

EAAFP SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER TASK FORCE WORKSHOP, PALEMBANG, INDONESIA, 23-24 MARCH 2012

For two days back to back to the 6th EAAFP meeting of the Parties the Task Force held its 12th meeting in Palembang, Indonesia with a record 38 participants from 14 different nations. The meeting focussed on developing the workplan for the coming two to three years to implement, update and revise the Action Plan. Matters related to the hunting issue as well as improved surveys and monitoring dominated the workshop, but the current IUCN synthesis analysis of coastal habitat loss naturally featured strongly in the discussions. All countries and regions reported on the status and conservation progress and it was good to see how much progress has been made over the last two years. It was also good to see so many new members, mostly from China, but also from Vietnam and Thailand. Particularly welcoming was the stronger representation of governmental reps, namely Russia, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand and Bangladesh. A detailed account of the reports and discussion can be found below:

INTRODUCTION BY EVGENY SYROECHOVSKY

The formation of Task Force is a good example of bottom up approach: A small group of interested individuals established in 2004 gradually developed to full Task Force.

2010 – New Era – SBS RT finding home under EAAFP and transferring to EAAFP TF with the key role of Birdlife – RSPB stepping in – WWT initiate conservation breeding programme. We still face a lot of unknown facts. We need to fill these gaps if we want to be successful.

Data gaps in sightings from Sept Oct and spring. Why so few recent records from Bohai Bay?

Do SBS migrate over Thai peninsula? Or even direct from Bangladesh and Myanmar to Yellow Sea?

If pop estimates are correct – 120 pairs (400-500 birds), still missing 80% of bird stopovers in spring, 70% in autumn, 50% in winter.

Wintering – other possibilities – Sumatra?, Myanmar?, Vietnam?, Sundabarns?, Sri Lanka?
(huge flocks of waders recently found - 100 000s)

SUMMARY OF COUNTRY FEEDBACK SESSIONS.

RUSSIA Evgeny Syroechkovskiy

Range has contracted over the last two decades – for example the species no longer breeds on Belyaka Spit – 36 pairs were recorded in 1987 and only 1 recorded in 2009 and not in 2011 .

Meinypil'gyno in South Chukotka appears to be the current key site. 60+ pairs in 2003 but this has rapidly declined to 15 pairs in 2008 and levelled to 12-13 pairs in 2011.

Over the last 10 years 470 individuals have been ringed/colour marked. There have been 18 recoveries in 7 non-breeding countries. No longer ringed to reduce disturbance.

Breeding ground monitoring coverage – some gaps on Koryak Hills (especially the moraine hills) and also a couple of segments west of Belyaka Spit. There are 41 known sbs breeding locations; 28 have visited more than twice, 18 no birds subsequently found, and 10 numbers declined.

Current population estimate is 35 (realistic – last maximum count of pairs) - 122 pairs (optimistic – max number of pairs recorded plus estimates for uncounted sites).

Estimated 15-30 pairs for Meinypilgyno count segment (30 includes additional pairs in moraine hills).

3-30 pairs on Koryak coast south of Meinypilgyno (includes additional pairs in moraine hills).

Predictive modelling – suggested lots of suitable habitat in Alaska. Also in bay to the north west of Kamchatka (v few ornithological surveys there ever and no resident ornithologists).

Good potential and unsurveyed breeding habitats south of Meinopyl'gino.

Heritage Expedition is surveying main sites on Koryak coast for two more years.

There remains the threat of collection for taxidermy and also by egg collectors on the breeding grounds. Conflict with involving the local people in conservation in case they are lured by earnings from collectors.

Conservation breeding initiated in 2011 led by WWT. Needs to be integrated with habitat protection and hunting mitigation on non-breeding grounds.

12 individuals now in captivity in UK.

Non-breeding work – stop-over sites in spring and autumn. Hunting (shooting) is a threat on stopover sites within Russia. Focus on geese and ducks, but if few will target waders. Need survey work and awareness raising. The non-breeding sites in Russia potentially overlap with breeding Nordmann's Greenshank.

JAPAN

Minoru Kashiwagi

Current trend – shorebird survey (1974-85 – WBSJ). Average autumn number in Japan was c40/pa. (51,000 shorebirds in total/pa). In 2000 and 2001 – only 6 seen each year. There are many observers of tidal flat areas in Japan so the species is probably not overlooked. From 1960 – 2009 the trend shows a possible increase that peaked in 2004 & 2005, and has declined since.

Legal status – in Japan; red list, threatened for extinction 1A – corresponds to CR in IUCN criteria.

Sightings up to 2000 – sightings widespread throughout Japan. Now sightings in northern part of Japan with 2006-2009 - 4, 12, 8, 7. On average, 7 records. Most sightings in winter are of juveniles.

Key monitoring tools are the 1) shorebird survey 2) National Monitoring 1000 project, and 3) seasonal surveys which covers 100+ sites on northward and southward migration. Undertaken by local birdwatchers, co-ordinated by national government and NGOs.

There is currently no Spoon-billed sandpiper National SAP

Key threats in Japan are development and reclamation of habitat

Current activities focus on monitoring in Japan and also supporting benthos monitoring in the Gulf of Mottama with BANCA.

Financial support is mainly from Keidanran Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF).

Future activities need to focus on awareness raising activities, monitoring and collaboration within Japan. In addition to continuing the benthos monitoring work with BANCA in Myanmar.

SOUTH KOREA (ROK) Nial Moores

Complete migrant (records in April-May and Aug-Sept) no surveys in June or July (are they there?). Largest numbers seen in the end of May. (In SSMP work – the survey period finished before the peak time of sbs in ROK in breeding plumage). Also records of 2nd year birds and believe that they over summer in Yellow Sea.

Difficult to age the birds in autumn – change plumage rapidly

Assessed as declining over the long-term and during the last decade. Data doesn't show a step-change in the rate of decline.

Data insufficient to identify short-term trends.

In ROK – 16 important inter-tidal areas with varying degrees of reclamation. Most sites have some reclamation or coastal barrage. More than 50-60% lost in last decade. All rivers have barrage/dam in place.

Last year (2011) SBS were observed at 3 sites on the west coast - 1) Geum Estuary (all juveniles); 2) Saemangeum (5 birds Sept 2011 - juveniles) – close to sea wall; 3) Gomso Bay (2-4 birds in last two years – juveniles).

Pre Saemangeum reclamation there were 75 birds recorded of which 73 were adults.

The Nakdong Estuary on the south-east coast is also an important site for SBS. The outer part of the estuary has, in parts, a sandy/silt mix.

Legal protection – SBS is classified as top category for species protection but in practice this doesn't influence development proposals which remain the key threat in ROK.

There is no hunting in ROK

The three remaining sites on the west coast are Ramsar but threat of development remains high.

Counting of main sites by Birds Korea in 2010 and 2011. Plus make request for additional records. Feeding study initiated in 2011 and funding in place for some more work in 2012.

There is no National SAP/working group.

Current threats – Saemangeum continues to be reclaimed and no tidal exchange in early 2012. (Still an opportunity for some restoration but sbs not being considered)

Substrates at Geum estuary changing due to Saemangeum

Roost sites at Geum Estuary heavily disturbed by people – including photographers.

Increasing construction in hinterland of Gomso Bay

Nakdong Estuary – airport proposal and increased shipping

Pollution may be a threat

Current and planned activities include awareness raising within ROK. Also a feeding study will commence in 2012 funded through an RSPB/Birdfair small grant, combine with work in China and do publicity at WCC. Continue to receive small donations.

Work in ROK needs more funding as well as technical support.

Need more information sharing and collaboration between Task Force members. The information flow needs to be two-way. Nial pointed out that he didn't know what the Task Force is! Offered to be Species Guardian. Didn't like the fact that BL puts out press releases without communicating this to Partners / Birds Korea.

CHINA: (Rudong, Shanghai) Li Jing

The species is not specifically protected in Rudong

Rudong is an inter-tidal area which has been identified for development of chemical industry; phase 1 is completed, and phase 2 is underway (pollution from the chemical plant is threat). Spartina invasion is ongoing and worsening.

The area is an important stopover site. 8 SBS found in 2008. Systematic monitoring began in 2010. Not protected. 21 highest spring day count. 103 highest autumn count in autumn. Surveyed 50km north and 50km south, partly funded by EAAFP. Australian models suggest 137 birds pass through. Present for 3.5 months early Aug – early Nov. Most are ads or 1st summers. Few juvs in both spring and autumn. Leg flag birds recorded from Sakhalin and Chukotka were found in springs of 2010 and 2011

No wintering in Rudong.

Not protected species in China. 1988 Wildlife protection law (but sbs not on it) – currently revising the list. Two levels of threat. SBS likely to be added to the highest level of protection after current round of revision (maybe in 2 years time). (BUT, in 2000 State Forestry Authority recognise protection – but only at low level).

Current monitoring – monthly as part of Chinese coastal waterbird census

No SAP/working group in China

Threats (see above). Land-use pressure minimises high tide roosts

Current/planned activities:

Conservation activities funded by Disney – 1) env education, 2) birdfair in 3 cities, 3) Roundtable in Rudong. Surveys planned for spring 2012 at Yan Cheng and Wen Zhou funded by US FWS.

Need funding beyond Disney and USFWS. Need to get legal protection – nature reserve, sanctuary and scientific research and monitoring sites.

SBS has only low level of protection in China. Text produced in 1960s, list announced in 1988. Being reviewed at the moment. GTBs will be protected but will take 1-2 years. Chemical factory under construction will discharge on to the mudflats!!

CHINA: (Minjiang Estuary, Fujian province) Gao Chuan

Not a big site c5km long 3km wide. Muddy and sandy, part of delta system, rich in food, waders and egrets abundant (can be difficult to pick up in large flocks of waders. On high tides flocks become compact and easier to find/survey. (Also important for Chinese Crested Tern).

2010-12 survey project; Sept 2010 – May 2012; 1 or 2 visits every two weeks. Hour before high tide to 1.5hours after high tide. Arrive in October. Rare to find in April, all leave in May. Some winter – 10-14. Some moulting in March. Mix with Dunlin and Sanderling, appear to feed on small crabs.

Key threats in the estuary is coastal development, particularly industrial. The spread of Spartina is a key threat. Pollution from development could be a problem. Hunting has been observed, but not necessarily targeting SBS.

Activities – monitoring. Education with children, and working with local media. Through the media introduce flagship sp – eg SBS & Chinese Crested Tern. Undertake beach cleaning in autumn. Report illegal hunting

CHINA : Disney's Friends for Change Vivian Fu

There is a need to continue monitoring; environmental education, increase public awareness; more communication between NGOs and Government.

CHINA: (Hong Kong & Hainan) Yu Yat Tung

Regular spring visitor – Mai Po used to attract birders to see the bird. Mai Po regular survey since late 90's until now (probably under-recorded as they mix with many other small waders). Number of birds have declined.

Mudflats are expanding and thus the birds may be re-distributing further away from observers. There maybe a number of SBS being missed.

CHINA- general note - in some areas in southern China – mangrove planting on tidal flats is underway – leading to habitat loss.

THAILAND Wichyanan Limparungparththanakij

Protected under Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act since 1992. It is classified as EN on the Thailand Red-list of threatened species (2005)

In last 10-15 years find about 8-20 individuals per year. Probably no change in numbers on Thailand. Gulf of Thailand,

Arrive in mid Oct, leave mid March until 1st or 2nd week April

Protected by law but enforcement is low. Decrease in illegal hunting in recent years. Improvement of protection by local communities in some areas, partly due to increased awareness of the species threat status.

Use inter-tidal mudflats at low tide, but move to saltpans at high tides (occasionally will forage in the pans all day)

Annual midwinter counts (AWC) undertaken since 2005-12. 17 individuals were recorded from 8 out of 50 sites surveyed.

A national action plan developed in 2010. Implemented by BCST in collaboration with Dept of Marine and Coastal Resources (2011-2013). Good co-operation between BCST and Thailand Government agencies.

Current threats – urban and industrial development. Coastal erosion and mangrove planting. Hunting and trapping.

Current activities – raise public awareness, media such as TV programmes. Printing and distribution of leaflets. Education in universities, high and elementary schools as well as school teachers and the general public. Utilise Pak Thale Bird and Nature Center as the centre of information and learning focussing on the livelihood of local communities and its importance as an ecosystem to shorebirds.

Need to identify the important sites and increase their public recognition. Designate protected areas: Khom Kham & Samut Sakhon to become Ramsar sites.

Propose and benthos analysis between foraging and artificially similar non-foraging sites. Analysis of the relationship between behaviour and time use.

Develop a Bird Conservation Status Report using GIS.

Need ongoing funding for survey work and awareness raising activities.

VIETNAM Vladimir Morozov, Nguyen Van Thang

The species is not protected in Vietnam.

The Mekong Delta is probably a key site. In 2011 SBS were recorded in April and also November. There are other suitable coastal areas that need surveying

In Vietnam SBS use saltpans as well as inter-tidal habitats

Up to 8 SBS were recorded in small numbers at Tan Thanh and Ngang Island between the 17 – 20th December 2011. Funds from CEPF for 2011 survey (followed Russian surveys of Red River Delta in 2009).

Current trends can't be estimated as data deficient

Current threats are likely to include habitat disturbance through shell fishing and human use inter-tidal areas.

There is some hunting but it is not clear what the impact is on waders or SBS.

Future threats – tourism development, future hydropower development of rivers impacting the deltas.

There is currently no national SBS SAP.

Funds for survey work and studies are required. Also technical support and capacity building to undertake surveys.

MYANMAR Tony Htin Hla

From the 2007 SAP it was recognised that there was insufficient information on SBS numbers and distribution from Myanmar. This stimulated survey work undertaken in Myanmar from 2008.

1st week in January 2008 (9 SBS seen in Martaban on west coast; 38 seen on east coast)

Rakhine team (NanThar Island) recorded 35 SBS.

Then in January 2009 (Martaban & Rakhine again) 47 & 14 respectively. This is when bird hunting was noticed in Nan Thar. Undertook socio-economic surveys to identify extent of hunting in Bay of Martaban in 2010. Identified hunters, and then developed alternative livelihood agreements (boats, fishing nets, ice-boxes, engines).

Team in January 2010. 12 to 16 SBS in NanThar. 74 and extrapolated 180 in Martaban. 1 in Irrawady. Hunting significantly reduced by 2011. Benthos surveys commenced in 2011 with support by Minoru funded by Keidenran.

In Myanmar all water-birds are seasonally protected, and SBS is totally protected.

Some good habitat still to be protected. Promoting Martaban as a Ramsar site, and hoping to get adopted this year for CoP11. Martaban is one of the worlds most important site for SBS, hosts at least 50% of global sbs population. BANCA will work closely with MOECAAF supported by Task Force and BirdLife/RSPB to develop the paperwork for Ramsar process for Martaban and Nan Thar Island.

Threats to Martaban – Deep sea port on southern edge near Moulmein. Oil and gas exploration. Migrant hunters from other places. Unsustainable fishing.

Next actions Local Conservation Groups. Further surveys.

Conservation actions at Nan Thar. Threats include sand extraction for Deep sea port development in Sittwe and still occasional illegal hunting by migrants from other places. Eco-tourism is developing and with support of Lighthouse Foundation further promoted.

BANGLADESH Sayam Chowdhury

Recovery Team, now Task Force started survey in 2006 and found 11 birds at 3 sites. SBS is considered a rare winter visitor to Bangladesh. But surveys since 2009 suggest it is a regular winter visitor and Bangladesh is a key range state for wintering birds. Sonadia Island is a key site.

Population steady since 2009. Spring survey in 2010 49 inds.

The species is protected by Bangladesh Wildlife Preservation Act, but no enforcement

No National SAP, but there is a national working group that is active.

Key threat is hunting and trapping. Noose traps is most typical method of catching shorebirds.

Deep sea port is biggest threat to Sonadia , proposed for 2014, overlaps with key sites for sbs. But will also change hydro-dynamics of the whole system.

Hunting mitigation work is effective. Over 25 hunters have signed agreements to stop.

Large-scale awareness education in and around Sonadia Island throughout 2012.

Need a map to show which mudflats should be excluded from mangrove planting (KEY ACTION).

Funds secured until Dec 2013 through US FWS and SOS funds from IUCN

New surveys needed. GIS satellite data followed up by aerial survey to ID possible sites.

INDIA S. Balachandran

Western most range of sbs, but few recent records. None in last three years.

All birds protected by Indian Wildlife Act

Fishing villages in Point Calimere (1-2 SBS annually until 2004) – will catch waders during migratory season.

Monitoring at Point Calimere are three times each year for all waterbirds.

Bird migration study centre at Point Calimere

Threats – degradation of coastal mudflats, and conversion into saltpans, mangrove plantation, aquaculture. Saltpans are for both local industry but also national big businesses.

Notes from hunting working group

What has worked well:

(Thailand): not serious for shorebirds, but inland areas. All birds protected by law.

Use volunteers to discuss with hunters about law and how birds shouldn't be hunted. BCST does direct awareness raising and then use police to inform.

Shrimp farmers put up nets to protect stocks – volunteers advise shrimp farmers to make nets more visible, also use cds to 'scare' away birds. Could use larger mesh nets. Small waders are by-catch.

(India): three type of nets (noose/clap traps/nets). Pay trappers to catch birds for banding instead of killing – 8 families.

(China): 10,000 birds killed in Rudong (nets). No mitigation work being done yet. Maybe not such a big problem for shorebirds?

(Myanmar): mitigation east coast work well – people are less wealthy, so extra money is useful. Doesn't work well on west coast. On west coast use enforcement as they don't necessarily require financial incentive.

What has not worked

(India) – others now trapping birds so they can get paid!!

(Myanmar) – need appropriate alternative livelihood that they want – they need a choice, not just fishing. Also new hunters emerging – attracts nomadic shorebird hunters.

What lessons learned

What level of awareness raising should be undertaken prior to the introduction of the alternative livelihoods?

Identify what drives the hunters to hunt shorebirds (different drivers will have different solutions).

Need the awareness raising to be followed up by concrete actions/resources, and need for long-term sustainability. (eg Bangladesh – hunters reverted back to hunting when funding dried up). Eg micro-credit.

Take lessons from other alternative livelihood programmes.

Bangladesh: Developing LCGs – need to get the membership and structure right for them to be effective, need elders with influence and cross section of community, and men and women.

Bangladesh – involve the former hunters in the delivery of awareness raising campaigns.

Also, need close monitoring of the hunters. What do hunters do outside the shorebird season. Need year round livelihoods, not just in the shorebird season.

Need to involve social scientists in the socio-economic aspects of the work, not just shorebird biologists. Need to understand each others perspective; need to work together in partnership. Needs to be iterative.

Community needs to have a stake in the conservation output. Community led.

Link between alternative income through eco-tourism. So, preventing hunting but birdwatchers come and see the birds and bring money into the local community. Possible in Nanthar and Sonadia.

Help local communities feel part of a global movement to protect the spoon-billed sandpiper. Need specific education and awareness raising to develop this. A short video from each country across the flyway. Also, school exchange from breeding grounds, migration routes and wintering grounds.

Gaps in knowledge and next steps

Need a workshop on hunting across the flyway region

Are any part of shorebirds used in Chinese medicine?

Need an assessment of the problem in China, maybe focus on current key known sites along Chinese coast.

(NOTE - Hunting as a threat is often overlooked. Need to repeat and follow up - Talk directly with local communities).

Fisheries based alternative livelihoods are more complex than land-based initiatives – what lessons are there from elsewhere.

Questions/points – bird hunting is an issue in Caribbean, parts of south American, and Africa – are there lessons that can be learned from across the world.

SURVEY WORKSHOP NOTES

Only western Kamchatka not frozen in May. Need analysis of intertidal areas in western Kamchatka.

Concentrations of waders in Sea of Okhotsk but poor coverage

Birds start to arrive in S. Korea in August. Largest nos recorded in late Sept. (but best counting conditions). Large proportion used to migrate directly into the part of the Yellow Sea that we know about. Now could be staging in the DPRK.

Rudong – first record August 6 2011, most start arriving in late August.

Main gap – autumn in Russia, plus areas north of Rudong. Basically the gap between the breeding grounds and them turning up in late August

Autumn – probably jump over Hong Kong.

Fujian 5000 km from breeding grounds. Bangladesh/Myanmar – 8000km

Are there any serious possibilities that we have not yet considered? Areas further south – any big gaps in winter?

India - Possibility of SBS at Point Calimere and other suitable places along the East coast in India.

Have we actually found all the main wintering sites and are just undercounting birds?

Sri Lanka - need counts on Jaffna Peninsula where there have been large wader concentrations

South China - many possible places that have not been sufficiently surveyed.

Mid-summer survey in Yellow Sea to establish summering 1st-yr birds.

Major gaps in spring passage – 20-30 in Rudong, but very few recorded elsewhere. Big gap in mid – end May. Nial – may be missing birds at known sites because tides are not very high – poor counting conditions.

Need to take into account sea temp and land temp.

Alkaline salt ponds – natural shallow saline lakes – are there any left? Do SBS use them?

May be using salt pans too. SBS move back out onto the mud flats. Need to summarise use of salt pans (Thailand?)

How do we fill the gaps?

End May surveys in DPRK.

Need a citizen science survey via web portal? Some doubt the usefulness and the coordination required

How do we organise future surveys?

1. Need to appoint official survey coordinators – international and national focal points.
2. Coordinated SBS photo competition? Ethical concerns over disturbance.
3. Need agreed written SBS survey protocol - ES. NM – post final version on EAAFP website. Resourcing. Good survey (self-funding) model (e.g. as that developed by Christoph for Myanmar and Bangladesh/BirdLife for China – professional international coordinator, country coordinators, international (self-funding) volunteers, qualified national count team, plus training less experienced observers. Need clear mechanism for choosing appropriately qualified volunteers. Need to ensure we don't spend a great deal of time on the tourism side of things. BirdsRussia developed surveys with involvement of self-paying volunteers
4. Further work on satellite imagery needed.
5. Need further modelling to overlay (e.g. tidal ranges, temperatures during appropriate season, productivity) on habitat suitability map of staging and wintering sites to identify priority sites for survey. Prioritise towards potential population bottleneck sites.
6. See also notes from the UK Support meeting
7. Photo guide to stages on moult needed.

General Discussion

8. Need more capacity in TF to coordinate and guide activities on implementation
9. Ethics guidelines for photography in local languages – China and Korea. Photographers as citizen scientists

10. Potential increased involvement of EAAFP (secretariat ?) in SBS conservation
 11. Written draft of survey methods – produced by group of experts then circulated to for comment. Final draft to be translated into local languages.
- Involvement of capable people from other parts of the flyway (Korea, Japan, China) to work on SBS surveys in other parts of the SBS range.

Coastal development in South Korea. Nial Moores.

Lost 80% of intertidal habitats.

Remaining 110,000 ha from 460,000 ha. MOE estimate there is twice as much habitat remaining.

Geum Estuary – 6,000ha of intertidal habitat.

Saemangeum – sea wall now has 6 lane highway, airport and super port planned nearby. Multi million dollar plan for restoration includes no tidal flats or shorebird conservation measures.

Nakdong – protected but local city wants to build new airport.

Shorebird counts started by NGOs led to an opening of dialogue. Now gov has taken over.

Shorebird counts are conducted by small number of vols and gov officials at small number of sites.

Massive citizen campaigns for e.g. Saemangeum but eventually unsuccessful.

Domestic organisations have no seat at any conservation table any more.

Unique among OECD countries in having no international NGO presence.

Suggested South Korea is a warning to everyone else.

IUCN desk study

The study results and recommendation for a motion at the IUCN conference was introduced and ways forward briefly discussed. Further activities are planned and various future events planned in China and Korea around the IUCN WCC and later in the autumn.

Cristi's closing address

SBS is No. 1 of 40 Critically Endangered bird species for BirdLife Asia.

Special Thanks to Baz Hughes and Rob Sheldon for taking minutes

Christoph Zöckler