
Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force

News Bulletin No 29 · November 2023





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

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. 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 from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Manfred Hermsen Foundation



It was 20 years ago this summer when we went to Meinypylygyno for our first comprehensive survey and established that this area is the ‘Capital of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper’. We found over 85 territories. I remember finding one nest not far from the village and Evgeny found one even closer – almost within the village boundaries, both soon later predated. We were very busy but had a great time. With hindsight and the current knowledge and expertise of our team today, I am pretty sure, the local SBS population was much higher. Sadly, today we are monitoring only a fraction of those large numbers.

It is however striking to see, how the Russian team under the leadership of Elena Lappo is sustaining the work year by year and again in the summer of 2023 despite all odds of a waging war, international sanctions and missing key staff. Lena was also there in 2003 and hardly missed a year in between. But Lena has also been in Myanmar and joined us during the Wader Study Group conference in Germany. Even more remarkable is the feat of getting a seaplane over to Meinypylygyno with the help of Sonya Rozenfeld, for surveys of key sites that are otherwise difficult to reach.

Equally busy has been Katherine Leung from China. Not only has she been very active in her own country, but also tirelessly working for SBS in Thailand and Myanmar. She reports from both Thailand and China.

These two women feature heavily in this newsletter. In fact, almost the entire issue is made by them and other women, including on Lena Golub’ in SBS on Arts and our guest foreword by the new secretary general at the EAAFP, Jennifer George. Jodie Clements of WWT is having the difficult task of reporting on the few remaining SBS in Slimbridge. It is no coincidence, but rather a reflection of the strong role women are taking in species conservation today and in our Task Force in particular.

The establishment of a Little Spoon Cafe in Yangcheng in honour of our very species is yet another testament of how China is embracing the small iconic species. This should give all of us hope for the little sandpiper.

Thank you all for contributing to this newsletter and our conservation work. Enjoy another issue of the SBS Bulletin.

Guest Foreword

Jennifer George · Chief Executive,
East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat



Fitting in the palm of your hand this species fills our imaginations. Why would just one bird in the whole world have a beak like a spoon? Why does it choose the countries it travels to? How can such a small bird achieve such feats of travel?

There are so many wonderful photos in your past newsletters that helps to tell their story. Wouldn't it be great if it was that easy to see them in the wild! In Jiangsu Province, China in September after the World Coastal Forum, I almost got to see one but only saw the place others said they had seen a Spoon-billed Sandpiper! Not only are they rare but they are elusive.

With only a few hundred remaining, our efforts in monitoring and data recording are crucial. Knowing their journeys from site to site builds our understanding and therefore the best responses needed to save them from extinction.

Building relationships between those sites, between time site managers, and between the local communities who share these birds will create a collective passion across our flyway. So many already share this passion as this newsletter clearly shows, and I see there is much potential to encourage and support sites to connect with each other. This is an area that the Secretariat can provide some help with.

At the Secretariat, our new Communications Officer will continue to celebrate this species and the people who care for them through the social media channels of the EAAFP. Keep us in touch with the work you are doing so that we may share them widely.

I read about the first successful breeding with artificially raised chicks by one of our partners, the WWT in the UK. Then I imagined following their life stories through webcams, tracking, and other emerging technologies as they grew into adults

and the possibilities of taking their life stories to the world.

But it's not just about Spoon-billed Sandpipers. It is about the people who care for them – the scientists and those who monitor, the birdwatchers, and most importantly, it is also about other endangered species which share the same habitats. Therefore, the work that is done for Spoon-billed Sandpipers has the potential to upskill and inspire work for other species at the same time, and for their wetlands that are so crucial for their survival. It is the birds who connect us all across borders.

I am new to the EAAFP Secretariat and still getting to know our partners, both government and non-government, learning about migratory waterbirds with the help of many experts across the EAAF. In 2017, I was in Yangon, Myanmar and did not know anything about this brave little bird and their Flyway Network Sites (FNS) but now I am seeing a growing number of FNS in Myanmar. This small bird has helped me to understand and value the migration of waterbirds and why we must do all we can to protect their habitats. This is why on a personal level I am keen to find ways to tell their stories.

Iconic species such as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper helps to inform the wider public and build a strong network across our flyway. I appreciate the work of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) and the editors of this informative and attractive newsletter and the influence it can have for the future of this species.

I look forward to supporting the work of the SBS TF and meeting the brilliant minds behind it at its next full gathering in Shenzhen, China in January 2024.

Spoonie Field Work in Thailand – December 2022 to March 2023

Katherine Leung

Where would be a good place to spend the winter season on the EAAF? How about warm and sunny Thailand? During the 2022/23 non-breeding season, I visited the Inner Gulf of Thailand 3 times to follow the wintering Spoonies there.

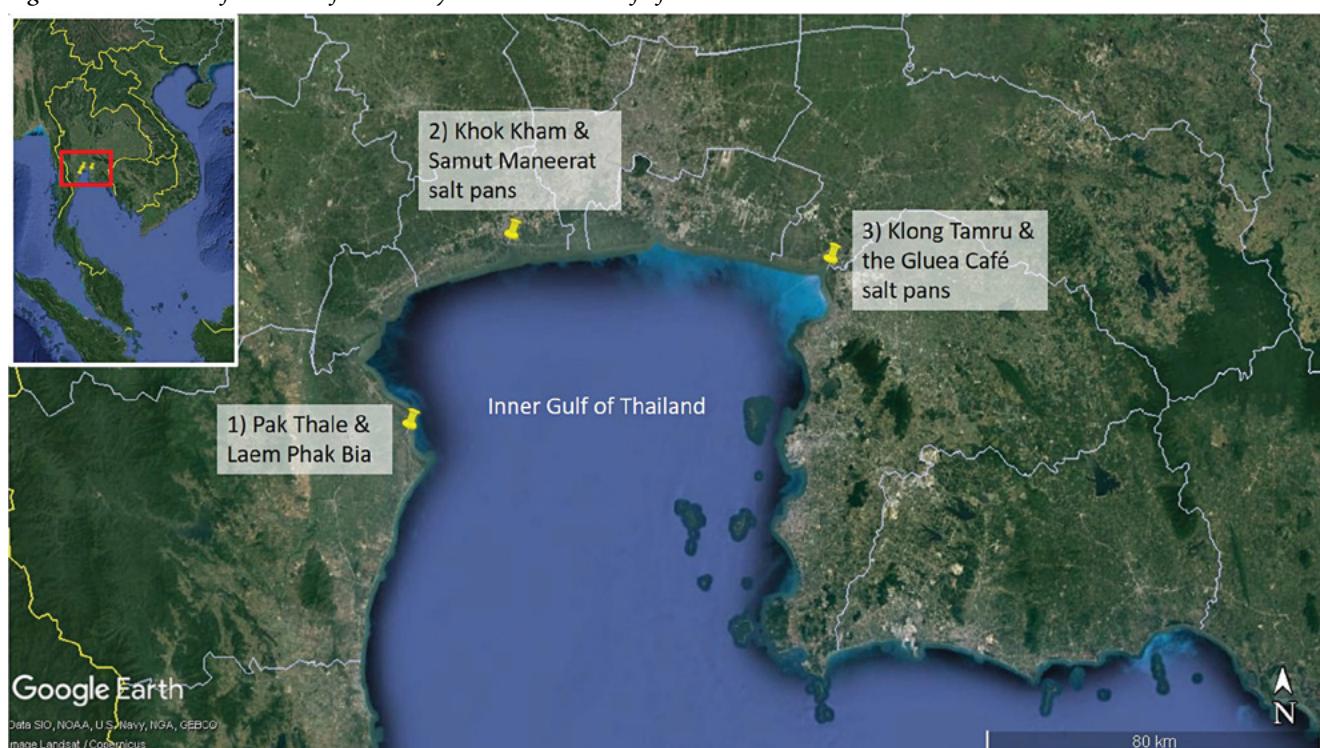
My first visit in December lasted for 20 days to carry out mark-resighting scan survey for estimation of Spoonie population. The King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) and the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) were the local partners who helped organising the survey. A team of 26 participants from both Thailand (Department of National Parks of the Thailand Government, Mahidol University, KMUTT and BCST) and Myanmar (Nature Conservation Society, and Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association) joined together to survey 3 major Spoonie wintering sites in the Inner Gulf of Thailand (Figure 1). Ten

Spoonies were observed at the 3 locations over the field work period, including one head-starting individual White P7.

During the field work period in December, I saw that the Spoonies were very “site faithful”. They were often observed feeding in the same salt pond, even at the same spot every day. Hence, I pondered how feasible it might be to capture them for ringing with the special traps I once used for catching Spoonie in Jiangsu and Guangdong, China.

With help from Prof. George Gale and Dr. Phil Round, permission was obtained from the Department of National Parks to attempt trapping together with their team in February. Besides ringing, it was also planned to deploy satellite trackers so as to find out more about Spoonies’ northward migration. In mid-February, the first trapping attempt was made at Khok Kham.

Figure 1. Locations of the three field survey sites in Inner Gulf of Thailand





Participants at Pak Thale Nature Reserve

King

We had definitely picked the correct spot for setting up the trap. Not long after the trap was set, our targeted Spoonie came back to feed as close as a meter from the trapping area. However, a defensive Tibetan Sand Plover, who thought it “owned” the trap chased the Spoonie away every time it walked close.

Very disappointingly, the trap was only partially triggered due to the weight of the algae we put to camflouge the netting. The Spoonie flew off! It was a heart-breaking moment. During the rest of the week this Spoonie still fed around the same location, but never went into the trapping area again.

We were given a second chance in early March to attempt trapping again while the DNP team carried out their routine ringing programme at Pak Thale. It goes without saying, we “triple” checked the trap was working properly when we set it up. On the first 2 days, we had Stints, Sand Plovers, Dunlin, Black-winged Stilt, Common Greenshank

and Marsh Sandpiper running through the trapping area and one Spoonie feeding close by. All seemed so promising.

Our patience seemed to pay off on Day 3, through my binocular, I saw the Spoonie run into the trapping area, so I pressed the button. This time the trap was triggered properly, BUT...

...believe it or not, a gap remained open between the 2 pieces of netting after the trap triggered. Once again, I witnessed the Spoonie flew off from the trap.

That was the last scene of the 2nd trapping attempt. Disappointing indeed and very hard lessons learnt, but I departed Thailand with no regret. There were obviously plenty of rooms for improvement, and I am very confident that we'll get it right next time. There is a say in Chinese: “Failure gives birth to success”. We are planning to try again in 2023/24 non-breeding season.



Mr. Tee, the famous Spoonie Man at Khok Kham, helped us to decide the best trapping location

Ziyou Yang



A “fun” scene during the 1st trapping attempt at Khok Kham

Ziyou Yang

Thank you:

Andrew Pierce, Ziyou Yang and Philipp Maleko, for their great accompany and support to the trapping field work.

George Gale for sorting out all the administrative and logistical aspects of the field work, and always being supportive to my suggestions.

Somying Thunhikorn and Jirut Khamaye (Nick) for arrangement of the trapping permit and their DNP colleagues for their man-power.

Phil Round, Khwankhao Sinhaseni (Kimmie), Mr. Tee and Mr. Daeng for contributing their local knowledge of the sites.

Nigel Clark, Rhys Green and Guy Anderson for sending their technical advices and encouragement remotely from the UK.

The International Conservation Fund of Canada (ICFC) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) for supporting the expenses for the survey and trapping field work.



Catch you next time!

Katherine Leung

BirdsRussia Chukotka Spoon-billed Sandpiper Expedition, Survey and Monitoring in 2023

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The SBS team in June 2023 (from left to right): N. Karlionova, D. Nizovtsev, E. Lappo, A. Ivanov, I. Murashev A. Ivanov



The expedition team in July 2023 (from left to right): A. Ryabitsev, D. Nizovtsev, S. Rozenfeld, G. Kirtaev, E. Lappo, A. Ivanov, S. Belogorodseva, N. Karlionova N. Kirtaeva

Monitoring, ringing and colour marking of the breeding population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) in Meinypyl'gyno area continues since 2003 almost annually. In the summer of 2023 the wader surveys were running from 31 May till 12 July by E. Lappo, A. Ivanov, D. Nizovtsev, N. Karlionova and I. Murashev. From 28 June till the end of July the team was joined by S. Rozenfeld, A. Ryabitsev, G. and N. Kirtaev conducting waterfowl aerial survey and filming.

The breeding conditions

The spring of 2023 turned out to be late and cold. At the beginning of June 90% of the tundra surface was still covered by snow. Only hilltops and some ridges were free of snow, and these were the areas available for the first nests of early breeders, such as Red Knots and some pairs of Pacific

Golden and Ringed Plovers. Snow accumulated in large amounts in the tundra and between buildings in the village for the first 10 days in June. Only by mid-June the tundra became snow-free. The mouth of the First River linking the Pekulneiskie and Vaamychgyn lakes with the Bering Sea was blocked by ice and gravel by autumn storms of 2022. It was partly manually opened on 11 June, before meltwater caused floods in some of the Meinypyl'gyno area and flooding of some early wader nests.

Spring migration and the early breeders

At the beginning of June some species were recorded in low numbers on migration (*Calidris tenuirostris*, *C. melanotos*, *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, etc.). Flocks of Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* were relatively common till 11 June. Not



many nests of some locally breeding waders were found. We assume that this was a result of late, cold and snowy spring in late May and early June, which prevented successful feeding of birds in the region.

First SBS female with the flag Lime 36 was recorded on 31 May and two days later she was found with her former male Lime 24. Individual recognition of color-marked SBS allowed to record arrival of other local birds to the main monitoring area, which lasted till at least 12 June.

In total 30 SBS were seen in the wider area around Meinypyl'gyno in 2023 (18 males, 11 females and 1 bird of unknown sex). Of 18 males 16 were

individually marked by engraved leg flags (ELF), and 9 of 11 females had ELF, including 4 head-started birds (male White 1H from 2016, male White 2L from 2017, male White EH from 2020 and female White NC from 2019) (Table 1). Males Lime 24 and Lime 27 were ringed as adult birds in 2015, so they are at least 9 years old. And female Lime E3 was ringed as a chick in the same 2015, it means its age now is 8 years.

In 2023, 22 adult SBS were recorded within the main monitoring area with 6 nests found and 3 possible additional breeding pairs (1 territorial pair, 1 heavy female with male, and 1 female found rather late on its breeding territory), which is about the same as in 2022, but still a decline from

Tabl. 1. SBS recorded around Meinypyl'gyno in three sections of the main monitoring area and in a distant Western Oil Drill Station in 2023

| Sex | Main monitoring area | | | Western Oil Drill Station | Total |
|--------------|----------------------|---|-------------------|---|-----------|
| | Western section | Central section | Eastern section | | |
| Males | 0 | Lime 24, Lime 27, Lime 79, Lime 94, White 1H, White 2L, Lime 8V, Lime M4, Lime OY, 2 unmarked | White EH, Lime UN | Lime 7L, Lime HN, Lime 84, Lime 92, Lime 8X | 18 |
| Females | 0 | Lime 36, Lime 88, Lime 8M, Lime J0, Lime E3, Lime XP, White NC | Lime 47, Lime 49 | 2 unmarked | 11 |
| Unknown | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 unmarked | 1 |
| Total | 0 | 18 | 4 | 8 | 30 |



Male Lime 92



A. Ivanov

Male Lime 94

D. Nizovtsev



Female Lime J0



D. Nizovtsev

Male Lime HN



Male White 1H

A. Ivanov



Male White EH

D. Nizovtsev

16 pairs in 2018 (Fig.1). Additionally, 8 adult SBS with 2 confirmed pairs were found in neighboring Western Oil Drill Station (1 nest and 1 brood). Among the adult birds were also 8 territorial solitary males and 1 unmarked bird of unknown sex

and breeding status. The number of solitary males has increased significantly in recent years.

Ringing and color marking programme has been running in Meinypyl'gyno since 2001. In South



Adult male Lime HN at Western Oil drill station with chicks
A. Ryabitsev



Chicks Lime X7 and Lime Y7 from Western Oil Drill Station
A. Ryabitsev

Table 2. Number of waders nests/broods and birds marked in 2023

| Species | Found | | Ringed | | Total ringed |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|
| | nests | broods | adults | chicks | |
| Pacific Golden Plover | 12 | - | 1 | 5 | 6 |
| Common Ringed Plover | 22 | 10 | 15 | 49 | 64 |
| Mongolian Plover | 6 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 12 |
| Red-necked Phalarope | 6 | 1 | - | 3 | 3 |
| Spoon-billed Sandpiper | 8 | 1 | - | 11 | 11 |
| Red-necked Stint | 4 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 |
| Dunlin | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Red Knot | 2 | 4 | 3 | 14 | 17 |
| Total | 60 | 21 | 24 | 94 | 118 |

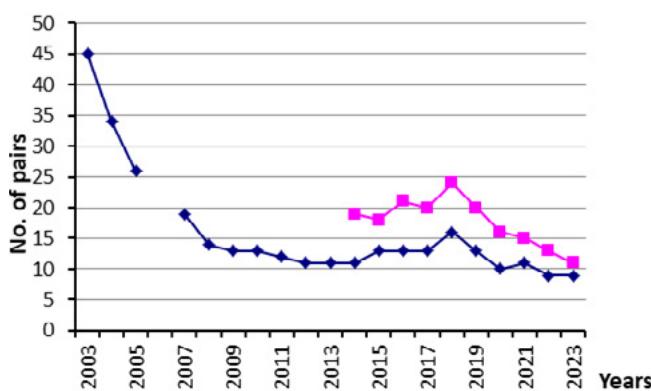


Figure 1. SBS breeding population in the core monitoring area (blue line) and grand total (purple line) near Meinypylygyno in 2003–2023

Chukotka adult birds get a Lime flag on right tibia, and chicks – on the left tibia. Since 2012 SBS are also marked with individually numbered flags (ELF). In total, 11 wild SBS chicks were ringed and marked with ELF in 2023 in Meinypylygyno. A total of 118 waders of 8 species (including SBS) were ringed in 2023 (Table 2).

Nest predations

To learn about nest predators and predation rate we set up 5 automatic nest cameras (= camera traps) and 5 Wyze Cameras near 23 nests of 3 other wader species (Common Ringed, Mongolian and Pacific Golden Plovers). The list of recorded nest predators consists of several species – Red Fox, Arctic Fox, Arctic Skua (Table 3).

Table 3. Nest fates and nest predators

| Species | Found nests | Successful nests | Predated nests | Other reasons | Unknown fate | Recorded nest predator (n) |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Pacific Golden Plover | 12 | 4 | 4 | 1 abandoned | 3 | Red Fox (1) unknown (3) |
| Common Ringed Plover | 22 | 10 | 3 | 1 floated 1 crash by car | 7 | Red Fox (1) Arctic Fox (1) unknown (1) |
| Mongolian Plover | 6 | 1 | 3 | 1 crash by foot 1 abandoned | - | Arctic Skua (1) Arctic Fox (1) unknown (1) |
| Total | 40 | 15 | 10 | 5 | 10 | - |



Nest of Lesser Sand Plover predated by Arctic fox



Nest of Lesser Sand Plover predated by Arctic Skua

A. Ivanov gives a lecture about bird ringing and marking at the local school
E. LappoN. Karlionova demonstrates the nest cameras and photos of predators during a lecture at the local school
E. Lappo

Because of the high level of nest predation and its high risk for SBS breeding success it is important to continue the monitoring of nest survival and to think about ways to control numbers of predators within the area.

The lecture about local birds, their survey and conservation was provided in local school by E. Lappo, N. Karlionova, A. Ivanov on 27 June 2023.

Again in 2023, we could not resume the Head-



The interview in Chukotka TV News by E. Lappo



The interview in Chukotka TV by A. Ivanov

starting project because of lack of skilled people and funding. But, considering its importance for the local SBS population (Loktionov et al., 2023) we hope to do it in the near future.

In Anadyr E. Lappo and A. Ivanov provided the interviews to Chukotka TV and radio and for some internet resources (“Russia 24-Chukotka”), information agency “Chukotka”, radio “Purga” (“Snowstorm”), internet-resource:
<https://prochukotku.ru>

<https://www.ks87.ru/nauka-i-turizm/127/16015>

https://prochukotku.ru/news/priroda/na_chukotku_priletit_pervaya_gruppa_uchyenykh_dlya_nablyudeniya_za_ischezayushchim_kulikom/

https://prochukotku.ru/news/priroda/kuliki_lozhkoklyuyv_prileteli_na_chukotku/

<http://www.igras.ru/news/3541>

<https://birdsrussia.ru/news/novosti-organizatsii/otsenka-vozdeystviya-programmy-putevka-v-zhizn-na-populyatsiyu-kulikov-lopatney-nak-hodyashchikh-sya-p>

We are specially thankful for Pavel Tomkovich for editing this article and for leading the field-work on SBS in Meinypyl'gyno in previous years and remotely supervising this year; and for Elena and Andrey Golub' for additional bird observations and data in Meinypyl'gyno; Natalia Kirtaeva for tasty cooking; and also Svetlana and Roman Belgorodsevy and Marina Nikulina for the help in logistic in Meinypyl'gyno; and for Vladimir Yakovlev for his permanent coordination from Moscow. All expenses were paid by BirdsRussia with support by NABU. Some financial support was generous provided by the Russian souvenir shop “KULIK” in Anadyr. Travel expenses of Elena Lappo were supported by Russian Science Foundation № 221700168. <https://rscf.ru/project/22-17-00168/>

The video about the scientific research in Meinypyl'gyno was made by Artur Ryabitsev funded by Association RGG
<https://youtu.be/6p-yug-7ZUY?feature=shared>

SBS breeding site at South Chukotka survey with the seaplane in 2023

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The breeding pair from Okeanskoye with individual codes

A. Ivanov

The SBS BirdsRussia expedition team was running wader surveys in the vicinity of Meinypyl'gyno. On 28 June the small seaplane "Sterkh C1" piloted by G. Kirtaev came to Meinypyl'gyno for waterfowl aerial surveys lead by Sonya Rozenfeld. This was especially planned to be combined with our interests to send part of our team by seaplane to check some areas where SBS breeds outside the Meinypyl'gyno area.

Finding more possible breeding areas and survey in different parts of Chukotka has been one of the aims of our previous expedition organised by E. Syroechkovkiy, for example with **Heritage Expeditions** lead by Rodney Russ (in Koryak lagoons in 2011-2017) where we found several SBS nests in some place, like Machevna Bay (SBS TF News Bull. No. 6, Aug 2011, page 9-11) and Mellen

lagoons (Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bull No 16 Oct 2016, page 30-32).

The **number of individually marked SBS** seen on the non-breeding grounds is higher than we have seen in Meinypyl'gyno: 53 marked individuals were seen in Autumn 2022 compared with 29 in Meinypyl'gyno in 2022 and 25 in 2023. Therefore more than 2 dozens are missing. That means there could be some other places on the breeding grounds where SBS has been breeding.

According to GIS modeling done for the area (by A. Narykov, E. Lappo, unpublished report) we had several places of interest. But we were very much limited by time, weather, fuel, and people, so the list of sites were restricted to: Okeanskoye, Mellen and Opukha lagoons.

*The seaplane Sterkh C1**E. Lappo*

The expedition team in July 2023 (from left to right): D. Nizovtsev, N. Kirtaeva, G. Kirtaev, N. Karlionova, E. Lappo, S. Rozenfeld, A. Ivanov, A. Ryabitsev

The so named “**Okeanskoye**” site, discovered in 2015, was selected. We found 18 breeding SBS (Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bull No 14 Aug 2015, page 19-23), re-visited the site in 2016 (Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bull No 16 Oct 2016, page 8-12), but never visited again since. It was time to check this place again.

In 2023 E. Lappo and A. Ivanov visited Okeanskoye twice on 4 and 8 July, with four flights, because only one passenger next to the pilot is available.

The suitable habitat was much more visible from the air this time (because in 2015 we went there

by all-terrain vehicle “Kerzhak” and were in a dense fog for all three days). But in 2023 from the “bird eye’s” view it looked like being the alluvial sediments along the former river beds perpendicular to the sea, covered by crowberry, and speckled by small depressions with streams and pools covered with grass and sedge.

Only a small part of this area was surveyed in 2023 on foot - in about 1/6 of such habitat and 6 SBS and one nest was found (one pair, plus one possible male and 3 birds of unknown sex – all of them were unmarked). Possibly more pairs of SBS were breeding there because some observed birds were warning like having broods. However,

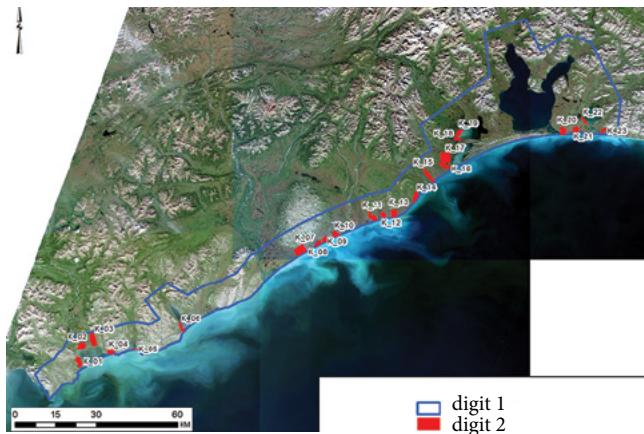


“Professor Khromov” – the ship of Heritage Expeditions with its boat

E. Lappo

The team from Heritage Expeditions in Chukotka (from left to right): K. Ovsyanikova, E. Peng, T. Noah, C. Zöckler, K. Eberhardt, E. Lappo, E. Syroechkovskiy, M. Kelly, R. Russ, L. Thorphe, C. Collins

E. Lappo



The SBS habitat in Okeanskoye from the sea plane E. Lappo



The SBS habitat in Okeanskoye from the land E. Lappo



SBS chick Lime C8 from Okeanskoye E. Lappo



SBS adult male Lime 95 from Okeanskoye A. Ivanov

our surveys there were very limited in time, and we were unable to search for every brood. 3 chicks and both parents were caught and marked (Lime A8, Lime C8, Lime H8) and Lime 95 and 96 respectively. Blood samples were taken from the

adults for genetic analysis.

We were very lucky that both marked adults and two of three chicks were later seen in China, during autumn migration at Tongzhou Bay Jiangsu



Adult SBS Lime A2 seen in Okeanskoye in 2016 marked in Meinyypyl'gyno in 2014 as a chick
N. Yakushev



SBS chick Lime A4 in Okeanskoye in 2015 in the hands of S. Millington, E. Lappo and T. Mu
A. Maksimov



BirdsRussia Team in 2015 at Okeanskoye (from left to right):
E. Loktionov, E. Lappo, A. Maksimov, V. Yakovlev, E. Syroechkovskuy, S. Millington, T. Mu
E. Lappo



The field camp in Okeanskoye in 2016
T. Noah

Table 1. Records of SBS Lime A2 in Russia, Bangladesh and South Korea

| Year | Location | Dates |
|------|--|------------|
| 2014 | Breeding grounds, Meinyypyl'gyno, Chukotka, Russia | 08.07.2014 |
| 2015 | Non-breeding grounds, Cox'x Bazar, Chittagong Division, Bangladesh | 12.11.2015 |
| 2016 | Non-breeding grounds, Cox'x Bazar, Chittagong Division, Bangladesh | 15.02.2016 |
| 2016 | Breeding grounds, Okeanskoye, Chukotka, Russia | 04.06.2016 |
| 2016 | Non-breeding grounds, Seochon-Goon, Chugchongnam-Do, South Korea | 04.10.2016 |

province, only a few kilometers south of Donglin (Ziyou Yang pers. comm.) – see this issue, page 21. However this is not the only link between the SBS in Okeanskoye with other breeding and non-breeding areas. Lime A2, marked in Meinyypyl'gyno in 2014 was seen in Okeanskoye in 2016, in Bangladesh in 2015 & 2016, and South

Korea in 2016 (Table 1). Lime A4 was caught and marked in Okeanskoye in 2015, but never seen later.

Other visits by seaplane were made to Mellen and Opukha lagoons on 10 July. It was not possible to land in Opukha because of shallow waters and fog.



Heritage expeditions team in Mellen lagoon, where SBS was nesting in 2016
K. Ovsyanikova



Habitat in Mellen lagoon

E. Lappo

In the Mellen Lagoon, SBS was found nesting in 2005 by BirdsRussia Team (P. Tomkovich, R. Schuckard & T. Noah, pers. comm.) and in 2016 with Heritage Expeditions (Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, News Bull, No 16, Oct 2016, page 8-12). In 2023 E. Lappo was able to undertake a ground survey for 1+1 hours in two places, but both were not the best SBS habitat and no SBS were observed. Unfortunately, it was not possible to visit the formerly known breeding site because of very low tide.

Survey in Okeanskoye confirmed the existence of a local SBS breeding population with numbers of SBS comparable to the entire Meinypyl'gyno area. According to GIS analysis this type of SBS breeding habitat of the former delta areas recently abandoned by river waters (D. Dobrynin, pers. comm.) are unique and previously unknown, and look quite distinct. We suppose the analysis of satellite images would help to find similar habitats.

The limited time and other logistic problem prevented us to make more detailed land surveys within the area, but we assume that some places (Okeanskoye, Mellen, Russkaya Koshka etc) need to be re-visited again for more detailed habitat investigation and SBS survey.

The prospect of visiting such remote SBS breeding sites in Southern Chukotka in the future with the help of a seaplane compared to a small ship, or caterpillar track, looks very promising and we hope for the next years to combine monitoring and marking SBS in Meinypyl'gyno, with organizing visits to Okeanskoye for more detailed land surveys and SBS marking.

We are very grateful for the assistance and hospitality by Dmitry Vazhenin, Evgeny and Ekatherina Mishchenko in Khatyrka, Egor Radivilov in Al'katvaam, Roman and Svetlana Belgorodsevy, Elena and Andrey Golub' and Marina Nikulina in Meinypyl'gyno and Vladimir Yakovlev for coordinating logistics from Moscow.

This SBS survey by seaplane was possible in 2023, by a combination with funding by NABU and the Association RGG aerial waterfowl surveys in Chukotka (on Eiders species, Emperor Goose and other waterfowl species), Sterkh project in Yakutia, and BirdsRussia budget. Travel expenses of Elena Lappo were supported by Russian Science Foundation № 221700168. <https://rscf.ru/project/22-17-00168/>



When searching for Spoon-billed Sandpiper along the lonely coasts of Chukotka we often encounter and enjoy the overwhelming, largely unspoilt wil-

derness. This year, Elena Lappo was lucky. She took these photos of a huge walrus haulout and a lone white wolf near its den at Opukha Lagoon.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Fieldwork in Southern Jiangsu – Autumn 2023

Katherine Leung

This is the first time since 2019 that the international SBS fieldwork team is back in China to carry out ringing and surveys for SBS population estimation, following method in Chang et al. (2021). Since 2015, the RSPB and WWT team has been partnering with the local team from Jiangsu Key Laboratory for Biodiversity and Biotechnology, School of Life Science of Nanjing Normal University (NNU), the Jiangsu Academy of Forestry and the Yancheng National Nature Reserve for the ringing expeditions. The team spent eight days in the field this year from 10-17 Sep. Despite the challenges from continuous rainy weather for three days, a total of 962 shorebirds, gull and terns were ringed, including two SBS. Surveys for SBS population estimation were also carried out in early and late September by local volunteers organised by SBS in China.

In previous years, we usually carried out our fieldwork in Donglin, Yangkou and Tiaozini. Due to the recent discovery of Tongzhou Bay as a SBS hotspot, with up to 11 SBS recorded in August, we have extended our fieldwork to this site further

south of Donglin. We carried out one mist netting session and one cannon net catch there. The most significant bird ringed being a first winter Nordmann's Greenshank, it was also fitted with a GPS-tracker. We also carried out mark-resighting scan survey of SBS at this site for the first time. At least three flagged Spoonie were recorded: White P7, White EH and Lime L0. Since August, birders and photographers also recorded Lime 96, White H0 and a SBS carrying light blue plain flag from Northern Chukotka. This site is still threatened to be developed into a port.

Donglin is definitely the highlight of this year fieldwork. Based on observations during scan survey in early September, the team identified a spot for setting up a cannon net on the intertidal mudflats with the possibility to catch some of the 22 SBS present. In order to transport the big team and equipment safely from the seawall onto the mudflats, a tractor was hired. The tractor is usually used by the shellfish harvesting company to transport workers onto the mudflats. As planned, the net was fired at peak tide, and we caught



The biggest ringing expedition team since 2015

Chang Qing



First winter Nordmann's Greenshank caught by cannon net at Tongzhou Bay
Philipp Maleko



The tractor drove pass 1.5 km of invasive Spartina before reaching the open mudflats
Zhou Weiming

two SBS. Scan survey that afternoon produced fruitful outcomes as well. Six SBS with flags were recorded: Lime 27, 47, 76, 79, 95 and 96.

Our catching fieldwork was then hampered by

heavy rain for 3 days, so the team spent time to carry out mark-resighting scan survey.

The Yangkou site was less used by SBS this year due to the lack of suitable hightide roosting



SBS caught at Dongling on 12-Sep-2023 marked with Yellow TX and CX



Xin Yu



Lime 96, adult female marked at Okeanskoye on the breeding grounds in Chukotka in summer 2023 Katherine Leung



Yellow XJ, which was record in Yangkou in 2022 autumn, was recorded at a site between Yangkou and Donglin this autumn
Wei Yan

sites. Much of the aquaculture pond area were being converted into solar power farm. During the survey in early September, only one SBS was seen. Resighting records of flagged SBS suggested that some of the Yangkou's SBS might have moved further south towards Donglin.

Tiaozini continued to support substantial number of SBS. At least 30 individuals were present at the 720 hightide roosting site and 10 at the Northern hightide roosting site on 15 September 2023. However, as SBS did very few feedings at the 720 hightide roosting site, it increased the difficulty to obtain data for the mark-resighting scan survey. Only six flagged individuals were recorded from the two hightide roosting sites during the scan survey period from 10-19 September: Lime 24, Lime 88, White 4U, White C2, Yellow EJ and Yellow YE. Volunteers from SBS in China also carried out scan surveys at Fangtong, south of Tiaozini. Four unflagged adult and one first winter individual were recorded there. Total of 5 first winter SBS were recorded across all survey sites during the scan survey period.



First winter SBS recorded at the Northern hightide roosting site on 15 Sep 2023
Ewan Weston



Ringing station during our mist netting session

He Tao

Table 1: Peak counts from the past 4 years from Jiangsu Province during our survey

| | Tiaozini | Fangtong | Yangkou | Donglin | Tongzhou Bay |
|------|----------|----------|---------|---------|--------------|
| 2020 | 60 | na | 10 | 30 | na |
| 2021 | 20 | na | 7 | 20 | na |
| 2022 | 53 | 9 | 12 | 21 | na |
| 2023 | 40 | 5 | 1 | 22 | 5 |

As the rain cleared out in the afternoon on 16 September, the team seized our last two nights to carry out mist netting. We caught 442 birds on the first night at Yangkou, and 214 birds at Tiaozini. Unfortunately, no further SBS was caught.

The continued marking of Spoonies on both breeding and non-breeding grounds is not only important for us to understand their migration routes and behaviour, and their annual survival rates, but also enables us to produce accurate global and local population estimates using mark-

resighting methods. All this information help formulate conservation actions to save the species. Thank you to all the volunteers who participate in the ringing expedition and scan survey.

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Assessment of Hunting Pressure on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other Shorebirds in Russian Far East in 2019-2022

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Introduction

The Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative (AMBI) Work Plan objective 3 states to prevent illegal hunting and regulate unsustainable legal harvest of Arctic migratory birds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). Action 3.1 initiates surveys of hunting pressure on Arctic-breeding shorebirds in stopover areas in the North-East of Russia, including Chukotka, Kamchatka, Sakhalin and mainland coasts of Sea of Okhotsk¹. The implementation of these activities was started in 2019 by BirdsRussia and Working Group on Waders on Northern Eurasia. This is the first project focused on the assessment of hunting pressure on Arctic shorebirds in Russia. The main aim is to reveal the territories of the largest hunting pressure on shorebirds first of all for priority EAAF Partnership species of shorebirds: Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, hereinafter SBS. Special attention is paid as well to Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* which is the most popular shorebird target species for legal hunting in the Russian Far East.

In 2019 a survey was carried out in Kamchatka (Klokov et al., 2020)², in 2020 in Sakhalin (Matsyna et al., 2021)³, in 2021 in Khabarovsk Krai and Amur Oblast (Matsyna et al., 2023)⁴, and in 2022 in Magadan Oblast (Fig. 1). This article provides the first summary of the results of these studies in relation to small waders and Spoon-billed Sandpiper.



Figure 1. Regions of the Russian Far East surveyed in 2019-2022: 3 – Magadan Oblast, 4 – Kamchatka Krai, 5 – Khabarovsk Krai, 8 – Amur Oblast, 9 – Sakhalin Oblast; regions proposed for survey in the nearest years: 10 – Primorskiy Krai; other regions: 1 – Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), 2 – Chukotka, 6 – Republic of Buryatia, 7 – Zabaykalskiy Krai. Areas of the highest probability of shooting on SBS during seasonal migrations (highlighted by red points)

¹ CAFF Congress MB5: Worldwide partnerships to conserve migratory birds: The Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative. 2018. Available from: <https://www.caaff.is/arctic-migratory-birds-initiative-ambi> [Accessed 8th October 2021].

² Klokov, Konstantin, Yuri Gerasimov, Evgeny Syroechkovskiy. First attempt to evaluate hunting Pressure on Shorebirds in Kamchatka: Progress Report. SBS Task Force News Bull. 2020. № 22. P. 31-34.

³ Matsyna Aleksandr I., Matsyna Ekaterina L., Konstantin B. Klokov, Evgeny E. Syroechkovskiy. Hunting pressure on shorebirds on Sakhalin Island. SBS Task Force News Bull. 2021. № 24. P. 26-29.

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Interview with young hunter, Sakhalin, 2020

Methodology

The methodology was based on the experience of estimating waterfowl hunting pressure in the eastern part of the Russian Arctic developed by E.E. Syroechkovskiy and K.B. Klokov⁵. It was used in 1999–2006 to estimate bird harvests in 22 villages of Chukotka and northern Yakutia near the seacoast. We adapted this approach considering that, shorebirds are not the main object of local hunting. The survey of each village included two stages. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with 2–3 experts to identify on a qualitative level the general picture of how shorebird hunting occurs at this place and how important it was for local hunters.

The second stage was using anonymous questionnaires completed by the hunters themselves. In Kamchatka, since the majority of hunters do not

distinguish species of shorebirds we did not use the names of shorebird species in anonymous questionnaire. Instead, we asked hunters to divide shot shorebirds into the following groups: Whimbrel (well known to hunters); other large-sized shorebirds (except Whimbrel), medium-sized, and small-sized shorebirds. In addition, we asked to list the species of harvested shorebirds, but only a few respondents did so.

In 2020 the methodology was improved. In addition to the interviews with hunters, direct observations of hunting and inspections of harvested birds at key sites were included. This allowed the identification of species which hunters could not distinguish themselves. Furthermore, telephone interviews with experts from remote regions were conducted.

⁵ Syroechkovskiy E.E. and K.B. Klokov, 2010. Using questionnaire method to study the impact of hunting on waterfowl in the Russian Arctic. Cazarka, 13, pp. 76-103 (In Russian).

In some areas we were unable to conduct anonymous questionnaires due to local specifics in the hunting management. There are enough completed anonymous questionnaires to make a rough quantitative estimate of the number of harvested birds obtained in Kamchatka and the Amur Region. In the other regions, the estimate was made as an expert judgement of fieldworkers based on the total data collected and opinions of local experts. The figures obtained should therefore be treated as a first approximation, which only gives an indication of the magnitude of shorebird hunting.

Results and Discussion

As a result of the surveys carried out, we were able to draw a rough picture of the shorebird hunting pressure in five main regions of the Russian part of the EAAF. In total, more than 100,000 people in all five regions have an official hunter's certificate. About 30,000 of them annually receive permits to hunt birds (mainly waterfowl). These people are potential shorebird hunters. The only shorebird species which is hunted purposefully by many hunters is the Whimbrel. In some areas, hunters also target the Far Eastern Curlew, even though it is a protected species. All other shorebird species are mainly hunted as follows:

- by teenagers, who do not legally hunt but train themselves to become hunters,
- in the absence of other game, in order not to return home empty-handed,
- by some gourmet hunters who consider it a delicacy,
- by furbearer trappers as a bait for sables.

This shows that shorebirds, except Whimbrel, are mostly shot randomly during waterfowl hunts, both in autumn and spring. The hunting pressure depends mainly on the timing of the migration of a particular species. Shorebird species that form mass aggregations at stopover sites at times when waterfowl hunting is open are strongly affected.



Interview with young hunters in the Nikolayevsky District of Khabarovsk Krai, 2021

Those species which have the peak of migration before or after the hunting season are not shot. To save ammunition, hunters usually shoot at dense flocks targeting small and medium shorebirds. This results in many wounded birds that subsequently die, and a significant number of killed or remaining undiscovered. Apart of the waste and disregard for the hunted waders, such hunting of mixed flocks of small shorebirds, risks targeting rare species, such as Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Most hunters do not distinguish between species of small and medium-sized shorebird. They call them "dumplings", "galushkas", or other local terms. Only a few hunters know which of these species are allowed and which are prohibited to hunt.

Below are the results of the project in Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Khabarovsk Krai, Magadan and Amur Oblasts summarized for selected shorebird species and groups of species.

Our observations and interviews revealed the main areas where these waders are shot relatively frequently by hunters at places of shorebird concentrations along the Sea of Okhotsk coast, close to settlements with many hunters (see Fig. 1). These are the western and southern coasts of the

Kamchatka Peninsula, the northern part of Sakhalin Island, the coastal districts of Khabarovsk Krai and the area around the city of Magadan and Ol'sky district of the Magadan Oblast. There are no such places in the Amur Oblast. On Kamchatka of medium-sized shorebirds mostly the globally endangered Great Knot are important for hunters. In Magadan Oblast and Khabarovsk Krai, the most commonly hunted species in the medium-sized group, are Common Snipe, Great Knot, Red Knot, and in Khabarovsk Krai Terek Sandpiper, Ruff, and Redshank. Great Knot and Red Knot are shot mainly in dense flocks resting on the Sea of Okhotsk at high tide. Small-sized shorebirds are also shot in flocks in the same areas. In Khabarovsk Krai (Tuguro-Chumikansky district), more than one third of the hunters surveyed (37.2%) regularly shot small-sized shorebirds. Dunlin, Red-necked Stint and Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* constitute the majority of birds shot in this size group, but Spoon-billed Sandpiper can be among them.

In Magadan Oblast more than one third of the interviewed hunters (34%) reported taking small shorebirds occasionally or in the past. Many people mentioned that they had done so in their youth. We believe that Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, and Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* constitute the main part of the hunting bags in this size group of shorebirds. During surveys hunters also named Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minimus* and Lesser Sandplover among the hunted birds.

On Sakhalin, the following species are taken by hunters in high quantities: Dunlin (considerably more than all the others; over ten thousand),

Lesser Sand Plover, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* and Red-necked Stint (in small numbers).

According to our expert estimates, the total number of hunted small shorebirds is approximately 20,500 in Sakhalin, 6,000 in Kamchatka, 5,000 in Khabarovsk Krai, 1,200 in Magadan Oblast, and about 100-200 in the Amur Oblast.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Spoon-billed Sandpiper currently remains one of the most endangered water bird species on the flyway and possibly in the world. It has a narrow breeding range in the coastal tundra of Chukotka. The species is considered globally "Critically Endangered". Sakhalin Island and Kamchatka as well as Magadan and the Amur Delta are important stopover sites for this species. Ivanov et al. (2023)⁶ provided the most detailed summary of Spoon-billed Sandpiper sightings on Sakhalin during migration. Unfortunately, key Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites on Sakhalin coincide fully with the areas of active shorebird hunting (Fig. 2). Shorebirds are commonly hunted indiscriminately by shooting at dense flocks consisting of several species, which often consists of SBSs as well. Thus, they can likely become victims to such shots.

Although we are far from knowing all its traditional staging sites, this hunting practice is a cause for major concern. Spoon-billed Sandpiper sightings on the shores of Sakhalin are most dispersive and the birds could potentially end up in any place where they could be targeted. There are many areas with considerable hunting pressure at known Spoon-billed Sandpiper staging sites. We know about shot SBS in the past at all the study areas along the Sea of Okhotsk – Kamchatka, Sakhalin, and Khabarovsk (Fig. 1). All

⁶ Bamford M. et al 2008 Migratory shorebirds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway: Population estimates and internationally important sites (Canberra: Wetlands International – Oceania); Conklin J. R. et al. 2014 Prioritizing migratory shorebirds for conservation action on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (Hong Kong).



Spotted Redshanks in the nuptial plumage, harvested during spring duck hunting at the Piltun bay in the Okhinsky district of the Sakhalin oblast, 2020

known cases were incidental. The birds were killed in flocks of small shorebirds. This hunt is most common and still practiced not only in northern Sakhalin, but also in several districts of Khabarovsk Krai, namely Nikolayevsky, Tuguro-Chumikansky, and Okhotsk districts. The Khabarovsk Krai remains poorly investigated in terms of shorebirds but is undoubtedly important on migration for this species. The probability of shooting SBS in the northern part of western Kamchatka coast is supported by the fact that signal transmission from three of the nine birds with radio transmitters stopped sending signal from this area (Chang et al 2020).

Given that hunters kill a very significant number of small sized shorebirds (see above) we should consider hunting of SBS as an important threat to its population. If, for example, we assume that in the wild there is 1 SBS on average among 1000 small waders, we can suppose that up to 20 SBS



Weekend harvest of hunters – mouth of Bolshaya River, Kamchatka, 2019

may be killed annually in Sakhalin, 6 in Kamchatka, 5 in Khabarovsk Krai, and 1 in Magadan Oblast. These are very significant numbers.

Conclusions and recommendations for conservation

The results of our survey clearly show that hunting of shorebirds in the North-East of Russia (most northern part of EAAF) has a major impact on Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Although, many older residents told us, that hunting for small-sized shorebirds in North-East of Russia has declined significantly over the past 40-50 years, our surveys have revealed that it remains an additional threat to the populations of the rare protected species, including Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Great Knot. Shooting in flocks causes the highest damage, with many birds being wounded, and not found, dying a painful death. Shorebirds are most affected by hunting at coastal areas of the Sea of Okhotsk close to human settlements. Most shorebirds are hunted here by a relatively small number of local hunters. The most promising way to protect shorebirds would be to organize regular awareness-raising activities with local communities in these districts. The best solution for this task would be to develop a special integrated project combining research, education, and conservation components.

Hunting control in all North-East of Russia, is weak. For shorebird conservation special education activities are much needed not only for hunters but as well for wildlife officers. Since hunters often shoot protected shorebirds because of their inability to identify species and the lack of knowledge on the protection status. As well, hunting inspectors cannot control this process because they also can't identify many species of birds. These activities can be conducted together with hunter societies and regional hunting agencies. As we learned during our research, hunting societies are open to such activities. But they have limited resources.

A significant part of the hunters are really interested to learn about the species, their threatened status and flyways, which they targeted, but there is no place where they can be educated. The publication of a field guide of shorebirds of the Russian Far East is a very important step in improving the level of knowledge of both hunters and hunting officers.

For key Spoon-billed Sandpiper staging sites, especially in Kamchatka and Sakhalin, a memorandum or temporary hunting ban should be negotiated with the hunting fraternity. Monitoring and special research should be conducted in several districts of Sakhalin, important for the declining population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Seasonal protection should be introduced in all such sites to restrict the hunting pressure.

There is also an alternative way of conserving small shorebirds. This is to close hunting of all species of shorebirds. Considering that hunters only shoot small shorebirds incidentally, such a ban would not seriously harm their interests. This question requires more research and strong enforcement.

Also, the creation of new protected areas, important for shorebird stopovers with high levels of hunting pressure, will be of great importance.



Poster "Shorebirds of the Far East – the national treasure of Russia" developed for the project

It is highly desirable to continue the initial work on publishing and disseminating special informational posters demonstrating the species diversity of shorebirds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and engaging directly with the hunting community. This information, not otherwise available to hunters, greatly increases their awareness of the fact that most shorebird species are endangered and prohibited to be hunted.

Further research perspectives

Although our study filled a significant gap, the available data on shorebirds hunting in the Russian North-East is still insufficient and can be improved. It is desirable to enhance the necessary background data on hunting in the region to propose an effective shorebird conservation program.

The methodology used provides acceptable results and it can be applied to other areas. We need further research, in Primorskiy Krai, including the lowland around the Khanka Lake, which is an important region for shorebirds. During migrations, many rare species stop here, including SBS and others. The assessment of the hunting impact on these species is very important. The coast of the Sea of Okhotsk is one of the least ornithologically investigated areas with important shorebird concentrations during autumn migration and high hunting pressures. Our surveys have not yet covered all important sites.

One more important argument to continue the project is the active involvement of specialists from various regions of the Far East. Their attention will also help to lobby for shorebird conservation in dialogue with the hunting communities and other institutions and authorities.

Acknowledgments

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We acknowledge employees of these agencies and societies, as well as the experts and consultants who provided valuable information on the population, distribution and hunting of shorebirds in Russian Far East.

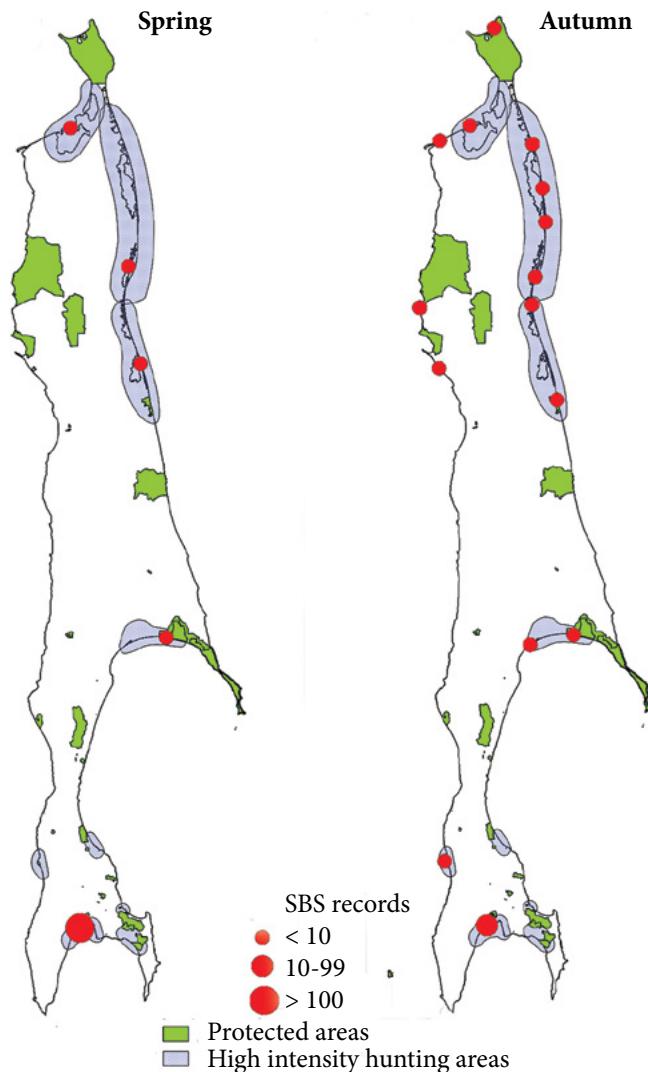


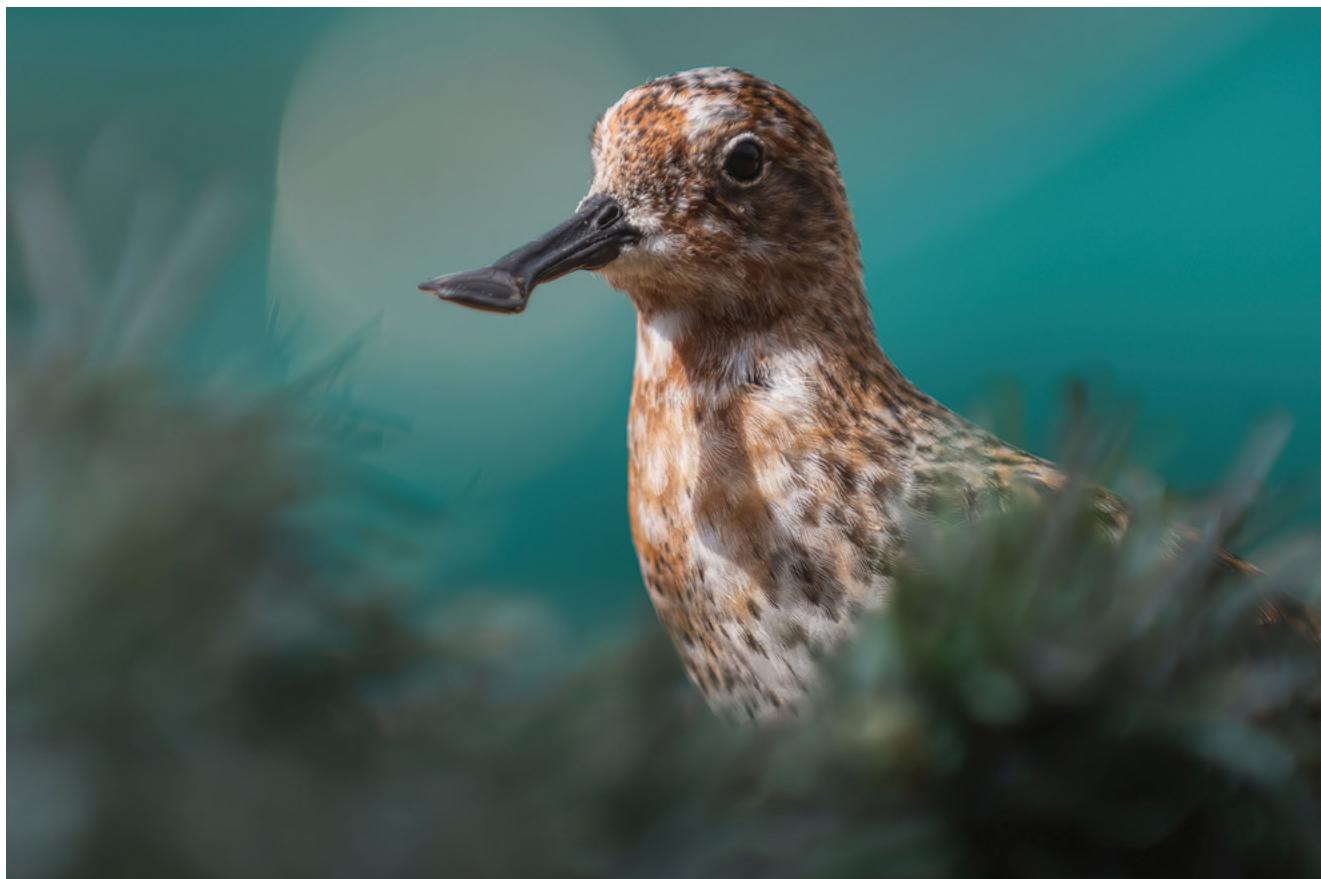
Figure 2. Spoon-billed Sandpiper sighting sites in Sakhalin Island in relation to places of intensive hunting and protected areas during northward and southward. The sighting sites are shown according A. Ivanov, V. Zykov, Z. Reviakina, P. Ktitov, Important stopover Sites for Spoon-billed Sandpiper on Sakhalin Island. SBS NB, 2023, 28, 14-21

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Conservation Breeding

Jodie Clements, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT)



Jonathan Bull, 2023

As the conservation breeding project at WWT Slimbridge, UK, comes to an end we summarise here the last 12 years of what should be viewed as a first attempt at applying conservation breeding techniques to Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation.

In 2011 and 2012 arduous journeys were made to bring SBS eggs from the breeding grounds of far eastern Russia to the UK, to establish an ark population as a measure to prevent extinction. In 2013 the captive population comprised nine males and two females of breeding age and eight yearling males and seven yearling females. That summer the birds displayed an array of positive breeding behaviours. With every year came new insights and theories as to what could increase the chances of a successful breeding season. However,

every year came new challenges, particularly from high summer time temperatures and a small and declining population.

In four of nine possible breeding years, 19 eggs were laid in six clutches. Seven chicks hatched, three surviving to fledge. It is quite likely that all of the eggs were fertile, however, the majority had “thin-shells” likely linked with calcium and vitamin metabolism issues in the parent females. Four chicks died within a few days of hatch. Post mortem examination revealed calcium related complications or yolk sac related sepsis. Of the surviving three fledglings one died shortly after fledging in a collision incident. One died nearing three years of age of a yeast infection. One fledgling is still alive in 2023 (aged 4 years) and lives in the same facility in the UK with his father (aged

11 years). These are now the only two SBS in the UK captive population.

The complexities of establishing a self-sustaining population have been vast and interlinked. Attempts to breed SBS came to a close when the last female died in 2021. However, the remaining males still hold as much value, serving as ambassadors for their species, raising awareness and still giving us a chance to gain knowledge and understanding of their husbandry needs.

In 2022 preparations began to equip the breeding facility to host tours for the public. Those of you reading this who have been lucky enough to see a Spoon-billed Sandpiper will most likely remember the life-lasting wonderment of your first sighting. While still maintaining the same levels of biosecurity (a feature in itself) we could tell the conservation breeding and headstarting story through real-life artefacts/set-ups as well as in real-time. Moving people to inspiration with such an experience is not an opportunity worth missing. Due to national outbreaks of Avian Influenza virus the tours had to be adjusted and in 2023 the SBS could be viewed from outside their facility as part of another headstarting project tour. 150 stakeholders and interested parties experienced this end of tour treat while attending WWT's Curlew headstarting project tours.

The two remaining SBS are healthy in their retirement. An overall report and review is currently underway for this first attempt of conservation breeding of Spoon-billed Sandpiper hosted by WWT Slimbridge.



Bethany Norris, 2023



Bethany Norris, 2023



Jonathan Bull, 2023

From the Archives

Meinypyl'gyno 2003



above: Christoph Zöckler, Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Elena Lappo, Vanya Taldenkov und Vladimir Morozov
below: Elena Lappo, Roman Belgorodsev, Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Dima Dobrynn, Vanya Taldenkov



The first SBS monitoring team in 2003, when a total of 85 territories were recorded in Meinypyl'gyno. In 2003 the village still had the old wooden houses. They were replaced in 2005

only during the Abramovich era. Elena Lappo is the only team member that has been coming back annually for the past 20 years.

CZ

SBS in Arts

Elena Golub'



Elena is working in the Chukotka department of the Pacific branch of the Federal State Budgetary Institution "VNIRO", conducting research on Pacific salmon. She came to Chukotka in 1996 after graduating from the Faculty of Biology of Perm State University, where she studied at the Department of Vertebrate Zoology, specializing in Ornithology. She has been working as an ichthyologist for 27 years, heading a laboratory of anadromous and freshwater fish, and defended her PhD thesis on Chukchi Sockeye Salmon.

Studying the fish, she is also very familiar with birds, she made the first birdlist of the area and is still involved in the ornithological observations in BirdsRussia expeditions together with her husband Andrey Golub'.

Elena Lappo When did you start drawing birds and other animals, do you remember your first experience?

Elena Golub' I drew while still at school, then there was a big break in my hobby. I became interested in drawing again not so long ago, just seven years ago. For the "canvas" I chose stones – peb-

bles from the Bering Sea coast. I also try to draw on shells, goose feathers and intervertebral discs of whales and walruses. I collect all this in the summer on the shores of lakes and the sea.

EL Where did you first see the SBS or hear or maybe read about it?

EG I saw the Spoon-billed Sandpiper for the first time in the vicinity of the village Meinypyl'gyno, back in 1998. The bird attracted attention with the unusual shape of its beak, although from a distance it can be confused with a Red-neck Stint. Very few people have seen the SBS in person, much less been able to hold its chicks in their hands. My children and I are lucky: we know this rare bird firsthand!

EL How, where and when did you draw the first SBS?

EG Since birds are my main subject of drawing, I could not help but depict a portrait of a SBS on the stone. Moreover, he is one of the symbols of Meinypyl'gyno. Another no less significant symbol is Sockeye Salmon, since it is in the rivers of the Meinypyl'gyno system that the largest herd of these salmon in Chukotka spawns.



EL Why do you think it is important to conserve the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?

EG Unfortunately, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper runs the risk of repeating the fate of already extinct species. Therefore, our task is to make every effort to prevent this from happening. Ornithologists do a lot, but even more depends on the inhabitants of Chukotka, their caring attitude towards those who surround them in this unkind land of the world.

EL What contribution can artists and sculptures make to the conservation of birds in general and the SBS in particular?

EG I hope that with my drawings I can attract attention to such birds, awaken people's interest in learning something new, and understand that the preservation of the world around us depends on each of us.

EL What do you like about your work in Chukotka entire?

EG I came to the Meinypyl'gyno lake-river system in the second year of my work in Chukotka. Since then, I spend the summer almost every year in this wonderful place, where the mountains meet the sea. 2023 was my 20-th anniversary season! What do I like about my job? First of all, it is connected with nature. All summer I don't sit in a stuffy office, but have the opportunity to travel and observe with my own eyes rare animals, most of which even my fellow students have only seen in photographs. Chukotka is a wonderful place, it's a pity that summer always ends so quickly ...

EL

News in Brief

China

SBS at the Chinese Ornithological Congress

The 17th Chinese Ornithological Conference COC was successfully held in Jiangsu Provincial Conference Center from October 19 to 23, 2023 in Nanjing.

The conference was organized by the Chinese Ornithological Society and hosted by our University (Nanjing Normal University) and Nanjing Institute of Environmental Science, Ministry of Ecology and Environment. In total 939 delegates from 33 provinces, municipalities, autonomous regions and special administrative regions, as well as from Europe, North America, Australia, Japan, Mongolia and other countries and regions gathered to share and exchange the fruitful results of ornithological research in China in recent years.

With the theme of “Chinese ornithological Research in the Context of Globalization”, the conference arranged five special invited conference reports and five youth reports, set up 26 modules of 185 thematic reports, 6 round table discussions, 106 exhibition and exchange posters, a total of 307 reports in various forms. In addition, a side session on “Scientific Basis and Practice of Migratory Bird Flight Passage Protection in China” was also held during the conference.

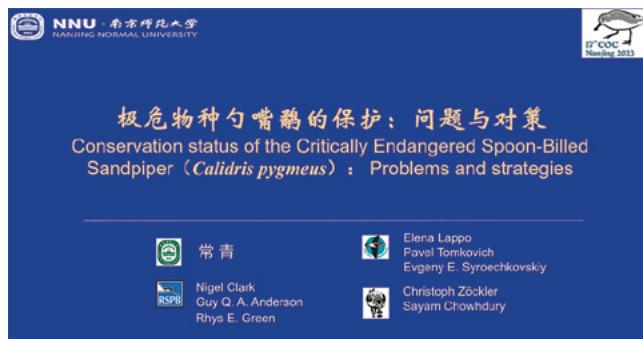
At the conference, Prof Chang Qing from Nanjing Normal University gave a presentation on behalf

of the SBS Task Force about the “Conservation status of the Critically Endangered Spoon-Billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmaea*): Problems and strategies” on behalf of our international team, RSPB (Nigel Clark, Guy Q. A. Anderson, Rhys E. Green), BirdsRussia (Elena Lappo, Pavel Tomkovich and Evgeny E. Syroechkovskiy) and SBS TF (Christoph Zöckler, Sayam Chowdhury). Chang Qing reported on the population status of SBS in breeding areas, stopover sites and wintering areas. He hopes more researchers could pay more attention to SBS conservation in China. Threats to the species and protection actions were suggested. He also hopes key habitat based on satellite tracking studies could be protected by the Chinese government in the future.

During the conference, our Chair Sun Lili organized a small seminar about SBS conservation together with Prof. Zhang Zhengwang from Beijing Normal University (the chairman of Chinese Ornithological Society), Prof. Ma Zhijun from Fudan University (Vice Chairman of the Chinese Ornithological Society) and Prof. Ding Changqing from Beijing Forest University (Secretary General of the Chinese Ornithological Society) and Prof Chang Qing to discuss the future of SBS conservation.

Myanmar

Last news: On 2 November, our SBS Guardian Ren Nou Soe found Lime 27 among three SBS! Lime 27, also labelled the King of the Flyway, is returning to Nan Thar for the ninth winter in a row after it has been spotted in China in August (s. Page 21) and on the breeding in Meinypyl'gyno (s. Page 10). Lets hope Yellow CU is also returning again to Nan Thar soon ...



News in Brief

Germany

Chinese Guests visiting the German Wadden Sea

From 9-12 September Lili Sun, Yin Yuzhu and Cao Huan of the Mangrove Conservation Fund (MCF) visited the island of Norderney and the Leybucht near Emden to experience the famous Wadden Sea area, watch migratory birds and learn about the challenges in managing the National Park and World Heritage Site.

Dr Christoph Zöckler from the Manfred-Hermsen Foundation welcomed the small Chinese delegation at the ferry terminal. The conservation fund, based in Shenzhen, Guangdong South China is focusing on coastal conservation and the delegation was keen to learn about the German Wadden Sea. On the island the delegation was greeted and guided by local conservationist Hartmut Andretzke, who also organised a bicycle and walking tour to the remote eastern part of the island. Morning fog obstructed most of the bird sightings but provided an atmospheric experience of the wild parts of the Wadden Sea National Park. Oystercatcher, Curlews and Sandwich Terns were only heard and faint glimpses of sandpipers, plovers and gulls hinted at larger flocks of birds. But as soon as the fog lifted thousands of small waders exposed themselves to our Chinese guests.

Dr Valeria Bers and Dr Gregor Scheiffahrt for the National Park authorities gave short presentations and insights into the National Park Lower Saxony and the wider Wadden Sea between the Netherlands and Denmark at the island's National Park Info Centre Wattwelten.

A specific focus of MCF were High Tide Roost Sites behind the dikes, which could provide ideas for the design of similar constructions at various key sites in China on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, which is important for the globally criti-

cally endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper as well as millions of migratory birds. Lili Sun, the chairperson of the board of MCF stated: ‘The visit was well beyond our expectations. It’ll have a profound influence on our subsequent work on the Chinese coast!’

MCF will host the next international Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force Meeting in Guangdong in January 2024, to which Christoph Zöckler and Hartmut Andretzke have been invited too.



From left to right: Yin Yuzhu, Lili Sun, Christoph Zöckler, Hartmut Andretzke, Cao Huan

Germany

During the **Wader Study Group Conference** from 29 September – 2 October a small extra sessional Task Force meeting among some members present at Sylt was held ad hoc to discuss the actions for conserving SBS.



From left: Hilger Lemke, Christoph Zöckler, Elena Lappo, Anton Ivanov, Nigel Clark, Natalia Karlionova

The last Page



In December 2021, a "**Little Spoon Cafe**" with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper emblem has been established in the Future Science and Technology City of China-South Korea Industrial Park

in Yangcheng, attracting "spoonie fans" to call in and support the SBS conservation work and the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature.