (currently around 250 individuals). This small success validates their work and perhaps gives a hint of what is possible with the right measures, in the right place, done by the right people.



Credit: Photo - Shore Plover Chick © New Zealand Government, Department of Conservation

Consultation on new protections for waders in the UK

Elizabeth Anderson

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is consulting on reducing the seasons during which three iconic waders can be shot in England, Wales and Scotland. The Common Snipe, Woodcock and Golden Plover are currently on Schedule 2.1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – which details when birds can be legally killed, normally recreationally or for food. However, concerns about plummeting populations had led the government to consider whether some birds, including these three iconic species, should have greater protections.

The consultation is targeted towards those involved in shooting, but is public, and conservation groups have also been responding, taking into account all three species presence on Birds of Conservation Concern lists in the UK – or for the Golden Plover, just in Wales. Suggestions being consulted on include that the Common Snipe should not be shot legally within Wales and that England and Scotland would see an extended “close season” (the dates when birds can’t be shot legally) – meaning that birds rearing chicks would be less likely to be shot, with around 85,000 of these UK Amber Listed birds killed annually according to estimates.

The UK Red Listed Eurasian Woodcock would see an extended close season across all three nations, but shooting would remain legal in a shortened open season. Protections for the Golden Plover would only be considered in Wales, removing them from the Schedule and therefore protecting them in that nation year round. Wales has recognised these plovers as Red Listed, but the rest of the UK is thought to have a stable breeding population, which is the sole focus of the proposals.



European Golden Plover © Elis Simpson

Whilst many conservationists welcome the potential for increased protections, others feel that the proposed reforms fail to go far enough, with no limits on the numbers of birds that can be shot during their open season, and no consideration of removing waders fully from Schedule 2.1.

To be a part of the consultation, [click here to visit the Defra website and complete the online form.](#)

Breeding attempts by Pectoral Sandpipers in north-east Greenland

Rick Simpson

A paper *First breeding events of the pectoral sandpiper (Calidris melanotos) in north-east Greenland: a harbinger of breeding range expansion?* in Polar Research Vol. 44 (2025) has described how three different female Pectoral Sandpipers (the birds were ringed) have been recorded sitting on eggs in the north-east of Greenland, in each of the following years 2016, 2023 and 2024. This offers the intriguing possibility that they may colonise the region.

However, none of the eggs hatched, with two clutches being shown to be infertile and one clutch being lost, presumably predated. The lost eggs were presumed to be infertile too, as the incubation by the female extended beyond the normal time for the species. There were no males seen in the vicinity of these three females.



Female Pectoral Sandpipers show low site fidelity, being opportunists with flexibility in their movements, which may explain their arrival in this new area, and may cause range expansion to be more likely. The males are nomadic, seeking out good breeding opportunities where there is a high density of females with which to mate. In this case, had any males passed by, the low density of individual females would mean they may not even meet and, if they did, would probably not encourage the males to stay long enough to breed if they did.

Previously there have been sporadic breeding records in the west of Greenland as the species extends its breeding range eastwards in Canada, presumably due to climate change affecting the breeding habitat. However, it is not clearcut that these birds are from the Canadian population as these records are 1,700km from Devon Island, Canada, the nearest known breeding population.

Paleartic based birds from an unknown population may be a possible source of these individuals. There is a growing number of Pectoral Sandpipers wintering in West Africa, but where these birds are breeding is unknown. It is possible that the Siberian population is expanding westwards into undiscovered breeding areas. Could this be an explanation for the increasing number of 'vagrant records' we see in western Europe, with these females migrating with other migrant *Calidris* carrier species to Greenland?

Either way it looks like the colonisation of north-east Greenland by Pectoral Sandpipers is still a long way off.

Credit: Photo - Pectoral Sandpiper © Elis Simpson

Video highlighting the problems faced by waders in Port Hacking, Australia

Rick Simpson

This film is available on YouTube and it is well worth watching in its entirety. Not only does it have some stunning footage of waders it is jam packed with interesting and informative information about the birds featured. It also carries a very strong message of conservation and the need for waking up to the needs of waders with which we share our shores.

'I find the best way of advocating for shorebirds is for the audience to see the problems as I do. Hence, years of work videoing the migratory shorebirds. The number one reason shorebirds of Port Hacking are under so much pressure is because of people's leisure activities. Frivolous for people, however access to this habitat is life or death for the voiceless shorebirds. I do these presentations to be their voice.'

'I find this style of presentation particularly useful when dealing with politicians or government departments as it is more of a wakeup call. It is harder for people to disengage from a presentation when they are needing to both watch and listen.' Julie Keating

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mupsQ7OI2mo>

Wader Quest's support enabling the study of the American Oystercatcher in the state of São Paulo

Bruno Lima and Karina Ávila

Everything begins before the beach fully awakens. The wind is already blowing steadily, the sun is just rising on the horizon, and the first steps in the field announce another long day. Walking along the coast, locating nests, observing behaviour, recording individuals.



Working with the American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*, locally called Piru-piru, requires time, attention, and endurance. It requires presence.

Each nest found, each bird banded, carries more than scientific information: it carries an attempt to understand and protect a species that, in the state of São Paulo, is classified as Endangered (EN).

This condition is directly linked to the fact that it occurs along one of the most densely populated coastlines in Brazil, where real estate speculation has drastically reduced natural areas. The dunes and their vegetation, essential for the species' reproduction, have practically disappeared across much of the state.



The only remaining dune formations are concentrated in the municipality of Ilha Comprida, but they are also under threat, whether from the spread of the exotic species *Casuarina* or from the impacts of unregulated tourism, such as the presence of dogs, vehicles on the beach, and shortcomings in coastal management planning.

It is in this context that the *Piru-piru Paulista Project* is being developed, linked to a PhD at São Paulo State University. The objective is clear and, at the same time, challenging: to understand population dynamics, reproductive success, and to answer a central question in shorebird ecology, where do young birds go after leaving the place where they were born?

From studies conducted in the United States, we know that this species can travel considerable distances along the coast. In Brazil, however, this type of information is still extremely scarce. Each new record has disproportionate value, as it begins to fill a fundamental gap in our knowledge of the species.



Answering this question requires continuous monitoring over time. It requires returning to the same stretches of beach, revisiting areas, and reconstructing fragmented stories. Banding becomes an essential tool in this process, allowing individuals to be recognized and their trajectories gradually revealed.

At the same time, the project seeks to understand less visible threats. The analysis of heavy metals in eggshells and feathers makes it possible to investigate how environmental contamination may affect these birds, connecting ecological processes to anthropogenic pressures that often go unnoticed.

This work, however, does not stand alone. It exists because there is support.

The essential support of Wader Quest has made fieldwork and the acquisition of bands possible. Without this support, many of these stories would remain invisible. More than an incentive, it is an indispensable element for the continuity of the research.



The project also relies on institutional partnerships with ICMBio, the Ilha Comprida Environmental Protection Area (APA), and the Municipality of Ilha Comprida, which contribute to enabling fieldwork and strengthening conservation actions.

There is also an element that transforms the project's reach: public participation. Residents, young people, managers, and the municipality itself become active participants in conservation. Nesting areas are identified and protected with local support. Observers record banded birds and share information. Science is no longer restricted to the research team; it becomes collectively built. It is at this intersection of science, support, and community that discoveries emerge that change how we understand these birds.



An individual banded with the code CO as a chick in November 2024, in Ilha Comprida, was recorded again in December 2025 in the same region, thanks to citizen science. In March 2026, this same individual was identified in São Francisco do Sul, in the state of Santa Catarina, more than 200 kilometres south of where it was born. It was observed among a group of young birds aged one to two years. This record, still rare along the coast of

São Paulo, indicates the possibility of movement between populations and reveals dispersal patterns that were previously poorly understood.

What may at first seem like a simple movement carries deep meaning. It shows that the limits we imagine are not necessarily the limits of these birds. It also reinforces the need to think about conservation on a broader scale, considering the entire extent of coastline they use throughout their lives.

This record is not an isolated point. It is the accumulated result of many hours in the field, persistent decisions, built partnerships, and continuous support. It is evidence that when science is sustained, it begins to reveal what once seemed invisible.

As a next step, the project aims to grow and incorporate new technologies, such as the use of transmitters, which will allow more precise tracking of movements and a more complete understanding of where young birds go and which routes they use along the coast.



This article is also available in Portuguese - [Texto em Português](#)

Credits:

Photo page 20 (top) - American Oystercatcher © Karina Ávila

Photo page 20 (bottom) - Adult being fitted with a colour band supplied by Wader Quest at night. © Davi Pasqualetti

Photo page 21 (top) - Karina Ávila, Quetzalli Anahí and Bruno Lima banding and recording an American Oystercatcher chick. © Davi Pasqualetti

Photo page 21 (bottom) - Chick being measured. © Quetzalli Anahí

Photo page 22 - Chick being fitted with band CO in São Paulo (supplied by Wader Quest). © Quetzalli Anahí

Photo page 23 - CO resighted in Santa Catarina © Mauricio Weingartner

Ireland's Breeding Waders EIP Delivers Significant Advances in Headstarting, GPS Monitoring and Predator Management in 2025

Breeding Waders EIP



Ireland's Breeding Waders EIP is celebrating a series of significant advances in 2025, reflecting a growing momentum in the conservation of some of the country's most threatened ground-nesting birds. From successful headstarting programmes to cutting edge tracking technology, and a new predator management initiative, the project is demonstrating what collaborative conservation can achieve.

Curlew Headstarting: Fifteen Curlew Released into the Wild

Ireland's endangered Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* received a much-needed boost this year with the successful release of fifteen headstarted juveniles in July 2025. With the national breeding population now estimated at just 100 pairs, and natural productivity still far too low, due to pressures such as predation and habitat loss, headstarting has become an essential conservation tool for giving young birds the best possible chance of survival.

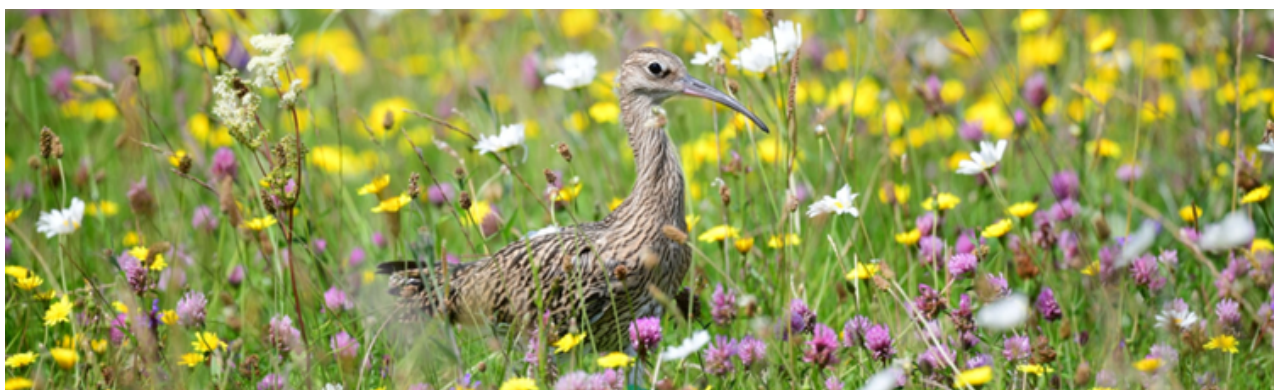


Curlew eggs were located through a combination of skilled field surveys and targeted thermal drone searches. Once identified, the eggs were carefully collected and transferred to Fota Wildlife Park in Cork, where they were incubated and hatched under expert care. The young birds were then returned to the Breeding Waders EIP team for a phased and closely monitored release onto carefully selected island habitats featuring invertebrate-rich grasslands, reduced predation pressure thanks to longstanding predator management, and natural water boundaries, giving each juvenile the strongest possible start in life.



A major development has been the expanded use of GPS tagging, fitted using innovative leg use harness design, allowing the team to follow the movements, habitat choices and early survival of released birds with unprecedented accuracy. These data are already helping to refine management decisions and deepen our understanding of how headstarted Curlew navigate the landscape. For those interested in seeing the process firsthand, the Breeding Waders EIP website hosts a video library showcasing each stage of the headstarting, tagging and release programme, along with access to the most up to date GPS tracking data.

www.breedingwaders.ie/headstarting-curlew/



Ireland Achieves Conservation Milestone with Release of Eleven Headstarted Dunlin Fledglings

In a landmark achievement for Irish conservation, the Breeding Waders EIP, working closely with key conservation partners, launched Ireland's first-ever pilot headstarting programme for Dunlin. This pioneering initiative culminated in August 2025 with the successful release of eleven headstarted Dunlin into the wild, a 100% hatch rate, and marks a hopeful step forward for one of Ireland's most threatened wader species.

Dunlin, like many other ground-nesting species in Ireland, have suffered detrimental declines in recent years. This >90% decline in breeding population sees just under thirty breeding pairs now remaining in Ireland. This decline is due to the degradation of their breeding habitats which include wet pools in uplands and coastal sites, and increased risk from predation. This Dunlin headstarting programme, the first of its kind in Ireland and only the second globally, aims to strengthen the breeding population, while the wider issues are being addressed, such as disturbance to nesting birds and degradation of habitat quality.



Eggs were located, collected and transported to Fota Wildlife Park, where the expert avian care team incubated and reared the chicks. Once old enough, the fledglings were ringed under a colour ringing scheme secured by the Breeding Waders EIP through the International Wader Study Group, enabling each individual to be uniquely identified and monitored throughout its life.



This successful release of these eleven headstarted Dunlin marks a significant step in supporting the conservation of Dunlin in Ireland. The Breeding Waders EIP, and their collaboration partners hope this initiative will contribute meaningfully to the survival of Ireland's breeding Dunlin populations and help to inform future restoration efforts for vulnerable wader populations across the country.

Encouragingly, resightings of the headstarted Dunlin have already been recorded at the release site in Roonagh, Co. Mayo, an early sign that these birds are adapting well to life in the wild.



For those interested in seeing the process firsthand, the Breeding Waders EIP website hosts a video library showcasing various stages of the Dunlin headstarting programme.

www.breedingwaders.ie/headstartingdunlin/



Midlands Mink Eradication Pilot Programme: Tackling a Key Predator Threat

Predators, including American Mink, pose one of the greatest threats to ground nesting birds such as breeding waders, Red Grouse, Grey Partridge and Hen Harrier. The American Mink was recently approved for inclusion on the EU 'Invasive alien species of Union Concern' list, and updated EU Regulations will require Ireland to introduce clearly defined plans, to manage its impacts.



In response, the Breeding Waders EIP in collaboration with programme partners has launched the Midlands Mink Eradication Pilot Programme, a targeted initiative designed to reduce predation pressure across some of the country's most important wader landscapes.



The programme aims to eradicate Mink from the pilot area over a three-and-a-half-year period. It will be delivered through a structured, trained and co-ordinated volunteer network. All volunteers will receive professional training in mink identification, trapping and humane dispatch, with all techniques meeting high standards of compliance with animal welfare legislation.

The pilot brings together local communities, landowners, conservation organisations and state agencies in a coordinated effort. By combining modern trapping techniques, data driven mapping and community involvement, the programme aims to create safer breeding conditions for vulnerable ground nesting birds.

If successful, it could serve as a model for wider national rollout.

For more information go to www.minkeradiction.ie



A Collaborative Approach for Long-term Recovery

What links these three initiatives, Curlew headstarting, Dunlin headstarting and Mink eradication, is a commitment to science-based, collaborative conservation. Each action strengthens the others: improved productivity through headstarting, better survival through predator management, and deeper ecological understanding through GPS tracking and monitoring.

Ireland's breeding waders continue to face immense challenges, but the progress made this year demonstrates what is possible when expertise, innovation and community support come together.

Collaborative conservation is the path forward, and the Breeding Waders EIP will continue to build on this momentum, working with partners across Ireland and beyond to secure a future for these remarkable birds.

Credits: All Photos © Breeding Waders EIP (unless otherwise stated)

Photo page 24 (middle) - Egg collection from the wild.

Photo page 24 (bottom) - GPS tagging Curlew by Seán Kelly, NPWS

Photo page 25 (middle) - Headstarted Curlew released at Lough Ree

Photo page 25 (bottom) - Breeding Waders EIP lead Ecologist Andrea Parisi collecting Dunlin eggs

Photo page 26 (top) - Headstarted Dunlin chicks in release pen.

Photo page 26 (middle) - Dunlin on the shore

Photo page 26 (bottom) - Minister O'Sullivan and conservation teams at release site on July 3rd L-R Jackie Hunt LIFE on Machair, Eithne Davis LIFE on Machair, Minister Christopher O'Sullivan, Andy Bleasdale_NPWS, Owen Murphy Breeding Waders EIP, Mark Reed LIFE on Machair, Andrea Parisi Breeding Waders EIP, Denis Strong_NPWS, Donal Beagan Breeding Waders EIP

Photo page 27 (top) - Mink on Lough Ree (SAC, SPA). © Owen Murphy

Photo page 27 (middle) - MMEP Staff L-R Owen Murphy - Programme Director, Patrick Dunning – Community Liaison, Conan Kelly – Programme Co-Ordinator

Photo page 27 (bottom) - Collaboration partners at launch of the Midlands Mink Eradication Pilot Programme in Sept 2025

Very rare sighting of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in West Bengal, India

Rick Simpson

A Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* was found on the 29th March 2026 at Patibunia Beach in West Bengal, a very rare Indian record of the globally rare wader.



One of the main wintering strongholds has been proven to be in Bangladesh, which neighbours West Bengal. A survey in Bangladesh in 2006 revealed just eight individuals. However, a winter survey in 2010 found 25 at Sonadia Island and 23 at Domar Char in the Sundarbans, an area of Mangrove islands stretching from West Bengal into Bangladesh. So, are these birds turning up in West Bengal more regularly but undetected?

Historical records seem to suggest otherwise since the only other records seem to be of one in West Bengal in 2018 and before that in 1981 in Tamil Nadu at the southern end of the subcontinent. Interestingly a record of observations in west Bengal, including 14 together has been largely dismissed by authorities as it is very unlikely to have a flock of that size, but, given the numbers in other parts of the region, perhaps this may be inaccurate rather than erroneous. We will never know.

Older Indian records come from the nineteenth century where of those collected two came from West Bengal. The first record being in 1935. Since then, several sightings have been recorded but more recent records have become thin on the ground.

Suggestive perhaps that this species may indeed be being overlooked, the finders of this bird had set out deliberately to look for Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the region every year since the previous sighting in 2018. The story of this sighting was to unexpectedly develop as at least two more individuals were to be detected in the same area.

One of those was sporting a lime green flag on its right leg bearing the identification 2K This bird was ringed as a chick hatched in the wild on July 6, 2025, in Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka, Russia.



The above photograph is by Patrali Pal and his description of how he came to take the photograph rather backs up how difficult these birds are to see even when you know one is there. Overlooking a bird you don't know is there is therefore entirely forgivable.

Patrali wrote on his post.

'My heartfelt gratitude to all my fellow birders and friends who spotted the bird, kept telling me patiently where it was, and I just kept pressing the shutter blindly! I did see the bird clearly a couple of times, but invariably it disappeared behind some other bigger birds, and I could either see it's spoon bill in between the legs of those birds before I could focus on it or it kept mooning me! I have quite a few shots of the back of the bird showing its leg tag only!'

Credits:

Photo page 29 - Spoon-billed Sandpiper, 29th March 2026, Patibunia Beach, West Bengal, India. © Soumya Aon

Photo page 30 - Spoon-billed Sandpiper, 5th April 2026, Patibunia Beach, West Bengal, India. © Patrali Pal



Help Protect the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS)

Report your leg-flag observations from any country in Asia through our new SBS resighting database, coordinated by the EAAFP Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force with technical support from WWT.

Every sighting counts – your observations matter! Join the SBS conservation community today!

[Leg-flag sightings database](#)

The world's largest Oystercatcher (sort of...)

Andrew Le Hegarat

Communities around the world sometimes look to put themselves on the map, commemorate a notable thing about their community, or celebrate their local environment.

On 23 January 2005, the locality of Kaiaua on the North Island of New Zealand joined the long list of places doing just that, with the unveiling of a sculpture of Torea Mangu, representing the mother of all Oystercatchers. Created by local artist Tony Johnston, she stands at over four metres long, 3.5 metres tall and 2.5 tons.

Torea Mangu stands as a symbol of wildlife of Tikapa Moana, and should stand as an inspiration for us all to appreciate the wildlife around us.

[Read more about Torea Mangu here](#)



By Russell Street

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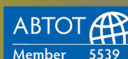


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Limosa and WildWings are proud to be the main conservation sponsor for Global Birdfair

The year so far at Wader Quest

Andrew Le Hegarat

In our Winter 2026 newsletter, we trailed exciting changes that would be coming to Wader Quest and how we interact with you, and how you can engage more with us.

Although we are looking at Summer coming up, we have been busy behind the scenes developing new ways to get involved, and to grow Wader Quest to support more shorebird conservation.

From early May, we will be putting live our refreshed website which will be your one-stop shop for interacting and getting involved with Wader Quest. Our web address will be staying the same - www.waderquest.net.

We have also had our first webinar with Rick Simpson, our co-founder and Chair of Trustees, and Elizabeth Anderson, one of our trustees - a recording of which will be available through our website and our YouTube channel in early May.

We have also been reviewing our membership offer and engagement activities, all of which will be launched at the same time as our website refresh. All current members will receive an email with more information.

We will be back at Global Birdfair again this year, and we thank the generosity of Limosa Holidays and Wildwings for their sponsorship of our stand at the event. Limosa Holidays and Wildwings have been a long-term supporter of Wader Quest, and we look forward to working alongside them again this year.

Lastly for now, our grants window will be opening again from May 1st to September 30th. If you are planning conservation or educational activities that will bring impact and benefit to wader species and their habitats either in the UK or further afield, we would like to hear from you.

Wader Quest Grants

Are you about to undertake your next conservation activity or piece of research?

Wader Quest provides grant funding to individual and organisation projects, and welcomes applications for funding for projects that further the vision, aims, and mission of Wader Quest.

Wader Quest was established to provide financial support to small-scale conservation projects, particularly those that:

- Deliver tangible and sustainable conservation outcomes.
- Demonstrate clear benefit to wader species (resident or migratory).
- Meaningfully engage local communities.
- Would otherwise face challenges in accessing conventional funding sources.

For the 2026/27 financial year, Wader Quest will consider applications up to £1,500.

Visit our website for more information and to apply.



Wrybill © Elis Simpson

Are you a company or organisation that would like to sponsor a project?

Get in touch to see how we can work together to support more vital work

Wader Quest Membership - How You Can Get Involved with Wader Quest

There are many ways to support the work of Wader Quest



Become an Individual, Family or Life Member and...

Get early access to our newsletter,
Member only events,
Discounts in our online shop,
and more...

Become an Club or Corporate Member and also get access to...

exclusive online talks,
sponsorship, advertising, and
partnership opportunities,

and more...



Current Membership Fees

Individual	£12
Family	£20
Life	£240
Club	£50
Corporate	£100

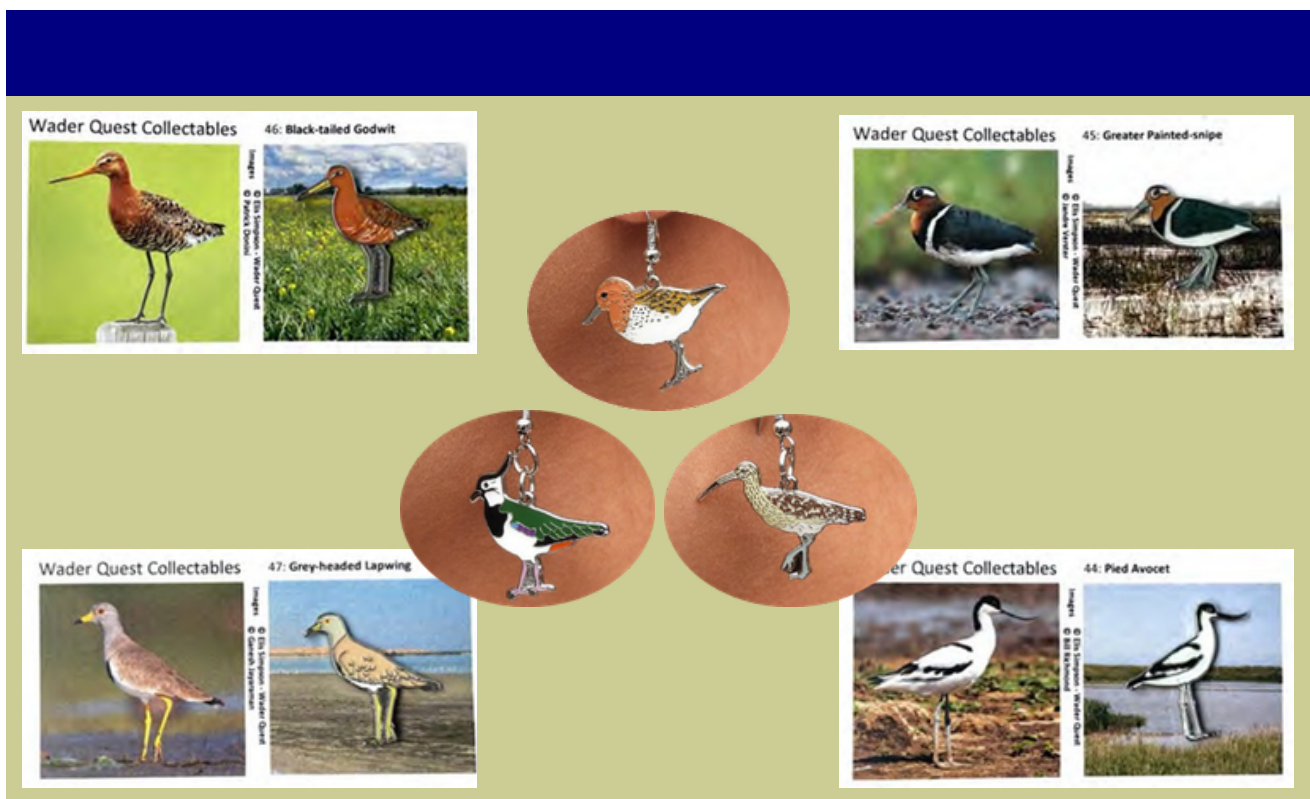
Show your support of Wader Quest and waders with Wader Quest Merchandise

Perfect for a gift, or for yourself

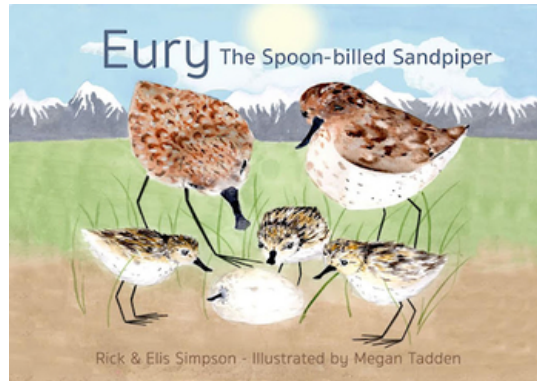
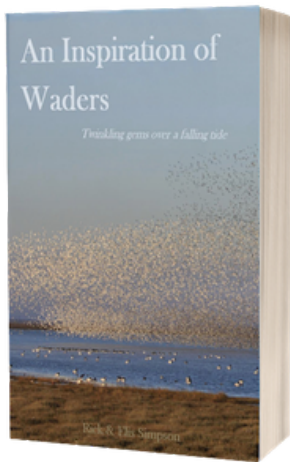
visit our Online Shop to see the following,
and much more...
(we are now on Etsy and eBay as well)

Wader Pin Badges and Earrings

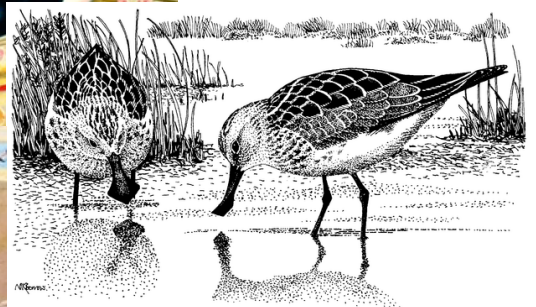
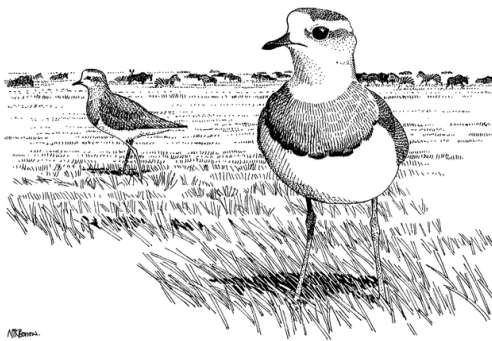
A wide selection of common and less
common waders



Wader Quest Books



Post Cards, & Greetings Cards



Wading Bird Garden Art by Red Dragon Metal Art

Steel wader shapes designed to rust and look spectacular as fence toppers or with a spike to place in the ground or flower pot

Supplied rust free, ready to rust

Place them in your garden and let the weather do the rest.

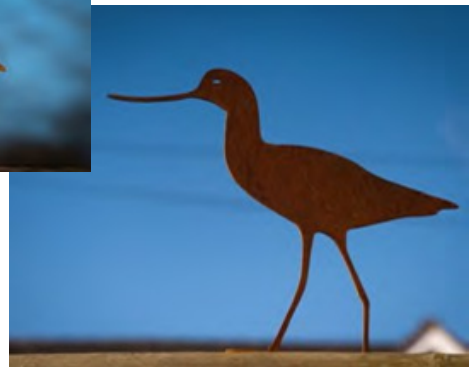
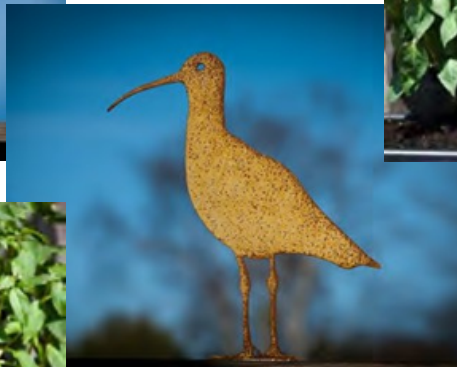
5 wader designs

Curlew (large or small)

Lapwing

Avocet

Sanderling



All available from the
[Red Dragon Metal Art website shop](http://www.RedDragonMetalArt.co.uk)



[WWW.RedDragonMetalArt.co.uk](http://www.RedDragonMetalArt.co.uk)

About Wader Quest

Wader Quest's aims

To raise awareness about the challenges waders face in the modern world. To raise funds to support wader conservation worldwide, especially those involving locally led community projects.

Our mission:

To promote, for the benefit of the public, the conservation and protection of waders or shorebirds and improvements of their physical and natural habitats; and To advance the education of the public regarding the conservation and protection of waders or shorebirds and their natural habitats.

Trustees

Rick Simpson (Chair)	Elis Simpson	Louise Hathaway (Treasurer)
Phil Hadley	Ray Heaton	Elizabeth Anderson

Operations Director

Andrew Le Hegarat

Newsletter

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Wader Quest (CIO)

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