

The size of the lakes, difficult access and numbers of birds moving around made it impossible to get good estimates of numbers but the order of magnitude was in no doubt. Where will they go when these lakes do dry out – as they always do? This will be fascinating to find out.



The Banded Stilt were the highlight of a month spent building a bird list for the million-acre property and capturing the station in pictures. My thanks go to Ken and Dawn for their hospitality and access to the property through the use of a station vehicle that enabled me to get to places I wouldn't have gone with my own vehicle.

#### BANDED STILT FLAGS

	<p><b>A single yellow flag on the right upper leg</b> was flagged as a chick in 1995 at Lake Ballard in WA. Several of these were seen at Lake Eyre in 2000 and one at Lake George in April 2001.</p>
	<p><b>A single orange flag on the right upper</b> was flagged in Victoria, the majority at Werribee in 2000. Several of these have been seen in the Coorong (Feb 2005, August 2007). And one in the pastoral lands in May, 2011.</p>
	<p><b>Orange above yellow flags on the right upper (rectangular flags)</b> was flagged as a chick in the Coorong in 2006. There have been several sightings of these in Victoria. In Feb 2008 one was seen at Yalgorup National Park, WA (about 1/2 way between Mandurah and Bunbury, on the coast). This is the first recorded movement of Banded Stilt from eastern Australia to Western Australia. One was seen accompanying a group of chicks to the water at Lake Torrens in June, 2010. A Coorong flagged adult was seen in the 2011 Lake Torrens breeding colony</p>
	<p><b>Orange above yellow flags on the left upper (rectangular flags)</b> was flagged as a chick at Lake Torrens in June 2010. One seen in the pastoral lands in May, 2011.</p>
	<p><b>Orange above yellow flags on the left upper (triangular flags)</b> was flagged as a chick at Lake Torrens in April 2011.</p>

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## Banded Stilt in central WA

May/June 2012

Rog Standen

While on a stay with friends who own the pastoral lease of Cunyu Station, immediately below the Little Sandy Desert of WA, I stumbled across huge numbers of Banded Stilt on a number of lakes that filled early in 2011 and/or 2012.

I knew from discussions with Maureen Christie that there had been chicks banded and flagged over the last couple of years at Lake Torrens SA, so I set about trying to find out if any had made their way to WA.



Camping beside Red Lake (one of the more accessible lakes) for a few days gave me the opportunity to spend many hours scouring the thousands of legs I could see through the scope. The birds continually fed across the vast lake and also formed a roosting raft that varied in size depending on how many were out feeding. Interestingly, the raft was always in the same part of the lake every time I went there over a three week period (frustratingly the raft was at the other end of the lake to where the track was closest to it).

What excitement I had when I finally found one of the flagged chicks! Still in immature plumage with just a hint of a breast band, the bird wore orange over yellow flags that were clipped to triangular flags meaning it was banded in early 2011. This bird was very recognisable as it also had a slightly upturned beak. That physical feature proved to be very useful a few days later when I took Dawn, the owner, to see this wonderful spectacle of thousands of birds in a huge raft. To my surprise I managed to find the flagged bird again in the same place on the lake as before. Dawn had seen the flock of birds, rising like a cloud, from her vehicle at the other end of the lake about 5km across, but did not know what they were. She was very excited about seeing these birds through a scope and especially seeing the flagged bird.



News of the sighting was relayed to Maureen who circulated it among the core Banded Stilt people and on a return email (this one from PhD candidate Reece Pedler) I found that another bird, with a satellite transmitter fitted at Lake Eyre in early 2012, had also flown to this property and was on Lake Nabberu at that time. The trouble was that Lake Nabberu is actually a series of connected lakes about 100 km long! Fortunately he could send me a satellite image showing which part of the Nabberu Lake complex it was last seen on. It happened to be on the other side of the Frere Range to where Red Lake is so still on Cunyu. Subsequent email traffic showed that it moved to Red Lake! Despite my attempts I could not find that one among the possible hundred thousand birds on the lake. But at least I could add some valuable information about what other birds were with the satellite bird and information about habitat and possible food.

In relation to the food, there was virtually nothing to see with the naked eye in the lake that the birds were eating. I hopefully have some samples that I sieved through some gauze that I will try and identify under a microscope. The water was not as salty about 11,000 EC, as I thought it might have been.

Contrary to the invisible food, one noticeable thing happening was that the wind was pushing the water hundreds of metres from one side and it then flowed back overnight when it calmed down creating a 'tidal' movement in the lake. This made it attractive to over 1,000 Red-capped Plovers and over 500 Red-necked Stint.

Other lakes had varying numbers from five to 1,800 to several thousand and at another lake further west, which is part of the extensive Lake Nabberu, close to one hundred thousand birds. However, when I got to this one, prompted by Reece's satellite bird having moved there, I suspect many of the Red Lake birds had gone there too as the numbers had dropped off at Red Lake by then. Other species on the Red Lake included Black-winged Stilt (over a thousand), Red-necked Avocets (10s), Curlew Sandpipers (5), Sharpies (3) and a single Greenshank with tens of thousands of Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck by the thousand and a few of several other duck species.

Several of the lakes dried up during my stay there, but the most westerly Lake Nabberu where the stilt went was much deeper than the rest and would have kept water in it for some months.