





Conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Gulf of Mottama and Tanintharyi Coastal of Myanmar



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Executive Summary

Participation of local community in the conservation is crucial for long-term conservation management. Two local Conservation Groups(LCGs) newly established in The Tanintharyi region are improved their conservation skills through five consecutive bird watching trainings. Two LCGs from the area of Gulf of Mottama are also trained to elaborate their bird watching, patrolling and conservation skills. Vinyl billboards were installed in the public areas of Myeik and Boke Pyin to raise the awareness on the conservation of migratory shorebirds during their wintering season. This year, a total of nine national surveyors conducted annual wintering census survey of Spoonbilled Sandpiper and migratory shorebirds at the Gulf of Mottama and Tanintharyi coastal accompanied by the LCGs members.

For the Gulf of Mottama, total of 44,870 wetland depended birds of 45 species were recorded in the Gulf of Mottama from 16-21 January 2022. The survey team recorded 17 and estimated 80 critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS), based on the SBS proportion in 173 flock counts of over 34,914 birds extrapolated to an estimated 160,000 birds of small waders in the area. These birds were encountered by the team at low tide feeding and widespread across the vast mudflat habitats. Only one flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper and two flagged RN or Little stints were observed. None could be identified individually. The flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper is likely marked in China (yellow) while the flagged, Red-necked stints are marked in N Western Australia (blue) and one in Kamchatka Russia (yellow and black) which is the same bird recorded in last January. Of other globally endangered species such as Great Knot 165 individuals and eight Nordmann's Greenshank were observed, as well as nine globally near-threatened species such as Black-tailed Godwit (3,723 individuals), Bar-tailed Godwit (3 individuals), Eurasian Curlew (313 individuals), which all decreased significantly in numbers, Rednecked/Little Stint (4,138 individuals) Curlew Sandpiper (2,703 individuals) decreased. The most abundant species were Lesser Sand plover (24,712) which significantly increased. Former hunters of the Local Conservation Groups (LCGs) joined the survey and guided the survey team onto the small wader flocks. They were trained and informed about the survey techniques, biology and significance of the species in a regional, national and global context.

Three sites located at the North of Myeik mudflat, recorded ten globally threatened species such as Nordmann's Green Shank, Great Knot, Chinese Egret, Black-headed Ibis, Bar-tailed Godwit, Black-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Curlew Sandpiper, Red-necked/Little Stint and Red-breasted Parakeet.

Three sites located at the Bokepyin mudflat, recorded twelve globally threatened species such as single Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Nordmann's Greenshank

1. Introduction

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a long-distance migrant, breeding on the coastal tundra of far eastern Russia, and migrating 8,000 km south along the East-Asian Australasian Flyway, including key staging posts in the Yellow Sea. The species winters on intertidal mudflats in South and South-east Asia, particularly Myanmar, China, and Bangladesh. The Spoon-Billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmaea*) is categorized as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. In 2010, it was assessed that the global population of this species was declining by 26% per year, with a global population estimate of approximately 100 pairs (Zockler et al. 2010).

In Myanmar, five wintering sites of Spoon-billed Sandpiper are located at Nanthar Island, Irrawaddy Delta, Gulf of Mottama, Myeik, and Bokepyin mudflat along with coastal Myanmar. Since established conservation efforts in 2010 onward, designated three areas (Nanthar Island, Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary, and Gulf of Mottama) designated as Flyway Network Site and Ramsar Site respectively include continued regular monitoring of population status.

Particularly Gulf of Mottama is hosting perhaps half of the global population of critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other globally threatened Great Knot, Red Knot, Black-tailed Godwit, Bartailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Nordmann's Green Shank, Asian Dowitcher. The Tanintharyi coastal area (Myeik and Bokepyin) have recorded 2-3 Spoon-billed Sandpipers, estimate about 2000 Great Knot and a minimum 60 number of Nordmann's Greenshank were confirmed (Zockler et al 2019). Moreover, over 1% of the flyway population of Eurasian Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit are wintering here. Near-threatened Asian Dowitcher as well Beach Thick-knee and 'vulnerable' Chinese Egret are at the site which is outstanding as Flyway Network or Wetland of International under the Ramsar Convention. Not only the presence of large numbers of waterbirds but also large areas of natural mangrove forest is highly productive for the fishery as vital resources the for local community.

The global population of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population is still declining (Aung et al 2018) and needs regular monitoring in all the key wintering sites across the flyway, particularly Myanmar is important, the Gulf of Mottama hosts over 120 individuals. Since the results of 2015 overall Spoon-billed Sandpiper and waterbird populations are still declining despite conservation efforts, thus the need for further monitoring of the population survey is crucial for further analysis. Tanintharyi (Bokepyin and Myeik) have less than 4 SBS recorded but are important for many globally threatened waterbirds such as Nordmann's Greenshank. The establishment of the Local Conservation Group (LCG) is essential for long-term monitoring of waterbirds and awareness outreach activities. Particularly, Tanintharyi coastal has a lack of LCG and weak of awareness of the waterbirds. By conducting the CEPA, local communities can be attention to the wetlands and waterbirds conservation, thus can help for future Flyway Network Site and Ramsar site designation process.

During the implementation of this project, Nature Conservation Society-Myanmar conducted Communication, Education, Participation, and Awareness (CEPA) outreach activities such as the establishment of LCG, capacity building, awareness talks, and an annual wintering census survey of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the Gulf of Mottama and Tanintharyi coastal with LCG members. In the villages near the Gulf of Mottama, two bird-watching trainings were conducted for the members of LCGs in Koe Te Zu village, Bilin Township in October 2021, and Ahlat village, Paung Township in December 2021, respectively. Annual wintering census surveys of Spoon-billed Sandpiper were conducted at the Gulf of Mottama and Tanintharyi coastal areas in January 2022.

2. Objectives

- To monitor the population status of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the key wintering sites in Myanmar especially Gulf of Mottama and Tanintharyi coastal areas
- To strength conservation efforts through establishing Local Conservation Groups(LCG)
- To raise awareness about conservation activities through capacity building and local people participation

3. Project area

Gulf of Mottama(GoM), one of the six flyway network sites in Myanmar, was also designated as a Ramsar Site since 2017. e This area supports a large number of species including marine mammal, fish, invertebrates and up to 150,000 migratory waterbirds especially during the non-breeding season. The migratory waterbirds include 12 globally threatened species including perhaps 60% of the global population of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpipers. GoM also supports various livelihoods for the thousands of people by providing fish for local and regional consumption.

Tanintharyi coastal areas cover by mangrove forests which is the largest remaining natural forest in Myanmar coastal, and its sandflat and mudflat areas are one of the important wintering areas of many migratory waterbirds including critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

4. Project activities

4.1. Establishment of Local Conservation Groups(LCGs) in Tanintharyi Coastal Areas

Since conservation goals are achieved only by the local people's participation, two LCGs were established in Tanintharyi Region in June and July 2021. The main objective of establishing LCGs is to enhance local people's participation in the conservation of mangrove forests and migratory waterbirds in Tanintharyi coastal areas. The first LCG is comprised of 13 interested local people from Thit Yar Wa Village, Myeik Township, and the second LCG with ten people from Ohn Taw Kone village, Boke Pyin Township. Before the agreement for establishing LCGs, a series of focus group discussions were made between NCS-Myanmar and local people, and the topics included the current status of mangrove forests and migratory waterbirds, the purposes of establishing LCGs, people's participation in the management of their own natural resources, etc. After that, the interested person to be a member of the LCG were invited to form a new LCG and their terms and responsibilities were explained.

4.2. Capacity building for the members of LCGs at Tanintharyi coastal areas

Two basic bird-watching training was conducted at five villages for LCG members and local youth who are interested in bird-watching and biodiversity conservation during October 2021. A total of 60 participants joined the training: 17 participants at Kan Pyin Village, 9 participants at Thit Yar Wa village, 11 at Ohn Taw Kone Village, 12 participants at Ni Par Village, and 11 at Lake U Chaung Village respectively. During each training, basic bird watching practices, shorebirds identification, and wetland conservation were presented using PowerPoint Slides. Also, bird-watching trips were organized for each training so that locals can understand the bird species richness in their region. New Binoculars were provided to the local conservation group for regular bird monitoring, bird watching, and patrolling. IEC materials including Spoon-billed Sandpipers, pamphlets on wetland conservation, and T-shirts stickered with Spoon-billed Sandpipers sketches were disseminated during the training. Moreover, set up (20) information signboards about the migratory birds' conservation at the key villages in Myeik and Bokepyin Townships.

4.3. Capacity building for the members of LCGs at Gulf of Mottama

Township in December 2021 and in Koe Te Zu village, Bilin Township in October 2021 respectively. Total of 20 LCG members have joined the trainings. For each training, presentations on shorebirds conservation, and basic bird watching practices were given and two bird watching trips were arranged. During the trainings, T-shirts with a sketch of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Fact sheets of shorebirds and wetlands conservation were provided to each participant. Total of four binoculars was also provided to two LCGs for bird watching and patrolling. After the capacity building training, LCG members are aware of the monitoring of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and enable to use field equipment including binoculars, telescope, and patrol logbook. They also could learn about the migratory waterbirds including population status, RedList categories, and their migration theory. In addition, some LCG members joined NCS's annual shorebird monitoring trip at the Gulf of Mottama in January 2022.

4.4. Annual wintering census survey of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Tanintharyi Coastal areas

Two methods were used for the annual wintering census survey; tidal cycle point count method and transect method. Tidal cycle point count method was useful to record the variety of birds in the coastal area in survey sites. It provides a uniform way of counting birds in between high tide and low tide across the location in the survey sites. Counting birds on the tide cycle was made the whole day at the survey sites. Points are set up at a distance of 200 m between each point, and the count duration was 30 minutes on each point. Observation and bird count at each site were conducted on one day at each survey site. For the transect method, surveys were conducted by walking along transects (each transect was 50m long) and birds on either side of the route were counted. Surveys were conducted by two observers from 2 Jan 2022 to 4 Jan 2022 in Thit-Yawa coastal area, Myeik Township (Table 1, Figure 1) and from 6 Jan 2022 to 8 Jan 2022 in Bokepyin coastal area in the Tanintharyi Region (Table 2, Figure 2). Only one individual Spoon-billed Sandpiper was recorded during our six days surveys in the Tanintharyi Region (Figure 3) and daily records were as follows;

Thit-Yawa (North of Myeik)

A total of coastal bird population **4970** individuals were recorded in the Thit-Yawa coastal area at the survey point (2nd Jan 2022). Of these included **six** globally threatened water bird species and **one** globally threatened terrestrial bird species were recorded in the survey point. These are **two** endangered water bird species Nordmann's Greenshank (EN) (18 individuals) and Great Knot (EN) (250 individuals), **four** near threatened water bird species Black-headed Ibis (NT) (22 individuals), Black-tailed Godwit (NT) (**one** individual), Bar-tailed Godwit (NT) (**five** individuals), and Eurasian Curlew (NT) (210 individuals), only **one** globally threatened terrestrial bird species Red-breasted Parakeet (NT) (65 individuals) were recorded in the Thit-Yawa survey point.

Ga-Pyone-Chaung (North of Myeik)

A total of coastal bird population about **1323** individuals were observed in the Ga-Pyone-Chaung survey point (3rd Jan 2022). Of these included **six** globally threatened water bird species and **one** globally threatened terrestrial bird species were found in the survey point. These are Nordmann's Greenshank (**EN**) (**nine** individuals), Great Knot (**EN**) (**14** individuals), and Chinese Egret (**VU**) (**15** individuals), Black-headed Ibis (**NT**) (**19** individuals), Bar-tailed Godwit (**NT**) (**25** individuals), and Eurasian Curlew (**NT**) (**38** individuals), and **one** globally threatened terrestrial bird species Redbreasted Parakeet (**NT**) (**150** individuals) were observe in the Ga-Pyone-Chaung survey point.

Pana-Taung (Boat trip) (North of Myeik)

A total of coastal bird population about **309** individuals were recorded in the survey point Pana-Taung survey by boat trip (North of Myeik) (4th Jan 2022). Of these included only **one** globally threatened water bird species Eurasian Curlew (**NT**) (**four** individuals) were found in the Pana-Taung survey point.

Table 1: List of recorded bird species in North of Myeik mudflat area during the survey from 2nd to 4th January 2022

No	Date			2-Jan-22	3-Jan-22	4-Jan-22
	Aproximate centre of		IUCN			
	survey - Latitude		Status	12.593313	12.613835	12.638325
	Aproximate centre of		Status			
	survey - Longitude			98.637998	98.631121	98.643687
	Day			1	2	3
	Common Name	Scientific Name				
1	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	NT	1		
2	Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica	NT	5	25	
3	Whimbrel	Numenius phaeopus	LC	6	29	16
4	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	NT	210	38	4
5	Terek Sandpiper	Xenus cinereus	LC	175	12	
6	Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres	LC	2		
7	Common Redshank	Tringa totanus	LC	165	49	4
8	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	LC	5	14	
9	Nordmann's Greenshank	Tringa guttifer	EN	18	9	
10	Red-necked Stint	alidris ruficollis	NT	185	8	
11	Great Knot	Calidris tenuirostris	EN	250	14	
12	Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	NT	8		
13	Lesser Sand Plover	nd Plover Charadrius mongolus		2500	65	
		Charadrius				
14	Greater Sand Plover	leschenaultii	LC	79	35	
15	Pacific Golden Plover	Pluvialis fulva	LC	2	25	
16	Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus	LC		2	
17	Grey Plover	Pluvialis squatarola	LC	75	12	
	Total Waders			3686	337	24
	Estimated total small					
	waders (includes					
	unidentify spp)					
1	Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna	LC			
2	Little Cormorrant		LC	1	6	25
	Total Wildfowl			1	6	25
1	Brown-headed Gull	Larus brunnicephalus	LC	57	5	130
2	Little Tern	Sterna albifrons	LC	25		
		Thalasseus				
3	Lesser Crested Tern	bengalensis	LC	255		
	Total Gulls and Terns			337	5	130
1	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	LC	5	5	16
2	Chinese Egret	Egretta eulophotes	VU		15	

No	Date			2-Jan-22	3-Jan-22	4-Jan-22
	Aproximate centre of		IUCN			
	survey - Latitude		Status	12.593313	12.613835	12.638325
	Aproximate centre of		Status			
	survey - Longitude			98.637998	98.631121	98.643687
	Day			1	2	3
3	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	LC	8	1	1
4	Great White Egret	Ardea alba	LC	48	78	45
5	Pacific reef Egret	Egretta sacra	LC	1		3
6	Intermediate Egret	Ardea intermedia	LC	4		2
7	Pond Heron spp.	Ardeola sp	LC	10	2	5
	Black-crowned Night					
8	Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax	LC	+	+	+
		Threskiornis				
9	Black-headed Ibis	melanocephalus	NT	22	19	
10	Black-capped Kingfisher	Halcyon pileata	LC			2
11	Collared Kingfisher	Todiramphus chlori	LC			1
	Total other dependent					
	waterbirds			98	120	75
3	Crested Goshawk	Accipiter trivirgatus	LC		1	
4	Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	LC		1	
5	White-bellied Sea-eagle	Haliaeetus leucogaster	LC			2
7	Brahminy Kite	Haliastur indus	LC	2	2	16
	Total raptors			2	4	18
	Total wetland dependent					
	species					
		Anthracoceros				
	Oriental Pied Hornbill	albirostris				2

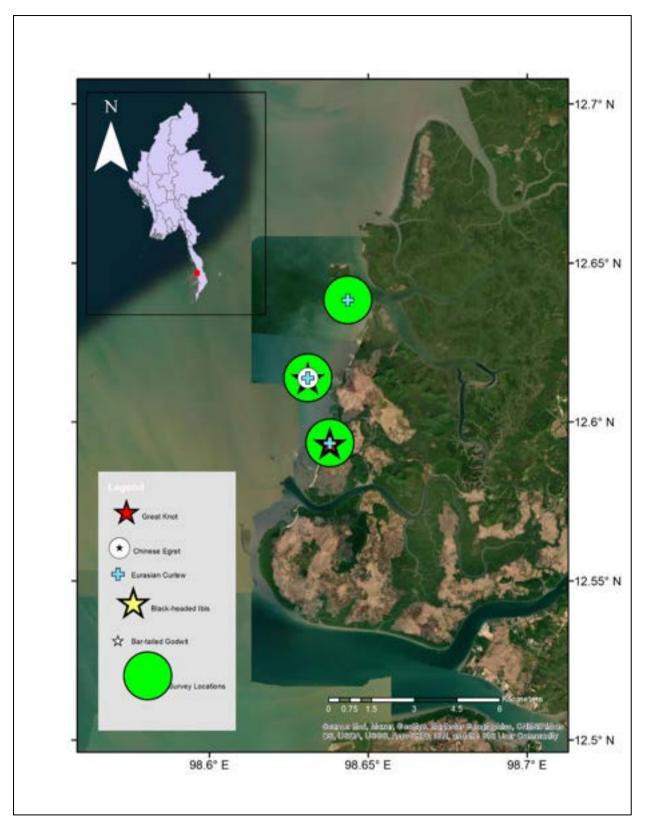


Figure 1: Survey locations map North of Myeik and its coastal area recorded globally threatened species

Persit-Kone and Nepa (West side of Bokepyin)

A total of coastal bird population about **5574** individuals were recorded in the Persit-Kone and Nepa survey point (6th Jan 2022). Of these included **five** globally threatened water bird species and **two** globally threatened terrestrial bird species were observed in survey point. These are Spoon-billed Sandpiper (CR) (**one** individual), Great Knot (EN) (**316** individuals), Black-headed Ibis (NT) (**one** individual), Bar-tailed Godwit (NT) (**142** individuals), and Eurasian Curlew (NT) (**365** individuals) were recorded in the survey point.

Bokepyin to Michaung-Chaung (Boat trip)

A total of coastal bird population about 3879 individuals were recorded from the Bokepyin to Michaung-Chaung survey by boat trip (7th Jan 2022). Of these included six globally threatened water bird species and two globally threatened terrestrial bird species were found in the survey boat trip. These are Nordmann's Greenshank (EN) (35 individuals), Great Knot (EN) (350 individuals), Lesser Adjutant (VU) (two individuals), Black-tailed Godwit (NT) (19 individuals), Bar-tailed Godwit (NT) (100 individuals), and Eurasian Curlew (NT) (500 individuals) were observed in the Pana-Taung survey by boat trip.

Leik-U-Chaung and Shanpie (West side of Bokepyin)

A total of coastal bird population about 1209 individuals were recorded at the Leik-U-Chaung and Shanpie survey point (8th Jan 2022). Of these included **five** globally threatened water bird species and **one** globally threatened terrestrial bird species were recorded in the survey point. These are Great Knot (EN) (two individuals), Chinese Egret (VU) (six individuals), Black-tailed Godwit (NT) (four individuals), Bar-tailed Godwit (NT) (eight individuals), and Eurasian Curlew (NT) (45 individuals) was found in the Leik-U-Chaung and Shanpie survey point.

Table 2: List of recorded bird species in Bokepyin mudflat area during the survey from 6th to 8th January 2022

No	Date			6-Jan-22	7-Jan-22	8-Jan-22
	Aproximate centre of survey		IUCN	N	N	
	- Latitude		Status	11.278627	11.268284	N 11.340544
	Aproximate centre of survey		Status	Е	Е	
	- Longitude			98.745798	98.726619	E 98.721634
	Day			1	2	3
	Common Name	Scientific Name				
1	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	NT		19	4
2	Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica	NT	142	100	8
		Numenius				
3	Whimbrel	phaeopus	LC	58	35	12
4	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	NT	365	500	45
5	Terek Sandpiper	Xenus cinereus	LC	28	310	
6	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	LC	2	6	2
7	Common Redshank	Tringa totanus	LC	34	15	151
		Phalaropus				
8	Red-necked Phalarope	lobatus	LC	8		

No	Date			6-Jan-22	7-Jan-22	8-Jan-22
	Aproximate centre of survey		HICN	N	N	
	- Latitude		IUCN	11.278627	11.268284	N 11.340544
	Aproximate centre of survey		Status	Е	Е	
	- Longitude			98.745798	98.726619	E 98.721634
	Day			1	2	3
9	Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	LC	40	40	105
10	Nordmann's Greenshank	Tringa guttifer	EN		35	
11	Spoon-billed Sandpiper ¹	Calidris pygmeus	CR	1		
12	Red-necked Stint	alidris ruficollis	NT	215	8	
		Calidris				
13	Great Knot	tenuirostris	EN	316	350	2
		Calidris				
14	Curlew Sandpiper	ferruginea	NT	12		
15	Dunlin	Calidris alpina	LC	5		
		Charadrius				
16	Lesser Sand Plover	mongolus	LC	315	325	
		Charadrius				
17	Greater Sand Plover	leschenaultii	LC	25	20	
18	Pacific Golden Plover	Pluvialis fulva	LC	5		
19	Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus	LC	2		
		Pluvialis				
20	Grey Plover	squatarola	LC	74	18	68
	Total Waders			1647	1781	397
	Estimated total small waders					
	(includes unidentify spp)					
1	Little Cormorrant		LC	13	45	14
	Total Wildfowl			13	45	14
		Larus				
1	Brown-headed Gull	brunnicephalus	LC	2500	1298	125
		Gelochelidon				
2	Gull-billed Tern	nilotica	LC	350	39	4
3	Little Tern	Sterna albifrons	LC		4	
		Thalasseus				
4	Lesser Crested Tern	bengalensis	LC	85	56	
5	Greater Crested Tern	Thalasseus Begii	LC	25	70	
	Total Gulls and Terns			2960	1467	129
1	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	LC	25	106	57
		Egretta				
2	Chinese Egret	eulophotes	VU			6
3	Great White Egret	Ardea alba	LC	58	68	22
4	Intermediate Egret	Ardea intermedia	LC	4	7	3
5	Pond Heron spp.	Ardeola sp	LC	5	8	10
		Nycticorax				
6	Black-crowned Night Heron	nycticorax	LC		+	+

No	Date			6-Jan-22	7-Jan-22	8-Jan-22
	Aproximate centre of survey		IUCN	N	N	
	- Latitude		Status	11.278627	11.268284	N 11.340544
	Aproximate centre of survey		Status	Е	Е	
	- Longitude			98.745798	98.726619	E 98.721634
	Day			1	2	3
		Threskiornis				
7	Black-headed Ibis	melanocephalus	NT	1		
8	Lesser Adjutant	Leptoptilos	VU		2	
9	Black-capped Kingfisher	Halcyon pileata	LC		2	
		Todiramphus				
10	Collared Kingfisher	chlori	LC	8	6	4
		Pelargopsis				
11	Brown-winged Kingfisher	amauroptera	NT	2	2	
		Halcyon				
12	White-throated Kingfisher	smyrensis	LC	1		
	Total other dependent					
	waterbirds			104	201	102
		Haliaeetus				
1	White-bellied Sea-eagle	leucogaster	LC		2	
2	Crested serpent Eagle	Spilornis cheela	LC	2		2
3	Brahminy Kite	Haliastur indus	LC	8	25	12
	Total raptors			10	27	14
	Total wetland dependent					
	species					
		Anthracoceros				
	Oriental Pied Hornbill	albirostris				8

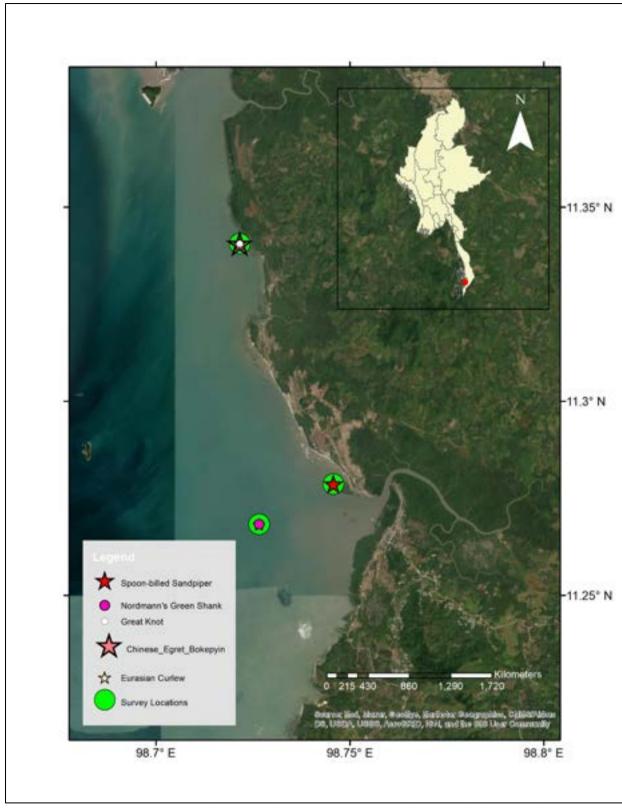


Figure 2: Survey locations map Bokepyin and its coastal area recorded globally threatened species

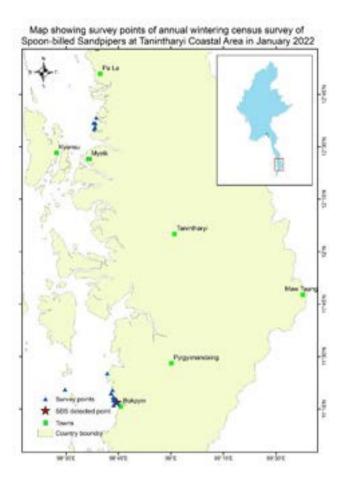


Figure 3: Location of survey points and SBS detected point along the coastal areas of Tanintharyi Region

4.5. Annual wintering census survey of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Gulf of Mottama

Before conducting the ground survey, previous survey results were reviewed particularly for the same survey area in 2021, to monitor the shorebird population with the suitability habitat assessment with Landsat 8 and Sentinel II from USGS. Apart from west coast of GOM, all other mudflat areas visited last year were revisited this year again, Areas near the main channel changed considerably within the last year (see Figure 4). The survey team of eight observers conducted the annual wintering census survey of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the key wintering areas of the Gulf of Mottama from 16-21 January 2022. They were accompanied by local fishermen of the LGCs, who join the team for the thirteenth winter survey in 2022. This year survey team was departed from Koe Tae Su village and had to walk to the boat sites for about 15 minutes due to low tide not enough to reach the village. The team spent a night near the boats on 15 January 2022 and waited for the tide to go to the core area. In the early morning of 16 January 2022, we leaved the boat sites and started to move. Unfortunately, our boats could move only a few meters due to the tide was not enough to float our boats. So, we spent this day by observing the birds near the channel. On the second day on the 17 January 2021, the water level was high enough during the morning high tide and the boat started to move closed to the cored area of Gulf of Mottama. Then we started the flock count surveys on 17th January 2022 and proceeded the surveys until 21st January 2022. The survey was timed to cover the highest spring tide because the boats could access all of the intertidal sandflats only during the high spring tide period and because shorebirds are likely to be concentrated at spring tides and gather in large flocks. This way we were less likely missing large flocks and counted the total numbers of small shorebirds

(Aung *et al.* 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). Other sites Nanthar Island, Irrawaddy Delta, Myeik and Bokepyin mudflat also surveyed at the same location of the previous years.

The Gulf of Mottama is challenged to count shorebirds at the vast intertidal mudflats. For the Gulf of Mottama, the survey team was transported to as many parts of the study area as possible in shallow-draft fishing boats, which were grounded on the mud in the intertidal zone at low tide to allow observation of birds from the boat and on foot. In this way, the observers were able to conduct scan surveys throughout the daylight period of tidal cycles and at a wide range of elevations relative to the high and low water marks. Following a protocol outlined in Aung *et al.* (2018), the surveyors were separated into seven-eight directions. Surveyors walked across the mudflat during low tide, diverging from the place where the boat was grounded, and also viewed birds from the boats, especially when the tide was high. Surveyors used spotting scopes and binoculars to record number of waterbirds during each scan and also estimated total number of shorebirds, especially during high tide.

A total of 47,490 waterbirds of 45 species were recorded in the Gulf of Mottama between 16-21January 2022. Of these, the large majority of over 46,600 shorebirds of 24 different species were identified. The estimated number of small waders was about 160,000 in the survey areas. This year, increased number of identified small numbers compared with the previous years although the Spoon-billed Sandpipers were not detected very much About 2,000 birds comprise of gulls, terns herons and egrets, which all decreased.

The most abundant species in 2022 were Black-tailed Godwit (NT), Kentish Plover and Lesser Sand Plover, Whiskered and White-winged Terns and, but again the latter two terns in smaller numbers than in 2019 and previous years (see Table 3). Black-tailed Godwit, Kentish Plover, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Pallas' Gull, Whiskered and White-winged Terns and Red Shank were decreased. The Black-tailed Godwit though has decreased previous year (Aung et al 2021) that reason would be the habitats changed. However, this year Lesser Sand Plover is increased significantly compared with the previous four years.

Table 3: Summary results of the key common shorebird species during the 2022 mid-winter count period in the Gulf of Mottama in comparison with 2010,2019,2020 and 2021 (Zöckler et al. 2014, Aung et al 2019, 2020, 2021), increasing species marked in green, declining in red

Species	Scientific name	No.2022	No. 2021	No.2020	No. 2019	No.2010
Lesser Sandplover	Charadrius	24,712	6,340	14,508	16,385	18,032
Red-necked/Little Stint	Calidris	4,138	3,884	4,760	7,690	6,353
Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris	2,703	2,235	4,512	3,003	6,762
Kentish Plover	Charadrius	2,399	7,107	3,727	10,997	8,131
Pallas' Gull	Larus	149	2,988	2,835	84	2,473
Whiskered/White- winged tern	Chlidonias hybrida	1127	5,925	2,435	8,088	10,345
Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa	3,723	14,392	2,310	5,625	3,405
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Calidris	831	856	2,138	1,909	4,000
Redshank	Tringa totanus	1,648	5,378	1,331	809	4,617

Also, 18 raptors (birds of prey) of 4 species were recorded during the survey. But the globally threatened Spotted Eagle wasn't observed for the third consecutive year.

Table 4: Globally threatened species recorded in the 2022 survey period in the Gulf of Mottama compared to 2021,2020 and 2019. *For Spoon-billed Sandpiper a separate more extensive analysis is below. Species marked in green were increasing and in red declining.

Species		IUC N	Total No. 2022	Total No. 2021	Total No. 2020	Total No. 2019
Spoon-billed Sandpiper*	Calidris pygmaea	CR	80	42	114	112
Great Knot	Calidris tenuirostris	EN	165	84	32	153
Nordmann's Green Shank	Tringa guttifer	EN	8			
Greater Spotted Eagle	Aquila pomarina	VU		-	1	-
Black-tailed Godwit	Limos limosa	NT	3,723	14,392	5,625	2310
Bar-tailed Godwit	Limosa lapponica	NT	3	24	4	21
Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	NT	313	1,264	597	280
Asiatic Dowitcher	Limnodromus	NT		2	-	49
Red Knot	Calidris canutus	NT		478	-	-
Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala	NT	13	55	1	-
Black-headed Ibis Threskiornis melanocephalus		NT	12	13	32	-

4.5.1. Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS)

The survey team observed only a total of 17 SBS from 4 different locations in the survey period from 16-21 Jan 2022 (see Fig 4). There is still some possible overlap in numbers, but observations of time and observer during the day were exchanged on return to the camp so that double counting was minimized.

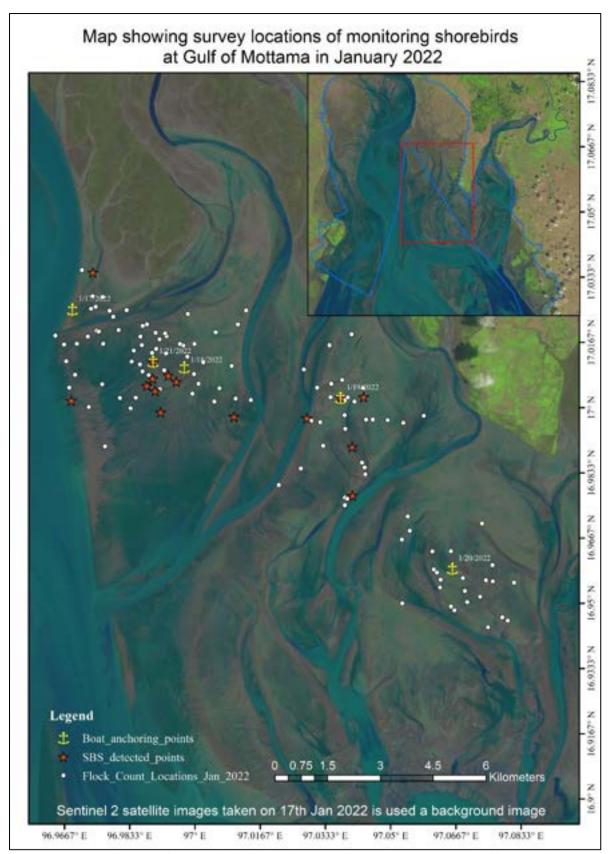


Figure 4: Distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper sightings in Jan 2022. Yellow anchors signs are depict camp sites or boat anchor points from where surveys have been undertaken on foot. White points represent flock count sites and red stars sites with SBS observations

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

Table 5 shows the average proportion of small waders in small wader flocks in the Gulf of Mottama during the survey period based on 173 flocks by seven different observers totaling over 34,914 small waders of eight or nine species (Red-necked Stint and Little Stint were summarized to one species group for this estimation). Other small waders only occurring in very few samples were not included.

Table 5: Average flock proportions of small waders in the Gulf of Mottama in January 2021 (n= 173)*, proportional observations for 2019,2020 and 2021= figures in brackets refer to 2021(Aung et al 2019, 2020)

English Nama	Scientific Name	Flock count	ľ	Mean proportion in %				
English Name	Scientific Name	total*	2022	2021	2020	2019		
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	Calidris pygmaea	17	0.05	0.07	0.19	0.18		
	Calidris							
Little /Red necked Stint	ruficollis/minuta	4138	11.85	15.59	18.06	22.37		
Curlew Sandpiper	Calidris ferruginea	2703	7.74	17.75	16.32	6.55		
Broad-billed Sandpiper	Calidris falcinellus	831	2.38	5.30	7.66	5.32		
	Charadrius							
Kentish Plover	alexandrinus	2399	6.87	18.41	12.53	31.41		
	Charadrius							
Lesser Sand Plover	mongolus	24712	70.78	42.00	44.17	32.20		
	Charadrius							
Greater Sand Plover	leschenaultii	89	0.25	2.77	0.69	1.63		
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius	25	0.07	2.83	0.39	0.34		
Total of all flocks		34,914(28,123)	(2021)					
Total of SBS calculated								
in flock @160,000		80(42)	(2021)					

Applying the flock count-generated proportion of 0.05% for 2022 which is again lower to 0.07 and 0.19 in 2021 and 2020, we can extrapolate the total population in the Gulf of Mottama in the winter 2021 of only 80 of Spoon-billed Sandpiper among the total flock of small waders was about at about 160,000. The LCGs were checking the wider survey areas for small wader flocks and enabled a complete coverage and estimation of small wader flocks. In last week of February 2022, two surveyors went to west coast, opposite of the core area where only one Spoon-billed Sandpiper was recorded and did not observe the large number of flocks.

4.5.3. Flagged birds

In total only one flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper was recorded; it was Yellow (flagged on migration most likely in Tiaozini, Jiangsu Province, China). Two flagged stints were recorded during the surveys; one was blue on the right (flagged on migration in Northwestern Australia) and another one yellow(upper) and black(lower) on right leg (flagged on the breeding grounds in Kamchatka, Russia). All flags were not photographed, and it was not possible to read the marked combination.

Table 6. Daily counts of bird list at the Gulf of Mottama from 16-21 January 2022

	location	Name of Survey Area		Koe Te Su Chaung Wa	Wun Bike Thaung	Kyar si Aung Aut	Kyun Thar Yar Aut	Kyauk pyin Thaung	Between Wun Bike Thaung & Kyar Si Aung Aut	Total
		-		16-Jan-	17-Jan-	18-Jan-	19-Jan-	20-Jan-	21-Jan-	
No	Date			22	22	22	22	22	22	
	Aproximate centre of survey - Latitude Aproximate	17.03173	IUCN Status (2017) ver 3.1	17.20873	17.02514	17.01031	17.00253	16.95889	17.01180	
	centre of		3.1							
	survey -	07.00044		06.00220	06.06070	06.00720	07.02522	07.06555	06.00020	
	Longitude	97.02844		96.99328	96.96870	96.99728	97.03722	97.06577	96.98930	
	Day			1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Common									
	Name	Scientific Name								
	Black-tailed									
1	Godwit	Limosa limosa	NT		2340	506	661	211	5	3723
	Bar-tailed	Limosa	NIT		1			2		2
2	Godwit	lapponica	NT		1			2		3
3	Whimbrel	Numenius	LC		199	370	197	120	42	928
3	Eurasian	phaeopus Numenius	LC		199	3/0	19/	120	42	940
4	Curlew	arquata	NT		147	15	95	46	10	313
<u> </u>	- was ***	Calidris			117	13	,,,,	10	10	313
5	Ruff	pugnax	LC		19					19
	Terek				-					
6	Sandpiper	Xenus cinereus	LC		6	9	26	14	1	56
	Common	Actitis								
7	Sandpiper	hypoleucos	LC	13						13
	Nordman's									
8	Greenshank	Tringa guttifer	EN					8		8
	Common	<i>m</i> .	. ~	2.0		225				1646
9	Redshank	Tringa totanus	LC	28	465	233	619	161	142	1648
10	Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis	LC	1	3		1	2	1	8
10	Common	Tringa	LC	1	3		1		1	0
11	Greenshank	nebularia	LC	6	31	15	11	14	14	91
-11				3	31	13	11		11	71
12	Sanderling	Calidris alba	LC		4	1	2	1		8
	Spoon-billed	Calidris				-	-		-	
13	Sandpiper ¹	pygmeus	CR		3	4	6		4	17
14	Little Stint/Red necked Stint	Calidris minuta	LC	2	312	1082	604	1252	886	4138
		Calidris								
15	Great Knot	tenuirostris	EN		59	37	30	38	1	165
16	Dad Vnat	Calidris	NT							0
16	Red Knot Curlew	canutus Calidris	NT							0
17	Sandpiper	ferruginea	NT		307	1041	253	379	723	2703
1/	Sandhibei	jerrugineu	IVI		307	1041	255	319	123	2703

	location	Name of Survey Area		Koe Te Su Chaung Wa	Wun Bike Thaung 17-Jan-	Kyar si Aung Aut	Kyun Thar Yar Aut	Kyauk pyin Thaung 20-Jan-	Between Wun Bike Thaung & Kyar Si Aung Aut	Total
No	Date			22	22	22	22	22	22	
	Aproximate centre of		IUCN							
	survey -		Status							
	Latitude	17.03173	(2017)	17.20873	17.02514	17.01031	17.00253	16.95889	17.01180	
	Aproximate		ver 3.1							
	centre of		3.1							
	survey -									
	Longitude	97.02844		96.99328	96.96870	96.99728	97.03722	97.06577	96.98930	
	Day			1	2	3	4	5	6	
	Broad-billed	Calidris								
18	Sandpiper	falcinellus	LC		94	192	123	58	364	831
1.0	D' 14	Recurvirostra								4.0
19	Pied Avocet	avosetta Charadrius	LC		10					10
20	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius	LC	22	2		1			25
20	Tiover	Charadrius	LC				1			23
21	Kentish Plover	alexandrinus	LC	3	123	169	1057	602	445	2399
	Lesser Sand	Charadrius								
22	Plover	mongolus	LC		3557	3711	4578	6589	6277	24712
	Greater Sand	Charadrius								
23	Plover	leschenaultii	LC		15	16	39	13	6	89
24	Pacific Golden Plover	Pluvialis fulva	LC	49	799	20	409	155	1504	2936
	110101	Pluvialis 1	LC	77	133	20	709	133	1304	2730
25	Grey Plover	squatarola	LC				1	13	13	27
										4.42=2
	Total Waders			124	8496	7421	8713	9678	10438	44870
	Estimated total small									
	waders									
	(includes									
	unidentify									
	spp)				30000	63000	60000	7950		160950
1	Ferruginous pochard				3					3
1	Total				3					3
	Wildfowl				3					3
	Black-headed	Larus								
1	Gull	ridibundus	LC			4	1			5
	D. II	Larus	.		. .		_			
2	Pallas's Gull	ichthyaetus	LC		105	10	6	18	10	149
3	Brown-headed Gull	Larus brunnicephalus	LC	1	543	141	25	11	199	920
3	Juli	or uninceptialus	LC	1	J 1 J	141		11	199	720
4	Huglin Gull					1				1
	Gull-billed	Gelochelidon								
5	Tern	nilotica	LC	1	27	4	44	28		104

	location	Name of Survey Area		Koe Te Su Chaung Wa	Wun Bike Thaung	Kyar si Aung Aut	Kyun Thar Yar Aut	Kyauk pyin Thaung	Between Wun Bike Thaung & Kyar Si Aung Aut	Total
No	Date			16-Jan- 22	17-Jan- 22	18-Jan- 22	19-Jan- 22	20-Jan- 22	21-Jan- 22	
	Aproximate centre of survey - Latitude Aproximate centre of	17.03173	IUCN Status (2017) ver 3.1	17.20873	17.02514	17.01031	17.00253	16.95889	17.01180	
	survey - Longitude	97.02844		96.99328	96.96870	96.99728	97.03722	97.06577	96.98930	
		77.02077								
	Day	Hydroprogne		1	2	3	4	5	6	
6	Caspian Tern	caspia	LC		19	12	6	2	6	45
7	Little Tern	Sterna albifrons	LC	1	4	2	4	1		12
,	Whiskered	Chlidonias		1			·			12
8	Tern	hybrida	LC	120	80	25		26	137	388
9	White-winged Tern	Chlidonias leucopterus	LC	15	121	39	466	96	2	739
9	Total Gulls	teucopierus	LC	13	121	39	400	90	2	139
	and Terns			138	899	238	552	182	354	2363
1	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	LC	10	20	3	12	6		51
2	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	LC	12	37	9	6	29	10	103
3	Great White Egret Pond Heron	Ardea alba	LC		9	3	8	20	2	42
4	spp.	Ardeola sp	LC	3						3
	Black-crowned	Nycticorax								
5	Night Heron Black-headed	nycticorax Threskiornis	LC	4	4	4				12
6	Ibis	melanocephalus	NT					12		12
7	Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala	NT		1				12	13
	Total other dependent waterbirds			29	71	19	26	67	24	236
1	Black Kite	Milvus migrans	LC	6						6
2	Eastern Marsh Harrier	Circus spilonotus	LC	6						6
3	Pied Harrier	Circus melanoleucos	LC	6						6
	Total raptors			18	0	0	0	0	0	18
	Total wetland dependant species			309	9469	7678	9291	9927	10816	10

5. Conclusion

In total sighting the number of Spoon-billed sandpiper were not different compared with last year, still decreasing although the other unidentified shorebirds population numbers are increased this year up to approximately 160,000. It is not entirely clear if this only relates to a smaller team and less survey activity or reflects a real decline or a shift in distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the core area of the Gulf. The latter is still possible but less likely as our trained LCGs and NCS small team have been scanning the entire Ramsar site during the winter period 2021-2022.

The number of 80 Spoon-billed Sandpiper is still lower than most previous years even though up again from last year's low and very concerning. As this declining trend is also observed in other areas the decline is not reflecting on the quality of the habitat in the area, even though other species have declined. The Gulf of Mottama is still very crucial for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper but with a continuous northward shift in the wintering area the prime position might be shared with more northern sites in Vietnam and China.

Observations of SBS have declined since 2010 (Aung et al 2018) and continued in recent years. This year's records might also point to an accelerated decline, which affects most small waders which have declined from at least 150,000 in 2010 (Zöckler et al 2014, Aung et al 2018) to only 56,000 – 60,000 maximums. It might also reveal some potential changes in the habitat. It is also planned to look more closely at the pollutants that potentially threatened feeding shorebirds in the Gulf. 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. Local conservation groups have been established and trained and have become a stable component in safeguarding the future of the Ramsar site.

The Tanintharyi coastal, Myeik and Bokepyin mudflat area is still hosting the wintering shorebirds and outstanding criteria to designate as Flyway Network Site or Ramsar Site. Although, need to conduct more awareness activities for community participation in the process of designation steps and government endorsement.

6. Acknowledgement

We thank East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), Manfred-Hermsen Foundation (MHF), Asian Water bird Conservation Fund and Shenzhen Mangrove Wetlands Conservation Foundation supported the financial support for annual wintering census surveys of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Gulf of Mottama and Tanintharyi coastal areas in Myanmar. We would like to thank all the members of LCGs for participating in both capacity building trainings and annual wintering census surveys.



Annex 1: Photos of outreach activities and fieldwork surveys

Photo 1: Survey sites selection through investigating the mudflat and sandflat map at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 2: Survey team conducting the shorebirds surveys at Gulf of Mottama in January 2022



Photo 3: The observers making daily recorded bird lists on the boat at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 4: Group photo of survey team at Gulf of Mottama in January 2022



Photo 5: Trainer of basic bird watching course teaching the LCGs members the basic practices of bird watching in Koe Te Zu village, Bilin Township in October 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 6: Trainer of basic bird watching course teaching the LCGs members the basic practices of bird watching during the field trip in Koe Te Zu village, Bilin Township in October 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 7: One trainee using the telescope, and the trainer and a trainee use the bird guide for bird identification watching during the field trip in Koe Te Zu village, Bilin Township in October 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 8: Group photo of LCGs trainees, trainer and staff of NCS-Myanmar taken during bird watching training in Koe Te Zu village, Bilin Township in October 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 9: Trainer of basic bird watching course teaching the LCGs members the basic practices of bird watching in Alatt village, Paung Township in December 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 10: Trainer of basic bird watching course teaching the LCGs members the basic practices of bird watching during the field trip in Alatt village, Paung Township in December 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 11: Two binoculars were provided to the leader of LCG in in Alatt village, Paung Township in December 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 12: Group photo of LCGs trainees, trainer and staffs of NCS-Myanmar taken during bird watching training in Alatt village, Paung Township in December 2021 at Gulf of Mottama



Photo 13: Group photo of LCG members from Thi-Yarwa village, Myeik Township, Tanintharyi Region



Photo 14: Group photo of LCG members from Ohn Taw Kone village, Boke Pyin Township, Tanintharyi Region



Photo 15: Bird watching training at Kan Pyin Village, Myeik Township, Tanintharyi Region



Photo 16: Bird watching training at Ohn Taw Kan Village, Boke Pyin Township, Tanintharyi Region



Photo 17: Bird watching training at Ni Par Village, Boke Pyin Township, Tanintharyi Region



Photo 18: Bird watching training at Ni Par Village, Boke Pyin Township, Tanintharyi Region



Photo 19: Installation of notice signboards in Myeik



Photo 20: Installation of notice signboards in Myeik



Photo 21 : Discussion between NCS and Officers from Forest Department for shorebird conservation, Tanintharyi Region via Zoom on 30 November 2021



Photo 22: Installation of notice signboards in Myeik



Photo 23: Installation of notice signboards in Boke Pyin



Photo 24: Installation of notice signboards in Boke Pyin

Annex 2: List of members of new established two Local Conservation Groups

Village: Kanpyin, Thityarwa village tract, Myeik.

No	Position	Name	Father name	NRC no	Date of birth	work	Address
1	Leader	U Aung Htay	U Hla Kyai	6/MAY(N)137369		Farm/ca	Kanpyin village
2	Secreatary	U Twel Tar Oo	U Min Naing Oo			Fishery	Thityar wa
3	Finance	Daw Shwe Thazin Soe	U Than Shwe	6/MMN(N)200987	28.06.98		Kanpyin
4	Member	U Myo Ko Naing	U Tit Naing				Kanpyin
5	Member	U Zin Minn Htike	U Kyaw Yin	6/MMN(N)200881			Kanpyin
6	Member	U Than Minn Wai	U Soe Wai				Kanpyin
7	Member	U Toe Tat Linn	USoeNyiNyiHein	6/MMN(N)241391	8.5.01	Student	Kanpyin
8	Member	U Hein Pyie Ag	U Aung Htay	6/MMN(N)251691	21.12.03	Student	Kanpyin
9	Member	U Wai Yan Myo	U Mg Myo	6/MMN(N)252262	11.2.05	Student	Kanpyin
10	Member	U Hein Tun	USoeNyiNyiHein				Kanpyin
11	Member	U Than Shein	UPhoLwin	6/MAY(N)076329		Farm	Kanpyin
12	Member	U Nyi Nyi Toe	UHtayWin	6/MMN(N)252289	15.1.03		Kanpyin
13	Member	U Linn Yu Lwin	UPoLwin	6/MMN(N)157119		Farm	Kanpyin

Owntawkan village, Bokepyin

No	Position	Name	Father Name	NRC No	Date of birth	Work	Address
1	Leader	Min Min Naing	U Lin Sein	6/BaPaNa(N) 025740	24-9-86		Owntawkan
2	Secreatary	Aye Khing	U Min Aung	6/BaPaNa(N) 038437	12-7- 1346		Lakeouchaung
3	Finance	Ko Ko Lwin	U Aung Than	6/KaThaNa(N) 034679	16-7-84		Owntawkan
4	Member	Naing Zaw Oo	U Mg Lin Tun	6/BaPaNa(N) 040979	29-7-95		Owntawkan
5	Member	Myo Htay	U Mg Myint	6/BaPaNa(N) 024366	4-4-1347		Owntawkan
6	Member	Paing Soe Thu	U Than Soe	6/BaPaNa(N) 049398	2-1-99	Fisheries	Lakeouchaung
7	Member	Myint Soe	U Kun Shwe	6/BaPaNa(N) 004469	5-3-62	Fisheries	Owntawkan
8	Member	Tin Tun	U Lun Tin	6/KaSaNa(N) 093936	25-6-60	Fisheries	Owntawkan
9	Member	Kaung Myat	U	6/BaPaNa(N) 042324			Bokepyin
10	Member	Aung Lwin Oo	U Kyaw Bin	6/BaPaNa(N) 139946	15-8-91	Fisheries	Owntawkan