

# Satellite Tracking Report from North-West Australia 2019

Number 10

08.05.19

A quieter week for the Oriental Pratincoles whilst the Little Curlew and Whimbrel continue their northwards migrations through the Yellow Sea region.

Increasingly it looks as if all four Oriental Pratincoles have now stopped migrating and settled into probable breeding areas. So we probably can't expect any significant movements from these now for many weeks. It is interesting to speculate just how these birds will spend their time between finishing the current nesting event, in June, and arriving back in Australia again next December. Will any of them attempt a second brood? Where will they moult – on/near their breeding grounds or at some other collecting point? When exactly will territories be vacated? When exactly will territories be vacated? And when will the return migration to Australia actually start?

It's good that we've got two Little Curlew still seeming to be progressing normally through the Yellow Sea region using farmland habitat just on the fringe of the coastal shores. They still have a long way to go to their breeding grounds in central Siberia and, based on previous years' data, are still due to make lengthy stopovers in northern China/south-eastern Siberia. I'm worried that we've now got only two birds left of the original five and desperately hope that these will continue and eventually give us the location of their breeding grounds and complete round-trip migration paths. We don't really understand why the fall-out rate for Little Curlew carrying satellite transmitters seems to be so relatively large each year, but it is disappointing and expensive - \$5,000+ each time a transmitter stops. Maybe in a future year we will have to try 2g transmitters on Little Curlew instead of the current 5g units? But first of all we have to see what the life is of the 2g transmitters we currently have deployed on Oriental Pratincoles.

The Whimbrel are both now progressing through the Yellow Sea region – one for the second consecutive year and the other for the third time. We have certainly had our money's worth from these two transmitters! Everything from now on must be considered a lucky bonus!

There is no further report yet on the Eastern Curlew carrying satellite transmitters. I think we can look forward to a bonus issue in the near future with, hopefully, the majority of the Eastern Curlew having moved onto the south-eastern Siberian breeding grounds. But who knows – some may breed significantly further north than any Eastern Curlew previously marked in Australia?

I shall be following the waders in another Flyway on Delaware Bay (USA) for the next three weeks, and watching these Aussie tracked shorebirds from afar. However, the remainder of the team will continue to prepare weekly reports for circulation.

(Contributed by Clive Minton)

ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE  
REPORT NO. 10  
4/5/19  
Grace Maglio  
THE BREEDING PHASE CONTINUES

Once again this week all of our superstar birds, except SUN, have made only local movements.

Quality data for SUN, our Taiwanese-based bird, remains scarce but we are confident that better weather in the region will yield more accurate results. For this report we have included a short article written by Dr. Taej Mundkur, Senior Technical Officer, Wetlands International, which shows how one little bird can bring together colleagues from all corners of the Flyway and beyond.

On hearing of the news of SEP's adventures, we received an email which highlights the excitement and the recognition of the value of the data gathered so far.

Written by Taej Mundkur:

How one satellite transmitter mounted on the back of an Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*) in north-west Australia only a few months ago has thrown open a new chapter in our knowledge about this "largely resident, with local movements" species of South Asia!

Prior to 2004, it was thought that the population of Oriental Pratincole in the East Asian - Australasian Flyway was around 75,000 birds. Separate to this, a population of about 100,000 were estimated to inhabit South Asia.

In February 2004 during the annual North West Australia expedition, participants observed an unprecedented, extraordinary number of this species along Eighty Mile Beach and the surrounding plains and as result a formal count was organised. Through ground and aerial based counts, it was estimated that 2.88 million Oriental Pratincole inhabited the area that year. It was not known from where these birds come to Australia, given that they breed in east Asia - China, Korea and Japan - to southeast Asia and there is a resident population in South Asia.

For the first time ever five Oriental Pratincole were marked with Solar 2-gram Platform Terminal Transmitters (PTTs) produced by Microwave Telemetry Inc. Over the last months, the birds flew north and amazing stories are unfolding.

One individual flew across Indonesia and east Malaysia to Thailand. After a break of enjoying yummy Thai food, it flew west to the Odisha coast of India. After a short rest it flew southwest across peninsular India to inland Karnataka, where it is currently hanging around. Will it nest here, time will tell?

And what will it do after that?? Fly back to Australia to spend the next southern summer there? Hopefully we will learn soon enough.

Can anyone in Karnataka go out there and check? Please share your observations.

While another flew up to Cambodia and swung east ending up on the east coast of Taiwan! A third is making itself at home on the lakeside of the famous Tonle Sap.

These studies will help us to better plan collaborative conservation actions across the Flyway for these species and its habitats.

Congratulations to the ever inspiring Clive Minton and the Australasian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) Wader and Tern expedition to Northwest Australia in February 2019 in marking these birds. Also, many thanks to the group for the regular updates on their exciting movements. Looking forward to learning more about these birds.

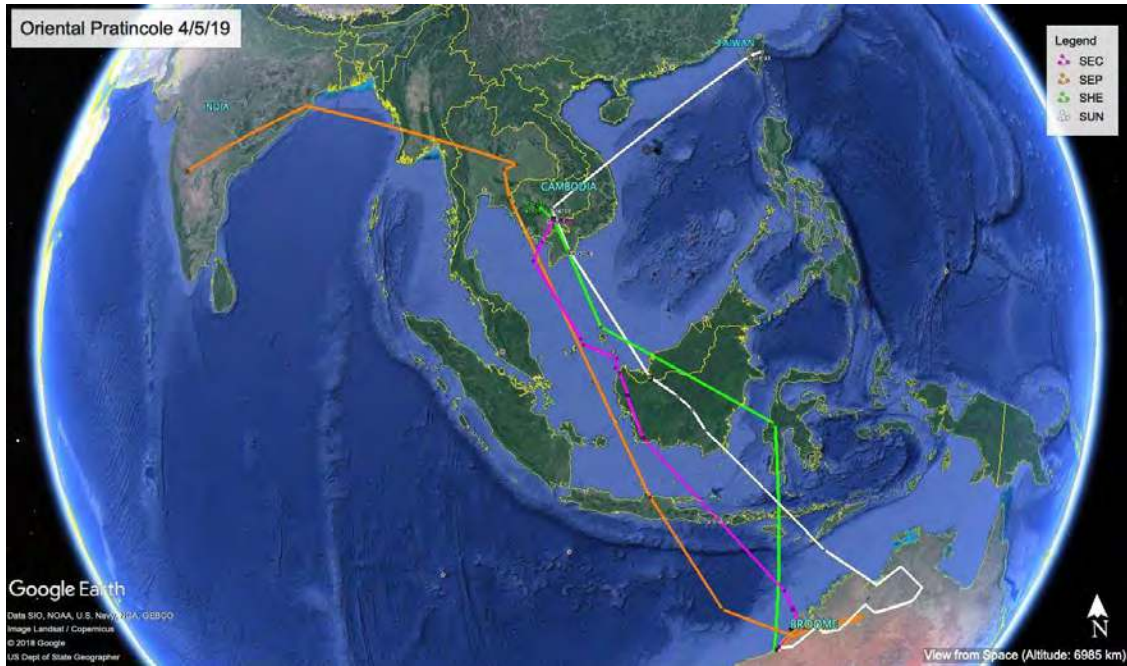


Figure 1 – Tracks of Oriental Pratincole 4/5/19

DISTANCE FROM RELEASE LOCATION 4/5/19

Bird ID	Distance from 80 Mile Beach release location (approx.)
SUN	4800km
SEP	6350km
SHE	4000km
SEC	3840km

SUN (PTT 83591) –Bad weather, bad data.

By Grace Maglio and Chung-Yu Chiang

There has been no accurate location data for SUN in Hualien County since the last reading 16 days ago. Once again this is most likely due to the inclement weather that is persisting in this region and the lack of sunlight preventing the Platform Transmitter Terminal charging for the optimal transmission of signals. We are however receiving enough data of less accuracy to suggest that SUN is still in this region and most likely somewhere along the Shoufeng and Hualien Rivers. As mentioned in previous reports breeding attempts have been observed in this area in previous years. It is hoped that as the weather eventually settles and the sun reappears, more information will become available.



Figure 2 - SUN – Last accurate reading 18/4/19, approximate location Hualien County, Taiwan. (Note the location of 2018 breeding location recorded by Chung-Yu Chiang)

SEP (PTT 83593) – Pushing the Flyway boundaries.

Excitement continues with SEP in South West India in the state of Karnataka, movements remain local and on the banks of the Krishna River, within the boundary of Heggur Village, Bagalkot District. We hope to have some ‘on the ground’ reports from colleagues from this region soon. Should data eventually indicate breeding behaviour, as we believe will be the case, this will be the first record of an Australian wader breeding in India. Watch this space!



Figure 3 – SEP - Short local movements Heggur Village, Bagalkot District, India

SHE (PTT 83595) – Surely this is breeding behaviour!??

After ten weeks, the continued short local movements and, with each passing week, a definite ‘centre point’ developing in the tracks, confirms our belief that SHE is breeding in the Tonle Sap Biosphere, Cambodia.

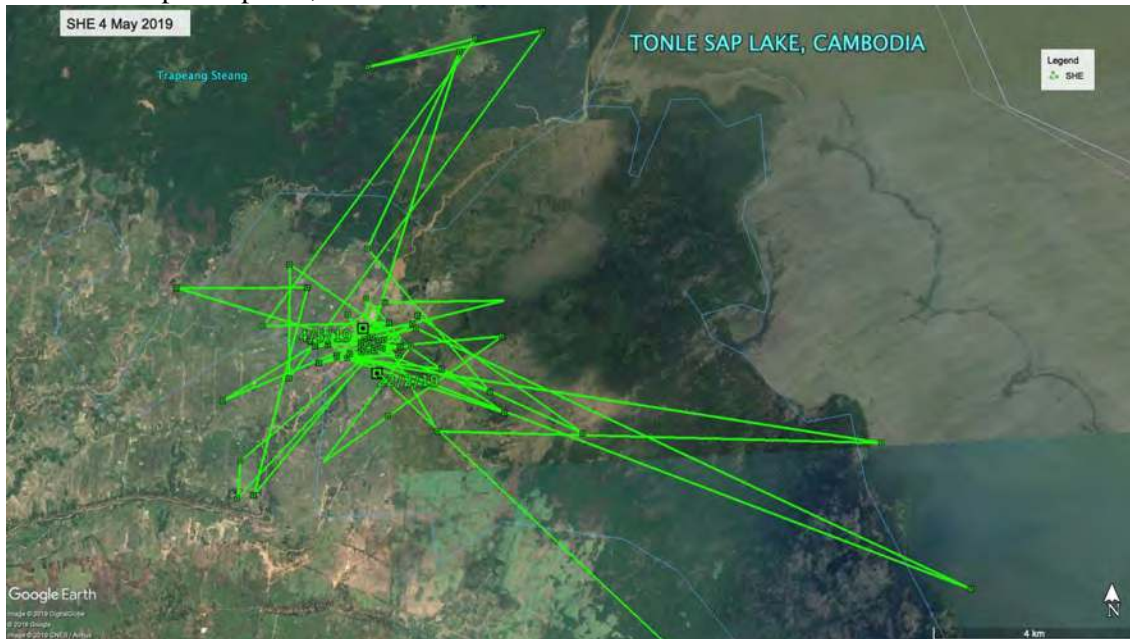


Figure 4 – SHE - 10 weeks in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve

SEC (PTT 83596) – Nesting? Too early to call.

Day 46 and still in Prey Veng Province. With each week we look forward to watching the progression of tracks to help us determine another breeding attempt in Cambodia. Once again, we wait for more data to help paint a better picture.

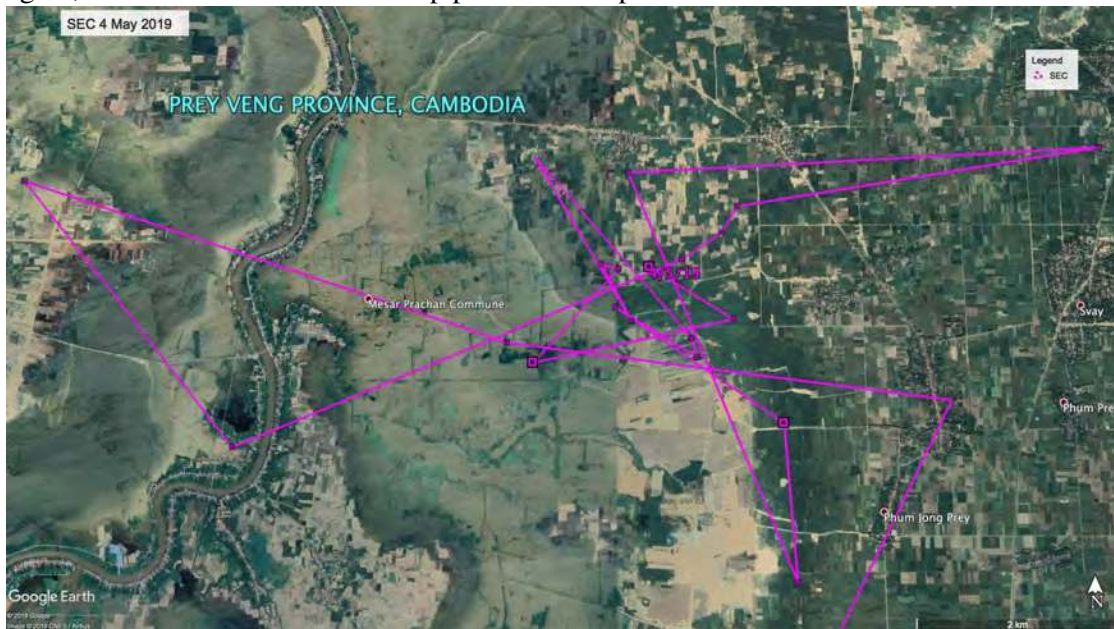


Figure 5 – SEC - Day 46 in Prey Veng Province, Cambodia

# LITTLE CURLEW

6/5/19

Inka Veltheim (and Katherine Leung)

Little Curlew LU has moved approximately 1,300 km further north. LU is now in the buffer zone of Yancheng National Nature Reserve. The area is farmland operated by state-owned enterprises, mainly growing rice, wheat and rapeseed. These farmlands are important feeding area for wintering cranes and geese, which are the main target species for the reserve.

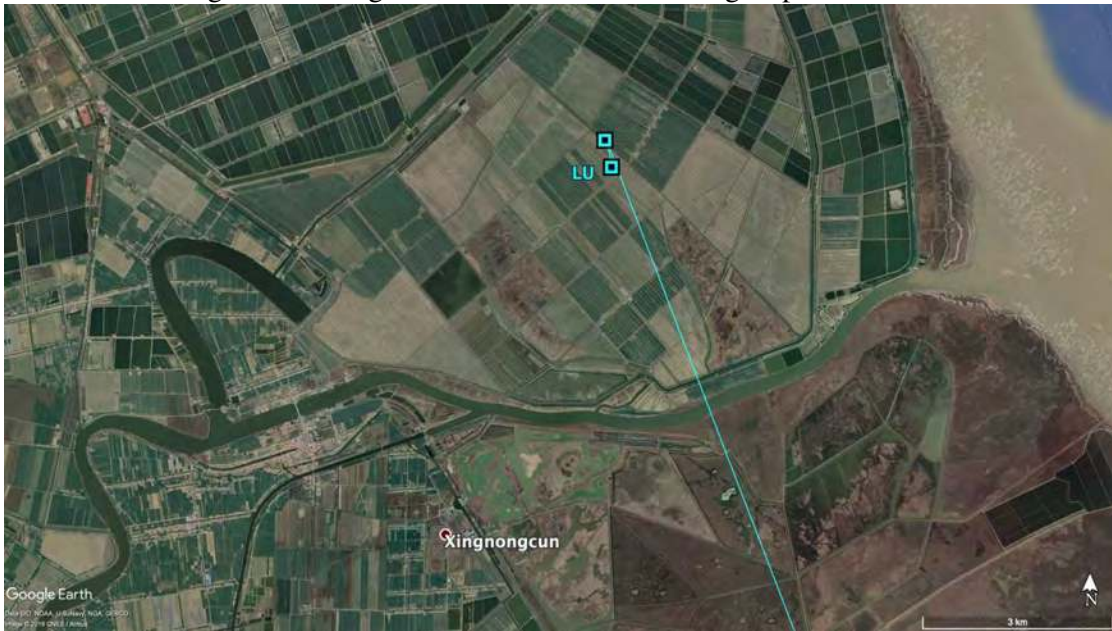


Figure 6 – Track of Little Curlew LU in Yancheng Nature Reserve



Photo 1: Farmland in buffer zone of Yancheng Nature Reserve (by Katherine Leung, Jan-2019)

LS remains near the area it stopped over, after its non-stop flight from Australia. It has moved 13 km and is currently near Mantou Mountain.

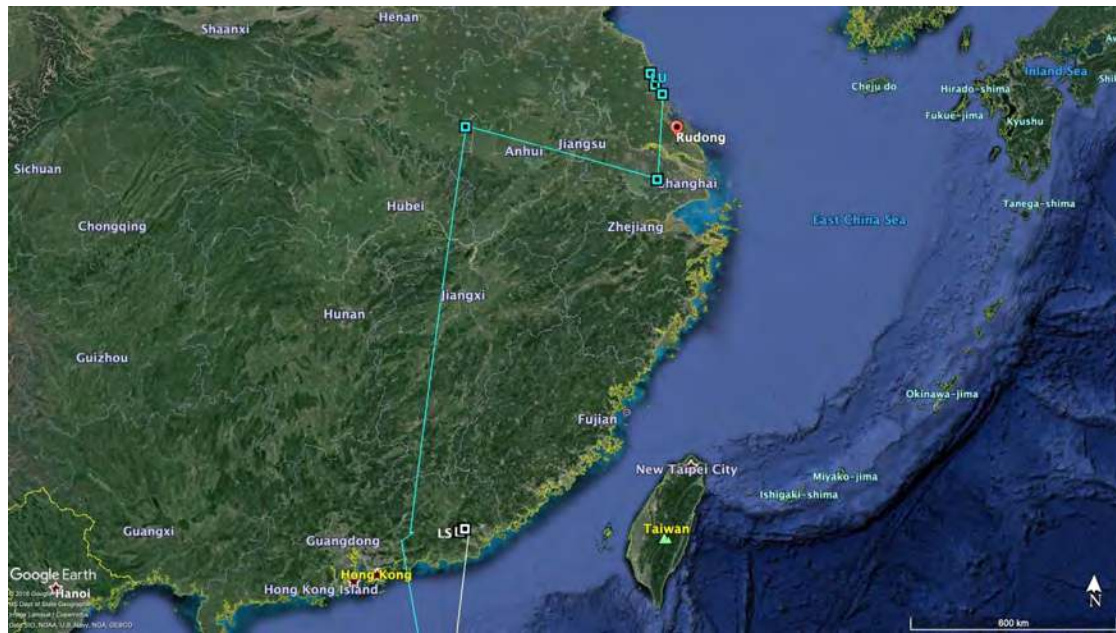


Figure 7 – Tracks of Little Curlew LS and LU



# WHIMBREL

7/5/19

Katherine Leung

## More stop-over sites

Both Whimbrel KU and LA have reached their stop-over sites in Southern China.

Whimbrel KU made 2 stops along its way at Sumbawa Island in Indonesia for a day, and then at Manila Bay in the Philippines for about 4 days. KU used to make a single flight from Broome directly to China in the previous 2 years. The reason why it has changed its tactic is unclear, but KU has shown us a couple more suitable stop-over sites for Whimbrels in South-east Asia.

KU then travelled another 1,033km and landed on a sandy beach 80km south-west of Shantou city in Guangdong Province on 6 May. KU's landing area is more towards the south-west comparing to previous 2 years. Will it then move back to its staging area in Putian, Fujian Province as per the last 2 years?

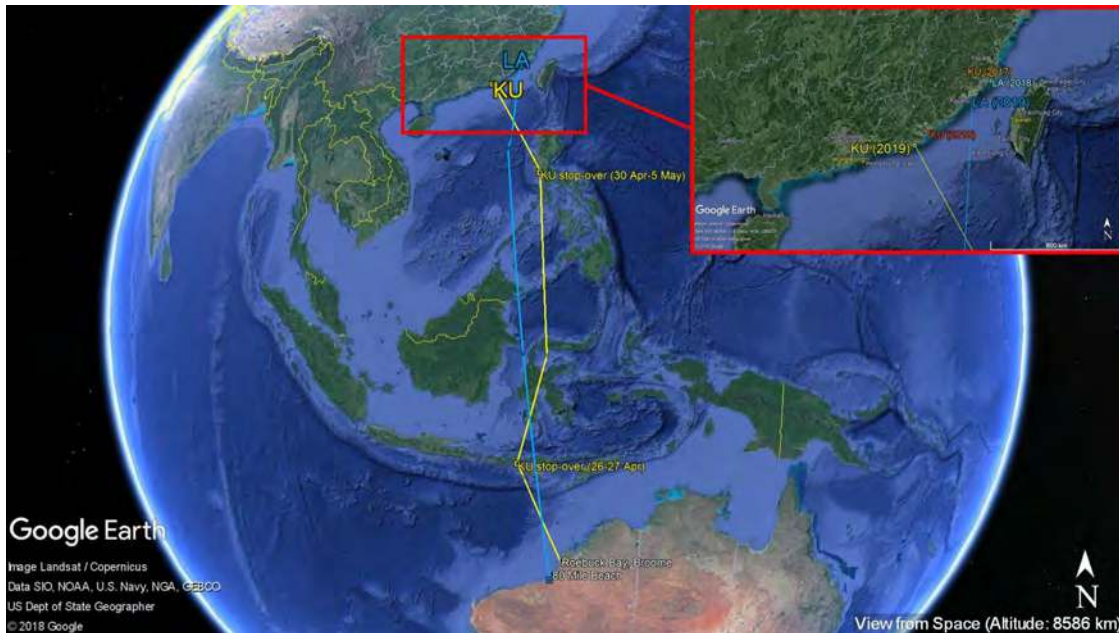


Fig 8: KU and LA's migration tracks and landing locations in Southern China

LA kept the same practice as previous year and made a direct 4,901km flight to reach the coast of Fujian Province on 2 May after 6 days. No long after it landed, LA decided to spend its time on Kinmen Island (outlying island of Taiwan) in the same bay. David Chang, a member of the North-west Australia Wader and Tern Expedition 2017 (the year we deploy these transmitters on LA and KU) from the Taiwan Wader Study Group is currently working on bee-eater research project on Kinmen Island and is trying to see LA again after 814 days.

Heavy rainstorm is forecasted in Southern China in the coming week. We'll see how the weather might affect the migration of KU and LA.

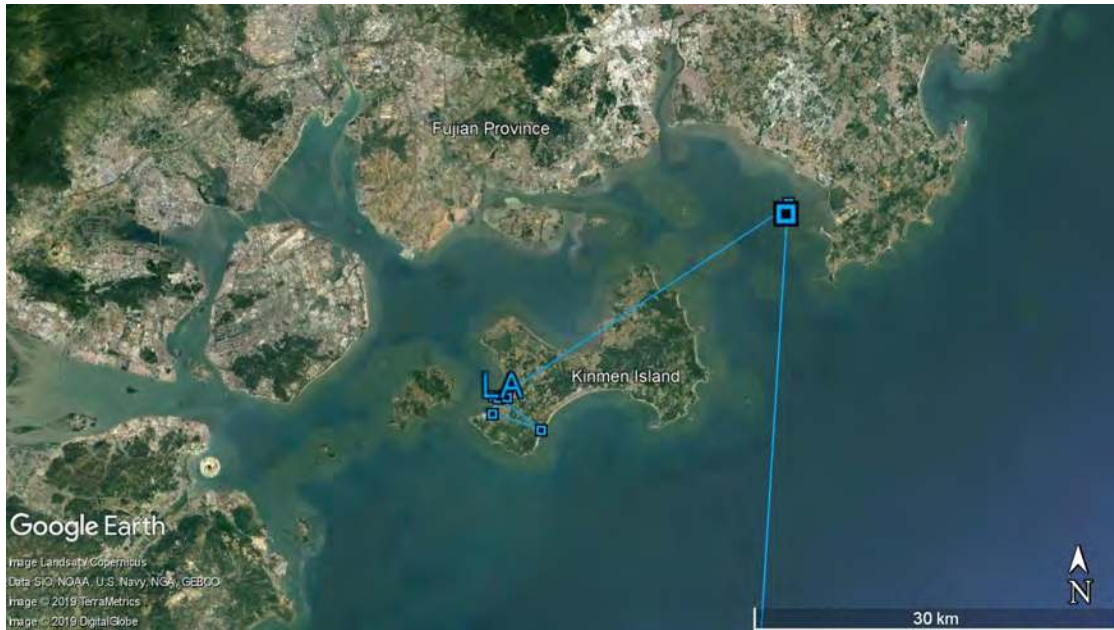


Figure 9 – LA’s landing in Fujian Province and stop-over on Kinmen Island



Photo 2 – Sandy beach on south-east shore of Kinmen Island where LA stop-over (by Katherine Leung, July-2018)



Photo 3 - Mudflat on south-west coast of Kinmen Island where LA stop-over (by David Chang, May-2019)

Migration summary of Whimbrels (as of 7 May 2019)

Leg Flag (track colour)	No. of days since transmitter deployment	No. of days since departing Australia (2019)	Distance travelled (2019)
LA (blue)	814 days	11 days	4,901 km
KU (yellow)	802 days	12 days	4,759 km

## Eastern Curlew

No further downloading of satellite tracks has taken place since tracking report No. 8.