

Media Release:

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Cannons Firing to Catch Top End Waders

Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and marine officers are assisting world renowned wader expert Dr Clive Minton and a team of cannon netting experts to capture and study local migratory shorebirds, commonly referred to as waders, in the Top End this week.

Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport marine wildlife officer Ray Chatto said the study is part of a national and international focus on flyway species that spend their non-breeding life in Australia, such as the East Asian – Australasian Flyaway, one of the world's great flyways.

"Millions of migratory waders breed in northern Asia and Alaska and pass through 22 countries to spend their non-breeding season in South-East Asia and Australia," Mr Chatto said.

"This week will involve a series of 'catches' from the Lee Point to Buffalo Creek area in Darwin, the Five Mile Beach area near Dundee Beach, Lake Finniss on Woolner Station and possibly Knuckeyes Lagoon and McMinns Lagoon upon our return at the end of the week.

Mr Chatto has advised locals in the area who may hear the booming sound of the cannon nets being released not to be concerned.

"The cannon netting method has been used for many years and enables us to capture a large number of birds at a time without harming them," Mr Chatto said.

"Captured birds are held very briefly while the team measure, weigh and band them with individual numbered metal bands and a small plastic coloured flag, for easier resighting in the future, before being released on site.

"The bands allow researchers to follow the movements, growth rates, longevity and other biological information of these wader species.

"Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) officers will also be involved in this research trip, taking small blood samples to check for potential diseases being carried."

Mr Chatto said the study is a repeat of a similar program that Dr Clive Minton carried out in 1995 where hundreds of waders and waterbirds were captured and studied.

"We expect to catch over a thousand birds, and we hope that some of the birds banded last time will be recaptured to provide further information on ageing and movements," Mr Chatto said.

"Species being targeted in this particular trip are Red Knots, Bar-tailed Godwits and Little Curlews, although potentially dozens of species will be caught, measured and banded.

"The program will then rely on keen birdwatchers in the Top End and all over the world to play an important role in this research by reporting coloured flags or metal bands on the legs of the waders to the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service on 8920 9260."

Ends

Media Note – for more information contact Ray Chatto on 0422 526 305

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