



Shorebird Colour Marking Protocol for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway

(adopted by MOP12 DD.10 (2025))



Colour-marking refers to the use of any colour mark attached to a bird that enables identification of the bird in the field (resighting). Along the East Asian – Australasian Flyway (EAAF), metal bands and plastic coloured leg flags/bands are being used to mark shorebirds. Most of the colour leg flags are also engraved with an individual code (referred to as engraved leg flag) to enable resightings of individual birds.

Researchers consolidate resighting data of colour marked shorebirds to study migration patterns, understand survival rate and longevity, and to work out population estimates and trends. This knowledge forms the scientific basis for conservation plans and actions to protect the shorebird species and the wetlands that they depend on.

Shorebird Colour-Marking Protocol for the EAAF was first developed in the early 2000s and was last updated in 2017 to better coordinate and communicate shorebird colour marking efforts on the EAAF. Unique colour marking combinations have been assigned to shorebird banding locations. Currently, there are over 70 individual colour marking sites/organisations along the Flyway. This 2025 colour chart shows the colour marking combinations where colour marking researches are currently active in the EAAF and in India and Sri Lanka.

Researchers who plan to colour-mark shorebirds must refer to this Protocol for the assigned colour combination of bands/leg-flags for their banding location. Before colour-marking any birds, researchers must approach the relevant national banding office(s) for permission to mark and for approval of the colour scheme. If a country where birds are planned to be marked does not have a national scheme, the scheme of a nearby country shall be requested for permission to use their national scheme and leg-flag colour scheme.

If colour-bands are planned to be used next to leg-flags, the choice of the colours and the colour scheme requires flyway-wide coordination. In the case of shorebirds, an approved band-colour scheme should be obtained from the EAAF Partnership Shorebird Working Group, to avoid multiple use of the same combinations.

Collecting resighting data is a vital part of any colour marking project and this can only be done by effective communication between researchers and observers who resight the colour marked birds in the field. After a new colour marking project begins, researchers should publicise via the EAAFP (webpage and e-newsletter; [example](#)) how colour marks were used by their project, and provide their contact information for observers to report sightings. It is the responsibility of the researchers to respond to observers who send them colour mark resighting records with the life history of the marked bird.

Shorebird observers, birdwatchers, photographers, and citizen scientists can use this colour chart as a “field guide” for observing birds with coloured leg flags/bands in the field, which helps to identify where an individual was marked. Observers are encouraged to record and report their sightings with the following information:

- Basic information: observer's name and email address, observation date and location (preferably with GPS coordinates), and the species of the bird observed with the colour mark.
- Details about the colour mark: **the most ideal would be to take a photo/video of the bird showing all parts of the bird's legs clearly.** If photographing is not possible, record in detail: the colour, type (i.e. flag or band), and position of the mark(s) on the bird's leg(s) (left or right, upper or lower leg); any code (letter, number, symbol) engraved on the flag(s).

Observers can report their sightings directly to the researchers, or via any of the following channels. Administrators of these channels will relay the sightings to the corresponding researchers and feedback the life history of the marked bird once such information is received from the researchers:

- [Shorebird leg-flag sightings in the EAAF](#) Facebook Group
- [BirdMark](#) Website
- [Shorebird Resighting Information of EAAF](#) Website
- [Reporting waterbird rings and flags sightings](#) Webpage
- For Chinese birders/photographers, email to flagsightings@163.com
- For Japanese birders/photographers, [Report form of marked bird resighting](#) Website

Updated: November 2025



Shorebird Colour Marking Protocol for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway

(Updated: April 2025)



Key:

Upper flag	Blue	Banding location
Lower flag	Black	

Pale blue	Russia, North-west Chukotka (Chuon Delta)
Orange	

Blue	Japan, Hokkaido (Furen Lake and Utonai Lake)
Blue	Japan, Hokkaido (Komukke Marsh) and Honshu (Lower Tone River)

Black	Indonesia, Java and Madura Island
Orange	[using plain flags only]

Pale blue	Russia, Northern Chukotka
	[using plain flags only]

Blue	Japan, Honshu (Tokyo Bay and Torinoumi)
White	

Orange	Indonesia, Sumatra and Central Borneo
Black	[using plain flags only]

Lime	Russia, Southern Chukotka

Blue	Japan, Kyushu (Ariake Sea) and Okinawa (Okinawa Island and Miyako Island)
Orange	

Yellow	Bangladesh
Yellow	[some Black-tailed Godwits are marked with 2 plain flags + 3 colour bands]

Lime	Russia, Southern Chukotka

Green	China, Yalujiang Estuary (Dandong, Liaoning)
Orange	

White	India (various sites: North; West; East coast; Inland)
White	

Black	Russia, Kamchatka (various sites)
Yellow	

Blue	China, Bohai Bay (various sites)
Yellow	

Black	India, South

Yellow	Russia, Sakhalin Island
White	[using plain flags only]

Green	China, Jiangsu (Dongtai and Rudong)
Blue	

Green	Sri Lanka
Green	

Red	Russia, Schaste Bay and Viakhtu Bay
	[on Nordmann's Greenshank, with colour bands]

White	China, Shanghai Chongming Dongtan Nature Reserve [before 2006, using plain flags only]
Black	

Yellow	Australia, Northern Territory
Blue	

Yellow (band)	USA, Northern Alaska (Barrow)
Green	[on Dunlin, with colour bands]

Black	China, Shanghai Chongming Dongtan Nature Reserve [after 2006]
White	

Green	Australia, Queensland (including Gulf of Carpentaria)
Green	

Orange (band)	USA, North Western Alaska
Green	[on Dunlin, with colour bands]

Black	China, Zhejiang [blue flag on opposite leg, using plain flags only]
White	

Orange	Australia, New South Wales
Green	

Blue (band)	USA, Western Alaska
Green	[on Dunlin, with colour bands]

White	China, Taiwan (various sites)
Blue	

Orange	Australia, Victoria
Yellow	

Green (band)	USA, Northern Alaska (Canning River)
Green	[on Dunlin, with colour bands]

White	China, Guangdong (Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Yangjiang and Zhanjiang)
Yellow	

Orange	Australia, South Australia
Yellow	

Pale blue (band)	USA, Northern Alaska (Ikpikpuk & Prudhoe Bay)
Green	[on Dunlin, with colour bands]

Black	Thailand (Inner Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Coast of the Thai Peninsula)
Green	

Orange	Australia, Tasmania
Blue	

Black	USA, Alaska [on Bar-tailed Godwit]
Green	

Green	Cambodia
Black	

Yellow	Australia, South-west Western Australia
Orange	

Blue	Mongolia (various sites)
Green	

Black	Malaysia (East and West Malaysia)
Yellow	

Yellow	Australia, North Western Australia
Black	[some Great and Red Knots, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits are marked with 1 plain flag + 4 colour bands]

Orange	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
White	

Green	Singapore (Sungei Buloh and Pulau Ubin)
White	

White	New Zealand, North and South Island
	[some Red Knots, Bar-tailed Godwits and Ruddy Turnstone are marked with 1 plain flag + 4 colour bands]

White	Republic of Korea
Orange	

Black	Philippines
Blue	[with colour bands]

Red	New Zealand, South Island
	[on Bar-tailed Godwit, with 1 plain flag + 4 colour bands]

Assigned but currently inactive:

Pale blue	Russia, Wrangel Island
White	

Blue	China, Guangxi and Hainan
Black	

Yellow	Vietnam
Green	

Black	Myanmar
Black	

Special colour flagging scheme for Spoon-billed Sandpiper:



Lime	Spoon-billed Sandpiper, wild birds from breeding ground
White	

Yellow	Spoon-billed Sandpiper, wild birds from stopover sites
Orange	

Orange	Spoon-billed Sandpiper, wild birds from wintering ground
Yellow	

Note: There are also small number of individuals marked following the Shorebird Colour Flagging Protocol, e.g. in recent year: Shanghai Chongming Dongtan (Black over white); Thailand (Black over green); North Chukotka (pale blue).

Each colour marking combination may be shared by several researchers in one banding location. To differentiate between the projects, some minor variations of marks may be applied (e.g. placing the flag(s) on left or right leg, cutting the flag(s) at an angle). The EAAFP Shorebird Working Group holds an inventory of what and how colour marks are used by individual colour marking sites/organisations.

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