Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No 18 · March 2018

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Two males in territorial dispute, Chukotka, July 2017 *Jeff Bleam*

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) News Bulletin is a regular 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, Bangladesh.

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

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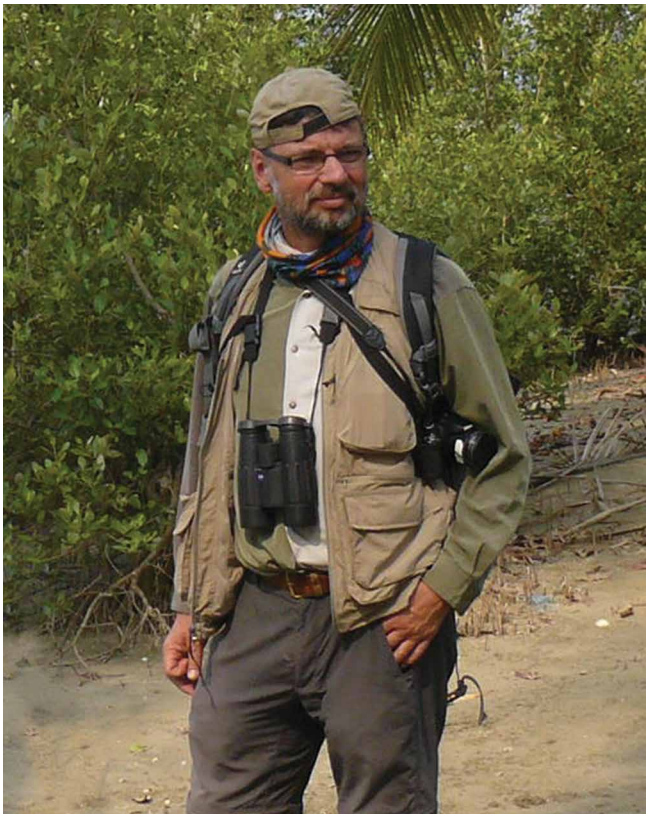
Foreword from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Coordinator SBS TF · March 2018

Mainstreaming has become the new buzzword in conservation. It refers to the expansion of biodiversity conservation into the collective engagement of all parts of society, governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations and the private sector alike. We seem to have managed this quite well for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper over the past few years. I am not just talking about the various different Spoonie T-shirts; I already have over 20 different shirts from seven different flyway countries. I don't mean the SBS vodka glasses either. I have still six which are regularly used to mark special events – although several people were asking for the SBS logo on the vodka bottles? There doesn't seem to be any limit to the possibilities and the production of corkscrews, iron sculptures and cookies as you can see on the last page are witness to this and will certainly help to access new audiences.

But the most important mainstreaming has been taking place in China, where initially authorities were puzzled about the existence of the tiny but odd bird. It is now featuring prominently in the China Russian Bilateral agreement on migratory birds and also in Phil Agland's film series on China's wetlands. More importantly it has been central in the recent new initiative to create a network of World Heritage sites in the Yellow Sea! China is the focus of this issue with many contributions from our Task Force members, but also government officials.

I have always been very optimistic in my outlook for the conservation of our key stop over sites in China, but I must admit, I am often quite sceptical about my own optimism. However, as you can read in this newsletter we can now be more confident about our optimism. The progress in protecting key sites in Jiangsu Province and avoiding further major reclamations will certainly boost our confidence and will give hope that we might save the species. There is still a lot to be done



and signs from the breeding and also wintering grounds signal that the species is still declining, but no longer so strongly.

I hope we can keep the momentum and continue protecting the precious coastal sites and its biodiversity along the flyway. All our successes and progress would not have been possible without the continuing support of our growing donor and supporter community. Among the many long-standing supporters like the Manfred-Hermsen Foundation, RSPB, NABU, BirdLife International, Heritage Expeditions, Wildsounds, WWT, ICFC, BCF and many others I specifically like to mention a new supporter in the Bennet Lowell Trust, who is supporting our work in the breeding grounds in Russia.

We like to thank them all for their continuing support and I hope you all enjoy this latest issue of the SBS News Bulletin.

Guest Editorial

Zhang Xinsheng · IUCN President and Chairman of the Council

Iconic mammals, such as Panda, Tiger, Polar Bear and many others are playing an important role in the conservation of the planet. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has been committed to species conservation and has been supporting many projects focusing on single species ever since its beginning, providing a large umbrella to save other species and the ecosystems likewise. But in recent years iconic bird species have come to our attention and we are now witnessing the rise of one such species on the East Asian-Australasian flyway – the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

The restless work of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force of the EAAFP and their numerous supporters for almost two decades resulted in the global fame of this charismatic species and of the need to save the threatened sandpiper from the brink of extinction. For this we need to save our precious coastlines in East and SE Asia and reverse the trends in reclamation of key intertidal areas and also prevent the illegal hunting of birds in many areas all over Asia. The challenges are huge but the approach is correct and Spoon-billed Sandpiper enthusiasts all over the world are committed to the conservation of this species. These include big conservation organizations, governments of key range countries like China, Russia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Bangladesh and many others like local people on the ground in the villages next to key SBS sites.

IUCN is committed to supporting these conservation efforts to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the recent important workshop in the city of Yancheng is an example of IUCN's contribution.

It is highlighted in this issue of the Newsletter and made a big step towards the conservation of intertidal areas of the Yellow Sea, recognizing them as proposed areas for the UNESCO World Heritage Site initiative, including key Spoon-billed Sandpipers stopover sites such as Tiaozini in Jiangsu and many others. IUCN is committed to continue this important work, where necessary.

I wish all those who are committed to the species conservation and the authors of this lots of success and the best of luck in their important conservation work.

IUCN

The New Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Wildlife Effectively Drives the Protection of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its Habitat

Ma Tian & Lu Jun & Zhang Guogang

On July 2nd, 2016, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Wildlife (hereinafter referred to as Law on the Protection of Wildlife) was revised on the 21st Session of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress of People's Republic of China, and has been officially implemented since January 1st, 2017. This is the first major amendment of the Law on the Protection of Wildlife since its inception in 1988 and execution in March 1st, 1989. During the 28 years after the issuance of the Law on the Protection of Wildlife, there have been big changes in terms of natural conditions, economic conditions and social thinking relevant to wildlife resources in China. The previous mechanism could not meet the requirement of the new situation for wildlife protection any more.

In recent years, with the declining of the population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper, a rare bird species, as well as the deteriorating habitat, Spoon-billed Sandpiper was listed by BirdLife International and International Union for Conservation of Nature as vulnerable species in 1994, endangered species in 2004, and critically endangered species in 2008. According to outdoor investigations and bird-watching data, coastal area in China is an important migration stop over place and overwintering place for Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Illegal hunting as well as drastic losing of habitats are considered as important reasons for the declining of population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The new Law on the Protection of Wildlife insists on the original protection mechanism while expanding the scope of protection and intensifying the protection; it is subject to solving the new problems in the new situation, and new mechanism has been set up to provide relevant legal basis. Therefore, the implementation of the new Law on the Protection of Wildlife provides more powerful and comprehensive legal basis for the protection of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and their habitats.

The 18st Session of the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress of People's Republic of China, examining the draft revision of the Law on the Protection of Wildlife

Enhancing the protection of wildlife habitats

The new Law on the Protection of Wildlife has enhanced the protection on the habitats of wildlife. The headline of the second chapter of the new law is »Protection of Wildlife and its Habitats«, making clear the significance of habitat protection to wildlife. Stipulations on the protection of wildlife habitats are included into the new clauses, providing foundation for the scientific management of wildlife habitats. For example, Article 11 of Chapter II stipulates that »authority of wildlife protection of people's government above the county level should periodically organize or authorize relevant scientific research institutes to investigate, monitor and evaluate the conditions of wildlife and its habitat, build up and improve files of wildlife and its habitats«. Meanwhile, the new law includes the protection of activity areas of wildlife such as migration routes, so as to offer institutional guarantee for the life channel of wildlife. Article 13 of Chapter II stipulates that »while making planning of development and exploitation, the people's government above the county level and relevant authorities should take full consideration of the need of wildlife and habitat protection, analyzing, predicting, and evaluating the possible effect of the plan implementation on the protection of

wildlife and its habitat, so as to avoid or reduce the adverse influence caused«.

As the case with other waders distributed along the East Asian-Australasian migration route, the declining of the population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper might be closely related to the losing of habitat caused by tidal flats reclamation in the coastal area of Yellow Sea and Bohai Sea. As the known biggest and stable distribution area for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the world, the tidal flat wetlands in Dongtai and Rudong in Jiangsu Province have not been properly protected. In recent years, Jiangsu government has made large-scale plans on the reclamation and development of the tidal flats in the intertidal zones of Dongtai and Rudong, some of which have been or will soon be enclosed. This directly leads to the losing of major habitat of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Additionally, most of the tidal wetlands in China have been subject to the invasion of Smooth Cordgrass *Spartina alterniflora*. As *Spartina alterniflora* has a high density, it is hard for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other waders to live in tidal wetlands distributed with *Spartina alterniflora*, which also directly leads to the losing of major habitats of these birds; on the other hand, the invasion of *Spartina alterniflora* has also changed the community composition on the tidal wetlands, influencing the food sources of Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

In view of the existing threats confronted by Spoon-billed Sandpiper, the implementation of the new law will facilitate the re-evaluation and adjusting of the reclamation and development plans towards the tidal wetlands by relevant authorities that will then make and carry out effective measures of protection, and adjust the current scope of natural reserves or build new ones, so as to include the key habitat of the endangered birds such as Spoon-billed Sandpiper into the protection system. Meanwhile, management of the habitat will be strengthened, including strict control of the surrounding pollution emission, avoiding pollution on the tidal wetlands; the expansion of *Spartina alterniflora* on the tidal wetland will be controlled, and effective measures will be taken to eliminate *Spartina alterniflora*. Currently, the Xiaoyangkou Provincial Natural Reserve in Rudong county, Jiangsu province is in the process of getting approval, and the second phase of reclamation of Tiaozini wetland has been suspended.

Evaluation and adjustment of wildlife protection directory

Since the implementation of the existing List of Endangered and Protected Species of China in 1989, there have been major changes in terms of the population, distribution, habitats, particularity, level of threat, resource utilization and ecological value of wildlife. This directory, however, is too obsolete to reflect the current status of wildlife. Considering this drawback, the new Law on the Protection of Wildlife has stipulated the cycle of evaluation and adjustment of the directory, requiring that the competent authority of wildlife protection of the State Council should evaluate the directory every five years, and determine relevant adjustments, in an effort to ensure timely update of the directory based on the resource conditions and make relevant protection measures. It is reported that considering the rarity of Spoon-billed Sandpiper, its level of protection is planned to be upgraded from »directory with three values« (land wildlife with significant ecological, scientific and social values) to the List of Endangered and Protected Species. This indicates that illegal hunting for Spoon-billed Sandpiper will result in severe criminal liability, so as to intensify the protection towards Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Strengthening punishment on illegal hunting for wildlife from multiple aspects

Illegal hunting is one of the major threats confronted by Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The new law insists on the punishment on illegal hunting for

wildlife while preventing such illegal actions from happening through multiple ways.

Firstly, the new law includes the stipulation on the eating of wildlife, attempting to cut down the need on dining tables so as to punish the illegal hunting and business. It is stipulated in Article 30 of Chapter III of the new law that »production and operation of food manufactured from wildlife under national key protection and their products are prohibited, or food manufactured from wildlife under national key protection without legal certificate of the sources are prohibited. Illegal purchasing of wildlife under national key protection and its products for eating is banned«. This article not only prohibits the food production and operation of wildlife under national key protection, but also bans the buyers of the products, thus states the legal responsibilities of both supply and demand parties.

Meanwhile, the previous law set forth relevant legal responsibilities on the hunting, trading and transportation of wildlife and there have been punishments on the direct perpetrators, but there was a lack of supervision on the supporting parts of the wildlife trading. The new law includes the stipulations on behaviors and subjects of information release and trade market in regard to wildlife trading: ads of selling, purchasing, and utilizing wildlife and its products or illegal hunting tools are prohibited; trading sites such as online trading platform and commodity trading market are banned from offering trading services for the illegal selling, purchasing, and using of wildlife and its products or illegal hunting tools. The new law has extended its administration towards the trading platform and ads of wildlife, in order to adapt to the trend of concealing and network development of wildlife trading, to supervise the whole chain of trading, and to maximize the protection of wildlife.

Strengthening the mechanism of education, communication and cooperation

The new Law on the Protection of Wildlife has proposed the system and mechanism where all parties are involved in the protection. For example, citizens, entities and other organizations are encouraged to participate in the protection of wildlife by donation, sponsorship and volunteer services to support the public welfare cause of wildlife protection; the people's government at all levels should enhance the education and popularization of scientific knowledge concerning wildlife protection by encouraging and supporting grassroots organizations, social organizations, enterprises, institutions, and volunteers to carry out publicity of laws, regulations, and knowledge of wildlife protection; educational and administrative authorities and schools should educate the students on wildlife protection; news media should carry out publicity of laws, regulations, and knowledge of wildlife protection, and guide the public supervision on illegal behaviors. It is fair to say that the new Law on the Protection of Wildlife is a co-governance law on wildlife protection.

The tidal wetlands where Spoon-billed Sandpiper inhabit is also an area for coastal production. The demand for land resources in the coastal area brings great pressure for reclamation on the tidal wetland. Decision makers usually pay attention to the short-term economic benefit without considering long-term ecological return of tidal wetlands. The implementation of the new law has facilitated the publicity and education on wildlife protection. Through publicity and education of multiple forms, the public and the decision makers are more aware of the ecological service value of tidal wetlands, e.g. the support of the economic value of aquatic products such as shellfish and fish, as well as their important role in purifying water quality and resisting natural disasters. Local governments are guided by the new law to make

The coastal production activities on tidal wetlands *Mu Tong*

sustainable planning for the utilization of tidal wetlands, so as to realize coordinated development of the society, ecology and economy.

In the meantime, the protection of migrant birds requires the joint efforts of the countries and regions along the migration routes. On one hand, Chinese government departments, non-governmental organizations, universities and research institutes should work together to carry out scientific research, investigation, publicity, education and training by integrating the existing resources and bringing their correspondent roles into full play, so as to maximize the efficiency of resource utilizing limited resources; on the other hand, communication and cooperation among relevant countries and regions should be enhanced. Spoon-billed Sandpiper is confronted with multiple threats in other countries. For example, the hunting in Bangladesh and reclamation in South Korea have greatly influenced the population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. By communicating the information and experience concerning Spoon-billed Sandpiper protection, we should enhance international and regional cooperation, urge relevant parties to reduce activities that are harmful to Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and join hands to promote the protection of Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Conclusion

The implementation of the new Law on the Protection of Wildlife marks a new height of wildlife protection in China, offering a more powerful and comprehensive legal basis for the protection of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. We are convinced that with the support of the law, greater achievements can be made in China in terms of the protection of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its habitats.

Tiaozini would be protected as part of future World Heritage Site: news from the Yancheng Workshop

Prof. Lei Guangchun, Beijing Forestry University

Yancheng International Symposium on the Conservation and Management of the Intertidal Wetland of the Yellow and Bohai Seas was held on 12-15th December in Yancheng, China. Over 100 leading experts participated and were engaged in presentations and dialogues on wetland conservation, world heritage and sustainable development.

Yellow Sea Ecoregion stretches from China to Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea. Sediments and nutrients are continuously discharged from the Yellow River, the Yangtze River and other rivers (Yalu River, Huai River, etc.), accumulating to form the world's largest continuous mudflat coast. The dynamic process of sediment accumulation and continental shelf subsidence still continues to shape the geological landscape and ecosystem on the Yellow Sea coast, making it one of the most diverse and fertile coasts in the world.

Yancheng contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation. C. 665 species of vertebrates have been recorded, including 401 species of birds, 26 species of mammals, 9 species of amphibians, 14 species of reptiles, 215 species of fishes, among which 32 bird species and 28 fish species are threatened. The tidal mudflat in the nomination property is home of millions of migratory waterbirds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, as breeding and wintering sites, as well as stopover of high quality. While 66% of the intertidal wetlands in the Yellow Sea have been lost in the past 50 years owing to reclamation, leading to a dramatic decrease in bird populations and ecosystem services.

Tiaozini is a critical habitat for the critical endangered species Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* and the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* and Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*. The area of nomination property is 148,432 ha. According to statements of authenticity and integrity: The nominated sites involve most important bird habitats along the long coastline, covering all the coastal geomorphological types and the deltas of major rivers. Part of Tiaozini is now included into the boundary of nominated World Heritage, and would be under protection from reclamation in future.

China moves to protect Coastal Wetlands used by Migratory Birds

Erik Stokstad

China has armored its coastline over the past several decades, building sea walls and turning more than half of its marine wetlands into solid ground for development. The impact on the almost 500 species of migratory birds that rely on this habitat has been severe. But the tide is turning in favor of wildlife, conservationists believe, as the government is now moving to tighten regulations and designate new reserves to protect coastal wildlife.

»The message has reached the central government,« says Jing Li of Saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, a nonprofit based in Shanghai, China. In particular, China's State Oceanic Administration (SOA) earlier this month announced it will dramatically curb commercial development of coastal wetlands. »I've never heard of anything quite so monumental,« says Nicola Crockford of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, based in Sandy, U.K., which has worked to protect habitat of migratory birds in China and elsewhere. SOA's 17 January statement said the agency will only approve coastal wetland development that is important for public welfare or national defense. Unauthorized projects will be stopped, and illegal structures torn down. The administration will nationalize already reclaimed wetlands tha t have not yet been built on. (Despite the loss of tides, these areas can still benefit wildlife.) »This represents a … true ›sea change‹ in the official political attitudes to the very large, and internationally shared, biodiversity values of the shorelines of China,« says ecologist Theunis Piersma of the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. »Man, is this hopeful!«

China's coastal wetlands – and in particular those in the Yellow Sea, which is at the midpoint of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway – are crucial for birds that migrate between Siberia and Australia. But development has robbed the birds of habitat and food, and some 10% of the species that use the flyway are in peril of extinction. Case in point

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is among the endangered shorebirds that could benefit from China's move to protect coastal wetlands
Tengyi Chen

is the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which specializes in plucking tiny crustaceans from the mud with its eponymous beak.

Lax regulation

Madcap economic development in coastal China led to intense demand for new land. Although there are some regulations to protect wetlands, local governments and businesses often ignored or dodged them. The central government began to give more because of environmental protections in about 2012. For example, China's equivalent of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cracked down on some local government officials charged with destruction of wetlands, says Zhijun Ma, a conservation biologist at Fudan University in Shanghai.

In 2015, the central government created a »red line« to protect 53 million hectares of wetlands, but a report from the State Forestry Administration, which has jurisdiction over much of the wetlands, warned that ongoing reclamation has put those wetlands in danger. SOA has stepped up action to prevent more destruction, issuing several regulations in recent years. And in 2016, SOA created 16 marine parks, bringing the total area with various levels of protection to about 124,000 square kilometers.

But the newest regulations are »a turning point« in SOA's attention to marine ecosystem protection, says Zhengwang Zhang, an ornithologist at Beijing Normal University. By deflecting development pressure, the new regulations will make it easier to create new reserves and should add momentum to efforts to expand a World Heritage Site around key wetlands, Crockford says.

More work awaits

Piersma and other researchers in the Global Flyway Network hope to continue research with satellite tracking of migratory birds to show which habitats are most important and to track progress in reserves. »We need to keep a close eye on the developments of the population, and see whether the recoveries actually will take place following political change.« Ma says a more comprehensive evaluation on the status, trends, and threats to coastal wetlands at national level is still required. There's political work to do, too. China still lacks national wetland protection laws, Zhang says, as well as a national action plan for coastal wetland protection. Penalties for damaging wetlands need to be strengthened.

Li notes that the current regulation is focusing on stopping reclamation but not directly on conserving biodiversity. It will take »huge resources« to restore reclaimed wetlands that have been invaded by spartina grass, which degrades the habitat for migratory birds, she says.

Enforcement will be important. Li suspects there is still opposition to the regulations from local governments that depend on development for revenue. Ultimately, Crockford says it will be important to win over locals by demonstrating the benefits of tidal wetlands, including nature tourism and flood protection.

Courtesy of Science magazine through www.sciencemag.org

Jing Li

Leizhou Peninsula attracts wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers and People who care

Zhang Lin, SBS in China

With support from SEE foundation and Manfred-Hermsen Stiftung (foundation), SBS in China team organized a capacity building training in Tiaozini in August 2017 for the core survey teams of Jiangsu, Shanghai and Zhenjiang provinces. The training involved detailed description and demonstration of Spoon-billed Sandpiper targeted surveys. In addition, Zhang Lin introduced basics of different plumages of SBS, especially plumages and moulting stages that are likely to be seen in southern China. A total of 24 birdwatchers from Zhuhai, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang, Shantou in Guangdong, Fuzhou in Fujian and Beihai, Beilun participated in the training and shared their experiences of their local shorebird sites.

The survey teams explored artificial ponds at Tujiao, Mumian and Dongli, Leizhou but did not find Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Combined surveys at the mudflat of Tujiao produced 30-35 Spoon-billed Sandpipers with seven color-marked birds as follows:

1. Left Pink Ring
2. White 2L
3. Lime M1
4. Lime M4
5. Yellow 53
6. Lime L5
7. Yellow YU

We thank for SEE foundation support, the program Free Flying Wings has been supporting over one hundred mudflats and twenty four endangered waterbird conservation projects in the eastern China.

Group photo of Zhanjiang, Guangdong capacity training workshop December 2017 *Chen Lan*

Brief summary of survey of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Guangxi Province, China

Vivian Fu, The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society

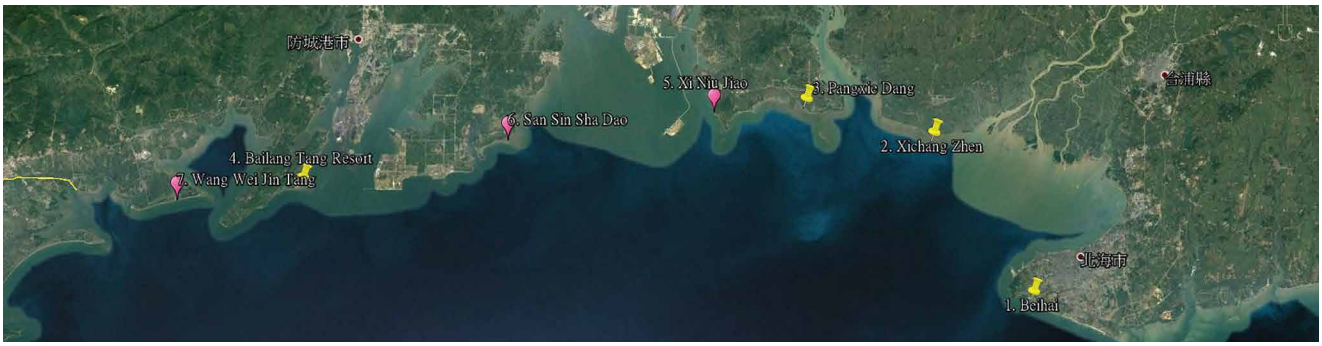
A survey of Spoon-billed Sandpiper was held between 19th and 24th December, 2017 in Guangxi Province, China. The survey covered most of the coastal areas of Guangxi Province. The survey was mainly carried by Vivian Fu (HKBWS), Xiao Xiao-bo (BRC), Tang Shang-bo (Beilun National Nature Reserve), and 5 birders from Beihai, Fangchen Gang and Qinzhou Bay.

Among the 7 sites visited along the Guangxi coast, we recorded two sites with Spoon-billed Sandpiper. These are also new localities for wintering Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China. The first site was labeled as Bai Lang Tang where one Spoon-billed Sandpiper without leg flags was sighted on 23 December, 2017. On 24 December, 2017, we surveyed along the coast of Qinzhou where we sighted at least 5 Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the sandy-mudflat during falling tide. At least 7 people confirmed the sighting.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper sighted at location 3. Pangxie Dang

Spoon-billed Sandpiper sighted at location 4. Bai Lang Tang

Number of SBS	Date	Location	Notes
0	20 Dec 2017	1. Beihai	Fishponds and mudflat
0	21 Dec 2017	2. Xichang Zhen	Where Satellite-tagged KT used to be. Sandy Beach by a dyke, fishponds behind
0	22 Dec 2017	6. San Xin Sha Dao	Sandy shore and sand bar, but survey team in Fangcheng Gang (Mr. Tang Shang Bo) found 1 on 25 December 2017
1	23 Dec 2017	4. Bai Lang Tang	Sandy shore next to a resort, SBS without leg flag
0	23 Dec 2017	7. Wang Wei Jing Tang	Sandy shore next to resort
at least 5	24 Dec 2017	3. Pangxie Dang	Sandy shore next to a dyke, with fishponds behind
0	24 Dec 2017	5. Xi Niu Jiao	Sandy shore



Surveys sites in Guangxi Province, China: 1. Beihai, 2. Xichang Zhen, 3. Pangxie Dang, 4. Bailang Tang, 5. Xi Niu Jiao, 6. San Xin Sha Dao, 7. Wang Wei Jing Tang

Sustainable Farming of Hard Clam in Rudong will benefit Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other Waterbirds

Fang Qin (Aquaculture Stewardship Council ASC, China) in conjunction with SBS in China

This is a joint project by ASC and SBS in China. A full report is about the analysis of supply chain of hard clam (Wen Ge) and sustainable farming of hard clam in Nantong (Rudong and Qidong county). Here are some highlights from the report:

Rudong has some 69.000 ha mudflat (over 2 meter water), there are two main farming in mudflat, hard clam and seaweed, of the five species hard clam, Wen Ge *Meretrix meretrix* L. is the most important farming product or income for local people.

In Nantong, where Rudong locates, the seed of Wen Ge account to 70% nationally, where Rudong and Qidong county are the two main mudflat has natural Wen Ge seed.

In the project, we visited Xin Gang and Dong Lin (both located in the southernmost part of Rudong), where there are also Spoon-billed Sandpipers regularly recorded. We noted the harvesting cycle of Wen Ge in Nantong (see table).

No harvesting in April and May will be ideal and sustainable Wen Ge farming for local company, and this should be considered with market needs and company cash flow plan.

There are four stages of Nantong Wen Ge farming industry, first stage, by 1955, there is no management at all with rich natural/wild Wen Ge resouces. Second stage, 1955-1974, Qidong county start net-farming and artificial enclosed mudflat farming and give local community greater income. Stage three, 1974-2000, Nantong starts to export frozen Wen Ge to Japan, however, the farming density and other unfavorable condition caused many problems of mudflat farming and the industry was facing big challenges. Stage four, 2000 to now, Rudong started the export of the Wen Ge product and some of local farming companies started to restore the mudflat for natural Wen Ge seeds and a more sustainable way of farming. In 2012, there are five Wen Ge seeds company in Rudong, and twelve Wen Ge seeds company in Qidong, these company provide seeds not only for local farming and sell the seeds to other farming companies all over China.

In Rudong, there are two large companies who are controlling the whole Wen Ge export business, actually, the small farming company has no or little access to export information, e.g. price, quality needs and product preference. In last three year, the total export quantity is dropping but the price is picking up.

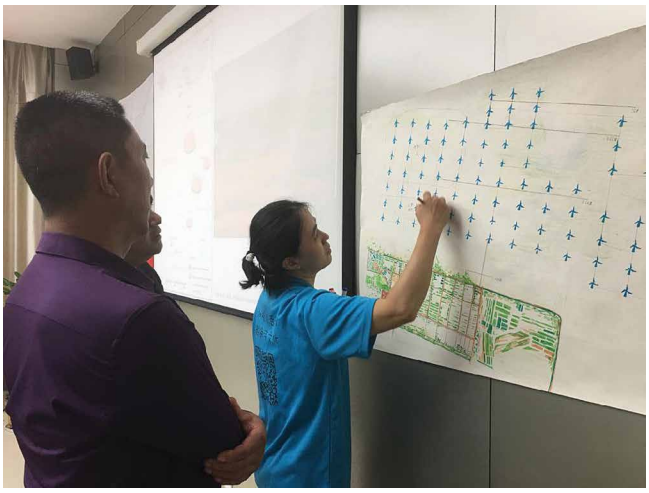
In Rudong, we noticed that the Wen Ge farming area is almost the same place for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other migratory shorebirds, the threats for Wen Ge farming are also the hidden threats for bird conservation. First, the reclamation of farming mudflat reduced the natural Wen Ge habitat and farming area, and this is the largest threat. Secondly, the high density of Wen Ge seeds and farming causes diseases and pollution. Wen Ge died in a large area. Thirdly, there is less natural Wen Ge seeds available in the mudflat, in the meantime, the wild Wen Ge become smaller. Fourth, Rudong still relies on a traditional harvesting method, picking up by hands or simple tools, the margin of local farming company is very small.

ASC would introduce a system to help increase local Wen Ge farming with emphasis on waterbird conservation, key steps are scientific research, foundation-based mudflat rental, sustainable farming, and a feasible plan for 2018 is to introduce a model mudflat in Rudong/showcase mudflat to show local community the value of ASC international market influence and a visible reward for sustainable farming and waterbirds conservation.

We like to thank the Manfred-Hermsen Foundation and NABU, who were supporting the project.

Harvesting cycle of Wen Ge in Nantong:

March - April:	collecting
April - May:	seeding, no harvesting
June 15th - December:	harvesting
December - February:	no harvesting



On August 26, 2017, ASC and SBS in China were working with Feng Li farming companies to understand how they use mudflat

Rudong and Qidong

Fengli farming company use the mudflat for different species of hard clam

Wen Ge collector in Dong Lin

Satellite tagging Spoon-billed Sandpipers in China reveals the Importance of the South China Coast

Chang Qing and Nigel Clark on behalf of the satellite tagging team

Jiangsu province is in the middle of the flyway and is of exceptional importance for the conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper on its flyway. Contributing to saving the species and following international responsibilities, bilateral conventions and cooperation along the line of the Arctic Council Programme AMBI, the State Forestry Administration SFA has given high priority to SBS conservation in the area. In 2015 SFA identified Nanjing Normal University as a focal organisation in Jiangsu to cooperate internationally on Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation. The National Bird Banding Centre provided all the necessary permissions for the ringing of SBS and other shorebirds and satellite tagging of Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

In the last issue of the newsletter we reported on the trials we undertook before putting satellite tags on the rarest wader in the world. We then reported on the first three tags that were deployed China in autumn 2016. In 2017 the Nanjing Normal University team supported by an international team of shorebird tagging and banding experts put more satellite tags on SBS. The tags are glued onto the back, over the pelvis, with superglue. Gluing the tags allows them to detach after a few months, probably when the bird starts to moult the contour feathers on its rump, and so it does not need to carry the tag for a long period. Tiaozini as the most important location for SBS in the Jiangsu Province was selected again for the tagging.

Catching SBS in spring is not easy!

From all the surveys that have been undertaken in Jiangsu in spring we knew that Spoon-billed Sandpipers tended to stop for only a few days, and that there were very large numbers of other shorebirds present at the same time. However,

The spring 2017 catching team *Guy Anderson*

with patience, we thought were able to catch three birds in full breeding plumage. These would be the most likely to return to the breeding grounds. Catching shorebirds was not a problem, but catching Spoon-billed Sandpipers was! There were so many Red-necked Stints that it became almost impossible to select the birds we wanted. After several days of not catching Spoon-billed Sandpipers in breeding plumage and in fact not catching any at all, the team decided to tag any healthy Spoon-billed Sandpiper that we could catch. Eventually we caught two Spoon-billed Sandpipers (leg-flagged CH and XT) among the 1,000 shorebirds caught! Both birds had a lot of breeding plumage but neither was in full breeding plumage.

CH left Jiangsu on 26 May and spent four days apparently exploring the east coast of South Korea before going on a tour of mudflats around the east side of Yellow Sea from May 30 to June 19. It returned to the northern coast of Jiangsu on 20 June, then moved north about 350 km. CH was back to Jiangsu on 1 July, arrived at Tiaozini on 3 July and stayed there at least until its tag dropped off. This behaviour may seem strange but it is consistent with that of many first summer shorebirds that do not breed and also increasing numbers of SBS during breeding period in Tiaozini (s. previous newsletter). Moving around potential suitable sites is important as it enables young birds that are not going to breed and so not under any time pressure, to build up knowledge of which are the best places to visit in future. It also demonstrated how important Tiaozini is for non-breeding first year birds.

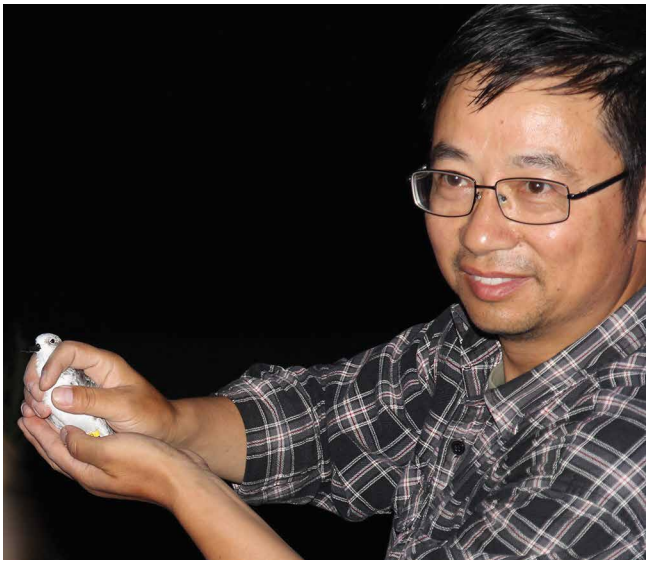
The second tagged bird (XT) did migrate but was always later than we would predict and it only got the potential breeding grounds in Northern Kamchatka late in the breeding season. This bird may have been a first time breeder but we cannot exclude the possibility that it was affected by the tag. The two areas in Kamchatka visited by XT look like they could be potential breeding areas from satellite images and local knowledge, but they are both in remote areas that have probably never been visited by ornithologists in the breeding season. Interestingly, one of the areas visited was some distance inland. We hope it will be possible to get to some of these sites next summer.

The long journey back to the Yellow Sea after leaving the possible breeding grounds, XT stopped at two sites on western Kamchatka before it stopped transmitting on 23 July. It was not seen back in Jiangsu in the autumn so we cannot be certain if the tag fell off or the bird died at that point. We hope that XT appears next spring in Jiangsu.

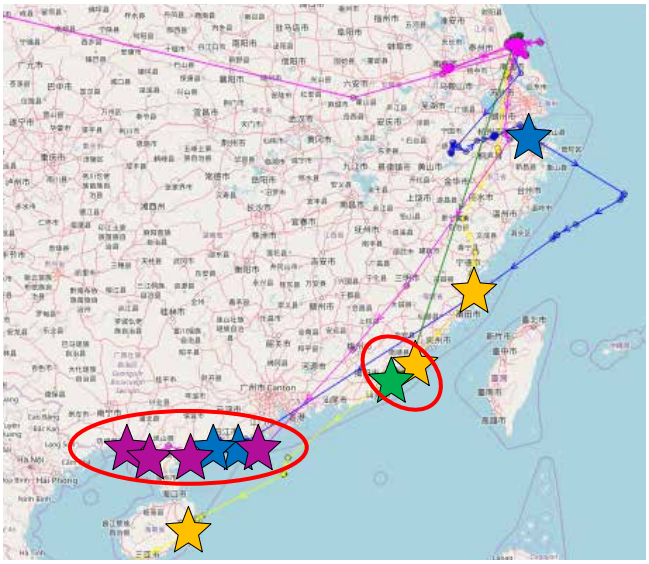
Although we only tagged two SBS we gathered a lot of data on the importance of the Jiangsu coast in spring for shorebirds en route to their arctic breeding grounds. This information will be very important increasing the knowledge of the significance of the Jiangsu mudflats in the lifecycles of shorebirds in the East-Asian-Australasian flyway.

The importance of South China

We had one remaining tag which we put on in October 2017 in Tiaozini and KT went to several sites in south China before spending a week in Vietnam. It then surprised us all by flying over Laos and stopping for a short while before stopping on the Irrawaddy River for four days en route to Sandwip in Bangladesh. We have now lost the signal, but it is quite possible that the tag has fallen off. Although we only caught two Spoon-billed Sandpipers we did have over 1,000 sightings of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the field including ET, HU and CT, the three birds that we tagged in 2016 now minus their tags and looking just like they should in late autumn. This is gratifying as it shows that the trials in captivity were correct in showing that once the tags fell off, birds would be free continue their normal life.



Prof. Chang Qing with tagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper
Guy Anderson



China, an important key stopover and wintering site

All four of the birds that we tagged in autumn (three in 2016 and one in 2017) spent time in one or more sites in South China and all stopped in sites where there was a lot of illegal bird netting, but efforts were made to alert the authorities to remove the nets and this has reduced the threat. This shows the direct conservation benefit of the satellite tagging program. It would be important to plan some future conservation activities in South China in the locations identified by satellite tagging. In addition the locations of satellite fixes from these birds while in Jiangsu given us a detailed understanding of the home range of SBS in spring and autumn when they are staging in the south west of the Yellow Sea.

The future

We are now analysing all the data that we have gathered from the six birds that we have satellite tagged and once completed we will consider if we need to put on more tags in China. We will continue to strictly limit the use of tags as we are acutely aware that attaching anything to a critically endangered bird must only be done when absolutely necessary for the conservation of the species. However, we are sure that we have already learnt many things from tagging that will increase the chances of bringing the Spoon-billed Sandpiper back from the brink of extinction.

Considering the increasing experience accumulated in Nanjing Normal University and plans of future cooperation and training on shorebird ringing, the area of Tiaozini may become a regular place for bird ringing in the future.

The satellite tagging team is a collaboration between Birds Russia, BTO, Nanjing Normal University, RSPB, WWT, SBS TF and many individuals.

Survey of SBS Breeding Sites in Chukotka under China-Russia Bilateral Agreement on Migratory Bird Conservation

Ma Tian, Lu Jun & Zhang Guogang

Russian Far East is one of the world's important breeding sites of birds where endangered birds such as cranes, geese and waders reproduce. In this region, Chukotka is the most important breeding site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which is a critically endangered species worldwide. Researches have already indicated that Spoon-billed Sandpipers breeding in Anadyr stop over at eastern coastal areas of China such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian during their migration in autumn, and some of them would winter in coastal areas in Guangdong and Guangxi. Besides, other birds that breed in this area such as Pacific Golden Plover, Red Knot and Red-necked Stint would also stop and overwinter in eastern coastal area of China during migration. Therefore, the communication and cooperation between China and Russia on migratory bird protection is of great significance to the protection of critically endangered birds such as Spoon-billed Sandpiper as well as their habitats.

In March 2015, the Russian-Chinese Bilateral Agreement on Migratory Birds (2015-2017) was signed in Moscow by the two governments (see also SBS News Bull 16). In order to carry forward the agreement and to understand the resource conditions for summer waterfowl in Anadyr, Chukotka, Dr Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, director of the Institute of Ecology and Evolution, Russian Academy of Sciences, invited Director Lu Jun, Deputy Director Zhang Guogang and Assistant Researcher Ma Tian from National Bird Banding Center of China to form an investigation group. The group conducted a 25-day survey in the breeding area of Spoon-billed Sandpipers from June 25th to July 20th, 2017, while communicating with Russian experts, understanding the efforts of the head-starting project of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, and discussing the further cooperation between the two countries in conserving Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Field Survey

The survey was mainly carried out in the surrounding tundra areas and seas of Meinypilgyno, with Anadyr and Beringovsky also included. The Russian-Chinese investigation group carried out the survey on the breeding sites of Spoon-billed Sandpipers by adopting belt transect method and line transect method. Guided by the Russian experts, the investigation group observed the hatch-

Field survey in the surrounding tundra areas of Meinypilgyno

ing of Spoon-billed Sandpipers around their nests, fully understood their habitat environment, and particularly studied their behaviors and habits in hatching. The investigation group also put geolocaters on Red-necked Phalarope. In addition, the experts banded fledglings of Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Common Ringed Plover and Red-necked Phalarope, and exchanged methods and experience of banding. Russian experts illustrated the methods of catching and monitoring hatching Spoon-billed Sandpipers with infrared cameras.

Totally 34 waterfowl species were recorded in the survey, of which 16 species had breeding activities. Six species were monitored at hatching, including Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Common Ringed Plover, Pacific Golden Plover, Common Eider, Siberian Gull, and Arctic Tern; and nine species hatched already and were in the stage of brooding, including Emperor Goose, Lesser Sand Plover, Red Knot, Common Snipe, Red-necked Stint, Dunlin and Red-necked Phalarope.

We searched the previous banding information of the two countries from the bird banding and recovery database, and found that 11 out of the 34 waterfowl in this survey already had banding and recovery records. They are White-fronted Goose, Bean Goose, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Dunlin, Red Knot, Red-necked Stint, Siberian Gull, Yellow-legged Gull and Slaty-backed Gull. The analysis result of the banding information of the 11 species indicates that the Russian Far East has a close relationship with the eastern coastal area and the Yangtze River Basin in China (such as Poyang Lake and Dongting Lake) for they are all on the East Asian - Australasian migration route. Generally, geese and waders that overwinter in the eastern coastal area and the Yangtze River Basin in China would migrate in summer to the Russian Far East areas including Khabarovsk, Sakhalin, Kamchatka peninsula, Yakut, and Chukchi for breeding.

Communication and Discussion

The investigation group listened to the introduction by experts like Evgeny and Pavel Tomkovich on the status and trends of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other birds in Meinypilgyno in recent years, and analyzed the reasons for the depopulation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. In recent years, the breeding population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Anadyr has shown a downward trend. Although the main causes have not been identified yet, there are two potential threats to Spoon-billed Sandpiper. First, the floods formed by melting mountain ice and snow in spring flow into the rivers and cause the rise of water level, which generates the risk of submerging some nesting areas of Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Secondly, eggs and nestlings of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and many other birds might be preyed by natural enemies such as *Corvus* Ravens, Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* and Arctic Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus parryii*. Meanwhile, the degradation of major stop over and wintering sites along the migration route, environmental pollution and human activities are also important factors for the declining of the population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The reclamation and degradation of the tidal flat in the eastern coastal area of China (e.g. that in Rudong County, Jiangsu Province) reduces the area for energy supplement during migration, thus increases the risk of migration. In addition, the investigation group listened to the research result on the gene segment for Spoon-billed Sandpiper introduced by Dr Kondrashov, and discussed the reasons for the fast decline of Spoon-billed Sandpiper by comparing with other waders from the perspective of evolution.

Currently, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) is working with Russian Academy of Sciences on the head-starting project of Spoon-billed Sandpipers. During this survey, the investigation group visited the hatching room and head-starting facilities of Spoon-billed Sandpiper, listened to

Expert Pavel Tomkovich showing the breeding condition of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other birds in Meinypilgyno in recent years

the introduction of the technical process of egg collection and hatching by Roland Digby, member of the WWT project, and his demonstration of the artificial brooding, banding and sampling after the birth of nestlings. By hatching over 10-30 Spoon-billed Sandpipers artificially each year and supplementing them to the wild population, the risk of failed breeding caused by nests being submerged by floods can be reduced, and the probability of eggs and nestlings being preyed by natural enemies is reduced, which increases the chance of successful breeding of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, and is of great significance to the protection of Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Publicity and Education

At the end of the trip, the investigation group took part in the publicity activity on the harmonious co-existence of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the community in Meinypilgyno organized by the Russian project team and the local community. During the event Director Lu Jun introduced the distribution and quantity of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China, the profile and protection of their habitats in Rudong and Dongtai in Jiangsu Province, the Estuary of Min River in Fujian Province, Guangdong Province and Guangxi Autonomous Region, as well as the relevant protection measures taken in China. Together with local residents, they discussed the development mode combining economic development and Spoon-billed Sandpiper protection.

Roland Digby introducing the head-starting project of Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Summary and Prospect

In recent years, it has been observed that a small number of Spoon-billed Sandpipers overwinter in the coastal areas of Guangdong and Guangxi, China, but constant monitoring is needed to prove the stability of the population, and it is yet to know where most of the Spoon-billed Sandpipers go for overwintering. Additionally, through continuous monitoring of the population during autumn migration, it is found that the monitored migration quantity is much larger than that in the breeding sites, from which it can be speculated that there are potential breeding sites in Russian Far East. Therefore, the study on the migration routes of Spoon-billed Sandpiper is one of the urgent topics now. Spoon-billed Sandpiper is the flagship species on the East Asian migration route. We wish to strengthen our cooperation with Russia to protect Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its habitats.

Director Lu Jun introducing the distribution and conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China

30 Head-started Birds, Field Surveys and Conservation Workshop: Spoon-billed Sandpiper Update from Chukotka, 2017

Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Pavel Tomkovich, Nikolay Yakushev, Egor Loktionov, Roland Digby, Ivan Shepelev and Elena Lappo

Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation activities of BirdsRussia in Chukotka in summer 2017 consisted of the following activities:

1) Continuation of monitoring, color marking and head starting work in Meinypilgyno.
2) Monitoring of several traditional locations: at Kaipilgyn, Russkaya Koshka (Danish SBS Support Group survey organized by BirdsRussia), Khatyrka Surroundings (Ural ornithological group of BirdsRussia) and Mallen Lagoon (Heritage expeditions led by Rodney Russ).
3) Continuation of discussions with Chukotka administration on preparations for creation of the Nature Park »The land of Spoon-billed Sandpiper«.
4) Exchange visit of China Delegation of the State Forestry Administration to Meinypilgyno for two weeks (see separate publication in this Newsletter).
5) SBS conservation workshop in Meinypilgyno organized jointly by Chuktoka Administration and BirdsRussia to involve local people in discussions on future conservation work in the area (hold on July 13 in Meinypilgyno).

Sadly most of monitoring locations other then main area in Meinypilgyno had shown continuous declines in numbers of breeding pairs. The workshop was a success with common understanding with local Chukchi community on the need of further conservation work to save the species.

The area of main Spoon-billed Sandpiper monitoring in the breeding grounds since the year 2001 – Meinypilgyno Village (62°32'N, 177°03'E) had recently got the status of INTERACT biological research field station (https://www.isaaffik.org/users/meinypilgyno). Field activities by total of 22

Previously head-started female U6 foraging on large prey items in the breeding grounds *Pavel Tomkovich*

persons from 6 countries in summer 2017 were focused primarily on monitoring, banding and head-starting of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper local population with some auxiliary projects. Support was coming from RSPB, WWT, MHS, NABU, Chukotka administration and number of other sponsors.

It often happens that conditions of each spring/summer season differ from those in other years. Birds and researchers experienced a warm start of the season 2017 with fast snow melt, which changed then by a rather humid and relatively cool summer since mid-June. But the most striking event was an exceptionally high spring flood in the Meinypilgyno river-lake system, caused by the drainage-river mouth into the Bering Sea being blocked with a high ridge of ice and gravel mix piled up by winter storms. This event had two »sides of a coin« for SBS. One of their preferable breeding habitats, the floodplain became renewed, and the flood made various tundra invertebrates easier accessable along the raising water edge for migrant and local shorebirds. It seems that because of that more SBS became settled along the most suitable stretches of flat shores of the Pekul'neiskoe and possibly Vaamychgyn lakes. At the same time, water table in the lakes was still increasing when SBS started nesting by mid-June. As a result we observed several egg-laying SBS females were heavy for over a week instead of 4-5 days. At the same time they were pushed daily by increasing water to find new areas for over a week instead of normal duration of 4-5 days. It was certain that SBS pairs were relaying after their early nests were flooded which we documented for several other shorebird species. As a result the nesting period of SBS was exceptionally long in 2017

First breeding pair where both partners have been head-started (OC and U6) *Pavel Tomkovich*

resulting in a record late hatching date of chicks (27 July) in one of the nests. We also presume that some females were unable to relay, and as a result the total number of actual breeding pairs in the monitoring area could be slightly underestimated this year.

In the main monitoring area, 13 breeding pairs and 4 solitary males of SBS were recorded, which is the same number of breeding birds for the third year in a row after the slight increase of the local population in 2015. Four other non-breeders flagged as chicks in former years were additionally observed there at least once in 2017. Irregular surveys in another small settlement of SBS at a distance of ca. 25 km from the village revealed 7–8 pairs and 2–3 birds of unknown status which is a slight increase of the number of breeding pairs there in 2017 compared to the estimates in former years. On the other hand, we were unable to find a single SBS in another distant area were 2-3 pairs were breeding in 2016 and even more birds were present in some earlier years.

The overall survival of shorebird nests to hatching of chicks in 2017 was reduced from previous four years, but still being moderate (46%, n=50). This happened presumably because of an increase in predation as a consequence of a decline in small rodents, the prime food of most predators. But at the same time survival of SBS nests (50%, n=12) did not differ significantly this year from the four previous years, although being slightly lower than in 2013 and 2014.

The Head-starting programme continued and was successful. Gained experience of hatching eggs indoors and raising chicks up to release into the wild allowed to release again 30 fledged young SBS on 28 July in one go. By mid-August all left the natal area.

In addition to 30 head-started birds 7 adult breeding SBS and 16 wild chicks were colour-marked in 2017. As before, each head-started bird got a white engraved leg flag (ELF), while wild birds were marked with light green (lime) ELFs. The number of flagged adults this year is the smallest one since the start of their marking with ELFs in 2013, because most breeding SBS in the local population are already marked. It is interesting that among 30 marked SBS that were breeding or attempting to breed in the population under control almost a quarter (23%) were head-started birds in 2017. And for the first time we documented breeding of a pair with both head-started mates (male white 0C and female white U6). Their first clutch of eggs was taken for head-starting, they relayed then and hatched two chicks one of which fledged.

A new activity in 2017 was tagging of SBS with satellite transmitters for learning about their individual migration pathways, stopover sites and migration strategy. The project was financially supported by MBZ foundation and WWT. Nigel Clark, the scientific advisor of the SBS Task Force came to Chukotka specially to attach transmitters. He was the main driving force to make this project a reality together with Prof. Rhys Green. Three adult birds (two males and one female) were tagged being captured on their nests where eggs have been collected for head-starting. Transmitter of one of the birds later stopped signaling on the way southward. Migrations of two other SBS were successfully tracked to their moulting area in the Yellow Sea where birds lost their tags during body moult as it has been planned. More details would be announced in further newsletters. In general it was a rather successful season for SBS and quite successful for researchers and aviculturists. Preparations for the summer of 2018 have already started, and we are looking for another exciting field season ahead.

Southward Migration Spoon-billed Sandpiper Studies on West Kamchatka in August 2017

Yu. Gerasimov, R. Bukhalova, A. Grinkova

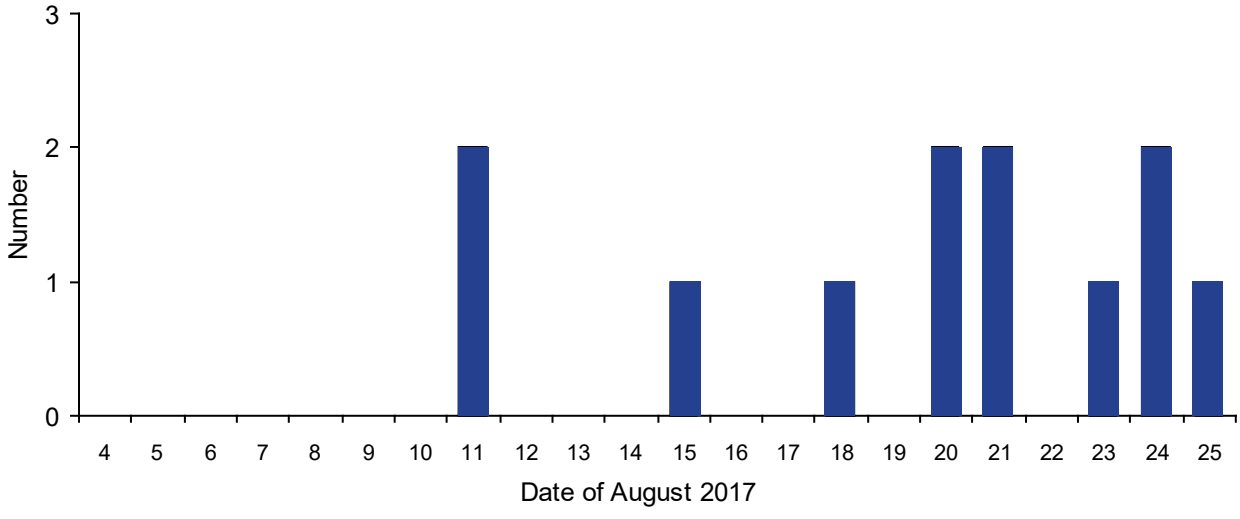
In August 2017 we continued our study of southward wader migration on the western coast of Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia with support of BirdsRussia and the RSPB. These investigations were in the same area as the three previous years. Field work was carried out on the Vorovskaya River Lagoon on 3-26 August. The lagoon is 40 km long and 1-1.5 km wide. We investigated only the southern part of the lagoon between Ustyevoe Village and the mouth of the river (54º 11‘ N, 155º 49‘ E). The length of this part is about 5 km.

As in the three previous years our work included daily counting on mudflats during low tide, observation of visible migration with counting of birds flying past, banding and flagging, and searching for flagged waders. 21 mudflat counts of waders during low tide were conducted and 29 species of waders were recorded in total. The maximum number of waders was 7300 individuals, counted on 10 August 2017.

Like in previous years getting new information on Spoon-billed Sandpiper southward migration was our prime goal. We observed Spoon-billed Sandpiper, feeding on the mudflats from 11 August till 25 August – final day of our counting (Fig. 1). The number of recorded Spoon-billed Sandpiper was smaller than in 2014-2016, but obviously it is connected with smaller number of observers.

But results of catching of Spoon-billed Sandpipers were even better than previous years. In total we caught 7 individuals, two of them twice. All birds were juveniles and received yellow flags with individual code: LE, VE, PE, YE, ME, XE, NE.
First bird (LE) with weight of 24.2 g (with flag) was caught at 14:40 on 15 August, second bird (VE) with weight of 27.0 g – 16:10 on 15 August. Two Spoon-billed Sandpipers with weight of 25.3 g (YE) and 29.6 g (PE) were caught in the morning of 21 August. First of them (YE) was retrapped in the afternoon of 24 August with weight of 28.5 g. This bird became heavier by 3.2 g in just three days. Other bird (PE) was retrapped in the afternoon of 25 August with weight of 31.7 g – heavier for 2.1 g. Three more Spoon-billed Sandpipers were caught 22 August morning (ME – 24.9 g), 23 August morning (XE – 26.7 g); 24 August afternoon (NE – 24.6 g). Length of wing of trapped birds was 101-106, in average 103.2±2.1 mm.

In August 2017 we did not notice any hunting of small shorebirds in study area.



Results of counting of Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the Bolshaya Vorovskaya River Lagoon

Second flagged SBS (VE), August, 18th

Third flagged SBS (PE), August, 21st

Fourth flagged SBS (YE), August, 21st

Fifth flagged SBS (ME), August, 22nd

Sixth flagged SBS (XE), August, 23rd

Seventh flagged SBS (NE), August, 24th

Breaking news:
VE (left) was seen at Sonadia Island, Bangladesh on January 27th 2018!

The iron Spoon-billed Sandpiper »migrates« to Vladivostok to represent Chukotka Region at the Economic Forum

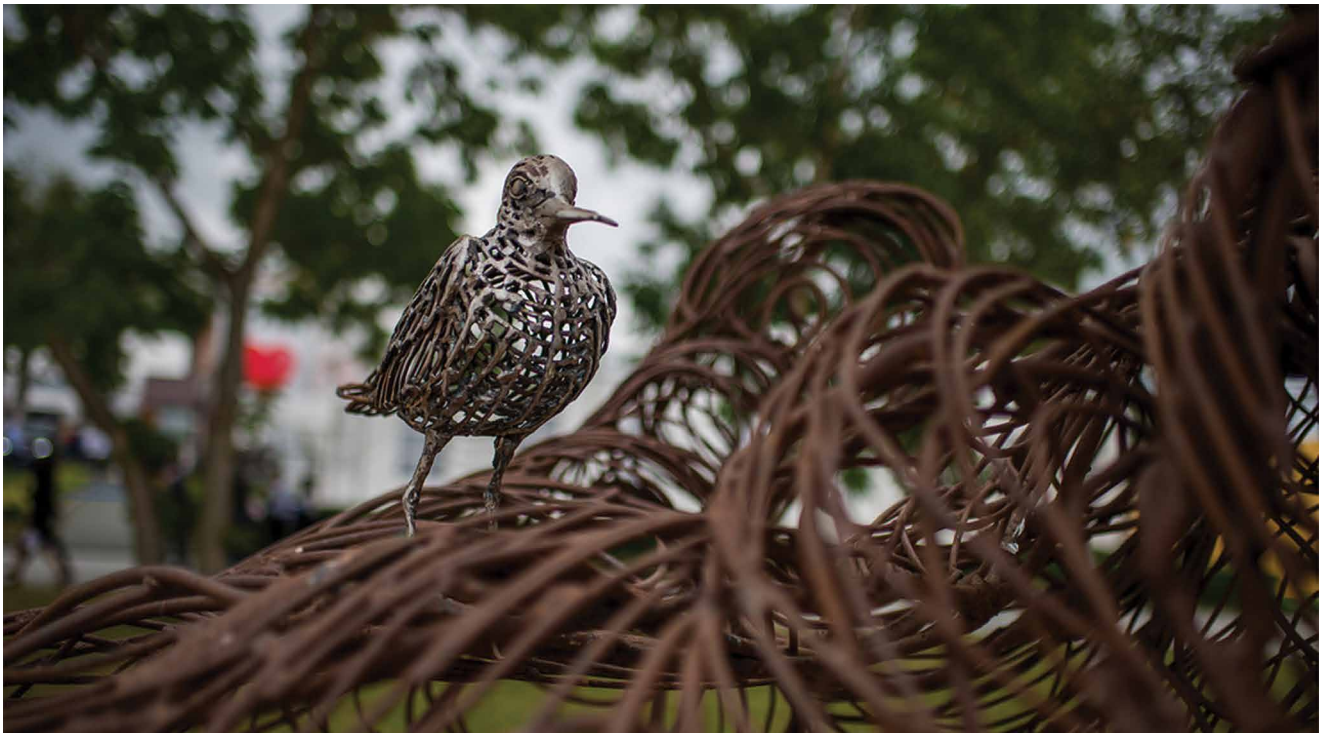
Elena Lappo (BirdsRussia, Institute of Geography Rus.Acad.Sci.), Irina Ryabukhina (Chukotka Administration), Olga Rastorgueva (Anadyr Museum)

The Third Annual Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) was held this September 6-7 in Vladivostok. More than 3,700 people from 55 countries around the world gathered to discuss economic issues of development and international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, along the flyway SBS use to migrate to the south. The 17 territories of Far-Eastern Russia were represented.

For the Chukotka region (Chukotka Autonomous Okrug ChAO) the forum opens the prospect of signing agreements with potential investors for tens of billions rubles and gives an opportunity to show the priorities of the region's Administration in the field of nature conservation, since this topic was the leading one at the forum.

Apart from economic issues, a cultural program was widely presented within the »Street of the Far East« exhibition. Each of 17 Russian regions presented had built its own pavilion to tell the story of its culture, nature and peoples. The exposition's main topic was in accordance with The Year of Ecology in Russia, this defined not only the cultural aspects but even the construction materials used.

The Chukotka pavilion constructed in a form of a full size bowhead whale was made from biodegradable and recycled materials (recycled paper, cardboard, empty barrels). Inside the »whalearium« there were sites with 3D models of marine inhabitants of the North, with light and acoustic effects, including »whale songs« and other sounds of wildlife. The yaranga, the monument of the dog sledges with figures of old men, the models of the pomor koch (traditional boats of the native peoples in the European part of Rus-



SBS metal sculpture by Vadim Kouleshov, Vladivostok 2017

sian High North) and other common artefacts of the northern regions of Russia. The highlight of the site was the sculpture of an SBS, standing on a huge human palm – symbolizing the fragility of nature facing the pressure of human activities … What will be the future of this species? Will it get squeezed in the dispassionate human palm or will we take the chance to save it? This piece of art symbolizes the big challenge for conservationists to save the species, where the Chukotka Administration is taking an active role. The Administration of ChAO has made the important and effective contribution to the conservation of the nature of Chukotka and especially to saving unique bird species that live there. The unique SBS monument was welded from metal wire by the metal sculptor Vadim Kouleshov especially for the Forum. It was created by the commission from Chukotka Governor Roman Kopin and »travelled« to Vladivostok as far as 8,000 km from central Russia, Volgograd thanks to PEK – a Russian transportation company which gave its assistance when all the other options were unavailable. The story of »iron SBS migration« showed the importance of cooperation and drawing public attention to these important issues.

After the forum the »iron SBS« was transported to Chukotka with the whole exposition and became a part of the permanent museum exhibition in Anadyr. It is symbolic that this rare and endemic species, one of the emblems of Chukotka wildlife, represented its region at the large economic forum. There it was seen and admired by participants from many countries in which it stops over during migration and wintering (China, Japan, Southeast Asian countries) and all Far Eastern regions of Russia. This artistic move by the initiative of Chukotka Administration helps to rise the problem of nature conservation and of saving the rare species within the region.

Thanks to Oksana Yaschenko and Anna Anikeeva-Syroechkovskaya for providing data and editing.

Updates from Myanmar

Phyo Paey Aung, Ren Naung Soe, Christoph Zöckler

Since the high level authorities were involved in the National Spoon-billed Sandpiper Action Plan of Myanmar, co-hosted by the Mon State Government in Mawlamyine in early January 2017, the Mon State Government is keen to conserve the ecosystem values of the Gulf of Mottama, the main reasons for the Regional Government to commit and take responsibility for the Ramsar site designation in north-east of Gulf of Mottama.

The Ramsar Convention announced the Gulf of Mottama as Myanmar's 4th Ramsar Site officially on 10th May 2017 at World Migratory Bird Day. This is a great achievement of our conservation partners around the world for the conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The Mon State government and project partners celebrated official Ramsar Site announcement ceremony at Supanu village in Kyaikhto town. At the event, Dr Aye San (Chief Minister of Mon State) attended and received site certificate document from U Kyaw Kyaw Lwin (Deputy Director General-Forest Department)/National Focal Point for Ramsar.

BANCA continues working with different stakeholders to secure livelihoods and conserve ecosystem values in the Gulf of Mottama. After the Ramsar Site designation, the Mon State Government is concerned about illegal fishing practices in the Gulf and would like to support mitigation of these practises.

In November 2017, the Mon State Government declared a fishery Co-management area in Thahton District and immediately took action to stop

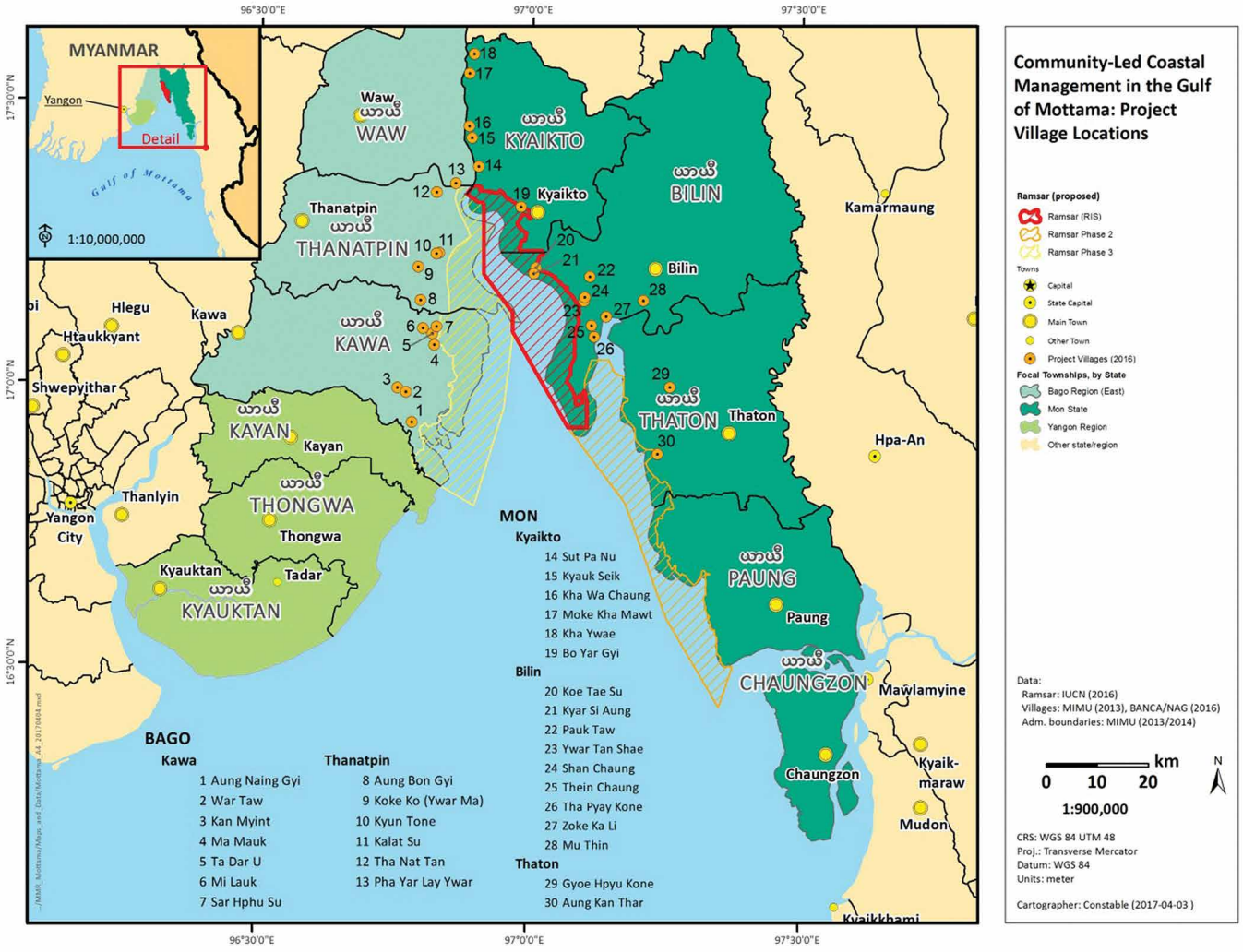
Dr. Aye San (Chief Minister, Mon State) received Ramsar site certificate from U Kyaw Kyaw Lwin Forest Department

illegal fishing in Thahton area. BANCA is regularly monitoring and patrolling bird hunting and illegal fishing in the Gulf and has not recorded illegal fishing in the Thahton district since it has been designated as Fishery Co-management area. Some of the illegal fishing boats moved to the west coast and are still fishing there. That is why it is important to have the whole Gulf of Mottama designated as Ramsar Site and engaging with the Bago and Yangon Governments will be necessary in the near future. BANCA is involved in the Bay of Bengal transboundary conservation program in collaboration with India, Bangladesh and Thailand, promoting community livelihoods and marine ecosystem conservation programmes.

In February 2018, BANCA has taken some keen Local Conservation Group leaders to Lake Chilka in Odisha (Orissa), one of India's migratory bird sanctuaries for exchange visits with the support of Ramsar Network Japan.

Nan Thar Island

Ren Naung Soe and his team recorded a maximum of 23 SBS during December and max. 20 in late January on the island. This has been the highest number since 2012 and shows the importance of this site for wintering SBS. There were also two ringed birds. One was Light Green 27 which has been observed every year since 2014.



Current Ramsar Site (red) and Proposed Expension (yellow) in the Gulf of Mottama

Green 27 ringed in Meinopylgino, Russia in 2013 returning to Nan Thar Island for the fifth consecutive year in Dec 2017 (left) and January 2018 (right) *Ren Naung Soe*

CU at Nan Thar island winter 2017/18

Another flagged bird was among the flock during both the December and January survey: Yellow CU was flagged in Tiaozini, China in 2016 and recorded wintering in Nan Thar for the third time (see above).

Location where KT stopped on the Ayeyarwady River for four days during his journey through SE Asia in autumn 2017

Satellite tagged KT stopping over in the Ayeyarwady River

On 8 December the tagged bird KT that was provided with a satellite tag in Tiaozini, Jiangsu Province (see separate article in this issue) flew across South China, Vietnam, Thailand and stopped over unexpectedly at the Ayeyarwady River near Pyay and stayed there for four days. This constitutes the first proven inland record for the species ever!

RNS and his colleague Kyaw Thein set out from Sittwe and arrived just a little too late at the site in

Bird hunter from Kamma, Ayeyarwady River
Ren Naung Soe

Western Myanmar special-cases-team Kyaw Thein and Ren Naung Soe on mission »Kamma«

Kamma near Pyay on the Ayeyarwady River. KT had just left on his way to Bangladesh (see Chang Qing and Nigel Clark in this issue). Ren and Kyaw still found several small waders including 15 Lesser Sandplovers, Kentish Plovers and 5 Red-necked/Little Stints.

More importantly they found that bird trapping is prominent on the river island. They met with the hunter, who lives from hand to mouth from hunting swallows alive with net mainly. He caught more or less 50 swallows a day by net. He gets 150 kyats (0.11304 USD) per one swallow selling. He sells to the people who sell birds alive in the temples to visitors who want to release the birds. He is not hunting in one place. He is also going to the other places along Ayeyarwady River for hunting birds. He said he does not want to kill the birds. So, he hunts the birds alive to sell the people who want to release them. He hunts the birds especially in winter and summer along Ayeyarwady River.

Nga Mang Thaung, Ayeyarwady Delta
The island in the Outer Delta is Ramsar site since 2017 and has 1 or 2 SBS each winter. On 8 January 2018 Lay Win and Phil Palmer found a total of 2 and maybe even 3 birds. One bird had a broken undertail cover and was easily distinguishable from other birds.

Bokpyin
On 28 Nov one SBS was present among a flock of about 500 small waders in the mudflats of Bokpyin in the very south of the country. Presumably the same bird was still present on 17 Jan 2018 (Saw Moses and Shane Thu Lwin). Despite intensive searching only one bird could be confirmed, which is a drop from two birds the previous year (see previous newsletter 17). Together with BANCA, CZ and Shane Thu Lwin engaged with local hunters who primarily target Eurasian Curlews, but also catch other birds. Awareness raising and training of former hunters to bird watchers and guards has been initiated.

Evaluation of Shorebird Hunting Mitigation, Outreach and Development at Sonadia Island, Bangladesh

Sayam U. Chowdhury & Priya Chowdhury

In 2010, Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project (BSCP) discovered that the local hunters have been trapping SBS along with other shorebirds on Sonadia Island (Chowdhury 2010), and then the project with support of ArcCona and many other international organizations signed conservation agreements with 25 active shorebird hunters on the island in October-December 2011. Resources were provided for alternative livelihood options including fishing boats, nets, livestock, and equipment for watermelon cultivation, and grocery and tailor shops.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the hunting mitigation scheme and awareness programs (2009-2016), a semi-structured questionnaire survey was conducted in December 2016 in and around Sonadia Island by the BSCP team. A total of 46 villagers and 17 ex-hunters were individually interviewed in and around Sonadia. To avoid bias an independent researcher carried out the survey.

All the respondents said there is no more hunting in the area. According to the survey responses, hunting stopped around five years ago (2011). The main reasons given for ending hunting were strict laws and regulations, education and higher profitability of catching crabs and shrimp farming.

All the hunters who could be reached during the survey have greatly benefited from the hunting mitigation (micro credit) scheme of BSCP. Most of them now have a monthly income ranging from BDT 6,000-16,000 while they received aid worth BDT 3,000-12,000. Apart from that, an aged ex-hunter earns only BDT 200-300 every month by practicing indigenous medicine and another ex-hunter has no income, as he is unable to work due to severe illness. All the ex-hunters claimed

Public interview in order to understand hunting situation and outreach impact at Sonadia Island

that there is no more hunting going on at Sonadia Island. Although they do not go for regular patrolling, as they were supposed to, when the fishermen keep an eye out when they go for fishing.

Every respondent in the survey knew that migratory birds arrive on the island in early winter and stay throughout the winter. Among 47 respondents, only three had not heard about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Many villagers know about Spoon-billed Sandpipers through billboards, posters or leaflets that have been distributed by BSCP, but 80% of the interviewees heard about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper via the school programs and boat race (Nouka Baich). Less than 10% of the respondents attended the village drama (Jatraa). Half of the respondents had attended at least one event organized by BSCP. About 30% of the respondents knew about the events but did not attend and the remaining 20% were not aware of these events.

One-third of the respondents had very good knowledge about Spoon-billed Sandpipers and another one-third had moderate level of knowledge. The rest of the respondents had little to no idea about the bird. A quarter of the respondents had precise information on the work that has been done by BSCP whereas the others had a vague idea. Almost 90% of the respondents have seen BSCP's billboards, flyers, posters etc.

Sonadia Island is not currently recognized as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, the island as a whole clearly meets three Ramsar criteria and probably also meets a fourth. Moreover the three sites we surveyed meet the 1% threshold of Criterion 6 by themselves (Chowdhury et al. 2011). Various industrial development projects are underway or being planned in and around Sonadia Island including a 1,200 megawatt coal-fired power

An ex-hunter and his sons at his new house, Sonadia Island

plant at Matarbari of Maheshkhali, c. 15 km north from the key shorebird site (Khan 2014), Liquefied Natural Gas terminals at Maheshkhali (Rasel 2017) and tourism development by Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority. The tourism project will acquire 9,467 acres (3831 ha or 78% of Sonadia Island ECA), of which 20% is intended to be for infrastructure development despite promises that development will be eco-friendly (Patwary 2017).

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New Video »**Finding New Spoonie Lands in Bangladesh**«: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRiBSDyhl-k

First confirmed record of Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* in the Philippines since 1996

Philip Godfrey C. Jakosalem[1], Ignacio Santillana[2], Christine G. Dula[3], Tateo Osawa[4] and Lisa J. Paguntalan[1]

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The Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* is a charismatic species listed by IUCN as Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2018). The population of the species declined sharply and is believed to be between 100-200 pairs (Clark et al. 2016, Zöckler et al 2016, Zöckler 2017). The species favors intertidal mudflats, coastal lagoons and estuaries often in the company of other species of sandpipers. The loss of habitat and hunting is believed to be the major reasons for the decline of the species. (BirdLife International 2018, Zöckler et al 2016).

In the Philippines, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is an accidental vagrant species with only one record in the Philippines (BirdLife International 2001). The bird was reported on 2 May 1996 along the coastal areas of Bicobian bay, in between Maconacon and Palanan, east coast of Luzon (BirdLife International 2001).

At about 11:12 AM on 6 January 2018, as Godfrey C. Jakosalem (GCJ) scanned the southwestern part of the Tibsoc-San Juan wetlands of west coast of the island of Negros, he saw that there were some Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis*, Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus*, Mongolian Plovers *Charadrius mongolus*, Greater Sand Plovers *Charadrius leschenaultii* and Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola*. His attention was caught by one individual with distinctly rufous back and he thought of a Broad-billed Sandpiper but with a spatulate bill. There were two more individuals with the same enlarged, spatulate-like bill. All were without any flags or colour rings. GCJ immediately took some pictures and called his colleagues and pointed out the three individuals that looked like Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmaea*. The three individuals then flew to join the larger flocks of Red Knots *Calidris canutus*, Great Knots *Calidris tenuirostris*, Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*, Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* and other waders.

Our observations were part of the annual Asian Waterbird Census where Philippines Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Inc. and Negros Bird Conservation Society are active participants of the bird counts within the Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area (the newest Ramsar site in the Philippines) and East Asian-Australasian Flyway Network Site, particularly in the Tibsoc-San Juan wetlands (10°23'13" N 122° 52'35" E).

As GCJ was observing them feeding on the mudflats, one Spoon-billed Sandpiper was a bit smaller than the two other birds. The smaller one had a paler superciliary line compared to the two other birds. We continued to observe the bird for about 15 minutes. The sandpiper spent most of the time feeding along the mudflats together with other smaller shorebirds. We continued to search for more Spoon-billed Sandpiper until 15:00 hrs within the Tibsoc-San Juan wetlands until the high tide settled in.

We revisited the site on the 7th January, but we were unable to relocate any SBS but observed a huge flock of more than 2,500 individuals of Great Knots, about 3,000 Black-tailed Godwits, Red-necked Stints, Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* and smaller plovers.

A lone Spoon-billed Sandpiper was observed

again on the 14th January at around 11:12 hrs in the same area. The bird was just 50 meters away from the first sighting. The bird returned to almost the same areas as the first sightings at same period of the tide coming in the midday. We do not know if this was one of the three birds observed a week before or a new Spoon-billed Sandpiper passing by the wetlands. As the tide was fast approaching the Spoon-billed Sandpiper flew to the drier parts of the wetlands together with most of the other shorebirds. This was the last time we have observed the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The observations in January suggest that the species is staying here over winter and may do so regularly. Future surveys will need to confirm this.

Acknowledgements
We are grateful for the help of the Municipality of San Enrique and Pontevedra particularly to Barangay Tibsoc, San Enrique and Barangay San Juan, Pontevedra, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Region 6, PENRO Negros Occidental, CENRO Bago City. We also like to thank Barangay Captain Junjun Quitco, Jose Quitco, Rosie Pablico and Elenita Amen the support. And lastly, Andrew Ross Reintar, Gerrie Mae Flores, Asher Pineda and Verna Liza Castro who joined the Spoon-billed Sandpiper search team. And lastly, to Taej Mundkur for his initial comments and suggestions for this article.

The Philippines Spoon-billed Sandpiper Watch Team:

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Verna Liza Castro, Bird Photographer

Wild Bird Photography Philippines
Tateo Osawa, Bird Photographer

Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Tibsoc-San Juan Wetlands within the Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area, Negros Occidental, Philippines, 06 January 2018
Philip Godfrey Jakosalem

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New papers on Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Sayam U. Chowdhury

SBS in Bangladesh

Lack of resources has prevented a comprehensive shorebird survey of the entire coastline of Bangladesh, thus survey effort has been focused on limited areas. A species distribution model with potentially suitable habitat reported by Zöckler et al. (2016) for wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers were used focusing on Bangladesh and satellite images from the Landsat Programme and Google Earth to identify previously unsurveyed areas of Bangladesh (especially along the eastern site of Meghna Estuary) likely to hold wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

The paper outlines results of shorebird surveys in Meghna Estuary, Bangladesh with counts of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other threatened shorebirds and demonstrate the global importance of the newly discovered site by comparing these counts with those made at other sites. The paper also describes threats and ecology of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and proposes conservation measures for their long-term protection.

The paper was published in Bird Conservation International in December 2017, the full paper can be downloaded from here: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959270917000247

Discovery of an important wintering site of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* in the Meghna Estuary, Bangladesh

SAYAM U. CHOWDHURY, MOHAMMAD FOYSAL, M ABDULLAH ABU DIYAN and SAKIB AHMED

Abstract

The Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* is one of the most threatened migratory shorebirds in the world, breeding in Russia and wintering in Asia. The global population is declining rapidly and is projected to be extinct within a few decades without intervention. Here, we present the results of shorebird surveys in previously unrecognized site in Bangladesh along the Meghna Estuary, identified for the first time by using species distribution models. Counts and habitat preference of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other endangered shorebirds are described here with notes on the global importance of the newly discovered site. The sum of the peak counts for each shorebird species across the two surveys was 25,993 including a minimum of 48 Spoon-billed Sandpipers. The majority of the Spoon-billed Sandpipers were observed during low tide while foraging (66.6%) and logistic regression testing for effects on the presence of foraging Spoon-billed Sandpipers indicate that they mainly preferred to forage on shallow mud. We summarise the threats to Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other birds in the new site that is currently not recognized as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, although it fulfils several Ramsar Criteria. We also propose conservation and monitoring measures for long-term protection of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its habitat.

SBS feeding behaviour

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is the only wader species in the world to have evolved a spoon-shaped bill but so far the specific use of this remarkable bill is fairly unexplored. In order to shed light on the feeding behaviour of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper the authors of the below described paper have observed Spoon-billed Sandpipers feeding on the breeding grounds since 2000 and from 2006 to 2017 on the non-breeding grounds. With these numerous observations and high resolution videos, the authors have produced detailed descriptions of how the bill is used and also offers some tentative hypotheses about the purpose for which the bill has evolved.

The paper was published in Wader Study in August 2017, the full paper can be downloaded

from here - http://www.waderstudygroup.org/article/10068/

Hammer, filter or microphone: How does the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* use its bill to feed?

CHRIS KELLY, CHRISTOPH ZÖCKLER, BAZ SCAMPION & EVGENY E. SYROECHKOVSKIY

Abstract
The remarkable and unique bill-shape of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* raises the question as to why such a structure might have evolved. The morphology of the bill was described in detail by Burton (1971) but at the time there was little information on feeding behaviour. Using information we collected during all stages of the annual cycle of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, we here qualitatively describe six feeding techniques that we observed to be commonly used by the species. Rather unexpectedly, feeding techniques were not strikingly different from other Calidris sandpipers. »Sweep-stitching« was the most distinctive technique but this appears to be an extreme variation of stitching commonly used by other calidrids. We discuss our observations with respect to various hypotheses that have been proposed to explain the bill-shape, and we use our observations of feeding techniques, along with details of the bill's morphology, to explore possible evolutionary drivers.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper pecking at large prey after »grandstanding« Sonadia, Bangladesh *Sayam U. Chowdhury*

SBS in Arts

Fei Yu, trained as a visual designer then became a freelancer bird artist; her series product »featheredfriend« has many birdwatcher followers. Elena Lappo talked to her.

EL How did you first hear about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
FY I was reading an article about Spoon-billed Sandpiper, they look very cute, delicate and charming, however, I feel sorry for the current situation of its getting extinct.

Where did you see your first Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
I have not had a chance to see them in the field yet.

When did you draw your first Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
Actually, I only got to know about the species for less than one year. But at the first sight, I can't help myself showing them in my own way. I want to show this lovely creature to people, to those who feel similar to me. So, without thinking twice, I started preparing for work by collecting all the information available online to work out the prototype.

What is your most memorable encounter with Spoon-billed Sandpipers?
Well, I hope I will see them one day in the field ... However, one of the most memorable things for me is getting the feedback about my product, finding out that some people found out more about SBS and started getting worried about their situation, others get to know about SBS for the first time through my work and now want to hold them back from extinction. These feedbacks are making me happy. It is a kind of story between me and SBS. I am sure one day when I see an SBS in the wild, I would remember it in my own way once and forever.

Why is the Spoon-billed Sandpiper so important for people and the planet?
First, I think it is unforgivable if one species gets extinct because of human beings. Second, we now know more about the importance of mudflat conservation, which gives more birds and living creatures the chance to survive, to sustain the mudflat biodiversity. If the existing collapse keeps going, human beings will surely be the final victims.

What contribution can art make to saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?
Art has a huge variety of formats, and in each category there is a group of audience or fans. If an artist could combine Spoonie and art in a way, the story of SBS could reach big audiences. Art is getting born from ordinary life and stays above it at the same time, and common people would get to know more about the crisis of SBS and mudflat biodiversity. I am sure this will in turn form strength to protect the species and the habitat.

News in Brief

British Birdfair 2017
The Optics Comp. Leica sponsored a two day lecture event with WWT at the British Birdfair 2017. Visitors including Jonathan Martinez and daughter from China/France and long-time supporter Helena Jefferson (middle back) joined WWT staff. But sadly we also have to say Birdfairwell to Dr Debbie Pain (left sitting) and Roland Digby (second from left standing). Fortunately Debbie will remain in the SBS TF and join the very active UK SBS Retiree Club with Dr Nigel Clark (sitting right), while Roland is seeking »asylum« from mosquito infested cold Arctic Chukotka in warmer climates on the Arabian Peninsula to look after small Houbaras. We thank them both for their huge contributions to SBS conservation and wish them all the best and hope to stay in touch.

Birdfair in Korea
Nikolay Yakushev (BirdsRussia) took part in the 8th Asian Bird Fair in Ulsan, Republic of Korea, November 17-20 (see left picture on next page). This annual event was created to raise awareness for bird observations, to protect birds and their habitats, and to communicate with all interested organizations and individuals. In 2017, about 100 participants from Korea and other countries arrived in Ulsan. The program of the fair included an international forum on ecotourism, a race of the Birdwatchers in the bird watching park and the exhibition itself, where the participants presented tourist products and sold various souvenirs. The stand BirdsRussia was dedicated to the project of preserving the sandpiper-shovel and was popular with visitors. Particular attention was attracted to souvenir spoons made by Ivan Shepelev and gingerbread in the form of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper (see pictures on next site and back cover of this newsletter) by Anastasia Yakusheva. The head-starting project also raised lively discussions and appreciation.

A special mention deserves the place of the fair – the city of Ulsan. As the largest industrial center in the Republic of Korea (the world's largest car factory, one of the largest shipyards and a petrole-

Nikolay Yakushev with visitors investigating wooden »sandpiper« spoon and SBS cookies

um refinery complex), Ulsan was one of the most polluted sites fewer than 20 years ago. However, in 2000, local self-government, along with interested citizens, began a massive campaign to turn the heavily polluted river into a reservoir filled with life. Now the river is home to the walls of plant and animal species, and in winter thousands of wintering birds find shelter on its shores. Local authorities are extremely serious about turning tourism into one of the leading branches of the economy of the city, so they showed high interest and helped to organize the fair. One of the dinners was hosted by the mayor, where foreign delegates exchanged gifts with him.

Myanmar Table Tennis Tournament

In anticipation of a potential TTT at the next SBS TF meeting planned in China some members of the TF were practicing with Myanmar National TT champion Ko Kar Lar (background).

The Last Leg with Rodney

Christoph Zöckler

For the seventh time the New Zealand travel company Heritage Expedition invited the SBS Task Force to join its cruise through the Bering Sea exploring its spectacular wildlife and search for breeding Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the summer 2017. I was lucky to participate again, my second cruise along the Kamchatka coast after we started the first in 2011.

Right from the start of our cruise along the coast of Kamchatka and Chukotka we witnessed the wild and dynamic landscape with an eruption of the 4.800 m high Kluchevskoie volcano, close up encounters with the magnificent Steller's Sea Eagle, and numerous whales, seabirds and the rare Red-legged Kittiwake in Commander Islands. Certainly one of the highlights was floating with the splashing walruses. Very special at least for the birding community and the Spoonie-enthusiasts was the encounter with at least three male Spoon-billed Sandpipers engaging in displays and even fighting over territorial disputes (see cover page). Part of this year's trip was also to cruise along the entire 300 km long coast that is currently planned as a new Nature Park: »Land of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper«! More on this grand plan in the upcoming issues of our newsletter.

For the last time the cruise has been led by Rodney Russ. Rodney generously provided the Task Force for the past seven seasons with opportunities to search for new breeding sites, to engage with interested customers from all over the world and he provided free transport for researchers and in one case even Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs and chicks from the core breeding area in Meinypylgino to Anadyr. In return the Task Force members gave lectures on board and guided the land excursions in search for breeding birds and helped in other ways with the logistics of the cruise. It has been a truly magnificent win-win relationship for both, a textbook example of cooperate support for conservation. Thank you Rodney! We hope that Heritage Expedition will continue this constructive relationship and we are looking forward to work with Heritage Expeditions and its dedicated team.

Rodney Russ on Kolyuchin Island, North Chukotka, July 2013

Close to Steller's Sea Eagle

I am the egg man, I am the Wal-Russ ...

The Last Page

From left to right and top to bottom: *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus, Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus, Calidris pygmeus, Calidris pygmaeus, Calidris pygmea*, ***Calidris pygmaea,*** Spoonbilled Sandpiper, Spoonie, Spooner, Spoon-billed sandpiper, Spoonbilled Sand-piper, **Spoon-billed Sandpiper**.
Anyway: Please do not eat Spoon-billed Sandpipers! Cookies are much tastier.