Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No 21 · October 2019

Contents

Spoon-billed Sandpiper eating a whole crab in 3 minutes, Tiaozini, 14 Sep 2019 *Shaoliang Zhou*

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, Fauna Flora International (FFI) and experts and conservation organisations from principal range states and other partners. We are grateful to the RSPB, NABU and the Manfred Hermsen Foundation for their continued support of the SBS Task Force and Spoon-billed Sandpiper projects across the range states.

Chair: ***Dr Evgeny Syroechkovskiy***
ees_jr@yahoo.co.uk

Coordinator: ***Dr Christoph Zöckler***
(Manfred Hermsen Foundation)
christoph.zoeckler@m-h-s.org

Assistant Coordinator: **Sayam U. Chowdhury**
Conservation Biologist, Dhaka, Bangladesh
sayam_uc@yahoo.com

Layout by Matthias Fanck Graphic Design, Zell im Fichtelgebirge, Germany · German SBS Support Group

Foreword from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Manfred Hermsen Foundation · October 2019

If there were an astrology for bird species, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper would currently be moving through a very favourable constellation of stars. Indeed, the tiny sandpiper has the attention and care of different communities across the world; from Russian scientists and Chinese entrepreneurs to local communities in Myanmar and Sumatra; coffee merchants in Germany, donors in Canada, a cruise operator from New Zealand and artists in Scandinavia, journalists in Australia, the US and many more. Recently the first article about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper appeared in the Portuguese language, in Brazil.

The sandpiper also received a surge in site protection. China, Myanmar and Thailand designated more protected areas and land has been purchased to protect the fragile coastal habitats of this flagship species, benefitting many other waterbirds and local communities in turn. Russia's plans to establish a huge protected area on the breeding grounds are making considerable progress. Hunting mitigation measures have expanded, but on this issue, a lot still remains to do.

But not all its stars appear to be favourable; the species continues to decline. Birds Russia reported a further decline in the core breeding area this year despite our head-starting efforts. In other areas on the breeding ground declines were also observed and it's possible that a warmer and drier climate might be having a larger impact than we previously thought. Numbers are also slightly lower at the key stop over sites in Jiangsu Province and on the wintering grounds. We have addressed many of the main threats and we have surely slowed down the decline, but it seems that we might still have missed some important factors. It might be the impact of climate change or some as yet undiscovered hunting issue. We're simply not quite sure. However, considering the huge global support and the wealth of knowledge and ideas gathered worldwide, I am confident we will make further progress and may stop any further decline in the near future.

As always we are very grateful to all our donors and welcome the Mangrove Conservation Fund (MCF, Shenzhen, Guangdong) and the Karl Kaus Foundation in Bremen, Germany as new supporters.

Guest Foreword

Birding, a new life long career

Sun Lili (Mangrove Conservation Foundation)

Sun Lili

My interest in birds started in 2012, the year I co-founded the Mangrove Conservation Foundation (MCF) with more than 30 entrepreneurs including Wang Shi and Ma Weihua and the SEE ecological association. When discussing the LOGO of MCF, Wang Shi proposed to use WWF's idea of using the panda, an iconic animal as the LOGO, and to choose one of Shenzhen's representative animal as the MCF LOGO and the Black-faced Spoonbill became the MCF LOGO, and it also became my natural name. My birding history began with watching the Spoonbill.

That winter I finally saw this cool bird: how can a bird have a bill like the Pipa, a Chinese musical instrument? How can a bird have ruby eyes? How can a bird have an exaggerated crest and dance to look for food?

From recognition to love, and from love to protection. I was secretary general of MCF for six years, and our main work was focused on protecting the Black-faced Spoonbill and its habitats.

In November 2018, I joined the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force to survey Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the Leizhou Peninsula. That survey recorded more than 20 SbS, including tagged TU 53, and it was my first sighting of a spoonie. During the observation, Nigel Clark from BTO asked me seriously, "Lily, do you want to be a bird watcher? Or do you want to be a qualified bird researcher?" Only then, I've learned that bird-watchers enjoy collecting sightings of bird species, but as an ornithologist, one not only need to be able to see birds, but also understand the complex environment, which is an "advanced skill".

Zhuang, from Zhanjiang Bird Watch Society a local NGO, also joined us. She was a former student camper at MCF. It made me realize that our previous work had been successful enough to influence young people to participate in environmental matters.

The trip to Leizhou made me realize two things:

firstly, evidence is the cornerstone of the conservation work; secondly, extensive social participation, especially the participation of young people is one of our most important missions. After the trip, I decided to initiate the "SBS project" in China, and conducted the first winter census in China.

At the invitation of Evgeny Syroechkovskiy and Christoph Zöckler, I attended the voyage to Siberia's eastern coastline in June-July 2019. This wild coastline has one of the most diverse assemblages of wildlife and habitats in the world: Largha Seals, Blue Whales, Humpback Whales, Brown Bears, Red and Arctic Foxes, migratory fish , a vast array of birdlife including Tundra Bean

Sun Lili

Goose, Steller's Sea-Eagle, Great Knot, Long-toed Stint, and one of the most iconic species, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

The most exciting place to visit was the small fishing village Meinypil'gyno, which is the breeding ground for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and the Headstarting Project is located here. Till now Headstarting succeeded in hatching more than 160 SbS, which played a positive role in the recovery of the SbS population. I visited the Headstarting camp, listened to the whole process, and I am amazed about the precise work. I also visited the release pen, which is located around the nest of the famous 01 spoonie, and I wondered whether his offspring would return again to this place. I was also guided to two nests. The brooding bird is so small and can hardly be sighted. Watching the chicks foraging and incubating on the tundra filled me with hope and inspiration.

At the Chukotka Coast, the local media learned about my experience and asked me why I was interested in waterfowl protection and what is the future of endangered species conservation? I suppose global participation and positive management is the key.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a globally endangered species. This adorable bird migrates and stopped in 12 countries from Russia to the ASEAN countries. And the conservation of this endangered birds cannot just relay on these 12 countries. Scientists from all over the world, including Russia, Germany, Britain, China, India, the United States, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Vietnam, have all been involved, constantly updating our knowledge of this endangered bird and its „friends": How many are left? What kind of habitats do they like? What kind of food do they like to eat ……

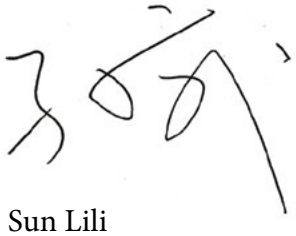
President Xi has repeatedly stressed that „Clear waters and green mountains are as good as mountains of gold and silver." We should promote ecological progress, promote green development, achieve harmonious coexistence between human and nature, and build a beautiful China. China is a big country and one of the most important countries on the East Asian - Australasian Flyway. China has the responsibility to make due efforts in environmental governance. We can see the efforts of the central government as well as the local government in new protected areas, which adds the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf to the list of World

Heritage Sites. As an NGO, we also feel the heavy responsibility on our shoulders: promote public participation in environmental protection and welfare.

Taking the 2018-2019 sbs winter census in China as an example, participants came from protected areas, research institutes, NGOs, environmental activists and enterprises, which represents the awakening of the awareness of citizens in Chinese society and the improvement of the whole society's awareness of the need for protection. Protection is no longer just the responsibility of the government. What NGOs are doing is based on scientific facts and they adopt an open, transparent and more efficient way to bring people closer to nature. The raising of public awareness will make our work successful.

Scientists in Meinypil'gyno told me that 80 nests have been found in the 2003. This year, only 12 pairs have been found. We know that Spoon-billed Sandpipers breed in Chukotka, but we don't know where the majority of pairs are nesting. With global warming and landscape changes in the tundra, will the Spoon-billed Sandpiper migrate farther north for breeding? The future of the SbS remains to be explored.

Conservationists often say that „Think globally, act locally". The trip to Russia was an important milestone in my conservation career. International cooperation and communication can help us think globally and find long-term nature-based solutions to climate change. It is also the cornerstone of the systematic reform of nature conservation.



Sun Lili

我与鸟的缘分始于2012年。那一年，我与王石、马蔚华等企业家及阿拉善SEE生态协会共同发起成立了红树林湿地保护基金会（MCF）。在讨论基金会LOGO时，王石提议借鉴WWF用熊猫作LOGO的办法，用深圳最具代表性的迁徙候鸟黑脸琵鹭形象作为MCF的LOGO。就这样，黑脸琵鹭成了MCF的LOGO，也成了我的自然名。我的观鸟史，从观察黑琵开始。

那个冬天我终于看到了这种炫酷的大鸟：怎么会有鸟长着琵琶一样的嘴？怎么会有鸟有着红宝石一样的眼睛？怎么会有鸟顶着一头夸张的羽冠（繁殖羽）？居然还会跳着舞步。

从喜欢到热爱，从热爱到保护。我任红树林基金会秘书长6年，主要工作都是围绕保护以黑脸琵鹭为旗舰物种的水鸟展开的。

学习观鸟，我得到很多人的帮助，“勺嘴鹬在中国”的创始人李静就是其中一位。2018年11月，李静邀请我与勺嘴鹬特别行动小组的专家们一起去雷州半岛进行勺嘴鹬调查。那次调查记录了20多只勺嘴鹬，其中包括戴着足旗的TU、53，这也是我第一次看到勺嘴鹬。

来自英国的Nigel Clark 是鸻鹬类水鸟足旗的发明人，在雷州的调查中，我有幸与他同组，期间Nigel严肃的问我“莉莉，你是想做一名观鸟者呢？还是想做一名合格的鸟类调查员？”我这才知道，观鸟爱好者和鸟类调查员是有差别的，作为一个鸟类调查员，不仅要能在复杂环境中对鸟种进行辨别判断，还要记录数量，甚至生态相关数据，这可是“高阶技能”。成为一名合格的水鸟调查员也成了我新的flag。

那次湛江调查我还惊喜地发现，我们的本地向导，湛江爱鸟会的专职工作人员小庄是2015年红树林基金会大学生自然体验营的营员，她从自然体验入手关注到湿地，之后入职到湛江爱鸟会，开始协调志愿者参与鸟类监测与调查。这让我意识到红树林基金会之前的工作还是开出花来，能够影响到年轻人参与到环境保护事业中。

雷州之行对我的触动非常大，最大的收获有两点，其一调查监测、持之以恒的科学研究是保护工作开展的基石；其二广泛的社会参与，尤其是影响到青年人参与到环境保护事业中来，是我们重要的使命。来自世界各地的科学家、保护地管

理者、环保热心人士的视角，给予了我灵感，勺嘴鹬及其关键栖息地保护项目的大框架开始成型。12月在海南举办的东亚-澳大利西亚迁飞区会议上，红树林基金会（MCF）和北京林业大学东亚-澳大利西亚迁飞区候鸟迁徙研究中心（CE-AAF）签署了“拯救勺嘴鹬”项目合作备忘录。随即，我们启动了勺嘴鹬冬季全球同步调查。短短的几个月中，我3次前往雷州半岛，不仅看到了勺嘴鹬，也向科学家和资深调查员学习到了辨识鸻鹬类水鸟的一些知识和技巧。在“成为一名合格水鸟调查员”的路上不断学习成长。

受EAAF迁飞区勺嘴鹬特别行动小组主席Evgeny Syroyechkovsky和全球协调员Christoph Zöckler邀请，我于2019年7月考察了俄罗斯远东，这里是生物多样性最丰富的的地区之一，勺嘴鹬等迁徙候鸟在这里繁殖。棕熊以洄游鱼为食，抹香鲸、海象等大型海洋哺乳动物近在咫尺，北极狐、赤狐在这里游荡，它们有时以鱼为生，有时偷取鸟蛋，还有面临繁殖困境的三趾鸥。

最令人兴奋的是拜访“梅村”Meinypil’gyno。这里是勺嘴鹬特别行动小组在繁殖地的基地，著名的“偷蛋计划”就在这里实施。自2003年俄罗斯和德国科学家踏上这块土地寻找勺嘴鹬繁殖地的第一次远征开始，这么多年科学家们一直在这里从事着勺嘴鹬人工繁殖等科学研究工作，“偷蛋计划”实施10年成功繁殖了160多只勺嘴鹬，这对维护勺嘴鹬种群数量起到重要作用。在梅村我参观了勺嘴鹬人工繁殖实验室，听科学家介绍了勺嘴鹬的人工繁殖过程，湿度、温度每一项都需要精准把握。参观了勺嘴鹬野放基地，了解到在繁殖地环志的第一只勺嘴鹬01号小勺的巢穴就在附近，遗憾的是01号勺嘴鹬已经去世，不知道它的后代们是否每年还会回到这里。今年科学家们在梅村找到11个勺嘴鹬的野外巢穴，我有幸在科学家的带领下，观察了其中2个地点。在茫茫极地苔原地带，只有14CM的勺嘴鹬简直小到可以忽略不计，勺嘴鹬爸爸（据说勺嘴鹬爸爸承担繁殖工作多些）一会儿跑去觅食，一会儿回来孵蛋，如此顽强、鲜活的生命坚守，令人感动。

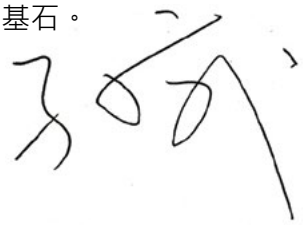
在楚科奇，当地媒体了解到了我经历，好奇于我为什么要做水鸟保护？怎么看待将来的濒危物种保护？我想大家共同的参与并采取积极行动是最好的答案。

勺嘴鹬是全球濒危物种，IUCN红色名录标识“CR”等级，是鸟界的“大熊猫”。这种萌趣的小鸟在俄罗斯楚科奇繁殖，飞越5000公里到中国江苏沿海停歇和换羽，在中国华南和东南亚越冬，迁徙途经东亚-澳大利西亚迁飞区12个国家，这么遥远的路途充满危机和挑战，所以勺嘴鹬的迁徙和保护也受到迁飞区各国的高度关注。目前，来自于俄罗斯、德国、英国、中国、印度、美国、孟加拉、缅甸、越南••••••各国的科学家、鸟类爱好者、政府都已经参与到了勺嘴鹬的调查、监测、研究中，即便如此，我们对勺嘴鹬的了解还是知之甚少：它们到底还剩下多少只？他们喜欢什么样的滩涂湿地？他们喜欢吃什么食物？••••••

习总书记反复强调“绿水青山就是金山银山”。提升生态文明建设，绿色发展，达到人与自然和谐共生，建设美丽中国。中国是大国，是12个迁徙途经中最重要的国家之一，有责任在环境治理领域尽到应有的努力。我们可以看到，中央政府以及保护地当地政府的努力，使得中国黄（渤）海候鸟栖息地（第一期）获批入选《世界遗产名录》。我们这样的民间环保组织，环保公益人，也感受到重责在肩。充分发挥我们的长处，动员社会参与到保护事业中来。以中国2018年勺嘴鹬冬季调查为例，参与者来自于保护地、科研单位、NGO、环保爱心人士、企业，这代表这中国社会公民意识的觉醒，全社会对保护的认知提升。保护不再只是政府的事。公益组织做的是基于科学事实，采用公开透明、更有效率的方式，拉近人与自然的联系。公众意愿的提升使得我们关注的事成为可能。

梅村的科学家告诉我，2003年这里最高发现过80巢勺嘴鹬，今年只发现了11巢，我们知道勺嘴鹬在俄罗斯远东繁殖，但仍有大量的繁殖地未知。全球气候变暖，寒冷的苔原景观发生了变化，勺嘴鹬是不是迁徙到更北的地方进行繁殖？勺嘴鹬的未来仍然有待探索。

保护学家们常说“Think globally，act locally”。俄罗斯之行是我保护事业上重要的里程碑。国际合作交流可以推动我们从全球化的视角考虑问题，从自然出发寻找气候变化的长期解决方案；脚踏实地，深耕本地，夯实保护一线工作，这也是是自然保护系统化变革的基石。



The breeding season of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka in summer 2019

Pavel Tomkovich and Evgeny Syroechkovskiy on behalf of BirdsRussia Meinypil'gyno-Team 2019

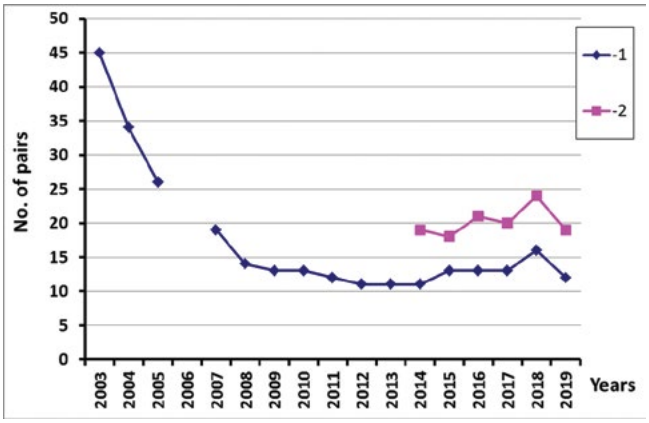
A pair just after arriving at Meinypil'gyno *all photos Pavel Tomkovich*

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SbS) is not a species, which can be easily found on its breeding grounds because birds are well merging with the colours of the tundra, are not very vocal, and low in density of pairs spread over their mosaic habitat solitarily or in few neighboring pairs. Nevertheless, knowledge of sounds produced by SbS, their preferable types of habitat and areas of former breeding of birds, which are rather sight faithful, helps to find pairs and later their nests and broods. With an accumulated knowledge over the years and once again having a large international team of helpers we think that we were able to reveal all or almost all SbS breeding pairs at the main monitoring area around Meinypil'gyno Village, Southern Chukotka. However, it is less so in distant areas, which we visited only occasionally.

The snow situation in spring and the weather during the season 2019 in the study area were rather favorable for breeding of most shorebirds including SbS. Unlike the previous year when first SbS were recorded unusually late, on 6 June, this year calls of migrants were heard on 30 May and first local birds were seen on 1 June. Accordingly, breeding started also early with first chicks hatched in captivity (the head-starting programme) on 1 July, the earliest record.

Among highlights of the year was the return and successful breeding of male 'Lime 07', who was a 'star' of 2018 by carrying a satellite tag the whole way from Chukotka to its wintering grounds and thus adding to our knowledge with unique information about new moulting (North Korea) and wintering (Sumatra, Indonesia) areas of the species (see also Newsletter No 19). It is worth mentioning that in summer 2019 four head-started chicks from the first clutch of this particular male were raised and released and four additional chicks from his replacement clutch were banded. In 2018 we were proud to record in the area covered by regular monitoring a notable increase in the local breeding population of SbS from 13 to 16 pairs. But in 2019, the main surprise and frustration for everybody was that only 12 SBS pairs

Male Lime Green 07, the "satellite star" from 2018 returned in 2019, 21 July 2019, Meinypil'gyno



SBS population estimates in the monitoring area (1) and in the whole surveyed area near Meinypil'gyno (2) in 2003–2019

were breeding in the monitoring area. In spite of the recruitment into the population of several new unmarked birds, more than in previous years old birds were not recorded (return rate: 61%; n=28 in 2019 vs. 64–76% in 2015–2018). For example both birds banded abroad (in South Korea and China) breeding in Southern Chukotka in 2018 were missing in 2019. Moreover, recruitment of new birds that were marked locally as chicks (both wild and head-started ones) turned out to be negligible. Only three such recruits were recorded with one yearling being a non-breeder, one solitary territorial male and one breeding female. During irregular trips to distant areas, especially with a boat to the area 22–26 km south-west of the village, in June and July 7–8 pairs were found which is quite similar with the numbers in 2016–2018. Thus, the total SbS population in the vicinity of Meinypil'gyno was estimated at 19–20 pairs in 2019 (Figure).

We have no clear understanding what has happened and changed the situation in the population, but there are two lines of evidence that this situation of 2019 can be unique in terms of possibility that not all alive birds were able to return north for breeding. First, we also had smaller numbers of breeding shorebirds of several other species – the Pacific Golden Plover, both tattlers, Red-necked Phalarope, Ringed Plover and Red-necked Stint. Second, we got information from our Chinese colleagues that two SbS females ('Lime 05' and 'Lime 34') not observed this year in Chukotka are alive and were seen in Tiaozini, Jiangsu Province in late August. Hopefully some other of 'our' birds are also still alive and will come back to their regular breeding area next summer.

However, a different scenario also might have happened. Typically, SbS males are site faithful to their breeding territories from year to year, while females are less so. As an extreme case we documented a movement of one adult female ('lime 22') for 27.6 km for breeding with a different male in 2018 and then her return back to the former territory in 2019. Therefore it cannot be excluded that the two mentioned females missing in the monitoring area simply moved away for breeding somewhere else, maybe just some kilometers away. Thus, to learn about reasons of the population decline in 2019 it is left to wait and see who will be back for breeding in summer 2020.

As in previous years we were banding and flagging SbS. In 2019, we flagged 23 head-started chicks that were released into wild on 25 July and were making attempts to flag as many as possible chicks hatched in nature. As a result 26 wild chicks were marked both in the monitoring area and outside; this number is slightly less than in 2016 and 2018, but more than in other recent years. The number of newly marked adults (n=7) is not large, but it does not differ significantly from previous numbers.

In 2019 we also recorded a slight increase in the predation rate of SbS nests. Not taking into account nests where eggs were collected for head-starting, 12 SbS nests (including 8 replacement clutches) were under our observation. Chicks hatched only in 5 of these nests (42%), less than in 2013–2018 (50–67%). This result once again shows the importance of head-starting for the increase of recruitment in the local SbS population. We do not know specific predators who took the eggs of SbS, but the Common Raven and Ground Squirrel were the main predators this year recorded by automatic nest cameras set up near nests of other shorebirds. We also had our general impression that Common Ravens were notably more abundant this year in the area. The population of Tundra Voles was increasing during this summer, which gives hope that predators will use these rodents as their main food next year, thus partly releasing SbS nests from pressure of predators.

We are proud with what we achieved in 2019, but this feeling is a little spoiled by the fact that we found less nests than usual. We hope next year SBS numbers in Meino would rise again and looking forward to work on this together with our traditional and new partners.

Male M4, back in Meinypil'gyno, 13 June 2019

Summer 2019 in Chukotka

Guy Anderson, RSPB

In June and early July 2019, I was fortunate enough to use a sabbatical opportunity from RSPB to join the Spoon-billed Sandpiper survey and headstarting expedition to Meinypil'gyno in Chukotka, led and coordinated by Birds Russia. Having previously been involved with surveying, flagging and satellite tagging in China and Myanmar, I was keen to follow these captivating and enigmatic little birds to their remote northern breeding areas. I was familiar with Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the tropical heat of Myanmar, and warm humid coast of Jiangsu. Arriving in Chukotka in early June, when biting winds still swept over patchy snow and frozen lakes, made me realise that by far the coldest conditions these birds face are on their summer breeding grounds, potentially 30-40° C colder than their 'wintering' areas.

My job was to help the team find Spoon-billed Sandpipers territories, identify individually marked birds and find nests. None of this is very easy. On arrival back on the breeding grounds in late May or early June, birds display for a few days only before egg laying starts, and then they become much quieter. They have so little time to lay eggs in order to successfully fledge young in the short arctic summer. No more than a 3 week window of opportunity. So they have to get on with it. Locating territories and then finding nests early is also essential for the headstarting project at Meinypil'gyno. The sooner eggs can be collected, the more chance the adults have of relaying a replacement clutch and rearing their own young – maximising the productivity of these birds. Finding replacement nests is also important – it allows further opportunities for Pavel Tomkovich to catch and flag any unmarked adults, and to flag any resulting wild-reared chicks. Spoon-billed Sandpipers flagged at Meinypil'gyno have been essential in understanding individual patterns of site use along the flyway, estimating global population size by mark-recapture methods (Clark et al 2018), and have helped estimate local populations at key migration staging site in China (Chang et al 2019).

Guy and Chris searching for Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the tundra near Meinypil'gyno, June 2019 *Julia Darkova*

So, much time was spent searching large areas of tundra, frequently with little reward at the end of the day. But this just made the feeling of elation and success even greater when birds were located, or especially when a nest was found. I was lucky enough to spend most of my field time with Chris Kelly, who was spending his third summer volunteering on Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the Arctic. Chris is a fantastic field companion and mentor for an arctic novice like me. He has extremely keen eyes and ears, and that sixth sense of knowing just where to look to find that elusive pair of birds, or to search for that well-hidden nest. His drive to understand the ecology and behaviour of Spoon-billed Sandpipers on their breeding grounds is remarkable and I learnt much from him.

Before visiting Meinypil'gyno, I had not appreciated the low density at which Spoon-billed Sandpipers occurred in this landscape. Territories found were usually in the same areas as last year, but with large tracts of unoccupied, but apparently

Spoon-billed Sandpiper 'Lime 32', fluffed-up and well insulated on a cold day, taken against a snow-field background on his territory in early June 2019 *Guy Anderson (RSPB)*

Female 'Lime 23'; one of the more confiding adult Spoon-billed Sandpipers breeding near Meinypil'gyno, on a warmer day in early July 2019. In contrast, her mate was one of the most secretive birds we found *Guy Anderson (RSPB)*

suitable, tundra habitat in between. This certainly suggests that the availability of suitable breeding habitat is not what is limiting this population currently. That may not always be the case; the arctic is warming fast due to global climate change and the regular members of the expedition team were noting changes around Meinypil'gyno including increased shrub height and cover. This is not what Spoon-billed Sandpipers require - they need low open tundra vegetation with nearby water, for nesting and chick rearing.

The fishing village of Meinypil'gyno has been the hub of research and conservation activity for Spoon-billed Sandpipers on their breeding grounds since 2001. The village provides great help and support to the expedition team; vehicles, facilities and of course easy access to the birds breeding on the surrounding tundra. Without the village being there, accessing the site would be much, much harder and the local breeding spoonies would probably have never been discovered in the first place. This was made clear to me when we were discussing the possibility of visiting Okeanskoe, a site further west along the Chukotka coast, where a good number of Spoon-billed Sandpiper territories had been found in previous years. The difficulties in accessing areas away from human settlement can be huge. Great variation from year to year in snow cover, flooding and weather makes reliably getting anywhere far from habitation unpredictable and/or dangerous. One attempt to reach Okeanskoe by vehicle was unsuccessful due to the persistence of ice and snow fields along the 'road'. A survey visit there to estimate territory numbers, and identify any marked individuals present, will have to wait yet for another year, and might be best considered as separate expedition, with its own logistics and organisation.

The difficulty that we, and all other teams looking for breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers elsewhere, faced this year does suggest that future satellite tagging of birds on spring migration north might be the only feasible way to identify areas to conduct ground searches. For sure there must be significant numbers of birds breeding away from Meinypil'gyno, in locations as yet unknown. Less than 20 breeding pairs were found at Meinypil'gyno this year. The estimated global population is an order of magnitude larger than this. So where are the rest? Cold searching for these, even in areas that look like they might be

suitable from remote sensing based habitat models, seems like an extraordinarily difficult and time-consuming task. To put it flippantly, the tundra is very, very big, and Spoon-billed Sandpipers are very small. Tracking technology needs to miniaturise further, but we expect that in a year or so, satellite tags that are small and light enough to be acceptable for deploying on northwards migrating Spoon-billed Sandpipers in spring – probably the time of year when they are most energetically-challenged will become available. It is probably not as urgent to locate more breeding areas of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, than it is to find all their main migration and wintering sites. The latter are known to frequently face threat to the birds from habitat loss, and/or direct mortality through hunting. If most other breeding sites are as remote as those at Meinypil'gyno, it seems unlikely that direct habitat change or mortality caused by humans is a major threat there. However, without knowledge of where the other breeding sites are, this is impossible to confirm or refute.

The reward for several days hard work: finding a very small, but very special, nest in a very big landscape. Spoon-billed Sandpiper nest, near Meinypil'gyno, June 2019 *Guy Anderson (RSPB)*

Until then, Meinypil'gyno still provides the only reliable access to breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers, and the benefits of the annual expedition there are numerous: headstarting, population monitoring, individual marking, potential for more satellite tagging, and demonstrable, visible evidence of the importance of Chukotka for this species. The Meinypil'gyno expedition raises awareness of Spoon-billed Sandpipers amongst decision makers in Chukotka and elsewhere in Russia, and provides the world's only ecotourism opportunity to see these birds during the breeding season. I feel very privileged to have been able to visit for a few weeks, and to have made a small contribution to the team's work this season.

Thanks to all the expedition team this year for help and companionship, and especially to Birds-Russia and WWT for handling all the complex logistics and planning – that is no small task.

References

Chang, Q., G.Q.A. Anderson, K. Brides, J.A. Clark, N.A. Clark, R. Hearn, K. Leung, D.S. Melville, E. Weston, J. Weston & R.E. Green. (2019). A high proportion of the world population of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper occurs at Tiaozini, China, during the post-breeding moult. Wader Study 126: 35-42.

Clark, N.A., Anderson, G.Q.A., Li, J., Syroechkovskiy, E.E., Tomkovich, P.S., Zöckler, C., Lee, R. & Green, R.E. (2018) First formal estimate of the world population of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea*. Oryx, 52, 137-146.

For the ninth time with Heritage Expeditions to the breeding grounds in 2019

Christoph Zöckler, Manfred-Hermsen Stiftung

The spectacular coast of Chukotka is still hiding some of the secretive breeding pairs of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and alluring. Once again the SBS TF was invited to join Heritage Expeditions to the coast of Kamchatka and Chukotka in search for remote sites that have the potential for breeding Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This year the cruise was led by Aaron Russ, one of the two owners of the New Zealand cruise company. Joining us this year were also Lili Sun of the Mangrove Conservation Fund, Shenzhen and Jing Li our long term partner of SBS in China.

In previous years we stopped and searched at many different suitable places along the Koryak coast and very few promising sites are left. One of those sites was Geka Bay, a place not too far from Korf, where nesting was found as recently as in the 1990s. In 2019 Heritage Expeditions visited this place in late June. The habitat was no longer suitable and appeared to be widely over-grown by pine bushes and a too dense vegetation; a response to a warming Arctic and no Spoon-billed Sandpiper was discovered. However, Dunlin and even more promising good numbers of Far-Eastern Curlew were breeding here.

Two more site along the Koryak coast were visited, but none showed any sign of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Other promising lagoons proofed to be inaccessible due to a growing bar at the entrance and increasing waves.

Frustrating as it was, Heritage clients were rewar-

Coast of Chukotka in the Nature Park "Land of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper" *C. Zöckler*

Coastal tundra in Geka Bay – gradually overgrown by pine bushes and denser vegetation *C. Zöckler*

Surveying Anana Bay at the Koryak Coast with Heritage late June 2019 *C. Zöckler*

Evgeny Syroechkovskiy showing Lili Sun (right) and Jing Li (centre) their first breeding Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Meinypilgyno *C. Zöckler*

ded with brilliant views of breeding Spoonies in Meinypilgyno, the capitol of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

For the first time the SBS Task Force was invited in the summer 2019 to also join the cruise that followed after Meinypylgino, from Anadyr further north along the northern coast of Chukotka. There are potentially more breeding sites and to visit these places in mid July became only possible with the ice-breaker *Kapitan Khlebnikov* but the huge ship also restricted our search along the North Coast of the Chukchi Peninsula.

On 11 July we briefly stopped at Belyaka Spit, the famous former capitol of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, where Pavel Tomkovich conducted his first research on the species back in 1987 and 1988 (see also a note from the archives on page 35). Today this area has been regularly guarded by Warden Alexei Dondua (see also News Bull 19). Alexei greeted us and showed us around but he also revealed that there was no sign of SBS this year. There is still hope that the bird that eluded him in 2018 but was seen in China in the same autumn may still be hiding somewhere on the vast spit. But there was no sign of its former glory anymore and all birds seemed to have declined as Alexei told us. He also pointed out to very dry conditions and that many ducks and other waterbirds did not breed at all this year.

Overall, the number of waders in general, including Spoon-billed Sandpiper have declined in 2019. Maybe climate change is taken a larger toll already than earlier anticipated. Future surveys will need to pay attention to overgrown sites in the south and dryer tundra sites in the north.

We like to thank Aaron and Nathan Russ and Heritage Expedition for their continuing and generous support of our SBS TF.

Christoph and Alexei at Belyaka Spit 2019 *Amelia Tockston*

Search for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Penzhina Bay, Kamchatka, preliminary report

Yuri N. Gerasimov & Andrey V. Gorovenko

Background

Apparently, the breeding sites of more than half of the world population of Spoon-billed Sandpipers maybe unknown. Also, the knowledge of migration stop-over sites between the Yellow Sea and the known breeding grounds in Chukotka is extremely limited. In the summer 2017, a satellite tracked Spoon-billed Sandpiper (caught and tagged on its spring staging ground on the Chinese Yellow Sea coast) spent time in 4 different areas around the coast of Penzhina Bay. The majority of these areas have been previously identified as possible breeding locations for Spoon-billed Sandpipers, based on remote sensing data of similar habitats with the known breeding sites in Chukotka. Therefore the areas visited by the satellite tracked individual, and areas of similar habitat nearby are of high priority for searching potential new breeding sites of Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Locating key sites used by Spoon-billed Sandpipers, and assessing their conservation status are of high priority for the conservation of this species.

The discovery of any new breeding or staging sites for Spoon-billed Sandpipers would help to improve the knowledge about the population size, determine new sites important for this species and fill an important gap in conservation work of the flyway.

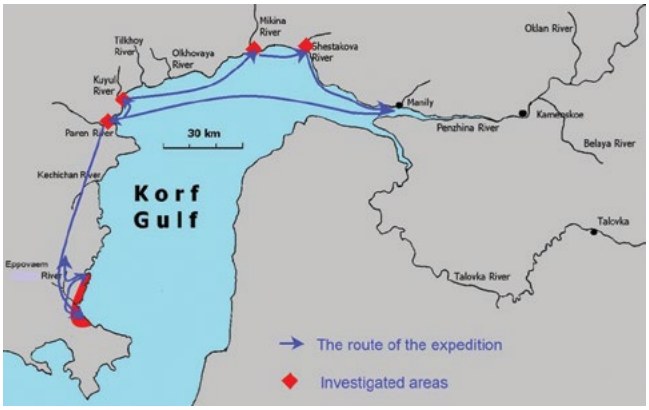
Aims of the project

The main aim of the project was to search for potential breeding/stopover areas for Spoon-billed Sandpiper around Penzhina Bay following areas identified by satellite tracking in summer 2017 and earlier Landsat imagery evaluation.

The coasts of Penzhina Gulf has never been studied by ornithologists except for investigations of the southward wader migration carried out by Yuri Gerasimov in 2002 & 2003 with the support of Australian Department of Environment and Heritage. Consequently, the additional purpose of the expedition was to study the distribution and abundance of both waders and all other bird species potentially breeding in the area.

Studied area and methods

The coast of Penzhina Gulf are one of the most hard-to-reach areas of Russian Far East. There is only one small town in this area, called Manily with regular transport connections; one helicopter flight per week from Korf Town. The only way to reach another village on the Northwest coast is by boat in summer (120 km) or by snowmobile in the snowy season (160 km). There are no settlements in the most remote of the surveyed areas – about 100 km to the south from the Paren Village and 220 km to southwest from the Manily Town (see map).



The route of the expedition and studied areas on the coasts of Penzhina Gulf

Penzhina Bay has the third highest tidal range in the world (14 m is maximum and 9 m on average) and it is an extremely dangerous place to operate. The survey team would like to cover many sites but not risking their life. It would also be weather dependent how much could covered.

In summer of 2017 preliminary estimation of possibility and cost of such research was made with discussion with people living in Manily Town. Using Manily as a base in the only comparatively cheap way to access and investigate coasts of Penzhina Gulf – rent of two boats with drivers (one





From top to bottom: field camp on the sea coast near Elistratova Peninsula, field camp near Aipina Gulf, field camp in the mouth of Shestakova River

Sites with very suitable habitats for nesting of Spoon-billed Sandpipers. From top to bottom: near mouth of Eppovaem River, near mouth of Kuyul River, Mikina River Mouth

boat for two researchers and one for fuel, equipment and as a back-up). But in the spring of 2018, these people refused to drive us. We were not able to find any other option for this trip in a short time. So we moved our research to next year.

In summer of 2018 we found another opportunity to explore the coast of Penzhina Gulf with the help of people from the Paren Village. It was decided that we would explore the Northern part of the Bay between the town and the village using a boat. And for the survey of the most remote area, we used all-terrain vehicle.

We arrived to Tilichiki Town (Korf airport) by regular flight on plan from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy on June 3. Then we arrive from Korf Town to Manily by regular flight on helicopter on June 5. Next day June 6 we had the boat trip to Paren Village (120 km).

From June 7 until June 12 June we visited the South by all-terrain vehicle together with 3 local guides from Paren Village. The total length of this part of our route was 250 km. First we surveyed sea coast and adjacent areas between mountains of Elistratov Peninsula and mouth of Eppovaem River. Then we moved to North and surveyed area near Aipina Bay.

On June 13–18 we studied the area nearby Paren Village, including trips by boat on June 15–18. The duration of exploring this area was longer than we had planned as we were waiting for favorable weather for the trip by sea.

On June 19–24 we surveyed the sea coast between Paren Village and Manily Town. It included 1–2 night stops in the mouth of Kuyul River, mouth of Mikina River, mouth of Shestakova River and some hour stops in the mouth of Tylkhoy River and mouth of Olkhovaya River. On June 24–25 we made some additional studies around Manily Town and finished on 26 June (see also map).

During our searches we paid special attention to places appropriate for Spoon-billed Sandpiper nesting. Extensive surveys on foot took place in each area. The coast of Penzhina Gulf was investigated first time by ornithologist, paying attention to all bird species. We made transect counts with total length of 217 km in different habitats.

Nest of Dunlin, Kuyul River, 19 June 2019

Results

Unfortunately we did not find any evidence of nesting of Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the coasts of Penzhina Gulf. We found several sites with very suitable habitats for nesting of Spoon-billed Sandpipers:

1) To the right of the Eppovaem River mouth;
2) To the right of the Kutul River mouth;
3) To the left of Milina River mouth.

However, these sites with suitable Spoon-billed Sandpiper habitats are very small compared with the total length of the coast of about 250 kilometers. The western coast of Penzhina Bay is mostly rocky and the northern coast is occupied by either rocky areas or hummocky tundra, which is not suitable for nesting of Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

Other wader species we found nesting in studied area were Eurasian Oystercatcher, Pacific Golden Plover, Ringed Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Ruff, Gray-tailed Tattler, Dunlin, Long-toed Stint, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank and Common Snipe.

We like to thank Karl Kaus Foundation in Germany for financing this survey and a small grant of RSPB/Bird Fair.

Conservation breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers at WWT Slimbridge

Baz Hughes

In response to the dramatic population decline observed in the 2000s, a conservation breeding programme began in 2011 to safeguard the species in captivity while threats in the wild were addressed. And, if the worst happened and the wild population was lost, a captive population could provide a source of birds for reintroduction into the wild.

Before the conservation breeding programme began, population modelling was used to assess the effect of taking eggs on the wild population. Using the estimated population size at the time and information available on adult survival, productivity and recruitment, the models indicated that any effect would be negligible.

The captive population was established in 2011 and 2012 from eggs collected from pairs breeding around Meinypil'gyno village in Chukotka, Russia. The flock is housed in specially-designed biosecure aviaries at WWT Slimbridge in Gloucestershire, UK.

In 2014, the birds displayed breeding behaviours for the first time. In 2015, these behaviours escalated with many nest scrapes constructed and females responding to the displays of the males. In 2016, two pairs laid seven eggs and two chicks hatched, but both died within days. In 2017, despite territorial singing and nest scraping, no eggs were laid probably because both 2016 breeding males died just before the breeding season.

In 2018, we "time shifted" the birds to avoid the hot summer temperatures we had previously experienced in the breeding aviaries (often exceeding 30°C from early May). We did this by shortening the birds' winter, with photoperiod increasing in mid-October instead of mid-December (i.e. the date of the winter solstice), in the hope birds would be ready to egg-lay in April. As predicted, the birds acquired their breeding plumage

Spoonie eggs being incubated at WWT Slimbridge, May 2019
Jodie Clements, WWT

Newly hatched chick, Slimbridge, May 2019
Jodie Clements, WWT

two months earlier than would wild birds, two clutches were laid and one chick was successfully reared to fledging, but it unfortunately died of a freak "night fight" injury.

In 2019, we again brought forward the ‚breeding season' by eight weeks, successfully maintaining 'low' breeding aviary temperatures (~10-20°C) from the beginning of April onwards when seven pairs were transferred to breeding aviaries. Lower

than ambient temperatures were achieved with the hire of a 'large space air conditioner' which was positioned in the corridor between the two rows of breeding aviaries so cooled air could be directed into aviary spaces, and the installation of an overhead cold water (5°C) misting system in seven aviaries.

Three pairs nest scraped from mid-April and one pair laid three eggs beginning on 28 April 2019 – exactly one year to the day that egg-laying started in 2018! All eggs were stored in a chiller set at 13°C until clutch completion, then removed and artificially incubated in an attempt to induce relaying by the female. All three eggs were fertile and, though the male of the pair made new nest-scrapes following first clutch completion, the female did not produce a second clutch. Three chicks hatched on 27 May 2019. One chick died 48 hours post-hatch due to either Klebsiella or E. coli caused yolk sac-related sepsis. Two chicks were reared indoors for the first ten days then transferred to an outdoor enclosure at the Spoon-billed Sandpiper facility. To prevent flying injuries, both chicks were primary feather trimmed at 18 days and then again at 32 days of age. At present they are accommodated in an aviary isolated from the adult flock.

The captive flock now comprises 15 birds (8 males, 5 females and 2 juveniles - one of these is a male but we still don't know the sex of the other bird as two DNA tests have proved inconclusive. Four of the adult birds (all males) are eight years old (i.e. 2011 hatched birds), while nine (four males and five females) are seven years old (i.e. 2012 hatched birds).

We will continue to strive to breed the birds and thus achieve our goal of establishing a sustainable captive breeding population. While things are looking better for Spoon-billed Sandpipers these days than they were ten years ago when we first considered establishing the captive population, with a wild population still numbering less than 300 [possibly only 100-150, ed.] pairs concentrated on a small number of sites during the moulting and wintering periods, at which disasters could happen (e.g. poisoning events, typhoons/tsunamis, disease outbreaks), we must ensure that we have an ark population in case the worst was ever to happen.

For more information on captive breeding at Slimbridge see: https://www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com/category/captive-breeding/

Freshly refurbished breeding aviary with Spoonie pair settling in well at WWT Slimbridge, April 2019 Jodie Clements, WWT

SBS Banding Expedition in South Coast of Jiangsu Province, China, 2019

Qing CHANG, Xuan WANG, Katherine Leong, Nigel Clark, Guy Anderson and Kane Brides

Participants of Wader Banding Expedition at Tiaozini, China's first coastal World Natural Heritage Site Weimin ZOU /JBWS

Previous researches indicated that the coastal areas of south Jiangsu province are critical stopover sites for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, as well as Eastern Curlew, Nordmann's Greenshank, Great Knot and other waders. To monitor wader population and study their migrations, a ten-days wader banding expedition was conducted at Tiaozini, Xiaoyangkou and Dongling between September 26 and October 4, 2019, which were organized by Nanjing Normal University (NNU).

Initially, NNU became involved in SBS work in Jiangsu in 2013 collaborating with surveys of the SBS Task Force and as part of the China-Russia bilateral intergovernmental cooperation. The first official SBS count with involvement of China government was undertaken along the Jiangsu coast in 2016. Now NNU has a well-established and collaborated fieldwork program with many partners like the Jiangsu Academy of Forestry (JAF), Yancheng National Nature Reserve (YNNR), Nantong Museum (NTM), Jiangsu Bird Watching Society (JBWS), and many international organisations, namely the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), British Trust of Ornithology (BTO) and Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT). More than forty people including international and local waterbird experts and volunteers participated this year, some of them have attended this expedition for five years.

Due to a lower tide series compare to last year, and the continuous change in habitats around the sites, many waders roost on the mudflat outside the seawall instead of fish pond where we set mist net last year. At first, the urgent task that need to be solved is to find the high tide roost areas. So the whole team separated into three groups on the first day to survey Tiaozini, Xiaoyangkou and Dongling. After whole day observation, the potential catching sites there were identified. Successful expedition starts from September 27, and 152 waders were caught, including one Nordmann's Greenshank.

Total of 1,778 individuals belong to 30 species were caught this year, including five Spoon-billed Sandpipers. One of them was banded in Siberia (Lime M4), and others were newly ringed at Tiaozini and flagged with yellow 'AH', 'EH', 'JY', and 'KY' respectively. These four new ringed SBS have been fitted with satellite tag to track their following south migration. 'KY' was soon rediscovered and photographed on Tiaozini mudflat a few hours later after the release. It seems everything goes well for 'KY' after tagged (see pic below).

SBS lime M4 caught in Tiaozini (left, K. Brides) and seen this summer in Meinypilgino (right, P. Tomkovich)

The number of SBS we captured this year are quite small (15 individuals were captured in 2018), this does not mean that SBS population were decreased in those areas. We carried out extensive field surveys, to identify individually-marked SBS present, and – at Tiaozini - to determine the ratio of individually marked to unmarked birds present. We will use these data to estimate the number of SBS present at Tiaozini during our fieldwork period. Preliminary indications of lower numbers than 2018 may be related to early departure of some birds for sites further south, as suggested anecdotally by earlier than usual records of birds in south China. Our fieldwork period in 2019 was also three weeks later than in 2018, to maximise the chances of catching adult SBS that had completed their post-breeding moult; a condition of being able to deploy glue-mounted satellite tags. More information will come after this expedition including from color-marked flags, and more accurate number of SBS will be given after the statistical modelling.

We noted the condition of the habitats at the three main study sites and recorded any threats to waterbirds observed. We will engage with the SBS TF and relevant authorities to make management recommendations for SBS and other waterbirds. Availability of high tide roosting sites, spread of invasive *Spartina*, and rapid changes to coastal processes including erosion of mudflats, are key areas of concern.

Besides the SBS and Nordmann's Greenshank, over 650 individuals of 24 wader species were also fitted with engraved legflags (green plain flag over blue flag with white engraving). Oversea sightings of the Jiangsu coast Green/Blue flag combination since 2015 have included Red-necked Stint in Thailand, Myanmar and Australia, Great Knot in India and Australia, Lesser Sand Plover in Australia, Terek Sandpiper in Australia and Peninsular Malaysia, Bar-tailed Godwit in Australia, Curlew Sandpiper in Australia, Ruddy Turnstone in Australia, Kentish Plover in Taiwan, Nordmann's Greenshank in Myanmar and Sanderling in Bali. It is hoped that more information can be gained from resighting of these individuals carrying engraved leg flag.

Five years' cooperation with the SBS Task Force and international organisations, such as the RSPB is a milestone for NNU and we hope more and more groups and individuals could join us to continue the conservation work.

Last but not least, many thanks to all birders and photographers, who have taken the time to read, photograph and report these sightings. Every sighting is valuable and adds to the ever growing database, and will help us to know more about the wader migration and conserve them in the EAAF.

Newly ringed and tagged SBS 'KY' rediscovered on Tiaozini mudflat *Yanqing Chi /JBWS*

A discussion after the last catch between Nigel (left) and Prof. Chang (right) and Guy at the background *ZOU Weimin/JBWS*

Over-summering of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Southern Jiangsu, China in summer 2019

Lin Zhang and Ziyou Yang

Figure 1. Lime J0 *Dongming Li*

Summary of 1st survey

From 15 to 17 June, 2019, five surveyors (Lin Zhang, Ziyou Yang, Jing Li, Wenjie Xue and Larry Chen) participated in the 1st round of over-summering Spoon-billed Sandpiper survey in Dongtai and Rudong County of Jiangsu Province in 2019. Luckily, we completed the survey right before the monsoon season started. We were not disturbed by heavy rain and got quite reasonable results.

The two survey sites, Tiaozini in Dongtai and Dongling in Rudong, had different species diversity (i.e. richness and abundance). There were more small waders at Tiaozini. Eurasian Curlew was dominant at Tiaozini, whereas Far Eastern Curlew was far more abundant at Dongling. The Eurasian Curlews were over-summering individuals undergoing obvious moult, whereas Far Eastern Curlews were post-breeding individuals in southward migration that had not yet shown much sign of moult. 32 and 14 species of waders were recorded at Tiaozini and Dongling respectively. Species recorded only at Tiaozini include Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Asian Dowitcher, Sanderling, Red-necked Stint, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper and Broad-billed Sandpiper.

As in previous years, the main target of this survey, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, was in 2019 recorded at Tiaozini only. The total number of Spoon-billed Sandpiper was at least nine, and they should be individuals that were not going further north to breed this year.

Two Spoon-billed Sandpipers had color flags, both of which were banded on their breeding grounds in Chukotka, Russia. One was lime J0 (Fig. 1). It

Figure 2. Nordmann's Greenshank in 1st-summer plumage
Lin Zhang

Figure 3. Nordmann's Greenshank with gaps in wings
Lin Zhang

was raised by its parents last summer. The other one had a white flag, however we failed to read the engraving on the flag so we could not tell its age.

Unlike previous years, none of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper this year was in full breeding plumage, indicating that they were still young birds. Five had 40-50% breeding plumage (including lime J0), three had 70% (including the individual with white flag), and one had at most 30% breeding plumage.

2nd survey

Lin Zhang conducted the 2nd round of over-summering survey on July 3rd. During this survey, he did not find more individuals of Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Tiaozini. Nevertheless, he did notice that some Nordmann's Greenshanks and Far Eastern Curlews had commenced primary moult at Tiaozini.

Discussion

The total number of over-summering Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Tiaozini and Dongling in 2019 was at least nine, all of which were recorded on the Tiaozini mudflat. This number accounts for more than 1% of its global population, building on previous evidence to show that in addition to an important staging site, Tiaozini is also a critical over-summering ground for Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The mudflat serves as habitat for different age groups of the species for close to 7 months per year (end of March to end of May for spring migration, mid-June to mid-July for over-summering, mid-July to mid-November for autumn migration). The banded Spoon-billed Sandpiper that we were able to identify during this survey was a second-calendar year individual.

This year's finding is very similar to that last year. On June 18th, 2018, eight surveyors recorded ten Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the Tiaozini mudflat, and the banded individual (Yellow YE) recorded

was also a second-calendar year born the year before.

The observation that no additional Spoon-billed Sandpiper was found at Tiaozini in the 2nd round of survey was unexpected. During the 1st survey, some non-breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers might still be hanging around at sites further north. We expected them to have reached Tiaozini in early July and added into the existing over-summering population.

The reason for the unexpected result is probably that manpower was limited for the 2nd survey. Our suggestion is to expand both the temporal and spatial scales of future over-summering surveys. For example, considering the importance of Tiaozini and how we consistently record Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Dongling during spring and autumn, both sites deserve at least 2 rounds of over-summering survey. Surveyors at both sites should split into multiple groups to investigate a greater area across the mudflat. We could even include Xiaoyangkou into the future over-summering surveys, so that we can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of over-summering shorebirds along the Rudong-Dongtai coast. This in turn will contribute to better understanding of Spoon-billed Sandpiper's migration strategy and more effective conservation of this critically endangered shorebird.

We like to thank NABU for providing funding for the survey.

Appendix. Banded waterbirds recorded at Tiaozini and Dongling during the 2019 over-summering survey

Species	**Flag**	**Date**	**Location**	**Comment**
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	Lime J0 on right tibia	June 15th	Tiaozini	
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	White engraved flag on right tibia	June 15th	Tiaozini	Flag not read
Great Knot	Black over yellow on left tibia	June 15th	Tiaozini	Banded in Kamchatka
Ruddy Turnstone	Green over blue on right tibia, blue angled flag on left tibia	June 16th	Tiaozini	Banded in Rudong, Jiangsu
Bar-tailed Godwit	Black over white on right tibia, blue angled flag on left tibia	June 16th	Tiaozini	Banded in Chongming, Shanghai

Eating the whole Crab in three Minutes

Shaoliang Zhou

Photographer Shaoliang Zhou said it took only three minutes for this lucky Spoonie to eat the whole crab.
Macrophthalmus japonicus, *Tiaozini mudflats, Dongtai, Jiangsu Province, 13 September 2019*

Nan Thar Island will be part of the Marine Protected Area

Ren Naung Soe & Pyae Phyo Aung

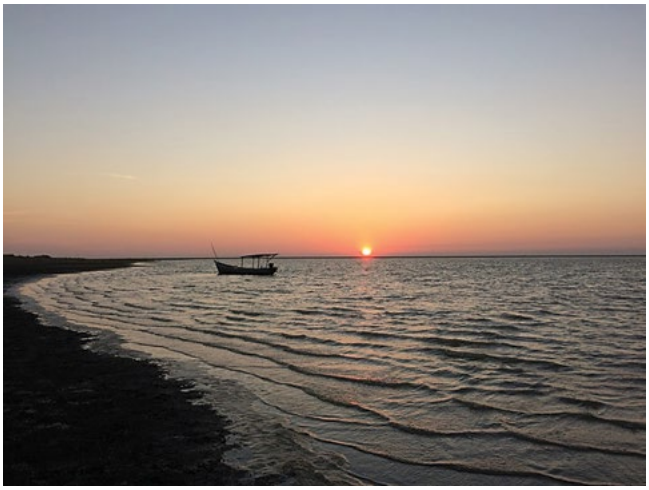
There is some fantastic news from Nanthar Island in Rakhine State. It is the second most important wintering site for Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Myanmar located at Rakhine in Western Myanmar. The Union Government announced it will designate the area as a Marine National Park. In the near future Nanthar Island and Mayyu Estuary will be the first Protected Area, Ramsar site and Marine National Park for saving the globally threatened Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, sea turtles and mangrove habitats and their sustainable use by local people.

Since 2008, ArcCona, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, BANCA and RBANCA have been continuously working to date for the protection. Nanthar Island is one of the important conservation sites for the globally threatened species and many other birds as well as Marine turtles.

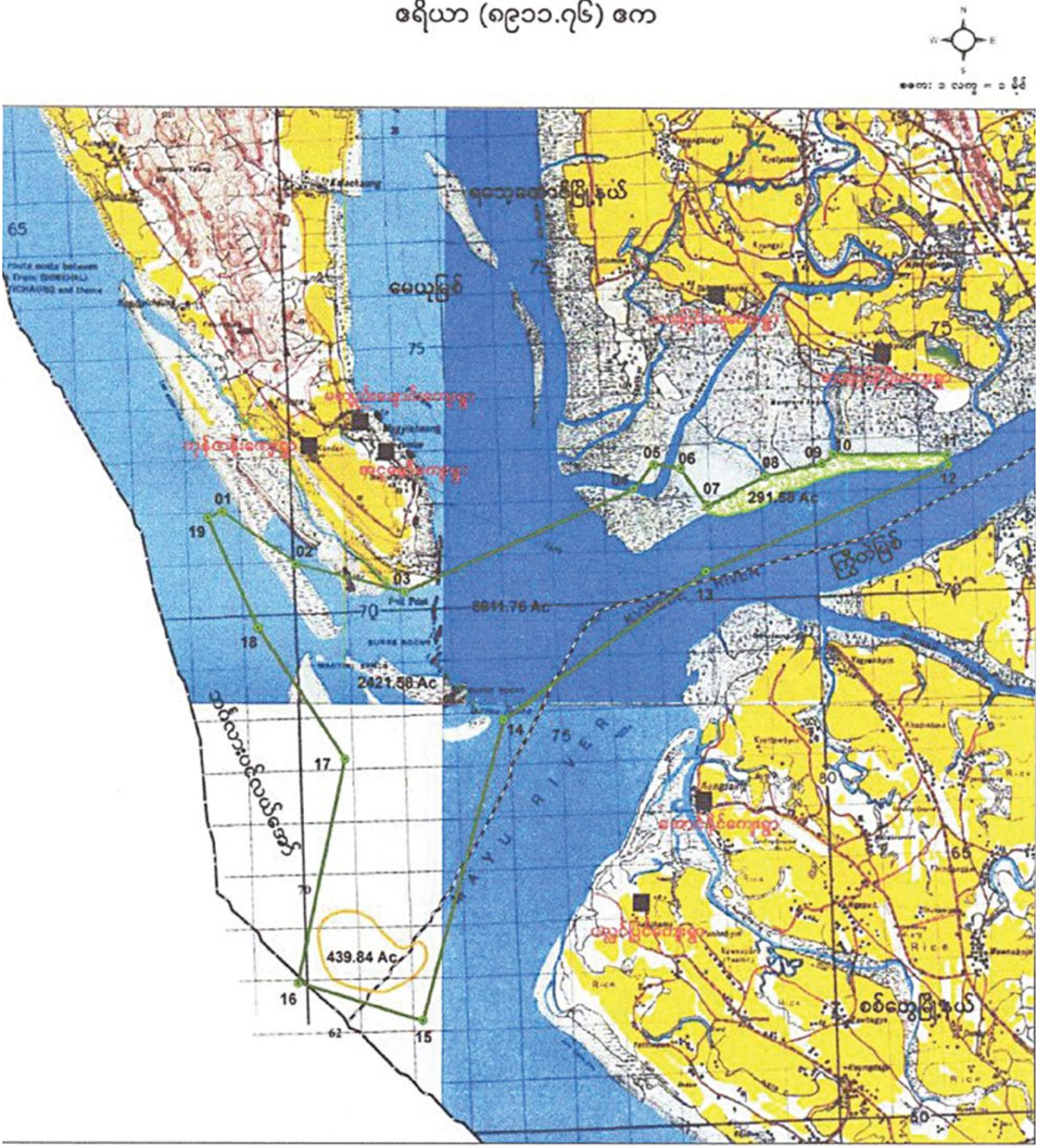
The Union of Myanmar became a member of Ramsar in 2002 and EAAFP in 2014 and designated five EAAFP Flyway Network Sites in Myanmar. Nanthar Island and Mayyu Estuary was designated as EFN site MOP 10 in 2018. Myanmar has a long coastal shore line and is rich in marine biodiversity including several outstanding habitats for migratory water bird species and other coastal biodiversity. Details are shown in the Myanmar Coastal Wetland Directory https://lighthouse-foundation.org/Binaries/Binary1139/Myanmar-Wetlands-web.pdf.

The international communities, local and national agencies working with high level government bodies of the Myanmar Government in the Coastal Natural Resources Management Committee led by Vice President and with the National Wetlands Committee led by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources Environmental Conservation (MONREC) to enhance coastal and wetlands conservation in Myanmar to fulfill the commitment of CBD and Ramsar Convention. Rakhine State Government, parliament members, especially forest department and general administrative department are willing to support the designation of Nanthar Island as a Marine Protected Area (MPA) and Ramsar Site. BANCA and RBANCA will continue to work closely with the Forest Department to achive the full protection and safeguard one of the most important wintering sites in Myanmar for the future!

After many years these efforts have finally become successful. The project has been supported by the Lighthouse Foundation from the very beginning and later also by RSPB and ICFC.



ရခိုင်ပြည်နယ်၊ စစ်တွေခရိုင်၊ စစ်တွေမြို့နယ်နှင့် ရသေ့တောင်မြို့နယ် အဆိုပြုနှံ့သာကျွန်းအကျော်ဝါအမျိုးသားဥယျာဉ် ဧရိယာတည်နေရာပြမြေပုံ ဧရိယာ (၈၉၁၁.၇၆) ဧက



Sheet No. 84 D 11/12/12/16

ရည်ညွှန်းချက်

- ပြည်နယ် နယ်နိမိတ်
- မြို့နယ် နယ်နိမိတ်
- အဆိုပြုသဘာဝထိန်းသိမ်းစရာနယ်ခြေ
- ကျေးရွာ

Updates: critical Spoon-billed Sandpiper habitat in the salt pans of Thailand secured!

Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok[1], Ding Li Yong[2]

Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok

[1] Bird Conservation Society of Thailand
[2] BirdLife International (Asia)

Sitting near the tropical heart of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, continental Southeast Asia holds some of the most important areas of coastal wetlands in the Asia-Pacific region. In winter, the intertidal mudflats, mangroves and other associated wetlands in this region is winter home and/or rest stop to substantial numbers of migrating shorebirds, including three of the EAAF's most threatened, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (CR), Nordmann's Greenshank (EN) and Great Knot (EN). Given that the wintering grounds of these three species converge here in the wetlands of Thailand, together with large congregations of so many other waterbird species, it is clear why Thailand remains a top priority for waterbird conservation in tropical Asia. And of the 14 coastal Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified in Thailand, the Inner Gulf of Thailand is undeniably the most important for migratory waterbirds in the country, with the wetlands of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia on the western side of the Gulf in Phetchaburi Province being among the best studied.

The landscape of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia is made up of a mosaic of man-made salt pans, aquaculture ponds and remnants of mangrove forests, with mudflats fringing the Inner Gulf coast. Here in Phetchaburi as with other Thai provinces abutting the Gulf, salt farming remains an age-old tradition among local communities, dating back to the Ayutthaya period. Aquaculture is another increasing source of livelihood for local people here while shellfish collection takes place on the coastal mudflats. With the loss and degradation of natural wetlands in the Inner Gulf, man-made wetlands such as the salt pans of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia are certainly playing an increasingly important role as roosting sites, and foraging habitat for migratory shorebirds at high tide. Each year, more than 20,000 waterbirds have been counted in Pak Thale-Laem Phak, including the largest concentration of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in

the country (c. 2% of the known, global population) utilise the wetlands here. In addition, a large number of species of conservation interest such as the Great Knot, Nordmann's Greenshank, Asian Dowitcher (NT) and Chinese Egret (VU) occur regularly. Recognising its importance as a significant wintering and passage site for shorebirds at the regional level, it is not difficult to see why Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia has been designated as Flyway Network Site by the Government.

While the conservation value of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia is well realised by the conservation community, the future of these wetlands are by no means guaranteed. Today, traditional salt farming on the pans are perceived by many Thais to be less economically viable compared to other forms of land use such as aquaculture or solar farms, and so is in rapid decline. Intensive aquaculture, meanwhile, is now driving rapid land use conversation throughout the Inner Gulf's coastline, alongside urban expansion as townships continue to grow. In addition, these wetlands are also threatened by water and land pollution from nearby local industries due to poor management practices. Such pollution impact both salt pans, aquaculture ponds and the adjacent mangroves, and contribute to habitat degradation.

The Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) has long recognised the conservation value of Pak Thale-Laem Phak Bia and has been involved in the conservation of the wetlands here for over 10 years. While the bulk of the work has been focused on the regular monitoring of the shorebirds on the wetlands by BCST's staff and network of dedicated volunteers, BCST has also organized activities and events to raise awareness among the local communities and the broader Thai public, including through the annually organised Thai Bird Fair which is now a mainstay of BCST's conservation calendar. In addition to this, BCST's staff has conducted experiments on salt pan management, promoted birdwatching tourism, developed new infrastructure at the site, and engaged the Thai government through various platforms to strengthen the layers of protection in place for the site.

In 2016-2017, BCST began exploring new approaches to conserve Pak Thale's wetlands. Realising that more effective wetland management measures could be put in place if the wetlands are being directly managed, a conversation with colleagues at the Rainforest Trust swiftly grew into more detailed discussions, and then the development of an ambitious proposal to secure funding to acquire 8-10 hectares of the most important areas of salt pans. Despite what seemed to be unsurmountable barriers spanning over two years, especially during negotiations with the private land owners, BCST was finally able to strike a deal to acquire the salt pans through Rainforest Trust's support, and with matched funding support from a highly successful crowd-funding campaign – the campaign succeeded in raising well over 50,000 USD over a period of less than two weeks.

As of 6 September 2019, BCST officially completed the land acquisition process at Pak Thale's salt pans (8 hectares). The site is now being planned for future management by BCST staff as a nature reserve for wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other migratory shorebirds in the long-term. Alongside this, we foresee that the Pak Thale nature reserve will also serve as a future hub for shorebirds and coastal ecosystem research and bird-watching ecotourism.

NB: BCST is still accepting donations and support to its wetland management activities. Further support is expected to support work to manage the land, including landscaping and water management to create suitable habitat, construction of hides and other facilities, and to sustain bird and biodiversity monitoring efforts. To donate, please contact Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok at email: ayuwat@bcst.or.th

In memoriam of Jun Yhang (Kiwi)

Jing Li

Kiwi – his Chinese name is Jun Zhang – worked for SBS in China as a young volunteer since 2013. He has been helping at the awareness raising program for Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation in China as well as participating in lots of Spoon-billed Sandpiper survey work, including the 2013 and 2014 survey as well as the Jiangsu SBS banding expedition in 2016 and 2017; Kiwi was fighting Leukaemia since 2017 and lost his battle on July 19th 2019.

We remember him as one of most passionate volunteers for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China, he was most instrumental in helping to produce short videos of SBS in China's field work, community service and people from all over the world working together, he has translated more than 20 different BTO and Cornell Lab bird ID & birding clips with Chinese subtitles to birders in China, even when he was already under treatment. He was also using his in-hospital time, and wrote a short wechat article about the city owl conservation in Taiwan.

We are badly missing you very much and will remember you, Kiwi, in the name of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Kiwi with Guy Anderson (RSPB) marking waders in Rudong *Jing Li*

From the Archives

all photos Pavel Tomkovich

More than 30 years ago in 1988 Pavel Tomkovich conducted his first research on Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Belyaka Spit, North Coast of the Chukchi Peninsula. He also was the first colour-marking some of the breeding birds. One of them still holds the record of the oldest ever recorded SBS of at least 16 years, when recaptured in 2002.

SBS in Arts

Elena Lappo interviewed Jodie Clements, who took care of SBS in Slimbridge, WWT (UK) and Meinypilgyno (Chukotka, Russia) and has unique chances to make some drawing of so many different SBS both in captive breeding population and in wild Chukotka areas.

EL Please, tell a few words about yourself and how you started drawing
JC My Name is Jodie Clements. I work for the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust in Slimbridge, U.K., caring for the captive population of Spoon-billed Sandpipers. I've been an aviculturalist/ornithologist of some description as far back as I can remember, and an 'artist' for some time longer. To be able to practice both in a meaningful way is a real privilege!

How did you first hear about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
It must have been in 2011. I remember my dad showing me an article in the newspaper titled something similar to 'Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpipers migrate to WWT Slimbridge, UK.' I think we all wondered how they got there.

Where did you see your first Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
At WWT Slimbridge. I can still picture myself saying, 'I didn't know they were THAT small!'. Now I've been here a while, it seems I'm not the only one who had that initial thought.

When did you draw your first Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
In my first week on the job as a caretaker to the captive Spoonies. During the daily observations I took my sketch book and pencil with me. Not and easy feat with how much they dash around!

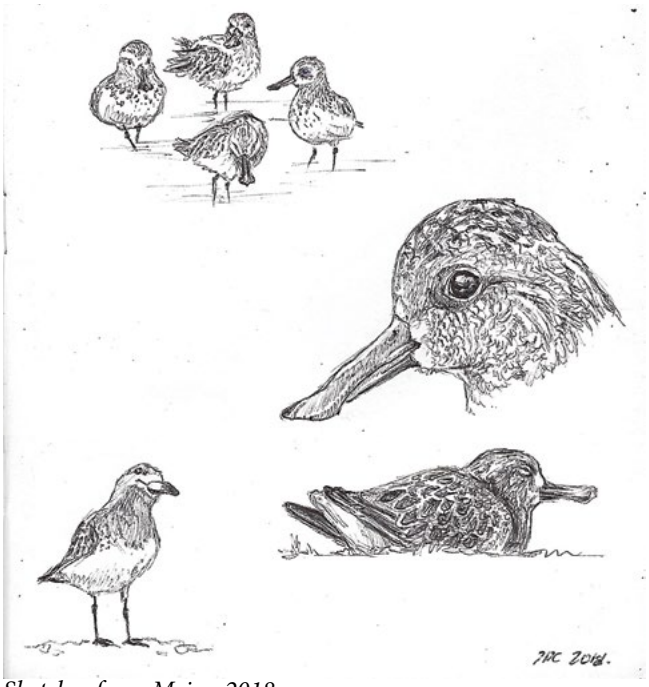
What is your most memorable encounter with Spoon-billed Sandpipers?
There are many! Probably the first time I saw

a wild Spoon-billed Sandpiper. It was my first expedition to far eastern Russia to assist with the headstarting project. It was marked with a lime flag, number 38, feeding on the edge of a melting snow field. Bliss.

Why is the Spoon-billed Sandpiper so important for people and the planet?
The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a flagship species, representing all avian species along the East Asian-Australian Flyway. Studying Spoonies has allowed key staging sites, important for many migratory birds, to be saved or restored; wetlands often important to humans too. Just to name one of the many reasons!

What contribution can art make to saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
Art is probably an underestimated tool in conservation, though it's not always easy to appeal to all and execute effectively enough to influence and

First sketches of captive SBS



Sketches from Meino 2018

make change. One such creative project is Population by Pixel a 2008 campaign by WWF Japan. Selected endangered species are represented by a photo made up of the same amount of pixels as there are estimated individuals left in the wild, raising awareness and urgency of conservation for these species. Art and artists have already played a part in Spoonie conservation. The illustrations within the recently released Spoon-billed Sandpiper Teaching Kit are perfect. Appealing to a key audience: the next generation. Hopefully we can continue to help raise the profile of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper creatively!

News in Brief

South Korea

Three Spoon-billed Sandpipers were observed on September 27 - 29, 2019 at the Geum Estuary and Seosan by Nial Moores, Per Kaijser and Jared Busen. Harsh light conditions made observations rather difficult but "either way, we can be certain that there were at least three Spoonies. It seems almost as likely that there were five, or perhaps even six."

One of at least three SBS at Geum Estuary, 27 Sept 2019 *Nial Moores*

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Ra Song Il, ranger of Mundok MBR, saw SBS several times in mid-May, sometimes at very close quarters (he said he could see it with bare eyes). The last time he saw SBS was the end of May 2019.

Reported by Simba Chan

Mundok Migratory Bird Reserve *Simba Chan*

Mundok Migratory Bird Reserve from far *both Felix Glenk*

Here is a link to GoogleDrive with the Mundok Photo Book publication, as well as the new EAAFP Network Sites Leaflet: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1K0-_yMR8Vs24_Okl_UM0fW-gSV_aO4Z93

Vietnam

New site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta found

Nguyen Hao Quang [1], Tri Cao Tony[1], Toby Trung[1], Nguyen Hoai Bao[1,2]

[1] Vietnam Wildlife Tours & Research
[2] University of Science, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City

As part of the new, 'Mekong Shorebird Project' (commenced in Sep 2019), led by Wildtour, and in collaboration with BirdLife International (Asia) and Viet Nature Conservation Centre to assess the conditions of key shorebird-triggered IBAs in southern Vietnam, two Spoon-billed Sandpipers were found on the intertidal flats of Binh Dai, Ben Tre province on the 21 Oct 2019 during a 6-day long shorebird survey covering multiple sites in the Delta. This is the first known record for this IBA, and suggests that the species may occur more widely in the Delta, albeit in very low numbers. It is also the earliest arrival of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Mekong Delta; birds typically are first recorded in winter here from mid-November onward.

One of two SBS at Binh Dai, Mekong Delta, Vietnam
Tobi Trung

Russia

Roman Kopin, the Governor of Chukotka, who is very supportive of the conservation of SBS visited Meinypilgyno this summer. Consultations about the Nature Park development of the ‚Land of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper' are making good progress. A more detailed report will follow in the next newsletter.

Evgeny Syroechkovskiy

Roman Kopin, Governor of Chukotka together with Evgeny Syroechkovskiy at the head-starting station near Meinypilgyno
Andrey Maximov

Next Coordinated Winter Counts

Like every year we like to organise coordinated counts for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper at all wintering countries. The dates are selected between 10 and 30 January 2020 with a core period between 15-25 Jan to coincide with AWC 2020. Please collect coordinates (decimal degrees) of each SBS sighting and kindly count all waterbirds at each site, and report your sightings to Sayam Chowdhury: sayam_uc@yahoo.com

The Last Page

The last bit of the crab *Shaoliang Zhou*