Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force

News Bulletin No 33 · Nov 2025

Elena Lappo

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

Mission:
The East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) aims to coordinate the conservation activities identified in the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Single Species Action Plan for the species, which was commissioned by BirdLife International. The activities in the Action Plan are regularly reviewed and updated by all Flyway Members and a growing network of active supporters and groups in the Flyway countries, and beyond.

The Task Force originates from the establishment of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team (SBS RT) in 2004, when several partners active in the conservation of this globally threatened wader met in Edinburgh. With the growing level of activity, the finalization of the Action Plan in 2008 and a growing network of partners, organisations and supporters the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was formed at the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) meeting in Korea in February 2010. In December 2010, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was officially endorsed as one of the first species Task Forces by the Partnership under the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group. Implementing organisation for the SBS TF is BirdLife International through its partner Birds Russia. It is chaired by the Government Partner of Russia. Task Force members consist of the EAAFP Government Partners of key range states for the species and international conservation organisations. These are: the Russian Federation, Japan, People's Republic of China, 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 by the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Manfred Hermsen Foundation

This summer's main news of a new breeding habitat found in an area far off the coast in the Kamchatka mountains took everybody by surprise. It was almost like a Voyager probe has found life on a different planet, when K9 the satellite tagged Spoonie landed off the usual coastal track in the previous year. Indeed, our Russian team confirmed life in form of breeding Spoonies. The team found even three breeding pairs with three chicks each during this summer's expedition into the remote mountain range. This is an incredible feat by the Russian team and very good news with hopefully more pairs in similar habitats nearby.

There is further good news on the progress of habitat restoration at the Jiangsu Coast. High tide roost sites have been established and expanded and are well managed at Yancheng City. The invasive Spartina grass has been removed from all mudflat areas. The World Coastal Forum (WCF) with over 600, including 150 foreign participants this autumn in Yancheng has yet again demonstrated China's commitment to conservation of its coastline, migratory species and particular the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which it seems the whole of China has adopted. MCF and the EAAFP secretariate convened several workshops and side events at the WCF.

Despite this progress in conservation there are still issues of concern along the Jiangsu coast. The green development and the rapid conversion of China's energy network into renewables is creating conflicts at some key sites for our sandpiper. The establishment of huge solar farms on former high tide roost sites and mudflats in Dong Lin, Nantong City, is a new type of threat and needs careful monitoring. Hopefully the Chinese authorities can rethink this approach and strike the right balance between nature conservation and the development of renewable energy.

It is good to see our Korean colleagues actively surveying and taking brilliant pictures of Spoon-billed Sandpiper stopping over at their coastal wetlands. Difficult news reaches us from Myanmar, where Lime 27 might have likely spent another winter at Nan Thar Island, but his favourite site could not been monitored again due to the civil war unleashing in the country but sightings on the breeding grounds and stopping over reveals the bird is still alive.

Finally, our new Action Plan for 2025-2035 has been finalised and is ready for adoption by the EAAFP MoP 12 in Cebu Philippines this November. We will report from this important meeting in the next issue.

John O'Sullivan reminded us of early days bygone in Meinypil'gyno in 2005, when international teams from 6 different countries participated in the key breeding areas of South Chukotka.

Enjoy the stories and more details about all these events in this new edition of our newsletter. As always, we are most grateful to our donors and we very much welcome the Paulson Institute as a new supporter.

BIRDSRUSSIA Chukotka SBS expedition report: monitoring the local SBS population in June and July 2025

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Fig. 1. *Male "White 1H" (banded as a HeadStarting chick in 2016) on the nest* *N. Karlionova*

Monitoring team and logistic. On 29 May 2025, Elena Lappo & Anton Ivanov arrived in Meinypil'gyno, South Chukotka. The main tasks for the first period of field studies were: (1) record arrival of Spoon-billed Sandpipers (SBS), (2) reveal early distribution of SBS over the area for learning about their pairing and for subsequent search for their nests. On 9 June Dmitriy Nizovtsev joined us, and we continued SBS survey and searching for the nests and banded the adults. On 25 June A. Ivanov and E. Lappo left Meinypil'gyno for their Kamchatka SBS expedition, and by the same flight N. Karlionova arrived in Meinypil'gyno. Natalia and Dmitriy stayed there until 23 July. The main tasks for the second period of field studies were: (3) continue searching for nests (late compensatory clutches), (4) find SBS broods and individually marked SBS chicks.

Weather conditions. The amount of snow at the end of May was about 90% on the spit and 70% in the moraine hills. During the last days of May there were very strong winds (up to 20 meter per second) that made the observation very hard. However, after few days the weather improved. Ice of the First River stayed until mid-June (at least until 24.06). Pekulny Lake was covered by ice until mid-June as well. Mouth of the main river (the First River) was blocked by ice and gravel by heavy storms during the autumn 2024, and it was opened on 15 June manually, so the water started running through the channel on 17 June. This lead to comparatively high flood in Ankavie area (SE end of the spit), and quite high floods at the Lower Vaamochka area (SW end, with most of SBS habitats near the Western Oil Drill Station till 24 June.

Fig. 2. *Monitoring team: A. Ivanov, E. Lappo, D. Nizovtsev, I. Drozd*

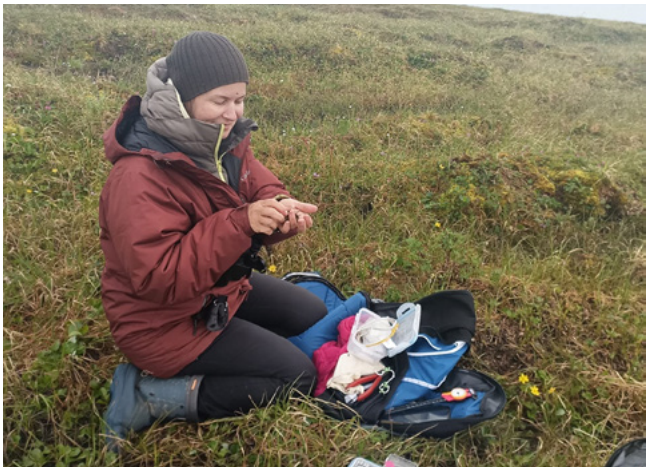

Fig. 3. *Ringing and color marking waders by N. Karlionova*

Spring migration of shorebirds. The spring migration of shorebirds was similar to previous years, most of the species arrived within their medium dates. Numbers of some locally breeding shorebirds (*Pluvialis fulva, Charadrius hiaticula, Phalaropus lobatus, Calidris alpina, Calidris ruficollis)* were as usual. Total bird list of this year consists of 102 species (of the total 200 species recorded for the area over the 20 years).

SBS monitoring results. The first SBS was recorded on 3 June (Lime "27", Lime "36" and Lime "0Y"). On 6 June we observed 9 individually banded SBS in total: 7 males and 2 females (Lime "0Y", Lime "36", Lime "H0", Lime "0J", Lime "47", Lime "94", Lime "79", Lime "2L"), and on 7 June three more (White "1H", Lime "8V", White "L5"). Individual recognition of color-marked SBS allowed to record arrival of new local birds to the main monitoring area.

The first nest (by the pair Lime "24" + Lime "36") was recorded on 11 June – on the stage of egg-laying, with 2 eggs, two more nests (by White "1H" + Lime "88" and Lime "8V" + White "L5") were found on 14 June. We also met female Lime "L7" (the chick banded by us in 2023) in pair with Lime "H0". On 16 June– more nests (male White "1H"+ female Lime "8V", male Lime "94", male Lime "M4") were found within the main study area. During visits of the Western Oil Drill Station (WODS) two more nests were found: male Lime "7L" and male Lime "84" with unmarked females, and displaying male Lime "48" with 2 more unmarked SBS were observed on 18 June. On 24 June we met male Lime "Y7" (another SBS chick banded by us in 2023) at WODS, and banded the female of Lime "84" by individual code Lime "52". The first nest was predated at WODS the same day (Lime "7L" with unmarked female). The new SBS territory with nest was found on 22 June, with unmarked pair, on the way to WODS, which we caught and banded as Lime "50"&"51".

During June-July we observed 27 SBS in total (17 males and 10 females) (Tabl. 1), among them:
6 males / 3 females, marked as an adult (by Lime),
8 males / 2 females marked as a chick (by Lime),
2 males / 2 females SBS from HS programme, and
1 male / 3 females unmarked.

Two SBS chicks banded by us in 2023, (male Lime "Y7" and female Lime "L7" from the same brood at WODS) bred for the first time. Female Lime "L7" was in pair with male Lime "H0". They had a nest, which was sadly predated at the last days of the incubation.

Table 1. *SBS recorded around Meinypil'gyno in three sections of the main monitoring area and in a distant (at the Western Oil Drill Station) in 2025*

Sex	**Main monitoring area**				
	Western section	**Central section**	**Eastern section**	**Western Oil Drill Station**	**Total** 17
Males	Lime 51	Lime 24, Lime 27, Lime 79, Lime 94, Lime 8V, Lime M4, Lime 0Y, Lime L0, White 1H, White 2L	Lime 0J, Lime H0	Lime 84, Lime 7L, Lime 48, Lime Y7	
Females	Lime 50	Lime 36, Lime 88, Lime E3, White NC, White L5	Lime 47, Lime L7	Lime 52, 1 unmarked	10
Total	**2**	**15**	**4**	**6**	**27**

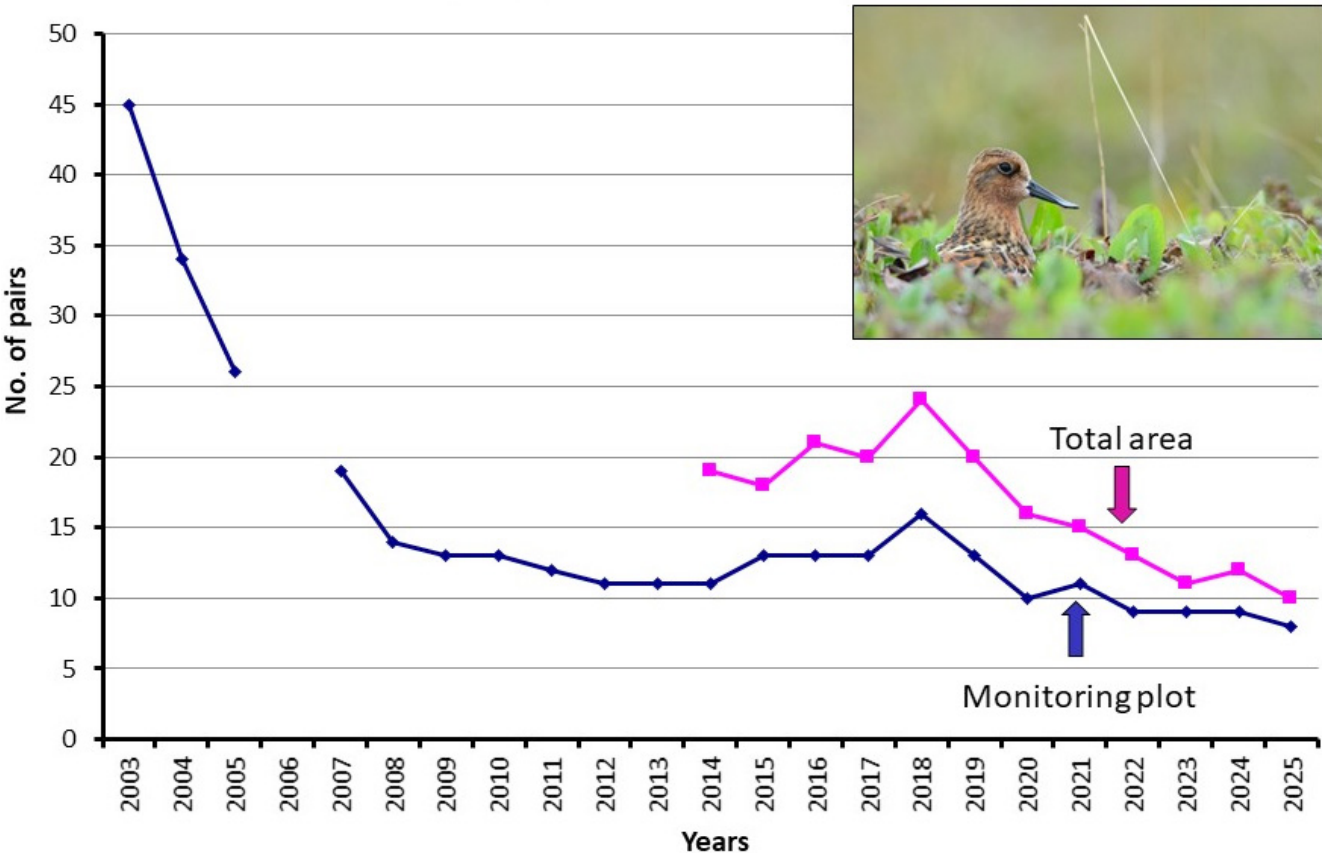

Fig. 5. *SBS population estimates in the main monitoring area (blue line) and grand total (purple line) near Meinypil'gyno in 2003–2025*

Fig. 6. *Male "Lime 27" (banded as a chick in 2013)*
N. Karlionova

Fig. 7. *Female "Lime 50" (banded as an adult in 2025)*
N. Karlionova

Fig. 8. *Male "Lime 0Y" (banded as a chick in 2021) A. Ivanov*

Fig. 9. *Female "Lime L7" (banded as a chick in 2023) E. Lappo*

Fig. 10. *Male "White 1H" (banded as a Head Starting chick in 2016)*
N. Karlionova

Fig. 11. *Female "White NC" (banded as a chick in 2019)*
E. Lappo

Totally 11 SBS nests (10 breeding pairs, and one pair had compensatory clutch) were found, 9 of which before 20 June (suitable for taking for the HS programme), and 2 more nests were found quite late (on 22 June and on 07 July). The disproportion in males and females meant a surplus of 7 solitary males.

In comparison with last year, we observed a slight decline in the SBS population in Meinypil'gyno (Fig. 5). Some remote areas (like Achaivaam, Myngyskon and others) where SBS were breeding until 2022 were checked and there were no more breeding pairs.

Among 27 SBS 4 were unmarked (3 of them we banded in June by Lime "50" (female), Lime "51" (male) and Lime "52" (female). The first SBS broods were banded on 5 July: 3 chicks from the pair White "1H" + Lime "88", 4 chicks from pair Lime "8V" + White "L5" and 2 chick from pair Lime "24" + Lime "36". On 6 July the last chick from pair Lime "24" + Lime "36" and 3 chicks from pair Lime "94" + Lime "E3" were banded, as well as 4 chicks from the "new" pair Lime "51" + Lime "50". We banded 21 SBS chicks in total (including the Western Oil Drill Station area). Some of the SBS chicks banded in 2025 were already seen on migration in South Korea and China (Lime "2U", Lime "P9" and Lime "C2").

Table 2. *Number of SBS and other waders nests/broods found and birds marked in 2025*

Species	**Found**		**Ringed**		**Total ringed**
	nests	**broods**	**adults**	**chicks**	
Pacific Golden Plover	4	-	1	-	1
Common Ringed Plover	6	14	-	28	28
Mongolian Plover	3	4	5	9	14
Red-necked Phalarope	2	-	-	-	-
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	11	-	3	21	24
Red-necked Stint	4	-	2	-	2
Dunlin	2	-	2	-	2
Pectoral Sandpiper	-	1	-	1	1
Red Knot	1	6	1	19	20
Total	**32**	**25**	**14**	**78**	**92**

Ringing and color marking of SBS is running in Chukotka since 2000, and in Meinypyl'gyno since 2001. Since 2012, SBS were also marked with engraved leg flags (ELF). In South-East Chukotka adult birds got a metal ring on left tibia, and Lime flag – on right tibia, and wild chicks – other way around, Head Starting chicks were marked up to 2021 by white engraved flags. In total in 2025 we ringed and marked 92 waders of nine species, including SBS (Table 2).

Nest predations. Of 11 nests, 4 were predated (even though the number of voles was high this year). However, SBS nest survival was higher compared to previous years (it was 63,4 % in 2025, in comparison with 62,5 % in 2023, and 50,0 % in 2024). In total 13 of 32 nests of different wader species were depredated (survival rate was 59,4 %).

To learn more about nest predators and predation rate we set up 3 automatic nest cameras (= cam-

Fig. 12. *Arctic ground squirrel near the nest of Pacific Golden Plover*

Fig. 13. *Pacific Golden Plover pushes away Arctic ground squirrel from the nest*

Fig. 14. *Brown Bear near the nest of Red-necked Stint*

Fig. 15*. Raven near the nest of Pacific Golden Plover*

era traps) near 3 nests of 2 wader species (Pacific Golden Plover – 2 nests and Red-necked Stint – 1 nest). All nests hatched successfully, although potential predators have been noted near the nests (Fig. 12-15).

The total list of potential nest predators recorded in previous years consists of several species: Red Fox, Arctic Fox, Wolf, Wolverine, Stoat, Arctic Ground Squirrel, Brown Bear, Sandhill Crane, Arctic Skua, Raven. Because of the high level of nest predation rate and its high risk for SBS breeding success it is important to continue the monitoring of nest survival using other wader nests and to think about ways to control numbers of predators within the area.

The habitat degradation due to anthropogenic factors and climate change continued, and needs to be explored more.

Acknowledgements. We are especially thankful for Andrey Etynkeu for his technical support and repairing our transport and the local sculpture “SBS on the Hand” in Meinypil’gyno; for Andrey Golub’ for logistics; for Svetlana and

Roman Belogorodsevy, and Marina Nikulina; and for Vladimir Yakovlev for his coordination from Moscow.

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Fig. 16. *Andrey Etynkeu repairing the local sculpture "SBS on the Hand"*

Fig. 17. *The local sculpture "SBS on the Hand" repaired by Andrey Etynkeu*

A new breeding ground on a mountain plateau in Kamchatka

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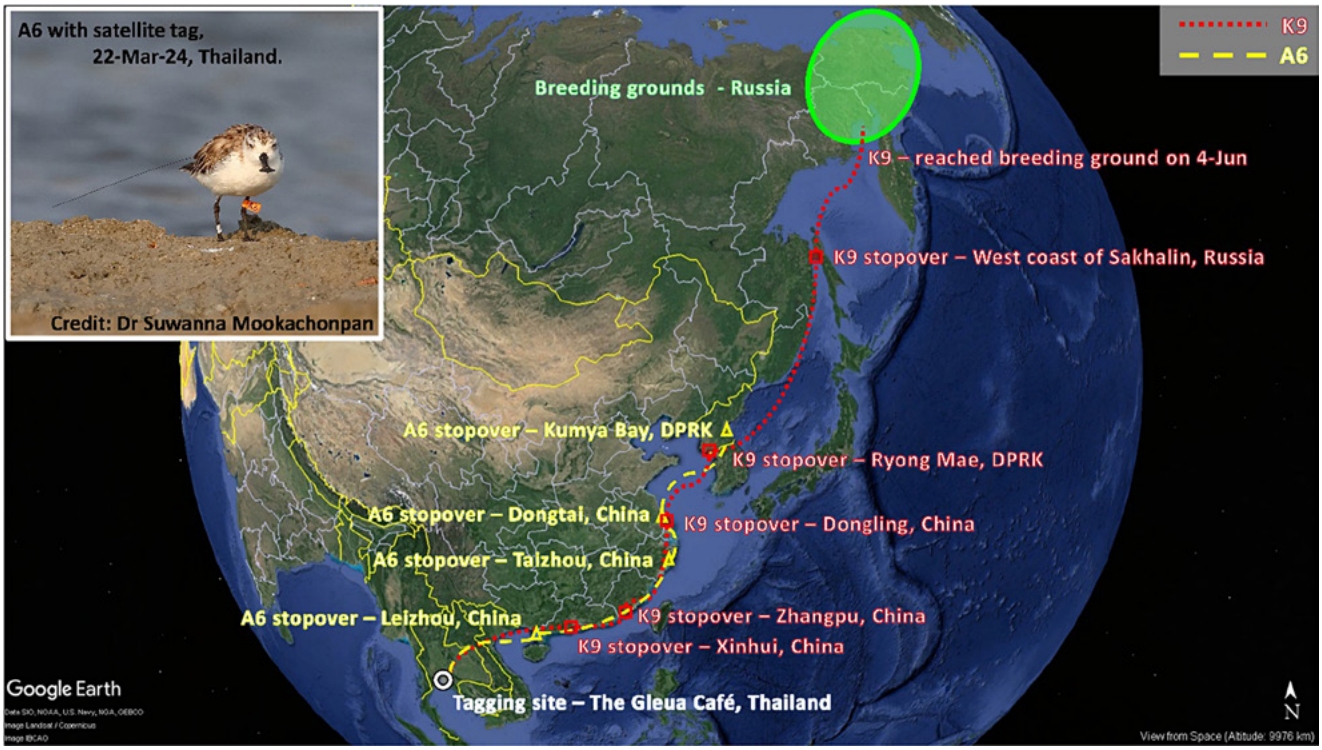


Satellite tagged "Orange K9" way in spring 2024 (Leung, 2024)

Introduction. This story started in March 2024, when two SBS were supplied with satellite transmitters in Thailand in spring 2024 by Katherine Leung (Leung 2024 – SBS TF News Bull 31: 20-22). This was an important achievement, because little knowledge was available on the homeward migration. We were also hoping the tagged birds would point to new breeding grounds.

We were sure that there were further SBS breeding areas somewhere in Chukotka. But we were very surprised when one of the tagged birds, marked by "Orange K9" moved to a Northern Kamchatka plateau by the time it was expected to arrive at the breeding range further north on the coast.

Most of us were thinking the bird died while the transmitter continued to transmit signals. However, when Prof R. Green and Dr N. Clark looked at satellite data more carefully, they found that the bird was moving around during incubation period in June and July, possibly breeding! We did not believe it, because the area does not look suitable for breeding of the SBS, because the species was known as a coastal breeder within distances up to 12 km from the sea (and even then near large water bodies). Nobody had visited this area before. Dr. S. Rosenfeld and G. Kirtaev flew above the neighboring areas by hydroplane in July 2024, with the sole purpose to check out the habitat and possible landing, but it did not look like very suitable. Their flight was organized and supported by Dr. C. Zöckler.

In early August 2024 K9 started its southward migration and arrived in China, where the bird was photographed and lost its satellite tag. It's worth mentioning that during the first spring migration tagging exercise in 2017 in China 'Yellow XT' came to similar plateau habitats in 60 km to the west from the presumed breeding site of the bird K9, but its tag stopped transmitting after a few days in June 2017 (Chang et al., 2020).

E. Loktionov, E. Lappo, Yu. Gerasimov, A. Ivanov (from left to right) in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy

E. Lappo in helicopter "Robinson" on the way to the plateau

Therefore, it was extremely important to check the "K9" site:
1) Was SBS really breeding at the mountain plateau, 400 m ASL, 40 km from the sea?
2) Was it a single bird (lost its way for some reason), or a previously unknown SBS breeding site?
3) If it was an unknown SBS breeding site – how many of them are there?
4) What are the habitat and the breeding conditions like?

The survey. During autumn, winter and spring 2024/2025 we were planning a survey to Kamchatka mountains, trying to combine it with our regular field work and monitoring programme in Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka, searching for experts and money for the Kamchatka survey. It was possible when we built up the group of four scientists – from Moscow (E. Lappo, A. Ivanov, E. Loktionov) and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (Yu. Gerasimov) came together and found a gap in their personal fieldwork.

It is a long story, searching for the right logistics and how to finance it. However, the real planning started when a possibility to rent a small private "Robinson" helicopter occurred, and we got a financial support from OBC, NABU and ArcCona for the survey.

A lot of preparation and analysis was done by the team of Prof. Rhys Green, and before the flight we had the tables with data and the map with exact position of points visited by "K9" in 2024 (Green, unpublished reports, 2025a, 2025b). On 8 of July we flew from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy to Ossora by a small aircraft "Yakovlev YAK 40". Few days before our team was reduced to three, because Yury Gerasimov got sick. However, he managed to buy all field gear and send it by boat to Ossora in advance. We agreed with Andrey – the owner/pilot of the private helicopter from Ivashka settlement to deliver us to the "K9 site", and he was so kind to pick us up from Karaga settlement which was close to Ossora to save time and money. On 9 of July, we were lucky with good weather.

First the landscape appears boggy and grassy on the lowland, and steep slopes covered by bushes, and stony peaks, but closer to the point we saw a plateau with tundra vegetation. We had two flights to the area (and back) with three of us and expedition gear, because the helicopter could take only 300 kg including the pilot.

Helicopter "Robinson" on the way

Field camp

We built up the tents and immediately went for the first excursion.

Results. We were presciently searching near the "centroid" area of the satellite signals.

On the second day, 10 of July, at about at 15.05 we heard the first SBS warning as it had a brood, at the upper reaches of a dry stony stream with permafrost. Soon we found the first SBS chick, and caught all three. Both birds were nearby, the male was actively warning, and the female was sitting aside. We banded all chicks, but the adult did not come to the trap net. We decided not to wait too long and left the brood.

All evening, we were thinking – if it is a single SBS family in the whole plateau, how it is related to "K9", and how and where female and male met each other and why they decided to breed on this plateau.

The next two days were rainy and foggy; we still could make our survey, but we did not meet any SBS until 14 of July, when we found another two broods. Both broods were at the same altitude and slope, in quite high tundra vegetation with small dwarf bushes, where we saw the chicks. We could not find them even though we were experienced searchers.

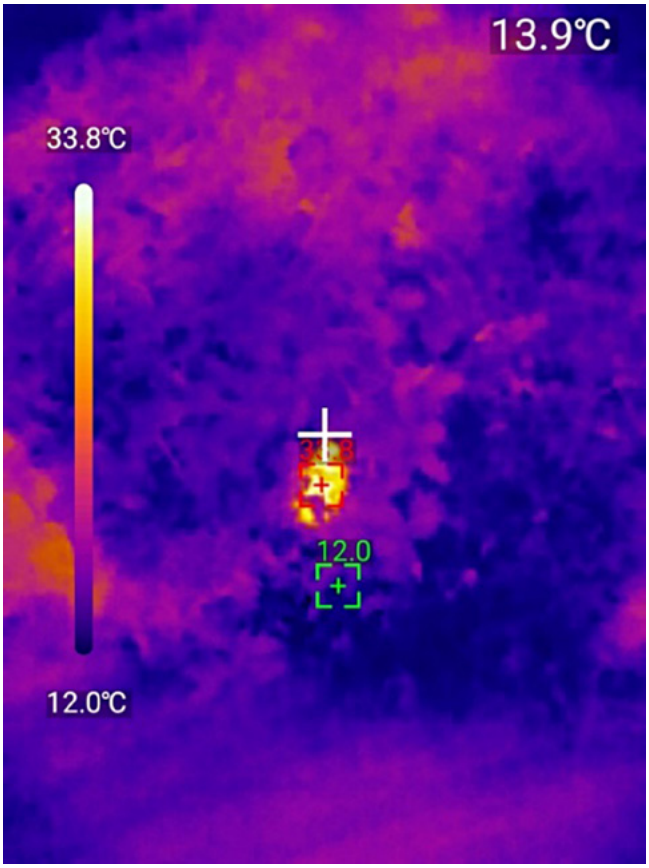
Near the second brood another two adult SBS landed, one of them was warning for several minutes, but both soon flew off. We do not know for sure if these were additional two SBS or birds from one of these three pairs.

Next day we brought a small thermal camera and managed to catch three chicks from each brood and banded them, together with one adult male.

In total we covered 25 sq. km of tundra on the plateau, but we did not find any more SBS. We found not only a single SBS, not even a single pair of it, but a real small SBS breeding group in the mountain area of Kamchatka.

The time was running out, the weather changed to heavy wind and rain, and the time for our return flight was coming. It took another 4 days, waiting for the weather to clear, discussing the plans with Andrey by satellite phone and planning our departure, but still making the survey, and Andrey was very kind to bring us back when the weather was still not very good, but manageable, on 18 July evening.

Weather conditions. The weather at the site was not stable: Of the 10 days we spent there, only 9-10 July was sunny and with no wind, 11 of July was partly cloudy, but no rain. From 12 till 17



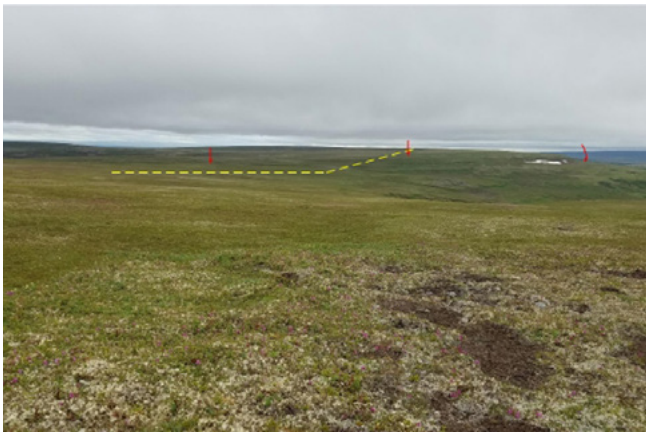
The methods of finding – with thermal camera photos (by E. Loktionov)

July it was raining heavily during the nights with strong wind up to 6 meters per sec, mostly from S and SE (so we completely missed 2 days of survey because of heavy rain), the rain sometimes changed to dense fog on 12-14, 17 and partly 16 July (which we realized, was not a fog but mountain cloud). The temperature was between 15-20 degrees for the first two days, but later dropped to +9 to +11. On 18 July the weather was cloudy, but with strong wind. Andrey the pilot of our helicopter after he started the flight, needed to stop half way for two hours for the weather to calm. Finally, he managed to pick us up with two flights. Late evening on 18 July we were back in Ossora.

Food supply. Even in bad weather Tipulidae imago and other insects were very much abundant. But the food supply needs to be investigated especially.

Possible predation pressure and other threats. The list of potential predators consists of some bird species: Hobby *Falco subbuteo* (flying in the valley), Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis* (a single pair), Gulls (passing by the area), Long-tailed Skuas *Stercorarius longicaudus* (three breeding pairs, observed catching voles and pikas), and mammals: Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*, Stoat *Mustela erminea* (mating, probably breeding — the most likely threat!), Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* (mostly observed in the deep valleys near the river beds, Ground Squirrel *Urocitellus undulates* (rare breeding).

The human disturbance is very low. We saw one caterpillar track in the valley in a distance of 3-5 km, and rare evidence of reindeer keepers visiting the area, but may be more often in past years. The area is very remote and hardly accessible.



The photo of the places of SBS broods: arrows are the brood locations, yellow line – is the watershed: to the left - Okhotsk sea basin (compiled by E. Loktionov)

Adult male with brood "A" breeding habitat *E. Lappo*

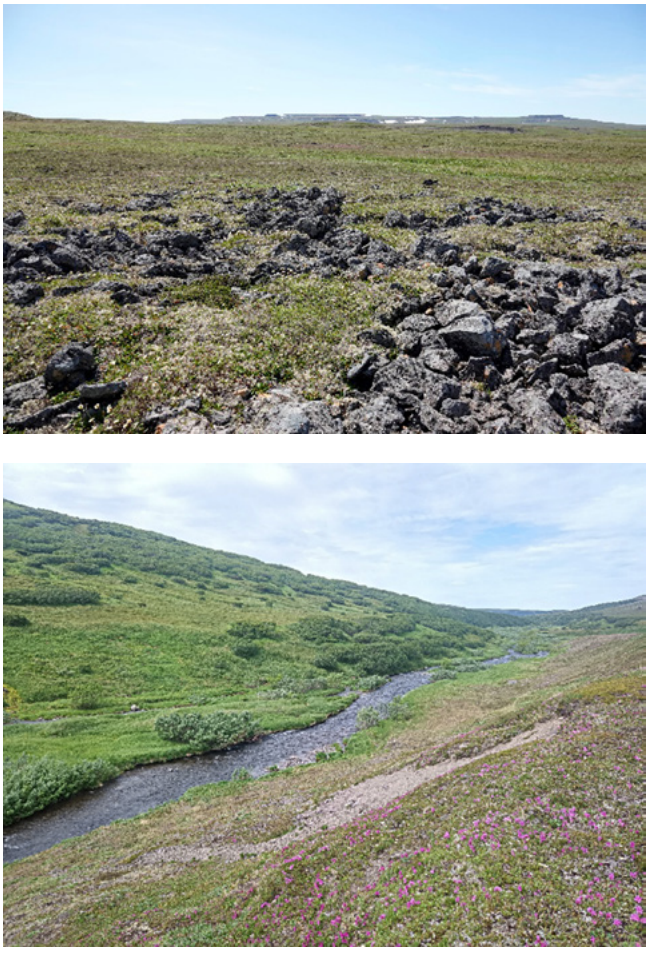
Male "Lime 61" from brood "C" *E. Lappo*

The Brood "A" breeding habitat *E. Lappo*

The previously known breeding and non-breeding distribution of SBS in Kamchatka. The SBS breeding range in former time was known from Northern Chukotka (Zöckler & Lappo 2008; Lappo et al, 2012) south to northern Kamchatka: Kayum Lagoon but vacant in 2009 (Gerasimov, Vyatkin, 1973, Zöckler 2009), Korf Peninsula (Portenko, 1957), near Cape Olyutorsky (Kistchinskiy, 1986) possibly breeding at Tymlat Lagoon but vacant in 2009 (Lobkov, 1986, Zöckler 2009) and the most recent nest near Cape Olyutorskiy (Lobkov, 2012). Non-breeding records were known for Moroshechnaya River (Lobkov, 1986; Gerasimov, 1988; Tomkovich, 1990), Sobolevo (Gerasimov, unpubl. report), in vicinity of Il'pyr Peninsula (Zavgarova et al., 2014), Ust' Khayruzovo (Dorofeev, Noah, 2015) and in other places.

We were thinking how to explain the SBS breeding on the plateau:

- Either SBS has always been breeding in the mountain plateau, we just were not aware of it, because mountains did not fit the habitats known for the species.
- Or, SBS occasionally breeds in the mountains on the way of its migration from Kamchatka to Chukotka breeding grounds.
- Possible that SBS only recently started to breed in the mountains switching there from the coastal habitats because of global warming and over-



Various habitats within the area of the survey

grown more dense and taller vegetation on the Kamchatka spits and lagoons (Zöckler, 2009).

We might not get the answers for these questions, but we will make the steps for future understanding SBS range and keep searching for them all together in the breeding and non-breeding areas.

P.S. SBS marked by Lime 61 already was seen at Tiaozini, China, on 05.09.2025 by Katherine Leung (see page 26 in this bulletin).

P.P.S. We have not met K9 at the plateau of Kamchatka, and nobody has seen it during the spring migration, but we are very much thankful to this bird to show us the way to this discovery.

Acknowlegements. We feel our survey would have been impossible without international cooperation and personal help of many people involved, so it is our pleasure to acknowledge:

• Expedition teams in China and Chukotka in 2017-2018 and Katherine Leung personally in 2024 – for tagging SBS with satellite transmitter;
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• Dr. P. Tomkovich for the scientific advises and unpublished data;

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• V. Yakovlev for his organizational help of the expedition and support from BirdsRussia;
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The Spoon-billed Sandpiper featured strongly at the 2025 World Coastal Forum in Yancheng, Jiangsu, China

Hu Huizhe and Jian Huang (MCF & CEAAF joint team)

From 24 - 25 September 2025, the second World Coastal Forum was held in Yancheng, Jiangsu Province. Under the theme of "Beautiful Coasts: Prioritizing Ecology, Embracing Green Development", the forum convened representatives from various sectors to discuss three core topics: Conservation and Restoration of Coastal Ecosystems; Sustainable Development of Coastal Areas; Global Dialogue on Coastal World Natural Heritage.

We've seen many familiar faces at this meeting. Members of the SBS Taskforce have been actively participating in various forums.

In the morning of September 25, the "Global Synergy: Safeguarding Asian Migratory Bird Flyways" thematic seminar was held during the forum. Ms. NIU, Hongwei, Chief Conservation Officer of Paulson Institute, and Ms. SUN, Lili, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Mangrove Conservation Foundation (MCF) / Vice Chair of SBS TF, attended and delivered speeches.

During the seminar on migratory birds, Christoph Zöckler, Chair of SBS TF delivered a presentation titled "The Message of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Building a Transnational Conservation Community Through a Flagship Species".

During the subsequent roundtable discussion titled „Building a Conservation Network for Asian Migratory Bird Flyways", chaired by Prof Lei Guanchun, John MacKinnon offered support by including key SBS sites in North Korea into the review of the country's Yellow Sea World Heritage submission. SBS TF member Pyae Phyo Aung from Myanmar shared insights on community management in coastal wetland areas and his thoughts on Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation.

Later in the seminar "Diverse Social Forces Support the Protection of Coastal Wetland", jointly organized by the Huatai Foundation, MCF and Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo.

Signing of the Framework Agreement between MCF and Yancheng Nature Reserve

SUN Lili signed the Framework Agreement on Cooperation in the Conservation and Development of Yancheng Coastal Wetlands (Supplementary Agreement) with Jiangsu Yancheng National Nature Reserve for Rare Birds and signed the Cooperation Agreement on the Tiaozini Wetland Conservation Special Fund with Yancheng Tiaozini. At last, "Declaration on Youth Engagement in Coastal Wetland Conservation" was unveiled by eight student and youth representatives from both China and abroad. The declaration calls on more people to engage in environmental protection through daily actions, pay attention to wetland ecosystems, and care for flyways.

In the afternoon of September 25, the "Yellow Sea World Heritage Sites: Flyway Transboundary Collaboration Workshop" was convened by the Mangrove Conservation Foundation (MCF) and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). Participants included representatives from China's Yancheng, Chongming Dongtan, and Yellow River Delta NR, South Korea's tidal flat heritage teams, domestic planning institutes, and international organizations such as RSPB, BirdLife International, ICF, and IUCN and the SBS Task Force. Four thematic tables explored: Coastal Wetland Management and Restoration; Public Awareness and Education; Research and Monitoring; Governance and Partnerships.

The workshop yielded actionable outcomes, including proposals for joint management frameworks, cross-border CEPA programs, synchronized species monitoring platforms, and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. These laid the groundwork for the "Yellow Sea Transboundary Collaboration Roadmap" and reinforced regional cooperation between China and South Korea as heritage site custodians.

From September 25 to 27, leveraging the momentum of the Global Coastal Forum, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Network hosted a field exchange in Yancheng's Dongtai Tiaozini

Wetlands. Supported by the Dongtai Coastal Economic Zone Administration and MCF. Participants included members of the conservation network – such as Quanzhou Birdwatching Society, Jinjiang Urban Forestry Bureau, Zhanjiang Bird-Loving Association, Hainan Duotan Wetland Research Institute, Myanmar Nature Conservation Society (NCS), and academic teams from Beijing Forestry University and Nanjing Forestry University.

Teams conducted census across 10,000 mu of Tiaozini's habitats, 720 mu of high-tide roosting areas and the Fangtang estuary. The collaborative effort enhanced data collection, shared monitoring techniques, and fostered trust among stakeholders. At the closing summit, Huang Jian (Project Leader of MCF's Spoon-billed Sandpiper Program) and Christoph unveiled the Tiaozini SBS Conservation Station, marking a milestone in regional efforts to protect this critically endangered species.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper fieldwork in southern Jiangsu, autumn 2025

Guy Anderson (RSPB) and Katherine Leung on behalf of the fieldwork team

Ringing expedition team 2025 *NNU*

September is the peak season for Spoon-billed Sandpiper staging in southern Jiangsu Province, China. Once again, our international team "stopped-over" in Rudong County from 16 to 28 September for our regular survey and ringing expedition, focusing on Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and other threatened shorebirds. This is the 11th year of the partnership with Prof. Chang Qing's team from Jiangsu Key Laboratory for Biodiversity and Biotechnology, School of Life Science of Nanjing Normal University (NNU), the Jiangsu Forestry Research Institute, and the Yancheng National Nature Reserve to carry out ringing expeditions on Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other shorebirds. The international team participation was again co-funded by RSPB and its generous donors.

The team's hard work this year – both day and night – produced impressive results. We caught and ringed nearly 1,300 birds, of an incredible 34

Newly marked Spoon-billed Sandpiper "Yellow-CV" and Nordmann's Greenshank "10" at Tiaozini *NNU and Katherine Leung*

Orange A6, recorded at Tiaozini, was marked and satellite-tagged in Thailand in March 2024 *David Qian*

White P7, recorded at Tongzhou Bay, was marked in Chukotka as a head-starting chick in July 2015. It is the oldest known surviving head-started chick *Xu Bin*

shorebird and 4 tern species. The highlights were:

- five Spoon-billed Sandpipers (three new individuals marked with yellow leg flags: AV, CV and EV; and two recaptured individuals that were flagged on the breeding grounds near Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka, Russia),
- 17 Nordmann's Greenshanks (all fitted with GPS trackers). Relatively little is still known about this Globally Threatened (Endangered) species, second only to Spoonies in the league table of waders of conservation concern in the EAAF. We hope these tags will provide valuable insights into their flyway and key sites used,
- total of 110 GPS trackers deployed on 20 species of shorebirds, ranging from Dunlin to Far Eastern Curlew,
- biometric data from all birds caught to advance our knowledge of the different populations and migration ecology of waders using the region in autumn. Data on the energetically-demanding process of moult is particularly valuable; the southern Jiangsu coastal wetlands are key moulting sites for many migratory shorebirds, including around half the world population of adult Spoonies.

All newly marked and tagged birds will all help further our knowledge of the migration routes and the ecology of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other shorebirds along the EAAF. They will help us understand local movements and habitat usage along the southern Jiangsu coast, particularly after the large-scale eradication programme of invasive Spartina on the intertidal mudflats in both Yancheng and Nantong Prefectures of Jiangsu Province in 2024-25. Detailed analysis of data comparing tracking results from tagged birds over multiple years is planned and has started.

The fieldwork team also carried out scan surveys, following the method in Green et al (2024) to collect data for Spoon-billed Sandpiper local and global population estimates. These data will be added to those already collected earlier in September by surveyors organized by local NGO SBSinChina. Between the two teams, scan surveys were carried out across all four main current Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites in southern Jiangsu: Tiaozini (including Fangtang Estuary), Yangkou-Fengli, Dongling and Tongzhou Bay. Over 1,000 scan observations were obtained with 25 flagged individuals identified during the survey (Table 1).

Every year of this fieldwork partnership we have seen changes taking place at each of the study sites. This year the most significant change at all sites was the disappearance of Spartina from the intertidal mudflats, following the large-scale

Table 1. Individually-marked Spoon-billed Sandpipers reported from the 4 southern Jiangsu sites in autumn 2025

Adults caught and marked on the Russian breeding grounds (Lime flags):
Tiaozini: 24, 48, 50, 52, 61, 88, 97, 99
Dongling: 27, 47, 79
Wild-reared chicks caught on Russian breeding grounds (Lime flags):
Tiaozini: 0E, 0J, 7L, 8M, A8, C8, KH, L7, LH, M4, U3
Tongzhou Bay: 2V, L0
Head-started chicks from Russian breeding grounds (White flags):
Tongzhou Bay: P7
Juveniles caught and marked in Kamchatka (Yellow flags):
Tiaozini: YE
Adults caught and marked in Jiangsu (Yellow flags):
Tiaozini: 53, EU, HU, XU
Tongzhou Bay: LY
Adults caught and marked on the wintering grounds:
Tiaozini: Yellow 0X, Orange A6

eradication programme in 2024/25. This dramatic change is good news in the long term for migratory shorebirds relying on open mud flats. Future monitoring of areas cleared of Spartina, and the ability to remove any few remaining, or regrowing stands rapidly will be important to prevent the need to repeat this drastic intervention in a few years' time.

At Tiaozini and Fangtang Estuary, no Spartina could be seen on the mudflat as we looked from the seawall, but some small patches of young plants were found on the outer southern mudflats. The tidal channels on the mudflat continue to shift towards the seawall and a huge sandbar has been formed in the south, providing a natural high tide roost site for the birds, except on the highest spring high tides. Large numbers of new wind turbines have been erected on the outer tidal flats – these are further offshore than the upper shore mudflat areas favoured by Spoon-billed Sandpipers, but their effect on migratory waterbirds in Jiangsu remains largely unknown.

Yangkou – Fengli, which was the best known site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper 15 years ago, continued to hold very small numbers this year. The lack of suitable high tide roost sites for shorebirds

Solar panels in the Yangkou ponds *Katherine Leung*

Solar panel on the intertidal mudflat at northern Dongling *Katherine Leung*

Lime 61, recorded at Tiaozini, is an adult marked this summer at the newly discovered breeding site in Kamchatka
Rainy Cai

International team members and Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China surveyor Zhang Lin heading out on boat to survey Tiaozini sandbar
David Qian

during spring tides is still a significant problem in this area. Over the past 3 years here, many of the aquaculture ponds, that when drained down used to provide good roosting sites, and where Spoon-billed Sandpipers were regularly recorded, have now been converted to solar farms. We saw no evidence of shorebirds using the areas now with solar panels installed.

Dongling is the site showing the biggest changes over the last year. All Spartina on the upper intertidal mudflats was successfully removed, and Spoon-billed Sandpipers were once again seen roosting with thousands of other shorebirds on the newly open mudflat area adjacent to the seawall. However, no feeding was observed on these 'restored' upper mudflat areas. We only observed Spoon-billed Sandpipers feeding on the lower mudflat, about 1.5 km away from the seawall, as in previous years. It will be fascinating to observe how rapidly the upper mudflat areas cleared of Spartina recover to provide suitable shorebird feeding habitats. In northern Dongling, a 5 km^2 section of upper mudflat that was cleared of Spartina has been rapidly developed into solar farm, resulting in a total loss of waterbird habitat. Beijing Forestry University is currently monitoring the benthos density and waterbirds usage of this area. We understand plans to extend this solar farm may have been halted or cancelled, but any similar development elsewhere is clearly a concerning possible outcome for intertidal areas without adequate legal protection along the Jiangsu coast.

Tongzhou Bay has not changed much since our first visit in 2023. There is an on-going development of a power station on site so the fate of the bunded areas currently used by shorebirds as high tide roosting site remains unknown. There could be opportunity to manage future ash ponds associated with the power station as roosting sites for shorebirds. Similar examples can be found in Malaysia at Selangor and Sarawak.

Despite the changes and threats, these 4 sites in southern Jiangsu are all critically important habitats for Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other migratory waterbirds of the EAAF. Currently only the Tiaozini area is protected as a World Heritage Site. Extending protection from threats and sympathetic management to Fangtang Estuary, Yangkou-Fengli, Dongling and Tongzhou Bay would be a key action to help Spoon-billed Sandpipers both in this region, and globally.

New 10-year plan to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper has a new international action plan to guide global conservation efforts over the next decade. Endorsed under the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), the International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (2025–2035) sets out a clear roadmap to halt the population decline and secure the long-term survival of this remarkable species.

Since the first Action Plan was launched in 2008, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force has led major progress along the flyway. Hunting and trapping have been greatly reduced, more than 830,000 hectares of critical coastal wetlands across Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, the Republic of Korea and Thailand have been granted protection, and key breeding grounds in Russia have been closely monitored by joint national and international teams. Advances in tracking technology have uncovered new staging and wintering sites, while capacity building and awareness campaigns have strengthened community involvement and local stewardship.

Despite these successes, the population continues to decline at around five per cent per year. The new Action Plan reflects this continuing urgency. It identifies nine key objectives and seventy-five priority actions designed to address immediate and long-term threats. These include eliminating hunting and bycatch, securing stronger protection for breeding and non-breeding sites, restoring degraded intertidal and roosting habitats and improving breeding success through both in-situ and ex-situ initiatives. Expanding satellite tracking, habitat modelling and genetic studies will further improve understanding of the species' ecology and migration.

The Action Plan is the product of collaboration among more than forty scientists and conservationists from across the species' range: spanning

Russia, China, the Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Bangladesh and beyond. It builds on two decades of collective effort, uniting governments, NGOs, research institutions and local communities in the shared mission to save the species from extinction.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper remains a powerful symbol of international cooperation for migratory bird conservation. The 2025–2035 Action Plan represents both a renewed commitment and a pragmatic blueprint for action – combining science, policy and local engagement to ensure that future generations can still witness this extraordinary bird along the Asian coasts.

Short note on a field trip to Yubudo tidal flat, Republic of Korea

Katherine Leung

Shorebird flock on the Yubudo tidal flat *Katherine Leung*

With the support from Prof. Hankyu Kim and his team from Kyung Hee University, a five-day field trip for Spoon-billed Sandpiper was made to Yubudo in early October. One of the main objectives of the visit was to collect data for estimating the juvenile population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper by carrying out scan survey (Green et al 2024).

Yubudo island tidal flat is part of the wider Seocheon tidal flat system, which is one of the four tidal flats protected under the "Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats" World Heritage Site (note: "getbol" means tidal flats in Korean language). The tidal flat surrounding Yubudo is huge and the island can only be accessed within 1-2 hours during peak tide, by a 5-10 minutes boat ride from Gusan. The island is a quiet place with only nine families still living on the island. However, during public holidays, the island can become very busy with birdwatchers and photographers drawn to observe Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the tens of thousands of shorebirds on the tidal flat.

Yubudo tidal flat is no doubt an important stopover site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper, particularly for juveniles during southward migration in autumn. Flagged juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpipers (both wild bird and head-starting individuals) from the Russian breeding ground are recorded on the Yubudo tidal flat almost every autumn since 2014. During our field trip, a peak count of 11 Spoon-billed Sandpiper was made on 8 October during high tide, including three individuals with flags, two of which are juveniles from this year (Table 1). The proportion of juveniles present at Yubudo is significantly high with over 80% of our scan observations being juvenile, comparing to less than 5% of observations being juvenile in southern Jiangsu, China.

Due to the high number of juveniles present at

Table 1: Observations of Spoon-billed Sandpiper on Korean Tidal Flat, Aug-Oct 2025

Location	Date	Comment
Hwaseong - Maehyang-ri Tidal Flat	12 August to 21 September	At least 2 different juvenile individuals, unflagged
Seochen – Yubudo Tidal Flat	10 September to 11 October	Peak count of 11 individuals, 5 flagged individuals: White 1H: head-starting bird from Meinypil'gyno, 2016 Lime C2, P9, 2H, 2U: wild juvenile from Meinypil'gyno this summer
Gochang Tidal Flat	9-12 October	One flagged individual: Lime L2: wild juvenile from Meinypil'gyno this summer
Jeju Island - Pyoseon Beach	2-12 October	One juvenile, unflagged

White 1H, known as "Pupu" by the locals, regularly visits Yubudo every autumn *Katherine Leung*

Lime 2U, juvenile from this year, was recorded on Yubudo on 9 September *Jinho Kim*

Yubudo, the Task Force is planning to continue field visit to Yubudo in autumn 2026 for researching juvenile population, capture and mark individuals with the possibility to deploy satellite transmitter for tracking to fill our knowledge gaps on juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpiper migration.

Acknowledgement. A big thanks to Prof. Hankyu Kim for arranging and supporting local logistics, and also securing all necessary permits. Work related to Spoon-billed Sandpiper was supported by Biome Conservation (ICFC). Thanks to Minjae Baek, Communication Officer of the EAAFP for her support in coordination.

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From the Archives

Chukotka 2005 - Looking back twenty years

John O'Sullivan

Members of the 2005 international expedition team in Beringovski. From left: Maksim Suildin, Tom Noah, Alexander Kuzmich, Nikolay Yakushev, Christoph Zöckler, Volodja Jakovlev, Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, John O'Sullivan, Rob Schuckard, Pavel Tomkovich, Viktor Nilsson, Konstantin Klokov

I can still feel the excitement. Being part of an expedition to the Russian Far East was a dream come true for me. In 2005, I was working for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK. The Society offered staff the opportunity every seven years of taking a sabbatical linked to its objectives in nature conservation. The chance came to join a multi-national expedition organised for the Russian Academy of Sciences by Evgeny E. Syroechkovskiy and I seized it.

From 27th June to 8th August, two teams worked coastal areas south of the Russian Pacific coast town of Anadyr, with the main objective being the study of Spoon-billed Sandpipers. I was in the southern team based in Meinypil'gyno, alongside Russian colleagues Maxim P. Suildin and Nikolai N. Yakushev, together with British-based Christoph Zöckler, with whom I travelled out, and who was already familiar with the area.

Imagine a vast coastal plain, barely inhabited by humans, and then only in small settlements on the coast. Divided by clean rivers and studded with lakes and other wetlands, with low vegetation of great variety and often spectacular colours. Salmon run up the rivers and are hunted by bears. Invertebrates, including clouds of mosquitos, provide a mass of food for nesting birds. Here and there in this wilderness the Spoon-billed Sandpipers sing their aerial song, display, lay their eggs and raise their young. Our main job was to find, count and record them and to band/ring the young ones. Keeping the local people involved

and informed, including by speaking to the children in their school, was also important.

We were based for much of the time in a comfortable prefabricated house in Meinypil'gyno, but camping excursions were also important: we carried our gear mainly on foot, but occasionally assisted by motorcycle, quad-bike or boat. We duly found the sandpipers, in both well-known and new sites, and were able to attach the distinctive green rings to the legs of the young. Close to the end of our stay, on 2nd August, Christoph and I found an independent juvenile feeding along the shore near the village. To our delight, it was carrying such a ring! We wished it good fortune on the long flight south that awaited it.

After 20 years, the work to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper still goes on, of course. Indeed, its breadth and depth is much greater than back then, which is very gratifying. I'm long retired from work now, but will never forget those wonderful days in Chukotka. May I take this opportunity to wish all those working along the flyway countries every success in whatever is their speciality. Long may this unique and beautiful bird survive to amaze us all.

A young spoonie north of Meinypil'gyno on 9th July

A fledged juvenile spoonie with a green leg flag, near Meinypil'gyno on 2nd August

Latest News

Chukotka, China, Myanmar

The incredible journey of Lime 27, the "King of the Flyway"

Male Lime 27 has been seen and photographed again this autumn (19 September 2025) in Donglin at the Jiangsu coast in China by Katherine Leung.

Lime 27 in Dong Lin 19 September 2025, record shot by Katherine Leung

Male Lime 27 was ringed in 2013 as a chick only with a metal ring in Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka and in 2015 and banded with Lime engraved flag "27". The Russian team recorded it this year in Meino (thus it is 12 years old), but it was solitary. There is a surplus of males on the breeding grounds for several years already (see special report on Chukotka by Lappo et al. in this newsletter).

Each year since it is flagged it has been seen and photographed by Ren Nou Soe on its wintering grounds on Nan Thar Island in Rakhine State near Sittwe, Myanmar, last time in November 2023.

But subsequently, the war between the Rakhine Liberation Army and the Myanmar military changed everything. Rakhine is now a war zone and Ren and friends can no longer access Nan Thar, but we assume Lime 27 has been wintering there again as in the previous 8-9 years. The trapping of birds is presumed to have resumed after the entire population of the Rakhine State is suffering from hunger, besieged by the military. Ren has fled the fighting in Sittwe with his family. He and his family are safe but struggling to survive on a day-by-day basis.

Lime 27 in Meinypilgyno 3rd July 2025 *Natalia Karlionova*

We are supporting Ren and his family as best as we can. The news that Lime 27 was seen again in Chukotka and Donglin, China, gave him a brief moment of cheer!

Christoph Zöckler

Yancheng, China

In May 2025 two Russian colleagues and I went to Yancheng for an exchange in bird breeding expertise. The internship of training raising waders at the Breeding Centre of the Yancheng Nature Reserve, China was very productive. First of all, I would like to thank our Chinese, Russian and English colleagues for organizing the internship. Everything was top notch. It was a great honour and privilege for our team to participate in such a project. It was wonderful to immerse ourselves in the work of the centre. Every day, we worked at the centre alongside the staff. We learned new details about caring for chicks, incubation, and other intricacies of the work. We had a unique opportunity to master methods of working with eggs and chicks of four species of waders and terns: Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Common Tern and Little Ringed Plover.

Nowhere else in Russia is it possible to gain such work experience working with shorebirds in breeding centers. It is great that such an exchange of experience took place. In addition to

More Latest News

working at the center, the host organized a trip to Yancheng and other parks to learn about and immerse us into Chinese culture and the nature reserve system of the Jiangsu Province. It was a wonderful experience. It was also a great opportunity to meet specialists from England – Jodie Clements and Roland Digby. It was very useful to discuss issues related to the breeding of shorebirds with leading specialists. Seminars on working with birds were also organized. Many thanks to the Yancheng Nature Reserve, Nanjing Normal University, MCF, RSPB and NABU who welcomed and helped us to organize and finance the internship in China!

Katya Paraphenyuk and Elena Lappo

Slimbridge

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust WWT drafted a report with all their experiences and lessons learned from 10 years of captive breeding of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Slimbridge and Head-starting in Chukotka. The report can be found at WWT-SBS-CB_Main-Report_FINAL.pdf

WWT

The Sightings Reporter

Launch of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force Sightings Reporter

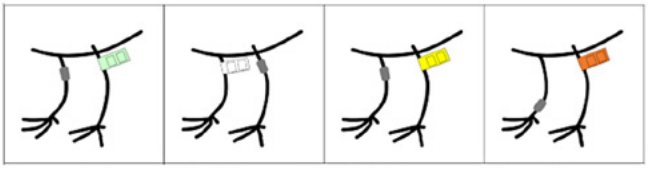
We are delighted to share the "SBS Task Force Sightings Reporter" is live.

Observers can visit the reporter webpage: https://spoon-billed-sandpiper-taskforce.shinyapps.io/sightings/ to submit Spoon-billed Sandpiper flag sightings and receive instant feedback of the life history of the individual.

Our database currently holds more than 3,200 records. Every sighting contributes to the understanding and conservation of this Critically Endangered species. Please help contribute to our research by submitting your sightings!

Katherine Leung

Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the EAAF are marked with a designated colour marking scheme using engraved leg flags (ELFs). Four colours are used to differantiate SBS marked at different sites along the flyway. Each flag has two alpha-numeric characters. Birds marked in their hatch year are flagged on right tibia, while birds marked beyond their hatch year are flagged on left tibia.



Lime green ELFs are used on wild captured adults or chicks at the breeding grounds in Southern Chukotka, Russia

White ELFs are used on head-started chicks

Yellow ELFs are used on wild captured birds at stop-over sites (e.g. Kamchatka, Russia and Jiangsu Province, China)

Orange ELFs are allocated for wild birds captured at wintering grounds (e.g. Southern China and SE Asia)

The last page

Halloween Spoonie, artwork by Chantal Macleod-Nolan