Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force

News Bulletin No 34 · May 2026

Movie posters from Germany and China

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 Elena Lappo and Coordinator Sayam U. 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.

Chair: Dr Christoph Zöckler (Manfred-Hermsen Foundation) · christoph.zoeckler@m-h-s.org

Vice Chair: Dr Lili Sun (Mangrove Conservation Foundation MCF) · sunlili@mcf.org.cn

Coordinator: Dr Sayam U. Chowdhury · sayam_uc@yahoo.com

Layout by Matthias Fanck Graphic Design, Zell, Germany, SBS Support Group

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force
News Bulletin No 34 · May 2026

Contents

Abhishek Das

Foreword by the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Manfred Hermsen Foundation

A new **Action Plan** has been adopted. Two new **film projects** have been completed. **China** is taking action to curb bird hunting at its coastal sites.

These are just some of the many reasons to celebrate. It is important to acknowledge both the small and the major achievements of our Task Force over the years. We marked these successes in November in Cebu, Philippines, at the EAAFP MOP, where the new Action Plan was adopted, and again in April in Bremen, Germany, where "Saving Spoonie" was screened for the first time. Also in April, an AI-animated Spoonie film was launched in Shenzhen, China.

Yet the species continues to decline, and recent winter counts indicate a further drop across almost all regions, particularly in the southern parts of the wintering range. This underlines the need for urgent and coordinated action. Much remains to be done to conserve this tiny sandpiper, and the new Action Plan offers clear guidance on the key issues. In this bulletin, you can read about progress in China, where engagement with the authorities has delivered encouraging results. There has also been progress in Vietnam in addressing bird hunting, supported by advice and assistance from Chinese authorities to their Vietnamese counterparts. Sadly, hunting resumed in Myanmar, and one dead Spoon-billed Sandpiper was found in a net in the southern Gulf of Mottama. Our partner NCS, however, continues to work actively with local communities in the Gulf and Delta region to stop bird trapping. More action still appears to be needed to tackle trapping and strengthen the protection of coastal sites in Thailand.

We are deeply grateful for the continued support of our partners and donors. I would like to acknowledge the ongoing commitment of the Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung in particular, which has supported our Task Force consistently since 2005. We extend our sincere thanks to the foundation and to all our other donors for their generous support.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and join me in celebrating our successes over the past 25 years.

Guest Foreword by Lei Guangchun

Chair, East Asia-Australasia Flyway University Alliance

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmaea*) is a global critically endangered shorebird that breeds only in northeastern Russia and migrates along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF). The current global population is estimated at only 300-550 individuals, due to global climate change, illegal hunting and accidental trapping, habitat loss and degradation from reclamation and invasive Spartina.

Although a comprehensive single species conservation plan has been implemented since 2010, its population decline has been slowed from 26% in 2000 to 5% in 2020s. More effective conservation and restoration work are urgently needed. Such work will be based on solid science and a wide participation of international and local communities, universities, research institutions and NGOs. In November 2025, a new 10-year conservation roadmap, the **International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (2025–2035)**, was officially adopted. It is a detailed strategy to halt and reverse the species' population decline.

This issue presents the updated International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (2025-2035), as well as new information on species distribution and conservation works on the ground. The implementation of the updated SBS action plan will also benefit all other migratory waterbirds, as well as local communities. The key issue for protection and restoration of SBS and other shorebirds in coastal habitats is the relationship between people and nature. How to balance the economic development and protection of coastal areas, such as measures to control the expansion of invasive plants, to strengthen the management of intertidal mudflats and high-tide roost sites through protected areas, as well as OECMs (Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures). Meanwhile, multiple approaches should be adopted in order to reverse SBS population decline, through research, capacity building, education and international cooperation.

I wish this new issue shares information widely to all who care for SBS conservation and sustainable development in the region.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Action Plan launched at the EAAFP Meeting of the Parties (MOP12)

Christoph Zöckler

It was a major milestone for the SBS Taskforce when after several years of elaborating, discussing and negotiating the draft Action Plan has been 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 vision and lists over 75 activities across the flyway countries and globally. The EAAFP Meeting of the Parties in Cebu, Philippines endorsed the draft plan on November 12th 2025. More than 40 members of the taskforce from almost all flyway countries have been working on the Action Plan, which will set the direction of activities for the next 10 year period 2025-2026.

Over the winter the plan has been lay-outed, embellished with sketches and graphics with support of MHS and finally in April printed in China with support by MCF, who also arranged for a Chinese version. Other language versions are anticipated or are in planning such as Burmese and national action plans based on this Action Plan translating action to national level are encouraged and planned.

All photos Elena Lappo

INTERNATIONAL SINGLE SPECIES

ACTION PLAN

FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE

SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER *CALIDRIS PYGMAEA*

2025 – 2035

https://eaaflyway.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/SBS-AP-2025-35.pdf

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Side Event at MOP12

Hu Huizhe (MCF)

All photos MCF

On November 9, 2025, the new "Spoon-billed Sandpiper Action Plan" side event was conducted during the Twelfth Meeting of the Parties (MOP12) of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) in Cebu, Philippines, jointly organized by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF), the Mangrove Conservation Foundation (MCF), and the Paulson Institute. Researchers, conservation organisation representatives, and international partners from China, Russia, Myanmar, Bangladesh and other countries attended the meeting to discuss global conservation progress for the SBS, monitoring results from key habitats, and future cooperation.

The meeting opened with remarks from the Chair of the SBS TF, Dr Christoph Zöckler, who was looking back to 25 years of species conservation and encouraged the participantats to join him in celebrating successes, followed by a welcome speech from SBS TF Vice Chair, MCF co-founder and Executive Chairwoman Dr Sun Lili on behalf of the organizers. Dr Sun Lili said that the core challenge in advancing SBS conservation lies in continuously strengthening cross-regional collaboration, including enhancing cooperation on breeding-ground protection, promoting data sharing and joint monitoring, and increasing public awareness and participation.

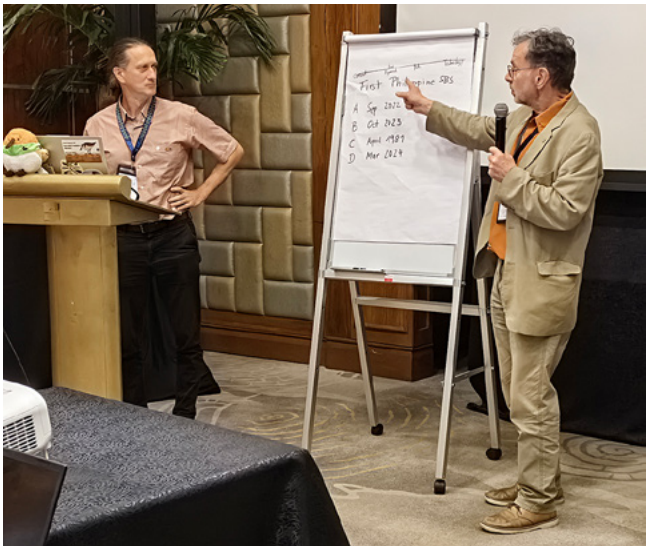
From the breeding-grounds, Dr Elena Lappo, from Birds Russia, presented the latest findings on changes in SBS numbers and distribution dynamics at breeding sites in Russia, illustrating that at the main breeding site, Meinypilgyno, the population declined from 45 breeding pairs in 2003, to only 10 breeding pairs in 2025, indicating continued population pressure. Encouraging news

came in 2025, when three Spoon-billed Sandpiper broods were found on a mountainous plateau far from the coast in North Kamchatka at an elevation of about 400 meters. In 2025, training on conservation breeding of plovers and sandpipers was also conducted in Yancheng jointly by British, Chinese and Russian teams.

In the field of captive breeding, Ms Jodie Clements from the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) reported on the progress, key findings, and future recommendations of the SBS captive breeding program. The report noted that transporting eggs is more successful than transferring chicks directly, and that SBS hatched under artificial conditions can maintain breeding capacity. Maintaining the annual rhythm like stable light cycles and seasonal dietary adjustments are essential for long-term health and reproduction of the captive population.

From the wintering-grounds, Mr Huang Jian (MCF) presented results of a synchronized winter survey of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China from 2023 to 2025, conducted by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Protection Network (a member of the CEAAF-MCF joint team). The surveys covered 4 provinces, 12 major survey stations, and 42 observation points, with approximately 300 participants in total, demonstrating the broad mobilisation capacity of China's conservation network. Data over the three-year period show that Zhanjiang is the most important concentrated wintering area for SBS in China, The population in Quanzhou appears to be increasing. Notably, most important SBS habitats in Zhanjiang are still not under formal protection, making habitat conservation an urgent priority. The survey also tracked 21 marked individuals, providing valuable data on cross-border migratory connectivity.

Prof Jia Yifei from Beijing Forestry University, member of the CEAAF-MCF joint team, shared progress in ecological research on SBS in Tiaozini Wetland. As a key stopover site for SBS, this area has been studied systematically in terms of food resources, body condition, and habitat management. The research shows that the mid- to low tidal flats are the most important foraging areas



Celebrating with SBS Quiz and prices!

for SBS, August is a critical month for accumulating body reserves during migration, and the need to address the negative impact of invasive Spartina grass as well as managing high-tide roost sites for migratory bird conservation.

Mr Pyae Phyo Aung from the Nature Conservation Society, Myanmar (NCS Myanmar), presented monitoring results from several wintering sites in Myanmar, including the Mottama Ramsar Wetland, showing a declining population.

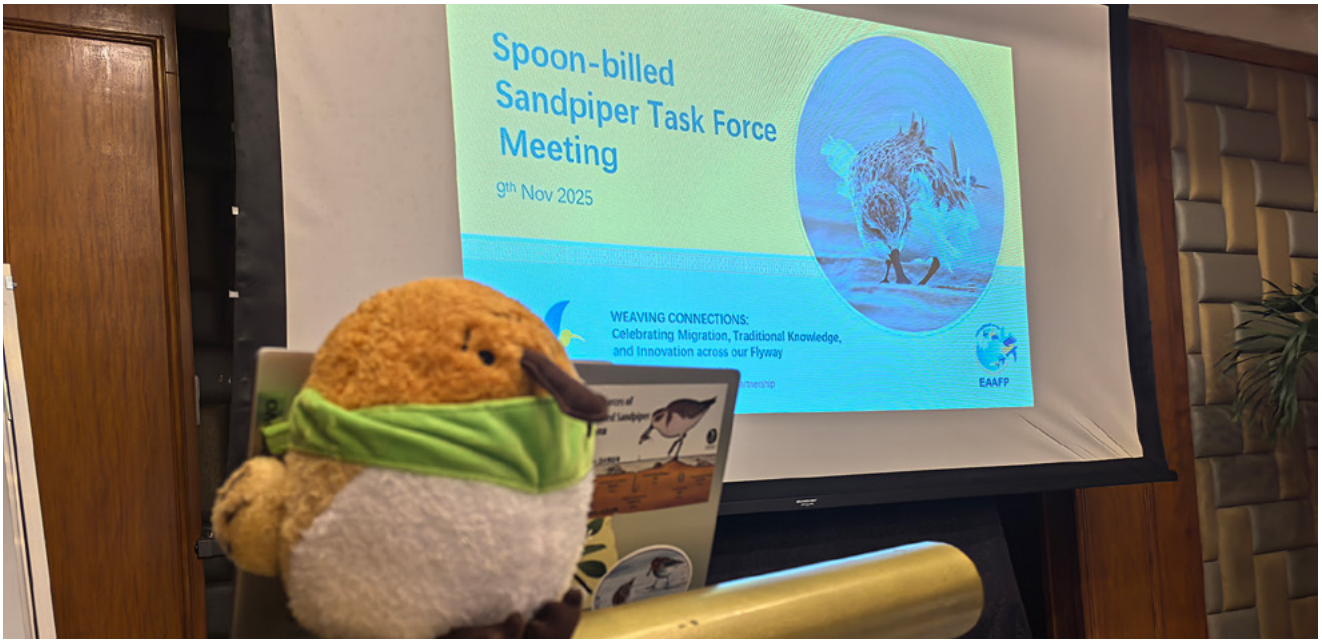
At the side event Dr Sayam U. Chowdhury, SBS TF Coordinator announced the background and framework of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper International Species Action Plan (2025–2035). He explained that the new action plan was built on the experience of the first plan, and was drafted after multiple rounds of international consultation and two key workshops in Myanmar in 2023 and

China in 2024. It was formally approved by the EAAFP during MOP12. The plan sets out a roadmap for SBS population recovery over the next ten years, focusing on site protection, cross-border joint monitoring, captive breeding and head-starting, and in conservation financing mechanisms.

Mr Terry Townshend from the Paulson Institute presented on efforts to tackle mist net use in China. He highlighted the work of China's Supreme People's Procuratorate and discussed aligning actions with high-level policies like Ecological Civilization and Beautiful China, as well as international commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and EAAFP. A more comprehensive summary is presented in this bulletin (page 11). He also suggested sharing good practices regionally through ASEAN, APEC, and events like the BirdLife World Congress in Nairobi in September 2026.

At the end of the event, Dr Christoph Zöckler invited representatives from China, Russia, Myanmar, and Bangladesh to discuss the specific challenges facing SBS, fostering deeper dialogue on targeted conservation strategies.

All participants agreed that, given the severe situation of the population, still declining at about 5 percent per year, strengthening international data-sharing platforms, integrating systematic monitoring across breeding and wintering grounds are key to reversing the SBS's critically endangered status over the next decade.



Christoph Zöckler chairing

Lili Sun welcoming

Cutting the Net: Progress in Tackling illegal Hunting of Migratory Birds in China

Terry Townshend[1] and Jinghui QIU[2]

[1]Beijing-based Wildlife Conservationist and Fellow of the Paulson Institute,
[2]Deputy Director-General, Public Interest Litigation Department, Supreme People's Procuratorate of the People's Republic of China

As readers of this newsletter know better than anyone, for the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea*, every individual counts. Along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), this rarest and most charismatic of shorebirds faces not only habitat loss but also a silent threat: illegal mist nets. Across Asia, these fine, nearly invisible nets kill millions of migratory birds annually. For shorebirds including the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* and Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, bycatch adds unacceptable mortality. However, what could turn out to be a decisive institutional response is now emerging from China, one of the most critical range states along the flyway.

A Regional Problem, A National Response

China sits at the convergence of four major global flyways, hosting billions of migratory birds. Its territory is the single most important "airspace" for avian survival in the region. In a move that recognises this responsibility, Chinese authorities are looking beyond traditional enforcement to address the root causes of illegal netting.

The catalyst came in 2023 at the World Coastal Forum in Jiangsu Province, where conservationists presented China's procuratorate system—a powerful prosecutorial authority with a public interest litigation mandate—with evidence on the role of mist nets in declines of migratory bird populations. The response has since unfolded on multiple fronts.

First, the Supreme People's Procuratorate issued a top-down directive making mist net management a priority biodiversity issue for 2024–2025. Second, authorities intervened at the supply-chain level, urging major e-commerce platforms such as Alibaba (Taobao) to prohibit sales of prohibited trapping tools. Under the "Green Internet Programme", users searching for mist nets are now redirected to pages displaying legal warnings. Third, Chinese prosecutors have promoted "bird-friendly" protective net standards in over ten provinces, including Shanghai and Guangdong. The aim is to develop standards that legalise only nets with specific visibility—cord thickness and mesh size sufficient to protect crops without killing birds. It will take time to find the solutions that work for a variety of agricultural and aqua cultural settings but the journey has started.

Grassroots Innovation: The "Spoon-billed Sandpiper Prosecutor"

A notable grassroots development occurred on 1 April 2026, when the Jinjiang City People's Procuratorate in Fujian Province unveiled the nation's first "Spoon-billed Sandpiper Prosecutor" logo

and inaugurated a dedicated prosecutor workstation at Weitou Bay—a critical stopover and wintering site for the species along the EAAF.

The initiative, launched on International Bird Day, features a logo depicting a Spoon-billed Sandpiper set against a backdrop of "procuratorial blue". At the same time, wildlife protection experts and volunteers were appointed as public interest litigation observers, formalising a network of local "Spoon-billed Sandpiper guardians".

This innovation demonstrates how national-level policy directives are being translated into site-based, species-specific action. By embedding legal authority at a key shorebird site, Jinjiang has created a replicable model for integrating prosecutorial power into on-the-ground conservation.

The text on this logo "勺嘴鹬检控官" (Sháo zuǐ yù jiǎnkòng guān) translates as "Spoon-billed Sandpiper prosecutor".

Policy Directives and Multi-Agency Campaigns
Concurrently, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA) launched a three-year campaign in late 2025, in collaboration with 16 government bodies, to suppress illegal bird hunting. This was reinforced in February 2026 by an NFGA notification mandating a "multi-departmental, rapid-response, whole-chain supervision" framework, instructing local authorities to eliminate mist nets and poisoning.

In Zhejiang Province, Haiyan County has established a dedicated ecological protection station for migratory birds. Guangdong Province reported record numbers—over 300,000 migratory birds this winter, including Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Wuchuan. Hainan reported that three Spoon-billed Sandpipers have returned to winter in Danzhou Bay for the seventh consecutive year—an encouraging indicator of reduced disturbance.

International Coordination and the EAAF
Chinese prosecutors have presented their strategy internationally, including at a 2025 webinar hosted by the Oriental Bird Club and BirdLife International and a Shanghai Procuratorate case study was shortlisted for a Global Award at the 47th Session of the World Heritage Committee.

The "China model" offers transferable components for other EAAF range states: regulation at the source through manufacturing standards and online sales controls; the use of specialised environmental enforcement branches; and a pragmatic balancing of livelihoods and conservation through bird-safe net standards. As BirdLife International CEO Martin Harper noted, this work has the potential to "bend the curve of migratory bird population declines" in the world's most threatened flyway.

Looking Ahead
While the threat of illegal hunting remains, the current trajectory shows an improving landscape of deterrence. The cross-ministerial three-year campaign, the innovative regulation of net supply chains, and the consistent return of Spoon-billed Sandpipers to protected sites all indicate progress. For the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, these developments provide a foundation to advocate for continued political will, ensuring that policy gains are matched by lasting outcomes on the mudflats.

Sincere gratitude is due to the prosecutors across China who have embraced migratory bird protection as a public interest mandate, and to the conservationists whose persistent advocacy has inspired this action—in particular Sun Lili, founder and executive chairperson of the Mangrove Conservation Foundation, whose decades of dedication to wetland and shorebird conservation, from the mudflats of Leizhou Peninsula to the international stage, have helped bridge the gap between civil society and judicial power in the fight to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Looking beyond China's borders, there is significant potential for Chinese prosecutors to share their innovative experience in migratory bird protection through existing bilateral and regional cooperation platforms, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Prosecutors General Meeting, where public interest litigation cases have been showcased, and the China-ASE-

AN prosecutorial cooperation framework, which has addressed financial crime but could expand to environmental enforcement. Other relevant mechanisms include the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) and the "Mekong Dragon" joint operation framework, both of which have facilitated cross-border collaboration on wildlife crime. By bringing the mist net governance experience and the "Spoon-billed Sandpiper Prosecutor" model to these dialogues, China could help catalyse a region-wide shift toward more effective, prosecutor-led conservation action to tackle illegal hunting along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

If a bird with a spoon-shaped bill can inspire a nation to reshape its legal landscape, then perhaps the flyway's most vulnerable traveller may yet find its way back from the brink.

References

Oriental Bird Club. (2025, January 27). Illegal mist net use threatens wild birds in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway [Webinar summary]. https://www.orientalbirdclub.org/club-news/2025/1/27/illegal-mist-net-use-threats-wild-birds-in-the-east-asian-australasian-flyway

Supreme People's Procuratorate of the People's Republic of China. (2024–2025). Top-down directives on mist net management as a priority biodiversity issue [Internal policy communications].

Shanghai Procuratorate. (2025). Migration without Borders, Protection without Limit – China's Rule-of-Law Solution for Human-Bird Conflict at the World Natural Heritage Site [Case study presented at the 47th Session of the World Heritage Committee].

National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA). (2025). Three-year campaign to suppress illegal bird hunting and trafficking (launched late 2025) [Policy announcement]

National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA). (2026, February). Urgent notification (Document No. 8) on spring migration season enforcement [Policy directive]

Haiyan County, Zhejiang Province. (2025–2026). Establishment of ecological protection station for migratory birds and marine restoration works [Local government records].

Guangdong Provincial Government. (2025–2026). Winter migratory bird surveyresults (300,000+ birds, including Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Wuchuan) [Provincial monitoring data].

Hainan Provincial Government. (2026). Danzhou Bay wintering Spoon-billed Sandpiper returns (seventh consecutive year) [Site monitoring report].

Guangdong Provincial Government. (2025–2026). Winter migratory bird survey results (300,000+ birds, including Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Wuchuan) [Provincial monitoring data]

Hainan Provincial Government. (2026). Danzhou Bay wintering Spoon-billed Sandpiper returns (seventh consecutive year) [Site monitoring report].

Harper, M. (CEO, BirdLife International). (2025). Statement on China's mist net work and potential to "bend the curve of migratory bird population declines" [Public comment].

World Coastal Forum. (2023). Presentation by conservationists to China's procuratorate system on mist net drivers and countermeasures [Conference proceedings].

World Coastal Forum. (2025). Side event: Global Synergy: Safeguarding Asian Migratory Bird Flyways – Presentation of case handling guidelines for procuratorial public interest litigation [Conference proceedings].

Friends of Nature (NGO). (2024–2025). Case against video platform for allowing illegal sale of wildlife-hunting tools (including clapnets) [Legal filing].

Alibaba (Taobao). (2024–2025). Green Internet Programme – Implementation of legal warnings and search redirection for mist net queries [Corporate policy update].

National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA) & 16 other government bodies. (2025). Three-year campaign to suppress illegal hunting and trafficking of wild birds [Joint policy announcement].

China Bird Recording Centre. (2025–2026). Observational data on Spoon-billed Sandpiper occurrences in Guangdong and other provinces [Citizen science database].

Leizhou Peninsula, Guangdong Province. (2025–2026). Wintering shorebird survey results [Provincial monitoring data].

East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). (2025). 12th Meeting of Partners (MOP12) – Planned agenda and flyway-wide conservation priorities [Partnership documentation].

Jinjiang City People's Procuratorate. (2026, April 1). International Bird Day | Lively and Dashing: The Nation's First "Spoon-billed Sandpiper Prosecutor" Logo Launches [WeChat public post].

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/yBNjfV8BccZEW3hgl2nDiA

Monitoring of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other Migratory Shorebirds in the Gulf of Mottama Ramsar Site

Pyae Phyo Aung, Saw Moses, Gideon Dun, Ye Min Aung, Nyan Lin, Shein Thu Lwin and Thura Soe Min Htike (NCS Myanmar)

Survey team at the Gulf of Mottama in the evening during low tide *All photos NCS*

In January 2026, with support from the Mangrove Conservation Fund (MCF), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP)'s small grant for Working Group/Task Force, NCS Myanmar conducted field surveys to monitor the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population in the Gulf of Mottama Ramsar Site (GoM) together with Prof, Yifei Jia from Beijing Forestry University (BFU) and Mr. Huang Jian Senior Project Manager of MCF. The primary objectives of these surveys were to monitor the Spoon-billed Sandpiper's wintering population, assess trends, and to contribute to global population estimates, aiding in the formulation of targeted species conservation plans.

During eight days of the survey between 18th and 25th January 2026, nearly 30,000 waders representing 28 species, 48 individuals of two duck species, 6,600 of gulls and terns of 9 species, 464 individuals of eight other wetland-dependent species and 27 individuals of two raptor species were recorded in the northern core area of the GoM. The total number of small waders within the survey areas was estimated at approximately 62,800, accounting for flocks that may have been missed in the extensive survey area.

The survey team recorded 19 Critically Endangered SBS, 25 Endangered Nordmann's Greenshanks, 24 Endangered Great Knots, 3,306 Vulnerable Curlew Sandpipers, 1,383 Vulnerable Broad-billed Sandpipers and 89 Vulnerable Grey Plovers.

During the survey period, observers recorded 25,355 small waders belonging to eight to nine species across 205 flocks in the northern part of GoM. For estimation purposes, Red-necked Stint and Little Stint, as well as Siberian Sand Plover and Tibetan Sand Plover, were grouped together

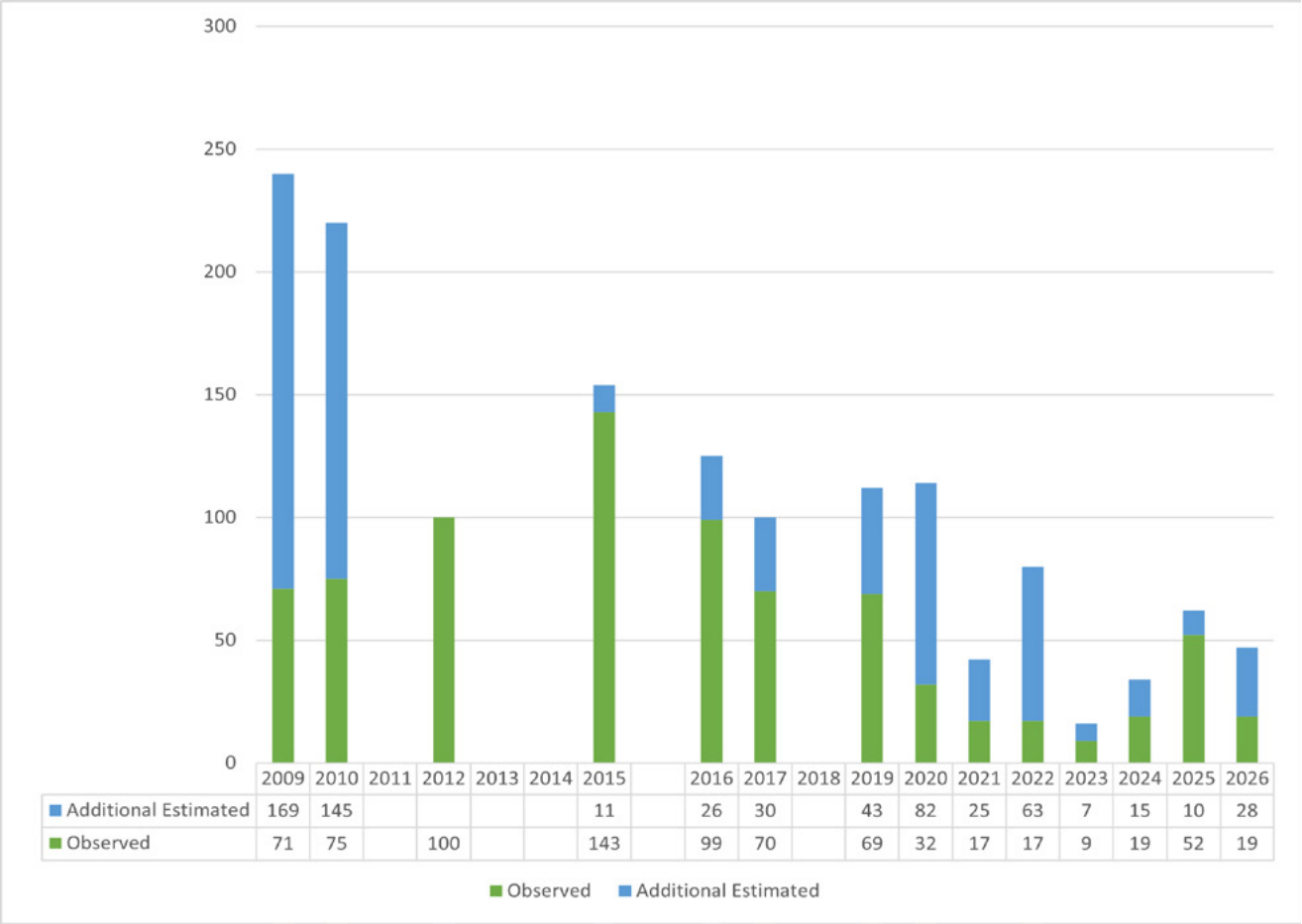
due to identification challenges in mixed flocks.

The average proportion of Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) within these flocks was calculated at 0.07494% (19/25,355), excluding species that occurred only rarely in the counts. Applying this 0.07% flock proportion for 2026,(which is higher than the proportions recorded in 2024 (0.04%), 2023 (0.03%), and 2022 (0.05%), but lower than 2021 (0.08%), 2020 (0.19%), and 2025 (0.09%)) the total estimated wintering population of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the GoM was 47 individuals, based on an estimated 62,800 small waders in the survey area. So the additional estimated number of SBS which weren't observed in the GoM during the 2025–2026 wintering season was approximately 28 individuals.

Over the past 18 years (2009–2026), the observed and estimated numbers of SBS in the GoM have fluctuated significantly. The observed numbers represent the actual counts recorded during surveys, while the estimated numbers are derived by adding additional estimate according to the proportion from the extrapolated flock counts (Figure 1).

Daily bird lists on top of the boat

In 2026, 19 SBS were directly observed, marking a sharp decrease from the 52 individuals observed in 2025.



	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Additional Estimated	169	145					11		26	30		43	82	25	63	7	15	10	28
Observed	71	75		100			143		99	70		69	32	17	17	9	19	52	19

Figure 1. Spoon-billed Sandpiper population estimates in the Gulf of Mottama from 2009-2026 (Aung et al 2026)

Table 1. Average flock proportions of small waders in the GoM in January 2026 (n= 205), proportional observations for 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026, total estimated number of each species based on the proportions.*
The highest observed number of SBS was recorded in 2015, with 143 individuals, whereas the highest estimated population was in 2009, reaching 240 individuals. This long-term trend highlights a substantial and continuing decline in the SBS population in the GoM, underscoring the urgent need for conservation actions.

English name	Scientific name	Total estimated number	Flock count total	Mean proportion in %							
				2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	*Calidris pygmaea*	47	19	0.18	0.19	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.04	0.09	0.07
Little Stint/Red necked Stint	*Calidris ruficollis/minuta*	8491	3428	22.37	18.06	18.36	11.85	15.14	10.29	17.23	13.52
Curlew Sandpiper	*Calidris ferruginea*	8188	3306	6.55	16.32	10.57	7.74	7.63	10.52	10.48	13.04
Broad-billed Sandpiper	*Calidris falcinellus*	3425	1383	5.32	7.66	4.05	2.38	7.51	6.49	3.90	5.45
Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	8562	3457	31.41	12.53	33.60	6.87	11.74	17.62	17.55	13.63
Lesser Sand Plover	*Charadrius mongolus*	32290	13037	32.20	44.17	29.98	70.78	56.26	54.72	50.07	51.42
Greater Sand Plover	*Charadrius leschenaultii*	1788	722	1.63	0.69	1.00	0.25	1.67	0.28	0.68	2.85
Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	7	3	0.34	0.39	2.36	0.07	0.03	0.05	0.01	0.01
		62,800	**25,355**								

The additional estimated SBS population for 2026 is 28 individuals, based on the proportion 0.07% and a maximum small wader population estimate of 62,800, including missing flocks (Table 1).

Bird hunting has been encountered during survey trips and community-based patrolling not only in the Gulf of Mottama but also in other parts along the Myanmar's coastal wetlands. In the core area of GoM, many birds are hunted opportunistically. Local fishermen sometimes catch birds as an additional food source while conducting fishing activities that typically last one to two weeks in the gulf. During these extended fishing periods, fishermen rely on both fish and birds as sources of additional for their daily meals, as they often cannot afford to purchase or store sufficient meat for the entire duration of their trips (Nyan Lin pers com.). However, hunting is believed to have resumed since the coup in February 2021 in Myanmar. A recent survey on bird hunting along the Myanmar coast, 22.7% (17 out of 79 people) reported that they had caught migratory birds at least once in the past 4 years; the lower the family income the more likely to do bird hunting as the alternative or main income (Htike et al. 2025).

Similarly, local communities living near high-tide roosting sites of migratory birds along the coast occasionally capture birds for household consumption. Previous assessments on bird hunting and its socio-economic drivers indicate that this practice is largely carried out by people from very low-income households. The findings also highlight the need to strengthen education and awareness-raising initiatives related to wildlife conservation and law enforcement in many coastal communities.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation in the Ayeyarwady Delta, Myanmar

Thura Soe Min Theik, Ye Min Aung, Saw Moses, Nang Phyu Phwe and Pyae Phyo Aung
(NCS Myanmar)

Ngamanthaung Island (the turtle nesting island) lies in the southeastern part of Meinmahlakyun Wildlife Sanctuary. It was designated as the third Ramsar Site of Myanmar on 2 February 2017. The island is characterized by newly established mangrove forests on its northern side, while the southern side faces the sea and consists of sandy dune beaches.

The sand dune beaches and intertidal flats on the eastern side of the island serve as important wintering grounds for a significant population of migratory birds. Threatened species recorded in the area include the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (CR), Spotted Greenshank (EN), Great Knot (EN), Woolly-necked Stork (VU), Curlew Sandpiper (VU), Broad-billed Sandpiper (VU), and Chinese Egret (VU).

The Nature Conservation Society–Myanmar (NCS), with financial support from the Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung (MHS), conducted shorebird population monitoring surveys from 2022 to 2026. Recent surveys carried out in December 2025 and February 2026 highlight the conservation importance of the wetland, recording approximately 4,000 individuals from 33 species, includ-

Sharing information of the Spoon-billed Sandpipers pamphlets to the Local Conservation Group LCG

ing 1,634 individuals of 16 wader species. Notably, the surveys documented 18 Endangered Spotted Greenshanks, 43 Vulnerable Curlew Sandpipers, 12 Broad-billed Sandpipers, 36 Vulnerable Grey Plovers, and 2 Vulnerable Chinese Egrets.

Socio-economic surveys conducted near Ngamanthaung Island in 2024–2025 revealed that bird hunting has resumed, with mist nets and poisoned bait being used to target migratory waders. Limited resources have constrained the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division (NWCD) of the Myanmar Forest Department in effectively managing the site, resulting in increased hunting pressure on both migratory birds and marine turtles.

A small community of around 10 households, who migrated from nearby villages for fishing and crab collection, resides seasonally on the eastern side of the island, while a village (Gayet Gyi Kyun) is located in its western edge. The Department of Fisheries regulates seasonal fishing closures and sea turtle nesting and maintains an informal agreement with these families, allowing temporary settlement in exchange for their support in protecting sea turtles and shorebirds.

With the support of motivated members of this local community, NCS-Myanmar facilitated the formation of a Local Conservation Group (LCG) comprising of ten members. Training on basic bird-watching techniques, shorebird identification, flock counting methods, and patrolling practices was provided in December 2025. Since then, the LCG has been conducting monthly patrols and shorebird surveys from December 2025 to March 2026.

Sharing knowledge on shorebirds identification, population counts to LCG members

Children collecting the plastic rubbish on the island

Local Conservation Group in Ngamanthaung Island

Bird surveys on the Ngamanthaung Island

Community-led Conservation and Enforcement to safeguard the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* in Vietnam's Red River Delta

Trang Nguyen, Son Mai, Van Anh Nguyen

The coast of Vietnam is a key part of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF); especially the Red and Mekong River Deltas. Hunting is recognised as a major threat to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the coasts of these river deltas are recognised as hotspots for hunting shorebirds that are significant for the survival of this species. In 2021, ten Vietnamese and international conservation organizations petitioned the Vietnamese government to ban the trade of wild and migratory birds to address this threat. This led to Directive No. 4/CT-TTg in 2022, acknowledging a "migratory bird crisis" and calling for the protection of migratory and wild birds.

The Vietnamese NGO WildAct Vietnam was among those 10 organisations which lobbied for stronger protection of migratory birds. Since 2021, we have been working to address waterbird hunting in the Red River Delta Biosphere Reserve, spanning what is now Ninh Binh and Hung Yen provinces[1]. This stretch of coastline is perhaps most notable for having an important wintering site for Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*, but recent records of Spoon-billed Sandpiper[2], after a gap of over a decade, are reinforcing the potential importance of this coastline for this species.

The scale of hunting in the Red River Delta

Waterbird hunting is clearly a major issue along this coastline. Surveys conducted by WildAct in 2021 and 2023 reveal widespread and organized hunting practices. In 2021, we documented around 1,300 mist-nets stretching over 140 kilometres, confirming large-scale, systematic hunting. Hunters use mist-nets combined with loudspeakers that broadcast bird calls, as well as decoys, trained birds, and occasionally guns. The survey was followed in 2023 by a larger survey followed in 2023 across 149 communes. Researchers walked over 1,300 transects and recorded 2,213 mist-nets spanning 553 kilometres, along with 615 trapped birds. These data were mapped and shared with local Forest Protection Departments (FPDs) which have a mandate for wildlife protection) to identify hunting hotspots (Figure 1).

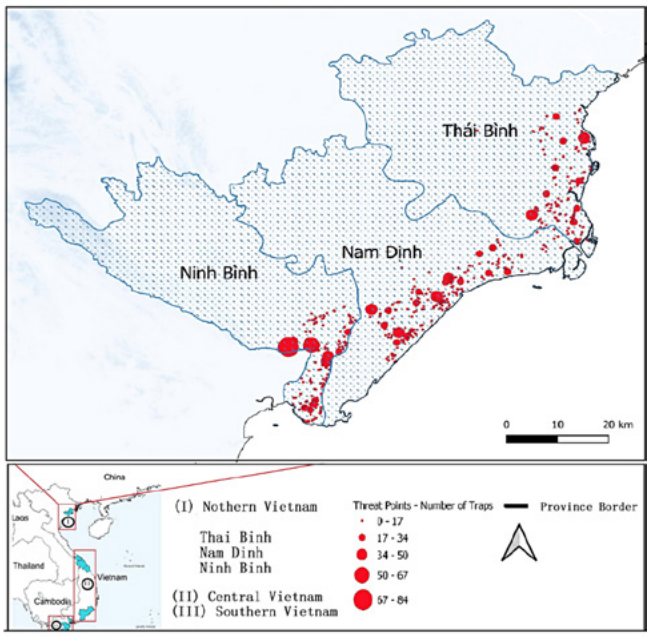


Figure 1: Map illustrating results from mist-net surveys in the Red River Delta Biosphere, covering six districts and three provinces, at that time being Thai Binh, Ninh Binh and Nam Dinh, now merged into Ninh Binh and Hung Yen Provinces

[1] Previously Ninh Binh, Nam Dinh and Thai Binh Provinces until the recent reforms and mergers of provincial boundaries

[2] Nguyen, H. B., Le, T. T., Phan, V. T., Bui, T. T., Nguyen, V. T., Nguyen, H. Q., Cao, Q. T., Insua-Cao, P., & Yong, D. L. (2023). The present status and distribution of the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper Calidris pygmaea in Vietnam. Wader Study, 130(1), 25-37. https://doi.org/10.18194/ws.00292

Enforcement

As a result, FPD officers removed about 25 kilometres of mist-nets (around 200 nets) and carried out enforcement actions, including 14 seizures of illegal bird meat. However, bird mortality remained extremely high. Of the 615 birds found trapped, only 19 could be rescued alive, although additional efforts saved 185 birds used as bait. Many birds died due to prolonged entanglement, stress, and exposure. In addition, despite legal bans, enforcement proved difficult because local communities often protected hunters from authorities.

Vietnam lacks specialized wildlife rescue centres for birds, and many facilities are reluctant to accept them due to disease risks. Mortality rates for birds caught in mist-nets are estimated at around 90%, as they are often discovered too late. To improve outcomes, WildAct has trained local rangers in bird handling, welfare, and disease awareness.

In addition, WildAct also convened a cross-sector workshop on migratory bird conservation, bringing together 28 participants from the Forest Protection Department, NGOs, sustainable tourism operators, and media representatives across Vietnam. The workshop created a platform to review the current situation, share data and experiences, and strengthen coordination among key stakeholders. It also provided space to openly discuss the roles, challenges, and opportunities of each sector in improving law enforcement, management, and conservation communication. Importantly, the consultation contributed to the development of national-level recommendations and an action roadmap, helping to reinforce Vietnam's unified commitment ahead of the 2025 East Asian–Australasian Flyway Partnership international conference.

Connecting local people in the Red River Delta Biosphere with Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other migratory birds

A key innovation of the project was engaging local communities through culturally relevant methods. Given the strong Catholic presence in the region, we worked with religious leaders to integrate bird protection messages into sermons. At one church in particular, in Kim Dong Commune, priests delivered conservation messages during Sunday Mass, linking environmental stew-

ardship with moral and spiritual values. However, the priests have since moved parish and further engagement of the church is required.

To reinforce awareness, local radio broadcasts delivered daily messages during migration seasons. These covered legal regulations, conservation activities, health risks of wild meat consumption, and community initiatives.

WildAct also focused on engaging young people through interactive educational activities. These included competitions, drama performances, and birdwatching field trips supported by schools and local authorities.

Two major events involved nearly 200 participants, including students, teachers, and parents. Activities combined guided tours, ranger-led sessions, and student presentations. Pre- and post-tests showed significant increases in knowledge, and feedback indicated strong enthusiasm and improved environmental awareness, as well as enhanced teamwork and communication skills. Overall, through these activities over 10,000 people have signed pledges to protect migratory birds.

Empowering local women to take a lead in bird conservation in Ninh Binh province

Recognizing the important but often overlooked role of women in environmental stewardship, the project launched a women-led conservation initiative. Working with local Women's Union groups, the program aimed to build knowledge, leadership, and confidence among women.

Initial training sessions with 50 participants revealed limited prior knowledge of conservation laws and practices, and a high proportion had consumed wild bird meat. After training, participants showed significant improvements in understanding and skills. All committed to stopping hunting and consumption of migratory birds.

Participants also gained knowledge of project development and communication strategies. Two women-led groups were selected for advanced training and developed community-based conservation projects focused on awareness and habitat management. These groups received funding to implement their initiatives.

The program demonstrated that empowering women can lead to both improved conservation outcomes and greater social equity.

Mobilising Citizen Action for Migratory Bird Conservation

To complement enforcement and community-based conservation, WildAct has developed a citizen-based monitoring approach that leverages technology to engage urban, tech-savvy Vietnamese youth in reporting illegal wildlife activities. Building on the SMART (Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool) system, this initiative expands data collection beyond ranger patrols by enabling citizens to document and report incidents related to illegal bird hunting, trade, and possession through digital platforms. This creates an additional layer of real-time, crowd-sourced intelligence that can be verified and integrated into existing monitoring systems.

In parallel, WildAct partnered with Golden Asia

Enforcement efforts by Forest Protection Departments in Ninh Binh and Hai Phong

to scale public awareness and participation nationwide. A 30-second video on migratory bird conservation is currently broadcast across more than 4,000 digital screens within Golden Asia's network, with a frequency of approximately 180 broadcasts per day. These screens are located in high-traffic public spaces such as major F&B chains, universities, hotels, and beauty salons, allowing the message to reach millions of people daily within their everyday environments. This wide-reaching dissemination not only increases visibility of conservation issues but also encourages behavioural change and public reporting of violations.

By combining technology, mass communication, and citizen engagement, this model strengthens early detection of wildlife crimes, supports enforcement agencies with actionable data, and fosters a broader culture of shared responsibility for biodiversity conservation in Vietnam.

Conclusion

The story of Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation in Vietnam's Red River Delta is not just about saving a bird species—it's about how empowered communities, dedicated youth and courageous women can become leaders of change. Our experience shows that when people are given the tools, trust and opportunity to act, conservation becomes a movement—one that is inclusive, resilient, and deeply rooted in local values. The path ahead may be challenging, but with collective action we can protect these precious flyways for generations to come.

Moving forward, we will continue supporting the FPDs Forest Protection Departments in Ninh Binh and Hai Phong to strengthen enforcement efforts and ensure safer stopover sites for migratory birds along Vietnam's coastline. This includes conducting seasonal threat surveys, sharing data with enforcement teams, and coordinating monthly trap removals during peak migration. By combining data-driven monitoring with local partnerships and national-level dialogue, we aim to reduce illegal hunting pressure and improve the long-term protection of key habitats. WildAct Vietnam also plans to broaden its collaboration both within Vietnam, but also along the flyway and particularly to share experiences on addressing hunting of shorebirds, with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper as a most precious flagship.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the financial support from the Conservation Leadership Program, Hong Kong Ocean Park Conservation Fund, Oriental Bird Club, Daughter for Earth and March Conservation Fund which helped to make this project a reality. Thanks to our volunteers who helped us every year with the threat surveys, our local partners and the Provincial Forest Protection Department.

WildAct Vietnam, 26 TT26, Khu Do Thi Van Phu, Hanoi.
Correspondent email address: trang.nguyen@wildact-vn.org

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Winter Counts 2020–2026

Christoph Zöckler, Katherine Leung and Sayam U. Chowdhury

- **The 2026 winter count recorded a minimum of 114 Spoon-billed Sandpipers (SBS), indicating a continued decline in recent years with roughly 5.3% in 2025–2026.**
- **South China continues to hold most of the recorded wintering birds.**
- **Declines in Myanmar, Bangladesh and Vietnam remain concerning, though survey completeness varied.**

Since 2016 regular simultaneous winter counts have been carried out on the key wintering grounds. Since 2020, these counts have been conducted regularly by more than 40 survey teams across the flyway countries that hold wintering birds including China, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh and more recently India (West Bengal).

The results for 2026 and the previous six years are summarised in Table 1. Approximately 114–142 birds were observed in January 2026 including an additional count of two individuals from West Bengal, India in March 2026. These numbers are similar to the low numbers recorded in 2023 (Figure 2) and highlights the need for urgent action. Despite relatively stable numbers in China and Thailand, the overall wintering population appears to be continuing to decline at about 5,3% per year, similarly as estimated by Green et al. (2024).

The wintering sites in China are surveyed most regularly and thoroughly by different teams and have again detected the highest number with almost ¾ of the wintering population recorded in southern Chinese coastal provinces (see Table 2). Myanmar showed strong year-to-year fluctuation, especially at the Gulf of Mottama. The Gulf of Mottama in Myanmar may still host higher numbers. Surveys in 2025 revealed a high figure of 62, but in 2024 and 2026 the numbers are lower, also for many other small waders. The vast mudflat area is notoriously difficult to survey (see also Pyae Phyo Aung et al. in this Bull.) and wintering SBS could have been missed. Therefore, we use an estimate of total numbers of likely individual based on the flock proportion extrapolated by the total number of small shorebirds for this site. The survey methods are very similar each year allowing for comparisons even though complete numbers unlikely to have been recorded. Compared to 2020, however, the numbers, although fluctuating from year to year, are steadily declining. This is also the case for other sites in Myanmar, although

Abhishek Das

Nan Thar Island and Bokpyin could not have been monitored for two years due to the military conflict in both the Rakhine and Tanintharyi Regions. Bangladesh and Vietnam show clear declines, though some coverage is incomplete, while data from Thailand are consistently stable at around 10 individuals.

Often it is not possible to read the individual code on the leg-flagged birds. This is especially true in large areas where birds are constantly moving across the mudflats, such as the Gulf of Mottama, where the few sighted flagged birds could not be read. However, a total of 28 flagged birds have been observed and mostly read; 19 of which in China by an individually recognisable two-figure code (Table 2).

Estimating the global population requires knowing how many leg-flagged birds are still alive in the wild and what proportion of them were detected during the winter counts. Green et al. (2024) estimated that around 63 flagged birds survived in 2024. If a similar number survived in 2026, then the 28 flagged birds recorded during the 2026 winter counts would represent around 44% of the surviving flagged population. If this detection proportion is broadly representative of the wider population, the lower-bound winter count of 114 birds would imply a global population of roughly 260 individuals. Using the upper estimated winter count of 142 birds, which accounts for potentially undetected birds in the Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar, would imply roughly 320 individuals. This estimate of 260-320 is uncertain and provides a wide range, but it still indicates an extremely small population and should spur all of us into urgent conservation action across the flyway.

Table 1: Winter counts of Spoon-billed Sandpipers across major wintering sites: 2020–2026. Values shown in the table are minimum counts and estimated upper totals (only for Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar) are shown as ranges where available. Numbers in square brackets indicate flagged birds recorded at the site. A (-) dash indicates no survey took place at the site, while (*) indicates numbers counted outside the main winter count period (January).

Site	Country	2026	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
South China	China	76 [19]	75 [11]	54 [8]	70 [8]	67 [10]	61 [16]	49
Gulf of Mottama	Myanmar	19–47 [1]	56 [4]	16–34 [5]	9–19 [1]	17–80	17–42 [2]	105
Nan Thar	Myanmar	–	–	5 [2]	5 [2]	7 [2]	5 [2]	18
Ayeyar Delta	Myanmar	1	0	0	1	1	–	–
Bokpyin	Myanmar	–	0	–	0	1	–	–
Pak Thale	Thailand	4 [1]	4 [1]	4 [1]	6 [2]	3 [1]	4 [2]	8
Khok Kham	Thailand	2 [1]	3	3	3	2	2	3
Chonburi	Thailand	4 [2]	3 [1]	4 [2]	1	3	1	–
Khlong Tamru	Thailand	0	0	1	–	–	–	–
Sonadia	Bangladesh	2 [1]	2 [1]	5 [3]	4 [2]	4 [2]	4 [2]	12
Nijhum Dwip	Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	0	2	6
Chattogram	Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	–	3 [1]	4
Meghna Estuary	Bangladesh	1	1	1	0	2	0	0
Mekong Delta	Vietnam	3 [2]	4	5 [1]	4 [1]	4 [1]	5	6
Red River Delta	Vietnam	–	1	1	0	2	8	–
South Central	Vietnam	–	0	0	1	–	–	–
Selangor	Malaysia	–	1	1	–	–	–	–
Patibunia-Susni	India	2 [1]*	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total counts		114–142 [28]	150 [18]	100–118 [22]	104–114 [16]	113–176 [16]	112–137 [25]	211

Table 2: Site-level winter count data for SBS in South China (2025–2026), including details of leg-flagged individuals.

Site name based on Action Plan 2025–2035	No. of SBS (MCF and local birders combined)	Flagged individuals
Guangxi Fangchenggang Shaluoliao	3	Yellow CV
Guangxi Fangchenggang Bailangtan	4	Lime 8V
Guangxi Qinzhou Sanniang Bay Yangwucun + Guangxi Beihai Xicang Damushen	9	Lime 2V, Yellow HU
Guangxi Beihai Tieshangang Henei	8	None
Hainan Danzhou Bay	2	None
Guangdong Zhanjiang Leizhou Fucheng	18	Yellow 53, Yellow 0X, Lime A8, Lime 61, Lime M4, White 2L
Guangdong Zhanjiang Wuchuan Shaerjiao	7	Lime L7
Guangdong Yangxi Xitou Santouzui Beach	7	White 1H, White L5, Lime 99, Lime L0
Guangdong Yangjiang Shanwaixi Sandbar	3	None
Taiwan Tainan Jiangjun	1	Lime 88
Fujian Quanzhou Weitou Bay	12	Lime 7L, Lime C8, Lime H0
Fujian Fuzhou Minjiang River Estuary	2	None
Total	**76**	**19**

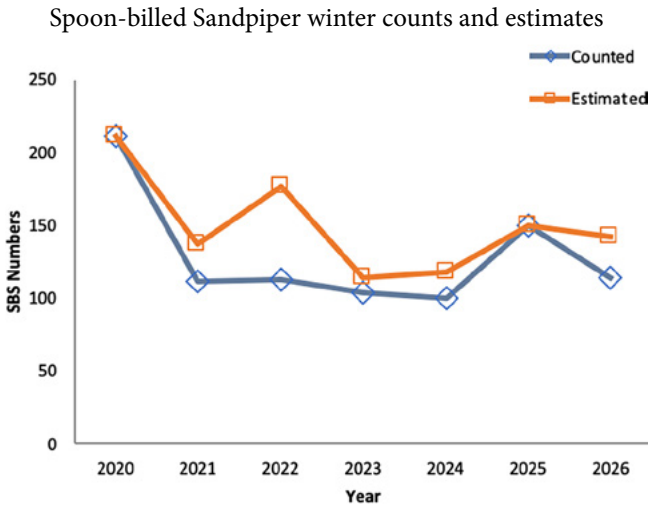


Figure 1. Annual winter counts and estimated totals of Spoon-billed Sandpipers recorded across the wintering range from 2020 to 2026. Counted values represent minimum confirmed totals, while estimated values include upper estimates where survey coverage or detectability was incomplete.

Reference

Green, R. E., K. K. S. Leung, N. A. Clark, G. Q. A. Anderson, K. Brides, Qing Chang, S. U. Chowdhury, J. A. Clark, M. Foysal, C. Zöckler, Yu. Gerasimov, G. A. Gale, N. Yakushev, J. Khamaye, E. G. Lappo, D. S. Melville, P. S. Tomkovich, E. Weston, J. Weston, and Ziyou Yang. 2024. 'New Estimate of the Trend in World Population Size of the Spoon-Billed Sandpiper Suggests Continuing Decline'. Wader Study 131(2). doi:10.18194/ws.00344.

Conservation through Tradition

Mohammod Foysal, Nazim Uddin Khan and Sayam U. Chowdhury,
Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project (BSCP)

The Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project (BSCP) is a flagship initiative of the Species Conservation and Protection of Ecosystems (SCOPE) Foundation, which has been working since 2009 to conserve the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its habitats in Bangladesh. The project integrates both scientific research and community-based conservation approaches.

Recognising the importance of community engagement, the BSCP team continuously explores innovative ways to raise awareness among local people about shorebirds, their habitats and broader wetland conservation. In Bangladesh, a riverine country with a rich cultural connection to boats and traditional boat racing, especially in coastal areas, such cultural practices offer a unique opportunity for conservation outreach.

To utilise this cultural platform, the BSCP team organised a traditional rowing competition near a key Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering site at Sonadia Island in the south-eastern coastal region of Bangladesh. The event was held on 30 March 2026, with active participation and support from the local community. Prior to the event, local residents were invited through announcements and social media outreach, generating strong interest and engagement. Local community leaders and representatives from the local Bangladesh Forest Department attended the event.

The competition took place during peak high tide in the morning. A total of five teams participated, each consisting of six members and named after a shorebird species (e.g., Team SBS, Team Godwit, Team Knot, Team Plover and Team Curlew). Each team wore distinct coloured t-shirts, allowing easy identification even from a distance.

The event attracted approximately 1,200 participants and spectators from diverse backgrounds, creating a vibrant and festive atmosphere. Traditional songs performed by local singers added to the celebration, while conservation messages were delivered in the local language throughout the event. This engaging and culturally relevant approach effectively captured the audience's attention and enhanced awareness of shorebird conservation. At the conclusion of the competition, prizes were awarded to the winning and runner-up teams. Before the prize distribution, speeches were delivered by the Forest Department and BSCP representatives, and local community leaders, emphasising the importance of conserving shorebirds and their habitats.

This marks the third rowing competition by BSCP, continuing its tradition of combining cultural heritage with conservation awareness. The programme once again demonstrated strong community appeal and effectiveness as a conservation outreach tool. This event was supported by BirdLife International - Emergency Site Casework and Biome Conservation.

Boat race of various teams named after shorebird groups
Nazim Uddin Khan/SCOPE Foundation

Intertidal Mudflats and the Conservation of Migratory Shorebirds:
PhD Thesis Summary by Sayam U. Chowdhury

Supervisors: Professor Rhys Green and Professor Andrew Balmford, University of Cambridge

This thesis provides an integrated conservation framework for migratory shorebirds across tropical Asia by combining remote sensing, field surveys, tracking data, citizen science and conservation planning, with direct relevance to the conservation of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other threatened species of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. It developed the first large-scale assessments of tidal flat exposure duration as a functional measure of intertidal habitat availability (Figure 1), showing that shorebirds consistently concentrate in mudflats exposed for intermediate periods (particularly 4–6 hours per tidal cycle), where prey availability is also highest. These findings provide a scalable method to identify the most valuable intertidal foraging habitats and help pinpoint critical feeding areas for species such as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

The thesis also improved methods for estimating shorebird populations across large coastal landscapes and demonstrated that migratory habitat type is strongly associated with long-term population trends. Coastal-obligate shorebirds, which rely heavily on intertidal habitats during migration, were found to be declining faster than species that use inland wetlands, reinforcing concerns that widespread intertidal habitat loss across the flyway is a major driver of declines for species dependent on coastal stopovers, including Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

By applying site prioritisation analyses across Bangladesh and tropical Asia, the research identified major conservation gaps, revealing that most priority tidal flats remain unprotected despite their importance for migratory shorebirds. Overall, this work advances both the science and practice of shorebird conservation by providing practical tools to map habitat quality, improve monitoring, understand population declines and guide strategic protection of the habitats most essential for securing the future of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other migratory shorebirds across the flyway.

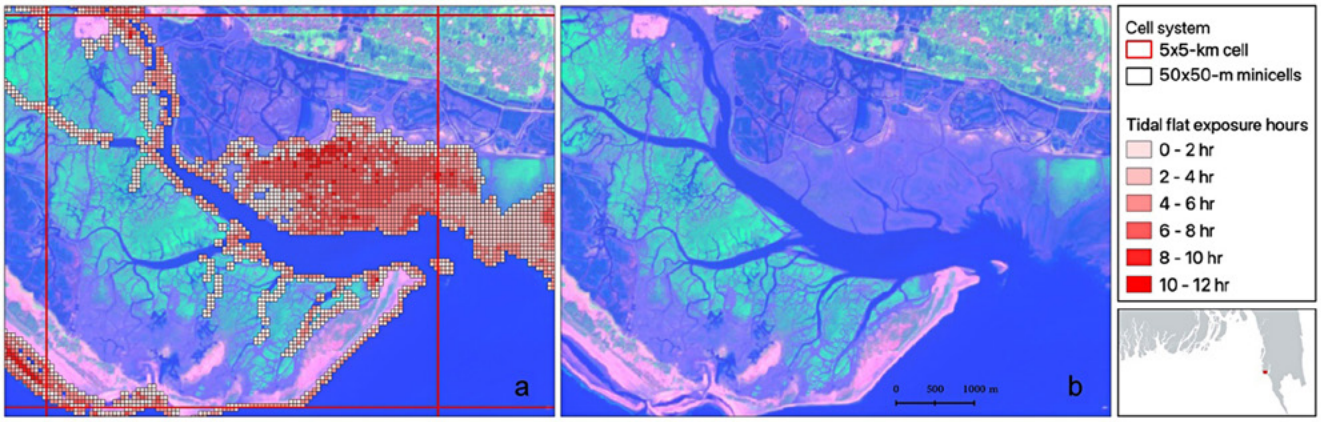


Figure 1. (a) tidal flat exposure hours within a 50-m minicell system overlaying a 5-km cell compared with (b) a Sentinel-2 satellite image without exposure hours and minicell boundaries taken on 22 February 2022 during low tide

First Record of a leg-flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper from India

Sandip Das[1,2], Soumya Aon[1], Kaustav Khan[1], Jayanta Manna[1], Sandeep Biswas[3] and Kaushik Deuti[4]

[1] Birdwatchers' Society, DB 75, Salt Lake, Kolkata 700064, West Bengal, India. [2] Regional Reviewer (West Bengal), eBird/ Cornell Lab of Ornithology, USA. [3] Independent Birdwatcher, 87 Dum Dum Road, Kolkata 700074, West Bengal, India. [4] Zoological Survey of India, Prani Vigyan Bhawan, M-Block, New Alipore, Kolkata 700053, West Bengal, India. Corresponding author: Sandip Das (sandipwildlife@gmail.com)

Introduction

In India, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper was historically recorded from scattered sites, but more recent confirmed records have been largely restricted to Point Calimere (Sugathan, 1985; Rahmani, 2012). The rediscovery of the species on the coast of West Bengal in 2018 (Chakraborty et al., 2018) suggested that this region may hold previously overlooked importance for the species. Building on targeted surveys following that discovery with annual surveys focused on the ten-day period before and after this original sighting, we document the occurrence of at least two Spoon-billed Sandpiper including India's first leg-flagged individual from the Patibunia–Susni mudflat complex in March-April 2026 and highlight the site's significance for migratory waterbirds.

Methods

On 29 March 2026, we (Sandip Das, Soumya Aon and Kaustav Khan) reached Susni Island, beside Patibunia Beach (21.6020°N, 88.2406°E) in the southernmost part of South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal state, India (Figure 1) at 05:30 h to begin a dedicated exploration for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This survey was carefully planned, as our previous visits had identified the area as an exceptionally promising habitat for the species.

Figure 1. Fraserganj-Kargil-Patibunia-Susni-Jambudwip coastal complex, South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal, India

A mangrove forest occurs along the eastern edge of the beach, sloping gradually from the higher forest floor towards the beach before merging with the mudflats. The upper littoral zone is predominantly sandy but transitions downslope into a mud-covered sublittoral zone with scattered mangrove saplings (Figure 2).

Most small waders were observed roosting in this zone. During high tide, they formed two large flocks, with a few smaller groups dispersed nearby. As most individuals were roosting with their bills tucked (Figure 3), species identification was difficult.

Results and discussion

Systematic shorebird surveys have been conducted across the mudflats and beaches of coastal West

Figure 2. Shorebird habitat at Patibunia-Susni mudflats, West Bengal, India *Sandip Das*

Bengal since 2012–13, following the first state record of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Kargil Beach, Fraserganj, on 1 April 2018 (Chakraborty et al., 2018). Since then, targeted annual surveys during peak migration and winter periods have focused primarily on the Fraserganj-Kargil area. During surveys on 30 September 2025, a notable concentration of shorebirds was observed further east toward the Patibunia–Susni mudflat complex, identifying this previously underexplored area as a potentially important site. Subsequent surveys, including the Asian Waterbird Census on 26 December 2025, confirmed the presence of substantial mixed-species shorebird flocks (Table 1).

These efforts culminated on 29 March 2026, when a Spoon-billed Sandpiper was observed at 09:05 h on Susni Island while scanning a mixed flock of approximately 15–16 small waders, including Tibetan Sand Plover, Red-necked Stint and Broad-billed Sandpiper. Photographs were obtained before the flock departed. On 31 March 2026, a leg-flagged individual was photographed by Jayanta Manna at the same site (Figure 5), although photographs taken by other observers indicate its presence from at least 30 March. The bird carried a lime-green flag engraved 2K on the right leg and a metal ring on the left leg. This individual had been marked as a wild chick on 6 July 2025 at Meinypilgyno, Chukotka, Russia, as part of long-term monitoring coordinated by Birds Russia and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force.

Subsequent image review and repeated surveys confirmed the presence of at least two individuals at the site: one flagged bird (2K) and one unmarked bird. Although reports suggested the possibility of additional unmarked birds, these were not documented simultaneously, and we therefore conservatively report a minimum of two individuals. The unmarked bird was last recorded on 14 April 2026, whereas 2K remained present until at least 10 May 2026 and was also recorded at Kargil Beach during high tide between 17 and 19 April.

The discovery is particularly significant because Susni Island had previously received little observer coverage due to access difficulties, yet appears to support suitable habitat for the species. These findings suggest that the Patibunia–Susni mudflat complex may represent a previously overlooked site of importance for migrating, and potentially wintering, Spoon-billed Sandpiper in eastern India.

Figure 3. Unmarked Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Patibunia-Susni mudflats, West Bengal, India *Soumya Aon*

Overall, we surveyed the site in November and December 2025, and March 2026; however, we were unable to locate any Spoon-billed Sandpipers (Table 1). Due to limited survey coverage during the peak winter months beyond December, further long-term monitoring is required to determine whether the site serves as a consistent wintering ground for the species. The site is situated within the critical overlapping region of two major migratory routes: the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) and the Central Asian Flyway (CAF). Notably, this represents the first record of this specific tagged individual anywhere along the EAAF and the westernmost record of leg-flagged bird. Consequently, the absences of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper during the winter months and record of two individuals during migration raises questions about their wintering location. Juveniles or first-year birds are known to disperse widely across the flyway with records extending as far west as Sri Lanka, the record of at least two individuals from West Bengal is notable and further surveys in the area throughout the winter may offer useful insights.

Conservation implications

Comparative observations suggest that Kargil

Table 1 (on following page). Waterbirds counted at Patibunia-Susni mudflats at Kargil Beach, Fraserganj, West Bengal during boreal winter 2026. Maximum count for each species on these dates are presented in the table.

Common name	Scientific name	8–9 Nov 2025	26 Dec 2025	29 Mar 2026	1–14 Apr 2026	18–19 Apr 2026
Lesser Whistling-Duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	-	11	-	-	2
Common Shelduck	*Tadorna tadorna*	-	27	-	1	-
White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	-	1	-	2	1
Great Thick-knee	*Esacus recurvirostris*	-	-	-	1	-
Black-bellied Plover	*Pluvialis squatarola*	2	36	35	30	12
Pacific Golden-Plover	*Pluvialis fulva*	25	7	-	12	1
Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	1	1	2	2	4
Tibetan Sand-Plover	*Charadrius atrifrons*	15	380	430	550	750
Greater Sand-Plover	*Charadrius leschenaultii*	-	16	47	80	90
Kentish Plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*	1	4	8	20	11
Small Pratincole	*Glareola lactea*	-	-	2	-	-
Eurasian Whimbrel	*Numenius phaeopus*	5	8	22	30	7
Eurasian Curlew	*Numenius arquata*	1	76	46	45	25
Bar-tailed Godwit	*Limosa lapponica*	-	-	26	25	6
Ruddy Turnstone	*Arenaria interpres*	-	3	6	12	7
Great Knot	*Calidris tenuirostris*	8	160	130	80	12
Red Knot	*Calidris canutus*	-	25	41	40	17
Broad-billed Sandpiper	*Calidris falcinellus*	2	9	22	25	25
Curlew Sandpiper	*Calidris ferruginea*	8	18	90	120	230
Temminck's Stint	*Calidris temminckii*	-	-	-	2	-
Red-necked Stint	*Calidris ruficollis*	-	7	120	80	40
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	*Calidris pygmaea*	-	-	1	2	1
Sanderling	*Calidris alba*	-	9	7	20	-
Dunlin	*Calidris alpina*	-	-	55	20	3
Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*	2	-	29	25	10
Terek Sandpiper	*Xenus cinereus*	2	6	12	25	15
Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	1	2	1	4	1
Common Redshank	*Tringa totanus*	4	8	47	40	12
Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*	1	4	5	8	14
Brown-headed Gull	*Chroicoc. brunnicephalus*	-	73	15	28	25
Black-headed Gull	*Chroicoc. ridibundus*	-	4	-	3	-
Pallas's Gull	*Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*	-	-	-	2	1
Black-tailed Gull	*Larus crassirostris*	-	-	-	-	1
Lesser Black-backed Gull	*Larus fuscus*	-	-	-	5	-
Little Tern	*Sternula albifrons*	5	-	25	30	14
Gull-billed Tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*	3	-	1	3	1
Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*	-	-	2	30	12
White-winged Tern	*Chlidonias leucopterus*	-	-	-	3	9
Common Tern	*Sterna hirundo*	-	-	-	2	1
Great Crested Tern	*Thalasseus bergii*	1	-	-	-	4
Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	-	2	-	1	2
Lesser Adjutant	*Leptoptilos javanicus*	-	-	-	2	-
Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	3	1	1	5	1
Striated Heron	*Butorides striata*	1	-	-	-	-
Indian Pond-Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	6	12	2	15	4
Eastern Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus coromandus*	-	2	-	20	4
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	-	-	1	-	-
Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	2	1	22	10	1
Medium Egret	*Ardea intermedia*	2	7	1	5	3
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	*15*	*25*	*55*	*30*	*32*

Beach functions primarily as a transient site for shorebirds, with limited foraging value due to high levels of anthropogenic disturbance, particularly extensive fish-drying activities. In contrast, the Susni-Patibunia mudflat complex provides a larger and relatively less disturbed intertidal system that appears to offer more suitable foraging habitat and may represent an important site for migrating, and potentially wintering, Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other shorebirds.

Despite this importance, the Susni-Patibunia complex faces increasing pressures from traditional fishing practices and rapid coastal development. Fishing such as 'Char Jal' (fixed-pole nets), tiger prawn fry collection and expanding tourism infrastructure are contributing to habitat degradation and fragmentation. These threats highlight the need for proactive habitat management before disturbance intensifies further. Feral dogs appear to disturb roosting and foraging shorebirds in the area.

This record is particularly significant as it represents the first documentation of a leg-flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper from India, contributing important information on migratory connectivity between breeding grounds in Chukotka and coastal South Asia. Given the species' global population – identifying and protecting additional sites along the flyway remains a conservation priority.

Sighting and proper photographic documentation of tagged individuals provide evidences of their migratory routes and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force relies heavily on the reporting of such tagged individuals over its long migration through different countries of Asia and observers are encouraged to use the online portal (https://spoon-billed-sandpiper-taskforce.shinyapps.io/sightings/) to report their sightings. Therefore, this report is particularly significant as it represents the first documentation of a leg-flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper from India.

Historical records

Historically, Indian records of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper were scattered and largely concentrated at Point Calimere, where most modern sightings and ringing efforts occurred between the 1980s and 1990s. Outside Point Calimere, records remained exceptionally scarce, with only isolated historical records from West Bengal and Odisha. Surveys in the Indian Sundarbans during 2005 did not detect the species (Zöckler et al., 2005), making the 2018 rediscovery in West Bengal and the 2026 Susni-Patibunia records particularly notable. The repeated occurrence of the species within the Fraserganj-Patibunia-Susni-Jambudwip coastal complex suggests that this landscape may hold greater significance than previously recognised.

Figure 4. Leg-flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Patibunia-Susni mudflats, West Bengal, India *Abhishek Das*

Figure 5. Photo of lime green 2K as a chick being tagged on the right leg by N. Karlionova and D. Nizovtsev of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Birds Russia Expedition) on 6 July 2025 at Meinypilgyno, Chukotka, Russia *Natalia Karlionova*

Table 2. Records of Spoon-billed Sandpiper from India between 1835 and 2018

Year	Date	Location	State	Record type	Number	Details	Source
1835	-	Saugur (Sagar Island)	West Bengal	Collected	1	Collected by Leadbeater	Hartlaub (1842); Blyth (1844)
1836	-	Edmonstone's Island (Jambudwip)	West Bengal	Collected	1	Collected by Newcombe	Newcombe (1836); Pearson (1836)
1879	-	Calcutta (Kolkata) market	West Bengal	Procured	1	Market specimen	Hume (1879)
1963	-	Fraserganj beach	West Bengal	Collected	1	Collected by ZSI	S.S. Saha (pers. comm.)
1981	19-Feb	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Ringed	1	Ringed by BNHS	Sugathan (1983)
1981	19-Mar	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Preserved	1	Preserved specimen (BNHS)	Sugathan (1983)
1981	17-Mar	Chilika	Odisha	Ringed	1	Ringed by BNHS	Balachandran et al. (2009)
1982	17-Nov	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Sighted	7	Observed by Sugathan	Sugathan (1985)
1983	03-Dec	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Sighted	1	Observed by Sugathan	Sugathan (1985)
1984-1993	-	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Ringed	~8	Approximate, BNHS records	Balachandran (pers. comm.)
1994	-	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Sighted		-	Rahmani (2012)
1995	-	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Sighted		-	Rahmani (2012)
1997	-	Point Calimere	Tamil Nadu	Sighted		-	Rahmani (2012)
2018	01-Apr	Fraserganj	West Bengal	Sighted	1	-	Chakraborty et al. (2018)

Conclusion

It remains possible that Spoon-billed Sandpiper was overlooked during previous winter surveys at Susni-Patibunia, particularly given limited survey coverage during peak winter months. As this is a newly explored site, regular and systematic surveys throughout the 2026–27 winter season will be essential to determine whether the area functions consistently as a wintering ground or primarily as a migratory stopover. We recommend incorporating the Susni–Patibunia complex into a long-term monitoring programme. Given the presence of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other important waterbirds, formal protection of the Fraserganj-Patibunia-Susni-Jambudwip coastal complex should be strongly considered. Such protection would help safeguard a potentially important and previously overlooked site within the flyway while also supporting broader conservation of migratory shorebirds in coastal West Bengal.

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere gratitude to Dr Christoph Zöckler (Chairman, Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force) and Dr Sayam U. Chowdhury (Coordinator, Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force) for providing the tagging data and to Dr Elena Lappo (Senior Scientific Researcher, Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia) for supplying the leg-flagged chick's

photograph. Special thanks are also due to Dr S. Balachandran (former Deputy Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai, India) for his instrumental role in coordinating this information exchange and to Shuvam Das of ZSI, Kolkata for composing the SBS site maps in West Bengal, India. I, as the corresponding author, would like to extend my personal thanks to Santu Chowdhury and Prasenjit Bhattacharjee for their constant support and presence during the previous surveys.

Figure 6. Feeding ground during low tide at Patibunia-Susni mudflats, West Bengal, India *Sandip Das*

Figure 7. Habitat of Patibunia-Susni mudflats, West Bengal, India during high tide *Sandip Das*

Abhishek Das

References

Balachandran, S., Sathiyaselvam, P., & Panda, S. (2009). Bird atlas of Chilika (1st ed.). Bombay Natural History Society & Chilika Development Authority.

Blyth, E. (1844). Descriptions of some new species of birds found in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. Annals and Magazine of Natural History, 14(89), 114–125.

Chakraborty, A., Tripathi, S., & Bhattacharya, B. B. (2018). Rediscovery of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Calidris pygmaea) on the coast of West Bengal. Indian BIRDS, 14(3), 83–84.

Chowdhury, S. U. (2015). Update on Spoon-billed Sandpiper Calidris pygmaea in 2015. BirdingASIA, 24, 6.

Dey, T. K., Rabbi, M. G., & Ahmad, F. (2015). First sighting of a flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper on Sonadia Island of Bangladesh. SBS Task Force News Bulletin, 13, 23–25.

Hartlaub, G. (1842). Notice sur l'Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus Bonaparte. Revue Zoologique par la Société Cuvierienne, 5, 36–38.

Hume, A. O. (1879). Gleanings from the Calcutta market. Stray Feathers, 7(6), 479–498.

Manna, S., Chatterjee, S., Jha, S., Rahut, B., Baidya, K., Das, S., Dutta, M., Banerjee, A. K., & Sengupta, S. (2024). A checklist of the birds of West Bengal, India. Indian BIRDS, 20(4), 97–128.

Newcombe. (1836). A specimen of Eurinorhynchus griseus. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 5(50), 127.

Pearson, J. T. (1836). Note on the Eurinorhynchus griseus. Asiatic Researches, 19(6), 69–71.

Praveen, J. (2025). Birds of India: The new synopsis. Nature Conservation Foundation.

Rahmani, A. R. (2012). Threatened birds of India: Their conservation requirements. Indian Bird Conservation Network, Bombay Natural History Society, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, BirdLife International, & Oxford University Press.

Sugathan, R. (1983). Some interesting aspects of the avifauna of the Point Calimere Sanctuary, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu. Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, 79(3), 567–575.

Sugathan, R. (1985). Observations on Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus) in its wintering ground at Point Calimere, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu. Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, 82(2), 407–409.

Zöckler, C., Balachandran, S., Bunting, G. C., Fanck, M., Kashiwagi, M., Lappo, E. G., Maheswaran, G., Sharma, A., Syroechkovski, E. E., & Webb, K. (2005). The Indian Sunderbans: An important wintering site for Siberian waders. Wader Study Group Bulletin, 108, 42–46.

Spoonie Field Study in Thailand with Kids: Learning the Scientific Method

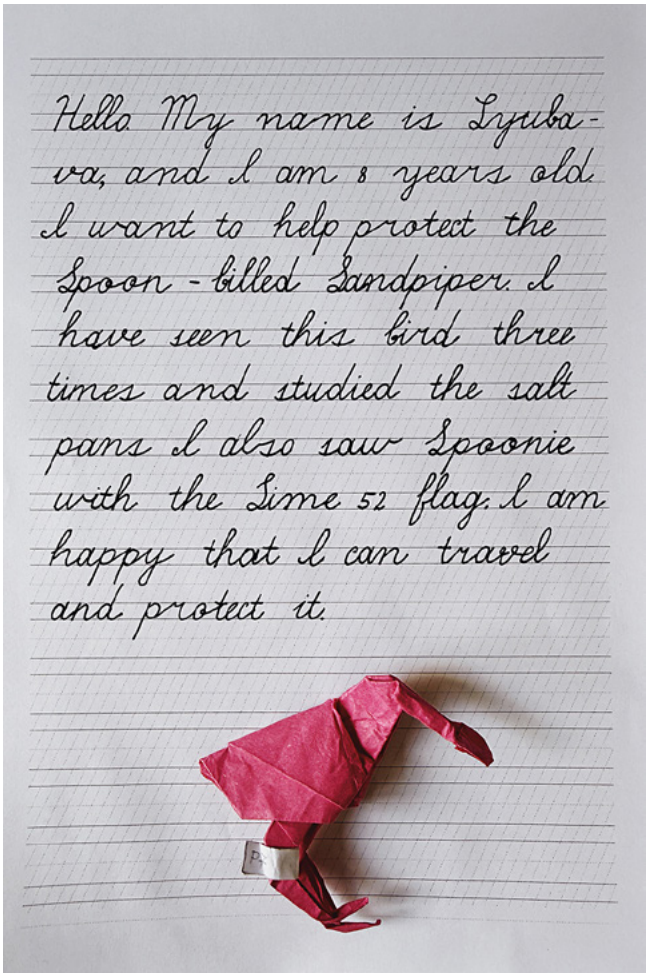
Alexandra Nardit

Hi, Alexandra!" — "Hi, Katherine!" We waved to each other in the heat of the Khok Kham salt pans, having met there quite by chance only a few days after we had first met on Zoom. On that hot March afternoon, Katherine Leung, Dr Phil Round, and Vatcharavee Sripra-sertsil were working in the field. We did not want to disturb them, but they kindly allowed us to walk over to the salt pan where the Spoonie Lime 52 was feeding at that moment. That is how the story of this article began.

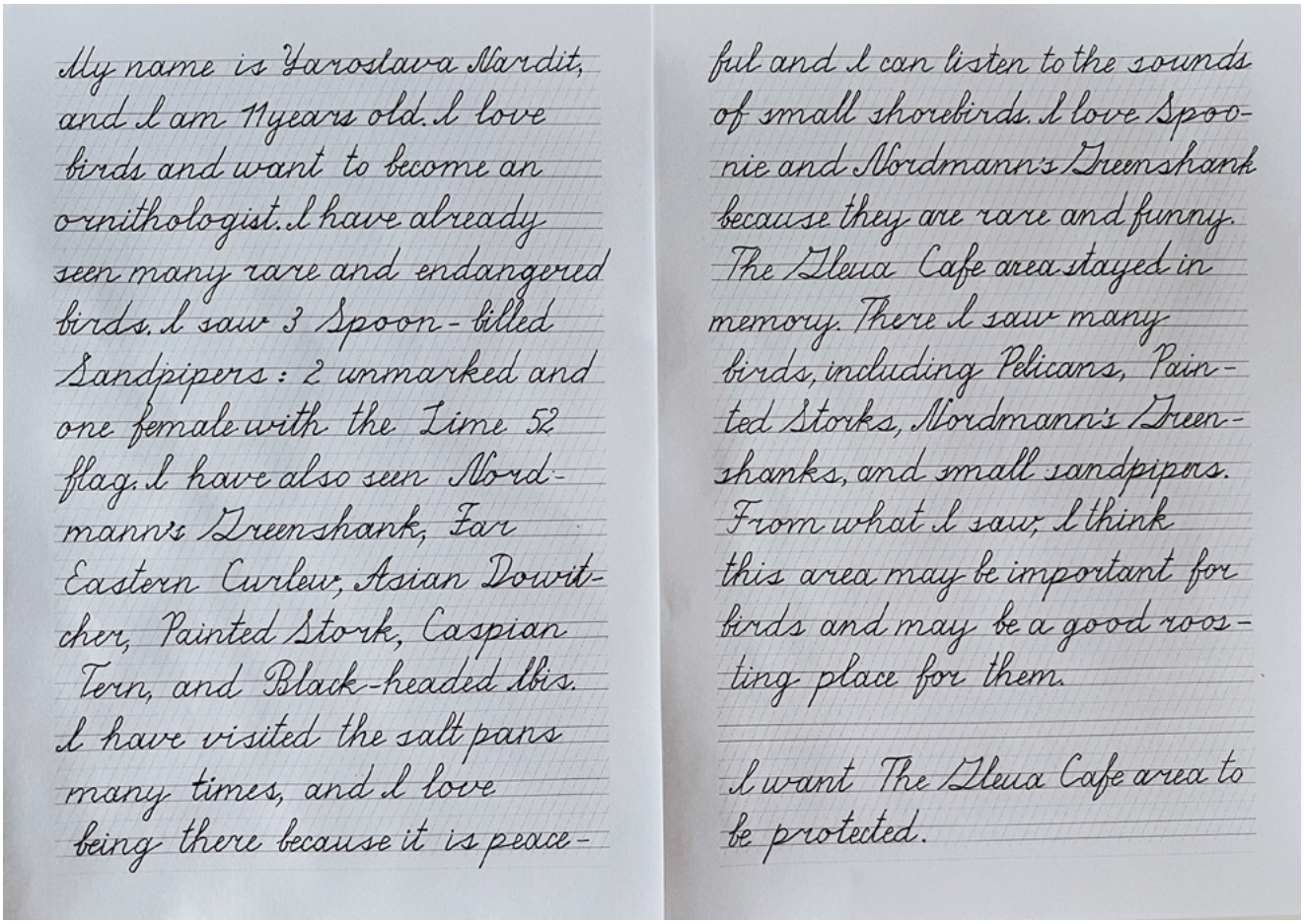
We are a family of four — Alexandra, Max, and our daughters Yaroslava (11) and Lyubava (8) — and over the past three months these field trips and Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) observations have become a practical way of learning the scientific method. The salt pans along the Inner Gulf of Thailand are now an important part of our family life. In January 2026, we first learned about the Spoonie and were struck by the thought that a bird weighing only 30 grams can endure an 8,000-kilometre journey. This little bird is unique. Its small body seems to hold a force far greater than itself, and that is why we wanted to help protect Spoonie.

We prepared carefully for every trip to the salt pans: route, weather, optics, food, water, sun protection, and safety in the heat all had to be thought through in advance. We also had to set clear rules and responsibilities for the children. This preparation took a great deal of effort, but it was important for good results in the field. Over time, all this gave our field trips their own rhythm and discipline.

Each of us has a role in our team. I organize the trips and document observations with photographs and video. My husband, Max, provides the support that makes these trips possible and joins our weekend sessions at The Gleua Cafe. Yaroslava takes a leading role in searching for birds, keeping checklists, and much of the field data collection.



Lyubava keeps track of session time, reminds us to drink water, and joins every search. At just eight years old, she endures these demanding trips with a remarkable steadiness that often reminds us of Spoonie. In this way, the children take an active and direct part in studying birds and helping to protect Spoonie.


My name is Yaroslava Nardit, and I am 11 years old. I love birds and want to become an ornithologist. I have already seen many rare and endangered birds. I saw 3 Spoon-billed Sandpipers: 2 unmarked and one female with the Lime 5Z flag. I have also seen Nordmann's Greenshank, Far Eastern Curlew, Asian Dowitcher, Painted Stork, Caspian Tern, and Black-headed Ibis. I have visited the salt pans many times, and I love being there because it is peaceful and I can listen to the sounds of small shorebirds. I love Spoonie and Nordmann's Greenshank because they are rare and funny. The Gleua Cafe area stayed in memory. There I saw many birds, including Pelicans, Painted Storks, Nordmann's Greenshanks, and small sandpipers. From what I saw, I think this area may be important for birds and may be a good roosting place for them.

I want The Gleua Cafe area to be protected.

To practice the scientific method in the field, we recorded the main conditions of each session: time, location, weather, water level, distance to birds, species present, behaviour and markings. For observation and documentation, we used binoculars, a spotting scope, and a smartphone with an adapter, while keeping our field notes in a structured written form. In this way, citizen science came to matter to us for more than one reason. Field observation teaches patience, because it is often a chain of success and failure. It teaches discipline, because useful work depends on repeated visits and careful notes. It also gives children a direct and living connection with science. A day without a sighting is still part of the work. A missed opportunity still teaches attention. Step by step, the children become more observant, steadier, and more mature in their attitude to both learning and nature.

From 4 February to 9 April 2026, we carried out 22 field sessions, amounting to 31 hours of observation in total, and visited three key sites in Thailand: Khok Kham, Pak Thale, and The Gleua Cafe. During these visits, we observed that Spoon-billed Sandpipers often fed on wet mud and in very shallow puddles. While feeding, they were often seen among Red-necked Stints and small plovers, sometimes slightly apart from other birds or at the edge of the main flock.

We also noticed some differences between sites. In our experience, Khok Kham was the most reliable and accessible site, with a more consistent pattern of bird behaviour that made observation easier. After disturbance, birds often returned to the same feeding pan or moved to a nearby one within ten minutes. Pak Thale is a much larger salt-pan complex used by large numbers of migratory shorebirds, so the Spoonie can be harder to find there. After disturbance, birds can move farther away. Pak Thale feels like a true home for many wintering and migratory birds.

The Gleua Cafe area left a special impression on us for another reason. Birds there seemed notice-

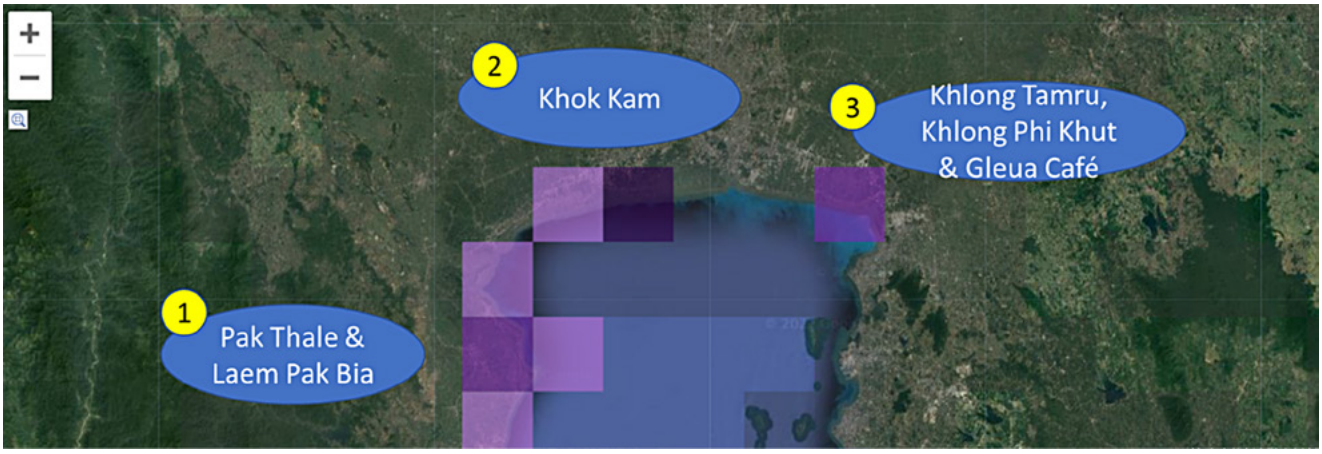
ably more cautious than at Pak Thale or Khok Kham. It was often harder to approach them, and after disturbance they frequently left the area altogether and did not return during the observation period. We did not observe any SBS there.

In time, we understood that studying Spoonie and other migratory waterbirds also meant learning their habitat — the salt pans. These salt pans are part of the traditional coastal landscape of the Inner Gulf of Thailand. Local people have produced salt here for many hundreds of years. Over time, this human-made landscape has also become a feeding ground for large numbers of migratory waterbirds. That is why these places are so valuable to both people and birds. As we learned this landscape better, we also came to know Khun Daeng and Khun Tii, whose local knowledge and help became an important part of our field trips.

Seen in this wider context, our fieldwork — and our attempt to apply the scientific method in practice — came to mean more than we had expected. What had started as something much simpler grew into real observations, real learning, and a deeper understanding of the birds and the places they depend on. In this way, we discovered not only some of the rarest and most remarkable birds of the EAAFP flyway, but also Pak Thale itself — the heart of the salt pans and, for us, a hidden gem of Thailand, where thousands of birds fill the sky. It is a place that stays in the heart and calls us back. That is why we believe Pak Thale, together with other wintering grounds and key sites used by migratory birds in Thailand, should be fully protected.

December 2025 Survey of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Inner Gulf of Thailand

Khwankhao Sinhaseni, Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST)



Map 1. Survey sites in the Inner Gulf of Thailand

For the past four years Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) has been leading annual surveys of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper using scan sampling and mark–recapture approaches across the Inner Gulf of Thailand. During the 2025-2026 season the annual survey was conducted from 1–5 December 2025 at the three principal sites known to support wintering SBS: Pak Thale – Laem Phak Bia (Phetchaburi), Kok Kham (Samut Sakhon), and saltpan areas in Chachoengsao, including the Bang Pakong–Khlong Tumru landscape and the Gleua Café site (Map 1). These locations form part of the Inner Gulf of Thailand's critical network of saltpan habitats, which remain among the most important wintering areas for the species globally.

Survey teams operated simultaneously across the three sites using scan sampling and mark–recapture approaches. Across all sites combined, a total of 10 SBS were recorded during the December survey period. While broadly consistent with recent counts, this figure reinforces the continued importance of the Inner Gulf while also highlighting the species' extremely low numbers and vulnerability. In general, the number of Spoon-billed Sandpipers across the three sites has been quite constant over the past four years, as shown in Table 1.

At Pak Thale, the largest and most complex survey site, seven participants covered an extensive area using three vehicles. Despite improved

Table 1. Records of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Inner Gulf of Thailand during the last four years of national surveys. Flagged birds in brackets.

Winter period	Pak Thale – Laem Phak Bia	Kok Kham	Chachoengsao Province
2022-23	6 (White P7)	3	1
2023-24	4 (White P7)	3	5
2024-25	4 (White P7)	3	3 (Orange A6)
2025-26	4 (White P7)	2 (Lime 52)	4 (Orange A6)

coordination and familiarity with survey tools, the team was unable to achieve full spatial coverage due to limited personnel. Three unflagged Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded during the survey period, although additional individuals were confirmed shortly afterwards, including the regularly observed White P7. The absence of birds at Laem Pak Bia during the same period suggests either localised shifts in distribution or limitations in survey timing. The site supports a range of other priority shorebird species, including Spotted Greenshank, with flagged and satellite-tagged individuals observed.

At Kok Kham, survey coverage was moderate, with smaller teams operating across the site. Two Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded consistently each day, slightly fewer than in the previous season. Additional reconnaissance surveys in nearby areas did not detect any individuals, suggesting either temporary absence or redistribution within the wider landscape. Observations confirmed that shorebirds tend to avoid saltpans covered with plastic sheets, a practice that is becoming more common and reduces habitat suitability.

Kok Kham is undergoing rapid land-use change, including construction and pond modification, leading to a decline in the availability of suitable foraging and roosting areas. These adverse changes may explain the slight decline in Spoon-billed Sandpiper numbers observed at the site.

In the Bang Pakong–Khlong Tumru area, habitat conditions varied considerably. Some ponds, e.g. at Nong Mai Daeng, remain relatively suitable despite nearby infrastructure development. In contrast, Khlong Tumru has experienced extensive degradation due to construction, with previously suitable ponds no longer supporting shorebirds. The Gleua Café site continues to hold a small but significant number of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, including flagged and unflagged individuals. However, low water levels across many ponds raise concerns about ongoing habitat suitability if dry conditions.

Across all sites, broader patterns of habitat decline were evident. Drying ponds, infrastructure expansion, and conversion of saltpans for industrial or commercial use are reducing the extent and quality of available habitat. These pressures are particularly pronounced within areas linked to the Eastern Economic Corridor, where rapid development is transforming coastal landscapes.

Beyond the primary survey sites, several additional locations were identified as potentially important for Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Pattani Bay and Laem Son National Park are considered promising but require further verification through expanded survey coverage. Don Hoi Lot remains a known site with existing records, while the Prasae Estuary and other coastal areas, including Saphan Rung Bridge, may also support suitable habitat.

Overall, the 2025–2026 season reinforced the critical importance of Thailand's Inner Gulf for Spoon-billed Sandpipers while highlighting persistent and, in some cases, intensifying threats. Key challenges include habitat loss and degradation, ongoing bird trapping, and operational constraints affecting monitoring and research. At the same time, the project demonstrated continued progress in survey coordination and data collection, providing a strong foundation for future work. Priority recommendations emerging from this season include increasing survey capacity to improve site coverage, aligning survey timing more closely with habitat conditions, strengthening enforcement against bird trapping, and promoting policies that support traditional salt production.

BCST is grateful to the support of the Oriental Bird Club for this survey.

Obituary: Remembering Prof Hankyu Kim (1987–2026)

Prof Chang-Yong Choi, Seoul National University & EAAFP Technical Sub-committee

It is with profound sorrow and a heavy heart that I share the news of the passing of Professor Hankyu Kim of Kyung Hee University–my dearest junior colleague, collaborator, and friend.

Professor Kim passed away suddenly in the early morning of April 21, 2026, at the age of 39. He had recently returned from demanding field research dedicated to the capture and tracking of shorebirds. After reporting feeling unwell, he was hospitalized for treatment, but tragically, he did not recover. His sudden departure has left his family, the Korean ornithological community, conservation activists, and citizen scientists in deep shock and grief. Surrounded by the love and tears of his family, friends, and colleagues, his funeral services were completed on April 23. He is survived by his parents, his sister, his beloved wife, and his 17-month-old daughter.

Professor Hankyu Kim was a rising scholar in ornithology and wildlife ecology, driven by an inexhaustible passion for nature and birds in Korea and elsewhere. He earned his B.S. and M.S. from the Department of Forest Sciences at Seoul National University and received his Ph.D. from

Professor Hankyu Kim *Chang-Yong Choi*

Oregon State University in 2021. From 2021 to 2023, he served as a post-doctoral associate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In September 2023, he returned to Korea to join the Department of Biology at Kyung Hee University as an Assistant Professor. There, he led the Wildlife Conservation and Ecology Lab (https://wildlife-conservationecology.khu.ac.kr), inspiring numerous students with his dedication. He was on the cusp of a well-deserved promotion to Associate Professor, a testament to his brilliant academic contributions.

Throughout his career, Professor Kim was deeply committed to understanding how wild bird populations respond to environmental conditions and climate change. He focused particularly on the Biodiversity Insurance Hypothesis, exploring how biodiversity in forest and marine ecosystems can buffer the impacts of ecological disturbances like climate change on avian populations. His recent research extended to the migration connectivity and strategies of diverse migratory birds under threats, including forest birds, shorebirds, raptors, and even penguins. His findings served as the critical evidence for designating three rapidly declining forest bird species as legally protected or candidate species for protection in the Republic of Korea.

Beyond his research, Professor Kim served as the Executive Director of the Ornithological Society of Korea for the past two years, where he modernized the society's administrative foundation and played a pivotal role in advancing Korean ornithology. He was also a passionate advocate for the practical conservation of habitats, actively participating in the efforts to designate the Gebol, Korean Tidal Flats as a UNESCO World Heritage site. His work bridged the gap between academia and field conservation, reaching local NGOs, municipal governments, and central administrative agencies. Hankyu Kim supported the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force's work and organised a ringing camp and surveys targeting the Spoon-billed Sandpiper on Yubu-do Island in 2025.

As many of you know, he was a researcher who never stopped challenging himself, armed with a warm heart, fiery passion, deep curiosity, a keen sense of humor, and an open mind. The sudden loss of Professor Kim, who was preparing for the future of his research, is a devastating blow to the small but dedicated ornithological community in Korea.

We have lost a gifted scientist, but more importantly, a true friend. It has been the greatest honor of my life to stand by his side from his undergraduate years through his journeys to Antarctica and the United States, until he finally reached his position today. I witnessed his growth through countless days in the field and in our daily lives. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who supported and helped Hankyu throughout his journey. We will remember him as a scholar who dared to ask big questions and a friend who always had an open heart.

Memorial: https://www.kudoboard.com/boards/4MbVZDbE/in-memory-hankyu

Professor Hankyu Kim in the Antarctic *Chang-Yong Choi*

From the Archives

Bangladesh 2006

Christoph Zöckler

The second Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) winter survey in Bangladesh in January 2006 was a big success, meeting many new dedicated surveyors and friends. A total of 11 SBS were spotted by members of three teams from Bangladesh, Germany, Russia and the UK. The survey was organised by Anwarul Islam, Wild Team Bangladesh and Enam Ul Haque, the Bangladesh focal point for the international waterbird counts. Despite drawing a blank the year before in India (see SBS Bulletin 32) the Manfred-Hermsen Foundation in Bremen supported the Bangladesh survey again very generously.

The entire survey team with members from Bangladesh, Germany, Russia and the United Kingdom hosted by Enam Ul Haque (bottom right)

Team III surveying at Teknaf Beach in the very South of Bangladesh

Anwarul Islam and Gillian Bunting (SBS Database manager, now at BirdLife International) on the survey boat of Team III

Latest News

Yangon, Myanmar

Israeli Ambassador Hanan Goder (right) and Pyae Phyo Lay (NCS)

The Israeli Embassy in Myanmar hosted the "Week of Nature" together with our Task Force partner "Nature Conservation Society Myanmar" (NCS) on 9 February 2026 at the Embassy. The Ambassador of Israel, His Excellency Mr Hanan Goder talked about Nature and Biodiversity conservation in Myanmar and highlighted the significance of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation in Myanmar led by NCS. Ambassadors from other countries, such as Russia and Germany as well as Special Guests, Strategic Partners and Senior Officers, nature lovers attended the event.

Campo Grande, Brazil

Vivian Fu of WWF Hong Kong shared updates of Spoon-billed Sandpiper Single Species Action Plan at CMS Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals COP15 in Campo Grande, Brazil in March 2026 and was able to distribute the first hard copies to key stakeholders.

EAAFP Youth Campaign

Youth Voices for the Flyway is a vibrant, youth-driven initiative that invites young people across the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF) to express their ideas, creativity, and commitment to protecting migratory waterbirds and their habitats. As a non-competitive, virtual open call, it provides an inclusive platform where diverse voices can be shared, celebrated, and amplified—regardless of artistic background or experience.

Please take part and check in here:
https://www.flickr.com/photos/eaafp/albums/72177720333506663/

Latest News

Bremen, Germany

Till Harms and his film team followed the Spoon-billed Task Force and many of its members over the past 4 years and filmed the team and its work at several locations in Germany, the UK and China. The film team realised how difficult it is to work on the conservation of the species along its East Asian Flyway, when they encountered difficulties to enter several of key flyway countries. Yet, they managed to produce a nice and at times funny snapshot of the Taskforce, its work and its challenges. The film was premiered during the Film Fest Bremen on 16 April and will be in the cinemas in Germany at the end of June. We hope that an English version will be available in cinemas of some Asian flyway countries and beyond in the coming autumn and winter season.

A trailer can be seen at:
https://www.realfictionfilme.de/saving-spoonie.html

Bremen, Germany

Ad hoc SBS Task Force meeting in Bremen prior to the film screening

Latest News

Shenzhen, China

The AIGC film The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a 13-minute short flim created entirely through AI-based production. The story is set in the far north of the Earth, on the Siberian Arctic tundra, where life begins with the cracking of a brown-speckled egg.

The main character, Yuri, is a Spoon-billed Sandpiper—an extremely rare and critically endangered migratory bird—born with its distinctive "spoon-shaped" bill. As it grows, Yuri must learn how to survive in a harsh environment while also coming to accept its unusual but endearing feature. When its two companions—the Ringed Plover and the Red-necked Stint—are pushed to the brink of survival in the Arctic, Yuri uses its unique bill to help them out of danger. When Yuri sets off on its first migration, it is more than just a journey. It becomes a long and demanding passage, covering over 8,000 km and crossing half the globe. From the Arctic's midnight auroras to the tidal flats of Tiaozini and the mangrove wetlands, Yuri and its companions face one of the most dangerous migratory routes in the world.

Told through AIGC imagery, with a focus on close-up detail and an intimate perspective, the film offers a way to observe one of the most fragile yet resilient forms of life on the planet. The film has been nominated for the AI category of the 2026 Asian Art Film Festival.

Moscow, Russia

Our Russian Partners secured some major funding from Russian sources to resume Head-starting on the breeding grounds. After a successful application the Presidential Foundation For Nature is supporting the project with about 300,000 US Dollar for the next 3 years. BirdsRussia will start this summer and we will report on the progress in the next issues.

PRESIDENTIAL FOUNDATION FOR NATURE

The last Page

Flowering Spoonies at the "Week of Nature" in Yangon