

Invisible connections: Why migrating shorebirds need the Yellow Sea

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Everyone is aware that China and other Asian nations, particularly Korea, have experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth over the past 30 years. One of the advantages of this development is that in most cases the pressure to trap migrant birds for food is diminished. On the other hand the economic pressure for development has placed many coastal mudflats and wetlands along the Australasian flyway under threat. The Yellow Sea is at the epicentre of this clash between the pressure for economic development and the needs of migratory waders on the Australasian flyway. This book sets out to highlight the particular threats and challenges facing migrant waders along the mudflats of the Yellow Sea.

To that end the book is divided into eight chapters dealing with all aspects of the flyway from the breeding grounds on the tundra of the Arctic Circle, the threats and challenges facing waders on the flyway and the threats faced while on their 'summer holidays' in Australia and New Zealand. The intention is to highlight that time is running out for the travellers on the flyway as economic development pressures gobble up more mudflats and wetlands for housing, factories and golf courses. As the loss of the mudflats at Saegmangeum in Korea illustrates only too well, when it comes to economic development, migrant waders come at the end of the queue. It is now obvious that

even international treaties carry little weight when it comes to competing economic interests.

To counter the pressure coming from developers the authors of this book, researchers from along the flyway, set out to show what an extraordinary jewel the Australasian flyway is. The aim is to educate the Asian public in particular about the long-term cost of impairment or loss of the flyway. Raising public awareness about the flyway and the exquisite waders that use it will play an essential role in preserving it for future generations. In that respect the publishers have done a remarkable job of assembling an impressive team of researchers to explain all aspects of the ecology and mechanics of the flyway. The technical discussions are then complemented by the most stunning set of wader photographs by Jan van de Kam that I have ever seen. In particular the photographs of many familiar species in full breeding plumage should drive home to even the most philistine of developers what will be lost if uncontrolled reclamation of mudflats and coastal wetlands proceeds at its present pace.

The photographs alone make this a must buy for any shorebird watcher. In particular, photographs of such rarities as Spoon-billed Sandpiper in breeding plumage are absolutely stunning and may well represent the only view of this rapidly disappearing species that most birdwatchers will get. This is a species that could well be lost in our lifetime.

Despite the serious level at which most of the material is pitched the primary objective of the book is to educate the broader public about the threats to the flyway through the Yellow Sea and the migrant waders that use it. Although aimed largely at an Asian audience there are elements of this message of interest to Australians as the development threat is no less real here. In particular threats to saltfields, such as Dry Creek near Adelaide, have intensified in recent years so the need to educate politicians and the wider

general public about the wonder that is the Australasian flyway is as urgent in Australia as it is in Asia.

This book does an excellent job of getting that message across to the general public so I would recommend that we all make the effort to purchase a copy to provide as birthday or Christmas gifts to friends and family. Although it contains a wealth of scientific data it would make an excellent addition to the coffee table where it would highlight the exquisitely beautiful birds and the threats they face on the Australasian flyway.

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