



Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No. 7, February 2012



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

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Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Minjiang estuary

© Chen Lin, Fujian Ecology Photograph Society

In figures:

103 birds max recorded in October at Rudong, China

2 new wintering sites at South China coast

3 birds on the Red River Delta, Vietnam

8 birds (two juveniles) recorded at two new sites in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

3 birds arrived in Khok Kham, Thailand on Oct 22 already

25 hunters already ceased hunting and signed agreements in return for livelihood support in Sonadia, Bangladesh

13 juvenile birds arrived safely at their final destination at WWT in Slimbridge

Almost 50,000 USD raised through private donations

1) Foreword from the Editor

Dear friends and colleagues,

The last half year has once again been a very busy period and this newsletter captures the whole breadth of activities across the flyway region and beyond. The safe arrival of 13 SBS in their final home at WWT in Slimbridge created the most excitement. This event and the entire project feature strongly in this issue, but there were also extraordinary developments in China. Increasing observer activity led to the discovery of the importance of the Rudong mudflat as a crucial spring and autumn stop over site. Unfortunately, most of the remaining stop over and wintering sites in China are threatened and urgent action is needed to achieve a change in attitude and value of coastal mudflats in China, but also in other countries. The endless efforts of our long-term Russia survey team paid off in Vietnam, when 8 birds were found in the Mekong Delta. The progress of hunting mitigation in Bangladesh is very encouraging and all in all there is more positive news which all raise hopes for the conservation of the species. Again, it is a great honour and privilege to work on behalf of the Task Force for the coordination of the activities and I would like to thank all the donors and foundations, who keep supporting our efforts to save the species. I would like to thank in particular the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme, with Wildsounds, Heritage Expeditions, and Ed Keeble, the Dutch Birding Association and Vogelbescherming Netherlands, the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, the Manfred-Hermesen-Stiftung, the Lighthouse Foundation, Keidenran Foundation for Nature, the Disney Foundation, the US Fish and Wildlife Services, The RSPB, WWT, the BBC Wildlife Fund, the Save our Species (SOS) initiative of IUCN, the Ornithological WG of Helgoland and many many private donors from all over the world.

Dr Christoph Zöckler,
Coordinator SBS TF, January 2012

2) Foreword from our partner Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

If, a year ago, anyone had told me that we would have 13 Spoon-billed Sandpipers housed in their purpose-built winter accommodation at WWT's Slimbridge HQ, I wouldn't have believed them. In fact, I remember a conversation with Rhys Green of the RSPB and Nigel Clark of BTO, both stalwart contributors to this work, in which we agreed that if we established a captive population of only five birds, it would be a success. February 2011 seems a long time ago. At that stage, we had just worked out that mounting an expedition to Chukotka to collect Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs and establish a conservation breeding programme for the species was feasible. Or at least it was logistically and financially possible, albeit at a considerable cost, and if everything, including the weather in Siberia, went our way.

Nigel Jarrett, WWT's Head of Conservation Breeding, and Liza Tambovstseva, Birds Russia's Spoon-billed Sandpiper Project Officer, had compiled a detailed list of the equipment we would need and the budget required (£350,000 excluding staff costs). We had also worked closely with Birds Russia and the RSPB to produce the many documents that were understandably needed to obtain permissions from the Russian authorities. Translation of the documents into Russian and the complex negotiations regarding permissions were undertaken and concluded at break-neck speed by Birds Russia, but the clock was ticking. We knew that we would have to buy and ship nearly a ton of equipment to Moscow and on to Anadyr and Meinypilgyno in little over six weeks before the conservation breeding team flew to Chukotka in mid-May. We had our work cut out! But with fantastic support from the Admin team at WWT, and with Liza working around the clock in Russia, we managed it and the team left for the Russian Far East on 14 May. They eventually arrived in Meinypilgyno on 27 May after their equipment eventually arrived, was passed by customs, and weather conditions allowed the helicopter to fly. Thankfully the final permissions were granted on 30 May – which was a great relief after all of the hard work the team had put in.

The next two months were a nail-biting affair. Would any Spoon-billed Sandpipers return to the breeding grounds? Would we find any nests? Could we successfully collect and incubate the eggs? Would the eggs hatch? Would the chicks survive? Could we get them back to the UK alive? I am very happy to say that the answers to all of these questions proved to be "yes". And from 20 eggs collected, we now have the 13 Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Slimbridge. This expedition would not have been possible without the Herculean efforts of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding team and Birds Russia, and the financial support of WWT, the RSPB and other funding partners. It also relied on the pioneering research work conducted at Meinypilgyno by Evgeny Syroechkovsky, Pavel Tomkovich, Christoph Zöckler and others (see previous newsletters).

Despite this initial success, we need to be realistic. We still have some work to do to establish an actual conservation *breeding* programme for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and this is only one small step forward, albeit an important one, in saving the species from extinction. We now have completed the first of several stages in the safety net that should buy us time to address the problems of habitat loss and reclamation throughout the East Asian - Australasian Flyway and trapping on the wintering grounds in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Due to the efforts of the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, considerable progress has already been made on the latter, but addressing habitat loss and reclamation of staging and wintering sites will be a difficult and long term undertaking.

Thankfully, we have recently secured significant funding from the UK Darwin Initiative and the Save our Species Fund for further conservation measures for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in 2012-2015. These include another conservation breeding expedition in 2012 - collecting more eggs to complete the captive breeding population and "head-starting" Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the breeding grounds (i.e. rearing and releasing them in Meinyopilgyno which could increase the production of young by up to six-fold), anti-poaching work in Myanmar and Bangladesh, and advocacy work along the flyway to try to begin a campaign to address habitat loss and reclamation.

The EAAFP Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force is at the vanguard of global species conservation. Saving this flagship species from extinction could help save other globally threatened species of waterbirds in the East Asian - Australasian Flyway.

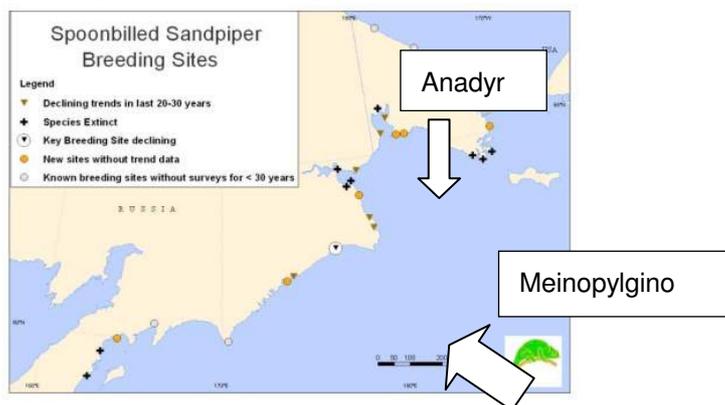
***Dr. Debbie Pain,
Director of Conservation at Wetfowl and Wetland Trust Slimbridge***

3) Conservation Breeding Programme for the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper

by Baz Hughes

The 2011 conservation breeding expedition: Since 2010, WWT has been working with Birds Russia, Moscow Zoo, RSPB, BTO, BirdLife International, the Birdlife Asian Partnership, ArcCona, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership and the Convention on Migratory Species to plan such a conservation breeding programme.

The 2011 expedition to Chukotka, which aimed to establish a captive breeding population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at WWT Slimbridge, was organised and conducted by WWT and Birds Russia, with support from RSPB. After determining that the expedition was logistically and financially possible in January 2011, there followed an incredible amount of work to plan the expedition; employ staff; arrange contracts; apply for work permits and state and national Russian Government permits for egg extraction and bird export; and purchase and ship equipment and staff to Moscow, Anadyr, and ultimately to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper breeding site at Meinopylgino.



Location of Anadyr and Meinopylgino, Chukotka



Meinopylgino



Base camp

The Expedition, Part One: Meinopylgino

The UK team flew to Moscow on 14 May and, with Russian colleagues, arrived in Anadyr on 16 May. After two weeks in Anadyr waiting for equipment to arrive and for suitable conditions for the helicopter to fly, they arrived in Meinopylgino along with one tonne of equipment on 27 May.

The team established their base camp in a rented cottage then spent two days cleaning, disinfecting and setting up equipment before the search for birds and nests began.



Martin McGill cleaning the house in which the Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs will be incubated



Predated nesting female Spoon-billed Sandpiper

The search area was approximately 100 square miles – requiring nine team members to walk about 10 miles each day. The first bird – a singing male – was heard and seen on 2 June. Over the next few days, more males were located on territories. After a male was located the nest searching team backed off and re-visited two days later to check whether males were paired. Usually they were and copulation was even observed.

Early hopes were dashed when meltwater flooded out the earliest territories, and on 16 June, the team again started looking for nests in locations where paired birds had been observed. However eggs from the first nest they came across had been predated, along with the nesting female.

Fortunes changed, however, and between 19 June and 3 July 20 eggs were collected from six clutches. At the time of collection, the incubation stage of the eggs ranged from less than 1 day to 18 days.

Eggs were collected from the field and artificially incubated.

The first clutch hatched on 5 July and the second two days later.



Incubating female Spoon-billed Sandpiper



The first clutch of Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs



1. Collecting the last clutch of Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs



2. Placing Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs in an incubator



3. The first ever Spoon-billed Sandpiper to be hatched in captivity



4. The same chick one day later

The Expedition, Part Two: Anadyr



Eggs and chicks aboard the Spirit of Enderby

After 6 weeks in Meinopylgino, the team were transported to Anadyr on the “Spirit of Enderby” courtesy of the Heritage Expeditions tour company.

The eight newly hatched chicks and 12 remaining eggs were moved onto the boat on 7 July to travel to Anadyr where the chicks would be reared before being flown to Moscow. On the journey a further nine eggs hatched.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper chicks aboard the Spirit of Enderby

The now 17 chicks and three eggs arrived in Anadyr on 10 July where they were reared in a bedsit...

...while in Anadyr, one egg failed to hatch and two chicks died without feeding. At 5-10 days old the surviving 17 chicks were transferred to a rearing facility on the tundra next to an ex-army base.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper rearing facility in Anadyr

Rearing chicks in a bedsit in Anadyr



***Fledged
juvenile
Spoon-billed
Sandpiper in
Anadyr***

Preparations back in the UK



Ground works begin for the new rearing facility

While the expedition team were collecting eggs and rearing chicks, back at WWT Slimbridge in the UK work was being done to re-furbish the existing quarantine station, design and build a new rearing facility, and ensure all required licenses and permits were in place for the birds' arrival.

The quarantine station was given a major upgrade, which included new roofing over the aviaries, all new paintwork and a complete and thorough disinfection.

Balai Approval (required for the import of the birds) was granted for the quarantine station on 19 August 2011.

A brand new rearing facility (more information in following sections) was designed and ground works began in August. The facility was completed in late Autumn.



Rearing facility construction



The newly replaced aviaries at the Slimbridge quarantine station

Quarantine at Moscow Zoo



Moscow Zoo

Unfortunately one full grown chick died on 9 August and the remaining 16 chicks were transported to Moscow Zoo on 18 August where they underwent a period of quarantine. This was originally planned to be for 30 days, but had to be extended to 87 days due to a case of psittacosis (in an unrelated bird) at the zoo which meant all bird movements from the zoo were temporarily prohibited. Unfortunately a further three chicks died during this period.

Whilst in quarantine at Moscow Zoo the Spoon-billed Sandpipers were cared for by WWT avicultural staff with excellent support from the zoo staff.



Quarantine facility in Moscow Zoo



Juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpipers in quarantine at Moscow Zoo



Juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpipers in quarantine at Moscow Zoo



Juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpiper feeding in quarantine at Moscow Zoo

Arrival and quarantine in the UK



Spoon-billed Sandpipers arriving at Heathrow Airport

The remaining 13 chicks were flown to the UK on 11 November for a further period of 30 days quarantine.

The birds arrived at Heathrow Airport in two specially designed transport crates. The birds along with the transport paperwork were checked by veterinary officials before the birds were released and transported to WWT Slimbridge.

Following the results of disease screening, the sandpipers were released from quarantine on 12 December. No losses or significant health problems occurred during this time.



Spoon-billed Sandpipers in quarantine at Slimbridge

Conservation breeding facility at Slimbridge



Spoon-billed Sandpiper winter accommodation under construction at Slimbridge



Outdoor aviaries in the completed facility



Spoon-billed Sandpiper being weighed

The birds were moved to a purpose-built conservation breeding facility on 15 December. Before being moved they were weighed, their body condition assessed and given a health check.

The facility consists of two indoor wintering rooms where they can be kept during the cold months, an outdoor aviary annex, a kitchen for food preparation, storage areas and a 'biosecurity portal' where staff change their footwear and clothes before entering and leaving the rest of the facility.

Although wild Spoon-billed Sandpipers breed in the arctic, they spend most of the year in tropical areas. Therefore, at the moment the birds are being kept in one of the wintering rooms heated to a balmy 25°C.

Each "wintering room" has a large salt water pool, sprigs of artificial Christmas tree to provide cover, a variety of food, fresh and salt water bowls, and nearly a dozen heat and UV lamps. The floor of the enclosure is covered with round 2mm-sand (like a beach of tiny, smooth pebbles) and in the second room, which we are preparing for them at the moment, they will have river sand – which has very small grains.

All 13 birds are making good use of their indoor space. They are bright eyed, active and alert which suggests that they are comfortable with each of the different areas we have provided (sand, water, "hot spots", "cool corners" etc.).



WWT vet Michelle O'Brien examines a Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Birds are checked and fed three times a day, and monitored outside these periods using remote cameras.

They can also be viewed, without disturbing them, through one-way glass panels.

A detailed biosecurity and disease management protocol has been produced which sets out a number of precautions that must be taken at the Spoon-billed Sandpiper facility together with details of disease surveillance and management measures.



A Spoon-billed Sandpiper is carefully placed in a carrying crate

Every two weeks the birds are caught and given a health check, which includes weighing and assessments of body and foot condition.

No losses or significant health problems have occurred since the birds arrived in the UK.



The Spoon-billed Sandpipers arrive at their new home...



...and are released into their new luxury accommodation

Plans for 2012

In summer 2012, outdoor breeding aviaries will be constructed at Slimbridge in time to settle the birds into them before they are first due to breed in summer 2013.

Another expedition will be mounted to Chukotka in 2012 to collect eggs and export 20 fertile eggs/chicks to the UK to supplement the captive population. Ideally we would export eggs from Meinopylgino to Anadyr in late June using a helicopter and fly them to the UK via Moscow. This would reduce the time and expense of rearing chicks in Anadyr and would avoid a prolonged period of quarantine in Moscow Zoo. This strategy would reduce the length of the time in Russia by over 4 months compared to 2011.

However, we will also prepare a back-up plan in case any chicks hatch en route. This would be to rear the chicks in the Moscow Zoo off-site breeding centre before exporting them to the UK. This way, the birds' quarantine period would begin as soon as they hatch and mean we could transport the birds to the UK in early August, again much sooner than in 2011. A second contingency plan, in case bad weather prevents helicopter flights (a real possibility), is to repeat a similar exercise to that undertaken in 2011.

Assuming there are sufficient nests and eggs found, we also plan to "head-start" another cohort of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This would involve taking eggs from incubating birds and raising chicks to fledging age at Meinopylgino, before release back into the wild. This could massively increase the number of juveniles produced at the site which holds at least 10% of the world population. Productivity is ~0.6 fledglings per breeding pair at present as predation from species such as skuas, stoats and American Ground Squirrels is currently very high. Extracted and head-started 4-egg clutches are likely to lead to at least 3 fledglings per nest based on 2011 experience. To this 500% increase would be added the fledglings produced by re-laying as females that 'lose' clutches early in the breeding season can re-lay (at least one female was known to have re-laid and successfully reared chicks in 2011). With post-fledging survival so low in recent years, head-starting would have had limited beneficial impact. However there are several major strategic benefits of initiating this programme now:

- Firstly, hunting mitigation in Myanmar and Bangladesh is showing significant progress. Within two years juvenile survival could start to recover significantly and at that point increasing the number of fledglings will become extremely valuable, as it can increase the rate at which the population stabilises and recovers. Initiating head-starting now means we will not miss the opportunity to accelerate recovery.

- Secondly, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a difficult bird to monitor throughout the flyway so it will not be easy to determine the point at which juvenile survival starts to recover. Releasing a significant number of leg-flagged fledglings will enable us to detect increases in recruitment at Meinopylgino in future years, allowing us to monitor the effectiveness of conservation actions on the non-breeding grounds and adjust conservation strategies accordingly. We also plan to attach radio-tags to a small number of birds to determine post-fledging movements and potentially key sites in the early stages of migration.
- Thirdly, head-starting will allow us to fine-tune in the field the methods needed for reintroduction. We currently do not know the full extent of the wintering areas, and even if current actions on the wintering grounds are successful, it is quite possible that reintroductions may be necessary to supplement the wild population if it drops too low to be sustainable. Similarly, reintroduction may be necessary at some stage to permit recolonisation of parts of the historic breeding range from which the species is now thought to be extinct.

Acknowledgements

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding programme is a collaboration between WWT, Birds Russia, Moscow Zoo and the RSPB working with colleagues from the BTO, BirdLife International, ArcCona and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force.

The project is funded by WWT and the RSPB, with additional financial contributions and support from BirdLife International, the East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, the Convention on Migratory Species, Heritage Expeditions, the Australasian Wader Study Group of Birds Australia, the BBC Wildlife Fund, the Mileage Company, the Olive Herbert Charitable Trust, the Oriental Bird Club and many generous individuals.

4) Spoon-billed Sandpiper Survey in coastal China, 21 September – 25 December 2011

Zhang Lin & Menxiu Tong - China Coastal Waterbird Census Team



Between September and December 2011 we were able to survey most promising sites along the Chinese southern coast on behalf of the China Coastal Waterbird Census Team, using a grant from the EAAFP in search of Spoon-billed sandpiper stop over and wintering sites.

In total 24 sites in 6 different provinces were visited. Often several small sites exist near by. But also in many cases the sites have changed rapidly and lost their habitat qualities for any waders, not only Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Survey sites (see also map):

Shandong Province: Rizhao, Jiaonan

Jiangsu Province: Ganyu, Qidong, Rudong, **Zhejiang Province:** Cixi, Wenzhou City

Fujian Province: Fuding City, Ningde City, Fuqing City, Changle City, Putian City, Nan'an City, Xiamen City

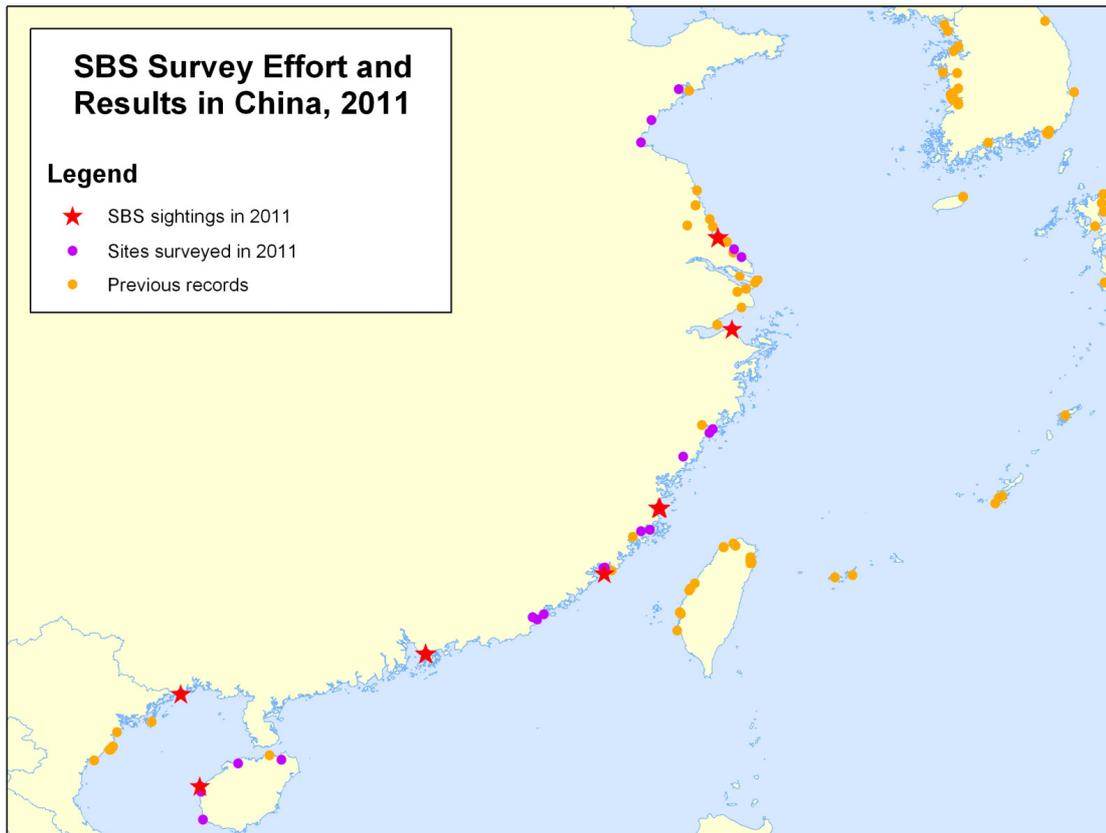
Guangdong Province: Shantou City

Guangxi Province: Fanchenggang City

Hainan Province: Haikou City, Lingao City, Dongfang City, Ledong City

Surveyors:

Tong Menxui and Zhang Lin with support of Han Yongxiang ,Li Zongfeng, Tang Zhenghua , Shen Zheng, Huang Qin Wang Qingliang, Dai Meijie, Dong Guotai, Yang Haiying, Ma Yanju, Wang Jian, Chen Qiangfa, Chen Lin.



At seven of the 24 visited sites Spoon-billed Sandpiper were observed. The majority with up to 103 birds were noted over a period between August and end of November in Yangkou, Rudong (see special report). Also, with regular observations is the Minjiang Delta, a wintering site with up to 11 birds seen. But from five additional sites, observations have been irregular and in two cases not for over 20 years. Also a new site was found on the West coast of Hainan and a winter observation was confirmed for Fangchenggang, near the Vietnamese border, where 2 birds were wintering in 2009 and one bird seen in April 27.

The entire mudflat in China faces the threat of development. Many good places were destroyed already in recent years.

But there are still some undiscovered spots, especially in South Zhejiang Province, Western Guangdong Province and Guangxi Province. There are few birders in the Mainland, especially water bird surveyors, to help find bird habitats.

We think the number of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in south China could be larger than this report shows. Ongoing surveys are very important key and necessary to find the Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

Overall the threats by reclamation and development are imminent and affecting almost every site. Even areas that are protected are still facing touristic development or other changes that are detrimental for wader habitats. The reclamation is agricultural, touristic, real estate and industrial development. In addition, the sites are threatened by the evasive cord grass *Spartina*. Also mangrove plantations have been noticed at several sites in the south. Birds are trapped, and even used to scare other birds from entering the fishponds. Very little mudflats are protected and of all sites along the entire coast only the Minjiang estuary is a protected area. Below is a summary of the observations and the status of the mudflats in the provinces.

Shandong Province

The coast is still relatively little developed and also hardly affected by *Spartina*.

Jiangsu Province

Rapid development of most mudflat areas, but some areas south of Rudong have still potential to serve as reserve areas once Rudong has been reclaimed.

Zhejiang Province:

The costal of South Zhejiang Province is total mudflat area. However, South Zhejiang is the most important light industries area in China, so more and more mudflat and fishpond have disappeared from many years ago.

Yongqiang seashore area and Lingkun Island are most important area for the Black-faced Spoonbill, Saunders's Gull and Dalmatian Pelican in China. About 1300+ Saunders's Gulls, 66+ Dalmatian Pelican and 50+ Black-faced Spoonbill are wintering in here.

And this place has big potential to find out more SBS in future.

Fujian Province:

The entire costal of Fujian Province was searched by Fujian Bird Watching Society and Xiamen Bird Watching Society several times in the past several years. They recorded Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Minjiang Estuary, Jujiang Saltpan and Xiamen Island.

However, most of the places are visited at a low frequency in recent years. Now, Spoon-billed Sandpipers are only regularly recorded in Minjiang Estuary.

Chigang overseas-Chinese-Farm is the most potential place to find out more SBS in future.

Guangdong Province

Shantou is in the northernmost coastal of Guangdong Province. The costal of Shantou City have marsh, mangrove, mudflat and fishpond, so this place is very good habitat for waterfowl.

The west of Guangdong Province has few birders to explore. And the coast of this area is the mangrove, mudflat and fishpond mix together. There are still many good habitats for the waders and Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Guangxi Province:

Fangchenggang City is westernmost of Qinzhou Bay. The costal of Fangchenggang City is good place for waders and other waterfowl.

Very few birders and researchers paid attention to the water bird of the Guangxi coast. This area may still have some surprises since it has suitable habitat for waterbirds.

Hainan Province:

There are not so many good places for the waders in Hainan Island. The eastern coast of Hainan island is the sand beach, and the tourist attractions are distributed everywhere of the eastern coast. The western coast of Hainan Island is underdevelopment area, and some salt pans and mangrove area speared in the western coast.

Changhua Estuary is the best place for shorebirds in Hainnan, although this area is the whole sandy beach, but this will be better than other place in Hainan. Other shorebird places are few mudflats.

Surveyors from HKBWS and KFBG will join the International Black-faced Spoonbill Census 2012 in Hainan. Changhua Estuary, Dongfang BFS Reserve and Yinggehai Saltpan will be their important survey area to search Spoon-billed Sandpiper.



Construction in Yongqiang seashore and Lingkun Island

© Menxiu Tong / China Wild Tour



© Tong Menxiu
China Wild Tour 2011

Dead birds on the nets
©Menxiu Tong / China Wild Tour



© Tong Menxiu
China Wild Tour 2011

Desilting of Mudflat near Jujiang, Xiamen
©Menxiu Tong / China Wild Tour



© Tong Menxiu
China Wild Tour 2011

Mangrove field in Caiqiao Mangrove Reserve, which is prepared for planting back to the mudflat.
©Menxiu Tong / China Wild Tour

5) Summary of 2011 Autumn SBS survey at Xiao Yangkou

Li Jing, Tong Menxiu and Zhang Lin of Rudong Spoon-billed Sandpiper Survey Group

We had the highest SBS count of 103 at Xiao Yangkou in 2011 autumn; this again proves the importance of this stopover for migratory waterbirds and especially the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

The 2011 autumn survey started on August 6th and ended on November 20th, total field work days were 53 days, and we had SBS in 44 days, the peak time were from Sep 26th to Nov 7th, when total 810 SBS were recorded during this period (see Figure 1). The maximum day was on Oct 12th, Tong counted a total of 103 SBS during high tide time; they stayed in the roost area (see Figure 2). The weather in August was against fieldwork, where thunders and heavy rains hold people indoors, however, forerunners of SBS arrived, the first peak counts were on August 27 of 21, and the second peak time was on Oct 12, similar to 2010, we guess SBS are passing by Xiao Yangkou in two waves. And the average stop time is about 7-10 days (see Figure 3).

Unfortunately, very few Juveniles were discovered in autumn. There were 3 first-summer in August. In September, only 1 Juvenile was noticed in continuous 2 days, on October 12, among 103 SBS, only 1 juvenile bird was recorded. There was no juvenile in November. However, there might be more juveniles outside our survey areas.

During 2011 autumn, we total recorded 97 species of waterbird/wetland dependable birds, a total number of 600,000 birds, and 96% are waders; September and October contribute about three fourths of total population. 9 species of endangered water birds and a total number of 10,000 were recorded during this period.

Xiao Yangkou is one of most important stopover for water birds, and a quick conservation action plan is prioritize anything in the coming 2 years. In 2011 the construction speeded up along the 7 kilometers long survey area (see Figure 4); and we lost fresh ponds twice in Spring and Autumn. We ask for an international team to work together for the future to conserve Xiao Yangkou and nearby wetland.

I thank Tong Menxiu and Zhang Lin for their intensive fieldwork and detailed records of birds at Xiao Yangkou, we thank Simon Buckell for his contributions in August, his records of flags are vital to our work at Xiao Yangkou. Special thanks to Tang Zhenghua, his enthusiasm for waterbirds is a great encourage to us and we feel honored that a real local birder joins our team finally.

BirdLife International, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society's conservation workshop were successful in August, we expect more conservation plans in the coming 2012 and more people will involve to keep the unique bird with us for decades.

* Rudong Spoon-billed Sandpiper Survey Group is a sub team of China Coastal Waterbird Census Team (CCWCT); the latter has been working for the survey of China coast area since 2005.

For more information, please visit <http://www.chinabirdnet.org/>

Reference: [1] Simon Buckell, *Yang Kou, August, 2011* [PDF] Sep 26th, 2011

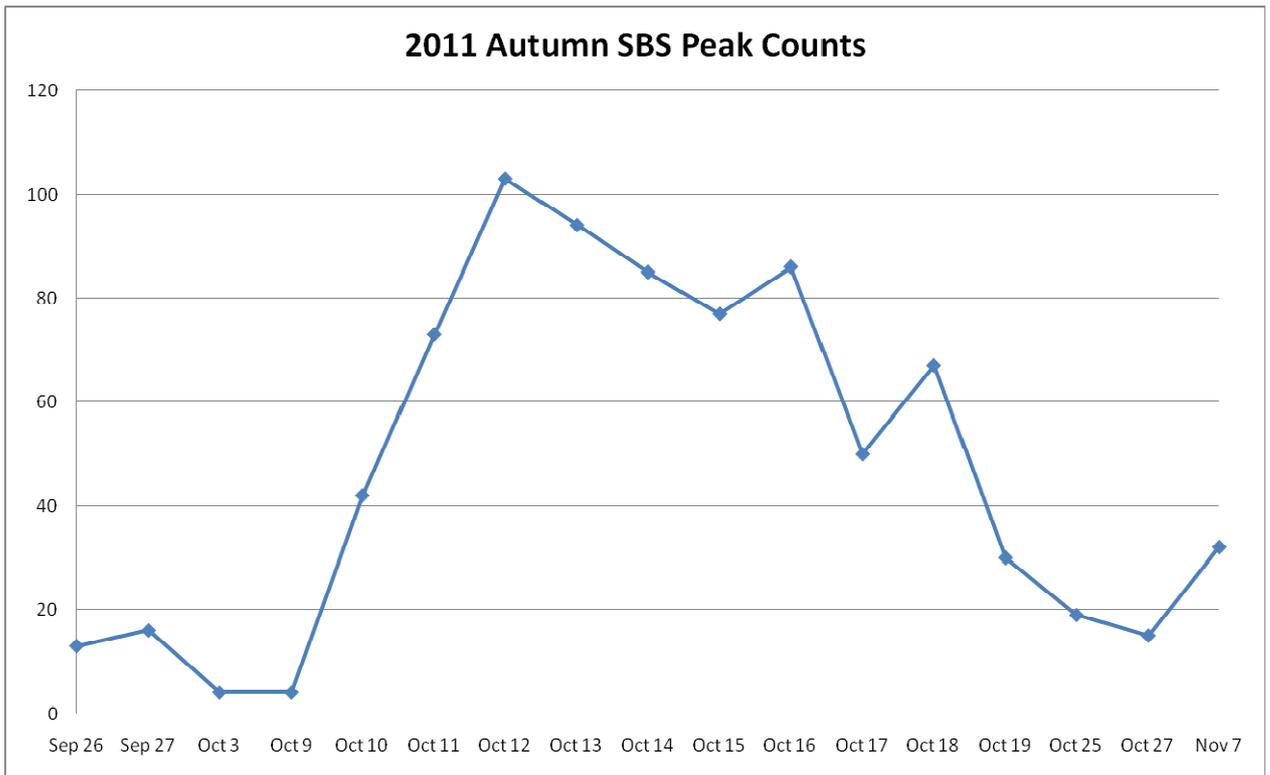


Figure 1



Figure 2: October 12th at high tide roost. Photo by Tong Menxiu © China Wild Tour



Figure 3: November 16, 13 SBS in a flock of waders during high tide. Photo by Tong Menxiu © China Wild Tour



Figure 4: Constructions on the high tide roost area. Photo by Tong Menxiu © China Wild Tour

The latest news are still 67 Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Rudong area on 18 October and the last ones were recorded as late as 20 November.

6) The Disney Project in China

Personal observations of Yangkou and news from the Min Jiang Estuary, China by Barrie Cooper, International Education Manager, RSPB

I was fortunate to visit these sites in August 2011 as part of the BirdLife China Programme Disney Friends For Change project, which is being implemented by the Wild Bird Society of Shanghai, Fujian Bird Watching Society and Hong Kong Bird Watching Society. I was there to do some training of teachers, birdwatching society volunteers and university students with the objective of developing education and awareness programmes about Spoon-billed sandpiper and coastal wetlands. It is essential that local people, including decision-makers, become informed of the importance of the mudflats at Yangkou. Not only do the mudflats provide seafood that the area seems to be locally famous for, it also hosts thousands of migrant waders including Spoon-billed sandpiper.

Because of my work commitments, I had limited time to do much birdwatching at Yangkou. However, I had sufficient time to appreciate what a wonderful site it is. I left with the conclusion that it is vital that Yangkou is prevented from going the same way as most other parts of the Chinese coast. At a meeting with local government officers, including the mayor, I made the point that there is limited time left for the relevant decision-makers to ensure that Yangkou becomes internationally famous for Spoon-billed sandpiper and as a migration hotspot. The spectacle of great knot flocks noisily flying overhead, combined with endangered Nordman's greenshank and other interesting waders feeding less than one hundred metres from the seawall, provides a rich opportunity for birdwatchers to savour this part of the East Asia/Australasian flyway. In addition to the mudflats, on the landward side of the seawall there are some pools and roosting areas that, with the correct management and infrastructure, could create a superb nature reserve that would be enjoyed by schools, local people and tourists. It could become a prime site on the Chinese coast and, being only three hours away from Shanghai, has the potential to provide real ecotourism benefits to the local economy. Unfortunately, this area is designated as a site for a biochemical factory. As someone who has worked on the development of RSPB nature reserves, I can see the potential to develop one of the best coastal nature reserves in the World. It would be wonderful for nature conservation, and Spoon-billed sandpiper in particular, if this dream can become a reality.

I think it is urgent to take these actions at Yangkou to save this SBS site:

- Develop a positive relationship with relevant government officers and other stakeholders to improve their knowledge, understanding and support for ensuring that Yangkou remains an internationally important site on the flyway.
- Reverse the expansion of spartina grass on the mudflats.
- Develop education and awareness programmes targeting local schools, communities, stakeholders and media to highlight the importance of the site and the need for its conservation. This can help to support the advocacy work.
- Promote the vision of creating one of the World's most important coastal nature reserves.

Meanwhile at the Min Jiang Estuary, the Fujian Birdwatching Society has been actively working in schools to promote Spoony's story. When I was there in August I recruited a local ten year old girl (Tina) to the RSPB's Wildlife Explorers club. Since then she has been translating articles from our children's magazine to share with her teachers and classmates. Tina's enthusiasm for birds and SBS has motivated her to work alongside Fujian BWS members to educate children in another school as well. As with other members of the Fujian BWS, she is a wonderful ambassador and communicator for SBS. As awareness of the importance of the Min Jiang Estuary grows, the future for Spoon-billed sandpiper in that part of China will hopefully become more secure. One final piece of good news from here is that there are some wintering there and Tina has now seen her first Spoon-billed sandpipers – she's on her way to become one of China's top ornithologists of the future.



7) A Message from Meinopylgino for the entire flyway

Liza Tambotseva, Birds Russia

Two meetings with local people were organized with help of the 'Friends of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper' local conservation group in Meinypilgyno in summer 2011. The first lecture on Sbs monitoring and captive breeding teams as well as discussions organized on the Sbs conservation issues. In the lectures the goals and tasks of the expedition were described.

Another meeting of about the same content was organized on 5 July 2011 at the local school, where about 40 children, teachers and some other villagers were present (Figure 3.3-2).



Figure 3.3-2. Meeting at the local school in Meinypilgyno on 5 July 2011. Photo: Liza Tambotseva

After the lecture at school, children of Meinypilgyno suggested to ask children in other countries of the SBS flyway (e.g., China, Myanmar, Bangladesh) to tell their parents and other adults not to destroy SBS habitat. They also ask all hunters of the flyway not to kill birds of this kind and to release SBS if they are caught. The children made drawings of a SBS on their balloons and release them in the yard of the school as a symbol of freedom for SBSs (Figure 3.3-3).



Figure 3.3-3. Children of Chukotka are drawing Spoon-billed Sandpipers on balloons and releasing them as a symbol of freedom for the birds. Photo: Liza Tambotseva

The children of Meinypilgyno were asked, what they think about SBS and the captive breeding program. Their answers are as follows:

- Chukotka is a land of wild (not destroyed) nature. Meinypilgyno is a safe place where live rare species of birds and mammals listed in Red Data Books of various ranks. Somewhere else such animals like the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Beluga Whale or seals are extinct or extremely rare, but here, in Meinypilgyno, they still can be seen, and people are welcome to come and see them. It is still not unusual to go to tundra for picking berries and to meet a brown bear.
- There are many birds in Chukotka, especially in Meinypilgyno. We have tundra where Spoon-billed Sandpipers live, and we are proud of this.
- To protect Spoon-billed Sandpipers it is necessary not to destroy nests, smash eggs, catch or kill the birds. Better to keep at a distance from bird nests.
- We hope that Spoon-billed Sandpipers will survive and many of them will live on our land.
- We are proud of Chukotka because birds from different countries come here to nest, and Spoon-billed Sandpipers live only here. We have tundra with Spoon-billed Sandpipers in it.
- To protect Spoon-billed Sandpipers it is necessary to stop their hunting, protect their nests. Children should take care of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and to avoid making a smallest harm to them. Please do not make any harm to this bird!

Apart from the above activities undertaken in Meinypilgyno by the 'Friends of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper' and the SbS expedition team, we consider that arrival of a Heritage Company ship with foreign tourists to see SbS was an important event to the villagers. They were able to see that nature treasures such as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper are the main attractions for tourists on their land, and that coming of tourists is beneficial for them. This gives hope that people will start thinking about a necessity of nature conservation, not only consumption.

8) Sighting of Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the Northern coast of the Sea of Okhotsk

I.V. Dorogoi, Magadan, Russia

Kulik lopaten, the Spoon-billed sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*), is a rare endemic of the Asian part of Beringia, whose numbers in recent years have dramatically reduced. His findings are very limited at the northern part of the Sea of Okhotsk, usually during the autumn, and more rare – in summer migration. For the first time this rare wader was recorded in August 1986 in the Tauy estuary (Kondratyev, 1988). Subsequently there were meetings of single birds in flocks of Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* in August 1994 (our unpublished data) and in September 1995 in the Ola lagoon (Dorogoi, 2001), and in June 2006 in the lower reaches of Shirokaya river, between Jana and Arman rivers (Dorogoi, 2007).

Several more observations can be added to those from our study area. Two birds, feeding in a mixed flock with Red-necked Stint in central part of Ola lagoon, on August 28, 2010, were observed and photographed by A. Krechmar (personal communication). A single bird (Fig. 1) and a pair of these rare waders in mixed flock with Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis*, Dunlin *C. alpina* and Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea* (Fig. 2) were observed in the northern part of the Ola lagoon (59°35'N, 151°24'E), respectively, on August 31 and September 3, 2011.

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9) Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) survey at the staging site in the south of Sakhalin, May 2011

Pavel Kitorov, IMGG FEB RAS,

SBS is long-distance migrant, therefore efficient conservation efforts on this species requires complete information on the migration connectivity, distribution on breeding, wintering grounds and location of important stopover sites. Pre-breeding records of SBS are regular on several locations of Sakhalin Island both during spring and fall migrations (Nechaev, 1991, Tab.1), therefore it is safe to assume that stopovers on the island are of importance for successful migration of this critically endangered species. Available information suggest that SBS cover migration distance along a narrow 'corridor' of stopover sites (Tomkovich 1990), making SBS vulnerable to habitat change/destruction along the flyway.

A survey of literature and unpublished records of SBS in Sakhalin is summarized in Tab. 1. Based on the results we selected one location for our SBS survey: Aniva Gulf near the mouth of the Rivers Srednaja, Tsunay, Susuja, so called Lososey Bay. The choice was based on several records of SBS groups in this site, during 70-th and 80-th (Nechaev 1991), and some recent observations of single birds during last decades. (Tab.1). However, that might be result of observation bias, SBS was registered at many tidal flats on Sakhalin, but observation efforts were unevenly different within those locations. It is safe to assume that SBS consistently use several bays and lagoons along the coast of Sakhalin, where stopover waders are concentrated in high numbers. Nevertheless, advantage of our observation place is that it is relatively easy accessible and in close vicinity of the regional capital – Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk.

The project was developed by Birds Russia and the Sakhalin Research Institute (IMGG FEB Russian Academy of Sciences).

Tab. 1. SBS sightings at fall and spring stopover sites, Sakhalin Island

Number	Date	Site	Source
7	25.05.1995	Aniva gulf, Lososey bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
singles	25-26.05.1977	Terpenia bay	Nechaev 1991
3 to 30	27-30.05.1977	Terpenia bay	Nechaev 1991
200	30.05 – 1.06. 1979	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Nechaev 1991
10	20.05.1988	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Nechaev 1991
10	27.05.1987	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Nechaev 1991
1	20-25.07.1909	Viachtu bay	Chersky, 1915, in Nechaev 1991
20	31.07.1987	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Nechaev 1991
singles	12.07.1987	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Nechaev 1991
singles	23-26.08.1989	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Nechaev 1991
11	27.05.1995	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
8	01.08.1979	Sakhalin bay, Rybnoe willage	Nechaev 1991
	08.08.1926	Terpenia cape, Kotikovo	Yamashina, 1928 in Nechaev 1991
	19.08.1947	Aniva gulf	Gizenko, 1955
	09.10.1914	Aniva gulf	Munsterhjelm, 1922 in Nechaev 1991

	09.10.1926	Poronaysk	Momiyama 1928 in Nechaev 1991
1	19.08.2009	Odoptu bay	Tiunov .I M, Blochin A. J. 2011
1	27.08.2009	Odoptu bay	Tiunov .I M, Blochin A. J. 2011
1	19.08.2010	Odoptu bay	Tiunov .I M, Blochin A. J. 2011
1	29.05.1995	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
1	28 .05.2008	Chayvo bay	Tiunov .I M, Blochin A. J. 2011
1	20.06.2011	Nabil bay	Tiunov .I M, Blochin A. J. pers. comm.
1	17.08.2011	Odoptu bay	Tiunov .I M, Blochin A. J. pers. comm.
1	28.08.2010	Aniva gulf Lososey bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
1	21.09.1989	Lunsky bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
4	22-23.08.1990	Lunsky bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
1	02.09.2000	Nyisky bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
1	16.09.2000	Nyisky bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm
1	14,16.09.2000	Nyisky bay	Zykov V. B., Reviakina Z. V., pers.comm

Location and logistics

Fig.1.i Shows the survey area in the north of Aniva gulf, 19 km from the capitol Yughno-Sakhalinsk in southern Sakhalin.

Fig.1.ii Road map showing optional ways to survey site. The area of highest concentrations of waders highlighted by red, locations of destroyed bridges are marked by green dots and yellow circle marks the place where SBS was sighted.

Fig.1.i

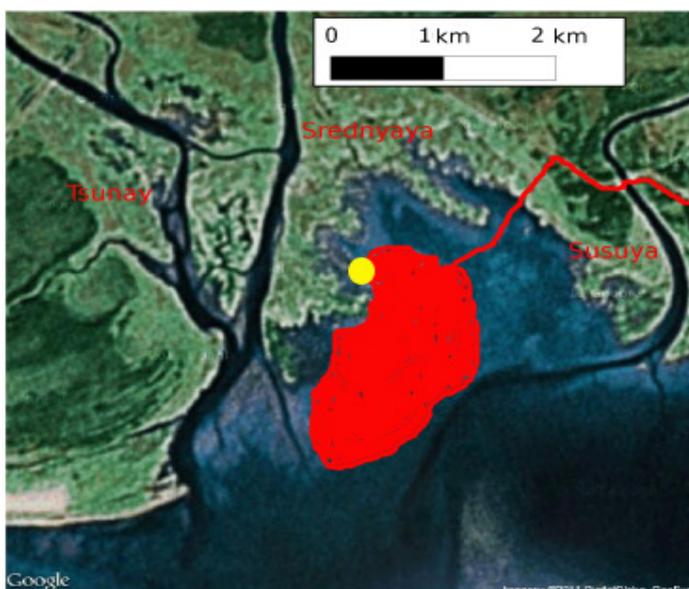
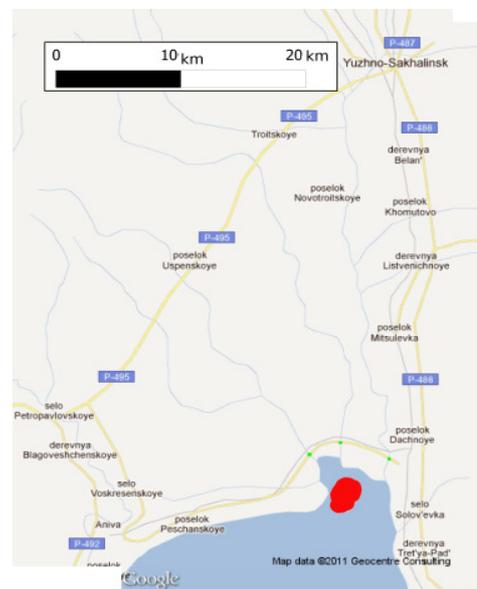


Fig.1.ii



The bridges across the Susuya, Tsunay and Sredniaja Rivers are completely destroyed (Fig.2), so a boat is required to access survey site both from the west and from the east.



Fig.2. Destroyed bridges across Susuja River

Habitats

Survey site is typical tidal flat, useful form many species of waders during migration. During high-tide, the area is covered with water completely, during low tide however substantial areas of mud flats are exposed (Fig.3). Mud flats are crossed by streams in the corner where 3 rivers meet the Aniva gulf. Coasts of the bay in this location are overgrown by reed beds, and surrounded by birch, larch and spruce woodlands (Fig.4).

Figs.3 & 4. Habitats in the survey site during high and low tide periods



Methods

We performed 4 trips to the survey site, with 5 days spent in the field: 19.05.2011, 26.05.2011, 28.05.2011, 29.05.2011. We made all efforts to scan flocks of small *Calidris* species with a scope, mainly Red-Necked Stints in order to identify SBS and to get kind of index of SBS number.

Results and discussion

The total number of waders was decreasing during the observation period (Fig.5), from more than 3000 at 19.05.11 to 1500 at 26.05.2011 and dropped to 700 both at 28.05 and 29.05.2011.

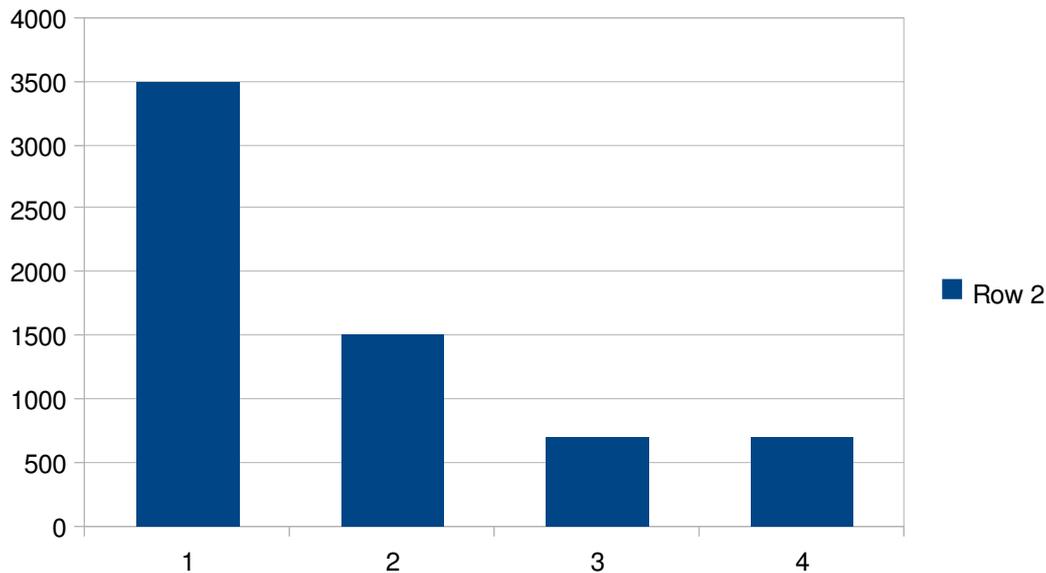


Fig. 5. Total number of stopover waders in the survey site. 1- 19.05.11, 2-26.05.2011, 3 – 28.05, 4- 29.05.2011

However, species composition was changing substantially from one day to another (Fig. 6).

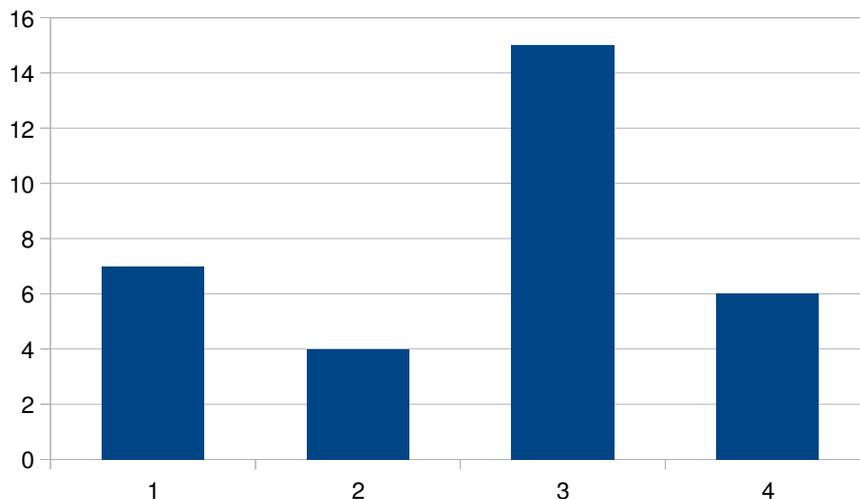


Fig.6. Species diversity. 1- 19.05.11, 2-26.05.2011, 3 – 28.05, 4- 29.05.2011.

Majority of waders at stopover site were Dunlins (*Calidris alpina*) and Red-Necked Stints (*Calidris ruficollis*). At the first day of survey, Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) was the most numerous species of waders (approximately 80 % of stopover waders). Red-Necked Stints composed less than 10 %. At the late May, the situation changed: Red-Necked Stints were most numerous waders (around 60 %) and Dunlins composed less than 40 % of shorebirds. Other species of waders were rare and did not affect much composition of stopover community.

The full list of recorded waders recorded at the survey site: Grey Plover, Little ringer Plover, Mongolian Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank, Redshank, Wandering Tattler, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Temminck's Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Great Knot, Sanderling, Common Snipe, Latham's Snipe, Eurasian and Far Eastern Curlews, Bar-tailed Godwit . Sharp-Tailed sandpiper and Far Eastern Curlew are enlisted in regional Red Data Book.

Spoon-Billed Sandpiper

We managed to record only one individual of SBS during our survey, at 29.05.2011. Surprisingly, the bird did not join flocks of closely related Red-Necked Stints, but was observed in small group of roosting Mongolian Plovers (5 individuals). They were roosting and cleaning feathers at a distance around 50 m from the bigger flock of foraging waders (around 400 individuals). The SBS did not forage, so no data on foraging behavior was collected. Observations of SBS lasted 30 seconds from a distance of 60 m, then the recorded individual moved away with other waders and changed location on tidal flats. Around 300 Red-Necked Stints were checked for SBS.

Weather during spring 2011 and waders

2011 might be not representative for evaluating the study site as a stopover site for waders and particularly SBS. Snowfall on 7 and 14 May and low temperatures created weather conditions more typical for April in the south of Sakhalin. Passage of waders was undoubtedly delayed. At end of May weather improved substantially, and favorable tail wind could trigger departure of waders from stopover sites and decrease number of landing birds. That might be an explanation for low species diversity at the beginning of survey, and low numbers of waders at the end of survey.

Hunting pressure on waders

Survey site is traditional area for waterfowl hunting. Duck blinds surround the tidal flats with intervals between them around 300 -500 m. The first day of survey overlapped in time with spring hunting season. Nevertheless, I found no evidence for hunting pressure on stopover waders. All observed hunters were following rules of spring hunting: hunt from blinds only, no walking. The preferred duck hunting time in this area is at high tide, when water stays close to the reed beds and waders are virtually absent during this period. Other protecting factor is that all bridges across nearest rivers are destroyed, and that limits number of hunters.

Recommendations for further SBS survey and monitoring work

On the basis of SBS records, it is safe to conclude that the survey site is used regularly by SBS for stopovers. However, the current number of SBS is so low that it is impossible to collect valuable information on stopover ecology and migration connectivity of this species by observations in the single site. Other challenge is that this species is similar to common Red-Necked Stint, and due to high mobility of foraging flocks might be overlooked.

For further survey of SBS at Sakhalin, I suggest to extend spatial scope of studies and carry out survey of SBS numbers and potential hunting pressure at other sites on Sakhalin, where SBS was sighted previously and/or habitats are suitable for this species. It is important to repeat the survey in Aniva Gulf next year as weather conditions of spring 2011 were abnormal and may not be representative as well as better understood logistics may improve the work in spring 2012.

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10) Towards a secure wintering ground for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Bangladesh

Sayam U. Chowdhury & Mohammad Foyzal

Starting in September 2010, a series of surveys were conducted to identify hunters and alternative livelihood options for them in Sonadia Island. After a solid year of background work, the team of the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project finally signed conservation agreements with 25 active shorebird hunters of the island between October and December 2011. A SBS conservation agreement ceremony was held on 7 October 2011, where initially eight hunters signed agreement in presence of the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (Sub-district Executive Officer of Government of Bangladesh), local leaders, Village Conservation Group executive members, local NGO staff, shorebird hunters, and Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project team. Later on, an additional 17 hunters signed up to the scheme by December 2011.



Fig.1. A Lesser Sand Plover caught in noose trap on Sonadia



Fig.2. A hunter signing the agreement during the ceremony

Eight "Professional", ten "Opportunistic" and seven "Occasional" hunters (Professional= 50-100% of income from bird hunting, Opportunistic=20-49% and Occasional=0-19%) of Sonadia Pochimpara, Ghotibhanga, Tajiakata, Demibunipara and Borodia villages have signed agreements to stop shorebird hunting and protect them instead. Village Conservation Groups (VCG) of these villages will be in charge of monitoring and hunters will repay a small percentage of the income generated by the alternative livelihood to their VCG over the next 24 months. The respective VCGs will then use this money for further hunting mitigation and shorebird conservation awareness within these villages. The entire process will be monitored and guided by the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project of Bangladesh Bird Club.

Hunters who have taken alternative livelihood support agreed that all of their family members shall not hunt, net, capture, sell, poison, kill or harm any bird. Instead, they will strongly protect birds from any sort of threat including hunting, habitat destruction and assist nature conservation movements in their villages. Also a few of them took responsibility specifically to guard and monitor bird hunting activities at nearby shorebird sites and these newly ex-hunters will visit these sites one day every week by rotation. In addition, they now understand that birds are completely protected under Bangladesh law and confirmed that they will comply with the law. If any of the above mentioned points are disobeyed then the agreement will be discontinued, the former hunters will have to return the funds given to them and they will also be exposed for possible legal actions against them.



Fig.3. An ex-hunter working at the watermelon field, Oct 2011



Fig.4. Watermelon seed germinated, Dec 2011

Alternative livelihood options taken up include fishing boat, net, livestock, watermelon cultivation, grocery and tailoring (sewing machine) shops. After providing watermelon seeds and fertilizers as the first set of alternatives for shorebird hunters of Sonadia Pachimpara in October 2011, a revisit to the village in December 2011 revealed that the hunters were extremely busy in the watermelon fields and they completely stopped hunting.

Future actions will include a massive awareness campaign in five targeted villages, monitoring activities of ex-hunters and engaging them for further motivation, and hunting surveys in additional villages to investigate the scale of shorebird hunting. In addition, regular monitoring of shorebirds including wintering, passaging and over-summering Spoon-billed Sandpiper will be carried out on Sonadia Island and new areas around the island will be searched.

Fig.5. Nordmann's Greenshank : a regular winter visitor of Sonadia Island



11) Sandpiper survey in southern Vietnam

Between November 29th and December 24th 2011 the first Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) survey in southern Vietnam was conducted by Birds Russia and University of Sciences, National University of Ho Chi Minh City according with Agreement between Birds Russia and Indochina Programme of BirdLife International funded by Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). Before survey we have received from ArcCona and Gill Bunting the general map of the Mekong Delta and adjoining territories and satellite images on which sites recommended visiting were marked because those sites should be potentially suitable for wintering SBS. SBS was recorded in one of those sites (Can Gio area, Long Hoa District) on April 3, 2011 by Nguyen Hoai Bao and in November 2011 by Jonathan Ch. Eames.

Our team consisted of 3 Russian and one Vietnamese ornithologist. For the first 3 weeks, one Vietnamese student accompanied us as well. He learnt to identify and count shorebirds taking into account possible future monitoring into areas important for waders and SBS. We surveyed outer parts of Saigon River Delta and Thanh An island (Ho Chi Minh Province, Long Hoa District), several outer parts of Mekong River Delta situated in Tieng Giang, Ben Tre and Tra Vinh Provinces and the most western Vietnamese sea coast at the Mu Ca Mau National Park and Dat Mui settlement vicinity (Ca Mau Province).

After 18 days of unsuccessful searches we did record SBS finally. They were found on two sites within one area that is situated at both sides of one of the main branches of the Mekong River Delta. At least 5 Spoon-billed Sandpiper were recorded on December 17, on the outland mudflat located at the main branch of Mekong near from Tan Thanh village and small town Go Gong (Tieng Giang Province) and 3 we found out on December, 20 on mudflat of the offshore Ngang island at the contrary side same Mekong's branch situated in Tieng Giang Province as well. Co-ordinates of the first record are 10°16'10,8" N, and 106°46'16,2" E, the second ones are 10°13'27" N and 106°46'54" E. The distance between these two places is about 6 km.

We consider that it was two different groups of SBS because species compositions and numbers of waders of the both sites were different to each other but the same for each site according double (twice) checking in different dates.

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Eugeny A. Koblik,
Nikolai N. Yakushev (all Birds Russia)

12) British Birdfair 2011

For the third time the Task Force was present at the British Birdfair. This year it was noticeable that the species has raised much more attention and it featured at many stands, most prominently with videos from the breeding season from Gerrit Vyn at the stand of Cornell Lab. Despite our amateurish efforts we won third price for the Best Stand Award for Conservation.



13) Latest news

Preliminary results from two expeditions to survey wintering birds raised hopes that the hunting mitigation work might have impacted on the numbers of waders and Spoon-billed sandpiper. On Nan Thar island at least 25 birds were observed on January 25, while on the southern edge of the Gulf of Martaban, at Ahlat at the Salween River mouth 4 – 8 birds and many more waders than usual have been counted. More detailed reports from this expedition and the encouraging results from the World Wetland Day in Myanmar's capitol Nay Piy Taw and other stories will follow in the next newsletter.