Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No 15 · April 2016

Contents

Foreword from the Editor 3
Banding in Rudong and Dongtai Jiangsu, China 4
Autumn survey in Rudong, China 6
Links Hotel and Birding Tours in China – two new partners of SBS TF 9
Following Spoon-billed Sandpipers to migrate – Postcard Exchange project 10
SBS at Birdfair 12
The Swiss Development Project on the Golf of Mottama, Myanmar 14
SBS survey in Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar, February 2016 16
BANCA glides ahead 20
China's highest winter count in Leishou, Guangdong 23
Sandwip – a new wintering site in Bangladesh 28
Monitoring autumn migration in West Kamchatka 29
Resighting of colour-marked Spoon-billed Sandpipers 31
SBS autumn observations from Japan 34
Spoon-billed Sandpiper ringed at Lake Tofutsu, Hokkaido, Japan 35

Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Yangkiau, Rudong, October 2015 *Luke Tang*

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

Mission:
The East Asian and 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. The key implementing organisation for the SBS TF is BirdLife International through its partner BirdsRussia. 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, People's Democratic Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Union of Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh and India, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT), Wetlands International, a representative of the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group and experts and conservation organisations from principal range states and other partners. We are grateful to the RSPB and the Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung for their continued support of the SBS Task Force and Spoon-billed Sandpiper projects across the range states.

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Foreword from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Coordinator SBS TF · April 2016

Just when our paper on the wintering Spoon-billed Sandpiper was finally accepted for publication in Bird Conservation International, we received the news from two new major sites about significant numbers of wintering birds in Bangladesh and Guangdong, South China. You find recent updates from both these sites in this newsletter. For the first time 10 SBS were ringed and colour-flagged in Dongtai, China, a joint effort of the BTO, RSPB the University of Nanjing and SBS in China. The yellow-flagged birds have been recorded already in Bangladesh and South China. There are many other flag re-sightings and especially good news is coming from the head-started birds that have been reported from Japan, Korea, Thailand, China and Bangladesh so far. Our conservation activities finally seems to have paid off.

During World Wetland Day in Moeyingyi, Myanmar the Minister for the Environment announced that the Golf of Mottama will be next to be designated as Ramsar site, after Lake Indawgiy was announced the second site for Myanmar during the event. But not all is good news. In fact, almost all major wintering sites and many stop over sites along the flyway are still subjected to some sort of hunting or accidental trapping. Despite our successes in Bangladesh and Myanmar, we still see many issues remaining. Hunting resumed in many places in Myanmar and is widespread across the country, affecting also many other water bird species. It is good to know that the Swiss Aid supported project in the Golf of Mottama can address these issues effectively. In addition to the threats posed by further reclamation and encroaching Spartina

in the core stop overs sites in Rudong and Dongtai, at least three SBS fall victim to accidental trapping by fishing nets. The hunting situation in South China, although easing due to severe changes of the coastline caused by storms, is still alarming and urgent coordinated action by all partners is needed. I wonder how the current economic downturn in China is playing out for the conservation of our small sandpiper. There are encouraging words from Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, who stated that he will do everything to protect the ecology of the Yangtze River. Maybe this does also include the Tiaozini Sandbanks? The second phase of its reclamation is postponed. This might be a good opportunity to declare the Tiaozini Sandbanks a national treasure and like the bamboo forest in Shaanxi for the Panda, Tiaozini could become another Chinese Gift to the Earth!

We like to thank all our long term supporters as well as our new partners and hope that our increasing foundation of enthusiastic supporters from all over the world will finally turn the tide for conservation.

SBS in figures:
48 SBS at least at Sandwip the new site in Bangladesh, among **30,648** waterbirds ·
45 SBS wintering in South China! ·
10 SBS marked with yellow flags in Rudong ·
15 re-sightings each of 01 and 05 ·
371 leg flag sightings of **59** different marked SBS have been recorded across the flyway ·
7 SBS caught in West Kamchatka, among a maximum of **17,000** waders on 13 August 2015 on that remote coast ·
102 SBS at Tiaozini on 11 October

Remarkable results from marking Spoon-billed Sandpipers in China

Nigel Clark

We can only conserve Spoon-billed Sandpipers if we understand their migration routes and demography and the best way to do this is by having individually marked birds. Marking Spoon-billed Sandpipers at the breeding site at Meinypil'gyno has yielded fantastic results enabling us to identify the sites used by individual birds, but it cannot tell us if they are representative of the whole popullation. To do this we need to mark birds at elsewhere. This is not easy as they are thinly spread on the breeding grounds and amongst vast flocks at moulting and wintering sites. The best hope to catch them successfully seemed to be in the autumn stopover sites on the Jiangsu coast in China.

In September a group of international wader experts (Nigel Clark from the BTO, Guy Anderson from RSPB, Richard Hearn from WWT, Ewan Weston from Grampian Ringing Group and David Melville from New Zealand) joined forces with Professor Chang Qin of Nanjing Normal University and SBS in China to start to develop a shorebird ringing program on the Jiangsu coast and hopefully mark Spoon-billed Sandpipers. We were not sure what capture method would work best, so we were prepared to try a range of techniques including working with two bird trappers who use traditional techniques to catch birds. Tang Yong Fa has been trapping birds for decades and used to catch for the pot before working for the Chongmin Dongtan Nature Reserve to help catch birds for banding. Chen Teng Yi is his protégée who learnt his skill while working at the reserve. He is now working in a hospital but returns to the mudflat whenever he can to help the banding operation. He is writing a book about the trapping method and the history of the trappers, so that it is not lost as bird trapping for food declines.

The first morning Tang and Chen only caught three birds using their clap nets on the mud flats

Setting the traditional Chinese Clap net out on the flats *Nigel Clark*

on the rising tide - a Redshank and two Dunlin, BUT one of the Dunlins already had a band on it! It had been banded in autumn 2014 on autumn passage in Kamchatka! As the tide rose they moved to the roost area behind the sea wall and the first pull produced one bird - a juvenile Spoonie! After that the birds came thick and fast with 140 caught in three hours. There was a wide range of species from Long-toed Stint to Redshank and Greenshank. While this was extremely successful at catching shorebirds we realised that we had been very lucky to catch a Spoonie and needed to try other methods.

We next tried night-time mist netting on the roosts behind the seawall and this proved extremely successful with catches of between 50 and 150 birds a night - on two nights we caught two Spoonies and on another we hit the jackpot catching three!

There was not much time for sleep, as during the day we were working with the trappers clap nets out on the mudflats targeting individual feeding birds. We caught two more Spoonies this way and came close to catching several more. This technique has great promise, but we feel we have a bit more development to be really successful. After a week of catching, the whole team was completely shattered but elated. We had caught a 10 Spoonies (eight adults and two juveniles) and a total of 1,000 shorebirds. All the Spoonies were leg flagged with engraved yellow flags and the other shorebirds had a green over blue flags.

After the expedition we all waited eagerly to see where the marked birds were seen. We did not have to wait long, with sightings coming from a range of sites throughout the flyway confirming the linkages between the countries in the flyway. It was the Spoonie sightings in winter that were amazing with three seen in Bangladesh and one seen in Guangdong province. All of these were marked as adults so we know where half the adults winter - but where are the other half? That's a challenge for next winter.

An adult Spoonie about to be banded *Nigel Clark*

A Spoonie being weighed *Nigel Clark*

Autumn 2015 survey at Rudong-Dontai, Jiangsu Province, China by SBS TF

Jing Li and Sayam U. Chowdhury

SBS 28 in Rudong Oct 2015 *Luke Tang*

In 2015, SBS in China received funds of the Conservation Leadership Programm Future Conservationist Award. The project enabled us to understand more about the diet and ecological behaviour of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Nordmann's Greenshank. The fieldwork lasts for three months and was led by Jimmy Choi, Postdoc research fellow from the University of Queensland. The study tries to understand the timing of arrival and leaving, their feeding behaviour and their diet, as well as information on the habitat and threats.

SBS in China is honoured to receive the funds and appreciates to work with world class volunteers and researchers. In 2015, another milestone for SBS in China, is that we banded 1002 birds, including 10 Spoon-billed Sandpipers and 2 Nordmann's Greenshanks. We had a super strong team from Nanjing Normal University, BTO, RSPB, New Zealand and volunteers from SBS in China. We would like to mention two young stars in the team, Mu Tong and Tengyi Chen. They both demonstrated great team work and super field skills. Tengyi and his shifu, Mr. Tang, used their magic whistle to help us to catch 3 Spooners on the mudflat.

In the Autumn survey, also joined by SBS task force, led by James Phillips in September and an international team in October we had the highest count of this year at Tiaozini of 102 on 11 October and 101 on 16 October. The whole situation in Rudong mudflat continues to deteriorate, with Spartina spreading further. Tiaozini, on the contrary, become much more important than Yangkou and Donglin. However, by-catch in fishnets and potential reclamation projects are the two biggest threats locally.

Between 12 and 17 October 2015 an international team of the SBS Task Force surveyed waterbirds at three sites (Dongling, Tiaozini and Yangkou) in Rudong-Dongtai coast, China.

Rudong-Dongtai coastal mudflats (starting from Dongtai of N 32°49'28.94" E 120°58'21.88" to Dong Lin N 32°16'4.22" E 121°25'20.31") are located in the north of Yangtze River estuary; in the southern part of the Yellow Sea, adjacent to four Nature reserves in Jiangsu and Shanghai.

Counts were repeated twice in most of the occasions and the maximum number is presented here. Counts were undertaken during both high and low tides, depending on the habitat type (mudflat & high tide roost).

A total of 54 species of waterbirds were recorded comprising 33 species of shorebirds at three sites. The most abundant species were Dunlin and Kentish Plover followed by Eurasian Curlew and Lesser Sand Plover. The maximum number of waterbirds of 29 species was counted at Tiaozini, Dongtai (20,379 individuals) on 13 October 2015.

Five globally threatened bird species were observed comprising c. 3,000 Eurasian Curlews, c. 15 Eastern Curlews, c. 450 Nordmann's Greenshanks, c. 70 Great Knots and c. 109 Spoon-billed Sandpipers in all sites. Details (based on additional information provided by Tong Menxiu, Karin Eberhardt, Hilger Lemke, Vladimir Morozov and Christoph Zöckler) of marked birds seen at Tiaozini during the survey:

Figure 1: Lime 10 (left leg): this male Spoon-billed Sandpiper was flagged in Moraine hills just north of Meinypilgyno, Chukotka, Russia in 2014 *Sayam U. Chowdhury*

Figure 2: Lime 04 (left leg): this Spoon-billed Sandpiper was flagged in Moraine hills just north of Meinypilgyno, Chukotka, Russia in 2013 *Sayam U. Chowdhury*

Figure 3: Lime 22 (left leg): the female 22 was marked a year ago near Myngynskon Lake Chukotka, Russia
Sayam U. Chowdhury

Figure 4: White X8: a 2014 headstarted bird, marked in Meinypilgyno, Chukotka, Russia. *Sayam U. Chowdhury*

Without photos: Yellow 52 (left leg) and Yellow 53 (left leg): marked in Rudong, China in September 2015

Table 1: Waterbirds counted in Rudong-Dongtai coast on 12-17 October 2015

Site	**Dongling**	**Tiaozini/ Dongtai**	**Yangkou**	**Dongling**	**Tiaozini/ Dongtai**	**Yangkou**
Species/Date	12 Oct 2015	13 Oct 2015	14 Oct 2015	15 Oct 2015	16 Oct 2015	17 Oct 2015
Mandarin Duck		22				
Eurasian Wigeon		120				
Mallard		20				
Spot-billed Duck		12				
Garganey		2				
Green-winged Teal		6			30	
Watercock		3				
Common Coot		1	8			
Common Snipe	1	5				
Bar-tailed Godwit	60	36		25	12	
Whimbrel	1	1			2	
Eurasian Curlew	400	2000	350	250	1500	200
Eastern Curlew	10	1	6		5	
Spotted Redshank	3	2				
Common Redshank		2				
Marsh Sandpiper	30	6	18			
Common Greenshank	50	20	5	5	40	
Nordmann's Greenshank	1	400		49	140	
Green Sandpiper	1					
Wood Sandpiper		2	1			
Terek Sandpiper	50	30	8	14	5	
Common Sandpiper		1				
Ruddy Turnstone	2	2		2	3	
Great Knot	20	30		45	30	
Red Knot	20	2	25	1		
Sanderling	300	400		70	50	30
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	2	83	8	3	101	5
Little Stint		1				
Red-necked Stint	200	300		70	400	
Dunlin	4000	6000	150	5000	2500	500
Curlew Sandpiper	3	1				
Broad-billed Sandpiper	300	20	2			
Eurasian Oystercatcher		300			85	
Pacific Golden Plover	4					
European Golden Plover				2		
Grey Plover	150	1700		800	700	
Common Ringed Plover		1		1		
Kentish Plover	4000	8000	2000	4500	3000	2000
Lesser Sand Plover	2000	600	25	1000	150	100
Greater Sand Plover		2				
Oriental Pratincole	1	2				
Unidentified small waders				1500	400	
Black-tailed Gull		20				
Vega Gull	2	20				
Common Black-headed Gull	2					
Saunders's Gull	1000	50			40	
Gull-billed Tern		10			2	
Little Grebe	2	50	6			
Great Crested Grebe		9				
Japanese Cormorant		2				
Little Egret	20	30			6	
Grey Heron	10	30		70	20	
Great Egret	20	20				
Black-crowned Night Heron	5	2				
Total Number	**12,670**	**20,379**	**2,612**	**13,407**	**9,221**	**2,835**
Total Species	**33**	**49**	**14**	**18**	**22**	**6**

Links Hotel and Birding Tours – two new partners of the SBS TF

Christoph Zöckler

The SBS in China autumn survey Team and the Birding Tour group in front of Links Hotel and the SBS shellfish sculpture in October 2015

In October 2015 for the first time the German Bird Tour operator Birding Tours together with China Wild Tours organised a tour to Rudong and Dongtai mudflats to see the spectacle of Spoon-billed Sandpiper accumulating at their prime stop over site along the Jinagsu coast. The tour consisted of six clients and myself as tour guide accompanied by Tong Menxiu, the local Chinese guide from China Wild Tour. In Yangkiau we saw 12 and the following day in Tiaozini we managed a total of over 80 SBS! Among them were at least three flagged birds including two yellow birds that were colour-marked locally only a month earlier.

We were very comfortably hosted by Links Hotel in Yankiau, who is supporting our SBS surveys and awareness raising for over one year already. They will keep supporting SBS in China and the Task Force and are becoming a new partner of our Task Force!

But the tour did not stay on the coast and we ventured inland to some most amazing forest reserves which hold six different pheasant species and many more fantastic birds and one flying squirrel. In total we recorded 221 different bird species, maybe only 215 as we cheated slightly by adding an additional but very enjoyable and productive day at the mudflats of Chongming NR that produced 6 more species.

More information although in German, can be found at http://www.birdingtours.de/uploads/media/Reisebericht_2015_Loeffelstrandlaeufer_und_Fasane.pdf . Birding tours is going to continue this tour in the autumn 2016 in support of eco-tourism and our conservation work. But the German tour company is going further and also advertising for a birding tour to Myanmar, where of course the wintering SBS will be part of a diverse birding programme.

Following Spoonies to migrate – Spoon-billed Sandpiper Postcard Exchange Project

Vivian Fu, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society / Bird Life International China Programme

Postcards from Japan *© Wild Bird Society of Japan*

Following a joint project of an animation with SBS Task Force partners to promote conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in 2013, this year, we are organizing another educational activity with partners along the flyway (Myanmar –Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association; Thailand – Bird conservation Society of Thailand; Hong Kong – the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society; mainland China –Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China, Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society; Japan – Wild Bird Society of Japan; South Korea – Birds Korea; Russia – Birds Russia)to spread the message, using postcards this time. The SBS postcards were now finished their journey following Spoonies from its wintering grounds to stop-over sites and reached the hands of kids in Russia, where Spoony breeds!

The idea of this education project is to send postcards of Spoon-billed Sandpiper prepared by kids, from its wintering grounds in Southeast Asia to the places along Spoon-billed Sandpiper's migratory route, up to the breeding ground in Russia. The kids will learn about the story of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its conservation before they prepare the postcards. Now the SBS postcards drew by kids from Thailand and Myanmar were already in hands of Chinese, Japanese and South Korean kids, and their Spoony postcards were on the way to Russia, telling kids there to help protecting Spoony together. To follow Spoony's migration to their breeding ground with the postcards, please visit the facebook webpage at: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Following-Spoonies-to-migrate-Spoon-billed-Sandpiper-Flyway-Exchange/1597030960551716

Postcard from South Korea *© Birds Korea*

Kids from Chukotka, Russia, received the postcards of Spoony
© Birds Russia

Kids from mainland China showing their work
© Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society

We thank people from Bird Conservation Society of Thailand, Biodiversity (BCST) and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) of Myanmar, Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society, birding group of Beihai, Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China, Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ), Birds Korea, and Birds Russia for making this happened!

Animation to promote conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper produced in 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INu1Z5xHeWQ

Postcards from Mynamar and Thailand

SBS Task Force at the British Birdfair 2015

Christoph Zöckler

Nigel Clark, Sayam Chowdhury and Christoph Zöckler at the Birdfair 2015 *Chris Gel*

For the sixth time and after a year's break the SBS Task Force was present again at the 2015 Birdfair in Rutland Water! This was only possible because our long standing supporter Wildsounds supported our stand not only financially but also with a special price for our raffle.

This year we were honoured to raffle a book by the legendary David Attenborough and Duncan MacDonald managed to get with a personal signature from the famous TV presenter (see poster). Amazingly the winner was again Milko, who already won a cruise last year with Heritage Expeditions, our other sponsor who was this year also present at the Birdfair!

All in all the team, this year supported by our member Sayam Chowdhury from Bangladesh and Chris Gel from the Philippines managed to raise a good 1000 £ for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and met many of our long-term supporters and friends.

Sir David's contribution to the salvation of Spoon-billed Sandpipers

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Myanmar's Gulf of Mottama: The first GOMP year

Karin Eberhardt, Development Advisor, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Embassy of Switzerland in Myanmar

Valentine's Day 2015 marked the start of a new effort to save the habitat of the bird with the heart-shaped bill. That day the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) approved a contract with Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, in consortium with Network Activities Group (NAG) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), to implement the Community-led Coastal Management in the Gulf of Mottama project (GOMP).

The Gulf of Mottama is a large funnel-shaped estuary with a powerful tidal bore, perhaps the largest expanse of mud in the world! Newsletter readers know that the discovery of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper here in 2015, put the Gulf on the map as the most important wintering habitat of our favorite species, as it shelters at least half the global population of the SbS. The discovery was followed soon thereafter by an extended and successful effort on the part of local NGO Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) to stop the hunting of shorebirds.

The Swiss government approved the project funding on the grounds that the Gulf of Mottama is a globally significant estuary, in process of being designated as a Ramsar site not only due to the large numbers of migratory birds that winter here, but also for the potentially rich fisheries that sustain human communities. Due to unsustainable fishing practices, the fisheries in the Gulf of Mottama have declined precipitously over the last decade. The restoration of these fisheries through co-management between communities, commercial fisheries and government, is a keystone objective of the project. This first phase of the project runs to April 2018, but if all goes well, the project may be extended through two additional phases to 2023.
GOMP is an ambitious project with the ultimate aim that the unique biodiversity of the Gulf of Mottama is conserved and sustainably developed to benefit the human communities that depend on it. The project works to restore the fisheries of the Gulf and improve the fisheries value chain, to provide alternate livelihood options to fishing, and to create a community-led management plan and Gulf-wide management body that includes what is necessary for the conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its habitat. Though the project is wide-reaching, the project partners have the collective expertise to achieve its goal: Helvetas as the lead has extensive experience in community development and value chains; local NGO NAG has proven success innovating fisheries co-management approaches in Myanmar; and IUCN expertise for enhancing scientific knowledge as the basis for Ramsar site management.

As the pioneer for the conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Gulf of Mottama and its designation as a Ramsar site, local NGO BANCA has also signed on to the project as a partner with IUCN. The partnership will enable BANCA to continue its critical work of shorebird surveys and monitoring hunting, as well as education and support to local conservation groups. In recognition of his important contribution to not only the Gulf of Mottama but other wetland and shorebird areas of Myanmar, BANCA's Pyae Phyo Aung was recently nominated by the Ramsar secretariat to be a member of the CEPA Oversight Panel, responsible to monitor and report on the implementation of the Conventions' Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) program in Myanmar.

One year on, by Valentine's Day 2016, project results include a workshop in September 2015 in Naypyitaw, in which 60 participants from local and national government discussed options for the local-level management of the potential Gulf of Mottama Ramsar site, and agreed on the formation of a National Wetlands Committee to provide overall oversight to not only the Gulf but all

wetlands in Myanmar. A Project Outreach Coordinator was hired to work together with BANCA and the rest of the project team to engage stakeholders in the gulf for the creation of a management plan, and build on local institutions to create a management body that includes representatives of local communities, fishers, and township and State authorities across coastal areas of Mon State and Bago Division in the east and west of the gulf. From their newly-established office in Thaton, project staff have completed baseline studies on local livelihoods and fisheries, and begun activities in the first of the 34 villages to be targeted this year in three pilot townships.

BANCA has continued its shorebird surveys in the open season, including participation in the Asian Waterbird Census in January, and Department of Marine Studies at Mawlamyine University has signed a partnership agreement with Prince of Songkla University in Thailand to support a series of scientific studies to be conducted by graduate students.

The 2 February 2016 World Wetland Day national celebration on was held in Moeyungyi Wildlife Sanctuary, Myanmar's first Ramsar site. The day was celebrated by the formal designation of Myanmar's second Ramsar site at Indawgyi Lake in Kachin State, a great achievement! Later in the day, BANCA's Pyae Phyo Aung presented an excellent update of conservation efforts for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Myanmar, while Zin Myo Thu of IUCN presented the GOMP objectives and progress to date. During his opening speech, the Minister of Environmental Conservation and Forestry restated his commitment that the Gulf of Mottama would be designated soon, bringing us one step closer to the preservation of this important habitat.

Karin Eberhardt speaking at WWD 2016 *Christoph Zöckler*

SBS survey in Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar, February 2016

Guy Anderson, Pyae Phyo Aung, Nigel Clark, Geoff Hilton, Chris Kelly,
David Melville and James Phillips

Returning to our boats after a day's survey on the mudflats *Guy Anderson*

From 7-13 February 2016, an international team worked with BANCA (BirdLife Affiliate) in Myanmar, surveying SBS and other waterbirds in the upper Gulf of Mottama. This repeated a similar effort in January 2015, with earlier surveys taking place most years from 2009 onwards. The February 2016 survey was timed to coincide with the coordinated count of SBS across the whole wintering range. It is quite a logistical challenge; the only way to access most of the important sand and mudflat areas in the Gulf is on small shallow-draft boats, moving at high tide. Surveyors need to work from, and live on, these boats for the whole survey period. When at a chosen survey point, the boats drop anchor and wait until the water drops, and then the area around the boats is surveyed on foot, taking great care to return to the boats well before the next incoming tide. The boats can only travel a certain distance during each high tide while the water is high enough to float them, and distances, routes and destinations each day depend heavily on the height of each tide, direction of travel and local topography. Getting to the chosen survey areas each day requires very careful planning and constant communication with the local boatmen, who are incredibly skilled in finding their way around the mudflats and creeks in Mottama; local knowledge is essential. The total survey period is limited to periods of spring tides, when the high tides are high enough to allow boats to travel around the upper Gulf. Stay out there too long and you risk getting the boats stuck for 10 days or more. Again, following the advice of the local boatmen is essential, to avoid an unscheduled, very long, and very muddy, walk. This year the team managed a full 6 days of surveying from the boats; about as long as is possible during one spring tide series. Getting a team of 12 waterbird surveyors into the Gulf required eight boats and total team of more than 25 people.

The scale of the intertidal area in Mottama, the constantly changing availability of high tide roost

Spot the Spoonie. Spoon-billed Sandpipers can be surprisingly difficult to pick out in flocks of small waders, particularly from Red-necked Stints, unless their bill can be seen head-on. The SBS is on the far right *Guy Anderson*

sites for shorebirds, and the speed at which the tide advances and retreats all make surveying shorebirds especially challenging. As the tide drops, shorebirds typically leave their temporary high tide roost sites on saltmarsh and concentrate on the first mudflats to expose, but then soon move on and disperse over a wide area as more mud is revealed. Predicting where flocks will roost on a given high tide is very challenging. In addition, the highly dynamic nature of the estuary means that rapid habitat change can occur from one year to the next. Areas that were open mudflat can be rapidly colonised by saltmarsh grass, and saltmarsh or mudflat areas can be rapidly washed away by shifting channels. The scale and pace of intertidal habitat change between years in Mottama must be unrivalled anywhere else in the world. Therefore surveying the same precise locations in consecutive years may yield very different results in terms of waterbird numbers. Useful surveys require very recent satellite imagery showing the current habitat patterns and channel positions. These are essential to select survey areas each day that are likely to contain suitable foraging habitats for shorebirds. All these challenges mean that achieving repeatable, complete, direct counts of a species like SBS over a large area is practically impossible. Instead we use a sampling method whereby we estimate the proportion of SBS present in flocks of small waders by scanning through as many flocks as possible each day, and then sampling different areas (separated by at least a few km) on different days. We then use this data in combination with separate estimates of the total number of small shorebirds present in each survey area (by observing pre- and post-roosting flocks on the move) to estimate the total number of SBS present.

Using these methods, we estimated 100 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were present in the area we surveyed. This compares with an estimate of 154 from the February 2015 survey in the same area of the upper Gulf, using the same methods. Whether this represents a real change in SBS numbers wintering in the upper Gulf of Mottama, a partial redistribution of SBS away from the areas we surveyed due to habitat change, or simply change in terms of encountering flocks of small shorebirds with fewer SBS present than 2015 (or some com-

Black-tailed Godwits; one of several species of larger shorebird recorded in increasing numbers in the upper Gulf of Mottama
Guy Anderson

bination of all three of these factors) is unknown. We can say that the same order of magnitude of SBS were apparently present in February 2016, and until better data become available, it would be premature for this estimate to cause any alarm – simply due to the difficulties described above in conducting accurate repeatable SBS surveys here. The upper Gulf of Mottama clearly still holds a very significant proportion of the total global SBS population in winter.

During the January 2015 survey we were surprised that we did not find any individually marked SBS from the main breeding site at Meinypil'gyno in the Russian arctic. Given the greater numbers of flagged birds potentially available by February 2016, from continued marking of adults and chicks in Russia in summer 2015, and of migrating birds in Kamchatka and China in autumn 2015, we made every effort to check all SBS for flags.

We found at least three individually marked birds:
Lime 24 (an adult ringed as a chick in 2010 and then caught again on the nest at Meinypil'gyno in summer 2015 and flagged (on the right leg, as already ringed on the left). This bird was also seen in the autumn 2015 at the Tiaozini mudflats on the Jiangsu coast in China,
a second lime-flagged bird, not seen well enough to read the flag code, but definitely a different bird as flagged on the left leg and definitely with an engraved flag,
White X7 (a headstarted bird from 2015). Ano-

ther sighting of a white-flagged bird some 5km away the next day could have been a second head-started individual, but without being able to read the flag code, this is not certain.

These data on marked SBS are consistent with those from January 2015; rather few marked individuals appear to be present, given the total numbers of SBS. At least two of three marked individuals we found in February 2016 were only flagged in summer of 2015, and hence were not available to be seen during the January 2015 survey. This gives no support to the idea that the January 2015 survey was just unlucky in terms of the low number of marked individuals found. It is possible that a shortage of birds marked as adults is related to the previous high levels of shorebird hunting in the Gulf; happily now much reduced through the excellent work of BANCA. Under high hunting pressure, any adult SBS regularly wintering in Mottama might have had a low chance of long-term survival. Any regularly returning adults to the Russian breeding grounds at Meinypil'gyno (where the vast majority of adult SBS have been marked in recent years) might therefore have had a low probability of wintering in Mottama. Also of interest was the lack of sightings of any of the ten SBS individually flagged in Jiangsu Province, China in September 2015. At the time of writing, one of these has been found wintering in southern China and 3 in Bangladesh. The whereabouts of the other 6 are unknown. It is possible that we still have some way to go to fully understand migratory connectivity and population structure in SBS.

Whereas changes in the numbers of SBS in the upper Gulf of Mottama between 2015 and 2016 are hard to confirm and/or interpret, data on other waterbirds here is more striking and indeed very positive. Whereas most small species of shorebirds (small sandpipers and plovers) were recorded in similar numbers in both years, several larger species of shorebird were recorded in much greater numbers in 2016 than in 2015, and indeed than in any similar survey in the upper gulf in the preceding 6 years. For example, estimated numbers of Eurasian Curlews increased from 160 in Jan 2015 to 940 in Feb 2016, and similarly; Whimbrels increased from 25 to 340, Black-tailed Godwits from 6000 to 8500, Bar-tailed Godwits from 4 to 240, Common Redshanks from 1850 to 3380, Marsh Sandpipers from 100 to 560, and Pacific Golden Plovers from 1170 to 2830. Although far from proving a causal link, and likely due to a combination of factors, these increases in recorded numbers have to be good news, and suggest that the work conducted by BANCA and partners in reducing waterbird hunting pressure in the Gulf, by providing alternative livelihoods for hunters, really can allow significantly larger wintering bird populations to persist in Mottama. Larger shorebird species are quite likely to have been those most directly targeted by hunters, as they are more profitable quarry, hence it is particularly encouraging that these are the species apparently showing the most dramatic increases.

The February 2016 SBS survey work in the Gulf of Mottama was funded by BTO (a major donation from an anonymous supporter), RSPB, and WWT, and coordinated in Myanmar by BANCA (BirdLife Affiliate in Myanmar). James Phillips, David Melville and Chris Kelly kindly volunteered their own time to take part in the survey.

The survey and support team back on dry land after 6 days surveying *BANCA SBS survey team*

BANCA glides ahead

Pyae Phyo Aung / Phyolay (BANCA)

The new Executive Director of BANCA, U Saw Tun Khaing took up position on 1st of September 2015. He is one of the founders of BANCA when he worked as Country Director in Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS-Myanmar Program). Being a forester and doing his M.Sc. in Silviculture from University of Aberdeen, Scotland, he used his expertise on forestry to help establish Myanmar Protected Areas when he worked as Deputy Director in Forest Department. He was involved National Park Project (NCNPP) in 1981 and established Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division (NWCD).

BANCA was recognized as the leading national NGO for wetlands conservation in Myanmar by Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MOECAF), and for its conservation achievements in Gulf of Mottama. The Gulf of Mottama is in the center of attention of many international conservation organizations because of BANCA's conservation efforts on the Globally Critically-endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and for its unique biodiversity and for the livelihoods the Gulf supports. BANCA became the key partner for Community Led Coastal Management Gulf of Mottama Project (CLCGoMP) with IUCN and funded by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

From 7-8 September 2015, MOECAF conducted the National RAMSAR Workshop at Naypyitaw. At the workshop BANCA, BirdLife International and RSPB presented on the Gulf of Mottama, Moeyungyi Wildlife Sanctuary and highlighted the importance of wetlands in Myanmar. Between 8 and 16 October 2015, BANCA carried out CEPA activities focusing on wetlands in the Gulf of Mottama villages with the supported of BirdLife Gala Spring. About 4000 students attended where BANCA delivered the key messages of important wetlands.

BANCA team and students

On November 2015, our taskforce member Ren counted 27 Spoon-billed Sandpipers on Nanthar Island. During the 2015-2016 wintering season, BANCA supported Sittwe Nature Conservation Association (SNCA) for regular SBS surveys in Nanthar Island. During 2015, SBS Task Force coordinator Christoph Zockler visited Myanmar several times and collaborated with BANCA for coastal conservation programme. During his visit, he discussed with U Saw Tun Khaing and the team for new initiatives for potential protected areas in coastal region of Myanmar.

In December, U Saw Tun Khaing visited to Gulf of Mottama and villages near the coastal area for monitoring on BANCA's activities. During the trip, he encouraged the LCG members and met with the village heads.

On 2 Feb 2016, Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MOECAF) had celebrated the World Wetlands Day (WWD) at the Moeyungyi WS. At the event, BANCA and IUCN presented to designate Gulf of Mottama as a RAMSAR Site and discussed further conservation plans.

Director of Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division (NWCD) and Forest staff with representatives of BirdLife International, SDC, BANCA and the SBS TF at the WWD 2 Feb 2016

BANCA's Executive Director looking through Swarovski spotting scope and monitoring BANCA's activities in villages

U Saw Tun Khaing (Executive Director), Dr Christoph Zöckler and Pyae Phyo Aung at BANCA office

Meeting with village head at near Nanthar and Forest Department of Rakhine State

The Minister of MOECAF opened WWD event and indicated that the Gulf of Mottama will be designated as a RAMSAR site in near future. From 20 to 25 of Feb 2016, U Saw Tun Khaing and team visited to Nanthar Island and villages. During the visit, Ren and his team, together with BANCA team explained the current situations and conservation status in Nanthar. The team arrived on Nanther and after a quick survey, recorded 2 SBS and one SBS with flag number 27. The team also organized meeting with the Forest Department with Rakhine State and discussed further conservation plans in the region. U MyintLwin, the Director of Forest Department of Rakhine State expressed keen interest to collaborate with BANCA in future.

Visiting to Sea Turtles conservation area in Rakhine State

China's Spoon-billed Sandpiper highest winter count in Leizhou peninsular, Guangdong province

Jonathan Martinez, John Anthony Allcock

The Leizhou peninsular in southwest Guangdong Province, China was historically known to be a wintering site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper since Jabouille (reference 1932) mentioned that it was the commonest wader along the shore of Nanshan Island during winter. In recent years there had been few records in the area until four birds were found by JM and Richard Lewthwaite on 17th of December 2012 roosting on a drained pond in Fucheng estuary near Leizhou town (see also Martinez et al SBS TF Newsletter No 9 and 12). Birds have subsequently been seen in the area in each successive winter.

The remoteness of this part of Guangdong province makes regular monitoring of the Fucheng estuary rather difficult, so assessment of the importance of this site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been rather slow. Furthermore, the Fucheng estuary is a very large coastal wetland complex containing approximately twenty kilometres of intertidal mudflat bordered by mangrove forest, hundreds of fishponds and a few large "Gei Wai" (traditional shrimp ponds), making it difficult to survey the entire area to establish how the species uses this complex of habitats and where surveys are most effective. Knowledge regarding the number of birds, time of occurrence and favourite foraging and roosting areas has been accumulated gradually since 2012 from visits conducted at different times of the year, and ongoing discoveries reveal how little we still know about the status of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China.

Four Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Fucheng on 30th of December 2015, including ringed bird from the head-started program
Jonathan Martinez

The site where JM and Richard Lewthwaite found four Spoon-billed Sandpipers in 2012, and where the species was also seen in November 2013 and October 2014 (JAM pers obs), is an area of Gei Wai just east of the river mouth. The presence of roosting Spoon-billed Sandpipers is dependent on the presence of drained Gei Wai. During winter months the Gei Wai sluices are open to the sea and the Gei Wai operate tidally. As the high tide at this time of year is typically lower during the day than at night these ponds often do not flood during the day but do during the night, allowing organisms to survive in the mud and making the ponds attractive for shorebirds during the day. This may mean that shorebirds roost somewhere else at night.

In fall 2014, two strong typhoons hit the East Leizhou coast, causing a huge amount of damage, especially in coastal fishponds and Gei Wai, and flooding the entire area. Following this event, most of the Gei Wai close to the sea have been abandoned and have been tidal throughout the year. Access to this area was previously achieved across a small wooden bridge over a tidal channel with strong current. Since this bridge was blown away by the typhoons, access is now only achieved by paddling across the channel on a polystyrene board used by the fisherman to access their boat. Landing in deep mud on the other side of the channel and accessing to the main path isn't easy.

Recently, other observers (Tong Menxiu, Vivian Fu, Zhanjiang birdwatching society observers) have seen Spoon-billed Sandpiper on the mudflat north of the river mouth during low tide. Access to the mudflat is relatively easy at least from one point, and the mud is not too deep to prevent access on foot.

On 30th of December 2015, we decided to visit the mudflat area to look for Spoon-billed Sandpipers. This visit was part of a trip that had already

Individual from the head-started program wearing white flag X8 at Fucheng on 30th of December 2015 Jonathan Martinez

recorded two Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Xitou on 26th and 27th December and five birds roosting in an abandoned Gei Wai at Fucheng on 29th December. About 5 hours before high tide, we headed to the mudflat, walked close to the shore line where shorebirds were concentrating and rapidly found 4 Spoon-billed Sandpipers amongst them. At this time waders were dispersed along a very large portion of coast, particularly north of the observation point, with most birds being very distant and out of identifiable range. Two of the four Spoon-billed Sandpipers present carried colour rings and at least one an engraved flag that JM manage to read.

Three and half hours before high tide, flocks of birds were arriving from the northern part of the mudflat and were congregating beside our viewing point ahead of the rising tide. At this point JAA picked up another flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper amongst newly landed birds and approached to read the engraved flag. Meanwhile JM continued scanning the mudflat and counting Spoon-billed Sandpiper, reaching a total of 13 birds, which was the highest recent count for the site and for Guangdong. With the access to the mudflat being distant and with no experience about how fast the tide was coming, JM started to retreat.

Having read the engraved flag. JAA also scanned for Spoon-billed Sandpipers and reached an impressive total of 30 birds, far above our expectation of the total wintering population at Leizhou. When both observers met up a few minutes later, JM realised that this was a unique opportunity to see so many of them in a single view, so started to scan the mudflat again and independently reached a total of 29 birds. To avoid being caught by the rapidly approaching tide we both walked back to the car. At this point birds were still moving, obviously heading further south along the mudflat in the direction of the Gei Wai roost sites 5 km from our viewing point. It is possible that even more Spoon-billed Sandpipers were present at the site, either passing through inside the flock of birds without stopping at this precise place, or still further north when we left.

To the current knowledge of the authors and others (Richard Lewthwaite), this count of 30 Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Fucheng Estuary on 30th December 2015 appears to be the highest count of this species during winter months in China, and the highest ever recorded in South China. This count alone would place China as the third most important wintering country for this species (behind Myanmar and Bangladesh). In addition to this site, wintering birds have also been seen at Donghai Island, 30 km from Fucheng (two birds in January 2015; Zhang Ming, South China Endangered Animals Institute, pers obs), and further afield wintering birds are known from Xitou (two birds on 26th and 27th December 2015).

This sighting raises a few questions.
Given the size of the Fucheng area and the small numbers of surveys, has the size of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering population been overlooked during the past at Fucheng, or does this high count represent an increase in the population at this site?

Individual wearing Kamchatka colour combination black over yellow at Donghai Island on 25th of January 2016
Jonathan Martinez

Do similar numbers winter there each year, or is this high count the result of unusual weather conditions (November/December 2015 was relatively mild in southern China compared to most years) or any other factors?

How important is the Fucheng area as a staging site for Spoon-billed Sandpipers migrating to or from wintering sites elsewhere?

Are there other, as yet unknown, wintering sites elsewhere in Guangdong, or sites that have the potential to support the species but are currently unoccupied due to the low global population size? How many birds historically wintered in Guangdong before the recent drastic decline in population?

One of the known threats to Spoon-billed Sandpipers in their wintering range is hunting and trapping activity. Nanshan Island (where Jabouille reported large numbers in 1932) and the Fucheng area were among the blackspots for illegal mistnetting activity discovered by JM and Richard Lewthwaite during their visit in December 2012. Most of the coastal sites in SW Guangdong have been subjected to illegal mistnetting and other hunting

of birds at industrial scale since recent Chinese economic development treats wildlife as delicacies and luxurious gifts. In November 2013, JM and Richard Lewthwaite found 2294 illegal mistnets at coastal sites from Zhuhai city to the West Guangdong border, including many places representing suitable habitat for Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The mistnets are usually put in place during autumn and then left in the field until they collapse, leaving no chance to any wintering bird living in such an area. There has been observations of Spoon-billed Sandpipers being caught in such mistnets (Zhou Fasheng 2003, Zhanjiang Mangrove Forest National Nature reserve warden 2013).

Given the location of the major wintering grounds in Myanmar and bordering countries, the Guangdong coast may lie on the migration route for many of the world's remaining Spoon-billed Sandpipers and staging sites may be located in the region. Illegal mistnets in this area may thus present a significant risk not only to birds wintering in Guangdong, but also to those wintering in other countries.

Hopefully, however, the mistnet situation is improving in Leizhou and most of southwest Guangdong, helped by the efficiency of the Forestry Department to remove the illegal mist-nets that have been reported to them during the 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 visits by JM and others .The recently created Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society has also carried regular surveys since 2014 around Zhanjiang and the Leizhou peninsular to find and report illegal mist-netting activities to the Forestry Dpt. In October 2014 as well as January and December 2015 surveys, no mistnets were found in the Fucheng area during surveys conducted by JM. It is currently too soon to tell whether the high count in December 2015 is related to this work, but the chances for the species are surely improved by continuing these efforts to control the illegal mist-netting problem.

Last minute addition: result of mid-winter census in South West Guangdong

Four days survey were conducted by JM and JAA from 25th to 28th of January in South West Guangdong, joined by Vivian Fu from the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society , Lian Zhi-bing, Quan Sheng-yi, Xu Si-min, Chen Shi-qian, and Zhang Jie-jun from the Zhanjiang Bird Watching Society and Lin Quang-xuan, Zhang Wei, Liu Jun, He Tao and Liu Yi-ming from the Zhanjiang Mangrove National Nature Reserve on 26th at Fucheng.

On 25th, four Spoon-billed Sandpiper were found wintering at the Donghai Island site, and a single bird was found at Paisha, a small islet offshore from the southeast tip of Donghai Island.
On 26th early morning, during the rising tide, four different teams were created and dispersed along the entire Fucheng mudflat where access permitted, in order to cover simultaneously a wider area than JM and JAA covered in December 2015. Each team had to note carefully the exact time any Spoon-billed Sandpiper was sighted in order to avoid double counting of moving individuals.

Each portion around each team viewing point of the mudflat was scanned at very short interval especially when shorebirds started moving because of the rising tide.

Three of the four team recorded totally 38 birds. The increase of surveyor paid off by adding 8 more birds to the December count.

On 27th, JM, JAA and Vivian Fu visited a sandflat about 15 km east of Fucheng which produced no bird, but which since proved to be used by Spoon-billed Sandpiper, following a sighting of 6 birds in early March (Tong Menxiu pers obs).

South West Guangdong Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering site in winter 2015/16 (copyright Google Earth)

On 28th, JM and JAA confirmed the presence of 2 wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Xitou, which bring the total wintering population for South West Guangdong in 2016 to 45 birds and confirming the global importance of the region for the species during winter.

During the December surveys, a total of 3 different flagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers were sighted, 2 birds from the head-started program (white flag X8 and only colour ring) on 30th of December at Fucheng, and 1 with yellow flag (53) from Rudong on 30th of December.

During the January survey, 7 different flagged birds were sighted, including 1 with Kamchatka colour combination black over white at Donghai Island on 25th of January, 1 lime flag with unread engraving, the yellow flag 53, and 4 from the head-started program white flag (MA, single colour ringed bird and 2 unread) all at Fucheng on 26th of January.

Further SBS surveys along Sandwip coast in Bangladesh

Sayam U. Chowdhury, Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project

After the discovery of the new Spoon-billed Sandpiper site in Bangladesh in February 2015, Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project conducted a detailed survey between 5 and 11 December 2015. The team counted a total of 30,648 waterbirds of 43 species including 27,785 shorebirds of 26 species at three sites along the Sandwip coast of Chittagong division in southeast Bangladesh.

In February 2016, the BSCP team counted a minimum of 48 Spoon-billed Sandpipers including four marked birds - Lime Green 11 (adult female marked on her nest near the southern shore of Pekulneiskoe Lake, Russia in June 2014), Yellow 56, Yellow 57 and Yellow 60 (marked at Dongtai, China in September 2015). Other birds of global importance include the Endangered Spotted Greenshank (2) and Great Knot (15), Near Threatened Black-headed Ibis (137), Black-tailed Godwit (100), Asian Dowitcher (67), Curlew Sandpiper (780) and River Tern (2). The results further indicate that, currently this area is most important for globally threatened shorebirds in Bangladesh. BSCP hopes continue monitoring the sites in coming months and following seasons.

Between December 2015 and February 2016, BSCP counted a minimum of 76 SBS from different sites along the coast, which is the highest count since 1989 in Bangladesh!

Monitoring Autumn migration on the West Coast of Kamchatka

Alexander Matsyna, Ivan Tiunov, Yuri Gerasimov, Rimma Bukhalova

The Kamchatka branch of BirdsRussia continued the monitoring work of Spoon-billed Sandpiper late summer migration in 2015 at the western coast of Kamchatka Peninsula involving Russian volunteers from different regions of Russia with RSPB financial support.

The works was carried out in the southern part of Vorovskaya River Lagoon on August 1–30. Field camp was located on sand spit width of 0.3–0.4 km near southern end of the lagoon and 2 km from Ustyevoe Village in 54°11‘ N; 155°49‘ E. The sea water lagoon has 40 km length and 0.5–1.5 km width. The maximum tidal range is about 5 m. At low tide, large sandy beaches and mudflats are exposed which are important feeding areas for a large numbers of the shorebirds during migration. We can investigate southern part of lagoon only which has length 5–6 km as we could not cross the river mouth.

Field works included per day mudflats counting of waders, observation of visible migration with counting of flying past waders, banding and flagging, searching of flagged waders. In total 29 mudflat counts of waders during low tide were conducted and 30 species of waders were recorded. The maximum count was 17,000 individuals (13 August), and the average count for all days was 7000 individuals (excluding very foggy day of 16 August). Also during August 2986 waders were banded and flagged, including 2563 Dunlins, 309 Red-necked Stints, 52 Mongolian Plovers and others.

Getting new information on Spoon-billed Sandpiper southward migration was prime goal of our investigation. We observed birds of this species feeding on mudflats from August, 13th till August, 29th – final day of our observations. It might be continued after that. During this period registrations of feeding birds were made almost every day (Fig. 1). Undoubtedly, that the real number of Spoon-billed Sandpipers could be higher. We had no possibility to look through all territory during mudflat counting in detail enough. Even distinction of Dunlins and Red-necked Stints was problematic from the big distance sometimes.

Fig.1. Results of counting and mist netting of Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the Bolshaya Vorovskaya River Lagoon during whole period of observations in 2015

6 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were caught during our mistnetting period from August, 18 till August 29th: two birds on August 18th, one bird on August, 22nd, one bird on August, 28th, and two birds on August, 29th.

All birds were juvenile, 5 birds received yellow flag with individual code: AE, CE. EE, HE, KE.

One more bird caught on August, 29th has blue ring on left tibia and light blue flag on right tibia. This bird was flagged on Belyaka Spit where it has been caught as a nestling.

The weight of flagged Spoon-Billed Sandpipers was 25.7–32.2 gram, in average 28.8±2.6 gram, length of wing 97–107, in average 101.2±3.5 mm.

As well as last year we observed big groups of both young Red-necked Stints and Dunlins going from this area direction to North Sakhalin Island. Sometimes we observed start of such migration from southern part of lagoon (just near our camp) to the west (sea side). All times it was just before sunset or soon after it.

In August 2015 we did not see any hunting of small shorebirds in the study area. Hunting rules of Russia do not allow shooting of Calidris species and other small shorebirds. In Kamchatka mainly Whimbrel is popular hunting bag for local community. Additionally Godwits and some other medium size shorebirds are common in hunter bags. But this doesn't exclude the possibility of shooting of different species of shorebirds in other parts of Kamchatka coast.

Next year the plans of BirdsRussia in Western Kamchatka are to try to extend the period of mist netting into July when migration of adult birds could be observed.

Introducing our Spoon-billed Sandpipers:

First flagged SBS (AE), August, 18th

Second flagged SBS (CE), August, 18th

Third flagged SBS (EE), August, 26th

Fourth flagged SBS (HE), August, 28th

Fifth flagged SBS (KE), August, 29th

SBS with blue flag, from North Chukotka, August, 29th

Brief update on re-sightings of individually colour-marked Spoon-billed Sandpipers

Rebecca Lee, Roland Digby, Pavel Tomkovich & Sayam U. Chowdhury

While Spoon-billed Sandpipers have been colour-marked since 1986, alphanumerically engraved leg-flags were used for the first time in 2012. These flags have been either light green, white or yellow and engraved with a unique combination of letters and/or numbers allowing each marked bird to be individually identificable.

In 2012, light green engraved flags were fitted to the first nine birds released as part of the head-starting programme in Meinypil'gyno, Russia. Since then, in each breeding season 2013–2015, light green engraved flags have been used for adults and chicks wild-caught in Meinypil'gyno (31 adults and 35 chicks), while headstarted birds have been fitted with white engraved flags (70). In 2015, yellow engraved flags were used for the first time with yellow flags engraved with letters used in Kamchatka, and yellow flags engraved with numbers used on the Jiangsu coast of China (10).

Since 2014, on behalf of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and Birds Russia have operated a leg-flagging database, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Individual Re-sightings Database (SBS-IDB), to store detailed information on each sighting, including photos when available, and to allow the histories of individuals to be quickly assessed by bringing together data on nesting, parentage, sightings and breeding history, and for headstarted birds, detailed information on incubation, rearing and release.

In the initial discussions about marking headstarted Spoon-billed Sandpipers, the phrase 'needle in a haystack' was used frequently, reflecting that we thought it unlikely these tiny characters on tiny flags on tiny birds would ever be found and read in this massive flyway. How wrong we were!

Through the efforts of over 100 observers across the flyway, 371 leg-flag sightings (and 159 photos of leg-flagged birds) have been added to the database. From these sightings, 59 different individuals could be identified from 252 sightings: 22 birds marked as adults in Meinypil'gyno, 10 marked as wild-caught chicks in Meinypil'gyno, 16 marked as headstarted chicks in Meinypil'gyno, nine marked on the Jiangsu coast, and two marked in Kamchatka, Russia. One of the headstarted birds was actually identified by a small pink colour-ring fitted during the rearing phase, as the leg-flag had been removed before release due to concerns about the bird's leg joint.

The birds flagged with Light green 05 and Light green 01 have been reported more than any other – a remarkable 15 times each.

Although not leg-flagged until June 2013, Light green 01 (nicknamed the 'Monument Male') is thought to have first bred at Meinypil'gyno in 2010. Although suspected, offspring couldn't be confirmed that year, but he returned in 2011 and two fledglings were observed. In 2012–2014, he produced two clutches each year; from which, a remarkable 10–11 chicks are thought to have successfully fledged (five headstarted and five to six reared in the wild). Of these, seven were leg-flagged (all five headstarted birds and two of the wild-reared birds) and four have been re-sighted: Light green 27 (wild-reared in 2013) has been seen in China and Myanmar; Light green EA (wild-reared in 2013) in Myanmar; White AA (headstarted in 2013) in Thailand, South Korea and back at breeding grounds in Russia (more below); and White M9 (headstarted in 2014) on the western coast of Kamchatka. Away from the breeding grounds, Light green 01 has been reported 13 times. All of these from the Jiangsu coast in China: five reports from Yangkou, Rudong County in August–October 2014, seven reports from Yangkou in September–October 2015 and one report from Tiaozini, Dongtai County in September 2015.

Light green 05, a female also flagged at Meinypil'gyno in June 2013, has been recorded breeding there in each of the last three summers, 2013–2015. While no chicks resulted from her two clutches left in the wild, from the three clutches collected for headstarting, nine fledglings were released (two in 2013, three in 2014 and four in 2015), of which three have been re-sighted: White M7 in South Korea, White P7 in Thailand, and the bird with a pink colour ring in China. Away from the breeding grounds, she has been reported 13 times from both Thailand and China and has been seen in 10 separate months (one out of every three months since she was flagged). In winter 2013/14, she was reported in Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand in January, February and March. She was seen on passage at Tiaozini on the Jiangsu coast in the following May. After breeding back at Meinypil'gyno, she returned to Khok Kham for winter 2014/15, being reported there five times in November and December. In the 2015/16 winter, she has again been reported from Khok Kham. This time once in October and once in February.

The most re-sighted headstarted bird is White AA. The offspring of Light green 01 and Light green 02, White AA was collected as an egg on 13 June 2013, hatched on 5 July and, along with its three siblings, was released 20 days later on 25 July. After leaving the release area on 6 August, this bird was next seen five months later in January 2014 at Pak Thale, Thailand where it stayed until at least March 2014. It was not reported again until it returned to the breeding grounds at Meinypil'gyno last summer, in June 2015. Unfortunately, nesting was not observed. The last sighting came from South Korea where it was seen on 14 August 2015 at the Nakdong River Estuary.

The SBS Task Force is hugely grateful to all the observers and others who submit reports of marked and unmarked Spoon-billed Sandpipers. This information is crucial for the conservation of the species. The sightings inform estimates of global population size and trend as well as analyses of survival and productivity rates. Sightings also help to identify which sites are most crucial and the linkages between sites.
Please report all sightings of Spoon-billed Sandpipers (marked and unmarked) to sbsrecords@eaaflyway.net. There is a useful guide available on reporting information on sightings that can be downloaded from: www.eaaflyway.net/documents/Final%20SBS%20records%20factsheet_online_english.pdf.

Acknowledgements: The information presented in this article is the result of the efforts of the many people involved in marking Spoon-billed Sandpipers with engraved leg-flags and over 100 observers from throughout the flyway – we wish we could name you all here! Catching and marking Spoon-billed Sandpipers is no easy feat requiring countless hours of fieldwork and significant physical effort. Finding and observing the birds well enough to read leg-flags is also not an easy task with challenges including remote locations and difficult weather and tide conditions. We are hugely gratefully to all those marking and observing Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust would also like to thank the funders of our work on Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Significant funding has been provided by our sponsor Leica Camera AG, the IUCN Save Our Species Fund, the UK Darwin Initiative and the RSPB, with additional financial contributions and support from BirdLife International, the East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, the Convention on Migratory Species, Heritage Expeditions, the Australasian Wader Study Group of Birds Australia, the BBC Wildlife Fund, Avios, the Olive Herbert Charitable Trust, the Oriental Bird Club, British Airways, New Zealand Department of Conservation, Queensland Wader Study Group, New South Wales Wader Study Group, Chester Zoo, Wader Quest, Dutch Birding, OSME, the British Birds Charitable Trust and many generous individuals.

Re-sighted flagged birds on the breeding grounds in Chukotka *Pavel Tomkovich*

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper V6 was recorded on mouth of the Kimonbetsu River Hokkaido, Japan

Morio Shinohara and Hiroshi Tomida

From 4 to 5 September 2015, a Spoon-billed Sandpiper with white flag V6 was observed at the mouth of the Kimonbetsu River (Lon. 42.27.55, Lat. 140.51.33). The bird was foraging together with 30 Red-necked. This is the first record of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the area.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper ringed at Lake Tofutsu, Hokkaido, Japan

Yoshiaki Watanabe and Hiroshi Tomida

During the southward migration in 2015, at least five Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded at Lake Tofutsu, Odaitou (Notsuke bay), Kinonbetsu River (The juvenile attached flag V6 was seen. (Wild Birds Society of Japan, Muroran Branch. http://www3.plala.or.jp/wbsj-muroran/frame-setteipage-jyohou.html) in Hokkaido, Hakata bay in Fukuoka Pref., Daijugarami (Higashiyoka tidal flats) in Saga Pref. and Fukiage coast in Kagoshima Pref. (T. Moriya pers.comm). Here, we present our observations on Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Lake Tofustu, Hokkaido.

On a spring tide night we mist-netted and ringed (No. 3E-37918) one Spoon-billed Sandpiper during annual bird banding survey at Lake Tofutsu on 29 August 2015. The bird was identified as a juvenile based on plumage and measurements (bill to skull: 21.76mm, tarsus: 21.27mm, wing: 99.0mm, weight: 25.7g). Comparing the body weight with previous observations (see Y. Gerasimov et al. Sbs TF News Bull. No.13 pp.6-7 2015), this bird was found relatively small.

During the ringing camp a total of five shorebird species were ringed, these include Latham's Snipe, Grey Tattler, Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Those captured birds were released on the following and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper was seen foraging on tidal flats

A juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Lake Tofutsu on 30 August 2015

Coastal lagoon along Okhotsk Region in Hokkaido, Japan.

Breeding plumage of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Lake Komuke on 5 May 2007

with Red-necked Stints for approximately 50 minutes after the release. Then, the birds departed from Lake Tofutsu.

The Okhotsk Sea coastal lagoon in northeast Hokkaido is one of the important stop-over sites for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Japan. The Lake Tofutsu (N.43.56, E144.21) is a Ramsar site which supports approximately 20,000 ducks and geese and also an important stop-over site for migratory shorebirds.

National monitoring started at Lake Komuke and Lake Tofutsu of the Okhotsk region, Hokkaido in 1973. As these sites have previous Spoon-billed Sandpiper records, we conducted birds monitoring surveys since 2004 during spring and autumn migration including birds banding/ringing every autumn.

Between 2004 and 2012, a minimum of 14 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded in the area with records of one to two individuals every year, except for 2011. The records obtained in Lake Tofutsu are; two juveniles in autumn 2010, one juvenile in autumn 2012, and one juvenile in autumn 2015.

To watch the movie on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Okhotsk region please visit http://nabeyoshi.tumblr.com/

Site name	Location	Data		Year	Num	Age
Lake Kokuke	44.16.26 N 143.29.01 E	17-19	September	2004	1	juv
		17-18	September	2005	1	juv
		30-31	May	2007	1	ad
		2	June	2007	1	ad
		31	May	2008	1	ad
		29-30	August	2009	1	juv
		28	August	2010	1	juv
		3	September	2010	2	juv
		4	September	2010	1	juv
		1-2	June	2012	1	ad
Lake Saroma	44.06.36 N 143.54.31 E	14	September	2006	1	juv
Lake Tofutsu	43.57.06 N 144.21.35 E	31	August	2010	2	juv
		27-28	August	2012	1	juv
		9	September	2012	1	juv
		29-30	August	2015	1	juv
Lake Notoro	44.00.59 N 144.09.03 E	22-25	August	2004	1	juv

Spoon-billed Sandpiper records in Japan between 2004 and 2015

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