Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team
News Bulletin No. 5, February 2011

Reinforcement of the hunting ban on Nan Thar Island, Dec 2010. Photo: Ren Nou Soe

Compiled by Christoph Zöckler on behalf of the EAAFP Sbs Task Force

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In short

It has been a very active period since we last reported in June 2010 and again lots and lots of exciting news emerged. Most importantly, the SBS RT transformed into a Task Force within the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). BirdLife is chairing and coordinating the group through its Russian partner Birds Russia, supported by the RSPB.

The decline monitored in the breeding area seems to have slowed and first news from the stop over sites in China with max. 24 SBS, in West Myanmar 22, Bangladesh 17 and at least 37 in Martaban are all indicating that things have not gone worse. Local people in Myanmar are willing to cooperate and several agreements have been arranged already. More activity in Myanmar is ongoing as we write the newsletter.

Our stand at the British Birdfair in the summer was yet another success, surpassing last year's funds raised and boosted the awareness of the species. The fundraising activities have been very successful. BirdLife International secured another grant from the Packard Foundation for the work on the breeding grounds in 2011 and 2012, the Disney Foundation for protecting Chinese coastal wetlands and last not least Heritage Expeditions joining Wildsounds, Dutch Birding Association and Ed Keeble as SBS Species Champions. We are also grateful to the Lighthouse Foundation and the Manfred Hermsen Foundation, both in Germany for their continued support. Tremendously successful was the fundraising organised by our Swedish and German support teams. A raffle for a SBS paintings from Lars Jonson generated over 27,000 USD, while the German support team managed over 2000 € for our work in the wintering areas in Bangladesh and Myanmar

1) Foreword of the Chairman

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to report to you all of the great advances we made in the last months of the previous year. At the last meeting of the EAAFP in December in Cambodia the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) has been formed and endorsed as a task force of the flyway partnership. This is a very welcoming development of the SBS Recovery Team that existed for over 6 years and has raised so much attention, had created in cooperation with BirdLife International the action plan and moved forward the conservation agenda for the species that is identified in the plan. It is a crucial step to ensure optimal implementation of our species action plan in the flyway region. BirdLife International, which had shaped a working group for conservation of the species, suggested that Birds Russia – potential affiliated BirdLife partner of Russia, will lead in this work among other BirdLife species guardians and will represent BirdLife in the EAAFP SBS Task Force, to play a key role in coordination of the work on the flyway. I have been offered to chair the task force representing Russia in the flyway partnership and take on this offer with great pleasure. This way we ensure full participation and a leading role of BirdLife in this important task. I am particularly happy that we can continue working with Christoph Zöckler, who has done so much for raising the work of SBS Recovery Team and served as its leader for last years, in coordinating the tasks that needs to be done in this crucial period of time. I am also very grateful for the support we receive from the RSPB in taking up this important task.

The species is still declining and we only recorded 12 pairs at our regular monitoring site in Meinypilgyno in South Chukotka. This is two pairs down from the year before. The decline is slowing and also the messages from other flyway areas are encouraging. In Rudong, China, 24 (a new maximum for the site!) birds have been observed in October on autumn migration and 22 birds were recorded on Nan Thar, the highest number for three years! All this might just be shifts within the stop over and wintering sites and we still know very little about the key sites, but it is encouraging to see that still good numbers can be recorded. Also encouraging is the fact that the hunters identified in Myanmar are willing to cooperate and more than 15 agreements have been signed already. More of these agreements are being achieved at the moment I am writing this with the generous support from many people and bird watchers all over Europe. Similar arrangements are agreed with our partners in Bangladesh and it looks like we are tackling the main issues and making huge progress. Nevertheless, it more and more became clear to me that we cannot afford not to venture into a captive breeding programme that has been proposed by some of our partners. This might sound strange to some of you and I was very sceptical in the beginning about breeding a long distance migrant bird in captivity. But I am now convinced as we have only little time remaining to build a captive bred population of Spoon-billed sandpipers. We now have learnt a lot about the possible prospect of breeding sandpipers and we have to try it with Spoon-billed Sandpipers before the remaining known population on the breeding ground is getting to small as a back up of our activities and to supplement the wild population, once our conservation activities gain momentum. There is a lot of questions still to be answered but we cannot afford not to try it.

This will not mean that our activities mainly on mitigating the hunting pressure will cease nor would we allow any birds being jeopardised on the breeding grounds. Conservation of wild populations still is our main priority and majority of resources we will raise should be spent for conservation of the habitat on the flyway scale, identification of unknown threats, search for key unknown stopovers etc. Now, embellished by the Flyway partnership and fully supported by BirdLife International, we can make a difference. We are already receiving enormous support from all over the world and this is very encouraging. I am confident that we can turn this with all of your help.

Dr Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Chairman SBS TF, January 2011

2) SBS RT transformed into EAAFP SBS Task Force

Message from the EAAFP Chief Executive Roger Jaensch

At the Fifth Meeting of Partners of the Partnership for the East Asian – Australasian Flyway (EAAFP), held in Siem Reap, Cambodia in December 2010, the Partners agreed to establish a Task Force for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The Task Force is a medium-term arrangement that will address the specific task of implementing the International Action Plan for this species. The pre-existing Recovery Team for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper will be incorporated in the new EAAFP Task Force. The EAAFP Partners will soon consider adoption of the draft Terms of Reference for the Task Force in which Russia would be designated as chair, Birdlife International (working through Birds Russia) would be the lead organisation and Christoph Zöckler (on behalf of Birds Russia, supported by BirdLife International) would be the coordinator. Representatives of the sandpiper's range states, shorebird experts and the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group will be among the members of the Task Force. The Partnership recognises the urgency of enhanced international cooperation to ensure the survival of this species and wishes the Task Force and its leaders every success. (Roger Jaensch, EAAFP Chief Executive).

The 9th meeting of the SBS RT, now SBS Task Force in Siem Reap, Cambodia, 8 Dec 2010. Photo Chang-Yong Choi

3) Breeding Season 2011: Summary of results in Chukotka 2011

(sponsored by Packard Foundation via BirdLife International)

a) Meinopylgino (South Chukotka)

In the 7th year of monitoring Pavel Tomkovich and Nikolay Yakushev have been again on the breeding grounds all summer of 2010, later supported by Swedish and Danish birders.

Table 1. Breeding population trend of Sbs in the core breeding area of Meinypilgyno, southern Chukotka

	2003	2004*	2005	2007*	2008	2009	2010
Nests	23	14	15	10	6	4	4
Additional broods	16	11	11	5	-	5	3
Additional territories	21	11	6	6	9	5	5
Total	60	36*	32	21*	15	14	12

*incomplete survey

b) undisclosed site in North Chukotka

An international team effort of Swedish, Danish and Czech ornithologists supporting the Russians, found 1-3 pairs in North Chukotka. Three males were displaying but only one pair bred. There seems to be a lack of females which si a worrying sign of a crashing population. One ringed bird could well be a bird that we marked as adult in 2000, but not individually. This would mean another old bird of at least 12 years.

Photos: Alexander Hellquist

c) Belyaka Spit, Chukotsky Peninsula

The Rufford Foundation supported Alexei Dondua and partner to return to Belyaka and found one pair breeding, hatching just one chick. The nest was actively defended and guarded by his co-workers and local Chukchi people. Active nest defending included also the shooting of Arctic Foxes. This might have prevented the predation of the nest or chicks, but is widely regarded as a controversial method with little or no long-term effect.

Male Arctic Fox shot by Eugeny Vukvurosgyn in the vicinity of SBS' nest, 1 July 2010. Photo: Natalia Vartanian

Although it is good news that the site is not totally abandoned by the species, as suspected after last year's results, just one or maybe two pairs compared with 60 pairs in the late 1980s is still alarming news and it is also unclear why only one chick hatched.

For more details on all findings contact: Pavel S. Tomkovich, Dr.Sci., Zoological Museum, Moscow State University, Bolshaya Nikitskaya Street, 6, 125009, Moscow, RUSSIA
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4) A trial to establish a captive population of Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* to minimise the risk of global extinction

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) is in dire peril of global extinction. Here we propose urgent action to establish a breeding population in captivity whilst efforts continue to overcome the formidable problems the species faces in the wild. SBS is a morphologically unique small sandpiper with an astonishing spatulate bill and is endemic to the Russian Federation. It breeds only on the Pacific and Arctic Ocean coasts of the east

of the Russian Federation and, when not breeding, migrates to intertidal areas in south-east Asia. The breeding population has fallen from 2,000-2,800 pairs in the 1970s to 120-200 pairs in 2009. Its conservation status was upgraded by IUCN in 2008 from Endangered to Critically Endangered - the highest threat level possible. If the world population continues to decline at the rate recently observed, then it will fall below ten pairs in 2017-2019 and to one pair in 2025-2026. Even before those levels are reached, the risk is high that chance event will extinguish the species. Hence, the window of opportunity for safeguarding the future of the SBS is closing very quickly.

There are several potential causes of the SBS decline. Recent studies on the breeding grounds show that the annual survival of adults is not particularly low and the average production of young per breeding pair are quite high, but very few of the successfully fledged young birds survive to become breeding adults: probably no more than one-fifth of the survival needed to maintain the population. This suggests that the decline is due to a factor that affects the survival of full-grown birds during the non-breeding season and kills many more immature than adult birds. Available evidence suggests that the killing of waders by people for food at non-breeding sites in south-east Asia is the most likely cause. At the main known SBS sites in Myanmar and Bangladesh, hunting of waders by various methods, including mist nets and nooses, is frequent and widespread. Numbers of SBS killed are not known precisely but appear to be a substantial proportion of the population. Young birds may suffer higher death rates than adults because they are easier to catch or because they remain in the wintering areas during the summer when they are one year old, when the adults have returned to Russia to breed. Hunting pressure on waders in Myanmar is thought to be particularly high in summer, which may explain why so few young SBS survive to return as breeding adults.

Efforts have begun to reduce SBS mortality caused by hunting in Myanmar. Conservation agreements to stop wader hunting have been negotiated with villagers (see separate notes in newsletter) and increased efforts will be made to educate hunters, compensate them for losses incurred if they give up wader hunting and persuade them to release captured SBS alive. Enactment and enforcement of wildlife protection laws may also have a role, but this is thought unlikely to achieve rapid effects in the areas concerned. Important though these measures are, their implementation will take several years and might have limited effectiveness, at least to begin with. Furthermore, it is thought that the location in winter of between a quarter and a half of the SBS population is unknown. If hunting of SBS is occurring at these unknown sites, then no action to reduce its effects can be taken until further surveys reveal their whereabouts.

Simulation modelling of the wild population has been undertaken using the best available information on its demographic rates. The modelling indicates that, even if conservation measures to prevent hunting are implemented quite rapidly in currently known non-breeding sites and rapidly extended to the other unknown sites, the population will continue to decline and will remain at dangerously low levels for at least a further fifteen years. The modelling further shows that removing SBS eggs or chicks to establish a captive population would have a very small effect on the size of the adult population, especially if this intervention would begin immediately. Each clutch or brood of chicks removed would only cause the adult SBS population to be about one-thousandth part lower than it would otherwise have been, so removing even ten clutches would only reduce adult numbers by one percent. This small impact is not surprising when the extremely low survival rate of young SBS is considered.

The risk of extinction is extremely high, so to minimise this risk the establishment of a population of spoon-billed sandpipers at conservation breeding centres in the UK is considered, using tried and tested methods. It is proposed that the first population be established at WWT, using methods that have successfully established hundreds of species of Sphenisciformes, Anseriformes, Gruiformes, as well as Charadriiformes from around the world. Using these techniques a viable captive population of SBS would be established to ensure that the species does not become extinct in the short term, even if its decline continues to a point where it becomes extinct in the wild. The captive population would be used to provide captive-bred birds for supplementary releases to the wild if the wild population falls to a level where stochastic processes might extinguish it and if demographic studies indicate that increasing recruitment artificially would be beneficial. If the worst happens and SBS become extinct in the wild the captive population could be used to provide captive-bred birds for reintroductions to the wild.

There are currently no SBS in captivity, but experience with related species shows that establishing a viable captive breeding population and successfully re-introducing captive-bred birds to the wild would be feasible. Virtually all of the wader species most closely related to SBS for which captive breeding has been attempted have been bred successfully, some of them in large numbers. Captive-bred waders of three species have been successfully released to the wild and joined or established breeding populations.

Setting up a captive population of SBS is not straightforward because of the remote locations where they breed. This will create a range of logistical issues surrounding the obtaining of the birds and their

transfer to a temperate climate where they can be maintained throughout the year, and we propose that these are dealt with as described below. Ideally, and were the situation less critical, an advance trial would be undertaken using a similar species breeding is the same area in 2011 so that SBS could be taken in 2012. However, there were about 12 pairs of SBS at the only remaining sizable breeding colony at Meynypilgyno in 2010. At the current rate of decline we would expect this to decline to 9 pairs in 2011 and 6 in 2012. At this colony level chance events could lead to the sudden extinction of the colony so we propose to start to set up the captive population in 2011. Red-necked Stints would also be taken from the surrounding area to enable us to ensure that sufficient birds are available to maintain ideal flock sizes for captive management (see below). We propose that five clutches of SBS eggs be taken from the wild in June 2011 from the best studied breeding site at Meinypilgyno, to establish a captive group of 20 individuals. These clutches would be taken approximately half way through incubation, to optimise both the chances of pairs relaying and of eggs successfully hatching. The precise number of clutches would be determined in the field when we know how many pairs have returned to breed. Taking SBS as eggs or chicks is essential if the resulting birds are to become sufficiently habituated to conditions in captivity to breed. If five clutches cannot be found at earlier stages of incubation, one or two eggs would also be taken from SBS clutches from other pairs that are close to or in the process of hatching as they rarely raise more than two chicks in the wild. Experience with other captive populations of calidrids has shown that having a breeding group of about 20 birds maximises the breeding success and minimises the effects of aggression at pair formation. Given that it is unlikely that every egg would survive for the two years it takes them to start to breed, the captive SBS may have to be housed with a group of red-necked stints (RNS) to increase the flock size to a suitable level. Thus we would also be prepared to rear four clutches of eggs from RNS from nearby sites. We would take these clutches at different stages in incubation to better understand the conditions under which small calidrids will relay. Eggs would be hatched in portable incubators and reared in temporary facilities at Meynypilgyno. A trial carried out in the UK in 2010 showed that eggs of the related Dunlin and Ruff could be transported successfully to a rearing facility, hatched and reared artificially using portable incubators and temporary housing. When fully-grown, the young birds would be removed to a captive breeding facility in the UK with experience with captive calidrids, where a mixed-species flock would be established and breeding attempted when the birds mature in 2013.

Many full-grown waders have previously been transported successfully over long distances for example 30 Rock Sandpipers were transported from Alaska to the Netherlands without problem. Further collections of eggs are likely to be required in 2012 and 2013. Some of these would be obtained from other breeding colonies to increase the genetic diversity of the captive population. The resulting birds would be housed at additional conservation breeding centres to minimise the risks to the captive population.

There will be many remaining questions and huge challenges ahead, but we are at a stage in the conservation of the species, where we cannot afford it not to try to breed this unique wader in captivity.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force

5) Sbs RT at the Birdfair, Rutland Water , UK August 2009

From August 20–22 ArcCona and the SBS RT was present at the 22nd *British Birdfair* in Rutland Water, England. The stand was again sponsored to 50% by the organisers Rutland Water and RSPB. Several SBS RT members were able to participate, incl. Nigel Clark (BTO), who supported the stand with a huge oversized Marché SBS, an artwork by Su Gough (BTO), trapped in a net, highlighting the peril of wader trapping in the wintering area. This generated a lot of interest and triggered a lot of discussions on the demise of wintering SBS.

Oversized paper marché Spoon-billed sandpiper trapped in net over SBS RT stand the Birdfair Stand August 2010, artwork by Su Gough (BTO). Photo CZ

Also present were Evgeny from Russia, this year accompanied by his wife Lena and daughter Anna. Jens and Sus from Denmark, and Gill and myself from the UK were at the stand most of the time. In total we raised over 1,400 USD this time also through a raffle of a SBS sculpture by Mark Andrews and selling lots of goods such as T-shirts vodka glasses and SBS stamps from Vietnam. The lucky winner of a SBS sculpture was Lincoln Fishpool from Kent. We also welcomed our new BirdLife Species Champion 'Heritage Expeditions' and discussed potential collaboration next summer and finally received a very generous additional funds from our long-term supporter and BirdLife Species Champion 'Wildsounds'.

Anna Syroechkovskaya assisting the BirdFair with artist Mark Andrews during the raffle draw Stand August 2010. Photos: C. Zöckler

Thank you all for your support to make our presence at the Birdfair again such a success

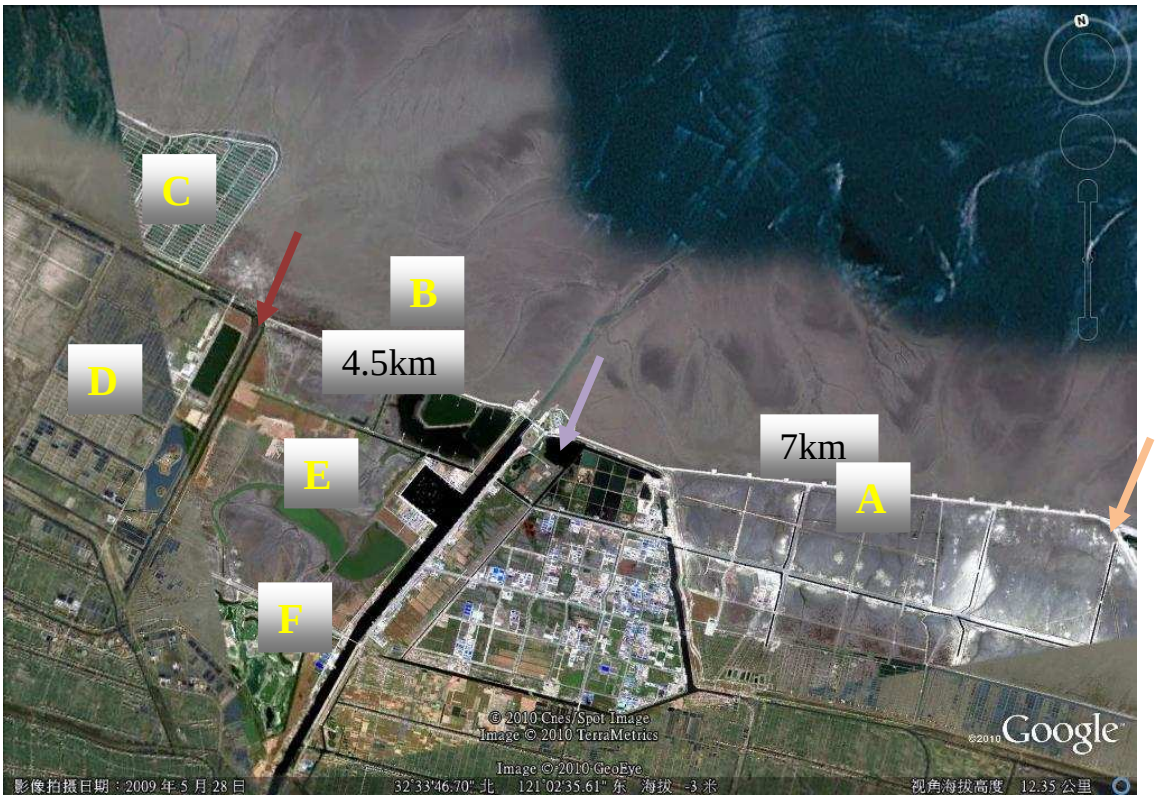
6) 2010 Spoon-billed Sandpiper migration survey at Xiao Yangkou, Rudong

Li Jing, Tong Menxiu, Zhang Lin

In 2008, a birder from Hangzhou, had the first photographic record of Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus* at Xiao Yangkou, Rudong. After that, birders and photographers from nearby cities have continuous sightings of this critical endanger bird with a number of less than 2-digit. Until 2010 spring, Zhang Lin has first noticed that there are more than 10 or 20 Spoon-billed Sandpipers stopover at Xiao Yangkou, Rudong, a famous fishery harbor located at the north of Yangtze River mouth and the southernmost part of Yellow Sea.

The spring survey has not been systematically organized. All the counts are done by Zhang Lin when he led birding tours and carrying a monthly water bird survey. However, the results of spring survey were inspiring. With the help of Hong Kong Birdwatching Society and BirdLife, a team of three successfully got the fund from Conservation Leadership Programmee, and started the autumn survey and conservation activities in August. Tong Menxiu has been onsite monitoring the number of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other water birds for 45 days while Zhang Lin and Li Jing continue the counts in October.

Survey Area

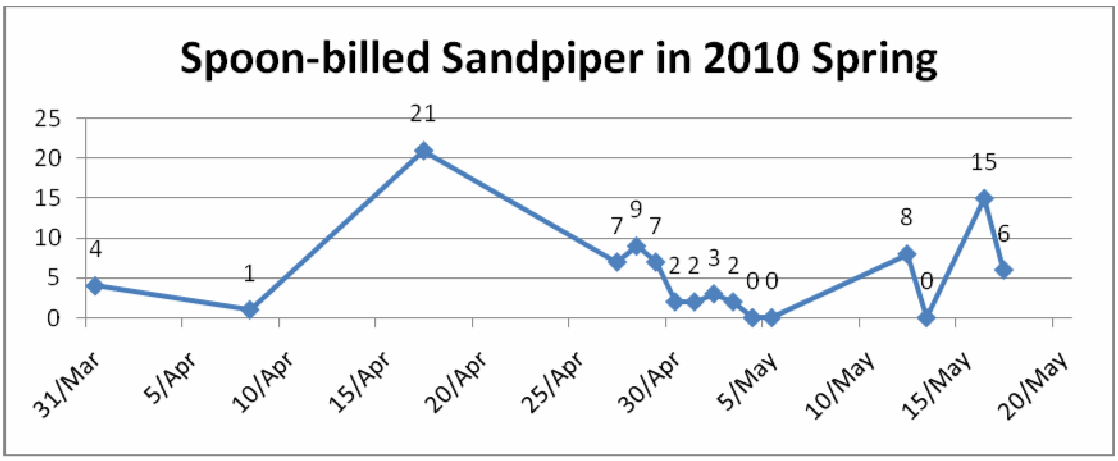


Left Arrow in brown: Tractor check point, where local fishermen take the tractors to pick up the shellfishes;
Middle Arrow in Purple: Haiyin Temple, a sightseeing stop
Right Arrow in Pink: a big turn of seawall
Zone A: mudflat east of Haiyin Temple and the unused land inside seawall
This area includes a natural mudflat and the land inside the seawall, a well build 7 km road. The land has been claimed for a chemical base in near future. At this moment, it mainly consists of dry sand, with shallow water sometimes. It is one of the main high-tide roosts of saltwater waders and terns. The mudflat has less Smooth Cord-grass *Spartina alterniflora Loise* compared with site B. There is no disturbance from human so far.
Observation time during high tide: 2 hours
Zone B: mudflat west of Haiyin Temple, along tractor road to the sea
This is another natural inter-tidal mudflat. In this vast mudflat there are a lot of ditches, long or short, wide or narrow, deep or shallow. We can walk safely as far as 2~3km from the seawall. It's the main feeding ground for saltwater waders, herons and egrets, spoonbills, gulls and terns. If the high tide does not reach the seawall, it is another main high-tide roost. There are many local people fishing and collecting shellfishes but still not much disturbance.

The main problem for this site is that about 4/5 areas are now covered by Smooth Cord-grass , less birds stop here compared with the same time in 2009.
Observation time during high tide: 1 hour
Zone C: fishponds outside the seawall west of Haiyin Temple
This area contains a large-scaled agricultural pond, which attract freshwater waders, heron and egrets, spoonbills, gulls and terns. There are also many waders roosting here during high tide. There are a few disturbances from human beings, besides the artificial change of water level occasionally.
Zone D: fishponds inside the seawall west of Haiyin Temple
Same like Zone C but much smaller; more accessible on foot.
Zone E: west of Watergate, inside the seawall of Haiyin Temple
This area consists of wind mills, golf course, harbor and farmland, which attracts Little Curlew, Oriental Pratincole, gulls and terns, ducks, herons and egrets, crakes, grebes and freshwater waders. There are a few disturbances from fishing boats in the harbor.
Zone F: deserted paddy field and fishpond
This place is a typical habitat for grebes, coots and crakes. Sometimes a small quantity of ducks and terns rests here. There is no human disturbance.

Spring Survey Summary

Period: 2010 March to 2010 May
There were many Spoon-billed Sandpipers recorded in Zone A and Zone B in spring migration. They were first recorded on 31 Mar, with 4 individuals began to moult into breeding plumage. In April the migration reached its peak. In late April most of them had more or less completed moult and were in full breeding plumage. One single scan revealed 21 individuals in Zone A. On 16 May, 15 birds were tallied in Zone B. One of them had a light green flag, banded in South Chukotka, Russia. The spring migration ended in late May, possibly early June.



The Spoon-billed Sandpiper was also recorded in the surrounding area, with one on 1 Apr at Rudong Saltworks, Bingfang Town, 50 km southeast of Xiao Yangkou. Two other were found on 18 Apr between Liangduo River and Jianggang Town, Dongtai County, 50 km north of Xiao Yangkou.

Autumn Survey Summary

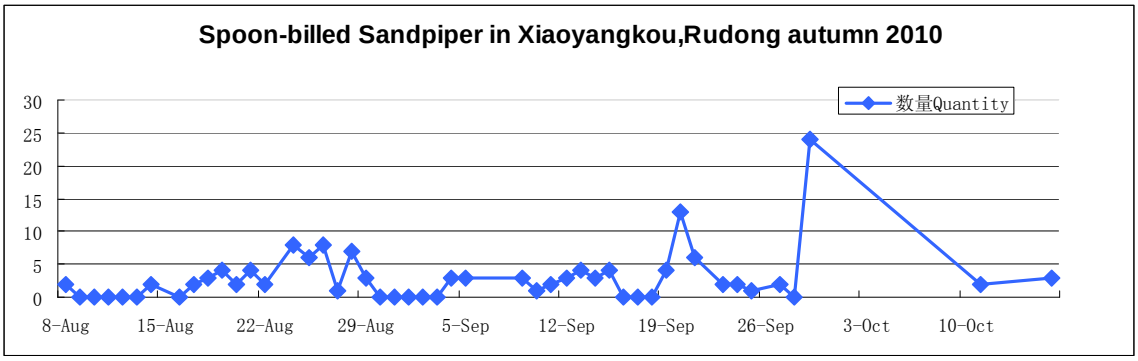
Period: August 8th, 2010~September 29th, 2010

Spoon-billed Sandpipers are recorded in Zone A and Zone B in autumn migration. First individual in southward migration was recorded on August 8th. Most are adults with a very few number of Juveniles. In General, they are active and alert, spend most time feeding and sleeping.

On September 20th, 13 were recorded. The tide height was mediocre, not the highest one, and there were many ditches still exposed. Many shorebirds rest on the ground near ditches while more flew into the seawall. Seven Spoon-billed Sandpipers stayed on the mudflat, all in non-br. or transitional plumage. They left when the tide fell.

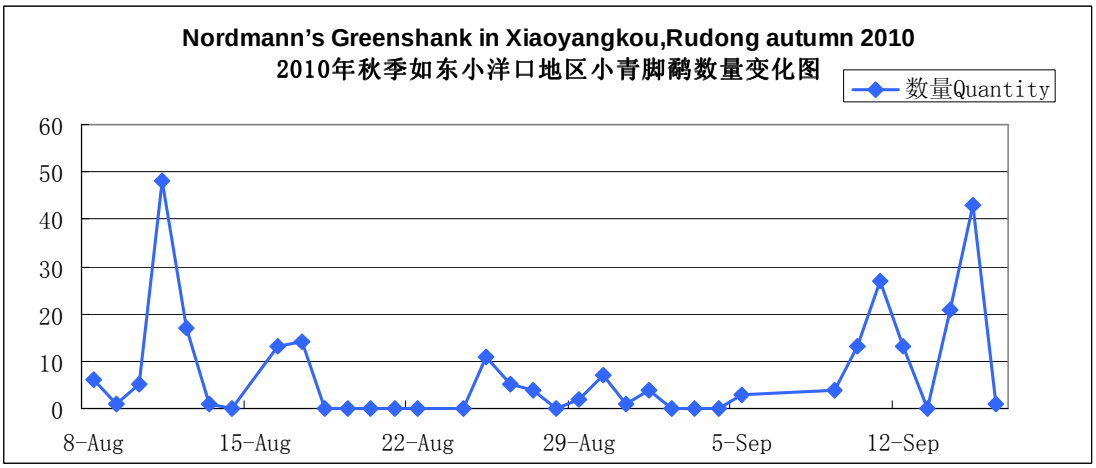
On September 24th, 24 were recorded. In the previous few days' observation, Tong noticed there were a big number of small shorebirds flying into the fish pond outside the seawall during high tide time. He found 24 spoon-billed sandpipers in fish pond later, all in winter plumage. There were estimated 8000 small shorebirds fledging away during counting. We can't exclude the possibility that there were more Spoon-billed Sandpipers in this flock.

No flag sighting during autumn survey.



There are also other Spoon-billed Sandpiper records in nearby area. On September 24th, birders had photographic records of 2 Juv. at Hengsha Island, a place near Shanghai and 160 km southeast of Xiao Yangkou.

Besides Spoon-billed Sandpiper, we got a good record of Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* . 7 Juveniles are recorded. Compared with spring survey, Nordmann's Greenshank prefers to stopping and staying longer at Xiao Yangkou in autumn. We had only 1–2 sightings during early April and May.



By September 29th, we recorded 77 species of water birds with a total number of 340,000, among which 42 species are Family *Scolopacidae* and Family *Charadriidae*, with a total number of 55,631. The dominant species are Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Red-Necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadriu mongolus*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*.

Other endangered species recorded during the survey are : Relict Gulls *Larus relictus*, Saunders's Gull *L. saundersi*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Chinese Egret *Egrette eulophotes*.

Discussion

The number of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Xiao Yangkou may be underestimated due to the following 3 reasons:

- **Lack of surveyors**. Half of the counts are conducted during high tide time. One surveyor can cover very limited area. For Zone A and Zone B, we need at least 2 groups of 3-4 surveyors lining up along the seawall of Zone A while a third surveyor could help count the Zone B in the same time;
- **Weather factor in Autumn survey**. There are many thunder storm days in the late August and early September in 2010.Local mudflat and fishery administration will publish thunder alarm to stop mudflat practice. Also the rainfall changes the ditches heavily and makes the walk much more difficult.
- **Smooth Cord-grass**. Smooth Cord-grass changed the mudflat, especially Zone B, heavily, reducing both the feeding and the roosting area of saltwater waders. We noticed there were fewer birds in Zone B in 2010 than in 2009.They are reluctant to stay in the Smooth Cord-grass covered mudflat during high tide. Instead, they roost in the fish ponds inside the seawall where it's more difficult to make a full tally.

-update as of by October 19th, 2010

7) New stop over site in Kamchatka

Yes, we saw 3 birds in the mouth of Kharusova river (N 57,08526˚, E 156,71585˚)

Honestly, at first moment I was very exited and wanted to write a letter to members of SBS team. Then I learned from Yury Gerasimov, that during their work on Moroshechnaya river they have seen SBS on migration many times. Moroshechnaya river is a little bit to the south from Kharusova river. So it's nothing special in our observation.

By the way there is a big wader stopover situated in the Kharusova mouth. Thousands of great knots, whimbrels, godwits, dunlins e.t.c e.t.c. I like this place very much.

Facts: On the 19 of August I was making counts of waders feeding on the mudlands of Kharusova mouth. In small flock (about 25) of red-necked stints I noticed three birds feeding in a strange manner. Red necked stints were piping the wet sand or mud, whereas this birds were "piping" small pools (they were searching something in the water and never tried to dry sand in spite of the fact that pools were very scarce there). They were rather far (I used 20-60 Nikon telescope), but looked like very spoonbillish. I tried to move closer, made several pictures but scared the flock. Two hours later i saw two birds with the same feeding manner. I crawled rather close and make several pictures. Altogether I made about 80 pictures of 4 birds, but unfortunately two of them are rather far.


Juvenile SBS in Kharusova mouth, 19 Aug 2010

Photos and text: *Fedor Kazanskiy*

8) Birds Korea Blueprint 2010

The Blueprint 2010 is a report in progress that spans 160 pages, contains over 200 images and presents background information from a range of sources which we hope you agree will be helpful to those working for the conservation of the avian and other biodiversity of the South Korean part of the Yellow Sea, and of the wider Yellow Sea / Flyway.

The Blueprint 2010 was published on October 21st and posted as a pdf (very greatly reduced in size, to only 40mb) for download from our websites on October 25th at:

http://www.birdskorea.org/Habitats/YSBR/Downloads/Birds-Korea-Blueprint-2010.pdf

The first hard copies were distributed at the CBD COP in Nagoya from 21st onward, and more will be posted (thanks to a donation from the AWSG)or handed over in the coming days and weeks to those who so generously contributed to it one way or another, and also to other key people and institutions

Now published (thanks to funding from the Ruffords Small Grant Foundation), The Blueprint 2010 will provide the background information and base for a (proposed) Blueprint 2012.

The Blueprint 2012 (capacity and funding allowing of course!) will go deeper, providing analysis on known and suspected population trends and on the status of IBAs and Ramsar sites. It will summarise more clearly a framework of actions required in order to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss in this extremely important region.

Nial Moores, Birds Korea

9) Latest sightings, threat and conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Sonadia Island, Bangladesh

Sayam U. Chowdhury

Sonadia Island still remains the most important wintering and staging ground for the spoon-billed sandpiper in Bangladesh, with records of a minimum of 13 individuals in January 2010 and 25 in March 2010. Regular monitoring is now taking place during winter migration, mid-winter and spring migration. Two spoon-billed sandpipers were recorded in late October 2010 and more surveys will take place later this season.

Given the importance of Sonadia, very limited information was available on shorebird hunting for the area. To find out the degree of threat to the shorebirds due to hunting, a preliminary shorebird hunting survey was conducted in late September 2010 around Sonadia Island with special focus on SbS. A total of 53 hunters were found to be active in five villages of Sonadia Island. Some of these hunters claimed to have actually captured SbS from Belekardia and Kaladia, which are the two key sites for SbS in Sonadia Island.

To address this serious hunting issue, further shorebird hunting and socioeconomic surveys will be conducted by Bangladesh Bird Club with support from SbS Recovery Team in February 2011 to ascertain the status of identified hunters, categorize any remaining hunters, and determine possible alternative livelihood options that the hunters are interested to take on.

I would like to thank British Ornithologists' Union & MBZ Species Conservation Fund for supporting my work on spoon-billed sandpiper survey and conservation in Bangladesh. (sayam_uc@yahoo.com).

10) Reports from Nan Thar Island and Bay of Martaban, Myanmar

Nan Thar Island, Myanmar, Arakhan region

This small island still hosted 14 wintering SBS, down from 35 noted in 2008 and hunting mitigation implemented in 2009 and 2010. Funds have been made available by the Lighthouse Foundation in Germany to establish minimal infrastructure for visiting tourists (shelter, toilet) and freshwater wells for the local people. However, those have been destroyed two times! At first, a strong wind on October and 7th and 8th destroyed most buildings, they were in the process of reconstruction, but again completely destroyed by the tropical cyclone Giri on October 22nd. There were no losses of lives, but all the infrastructure and buildings have to be rebuilt.

NanThar Sunshade

NanThar damage and reconstructed tant

A small local conservation group has been established. This group continues awareness raising and monitoring with available funds.

A survey at the end of December revealed 22 SBS! Unfortunately the aftermath of the storm did not allow tourists to visit the island, so several German and Finish bird watchers were not able to visit Nan Thar and support the local community. Fortunately, the Lighthouse Foundation is happy to compensate for the costs created by ‚Giri'.

Bay of Martaban, Myanmar

Our efforts focused on the mitigation of the hunting threat. Between March and May 2010 a team of socio-economic experts and zoologists of BANCA visited 14 villages in the target area in eastern Martaban and identified altogether 24 hunters (3 of whom were not known to the team before), signed conservation agreements with 15 hunters and distributed livelihood inputs to them.

For those hunters who are 'occasional', raising awareness of the wildlife law and the conservation value of the Spoonbill Sandpiper was deemed sufficient to discourage further hunting. For those who are 'professional' and 'opportunistic', the team asked them to sign conservation agreements and provided a measure of livelihood inputs, dependent on relative needs and percent of income formerly derived by birds. In general, each 'professional' hunter received livelihood inputs with a value of about USD500 (boats and fishing nets), while each 'opportunistic' hunter received goods with a value of approximately USD150 per hunter.

The agreements were negotiated with the knowledge of the whole community and most importantly it was agreed with the communities that the former hunter's social status has been raised. For example, in two villages, the village leaders took the initiative to assign the former bird hunters the role of *seheinhmu*, which is the person in charge of ten households according to local administrative systems. This is an honour which shows trust in a person as well as bestowing them with responsibility. By assigning the hunter the responsibility of *seheinhmu*, the village leader makes their behaviour more visible to the community as well as making them accountable to the community, increasing the likelihood that they will uphold the law and no longer hunt. This could be suggested to other village heads in the future.

All of the above objectives were achieved up to and beyond expectations, including laying the groundwork for future work with the communities.

At present two teams are active in the Bay to follow up on last spring's results and also to expand the mission onto the West. A team of British birdwatchers under the lead of Nigel Clark ventured again into the wild waters of the Bay of Martaban and encountered at least 37 SBS in similar flock sizes as last year, although the big flocks seemed to have moved to a different location within the Bay.

Tony Htin Hla, Ren Nou Soe, Christoph Zöckler & Nigel Clark

11) Update on SBS from the Inner Gulf in Thailand

The news from Thailand, where up to 10-20 Spoon-billed Sandpipers are thought to winter, in the Inner Gulf, near Bangkok, is mixed. An over-summering individual, reported in the last issue of this newsletter) was seen together with a juvenile at one of the two most regular Inner Gulf sites, Khok Kham on 9

November, and two birds have remained there until the present. However until very recently, many fewer birds were found at the single most important wintering site, the large expanse of salt pans extending from Pak Thale to Laem Phak Bia. No more than three (most often only one or two) were seen together throughout the period from 9 November 2010 until late January 2011. This raised the concern that the continuing catastrophic decline that is apparent on breeding grounds was now being reflected also in Thailand's small wintering population. (Maximum counts at Pak Thale have declined from 16 Spoon-billed Sandpipers in winter 2003—2004 to perhaps as few as five or six in winter 2009-2010.) With only three birds seen at the site so far in 2010-2011, Thai-based observers began to voice the previously unthinkable prospect that perhaps next winter there might be none left to return!

However, there was a huge collective sigh of relief when seven Spoon-billed Sandpipers were again reliably counted together at Pak Thale, on 1-2 February 2011 by three independent teams of observers. With now at least as many Spoon-billed Sandpipers as were recorded one year ago, this amounts at the very least to a stay of execution for the Thai Inner Gulf winterers. It can only be assumed that fewer birds were detected earlier in the winter as they were uncharacteristically more scattered this year Regardless of what happens elsewhere in the flyway, the condition of the extensive onshore and offshore shorebird habitats in the Thai Inner Gulf remains fairly good— a huge, and substantially unbroken expanse. Indeed, numbers of many other shorebirds have increased for reasons unknown, with a maximum count of c. 1100 Eurasian Curlews in a single flock in December 2010—up from c. 700 one year previously, continuing a trend of seeming increase in the Thai wintering population that species. While a small amount of opportunistic hunting or netting of shorebirds may continue, this is not thought to present a major threat.

The Thai BirdLife partner, the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST), and the government's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) is currently mounting a coordinated survey of all previously known Thai Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites and likely possible sites, so we hope to have some results to report on this in the next newsletter. Additionally, BCST is currently in the process of establishing a bird center at Pak Thale, together with local people, in order to promote greater awareness. Local funds were used by the Pak Thale subdistrict council to renovate an existing derelict building, and internationally renowned bird artist and identification expert, David Sibley, who visited Pak Thale in order to observe Spoon-billed Sandpipers in February 2010, has kindly offered to auction a painting to help raise funds to support this. [See David's web-page http://www.sibleyguides.com/2011/01/donate-to-help-spoon-billed-sandpiper/]

David has also informed us that tax-free donations for the BCST Pak Thale Bird Centre may be made through the kind auspices of Graham Chisholm, Audubon California, and BCST is extremely grateful to both David Sibley and Graham for their enthusiastic support of this project.

Phil Round, The Wetland Trust, Thailand

12) European SBS Support Teams

Sweden

In an effort to raise money needed to prevent hunting activities on the wintering grounds of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the 2010/2011 season, a lottery was arranged by the famous Swedish artist Lars Jonsson and Swedish birder Alexander Hellquist in late autumn 2010. By giving 100 Swedish kronor (c 15 US dollars) donors obtained one ticket and the chance to win a sketch of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper by Lars Jonsson. In every 150 tickets one was drawn as a winner when the fundraising closed on December 15th 2010. The lottery was announced on the web pages and magazines of the Swedish Ornithological Union and the Swedish Club 300. With a few weeks left of the fundraising it was also advertised on a few Facebook pages, Finnish email-lists and through Rockjumper Tours, in order to reach a broader audience.

The response was great - in total over 183,000 Swedish kronors (c 27,000 USD) were collected. Clearly, Lars Jonsson's skills as an artist made it attractive to donate. The result also shows that the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has a special place in the hearts of many birdwatchers all over the world. Although the same amount could probably be collected by arranging an auction, a lottery presumably creates broader involvement as more people can afford to participate. Hopefully the initiative has increased the awareness of the threats to this species in the birdwatching community, paving the way for future campaigns.

Encouraged by the positive feedback, the concept of giving donors a chance to win an artwork will be upscaled to support other bird conservation projects. At the initiative of the Editor of The World's Rarest

Birds Erik Hirschfeld, the website www.preventextinctions.com has been launched and a formal charity will be registered soon.

Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Likewise, on initiative of the German support team around Tom Noah and Axel Bräunlich, who created a web site fo the German support team www.loeffelstrandlaeufer.blogspot.com.

Although just started the initiative generated already over € 2,000. We are grateful to all donations and particular like to ‚Zoologische Gesellschaft für Arten- und Populationsschutz e.V.', who donated 1,000 €.