



Fate of A. Bird

On 7 April 1997, the Banding Office received the following message from the Australian Federal Police:

Subject: Deceased wildlife Persons: A. Bird (no further details)

Information: On 3 April Det. Sgt. Steven Kaipa from Madang CID, Papua New Guinea, contacted the Australian Federal Police. Kaipa explained that some of his officers had located a bird carrying a Canberra contact number at Saidor, south of Madang. After some initial confusion it was established that it was indeed one of the feathered variety, to which was attached an aerial and a leg tag.

Kaipa stated that, as per instructions on the leg tag, he had contacted Wildlife Australia and spoken to a Peter Driscoll. Mr Driscoll requested that the police to forward the personal belongings of A. Bird to Canberra. Due to financial restrictions, Madang P.P.C. advised contact with LO [Liaison Officer], who subsequently undertook to forward these to Canberra through the diplomatic bag.

In depth investigations by Royal PNG Constabulary personnel, Madang, revealed that A. Bird was travelling to Siberia (economy) and was the subject of a migratory study. Unfortunately, A. Bird appears to have experienced undercarriage problems, landing just short of Madang. Local police, on instructions, fed A. Bird with crab meat in an attempt to keep it alive.

Unfortunately, A. Bird succumbed to injuries and passed away on Easter Monday, being accorded full RPNGC police honours and buried in the confines of the Madang Police Station.

Task: For information of Peter Driscoll – Wildlife Australia. Personal belongings of A. Bird will be forwarded on receipt from Madang. [message ends]

A. Bird, alias Eastern Curlew 101-06459, had been banded, leg-flagged and fitted with a satellite transmitter at Moreton Island, Queensland on 10.2.97, by Dr Peter Driscoll of the Queensland Wader Study Group. It dropped out

of the sky at Saidor on 11.3.97 and was picked up exhausted and suffering from a damaged leg. Despite receiving most tender care, it died some days later. The satellite transmitter has been duly forwarded to the Banding Office in the diplomatic bag.

06459 was one of several Eastern Curlews (*Numenius madagascariensis*) to be caught up in Cyclone Justin shortly after take-off from Moreton Bay on northward migration in February. Other birds banded at the same time delayed their departure until after the cyclone, and two Eastern Curlews carrying satellite transmitters, have since been tracked to their breeding grounds in Russia.

The recovery of the bird caused a flurry of international communications and liaison involving the Australian Embassy in Port Moresby PNG, the ABBBS office in Canberra, Peter Driscoll in Brisbane, the Australian Federal Police, the Royal PNG Constabulary, and several PNG citizens who had discovered and cared for the bird on its arrival at Saidor. Notwithstanding some existing difficulties between the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments, the interest, goodwill and helpful cooperation between all involved could not have been greater. It is possible that the unfortunate bird was responsible for an improvement in international relations, in addition to increasing our knowledge of the migration strategies of Eastern Curlews.

Further details of the Eastern Curlew tracking project, jointly organised by the Wild Bird Society of Japan and the Queensland Wader Study Group, with assistance from the Queensland Department of the Environment, can be read on the Internet, at:

<http://www.wnn.or.jp/wnn-n/migrant/english/>