

**Statement on the conservation of intertidal areas along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) of critical importance for migratory waterbirds including the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper – a flagship species.**

The Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*, having declined dramatically in recent years to only about 150 breeding pairs, is one of the most threatened animals on the planet. Breeding in arctic Russia, it migrates 8000 km along the EAAF, depending on intertidal habitats for refueling in the Yellow Sea of China and the Republic of Korea and also for feeding in its main wintering areas in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

During its southward migration, one of the most important sites in the world for the species is the Tiaozini sandbanks on the coast of Dongtai, Jiangsu province, China, where more than half of the adults spend several months each autumn undertaking their annual moult; without this site<sup>1</sup> the Spoon-billed Sandpiper could suffer a further severe decline taking it even closer to extinction. The Geum Estuary of the Republic of Korea is another key staging post. Key wintering sites are the Gulf of Mottama in Myanmar, a Flyway Network Site (EAAF117) which has recently been proposed as a Ramsar site, and the coast of Sonadia Island in Bangladesh.

*Large scale developments are proposed at several of the most critical sites for Spoon-billed Sandpipers including Tiaozini sandbanks and parts of the coast of Sonadia Island. It is essential that any such developments minimise impacts on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.*

Over the last five years the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has received considerable global attention and has become a flagship species for the many threatened waterbirds using the EAAF. The rapid loss of intertidal habitats along the EAAF, especially to intertidal land claim, is recognised as a key threat to this species and many other declining waterbirds, as well as contributing to the collapse of fisheries and loss of ecological services. Observed rates of declines of waterbird species at 5–9% per year (and up to 26% in the Spoon-billed Sandpiper) are among the highest of any ecological system on the planet. This situation is of critical global concern and needs to be addressed urgently as part of a strategy for international conservation cooperation.

EAAF governments have already committed to halting the decline of wetland ecosystems along their coasts, including through enhanced protection of habitats for migratory waterbirds under a variety of instruments. These include: Resolution 28 on the 'Conservation of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and its threatened waterbirds, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea' adopted at the 2012 IUCN World Conservation Congress in Jeju, Republic of Korea; the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); the 'Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets' including those to reduce habitat loss (Target 5), prevent species extinction (Targets 12) and restore ecosystem services (Target 14); the Ramsar Convention, including commitments to intertidal wetland conservation in Resolutions VII.21 and VIII.4 and in Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan 2009–2015; and for EAAF countries that are Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species, through 'Ensuring Migratory Bird Conservation through Flyway/Ecological Networks and Critical Sites and Habitat and Addressing Key Threats' as outlined in the global 'Programme of Work on Migratory Waterbirds and Flyways 2014-2023'.

The urgency and importance of the actions needed in the Chinese part of the Yellow Sea were reiterated at a meeting in Beijing in September 2014 (<http://www.cms.int/en/news/experts-get-together-beijing-discuss-conservation-key-sites-migratory-birds-yellow-sea>).

Relevant governments have taken some positive actions to help conserve intertidal areas. Good examples include the coastal 'Blueprint' currently being developed in China and the proposal to designate Mottama Bay in Myanmar as a Ramsar site. However, time is running out for the conservation of some critical sites and endangered species. This situation is of global concern.

We, the Partners of the EAAF, restate our intention to work within existing structures, mechanisms and commitments to try to improve this situation.

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to Spoon-billed Sandpipers, this area also holds internationally important numbers (>1%) of at least 19 other waterbird species including Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Red and Great Knots *Calidris canutus* and *C. tenuirostris* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina*.

We recognise that migratory waterbirds are a joint benefit and responsibility of all of the countries that they inhabit along the flyway. Therefore, the considerable efforts and resources spent on their conservation in one country or one part of the flyway need to be supported by similar actions in other parts of their range, or they risk being ineffective.

We, the Governmental Partners of the EAAF, will work actively together through:

- Bilateral agreements on migratory bird conservation
- The Arctic Council (of which EAAF Partner countries of Russia and the USA are State Members and EAAF Partner countries of The Republic of Korea, Japan, China and Singapore are Observers) and the working group on the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna and its Arctic Migratory Bird Initiative (AMBI).
- EAAF Partnership Task Forces, Working Groups and other mechanisms

We, the intergovernmental agencies, international NGOs and other EAAF Partners, will work actively and

- Collaboratively with EAAF Governmental Partners and others

**to help ensure the better delivery of spoon-billed sandpiper and other migratory waterbird conservation (including and especially regarding the conservation of critical sites along the EAAF) in line with agreements under the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ramsar Convention and IUCN Resolution 28.**

**This statement is intended to highlight that while many positive actions have been taken, they have been insufficient to meet these international commitments with respect to intertidal wetland and migratory waterbird conservation. A flyway-wide step change in activity is needed if we are to deal with the crisis faced by the spoon-billed sandpiper and other migratory waterbirds that are a shared benefit across EAAF countries.**

## References

CBD COP 10 Decision X/2. 2010. Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets <http://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12268>

Convention on Migratory Species UNEP/CMS/Resolution 11.14. 2014. Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways. [http://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/Res\\_11\\_14\\_PoW\\_on\\_Migratory\\_Birds\\_Flyways\\_En.pdf](http://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/Res_11_14_PoW_on_Migratory_Birds_Flyways_En.pdf)

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Ramsar Strategic Plan 2009-2015  
<http://www.ramsar.org/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/strat-plan-2009-e-adj.pdf>

Ramsar Resolution VIII.4. Principles and guidelines for incorporating wetland issues into Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) [http://archive.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-resol-resolution-viii-4/main/ramsar/1-31-107%5E21494\\_4000\\_0](http://archive.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-documents-resol-resolution-viii-4/main/ramsar/1-31-107%5E21494_4000_0)

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