



Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No 22 · May 2020



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Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Fucheng, Leizhou

Li Cheng

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The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) News Bulletin is a regular, half-yearly update of activities of the SBS Task Force of the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). The News Bulletin is edited by Dr Christoph Zöckler, Coordinator of the EAAFP SBS Task Force with assistance from Sayam Chowdhury, Bangladesh.

Mission:

The East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) aims to coordinate the conservation activities identified in the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Single Species Action Plan for the species, which was commissioned by BirdLife International. The activities in the Action Plan are regularly reviewed and updated by all Flyway Members and a growing network of active supporters and groups in the Flyway countries, and beyond.

The Task Force originates from the establishment of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team (SBS RT) in 2004, when several partners active in the conservation of this globally threatened wader met in Edinburgh. With the growing level of activity, the finalization of the Action Plan in 2008 and a growing network of partners, organisations and supporters the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was formed at the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) meeting in Korea in February 2010. In December 2010, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was officially endorsed as one of the first species Task Forces by the Partnership under the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group. Implementing organisation for the SBS TF is BirdLife International through its partner Birds Russia. It is chaired by the Government Partner of Russia. Task Force members consist of the EAAFP Government Partners of key range states for the species and international conservation organisations. These are: the Russian Federation, Japan, People's Republic of China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Union of Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT), Wetlands International, a representative of the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group, the Mangrove Conservation Fund (MCF), Fauna Flora International (FFI) and experts and conservation organisations from principal range states and other partners. We are grateful to the Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung, Bremen, the RSPB and NABU, MCF and the International Conservation Fund of Canada (ICFC) for their continued support of the SBS Task Force and Spoon-billed Sandpiper projects across the range states.

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Foreword from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Manfred Hermsen Foundation, SBS TF Coordinator · May 2020

Covid -19 has even impacted the Spoon-billed Sandpiper – not directly I believe, but of course indirectly in many ways, for example as illustrated in our Last Page. The work of our Task Force was and is, hampered by the lockdown restrictions. Our friends at WWT in Slimbridge are furloughed. The spring surveys in Jiangsu were just able to resume again, but it is not yet clear if our Russian friends can go to the breeding grounds this year. No foreigners will likely join them anyway this season. For the first time in almost ten years our close partner ‘Heritage Expeditions’ will not be able to visit the Kamchatka and Chukotka coasts.

But, what most of us would consider impossible in the current circumstances might not yet be impossible for Evgeny’s team in the ‘Land of Unlimited Impossibilities’. We will need to report in our next issue if our Russian friends made it to the breeding grounds or not.

This issue will focus on the winter counts. We were lucky with a good coverage and in China the surveys were completed just in time before the early lockdown in January. Winter surveys covered a huge area of over 40 sites, most in southern China. This was only possible with the support by the Mangrove Conservation Fund (MCF) and the International Conservation Fund of Canada (ICFC). We are very grateful for their continued support. Please also see our guest foreword in this issue by Scott Hecker.

Both MCF and ICFC have also been supporting our hunting mitigation work on the wintering grounds. Alongside many other NGOs and foundations we have made big strides in stopping or limiting the hunting pressure on the flyway over the past ten years. The exclusive article about wader hunting in



Christoph taking a “back seat” behind SBS TF Chair Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Meinypil’gyno 2019

Kamchatka though illustrates how much work there still is ahead of us in a region which is difficult to access.

The virus also laid bare the treacherous situations in Asian’s wet markets and a lot of progress has been made on wildlife trade legislation in China and Vietnam in particular. This is of course good news well beyond the Spoon-billed sandpiper and other shorebirds and we hope to provide more details in the upcoming issues of our newsletter.

Anniversaries now seem to come faster and faster, but it is now 20 years ago, when we encountered our first Spoon-billed Sandpiper on a beach in Chukotka in June 2000 and our long story began. Enjoy reading!

Guest Foreword

Saving the World's favorite Shorebird

Scott Hecker, MSc, Director of Bird Conservation, ICFC

Anyone reading this newsletter surely has a visual memory of the first time they saw a photo of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, with its unique bill. For the luckier few, the memory of the moment they observed this bird in the wild. I have yet to be so lucky, but my first “view” of a Spoonie was wonderful, as captured so serenely in the video footage by Gerrit Vyn at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. In January 2016, Anne Lambert, founder of the International Conservation Fund of Canada, hired me to direct ICFC's Shorebird Conservation Initiative. Apparently, Anne had the Spoon-billed Sandpiper on her “to do” list for some time, and as part of my first official duties, I was to see if there was something ICFC might do to assist in this species' conservation. Her written suggestion included a link to the video clip of nothing but the Spoonies themselves on the windblown mostly frozen tundra of Chukotka, Russia going about nesting and chick rearing. It only took this 5-minute video to convince me too that this was a species that could use some help.

I was startled to soon learn from leading shorebird conservationists that there were predictions that Spoon-billed Sandpiper could go extinct by 2025. Bob Ridgely, a director at the Rainforest Trust, agreed with Anne that it should be of the highest priority, and he was hopeful too that ICFC might become involved in its conservation, before it was too late.

My further inquiries led to Nigel Clark, who suggested I start with Sayam Chowdhury of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force. Of Sayam, Nigel said, “To make a real difference when trying to save a species you need people with ideas as well as those with passion and commitment.” After speaking to Sayam, I knew we had an excellent team on the ground to best guide our involvement and support and, and therefore, I requested a proposal that focused on the non-breeding areas known to be of the highest importance to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.



The International Conservation Fund of Canada (ICFC) supports conservation actions that protect natural ecosystems and reduce impacts. Our projects typically focus on areas of high biodiversity, on critically endangered species, or on migratory connectivity of shorebirds. We develop field-based work plans with in-country experts and NGOs who work closely with local communities. Our support for Spoon-billed Sandpipers began in October 2016 on the Bay of Bengal in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Sayam coordinated ICFC support of fieldwork in Bangladesh and in Myanmar with our local partners. Our support included increased shorebird surveys, threat assessments, hiring of new guards, and the construction of field camps and a new boats etc.

After our first year of activities we were able to increase our support for SBS in 2017 beyond the

Bay of Bengal to newly proposed work in South China. There, SBS TF established a partnership for ICFC with the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) at sites in Leizhou Peninsula. Here the focus was again on the hiring of guards to survey and patrol important SBS sites, with an emphasis on searches for illegal hunting activity and the confiscation mist nets used to capture thousands of shorebirds. One aspect of this work that is particularly important to note is its benefit to other threatened shorebirds found at many SBS sites. These include the Critically Endangered Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and six other vulnerable species.

In 2018 and 2019 we continued to support the work in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and China, and were provided a new opportunity to fund wardens at Pak Thale in Thailand, after 8 hectares of habitat were purchased as a private sanctuary. This site is remarkably important for its size with five to ten overwintering SBA annually, as well as many other threatened shorebirds. It also provides one of the best opportunities for the public and tourists to see SBS and learn about their plight and conservation needs.

Approaching our fifth year in support of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project we are very pleased and proud of the excellent work by the many field staff now working with us, as well as the talented and dedicated effort among all who are assembled throughout the species' range to protect this iconic, global traveler.



Scott leads ICFC's Shorebird Conservation Initiative and other projects for which birds are a key focus. Scott has devoted his career to coastal bird conservation, while also conducting lectures nationwide, publishing research papers and guidance manuals, leading professional workshops, and appearing as an expert witness in legal hearings. Notably, Scott led Piping Plover recovery efforts for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which saw the state's population of this threatened species increase from 126 pairs in 1987 to 530 pairs in 2002. He then expanded his efforts to protect terns and shorebirds as the Director of Coastal Bird Conservation at the National Audubon Society. In 2008 he co-founded Conservian Inc., where he consults on coastal conservation in the Gulf of Mexico. Scott completed his Master's work in Belize, and has traveled extensively in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Message from the EAAFP Secretariat

Doug Watkins, Chief Executive, East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Taskforce has been implementing one of the most successful conservation programs for a migratory shorebird in the EAAF Flyway. It's achieving this by having two totally dedicated leaders in Evgeny and Christoph, and a huge team of people from across the world that have taken up the cause of halting and reversing the decline of this critically endangered species. I have been following this work from the very beginning in 2002, when three action plans for EAAF species were endorsed at CMS CoP - Black-faced Spoonbill, Chinese Crested Tern and Spoon-billed Sandpiper. I was also in 2004 in Edinburgh, when the SBS Recovery Team was founded. The group has now fully fledged to an efficient flyway Task Force and it is my great pleasure to support the group in my new role as chief executive for the EAAFP.

The enhanced hatchling program in the breeding area continues to be successful in bringing more young birds into the population.

The mobilisation of individuals and organisations at the national level has been a key to identifying critical staging and non-breeding areas. In some of the non-breeding areas, where hunting has been identified as a key threat, the team took up the challenge of supporting the development of a community-based program to redirect hunters into other livelihood options.

This work has contributed to the EAAF Partnership now assessing, more broadly, how illegal hunting and incidental catch of migratory waterbirds can be assessed and addressed.



The broader EAAF Partnership has a lot more to learn from the experience of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Taskforce. I congratulate the Spoon-billed Sandpiper team on your ongoing achievements to secure the conservation status of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Census in China, January 2020

Chen Qing on behalf of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Alliance

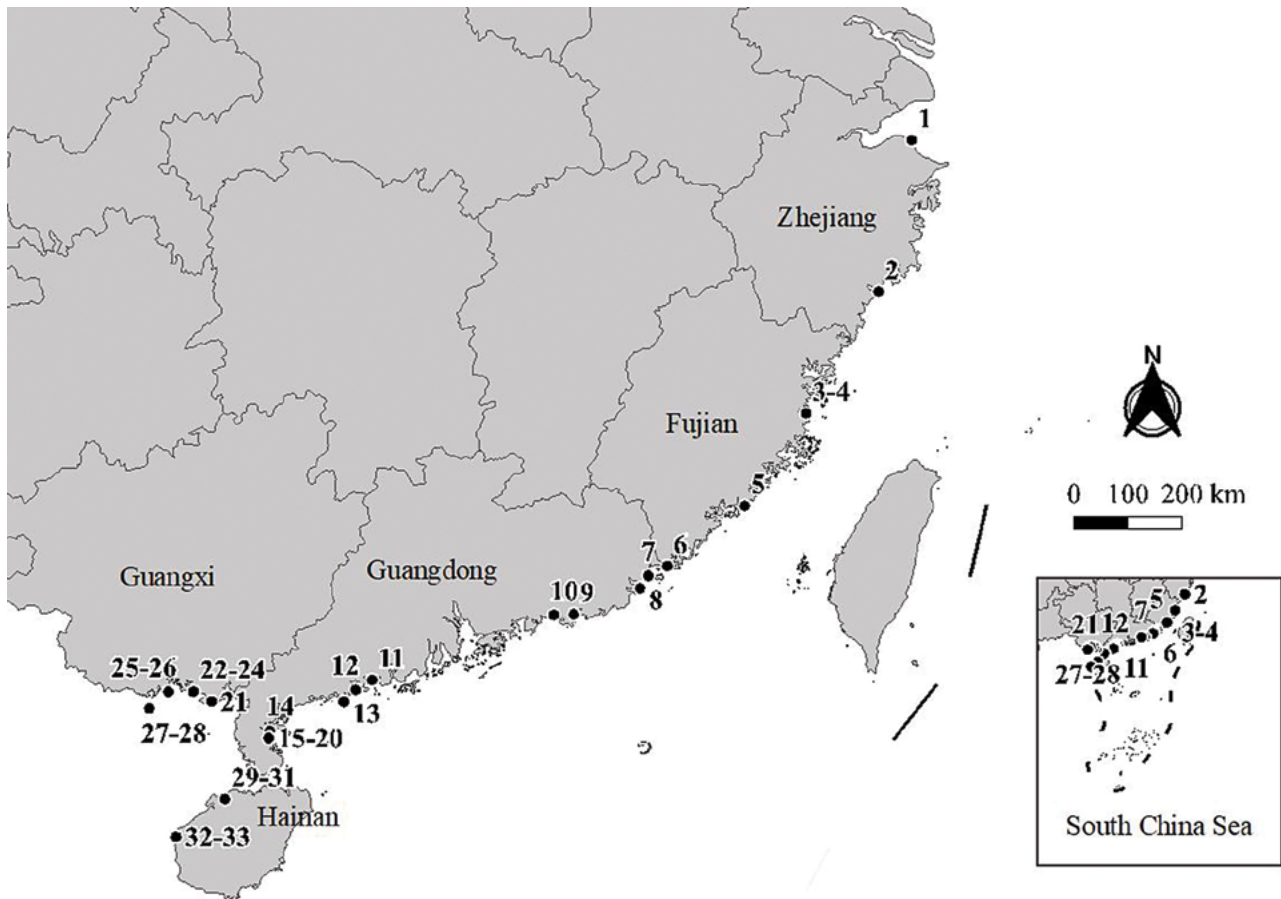


Figure 1: Survey sites of China SBS Census 2020. (1) Hangzhou Bay, Hangzhou, Zhejiang; (2) Wenzhou Bay, Wenzhou, Zhejiang; (3) Shanyutan, Minjiang estuary, Fuzhou, Fujian; (4) Meihuatan, Fuzhou, Fujian; (5) Weitou, Jinjiang, Fujian; (6) Gongkou port, Zhao'an, Zhangzhou, Fujian; (7) Hanjiang esuary, Shantou, Guangdong; (8) Haojiang esuary, Shantou, Guangdong; (9) Dahu, Haifeng, Guangdong; (10) Changshawan, Haifeng, Guangdong; (11) Moyangjiang estuary, Yangjiang, Guangdong; (12) Xitou, Yangjiang, Guangdong; (13) Pinggang, Yangjiang, Guangdong; (14) Donghai Island, Zhanjiang, Guangdong; (15) Beijia, Leizhou, Guangdong; (16) Hebei (north), Leizhou, Guangdong; (17) Hebei (south)-Tujiao (north), Leizhou, Guangdong; (18) Tujiao (north), Leizhou, Guangdong; (19) Tujiao (south), Leizhou, Guangdong; (20) Leigao, Leizhou, Guangdong; (21) Zhulin saltpans, Beihai, Guangxi; (22) Xichang, Beihai, Guangxi; (23) Daguansha, Beihai, Guangxi; (24) Xiniujiang, Qinzhou, Guangxi; (25) Shaluoliao, Fangchenggang, Guangxi; (26) Shanxinsha Island, Fangchenggang, Guangxi; (27) Bailangtan, Fangchenggang, Guangxi; (28) Jintan, Fangchenggang, Guangxi; (29) Dongchang, Danzhou, Hainan; (30) Guangcun, Danzhou, Hainan; (31) Xinying saltpans, Danzhou, Hainan; (32) Changhuajiang estuary, Dongfang, Hainan; (33) Mianqianhai saltpans, Dongfang, Hainan.

Introduction

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper migrates over Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang and Fujian in China and spends its winter in Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan of China and other countries including Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand. An 18-thousand-kilometer long coastline and its surrounding intertidal zones provide abundant food sources and roosting sites for migrants along EAAF. In order to improve the collaboration and boost cooperation for SBS conservation in China, the SBS Conservation Alliance was established (see SBS News Bull 20:11-14 2019). A bunch of nature reserve offices, institutions and birding societies joined in the alliance and contributed to the great effort. In the winter, between 2018 and 2019, SBS Conservation Alliance coordinated SBS winter census for the first

time, covering almost all previously recorded SBS wintering sites in southeast China. To better understand, SBS population and wintering locations in China, a coordinated SBS census was carried out between 17 January and 19 January 2020, adding 13 new sites such as Wenzhou Bay, Hangzhou Bay, Shantou, Maoming.

Methods

Global coordinated SBS winter count was carried out between 15 and 30 January 2020 in many countries across the flyway. Following these dates, China SBS Winter Census 2020 was conducted from 17-19 January 2020 at 33 sites in Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan (Figure 1).

The survey region covered over 2100 kilometers of coastline in SE China. A total of 28 members of the SBS Conservation Alliance with over one hundred people participated in the census. Constrained by local tide and labor constraint, census in Fuzhou, Fujian was conducted on 12 January 2020, which is also presented in this report. Counting was conducted once or several times at each site based on local tide condition. SBS individuals were individually counted and all marked birds were accurately read and photographed. For other species, we adopted a direct count method, when individuals were solitary and estimated numbers by groups when individuals gathered as flocks. Each flock was counted at least twice and an average value was taken as the final count. Once an individual engraved flag was found, we tried to obtain images of it. We identified potential threats (including hunting, fishing, aquaculture, invasive species, construction, pollution and other human activities) at 22 survey sites and we counted frequency of each threat.

Results

A total number of 49 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded at 13 sites in China during SBS

Winter Census in 2020, indicating a 68.97% increase in total number compared to the census in 2019. A total of 12 individually marked (engraved flags) SBS were recorded (Table 3).

Among 13 new sites, three sites recorded 10 SBSs (Table 1). Fucheng of Leizhou Peninsula remained the location with the largest SBS winter population in China, with a record of 28 individuals (taking up 57.14% of the total count, Table 2). At Fucheng, Leizhou Peninsula, there was a dramatic increase compared to last year's count. At Tujiao north, we counted 18 SBS individuals, the maximum count among all sites in this census.

Moreover, there were small numbers of SBSs at sites including Fangchenggang (3 at Bailangtan, 3 at Shanxinsha Island and another 4 at Shaluoliao) and Yangjiang (3 at Xitou and 5 in Pinggang, Table 1). We recorded one SBS individual at Daguansha, Zhulin salt pans and Xinying salt pans. SBS was not recorded at Shanyutan and Gongkou port where we recorded one individual in 2018.

We assessed potential threats at 22 survey sites. All sites indicated at least one threat. Hunting and fishing were considered as the most frequently recorded threats (10 times, respectively). Aquaculture and invasive species were relatively common threats among surveyed sites (seven times, respectively). Construction, pollution and other human activities were reported at few sites.



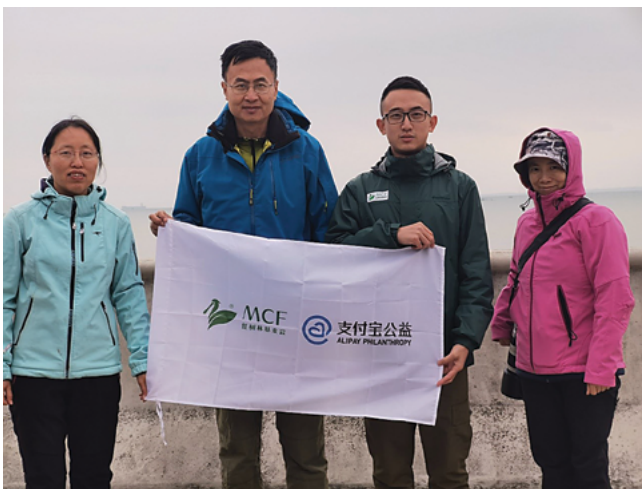
Table 1: SBS counted at all sites in China during SBS Winter Census 2020, with a comparison of counts in 2019

Province	Location	Habitat	Count in 2020	Count in 2019	Count Difference
Zhejiang	Hangzhou Bay, Hangzhou	mudflats	0	-	0
	Wenzhou Bay, Wenzhou	mudflats	0	-	0
Fujian	Shanyutan, Minjiang estuary, Fuzhou[1]	mudflats	0	2	-2
	Meihuatan, Fuzhou[1]	mudflats	0	0	0
	Weitou, Jinjiang	-	0	-	0
	Gongkou port, Zhao'an, Zhangzhou	-	0	1	-1
Guangdong	Xitou, Yangjiang	mudflats	3	4	-1
	Pinggang, Yangjiang	mudflats	5	-	5
	Moyangjiang estuary, Yangjiang	mudflats	0	-	0
	Donghai Island, Zhanjiang	mudflats	0	0	0
	Fucheng, Leizhou peninsula[1]	mudflats	28	13	15
	Hanjiang estuary, Shantou	mudflats	0	-	0
	Haojiang estuary, Shantou	salt pans	0	-	0
	Changshawan, Haifeng	mudflats	0	-	0
	Dahu, Haifeng	mudflats	0	-	0
	Guangxi	Xiniujiang, Qinzhou	mudfl./ponds	1	2
Xichang, Beihai		mudflats	0	0	0
Daguansha, Beihai		-	1	1	0
Zhulin salina, Beihai		-	0	-	0
Bailangtan, Fangchenggang		-	3	3	0
Sanxinsha Island, Fangchenggang		-	3	3	0
Shaluoliao, Fangchengg.		-	4	-	4
Jintan, Fangchenggang		-	0	0	0
Hainan		Dongchang, Danzhou	-	0	0
	Guangcun, Danzhou	-	0	-	0
	Xinying salina, Danzhou	-	1	-	1
	Changhuajiang estuary, Dongfang	-	0	0	0
	Mianqianhai salina, Dongfang	-	0	0	0

[1] Sites that were surveyed outside the global census weeks. [2] We combined six survey sites at Leizhou peninsula together to compare SBS count between 2019 and 2020, since the division of survey sites were slightly different.



The Survey team at Fucheng, Leizhou



Two Spoonies roosting

Table 2: Details of the marked (engraved flags) Spoon-billed Sandpipers

No	Date	Resighting Locations	Habitat	Marked Location	Flag Color	Engraved Flag details	Behavior
1.	2020/1/17	Bailangtan, Fangchenggang	Beach	RU	Lime	8V	Rest, foraging
2.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	LU	Yellow	TU	Foraging
3.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	LU	Yellow	53	Foraging
4.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	LU	Yellow	0X	Foraging
5.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	LU	White	4U	Foraging
6.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	RU	White	5X	Foraging
7.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	RU	White	6A	Foraging
8.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	RU	White	2L	Foraging
9.	2020/1/18	Hebei, Leizhou	Mudflats	LU	Lime	90	Foraging
10.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	LU	Lime	87	Foraging
11.	2020/1/19	Tujiao, Leizhou	Mudflats	RU	Lime	M4	Foraging
12.	2020/1/18	Hebei, Leizhou	Mudflats	RU	Lime	L5	Foraging
13.	2020/1/19	Hebei, Leizhou	Mudflats	LU		Only a metal ring was observed	

Acknowledgements

China SBS Winter Census 2020 was sponsored by Shenzhen Mangrove Wetlands Conservation Foundation (MCF), with technical support from Center for East Asian-Australasian Flyway Studies in Beijing Forestry University. We sincerely thank

all alliance members and all data contributors participating in this census. We thank all researchers offering advice and great help especially Chi-Yeung Choi, Yang Liu and Tong Mu.



Yellow TU (left) and White 4U (right)



Photos by Yi Fei

Salt pans and coastal flats on the coast of Binh Thuan – a new site for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Vietnam

Nguyen Hoai Bao^{1,2}, Cao Quoc Tri¹, Bui Thanh Trung¹ & Ding Li Yong³

Introduction

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* occurs widely, but sparsely across the coastline of mainland Southeast Asia as a winter visitor, with key concentrations in South China, Bangladesh and Myanmar, and smaller ones elsewhere (e.g. Thailand, Malaysia) (Lekagul & Round 1991; Cu et al. 2000; Round 2006; Zöckler et al. 2016; BirdLife International 2020). However, the current status of the species in Vietnam is not well understood and there remains large gaps in knowledge on its distribution along the unevenly surveyed Vietnamese coastline (Buchanan, G. in litt.).

Past surveys have shown that coastal wetlands on the Red River (north Vietnam) and Mekong (south Vietnam) deltas hold a few sites that support staging or wintering Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Figure 1), amongst larger congregations of other migratory shorebirds (Morozov et al. 2011; Bao et al. 2013; Zöckler et al. 2016). For instance, surveys led by Birds Russia in collaboration with Vietnam National University (Ho Chi Minh City) reported about 5-8 individuals on the Mekong Delta in Tien Giang province in 2011 (Morozov et al. 2011). Surveys thereafter between 2013 and 2018 showed that up to five wintering individuals were present there from November to April (Bao et al. 2013, Bao 2016, Bao et al. 2019), and forming approximately 1-2% of known global population.

Elsewhere on the Vietnamese Mekong delta, surveys have also found up to five individuals at Ba Tri IBA (Moore and Hoa 2000). Additionally, there have been past observations from Can Gio (the authors, Jonathan Eames, in litt.), an extensive area of mangroves and salt pans north-east of Ho Chi Minh City, although these likely refer to staging individuals. Unfortunately, none of the sites where

the Spoon-billed Sandpiper utilizes in southern Vietnam are legally protected in any form, and in most cases, the indiscriminate trapping of birds remains rampant.

Overview of Mekong Shorebird Project

As part of the Mekong Shorebird Conservation Project established in collaboration between WildTour, Vietnam National University and BirdLife International (Asia) and supported by Viet Nature Conservation Centre (Bao et al. 2019), we carried out systematic field surveys for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other threatened waterbird species at selected sites (Figure 2) within and adjacent to the Vietnamese Mekong Delta from September 2019 to March 2020. Our surveys which are ongoing, also cover the coastal wetlands of Can Gio on the north-west bank of the Saigon River, which is not strictly a part of the Mekong Delta, but an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA). Further, we conducted explorative surveys of coastal wetland sites that we assessed may be used by shorebirds, including accessible areas of fish ponds and salt pans while travelling in-between sites. This is conducted whilst assessing the status of hunting activities at all sites visited (through interviews with local people and physically checking for mist-nets and other evidence of hunting).

Results

During our surveys, we incidentally found what appeared to be a potentially important site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and associated small shorebirds on the coast of La Gi district, Binh Thuan province (10.724444, 107.910833). This coastal landscape is characterized by salt pans and fish ponds, while the intertidal zone consists mostly of sandy beaches, and smaller areas of sand flats. Here, one un-ringed Spoon-billed Sandpiper was eventually first observed on November 7, 2019 in an area of salt pans.

¹ WildTour Ltd, 10G Nguyen Thi Minh Khai Street, Da Kao Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam · ² Vietnam National University, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department, University of Science, Ho Chi Minh City, 227 Nguyen Van Cu St, District 5, HCMC, Vietnam · ³ BirdLife International (Asia), 354 Tanglin Road, #01-16/17/18, Tanglin International Centre, Singapore 247672

This individual was seen to move routinely between the salt pans (for feeding) and the sandy beach (for resting), and was observed regularly until our final visit here on January 21, 2020.

We noted that this individual Spoon-billed Sandpiper was closely associated with Red-necked/Little Stints and sand-plovers as is the case elsewhere. We counted up to 156 Red-necked/Little Stints (Table 2, November 14), which then gradually declined to 41 individuals by January 21, 2020. Other small shorebird species observed includes both Greater and Lesser Sand-plovers (up to 150 individuals), White-faced/Kentish Plover (up to 157 individuals in Jan 21, 2020) and small numbers of Curlew Sandpiper and Long-toed Stint (c. 7). Larger shorebirds include Common Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilt.

We also found some mist-nets being used by local salt-workers during our surveys (Nov-Dec) to trap birds, apparently for food. Two-three stretches of mist-nets were erected over salt pans, and we observed both shorebirds and other small passerine birds caught in them (e.g. Oriental Reed Warbler, Barn Swallow, Sand-plovers).

Discussion

In our surveys in La Gi, Binh Thuan, we observed that the majority of shorebirds used salt-pans to forage, and adjacent sandy beaches and tidal flats for roosting (including for Spoon-billed Sandpiper). Our findings are consistent with observations from elsewhere in Southeast Asia on the use of salt pans as important foraging areas for shorebirds such as Pak Thale in central Thailand (Round 2006; Jearwattananok & Yong 2019) and Keab and Kampot in eastern Cambodia (Taing, P., Senkethya, S. in litt.), although Spoon-billed Sandpiper has only been recorded in three areas of salt pans to date (two in Thailand) and two in Vietnam (this study). Yet, areas of salt pans and other working wetlands in Vietnam are still not well-surveyed for shore-

birds, and we are led to believe that there are likely to be undiscovered concentrations of shorebirds elsewhere in the south, south-central Vietnam coast where there are extensive areas of salt pans adjacent to extensive areas of natural tidal sand or mud flats yet to be surveyed for birds.

Our surveys found mist-nets to be widely used by local people for hunting birds at salt-pans and mudflats throughout south-central to southern Vietnam, and provides further evidence that the weakly regulated use of mist-nets for hunting (and protection of fish ponds) is a potentially serious threat to migratory shorebirds, as is seen elsewhere in Southeast Asia (e.g. Zöckler et al. 2010). At least for La Gi, we were able to positively engage local people on how mist-nets threaten shorebirds, which has led to some of the salt farmers remove their nets. This however, needs to be up-scaled to other areas in southern Vietnam where such forms of bird hunting remains rampant.

In conclusion, our findings identify one new wintering site for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Vietnam, and for other small shorebirds such as Calidrids and Plovers. Further surveys are needed in the poorly surveyed south-central coast (Vung Tau to Nha Trang provinces) and north coast to better understand the Spoon-billed Sandpiper's distribution and status.

Acknowledgements

We thank an anonymous donor for supporting the field survey work carried out under the project, Le Trong Trai (Viet Nature Conservation Centre), Paul Insua-Cao and Graeme Buchanan (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) for their support. Senkethya Sar, Porchhay Taing and Jonathan Eames provided useful information on shorebirds in salt pans in Indochina. We are grateful to the editors, Sayam Chowdhury and Christoph Zöckler for their input on our contribution.

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Figure 3: Spoon-billed Sandpiper foraging in salt pans on the La Gi coast
Bui Thanh Trung

Tables

Table 1: Coastal wetland sites initially identified for systematic survey under the project.

Province	Site name	Description
Ho Chi Minh City	Can Gio Bio-sphere Reserve	An existing IBA dominated by mangrove forests but does not include the abutting areas of salt pans, fish ponds and coastal mudflats
	Can Gio Beach	A stretch of sandy beaches and intertidal flats south of the Can Gio Biosphere Reserve, on the south-east coast facing the South China Sea. The coastline is also backed by small areas of active salt pans and fish ponds
Tien Giang Province	Go Cong Dong	An unprotected area covering mostly mudflats and remnant mangroves (includes Tan Thanh and Tan Phu Dong mudflats, and Con Ngang Island)
Ben Tre Province	Ba Tri	An IBA that covers mostly coastal mudflats and remnant mangroves
	Binh Dai	An IBA that covers mostly coastal mudflats and remnant mangroves; currently no conservation measures are known
Ca Mau Province	Dat Mui-Bai Boi	Two contiguous coastal sites on the Ca Mau peninsula dominated by mangrove forests and smaller areas of (accreting) mudflats

Table 2: List of shorebird species observed in La Gi, Binh Thuan, up till January 2020

Species	IUCN status	Dates of observation				
		14 Nov 2019	15 Nov 2019	29 Nov 2019	21 Jan 2020	
Bar-tailed Godwit	NT	0	0	0	1	
Common Greenshank	LC	14	0	0	8	
Common Sandpiper	LC	1	0	0	0	
Marsh Sandpiper	LC	64	67	0	3	8
Wood Sandpiper	LC	3	0	0	0	
Pacific Golden Plover	LC	5	0	5	158	
Greater Sandplover	LC	1	0	0	15	
Lesser Sandplover	LC	2	14	150	35	
White-faced/Kentish Pl	LC	6	9	10	157	
Little Ringed Plover	LC	0	2	5	6	
Long-toed Stint	LC	2	0	7	0	
Red-necked/Little Stint	NT	156	55	45	41	
Sanderling	LC	45	0	3	0	
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	CR	1	1	1	1	
Curlew Sandpiper	NT	0	0	2	0	
Terek Sandpiper	LC	0	0	0	1	
Black-winged Stilt	LC	2	0	5	2	



Figure 1: Sites where the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been known to occur in Vietnam in winter to date include Xuan Thuy (National Park), Go Cong Dong, Ba Tri and Binh Dai (discovered under Mekong Shorebird Project, Bao et al. 2019). It is recorded in Hai Phong and Can Gio on stopover only

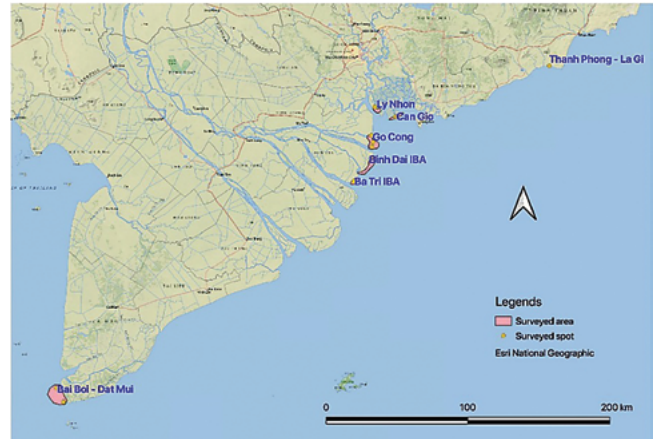


Figure 2: Surveyed sites covered under the Mekong Delta Shorebird Project



Figure 4: Engaging local salt farmers in the La Gi area
Image: Cao Quoc Tri



Figure 5: Shorebirds are widely hunted along the coast of Vietnam
Image: Bui Thanh Trung

Gulf of Mottama – SBS midwinter Census January 2020

Pyae Phyo Aung, Saw Moses, Chris Kelly, Elena Lappo, George Gale & Christoph Zöckler

From 24 Jan – 2 Feb 2020 an international survey team of eight surveyors from Russia, US, Germany, the U.K. and Myanmar assembled in the remote coastal mudflats of the Gulf of Mottama for the twelfth year to survey the key wintering areas of the Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other shorebirds. They were accompanied by an experienced team of Myanmar surveyors of NCS, local fishermen and former hunters. The Gulf comprises about 250,000 ha of which as of Jan 2020 161,000 ha are protected as a Ramsar site, the largest in the Indo-Burma Region. The wetland area is a funnel-shaped bay with a tidal range of about 7-8 m. But only parts are covered during the neap tide when the tidal range is about 3 m height. Its tidal cycle is extremely pronounced in speed and amplitude causing a powerful tidal bore phenomenon. The highly productive intertidal mudflats support up to 200,000 waterbirds, of which 12 are globally threatened according to IUCN Red List of Threatened Species including the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

A total of 62,327 wetland dependent birds of 63 species were recorded. The most abundant species were Lesser Sand Plover, Whiskered and White-winged Terns and Kentish Plover, but all in smaller numbers than in 2019. However Red-necked and Little Stint were recorded in high numbers and Curlew and Broad-billed Sandpiper slightly more common than in 2019. The survey team recorded 99 Spoon-billed Sandpipers and estimated 114 critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpipers, based on the SBS proportion in 55 flock counts of over 17,000 birds extrapolated from an estimated 60,000 birds of small waders in the area. These birds were encountered at low tide feeding and widespread across the vast mudflat habitats (see Fig. 1)

Of other globally endangered species such as Great Knot 153 individuals were observed, as well as seven globally near-threatened species such

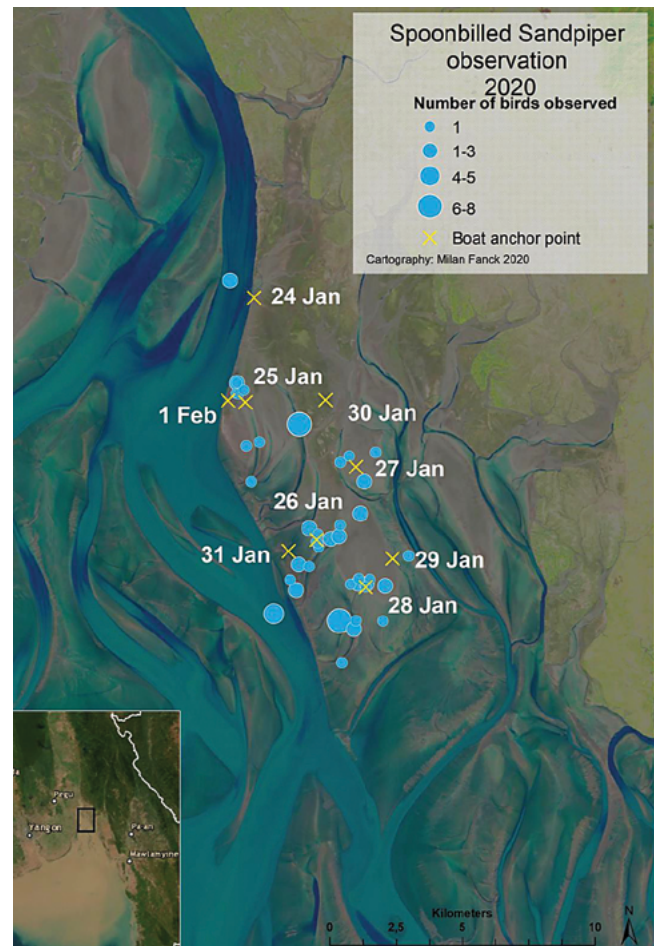


Figure 1: Distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper sightings in Jan-Feb 2020. Yellow crosses depict anchor sites or boat anchor points from where surveys have been undertaken on foot

Black-tailed Godwit (2,310 individuals), Bar-tailed Godwit (4 individuals), Eurasian Curlew (280 individuals), Asian Dowitcher (49), Red-necked Stint (4760 individuals - 50% of Little & Red-necked Stint), Curlew Sandpiper (4,512 individuals) and Painted Stock (1 individual). The most abundant species were Lesser Sand Plover (14,508), Kentish Plover (3,727), Whiskered Tern (2,435) and in unprecedented high numbers Pallas's Gull (2,835).

Estimated total number of SBS and other small wader species in the Gulf of Mottama

Table 1 shows the average proportion of small

waders in small wader flocks in the Gulf of Mottama during the survey period based on 55 flocks totaling over 17,000 small waders of eight or nine species (Red-necked Stint and Little Stint were summarized to one species group for this estimation).

birds are possibly resightings from previous survey days during the same survey, but 19 flagged birds were of different origin though only three birds could be individually identified. A fourth and fifth bird with lime green flags were identified

Table 1: Average flock proportions of small waders in the Gulf of Mottama in January 2020 (n= 55)* = figures in brackets refer to 2019 (Aung et al 2019)

English Name	Scientific Name	Flock count total*	Mean Proportion in %	
			2020	2019
Greater Sandplover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	117	0.69	1.63
Lesser Sandplover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	7527	44.17	32.20
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	2135	12.53	31.41
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	66	0.39	0.34
Broad-billed Sandp	<i>Calidris falcinellus</i>	1306	7.66	5.32
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	2781	16.32	6.55
Red-necked/Little St	<i>Calidris ruficollis/minuta</i>	3078	18.06	22.37
Spoon-billed Sandp	<i>Calidris pygmaea</i>	32	0.19	0.18
Total of all flocks		17,042 (38,178)	(2019)	
Total of SBS in flock @45,000		86 (81)		
Total of SBS in flock @50,000		95 (90)		
Total of SBS in flock @60,000		114	112 (62,000)	

Applying the flock count-generated proportion of 0.19% for 2020 which is similar to 0.18 in 2019, we can extrapolate a total population in the Gulf of Mottama in the winter 2020 of 86-114 of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, considering that the total flock of small waders was about at least 45,000 and at maximum 60,000 birds. The estimates of flock counts are not very accurate and can imply huge error margins hence the range in estimates.

Flagged birds

In total 24 flagged birds were recorded (see Table 2). Twelve were of Lime green colour but none could be individually identified, eleven of yellow colour from the stop overs sites in Tiaozini and at least one of these from Kamchatka Russia and one white bird from the head-starting programme on the breeding grounds in Chukotka Russia. 1-5

on 17 and 18 Nov 2019 and were quite likely still present in January and one of the recorded birds during this survey.

Yellow YE was observed and videoed on 26 January by CK. It was ringed and colour-marked on the West Coast of Kamchatka Russia on autumn migration on 21 Aug 2017 and has been resighted 12 times in Tiaozini in China and once in Gulf of Mottama on 30 Jan 2019!

Yellow HT was observed and videoed on 30 January by CK. It was flagged in Tiaozini on 11 Sep 2018 and subsequently resighted 13 times at Tiaozini each in autumn of which 11 times in 2019.

Yellow AU was observed and videoed first on 30



Yellow YE, GoM, 26 Jan 2020

ChrisKelly



Yellow HT, GoM, 30 Jan 2020 (video grab)

ChrisKelly



Mixed wader flock feeding in mudflats

C. Zöckler



Chris Kelly showing SBS video to fishermen

E. Lappo

Jan by CK and two days later observed again by MTHZ on 1 Feb. It was flagged in Tiaozini on 10 Sep 2018 and subsequently resighted six times at Tiaozini each in autumn of which 5 times in 2019.

Lime 49 was observed on 17 Nov 2019 by SM and is assumed to be quite likely present in Jan 2020. It was marked as adult on the breeding grounds in Chukotka in July 2017. It returned to the same breeding area in 2018 and 2019 but was not seen during migration or at stop over sites.

Lime 9C was observed on 18 Nov 2019 by SM and is assumed to be quite likely present in Jan 2020. It was marked as a chick near Meinypilgyno, Chukotka on 15 July 2018 and later observed two times in Tiaozini, China in autumn 2019.

Comparisons of results with previous years

The comparison with previous years is not providing any trends easily, because each survey year is different from the habitat structure, weather as well as coverage and observer capacity. However over the years we established a routine and regularity that does allow some comparison, as the similar results of the last two years demonstrate (see table 3). In total though the number of shorebirds has been much lower compared to previous years. It is not entirely clear if this only relates to a smaller team and less survey activity or reflect a real decline or a shift in distribution within the Gulf. The latter is still possible as the vast area has not been surveyed at other locations in this winter. However, there is little doubt that the numbers of SBS have gone down compared to ten years ago (see also Aung et al 2020).

Table 2: Distribution of flagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Jan 2020. LG=Lime Green, Y=Yellow, W=White. Figures in brackets refer to individuals previously counted

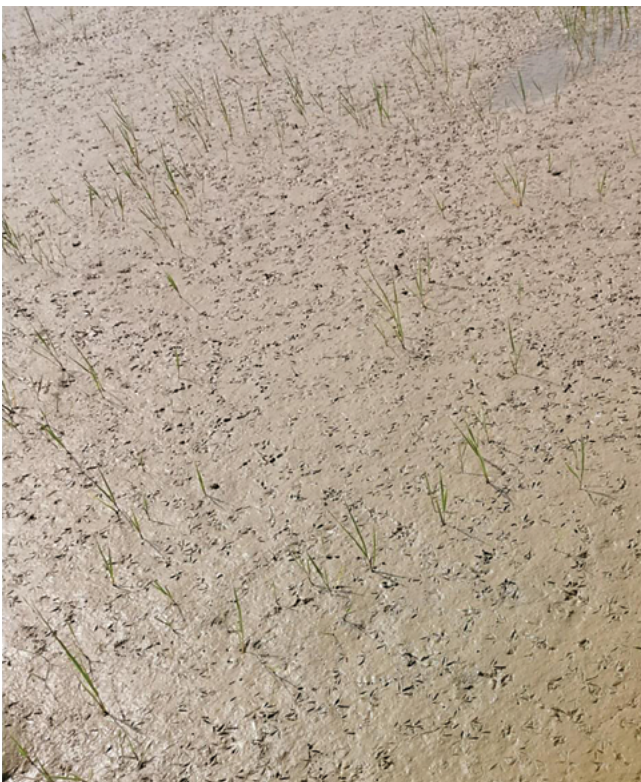
Date	Number of SBS	Number of flagged SBS	% of flagged SBS	Colours	Details
Nov 2019	24	6	25%	3 LG 1 Y, 1 only metal ring on right leg	Lime green 49, 9C
24/01/2020	-	-	-		
25/01/2020	9	2	22%	1 LG 1Y	left
26/01/2020	27	8	30%	4 LG, 4 Y	Yellow YE
27/01/2020	20	3	15%	1LG, 1Y, 1W	-
28/01/2020	17	3	18%	3 LG	left leg but 1 right
29/01/2020	4	-	-	-	
30/01/2020	10	3	30%	3 Y	right leg Yellow HT, left Yellow AU
31/01/2020	12	4	33%	3 LG 1Y	left leg
01/02/2020	(6)	(1)	17%	1Y	Yellow AU
Total	99 (105)	23 (24)	23% (23%)		



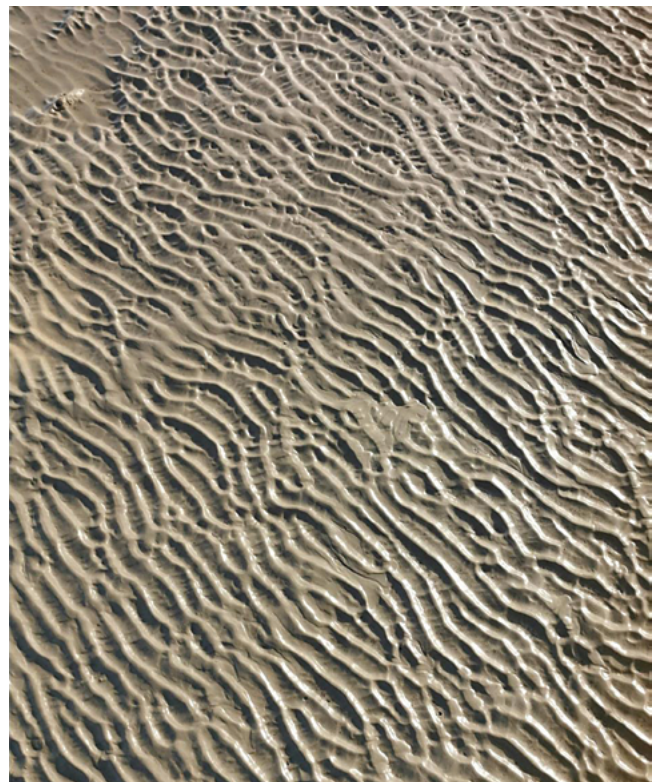
Mudflat and saltmarsh



Dog-faced Water Snake *Cerberus rhynchops*



Wader footprints



Ripples in sandy mudflats

all Christoph Zöckler

Table 3: The 2019 total estimated number of SBS compared with previous years in the period between 2010 - 2019

	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
SBS observed	75	100	35	35		99		8	76	99
SBS estimated	180 - 220				154		100		112	86 - 114

The numbers of flagged birds have increased significantly pointing to a high number of surviving birds but also reflecting a much lower overall global population. It is quite possible that based on the survey results and those from other wintering areas from five different countries, the total global population ranges only between 291-364 individual birds, which equals 75-100 breeding pairs. Still about 100-120 Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Mottama means that around 30% of the global population is wintering in the area, highlighting again the importance of the Ramsar site for the species!

It is reassuring that the site is now fully protected as Ramsar site and also has been managed and mitigated from almost all hunting activities.

The leaders of Local Conservation Groups (LCG) are former ex-hunters in the Gulf of Mottama. Regular participation in shore bird survey teams of BANCA and NCS as boat crew and helpers will foster this mutual relationship and significantly reduce the hunting pressure in the long-term. The former hunters understand the situation of migratory birds, the seasonality, feeding and roosting sites and local knowledge of birds and sites. BANCA trained them to become local bird watchers, especially to find Spoon-billed Sandpipers, activities that could generate another income source for LCGs in future eco-tourism scenarios in Mottama. The cooperation of LCGs and NCS is crucial for future shore bird monitoring, while the

LCGs team have developed an acute local knowledge where to survey in Mottama.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Helvetas and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) who provided financial support to the survey through the Community-Led Coastal Management Gulf of Mottama (GoMP). Additional thank to volunteers who kindly contributed their valuable time to the survey trips as well as members of the Local Conservation Group and the boat drivers. Milan Fanck kindly helped with GIS support.

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Save the long Journey from Russia to Myanmar

Pyae Phyo Aung & Ren Naung Soe (Nature Conservation Society Myanmar, NCS & Rakhine Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association, RBANCA)

These days the Myanmar Government focusing on the conservation of nationally and internationally important wetland sites. In 2017, Government designated very importance wintering area of the 'Critically Endangered' Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other migratory water birds in the Gulf of Mottama and also in the Ayeyarwady Delta, incl. the Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary.

This was the very first step to protect intertidal and estuaries wetlands along coastal Myanmar as Ramsar Site. Three years later in 2020, the Gulf of Mottama was extended to a total area of 161,030 ha coastal mudflats. In Feb 2020 the Myanmar Government received the recognition of the site application by the Ramsar Bureau is now the largest Ramsar Site in the Indo-Burma region. Moreover, the National Wetland Strategy for the implementation of wetland conservation for the future was endorsed in 2019.

Now, also with national level support Nanthar Island and Mayyu Estuaries, a coastal wetland of about 41,000 ha are submitted for designation as Myanmar's 6th Ramsar Site. It is here that Spoon-billed Sandpiper Lime Green (27) and Yellow (CU) are demonstrating that Nanthar Island and Mayyu Estuaries are now safe places for all those species travelling the long journey from Russia, while previously in the period from 2008-2015 they were not safe and trapped for food and sold. This period was a difficult time for migratory water birds because of high hunting pressure annually. Lime green (27) is now returning for the sixth winter and Yellow (CU) for the fifth returning each year to a safe sanctuary. Now in April they have left for their long journey back to the Russian breeding grounds. On 20th April only two non-flagged birds remained at Nan Thar. We hope that all will survive the treacherous journey and once again return to Nan Thar Island.



Yellow CU and 'King of the Flyway' Lime 27 returning to Nan Thar for the sixth year

both: Ren Naung Soe

News from Pak Thale Nature Reserve

Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok

Pak Thale is located in the Inner Gulf of Thailand, it is a coastal wetland dominated by salt pans and small mangrove areas. It has been recognized as a Flyway Site under the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership and forms a significant part of the Inner Gulf of Thailand Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) and is widely acknowledged by conservationists to be the single most important site in Thailand for coastal shorebirds. Every year, about 10 Spoon-billed Sandpipers are recorded in the Inner Gulf of Thailand, with Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia having the highest annual records. Other globally threatened species that regularly winter at Pak Thale include Great Knot (EN), Spotted Greenshank (EN), Far Eastern Curlew (EN) and Chinese Egret (VU).

In September 2019, the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) completed the land purchase at Pak Thale, Ban Laem, Phetchaburi. The land purchase was aimed to establish a secure habitat for Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other shorebirds at Pak Thale. BCST later announced the “Pak Thale Nature Reserve” together with the Rainforest Trust, Pak Thale Subdistrict Administration Office and the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources on 21 January 2020.

After the announcement of a nature reserve, BCST welcomed Dr Yuttapon Angkinan, Consultant of the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, and governmental representatives from the provincial offices in Phetchaburi, to visit Pak Thale Nature Reserve on 26 February 2020, followed by a visit from Toyota Motor Thailand led by Mr. Ninnart Chaithirapinyo (Chairman to the Board), Mr. Tawat Reowraeng (Assistant Managing Director) and Mr. Wassachai Sittibut (Director of Safety and Environment) on 5 March 2020. Both visits were aimed to introduce Pak Thale Nature Reserve to the guests and show the importance of conserving Spoon-billed Sandpiper (max of 8 in 2019/20) and other shorebirds. After a walk around the reserve, a meeting was held at Pak Thale Subdistrict Administration Office and was joined by District Chief of Ban Laem, Pak Thale Subdistrict Administration Office, Tourism Authority of Thailand (Phetchaburi), Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, media and representatives from BCST to discuss about future collaborations on conserving shorebirds and their habitats at Pak Thale.

BCST has set 5 priority actions to be carried out at Pak Thale Nature Reserve between 2020-2021 as follows.



Visit by government officials and other parties in January 2020



all Photos by BCST

1) Build new earthen embankment around the reserve property as the current salt pan layout does not follow the property boundaries. BCST is in the process of designing a new salt pan layout together with the salt farmers to minimize impacts from the buildup of the embankment around the reserve. BCST plans to start the construction in late May (wet season) when the salt harvesting season is over.

2) Monthly bird surveys in Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia. BCST has started monthly bird surveys in Pak Thale and Laem Phak Bia area since November 2019 covering 6 most important sites for shorebirds. Data from the survey will reflect populations and trends of shorebirds, particularly the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other globally threatened species. It will also help BCST design further habitat management in the reserve to attract shorebirds, as well as positioning the bird-watching hides.

3) Design and construct birdwatching hides for visitors based on a hide that BCST co-designed for Khok Kham Nature Conservation Club. The hides will be built upon the new embankment around the reserve to allow visitors to observe shorebirds at close range without disturbing them.

4) Collaborate with the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) under the project “Urban Forest” which BCST will focus on the

zoning of Pak Thale for both mangrove plantation and managing shorebirds habitat.

5) Preventing coastal erosions at Pak Thale in collaboration with the DMCR through bamboo fencing along the shore line for the distance of 4 kilometers.

Once again, BCST would like to express sincere gratitude towards everyone who has supported the land purchase. No matter how big or small your contribution was, it really helped made “Pak Thale Nature Reserve” possible. BCST is still accepting donations and support from anyone who would like to help conserve the globally threatened shorebirds. Further support will be used for the priority actions as mentioned above. Donations can be made via the following channels:

Via bank transfer

Bank name: TMB Bank

Bank address: Ngamwongwan branch, Non-thaburi, Thailand

Swift code: TMBKTHBK

Beneficiary name: Bird Conservation Society of Thailand

IBAN number: 026-2-67477-3

Via PayPal

Please make a payment to bcst.th@gmail.com

For more information, please contact ayuwat@bcst.or.th or via our Facebook page



Updates from ICFC supported projects in the wintering areas

Sayam U. Chowdhury, Wing-sum Bud, Ren Nou Soe, Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok, Pyae-Phyo Aung & Scott Hecker

Since 2016 the International Conservation Fund of Canada (ICFC) has been supporting the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and four local partners in Bangladesh, Myanmar, South China and now Thailand. ICFC helps employing local guards, building temporary camps, removing illegal mistnets to protect birds from hunting; developing livelihoods in farming and fishing as an alternative to hunting; establishing no-hunting bylaws among Village Conservation Groups with support from local governments and educating the local communities. ICFC shorebird conservation landscapes across four Asian countries supported approximately 40,000 waterbirds of 60 species including 57 Spoon-billed Sandpipers. These areas also supported globally endangered 101 Nordmann's Greenshanks, 1,298 Great Knots and ten globally near-threatened species. 2019 highlights of ICFC funded work is discussed below. See also: https://icfcanada.org/icfc-shorebird-conservation-initiative/shorebird_initiative

South China: At Leizhou Peninsula, the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society partnered with Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society for the site-based protection and monitoring work of shorebirds with special focus on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. With the support of International Conservation Fund of



Canada, a local site officer was hired by the Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society to coordinate the works at Leizhou, Guangdong. Between October 2019 and March 2020, a total of 20 patrols were conducted at Leizhou, Suixi, Lianjiang and Zhanjiang in order to find illegal mistnets and traps. A total of 137 illegal mistnets (7,255 m long) were found and all cases were immediately reported to the Forest Police for net removal, with a second visit conducted to ensure that the nets were removed. In addition, nine outreach events took place between September 2019 and February 2020 including three school-visits and six public bird-watching events. Through these activities more than 700 students and members of the public were reached.

Monthly surveys were conducted at Leizhou, Zhanjiang, Guangdong Province between September 2019 and March 2020. Winter peak count of Spoon-billed Sandpiper was recorded in March 2020 with 27 individuals including the marked Yellow TU. The team also joined the China Spoon-billed Sandpiper Census 2020 coordinated by the SBS Conservation Alliance (see separate article by Chen Qing/SBS Conservation Alliance) in collaboration with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force.

Bangladesh: Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other



Illegal mist-net patrol and removal activities at project sites in South China (left), outreach event at local schools (right)

Photos by Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society



White 3C at Sonadia Island, 2019 Sayam U. Chowdhury

shorebird conservation work in Bangladesh was mainly conducted by the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project in collaboration with Bangladesh Forest Department. ICFC supported work primarily focused on Sonadia Island, where monthly monitoring was conducted by researchers (October 2019 – September 2020) and weekly monitoring by local assistants. A man-powered boat was purchased and repaired through ICFC's support to enable the local assistants to patrol between sites and their villages. Between October 2019 and March 2020, a minimum of 12 Spoon-billed Sandpiper comprising three flagged birds wintered at Sonadia Island, two (White 3C & White MC) of which are head-started individuals.

Overall, a minimum of 22 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were counted at three sites (Sonadia Island, Nijhum Dwip and Chittagong) in Bangladesh including six marked birds. Unfortunately, the main Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites at the Meghna Estuary could not be visited this year due to bad weather, hence a significant portion of Bangladesh' wintering population is not presented here.

Myanmar: Local partner Rakhine Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (RBANCA) went out at monthly patrolling around the Nanthar Island and did not record any more bird hunting. The project continued to deploy two lo-

cal guards at Nanthar Island, Myanmar. The main activities for Nanthar Island focus on community patrolling in order to prevent bird hunting and sea turtle egg collection. In addition, 12 hand-pumps were installed to improve water supply in 5 villages near Nanthar Island.

A total of 45 species of waterbirds were recorded between December 2019 and March 2020 with highest number (2,165) in February 2020. Most abundant species was the Kentish Plover, followed by Lesser Sand Plover. Maximum 18 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded in March 2020 including "King of the Flyway" Lime 27 and Yellow CU. Other important birds such as Great Knot (41) were also recorded.

Nan Thar Island and Mayyu estuary are also submitted for Ramsar site designation by the Government of Myanmar (see separate article by Pyae-Phyo Aung & Ren Nou Soe).

Thailand: The Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation work in Thailand mainly focused at Pak Thale in Phetchaburi province. Local partner Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) has acquired the land of about 8 ha and established Pak Thale Nature Reserve (see separate article by Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok). With ICFC's support, a conservation officer has been hired to base at Pak Thale in order to undertake conservation activities and communicate with local stakeholders. The main activities include regular bird surveys, meeting with local stakeholders, develop a management plan for the protected area, manage shorebird habitat and provide facility for visitors. He also works closely with government agencies to expand the area designated for shorebirds and to prevent coastal erosion, which is one of the main threats to the site.

A total of 40 species of waterbirds were recorded during the surveys in Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia

between November 2019 and February 2020 with highest counts in January 2020 (15,949 individuals). Minimum eight Spoon-billed Sandpipers spent the winter at Pak Thale, comprising three flagged birds (Lime-green 77, White P7 & Yellow EH). The most abundant species were Lesser Sand Plover followed by Red-necked Stint and Broad-billed Sandpiper. Among the six sites of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia, DMCR land in Pak Thale continued to support large number of shore-birds throughout the season including 650 Great

Knots, 70 Nordmann's Greenshanks, 660 Eurasian Curlews, 440 Black-tailed Godwits, 130 Bar-tailed Godwits, 240 Red Knots, 760 Curlew Sandpipers, 1,460 Red-necked Stints and 21 Asian Dowitchers.

Khok Kham is another important shorebird site in Thailand, which supported minimum three Spoon-billed Sandpipers (including the famous flagged "Queen of the flyway" – Lime 05) with one bird still present on 18 April 2020 (S. Mookachonpan pers. comm. 2020).



Yellow CU and 'King of the Flyway' Lime 27 returning to Nan Thar for the sixth year



both: Ren Naung Soe



Consultation meeting with local stakeholders at Pak Thale

BCST

Summary of SBS winter counts and proportion of flagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers

Christoph Zöckler, Sayam Chowdhury & Pyae Phyo Aung

From 15-31 Jan 2020 our annual simultaneous winter count took place across the entire known winter range. Like every year it is organised and coordinated by the SBS Task Force for the sixth time. This period in January coincides with the long-running international mid-winter counts by Wetlands International. This is also the period where little if any movements between the sites are expected and simultaneous counts can provide a good overview of the wintering population and comparison with previous years if the coverage was similar.

In 2020 we have had the biggest turn out and the largest number of sites counted so far. Table 1 shows the count data for sites visited during the period in January 2020 from a total of 42 sites from five countries.

The **total of 221** is similar to previous years. Table 2 summarises the results in comparison with previous years. It shows though that a significant proportion of the population has not been found or counted.

Table 1: Count data for sites visited

Site	Country	No. of SBS	Observers
South China total of 32 sites	CHI	49	Chen Qing et al.
Haiphong	VTN	1	WWT
Mekong Delta (2 sites)	VTN	6	Bao Nguyen/DLY
Pak Thale	THA	8	BCST
Khok Kham	THA	3	BCST
GoM (55 flock counts)	MYM	114	SM PPA CZ CK EL
Nan Thar	MYM	18	RNS
Sonadia	BGD	12	SUC
Nijhum Dweep	BGD	6	SUC
Chittagong	BGD	4	SUC
Total		221	

Table 2: Total wintering numbers of Spoon-billed Sandpiper over the past six years

Year (Jan)	Total count	Remarks
2015	258	Without Leizhou in China
2016	249	Full coverage of known sites
2017	117*	incomplete
2019	193	Near full coverage
2020	221	Full coverage

Proportion of flagged birds

A total of 24 out of 105 recorded SBS recorded in the Gulf of Mottama were flagged, which is about 23% flagged birds in winter 2020 (see Table 3), a slight increase compared to 19% of flagged birds recorded in the winter before. This is similar but slightly lower than observed in the same area in Nov 2019 (27%) and to other wintering sites: Nan Thar: (18%), Bokjpyin, Taninthary; 33%, Gulf of Bangkok (38%) and Sonadia 3 of 12 (25%). In Southern China a total of 32 sites were surveyed, producing 49 different SBS of which 13 were flagged (Chen et al. 2020). Considering the high number of shorebirds involved, the figure of 24%

from the GoM appears to be closer to the mean proportion of 27.2% of 14 sites/surveys in the winter area and the real proportion.

The high proportion of flagged birds in several different wintering populations is very concerning and might hint to a much lower global population. In order to calculate from the proportion of flagged birds to the overall global population size

we would need to know how many of the flagged birds are still alive in Jan 2020. However, this is not known at the moment, but we have calculated the number of flagged birds that have survived until the previous winter and numbers range from 57-63. More analysis also from the flagged birds on the breeding grounds is necessary to provide a new global estimate the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population and is planned for the near future.

Table 3: Proportion of flagged birds at different sites of the flyway compared with those observed in the Gulf of Mottama (bold)

Site	Country	No. of SBS	No. of flagged SBS	% proportion	Observers
Xitou (Jan)	CHI	3	1	33%	J. Martinez
Leizhou (Jan)	CHI	15	6	40%	J. Martinez
South China total	CHI	49	13	26.6%	Chen Qing et al.
GoM (Nov)	MYM	22	6	27%	SM PPA CZ
GoM (Jan)	MYM	105	24	24%	SM PPA CZ CK EL
Bokpyin (Nov)	MYM	3	1	33%	CZ STL USN
Nan Thar (Nov)	MYM	12	1	8%	RNS
Nan Thar (Jan)	MYM	11	2	18%	RNS
Pak Thale	THA	8	3	38%	BCST
Khok Kham	THA	3	1	33%	BCST
Sonadia	BGD	12	3	25%	SUC
Nijhum Dweep	BGD	6	2	33%	SUC
Chittagong	BGD	4	1	25%	SUC
Mekong Delta	VTN	6	1	17%	Bao Nguyen/DLY
Mean				27.2% (n=14)	



First attempt to evaluate hunting Pressure on Shorebirds in Kamchatka: Progress Report

Konstantin Khlokov, Yuri Gerasimov, Evgeny Syroechkovskiy

Hunting of shorebirds in the Northeast of Russia (most northern part of EAAF) may negatively impact shorebird populations, especially threatened species. BirdsRussia had started the first ever attempt to evaluate the hunting pressure (legal and illegal) on shorebirds in the Russian Far East in 2019. First year we focused on Kamchatka and tried to get a first very general idea where, how and how many shorebirds are harvested. Special attention was given to Whimbrel – the most commonly shot shorebird and the globally endangered Far Eastern Curlew (FEC). Another area of concern were the small shorebirds, which include Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS). We had analyzed all published, unpublished and our own knowledge on hunting in Kamchatka and developed a methodology, which includes the analysis of ring recovery data (thanks to Russian Bird Ringing Center) to identify places of active hunting for shorebirds, anonymous social surveys of hunters as well as informal interviews with specialists of the Forestry and Wildlife Protection Agencies and leaders of hunters' societies. Our first preliminary evaluation show an annual harvest of 45,000 shorebirds in Kamchatka by legal hunters, of which 37,000 were identified by hunters as Whimbrel (including young Far Eastern Curlews which still have short bills in August and possibly other bigger shorebirds), about 1,600 of large and medium size shorebirds definitely not Whimbrels and about 6,000 small shorebirds of different species, which could include Spoon-billed Sandpiper. In addition shorebirds are shot by poachers. 90% of interviewed legal hunters have difficulties with identifying of shorebird species, may shoot Bartailed Godwit and Far Eastern Curlews together with Whimbrel and are not aware of shorebird declines and conservation needs.

Considering that Whimbrel are also harvested elsewhere, our results suggest that the flyway population estimate of 55,000 birds for Whimbrel is about 3-4 times lower than in reality. Our migra-

tion observation of Whimbrels in Kamchatka also confirm this. Hunting of shorebirds in the Northeast of Russia (most northern part of EAAF) may negatively impact shorebird populations especially threatened species.

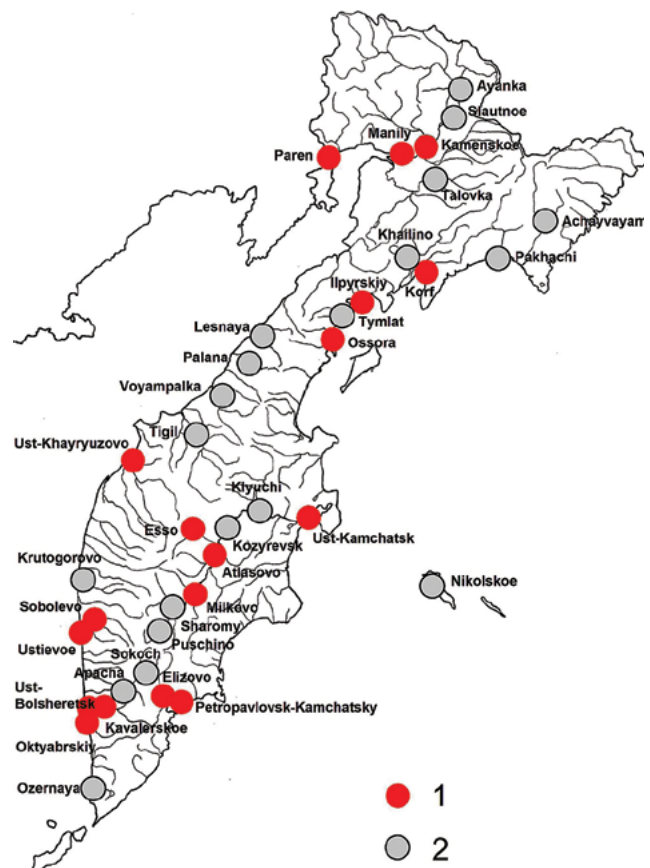


Fig. 1: Places where the survey was conducted in 2019. 1: Surveyed settlements, 2: Not surveyed settlements (in big towns – PK and Elizovo only some sampling done)

Small-sized shorebirds

According to the anonymous interviews in Kamchatka in 2019, 14.3 % of hunters shot small-sized shorebirds. The average bag in all Kamchatka was 2.2 birds a year for one hunter and total extrapolated numbers more than 6000. Many villages with likely shooting of small shorebirds in North Kamchatka were not surveyed, so overall harvest may be higher. The total number of shorebirds of small-sized species shot both legally and illegally

may be evaluated as at least 10,000 individuals and may be more.

Main reason of hunting small-sized shorebirds is absence of other game. It is easy to shoot some small shorebirds in a flock of birds sitting at the edge of the water or flying by. Reporting on the number of harvested small shorebirds is anonymous and hunters never mentioned the species. They never think about species, which they shot. With such type of shooting, it is evident that there are should be some birds which was wounded for each harvested and these birds died later and such birds are not mentioned in the questionnaires by hunters nor in our calculations. So, the number of shot small shorebirds may be twice as high as the data from the questionnaires suggests.

When we studied the migration of birds in Kamchatka in the late 1970s and during 1980s, we noted the hunting of small shorebird as a common

Table 1: Estimation of shorebirds number during migration on Kamchatka

Species	Number (individuals)	
	Northward	Southward
Pacific Golden Plover	2000	3000
Grey Plover	2000	3000
Mongolian Plover	3000	5000
Oystercatcher	700	1000
Red-necked Phalarope	10,000	20,000
Ruddy Turnstone	5000	2000
Dunlin	150,000	250,000
Red-necked Stint	100,000	150,000
Red Knot	3000	4000
Great Knot	40,000	60,000
Black-tailed Godwit	5000	8,000
Bar-tailed Godwit	10,000	15,000
Eastern Curlew	1000	1500
Whimbrel	70,000	100,000

Table 2: Preliminary estimation of number of harvested shorebirds in 2019

	Area of Kamchatka					All
	North	West	East	Centre	South	
Number of hunters	275	343	481	572	3244	4915
Average number of shorebirds harvested by one hunter per year:						
Whimbrel (poss. incl. young FAC)	2,06	23,21	15,85	0	6,45	8,86
Big- and medium-sized species except Whimbrel	0,52	1,93	0,04	0	0,24	0,53
Small species	1,62	10,07	0,44	0	0,61	2,23
Total number of shorebirds harvested per year:						
Whimbrel (poss. incl. young FAC)	566	7960	7625	0	20928	37078
Big- and medium-sized species except Whimbrel	143	662	18	0	791	1614
Small species	444	3454	214	0	1978	6090
Total	1153	12076	7857	0	23697	44782



Kamchatka hunters are well equipped and passionate about their hobby/lifestyle



Many Kamchatka hunters shoot dozens of shorebirds in one hunting trip

occurrence. Now it had decreased, as probably ammunition is more expensive. This hypothesis still need to be tested. In the 2010s, the majority of legal hunters with licenses report that they rarely hunt small shorebirds, or even medium-sized shorebirds, but prefer only Whimbrels. But our knowledge on poachers, particularly at commercially salmon fishing camps is still very limited. They may shoot whatever they see.

It is worth noting that shooting the flocks of small shorebirds hunters may kill the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Possibility of Spoon-billed Sandpipers shot in the northern part of the Kamchatka peninsula western coast is supported by the fact that signals transmission from three of the nine birds with satellite tags stopped in this area. It was the only part of the flyway, where transmitters suddenly stopped working.

Probability of Spoon-billed Sandpiper to be shot at flocks of small shorebirds in other Far-Eastern regions of Russia was mentioned by Yu. Arkhipov, V. Pronkevich, Z. Reviakina and number of other ornithologists working in another regions of Russian Far East. They knew of hunting in areas where Spoon-billed sandpiper was regularly seen during autumn migration in the Sea of Ohkotsk.

We should note that small-sized sandpipers are probably more often harvested in Sakhalin and Primorye than on Kamchatka. Obviously, this is due to the lower possibility of harvesting big-sized shorebirds in those regions. This is very consistent with the data of ring recoveries from Russian Bird Ringing Center from the small-sized shorebirds. So information about two Spoon-billed Sandpipers with rings shot in Primorye came to Russian Birds Ringing Center. One was reported shot by a hunter another one possibly as well.

It should also be noted that all small-sized sandpipers that form flocks on sea coasts (mainly Dun-

lin, Red-necked Stint and Mongolian Plover) are prohibited for shooting on Kamchatka in accordance with the hunting rules.

The project was supported by the Karl Kaus Foundation, the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership, Australian Government and UNEP/CMS. The Forestry and Wildlife Protection Agency of Kamchatka provided logistical support. The Kamchatka Hunter Society helped with contacts of hunters and distributing anonymous questionnaires. Local communities in Il'pyrskiy, Korf, Manily, Oktyabrsky, Paren', Sobolevo, Ustyevoe, Ust-Bolsheretsk, and Ust-Khairuzovo Kamchatka villages were cooperative in estimating hunting efforts. We are grateful to all these organizations and Kamchatka hunters who completed the questionnaires and answered interview questions for supporting our study.

Special thanks to Dmitriy Dorofeev, Anton Invanov, Alexander Matsyna, Evgeniy Lobkov, Nikolay Gerasimov, Sergei Kharitonov, Sergei Vakhrin, Andrey Gorovento, and Julia Zavgarova for contributing with data.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper at WWT Slimbridge

Jodie Clements

This year the majority of the captive Spoon-billed Sandpipers will be eight years old. Being generation zero of the captive population you could consider this quite an achievement, for the birds and for the staff caring for them. Over the last few months the staff at WWT Slimbridge have been treating them with extra care and kindness to get them through the UK winter conditions.

We went into the 2020 breeding season with five adult males, three adult females and the 2 juveniles hatched here last year. Ahead of the difficulties Corona virus pandemic threatened the human race with, the staff worked at full pace to ensure the breeding aviaries were ready for the Spoonies to move into before lockdown and furloughing of staff took hold of the Conservation Breeding Unit.

Pairs were moved into the breeding aviaries on the 25th March. This appears early but you may remember the captive flock are on a photoperiod shifted eight weeks earlier (than a wild Spoon-billed Sandpiper would encounter) to encourage them to breed in the cooler Spring months of the UK climate. Even before the Spoonies 'migrated' to the breeding aviaries we saw lots of positive signs and behaviours. They had begun moulting into their breeding plumage, establishing their dominance within and between the sexes, and lots of singing!

They continued their moult through April and singing became more frequent and competitive peaking towards the end of the month. One pair looked particularly promising with the male 'frog calling' in response to the other neighbouring males. However, no nest scraping has been seen or heard, nor evidence of scrapes in any of the aviaries. Neither have we seen any of the typical herding behaviour the male subjects the female to we have seen in previous years. Sadly, a male of one pair died on the 27th April. His female was subsequently given a new partner and aviary but

this meant that every pairing this year was brand new. In the history of breeding the captive Spoon-billed Sandpiper here at WWT Slimbridge pairs have never bred in their first year together. But the sun is still shining and we refuse to give up hope. As Nigel Clark so neatly put it in recent correspondence; you never know until they start their autumn moult.

You will have realised captive flock has faced a significant number of losses in the last 12 months. Much like the Corona virus is affecting the sick and elderly among us, a fungal infection is wreaking havoc on the captive Spoon-billed Sandpiper population. Staff here and our friends and partners across the globe are doing all they can to reduce their burden and combat this infection.

To end on a positive note, the chicks hatched at Slimbridge last year are looking very well indeed. We finally received the results of the sex of the second juvenile. It's a boy! We were very much hoping for a female and in light of having to test the second juvenile three times for a 'conclusive' result we are having both of them tested again.



2019 hatched birds at Slimbridge

Big Banner for a tiny bird

A Piece of Art for the World Migratory Bird Day 2019, contributed by Jing Li

1



2



3



勺嘴鹬对栖息地具有极高的忠诚度，它会年复一年地出现在同一个地点。

我们期待，春天跟KY的再次相遇。

Manfred-Hermesen-Stiftung
for Nature and Environment

Sponsored by SBS Task Force



About us: Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of shorebirds on the Yellow Sea mudflats, the most crucial staging sites for migratory shorebirds along the East-Asia Australian Flyway.

The story of SBS 'KY' leads us to more habitat protection, where birdwatchers, volunteers and local people are trying to conserve the Spoon-billed

Sandpiper and other waders on our flyway. SBSinChina is working with young illustrators in China to have more attention for these tiny birds in general public and is launching this banner (which is divided here into three parts) for World Migratory Bird Day on 9 May.

News in Brief

Thailand

BCST PRINTED Spoon-billed Sandpiper FABRIC MASK

สำหรับใส่หน้ากาก

99 บาท/ชิ้น

ผ้าฝ้าย ผ้าไมโคร ผ้าลินิน : ผ้าผสม

ขนาด Freesize

สามารถซักทำความสะอาดได้

ป้องกันสารคัดหลั่งจากการไอ จาม



Simba Chan, an ardent supporter of the SBS TF from his BirdLife Asia, Tokyo Office, proudly presents a SBS Face Mask. Available through <https://www.facebook.com/bcst.or.th/photos/pcb.2884206021694322/2885669868214604/?type=3&theater>. Price is 99 THB/piece (about 3 USD only!). Profits will go in support of Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project in the Inner Gulf of Thailand.

Myanmar

Nature Conservation Society Myanmar – a new NGO

Welcome to the new NGO in Myanmar: The Nature Conservation Society Myanmar (NCS). For over a decade, I have been working with many of you across the flyway especially for long distance migratory Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation. With support from the national government and international agencies, the Gulf of Mottama is today secured as a Ramsar Site and another important wintering site Nanthar Island and Mayyu Estuaries will be designated as Ramsar Site in the near future.

The Nature Conservation Society Myanmar (NCS) <https://www.ncsmm.org/> is established in November 2019 with the endorsement of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC) and approved by Ministry of Home Affairs. It continues working for biodiversity conservation including Spoon-billed Sandpiper and wetlands together with government, national and international agencies. The NCS representative is acting as Focal Point for Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and CEPA NGO National Focal Point for Ramsar and continues closely working with existing Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation network and beyond in many wetland projects across Myanmar.

Pyae Phyo Aung, pyaephyoaung@ncsmm.org



NCS 2020 Wintering Survey at Gulf of Mottama

China

A short video on Twitter about Spoon-billed Sandpiper “1H” at Yangjiang Coast, Guangdong Province:

https://twitter.com/SBS_in_China/status/1257274765762367490

New paper on Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Nordmann’s Greenshank in Jiangsu Coast by



Ziyou Yang et al.: http://www.sbsinchina.com/nd.jsp?id=352#_np=2_604

Japan

Good news from Saga, Japan: **Hitomi Yatsuki** had the opportunity to watch and photograph a Spoon-billed Sandpiper on May 6. Congrats!



Singapore

New online media interactive on the migratory and conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

In recent years, the dedicated satellite tracking work led by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force has significantly expanded our knowledge of SBS migration. However, there are little interactive resources on the web in Asia that non-technical audiences can use to learn about the species migration and the many conservation work on the ground. A joint SBS-TF BirdLife team worked closely with a Singapore-based media company, Kontinentalist Ltd to develop a new web platform that allows for a more interactive learning of SBS conservation, as well as broader migratory issues faced by wetland species in the EAAF. Users can track the migration of one individual sandpiper between Russia and Bangladesh, learn about the life history of the species and conservation work by clicking on an interactive map of Asia.

<https://kontinentalist.com/stories/spoon-billed-sandpiper-migratory-bird-conservation-yellow-sea-map>

Sayam U. Chowdhury, Yong Ding Li

Hong Kong

Female “T1” stopped over in Hong Kong on at least 7-8 April. Apart from the breeding grounds it was recorded in Tiaozini, Jiangsu in September 2018 and October 2017 & 2019.



From the Archives

Christoph Zöckler



Nikolaya Spit, Chukotka 11 June 2000

20 Years ago!

The Editor and his friend Manfred Trobitz in 2000 at the first SBS search expedition under the lead of Dr E. Syroechkovskiy at a Russian beach BBQ at Nikolaya Spit north of Anadyr. Two to three pairs were the first SBS of this expedition

and several followed, but almost all are gone by 2018. The surrounding sea though was frozen still by mid June. 'This is common situation in Russian Arctic' as our Russian expedition members confirmed. Photo E. Lappo

The Last Page



Thousands of people flock to the mudflats during the first days of easing after lockdown looking for food in Leizhou China, Feb 2020, leaving little or no room for SBS and other waders to feed (provided by Jing Li).