Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No 16 · October 2016

Contents

Head-started in 2013, male white MA is happily decorating the sky near Meinypilgyno *Tom Noah*

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

Mission:
The East Asian and Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) aims to coordinate the conservation activities identified in the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Single Species Action Plan for the species, which was commissioned by BirdLife International. The activities in the Action Plan are regularly reviewed and updated by all Flyway Members and a growing network of active supporters and groups in the Flyway countries, and beyond.

The Task Force originates from the establishment of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team (SBS RT) in 2004, when several partners active in the conservation of this globally threatened wader met in Edinburgh. With the growing level of activity, the finalization of the Action Plan in 2008 and a growing network of partners, organisations and supporters the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was formed at the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) meeting in Korea in February 2010. In December 2010, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was officially endorsed as one of the first species Task Forces by the Partnership under the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group. The key implementing organisation for the SBS TF is BirdLife International through its partner Birds Russia. It is chaired by the Government Partner of Russia. Task Force members consist of the EAAFP Government Partners of key range states for the species and international conservation organisations. These are: the Russian Federation, Japan, People's Republic of China, People's Democratic Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Union of Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh and India, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT), Wetlands International, a representative of the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group, Fauna Flora International (FFI) and experts and conservation organisations from principal range states and other partners. We are grateful to the RSPB, NABU and the Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung for their continued support of the SBS Task Force and Spoon-billed Sandpiper projects across the range states.

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Foreword from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Coordinator SBS TF · October 2016

The autumn migration is in full swing and as I write these lines most if not all the adult Spoon-billed Sandpipers are gathering in the Rudong and Dongtai mudflats in China to moult and fatten up for the onward travel to the wintering grounds.

This issue of the newsletter has a special focus on the work in Russia from the breeding grounds but also on the initiative Russia and China have taken to work closely together on the conservation of migratory species in a bilateral agreement signed by the countries. Both, Russia and China comprise of the large majority of the entire flyway. Russia hosts the entire breeding population and China harbours key stopover sites and a major wintering site. Both countries are very important and their joint work is key for the survival of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper as a species. Hence, it is very encouraging to see this bilateral agreement taking shape with first exchanges of Chinese scientists visiting the breeding grounds and an exchange visit planned in return of Russian scientists in Rudong and Dongtai this autumn. Hopefully, this bilateral agreement could also serve as an example for other countries and bilateral agreements to follow and ultimately implement the many conservation activities needed to save the species.

Meanwhile there were good and sad news from Slimbridge. This breeding season for the first time two pairs laid eggs and two chicks hatched successfully. Sadly, both died soon afterwards, but the fact that for the first time ever Spoon-billed Sandpiper have been breeding in captivity is very encouraging for the future of this ambitious project and we all have more good reasons to hope that next summer will be successful.

There are also encouraging news from Myanmar, where the new government is passing more powers to regional governments and the likelihood

of our important wintering site Nan Thar to be legally protected is very high. This is a good precondition to raise awareness and conduct other activities with our national partner NGO BANCA and our local partner in Nan Thar BECAR. In this respect it is very good news to hear that the project along with activities in neighbouring Bangladesh will be receiving support from the Disney Foundation in addition to the Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund by WWF provided earlier this year.

Last but not least, Spoonie will feature strongly in a new documentary film by Phil Agland, who has been working at many locations in China over the past 4 years. This 5-part series, which will be available in Chinese and English will likely attract an audience of 100 million viewers.

The SBS Task Force is very grateful for the continued support it receives from all over the world and we like to thank all our long-term supporters as well as our new partners and hope that our increasing foundation of enthusiastic supporters from all over the world will finally turn the tide for the conservation of this special sandpiper.

Guest Editorial

Amirkhan Amirkhanov
Deputy Head of the Federal Supervisory Natural Resources Management Service, Russian Federation

The protection of migratory birds is an important activity of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of the Russian Federation. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is included in the Red Book of Russia with the highest conservation status, and its protection has been received significant attention in our country. Intensive research, which forms the basis of the state-of-the-art conservation measures of the species, started by Russian scientists as we entered the millennium and continues to this day.

From the very beginning, protection of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper was carried out through the efforts of many nations. Since the year 2000, researchers and conservationists from various countries have taken part in annual field surveys in Chukotka under the leadership of Dr. Evgeniy Syroechkovskiy, and this work has since spread throughout the entire flyway and become truly international.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is now an indicator species under a Sino-Russian bilateral intergovernmental collaboration, and information concerning the initial joint activities related to this are presented in the current issue of the Bulletin. We hope that the joint efforts of our two countries will stop the decline in numbers of this charismatic species and that we shall save it. We attach great value to joint efforts in the saving of this species and, together with other countries, welcome collaborative research and are grateful to all organizations that have supported the study of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper throughout its range.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a flagship species for the conservation of water birds and their habitats, unique areas of the Arctic coasts of Russia and the intertidal zones of East Asia. In saving this species, we protect a myriad of constituents of biodiversity and the unique ecosystems of a dozen countries. We hope that the efforts of ministries

and agencies for the wildlife conservation of all countries along the flyway, together with international and national community-based and scientific environmental organizations, enable the saving of this irreplaceable bird. The establishment of a network of protected territories throughout the entire range of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper would be an important step in this direction and Russia is now starting this task.

I wish the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership productive and friendly work and outstanding results in the saving of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Amirkhan Magomedovich Amirkhanov *is Deputy Head of the Federal Supervisory Natural Resources Management Service, Russian Federation Head of the Russian part of the Working group on the implementation of the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Migratory Birds and their Habitats*

Russia-China bilateral intergovernmental cooperation on migratory birds had selected Spoon-billed Sandpiper as a focal species for joint conservation work

Evgeny Syroechkovskiy and Lu Jun

Conservation of migratory birds was always an important component of conservation work for the governments of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. Since the official bilateral Agreement was signed by the State Forestry Administration and Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology the bilateral cooperation come into an active stage.

On the 19 of March 2015 the first bilateral meeting took place in Moscow and "The program of the Russian-Chinese cooperation in conservation of migratory birds and their habitats", was agreed as Appendix 4 to the minutes of this meeting. Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) was designated as a target species of first priority for bilateral cooperation. To ensure the realization of the Agreement, as a first step in the frame work of cooperation, a joint project on conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper – the most critically endangered species migrating between Russia and China was started and the following conservation efforts were planned:

1 The appointment of teams of experts for Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation activities in both countries. To involve more people, including professors and PhD students in SBS focused research.

2 To collect and analyze information on distribution, the list of key sites and immediate priority conservation issues for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Russia and China as a background for the future conservation planning.

3 To initiate exchange travels of specialists of the two countries to exchange experience, learn from each other and develop joint research and con-

Participants of the first meeting of the Russian-Chinese Working Group on realization of the agreement of governments of the People's Republic of China and Russian Federation on cooperation in conservation of migratory birds and their habitats in Moscow

servation projects. Experts from China would be invited to visit Chukotka – the breeding grounds of SBS and experts from Russia will visit key non-breeding sites in China.

4 To start cooperative activities on ringing and color marking of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper on Chukotka and Jiangsu province with adjustment to international protocol of bird marking along the East-Asian flyway; to ensure safety of ringing and all kinds of marking/tracking of this species. Potential for using of satellite or GSM tracking devices would be explored.

5 To initiate arrangements for establishment of efficient network of protected areas along the Spoon-billed Sandpiper flyway in Russia and China, which would ensure survival of the species through preservation of the vital habitats. Countries would initiate activities, which would lead to the establishment of protected areas in the vicinities of Meinypilgyno and Russkaya Koshka (Chukotka, Russia) and on the Dongtai and Rudong counties staging sites (Jiangsu province, China). This would be the first step towards development of territorial system of conservation of the species in both countries.

6 Based on all collected information and progress of conservation measures organize a workshop at a later stage that focuses on Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation. It may become the basis for the countries action plans for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper to be developed further. Possible timing of the workshop could be in 2018 and it might be arranged back-to-back to an EAAFP SBS Task Force meeting. For the implementation of the China-Russia Programme and development of further cooperation on all aspects of migratory bird conservation (including SBS) a Scientific Advisory Group was established lead by Dr. Lu Jun (National Bird Banding Center, State Forestry Administration,

Prof Chang Qing during the field work in the Spoon-billed Sandpiper breeding grounds in Chukotka

China) and Dr. E.E. Syroechkovskiy (All-Russian Research Institute for Environment Protection, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, Russia).

On the Russian side, information support for the Ministry will be provided by the leading Russian bird conservation NGO – Birds Russia. The results of mentioned activities would be presented at the next China-Russia Working Group meeting scheduled for 2017 in China.

Following the described above plan active communication of Russian and Chinese SBS experts took place since late 2015. Russian teams were working in Russia (mainly in Chukotka and Kamchatka) and experts from China had initiated various important research and conservation activities at key SBS stopover and molting sites in Jiangsu Province.

The first step of exchange visits of experts took place in summer 2016, when Professor Chang Qing from the Nanjing Normal University visited Chukotka for 18 days in July. Professor Chang Qing is appointed by the government of China to lead the research and to suggest conservation activities on SBS in the whole of the Jiangsu province. The Russian team shared with Chang Qing the experience of SBS research and conservation in the breeding grounds at Meinypilgyno. Some more details are described in this issue of the newsletter. Various experts from different countries took part in this cooperative collaborative survey including a PhD student from China, Tong Mu, experts from the UK (RSPB and WWT) and also volunteers from different other countries. An exchange visit of four Russian experts is scheduled for October 2016 on invitation of the National Bird Banding Center of China. Joint studies would take place in Jiangsu province aiming for coordinated survey of SBS at all key sites in Rudong-Dongtai area. Russia is expecting experts

2016 flagged and ringed Spoon-billed Sandpiper in breeding ground *Pavel Tomkovich*

from SFA to come in summer 2017 to Chukotka again to continue joint newly established tradition.

Hopefully this is the beginning of long term continued exchange of visits of specialists from China and Russia, which will bring fruitful results for the conservation of birds. Conservation of SBS itself in this case is very important but it also works as a flagship and model species for a much wider list of conservation of migratory birds and their habitats.

The new editions of the Red Data Book for both China and Russia are in the final stage of revision and planned to be announced in 2017. Preliminary, for both countries Spoon-billed Sandpiper would likely get the highest conservation level in the national Red Data Books. This would help to keep focus on the species conservation and develop further activities under bilateral agreement, which would be reported also in the next volumes of this Newsletter.

Dr Lu Jun *(National Bird Banding Center, State Forestry Administration, China)*
Dr E.E. Syroechkovskiy *(All-Russian Research Institute for Environment Protection, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, Russia)*

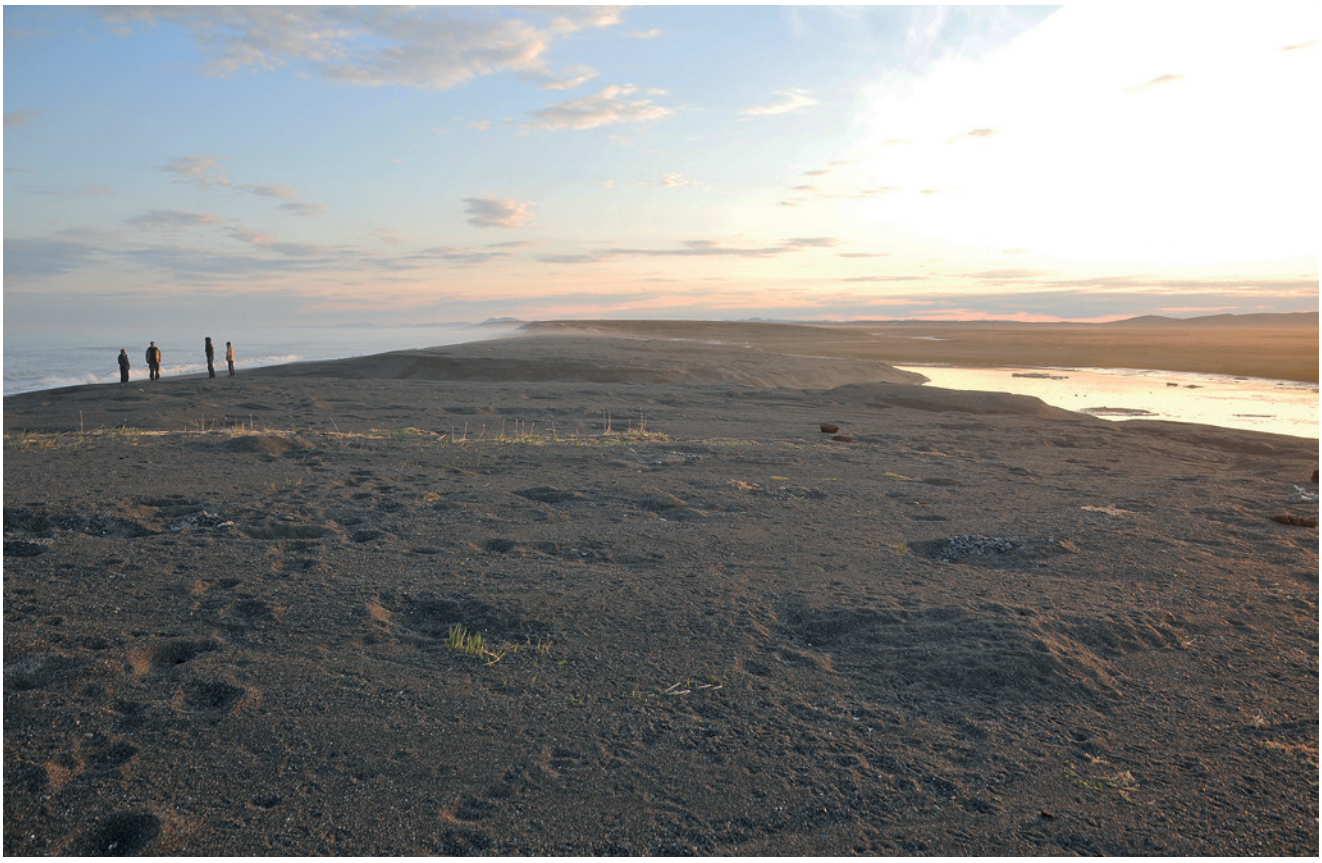
The 2016 Spring survey of the breeding site "Okeanskoe", South Chukotka

Tom Noah and Matthias Fanck

It's a long way to Meinypilgyno in South Chukotka, Russia: two and a half hours flight from Berlin to Moscow, eight and a half hours to Anadyr and another two hours flight by helicopter to "Meino". The heli only flies, when it is not needed otherwise and when there is no fog or bad weather. One or more of these reasons kept us waiting at Anadyr/Ugolnie Kopi for five days.

In support of the Russian team of Pavel Tomkovich, Nicolay Yakushev, Egor Loktionov and Roland Digby from WWT, who are working in Meinypilgyno for several years already, another international team operated in South Chukotka in the breeding season of 2016. The goal of this team was to survey a breeding area that was only discovered last year, on the coast of the Bering Sea west of Meinypilgyno. For reasons of protection, the precise location is not disclosed, but named "Okeanskoe". In mid-July 2015 during a very short visit, 18 breeding pairs were recorded. The total number might be higher and was estimated to be around 20-25 breeding pairs (see E. Syroechkovskiy in SBS Newsletter 14, August 2015). Thus, "Okeanskoe" is the second most important breeding area for the SBS after Meinypilgyno and therefore crucial for the survival of the species!

In order to obtain a better understanding of the situation at the site, the number of breeding pairs and potential threats, a small team of five people was sent to survey the site at the beginning of the breeding season. Between arrival and egg-laying actively displaying Spoon-billed Sandpipers can be easily surveyed without little disturbance by the surveyors, which is very important, considering the fragile situation of the remaining breeding population.



Arriving at "Okeanskoe" late at night *Matthias Fanck*

The international team was lead by the experienced surveyor Nicolay Yakushev and Roman Belogorodcev (responsible for logistics and transport). Roman lives in Meinypilgyno and has been supporting the Spoon-billed Sandpiper research and conservation activities with his wife Sveta for many years. Further members of the team were Tong Mu, biology student from China as well as Matthias Fanck und Tom Noah, both members of the German SBS Support Group.

After a delay of only 5 days in Anadyr we arrived in Meinypilgyno on 1 June. On arrival Pavel Tomkovich reported that the first Spoon-billed Sandpiper had arrived the day before. That was the reason why our team immediately started the following day to visit our survey area "Okeanskoe". Roman was confidently driving the Bigfoot "Kerzhak" along difficult terrain along the coast. We stopped briefly at the oil drill area, a breeding site West of Meinypilgyno that is difficult to access with quad bikes from the village. Here, we noticed four displaying males and one female Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Yesterday evening Kolya said we would start at four in the morning to our expedition to the Tundra. But as Russian hours have another gauge as Central European ones we are standing only at 2 pm around "Kerzhak" the rusty monster truck which would take us to Okeanskoe. Our rucksacks, the tents, boxes with food and pots, guns, rubber boat, cans, tools – all is packed and finally we can climb into the car. There is no co-drivers seat, Kolya relaxes on a box. The motor starts though the car stood for a long while on the spit at the river mouth.

It is far to our destination. Roman our driver does not stay for long on the old track on the spit: We are rolling along the shore where the grey sand is solid. A broad band of drift ice is still fixed to the shore line. Yesterday we found (and smelled) walruses lying on the bigger floes. Now we are driving near to the ice that is pushed together and rubbed by the surf. Sometimes big pieces of ice are lying on the beach which Roman skilfully avoids.

Just before the old oil drilling tower we are meeting the first Brown Bear. He is trotting in front of us for a while before turning towards the beach wall. As we stop shortly before the tower we can see that we passed him. Now he walks on the land side of the wall and comes pretty close. It is my second bear. My first bear in the Kazakh Tien Shan mountains was very distant and only visible by binoculars. The next bear is in front of us at a dead walrus lying among the ice on the beach. Kolya's hunting instinct is awakening: He wants to get the tusk which is still complete. The other one is broken. Shovel, axe, hammer, protection glasses ... It is difficult to remove the tusk from the big skull. There are many traces around the walrus, mostly of bears, but also even of a wolf. Time is passing, Russian time. But the days are long now. We are not in a hurry.

Gulls are sitting on the beach, mostly Glaucous and Vega Gulls. Only in the last moment they are taking wings – unwilling, unbelieving that there is something very large approaching. Sometimes they rise directly in front of us or beside us and land repeatedly – only to start again. Eiders and Scoters of different species, resting on the beach are flying off much sooner. The black and white wings, the dirty ice, the grey shore, the Grey Whales and the cold grey ocean out there: It is a world without colours.

Noon is fading, a slow orange dawn descends over us, our destination is still far. We are a small space ship cruising through a world not created for men.

Small creeks run across the beach into the sea. The steps which they dug into the beach are too high. Roman drives all the way to the front where the creek is meeting the sea, creating a small delta. With three axles and the huge wheels it works. The rivers are more difficult to cross. They are too deep

and force us to make long detours in land, along sandy shores, over gravel, snow fields and tundra until a drivable passage is found. To drive around the last river takes us three hours.

*The sun has set a long time ago though it is not getting dark this far north. It will rise soon again when we arrived at our destination: a dry spit between two lakes behind the beach wall. Roman is collecting drift wood, soon a fire is burning and the Chainik, the tea pot is steaming. (*From Matthias' diary)

We arrived in "Okeanskoe" in the night of 3 June and stayed until 9 June. The entire lowland is free of snow. However, near the river mouth one meter thick ice sheets cover large swathes. This area is where almost all SBS territories are situated. Part of the breeding area was still flooded, but the water was receding day by day and opening up the last remaining area. It is worth mentioning that there has been extraordinarily little snow over the past winter and many breeding areas were already dry at the start of the season. During the entire period of our stay in "Okeanskoe" it was sunny and very warm. Only at night we had frost up to minus 5 degrees. Precipitation was little, only on one day and a light wind was blowing from the sea – ideal conditions to observe Spoon-billed Sandpipers and enjoy their lovely display!

SBS are colonising here differently from Meinypilgyno – a very small area of about 2 x 2 km contains a high density no longer known from anywhere else in the breeding area. Several times we can observe up to three different males displaying in flight at the same time. Many territories border directly to each other. We established a

"Spoonie" at "Okeanskoe" *Tom Noah*

population of 16 pairs in the centre and another isolated pair about 5 km distant. In Meinypilgyno the pairs are all now breeding isolated from each other. Small congregations consists of max 2 or 3 pairs.

Probably because of the early snow melt and continuing good weather we found the first egg in "Okeanskoe" already on 5 June. On 8 June we found the first full clutch. It is not clear if by 9 June all birds had arrived. In Meinypilgyno a second wave of arriving birds was observed around the 10 June (R. Digby and P. Tomkovich, pers. comm.). Yet un-colonised areas suddenly were occupied by partly individually marked birds. Hence, the estimated total of 17 pairs is the absolutely lower limit of the actual numbers that might be breeding in "Okeanskoe". Maybe after reviewing all the different photos of many birds the estimate can be raised slightly higher. However, the total is in line with the findings from last year. Considering the high number of flagged birds in neighbouring Meinypilgyno we aimed at checking all birds for markings and indeed one bird that Kolya found was marked as a juvenile in Meinypilgyno. This findings confirms the wider dispersal of juveniles and also the significance of "Okeanskoe".

In "Okeanskoe" Spoon-billed Sandpipers are breeding in the centre of a gentle slope of the river floodplain near the coast. The prevailing habitats are numerous dry and sandy areas, dunes covered by crowberries and grassland in between wet areas and small pools and shallow river banks. Accompanying breeding birds were Temminck's Stints and Common Ringed Plovers as well as Dunlins on the margins. We surveyed all potential areas up to 6-7 km, but did not find any territories beyond 2 km inland. Near the tundra slopes Red-necked Stints were breeding in large numbers. Furthermore Pacific Golden and Mongolian Plovers as well as Red-necked Phalaropes, Terek and Wood Sandpipers were breeding in the near neighbour-

"Spoonie" on Ice *Tom Noah*

hood. Among the northwards migrating waders we noticed Grey-tailed and Wandering Tattler, Bar-tailed Godwits, Red Knots, Western Sandpiper, Whimbrels und even one Far Eastern Curlew. One of the most common birds in the floodplain was the Sandhill Crane. At least 30-40 Pairs were breeding here. Furthermore several nests of Greater White-fronted Goose, single pairs of Emporer and Bean Goose and further waterfowl like Harlequin Ducks, Black and Steinegers Scoter, Eurasian Teal, Pintail and Goosander (likely ssp. *americanus*) were found.

Our visit was too short to determine the level of threat posed by the numerous predators observed. Although we hardly met any small rodents, we did however encounter regularly several different predators, which could pose a threat to SBS. Among the birds these were: 2 pairs of Arctic Skua, 1 Pair of Long-tailed Skua, Short-eared Owl and Peregrine, and near the coast Vega and Glaucous Gulls (common, but not breeding in the floodplain). Relatively diverse and impressive has been the list of mammalian predators. Brown bears were relatively rare (about 15 observations), but wolverine was observed six times and one time even a wolf. Red fox was noted several times and Polar fox once heard.

On the way back to Meinypilgyno we checked another area, where in 2015 a breeding pair was found. We could confirm the breeding of one pair (nest wish eggs), but no further pairs. Finally we surveyed the moraine hills near the oil drill area that has not been surveyed properly before. Here we found an additional pair, but vast stretches were very dry due to the low snow conditions of the previous winter and not occupied.

We think that "Okeanskoe" is an ideal monitoring site because of its high breeding density and relative easy access and should be surveyed regularly. However, it is important to note that for this reason the area is also susceptible to indirect disturbance by researchers and other humans. For example, foxes follow happily the tracks of researchers and Raven are observing very carefully the activities of any humans, all providing devastating clues to Spoon-billed Sandpiper nests. In order to minimise these potential dangers any monitoring should ideally cover only the displaying and pre-breeding period before mid June.

Wolverine, one of the possible predators at "Okeanskoe"
Matthias Fanck

Kolya, Roman and Tong *Tom Noah*

Last but not least: "Okeanskoe" is the only known site with such a density of breeding birds, that we only knew from the 2000s in the core areas of Meinypyilgyno and Belyaka Spit. It is also a fantastic place to marvel Spoon-billed Sandpipers in an area with hardly any human interference!

Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Meinypilgyno: update of the 2016 breeding season

P Tomkovich, E Syroechkovskiy, N Yakushev, E Loktionov, R Digby, I Shepelev

From May-August 2016, the core research team dealing with Spoon-billed Sandpipers (SBS) in south-eastern Chukotka was accompanied by a PhD student from China – Tong Mu, who is working on Red-necked Stint and Red-necked Phalarope and helping with SBS work. And for the first time a Chinese expert Prof Chang Qing as part of the exchange program with the Chinese State Forestry Administration (see separate article of the newsletter) joined the team. Our work was also supported by our highly respected guest from the RSPB Dr. Tim Stowe, BirdsRussia, Board Member Andrey Maximov and our old good friend from Canada Marjorie Bousfield. Participation of a team from Germany – members of German SBS Support Group joined our work early in the season (see separate note in this newsletter). All activities were following the routine BirdsRussia developed for SBS monitoring and conservation work in previous years. It included searching for nests and broods, collecting eggs for Head-starting (HS), ringing and monitoring of the local SBS population, breeding biology observations. An effort to ring and colour-mark some limited numbers of both adults and chicks outside the main monitoring area was the only difference from previous years.

All these activities took place on the background of a unique general situation in the environment of the region. It happened that there was almost no snow cover on tundra after the winter 2015/2016. This was aggravated by absence of spring flood because the river mouth has not been blocked by ice and gravel during storms of the previous autumn. The following summer was also dry. All these were the reasons for many marshes, shallow lakes and some creeks to become completely dried off in the cause of the summer, thus causing some redistribution of SBS and presumably avoidance of the area by some birds searching for an area to settle for breeding. Picture was rather different and unique comparing to many previous years.

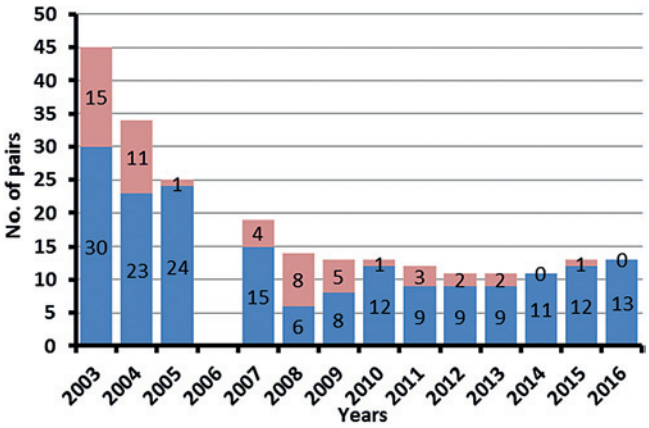


Figure 1. The number of breeding SBS pairs at Meinypilgyno monitoring plots recorded 2003–2016. The number of pairs in which nests or chicks were found are shown in blue, possibly breeding pairs (no eggs or chicks found) are depicted in red in each column

First SBS were recorded on 2 June which is within the range of arrival dates (30 May – 3 June), but some birds likely arrived earlier judging by early dates of egg-laying and hatching in some nests. Taking into account both the first signs of the local population increase in summer 2015 and positive results of HS activity we were expecting to witness further population growth in 2016. However, we found the number of pairs in the main monitoring area stayed at same level as in 2015 (Figure 1). We attribute this result to the unusual draught in the area in spring and summer 2016, and we hope for the improvement of the situation next year.

Considering satisfactory results of previous years activities the Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology of Russian Federation had given to BirdsRussia a permit to collect up to 40 SBS eggs for HS. Eggs were picked up from 9 nests (8 in the main monitoring area and one outside). Some of the eggs turned out to be infertile or unviable. As a result 30 of 35 chicks successfully hatched, fledged and were released into nature on 26 July. According to post release monitoring observation not a single birds was lost due to predation or

other factors before birds were observed departing vicinities of release site in early August. 30 HS SBS departing Meinypilgyno is the best result so far.

Out of the 9 pairs whose eggs were taken for HS, at least 7 had a chance to lay a replacement clutch (for others it was late), and one pair got a viable egg left for the parents to hatch. Out of the 7 pairs 5 or more pairs were able to relay, however, only two of them raised chicks; other replacement clutches vanished due to predators. Several other pairs that were not involved into HS activities also lost their nests due to predation. Which confirm overall pattern of rather low success of productivity of SBS nests in nature and shown effectiveness of HS for rising young for local population.

As before, all HS chicks were marked with white engraved leg flags (ELFs), while wild SBS were marked with light green ELFs – adults got flags on their left tibia, chicks on their right tibia. This way we marked in 2016 30 HS chicks, 38 wild chicks and 11 adults; thus, 79 birds were marked in total, which is a significant increase from previous years. Out of 26 SBS breeding in the main monitoring area 16 were already individually marked birds. One more bird, a female, has been wearing a plain light green flag being marked as a chick in 2010. This bird has been formerly recorded on migration in China by reading the number on the metal ring (Moskva KS18181), but it is for the first time the female is back to the natal area after five summers spent somewhere else. This year she finally got her ELF with no. 36. This shows that the fact that the bird was not seen by observers around Meinypilgyno not necessarily mean that the bird is dead. The more we study it the more it looks like in the southern population SBS may move significant distance in their breeding location within their range. In opposite to Belyaka Spit, where they were very highly site-faithful with several hundred meters of first km from where have they been first marked. It could also mean the bird has been longer in the non-breeding area than previously assumed, see also article on oversummering in this newsletter.

A total of five HS birds were seen around Meinypilgyno. Same number as last year. Two of them – males 'white AA' and 'left pink, no flag', were known to be breeding this year in the area; one more territorial male 'white MA' left unmated (see front cover photo!). Interestingly, two HS SBS (one-year old 'white E7' and two-year old 'white T8') were recorded close to the aviary where these birds were released, but they later on left, possibly looking for the opportunity to breed elsewhere, outside of the area of our regular observation.

As it is mentioned, for the first time we undertook this year catching and flagging of adult SBS outside of the main monitoring area. Four such birds were caught and ringed near recently hatched chicks.

Summarizing these preliminary results of the passed field season we hope that our efforts will be helpful in learning about migratory movements along the flyway of the marked Meinypilgyno birds, in further monitoring of the local breeding population, and also in enlarging of the local SBS population by effective HS.

Communication with local villagers regarding SBS conservation was run similar to previous years, but we conclude that this aspect of work should be intensified and done involving experts in communication. BirdsRussia is searching for adequate experts to be involved for the summer 2017 season. Field work was supported by RSPB, WWT, NABU, Chukotka Government and many other generous supporters.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding programme at WWT Slimbridge: the 2016 breeding season

Nicola Hiscock, Nigel Jarrett, Tanya Grigg and Rebecca Lee

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding programme was established at WWT Slimbridge in 2011 and 2012 from eggs collected from pairs breeding around Meinypilgyno village, Chukotka. In 2011, 19 viable eggs were hatched in Meinypilgyno or during the two-day long boat journey from Meinypilgyno to Anadyr and chicks raised in a temporary predator-proof enclosure erected on the tundra on the edge of a residential area in Anadyr. When they were fledged, 17 surviving chicks were transported to Moscow Zoo where they underwent a lengthy period of quarantine. Thirteen juvenile birds were then transported to WWT Slimbridge in early winter 2011.

In July 2012, 20 Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs were collected in Meinypilgyno for direct translocation in portable incubators to WWT Slimbridge, where 18 chicks were hatched and raised under quarantine conditions. At the beginning of 2016, 23 (16 males: 7 females) Spoon-billed Sandpipers were living in the captive population, living together as a wintering flock in a large aviary with access to heated rooms between August and March, and as pairs, trios or groups of males in smaller aviaries from April to July.

Prior to 2016, the peak of breeding displays was recorded during the first half of May and included daily and almost constant singing by males and many hundreds of 'bouts' of nest scraping by at least six different males with at least three females observed visiting nest scrapes.

In 2016, nest scraping was observed in the latter part of May and at a much lower frequency than in previous years and by only two paired males. The females of these pairs were observed visiting nest scrapes from 31 May. Copulations were first observed for Pair 1 on 2 June and for Pair 2 the next day. Over the following week, many copulation events were observed by the team and recorded using GoPro cameras. Both pairs comprised males from the 2011 cohort and females from the 2012 cohort. Pair 1, Blue Left (male) and

Spoon-billed Sandpiper egg hatching at WWT Slimbridge, July 2016 *Ben Cherry / WWT*

Pink Pink Right (female) produced a clutch of three eggs. The laying interval between eggs was approximately 36 hours. Both of the first two eggs were thin shelled with a chalky appearance and were missing the waxy egg shell cuticle. The third egg was "soft shelled" i.e. it had an egg membrane but not a shell. Pair 2, Pink Right (male) and Pink White Right (female) produced a clutch of four eggs, all of which appeared normal, and again with a 36 hour laying interval between eggs. All eggs from both clutches were replaced with dummy eggs as they were laid. Mass and linear measurements were recorded before eggs were 'cold stored' at approximately 15 degrees Celsius, prior to being placed in a Hemel incubator for artificial incubation.

Dummy eggs were removed from both nests when egg-laying ceased and pair members showed incubation behaviours, in an attempt to induce repeat clutches. Neither pair, however, did so, despite Pink White Right from Pair 2 looking 'heavy' for a few days following the removal of the first clutch of dummy eggs.

After 13 days' artificial incubation, egg fertility was assessed by candling (shining a light through the egg's shell to reveal signs of embryonic development). This revealed signs of embryonic development in two eggs (one from Pair 1 and one from Pair 2), both of which went on to hatch.

The first chick (from the second egg from Pair 1) initially appeared healthy when it hatched two days later than expected on 2 July (after 23 days' incubation). Not long after hatch, the avicultural team noticed that the chick was holding its left wing perpendicular to its body and a couple of hours later the left leg appeared to be splaying out to the side. Once the chick had been transferred to a brooder it had difficulty walking but it was bright-eyed and alert, eating fruit flies and drinking. Its health gradually deteriorated and it died on the afternoon of 4 July.

Newly hatched Spoon-billed Sandpiper chick at WWT Slimbridge, July 2016 *Ben Cherry / WWT*

Post mortem examination revealed that the chick had a reduced bone mineral density, a condition known as osteopenia. The splaying seen in the left wing and leg was caused by fractures of the tibiotarsus and ulna, which may have occurred during incubation or during hatching. WWT vets have suggested this is likely to be due to an underlying problem in maternal calcium balance.

The second chick (the fourth egg from Pair 2) hatched as expected after 21 days' incubation on 3 July and initially appeared healthy. In the 48 hours that followed, the chick began walking around strongly and was feeding well although the bird appeared stressed and alarm-called during the three hours following the death of the first chick. On the afternoon of 5 July, 24 hours after the death of the first chick, the second chick's health suddenly deteriorated and death quickly ensued. Post mortem examination found that this bird suffered from infection of the yolk sac and umbilicus. The stress that the death of the first chick caused to the second may have played a part in increasing its susceptibility to infection, as stress can adversely affect the immune system. Histology reports also confirmed that, like the first chick, the second chick was likely to have suffered from osteopenia.

All eggs which did not hatch were sent to Nicola Hemmings at Professor Tim Birkhead's lab at the Department of Animal and Plant Sciences at Sheffield University for assessment of their fertility status. Within hours of being found by the team, Egg 1-3 collapsed due to it poor shell structure. It was immediately sent to Sheffield and microscopy revealed sperm cells on the surface of the egg's yolk indicating the egg might have been fertilised. The other eggs which failed to hatch were incubated for the duration of the 21 day incubation period before being sent to Sheffield University where early to mid stage embryo development was found in all eggs (i.e. they were all fertile). The cause of embryo mortality is unknown and further investigations are to be undertaken.

Looking ahead, new preventative measures will be put in place to counter the causes of death recorded during the 2016 breeding season. More stringent hygiene controls will be implemented where necessary (note, however, that rigorous hygiene measures were in place during the 2016 season, e.g. microbial surveys of the birds' living areas and equipment revealed no pathogenic organisms; all incubation and rearing areas, incubators and kit were disinfected thoroughly and regularly; and all eggs and chicks were handled using gloves). Ways to increase calcium in the diet of the adult birds are currently being investigated by the avicultural and veterinarian team. The team will also seek advice from other wader breeding experts to inform any alterations that could be made ahead of the 2017 breeding season.

Although hugely disappointing for the team, this is a significant step forward in the conservation breeding programme for Spoon-billed Sandpipers. We're all hopeful for an even more successful season next year.

Acknowledgements: We wish to thank all those who have helped the Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation breeding programme over the years, from those who helped collect and transport eggs and birds in 2011 and 2012, to those who have helped us care for the birds at WWT Slimbridge, including the build and set-up of facilities. We would like to give a special thank you to Philips Lighting who provided additional lighting for bird enclosures in 2015 to alter the birds' lighting conditions and promote breeding. The conservation breeding programme would not be possible without the financial contributions and support of many organisations and individuals, too numerous to mention here. We are grateful to you all. Leica Camera AG is WWT's exclusive optic partner for Spoon-billed Sandpiper work. See here (www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com) for more information on the captive breeding and headstarting programme.

Massive loss of wetland habitat and rampant illegal mistnetting observed near Wenling city, Zhejiang province, China, May 2015

Jonathan Martinez

Shortly before joining a survey team looking for breeding Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus* on the coast near Wenling city, Zhejiang province, China, I searched through satellite pictures on Google Earth, most of which dated back to 2010, to identify potential areas of suitable habitat. During the survey itself, from 17th-20th May 2015, I was shocked to find that, compared to the 2010 satellite pictures, huge changes had occurred at every site, mostly as a result of heavy and widespread reclamation, which varied from fishponds areas in the process of being filled in to huge factory plants or residential blocks already built. In consequence, very little suitable habitat remained for shorebirds, either in the form of mudflats or high-tide roosting areas, although some drained fishponds were available.

The second alarming observation was the scale of illegal mistnetting going on. I counted a total of 760 mistnets at four different coastal sites around Wenling city (see map). This is a rough but low estimation as our time was limited for the survey.

The mistnets were placed very efficiently on fishponds or what was left of mudflats. Though waterbirds were clearly targeted, the main purpose of the netting was puzzling, since many birds had not been extracted from the nets but had been left hanging dead in them, sometimes in a near-skeletal state. At some aquaculture sites, dead birds such as Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* were hung on bamboo poles presumably in an effort to deter other birds from coming on site. The same explanation could apply to dead birds left in the nets elsewhere. Among hundreds of dead, netted waterbirds we came across were individuals from endangered species such as Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, which are classified by the IUCN as Vulnerable and Near Threatened, respectively.

Living birds we recorded included a group of six Swinhoe's Egrets *Egretta eulophotes*, classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN, at one site and three others at another site which were foraging very close to the nets; unidentified dead egrets were also seen in the nets. We recorded 23 shorebird species during the survey, including Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, both of which are listed as Near Threatened by IUCN. To our knowledge, there are no records of the critically-endangered Spoon-

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* at Shamenzhen on 23rd of May 2015

Jonathan Martinez

Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultii* and Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* caught in illegal mistnet at Shamenzhenon, 23rd of May 2015 *Jonathan Martinez*

billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaeus* in the area, but Wenzhou city, which is only 50 km further south, is known to be a regular wintering and stop-over site for the species.

The combination of habitat loss due to reclamation and the proliferation of illegal mistnets at the few remaining sites suitable for shorebirds must be impacting heavily on both wintering and migrant shorebird populations in this part of the province, especially the latter, which are more vulnerable to illegal trapping in view of the longer periods of time they spend in the area. Zhejiang province is located on a part of the Chinese coast where the main shorebird flyway splits into two, with one strand heading south through Taiwan and the Philippines to Australia and the other heading southwest along the South China coast to South-East Asia. This part of the China coast is therefore used by a very high percentage of the flyway total.

The illegal mistnets were reported to the local Forestry Dept, which has the authority and responsibility to take action and remove them. A programme of regular monitoring is clearly needed to keep the area net-free in the long term. Another urgent action that should be taken is to assess the scale of illegal mistnetting in the rest of the province, and report illegal cases encountered to the Forestry Dept. Thirdly, if the supposition is true that the purpose of many illegal mistnets is to scare birds away from local aquaculture, it is a matter of urgency to come up with a practical, non-lethal alternative which aquaculture pond owners and operators could implement.

Acknowledgments
I would like to thank Evgeniy Syroechkovskiy, Vivian Fu and Fion Cheung for their help in reporting these cases to the Zhejiang Forestry Dept, Geng Meijuan, Pr Yin Zuohua and Ng Shengrong for their assistance and company in the field during this survey, and Richard Lewthwaite for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Illegal mistnets with dead shorebirds on ponds at Shamenzhen, Wenling, Zhejiang province, China on 23rd of May 2015
Jonathan Martinez

Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Jiangsu Province, China and Korea in spring and summer

Jing Li, Zhang Lin & Nial Moores

As part of a National Geographic-funded project we have been surveying SBS in the Yellow Sea in Jiangsu Province and South Korea at the same times. As shown with some flagged birds the same individuals are using both sides during the same migration period.

Jiangsu part

In the past three years, we recorded a minimum of 34 Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the Rudong and Dongtai mudflats. During the survey, we often found similarly-plumaged individuals. If we were unable to tell these individuals apart we would record them only as one Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Thus the real total was probably much higher than 34

Yellow Flag "52" (recorded on Apr 24th, 2016, Tiaozini) was locally banded at Tiaozini in September 2015. It staged at Tiaozini in order to complete its wing moult. This bird was not seen since it left Tiaozini in late autumn. We still do not know its wintering or breeding site, but we know that at least this individual uses Tiaozini both in autumn and spring as a staging / stopover site.

Third Calendar-year Spoon-billed Sandpiper (rear bird) at Dongling, Rudong on May 9th 2016 *Zhang Lin*

Third Calendar-year Spoon-billed Sandpiper (rear bird) at Dongling, Rudong on May 9th 2016, showing more extensive breeding-type plumage than the bird in Figure. This bird has a White flag **engraved "X8"** confirming that it is one of the head-started juveniles from 2014.

Korea Part

On Yubu Island, a total of 7-9 individual Spoon-billed Sandpipers were found by the present survey in spring 2016, comprised of five or six adults and two or three Second Calendar-years. A substantial part of the shoreline could not be checked, as it is too dangerous to access from Yubu. It is possible that some Spoon-billed Sandpipers were overlooked feeding and roosting in this area.

The flagged male bird "01" was recorded at Rudong in the autumns of 2013, 2014 (see previous newsletters) and 2015 (Choi et al. in prep). Its presence on Yubu Island during the present survey proves that this highly successful individual (in terms of breeding success and longevity) uses sites both sides of the Yellow Sea during migration. During southward migration this bird is thought to be highly site-faithful to Yangkou Fishing Harbor-Fengli, Rudong (a few claimed re-sightings at nearby sites such as Tiaozini are thought to be putative only). We still don't know where "01" is wintering and he has not been recorded yet in Dongtai or Rudong during northward migration and unfortunately also not recorded on the breeding grounds in 2016 (ed.).

Over-summering in Jiangsu Province

The over-summering phenomenon (birds remaining on non-breeding or wintering grounds during their breeding season) has been reported at least in some 15 families of birds but its occurrence is particularly high in Charadriidae and Scolopacidae families of shorebird (McNeil et al. 1994). The first documented record of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper during over-summering period was

from the mudflats at Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon Province, on 19 July 2010 (Eiam-ampai et al. 2010). There are records of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in summer from Bangladesh in May and June. Zhang Lin recorded the first over-summering Spoon-billed Sandpipers for the Jiangsu coast on 3 July 2015 (Lin 2016); a total of six birds were seen comprising two adults. In 2016, a second calendar-year Spoon-billed Sandpiper was spotted and aged at Dongling, Rudong on 10 May. The bird had a white flag engraved "X8", which confirmed that it was a head-started individual from 2014. The bird was seen several times between August and October in 2015. Then it was reported to winter on Leizhou Peninsular, Guangdong Province in south China. As a third calendar-year bird, it was expected to go back to Chukotka to breed. It is unclear why the bird did not migrate to the breeding ground, instead just moved north to Tiaozini in June 2016.

On 21 June 2016, Zhang Lin observed a minimum of six Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Tiaozini. Five of them were aged as probable second calendar-years on plumage. One bird with 50% breeding plumage had a white flag engraved "X7", a head-started juvenile in 2015. It had at least 50% breeding plumage (Lin 2016).

These series of over-summering Spoon-billed Sandpiper records further confirms the delayed departure to the breeding grounds by sometimes more than two years and more importantly illustrates the important of intertidal wetlands of southern Jiangsu Province for Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other threatened waterbirds.

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Luke Tang

"Spoonie goes to Hollywood" – SBS in a new TV series "China: Between Clouds and Dreams"

Phil Agland

Well not quite, but in the coming months Spoonie's plight will be the centre piece of my forthcoming environmental TV series on China, 'Between Clouds and Dreams', to be broadcast across China and subsequently around the world on both terrestrial television and China's satellite television service.

It all started four years ago when I was asked whether I would consider being a consultant for Chinese Central Television. I suggested that perhaps it would be better for me to make a series of film on the environment… not really daring to believe it could happen. But it did, and that started an extraordinary two years of filming across the breadth of China from the western part of the Tibetan Plateau to the coast in Jiangsu.

Spoon-billed Sandpipers had entered my life almost 20 years before on a bank of exposed mud where the Red River exits into the Gulf of Tonkin. I can still vividly recall that moment, when a flock of 15 Spoonies, in their stunningly white winter wear, flew in with the incoming tide. Then, in 2008 came the devastating news that the world population of this, the most charismatic of all shorebirds, was collapsing to just a few hundred birds.

Catching up with them again on the vast mudflats south of Yangkou in April 2009 I wondered what could be done to help them at what was clearly a crucial stopover on their migration from Chukotka to wintering grounds in South-east Asia. Even then, it was worryingly obvious that the pace of reclamation and industrial development was so fast that these precious mudflats would be all but gone within a few short years. The seeds of a television series for an audience in China were beginning to be sown.

And so, three years later, as I discussed the possibility of a series of films on CCTV with a likely audience of a 100 million, Spoonie came to mind.

Spoonie feeding: shrimp pond, Yangkou, October 2013: a frame from the film

What better then to infiltrate Spoonie's story into a wider environmental narrative spanning the whole of China. For the story to interweave through the full five hours so that an audience in China would begin to understand just why this little bird, and other creatures like it are so important in the wider context of nature's life support systems that sustain we humans.

And what better way than to tell the Spoonie story through the perceptive eyes of children?

Three years later the series is finished and awaiting broadcast. It has evolved into a story about China's relationship with nature and the environment as told through compelling stories of real life drama – through extraordinary people across this hugely important land. Their human stories interweave with detailed ecology and nature history to give insight into our interdependent world. But it is children who are really the heart and soul of the series, for they are the future – through their eyes we discover what kind of world they wish to inherit as their country grapples with the reality of global warming and ecological collapse in the pursuit of an ambitious new future.

The series kicks off with a mystery letter arriving at a Primary school on the east coast of China. The reaction of the schoolchildren to its message is to take them, and us on a journey into the very heart of the battle to save Spoonie.

To get a glimpse of what is in store, follow the link to a preview. http://river-films.com/CLOUDS_AND_DREAMS_PROMO.htm
http://www.river-films.com/BAFTA_INVITE.htm

And what of the future? How can we ensure that the nation-wide publicity generated by the series can be used to help safeguard the future of Spoonie and all the other shorebirds on the East Asian Flyway?

The good news is that, in tandem with the essential ongoing scientific work, the film series may help plans for a 'state of the art' centre for education and research. A futuristic centre that would be the centrepiece of a sustainable development programme, working with local people to integrate conservation with local economic development.

Its aim would be to help bring 'wealth' to the local economy – a combination of financial return and both national and international prestige as a 'World Centre' for the study of the 'Greatest Flyway on Earth' - researching intertidal, high tide wetland and marine ecology, traditional use, and the study of climate change and rising sea levels. This work would reach out to schools and universities across China. The Centre would be at the heart of a living, working, evolving demonstration that conservation and development can and should be two sides of the same coin. That understanding Spoonie's predicament will have enabled all of us to think about the bigger picture and help forge an exciting future not only for the birds of the East Asian Flyway but for ourselves and our children.

The 'Ocean Flyway Centre' at the heart of a national marine reserve is a dream at the moment, but a dream that one day must become a reality.

Spoonie by moonlight, Yangkou mudflats 2013: a frame from the film

First re-sighting of two juvenile birds in Korea and China flagged in 2016 on the breeding grounds

Sang-yeon Lee and Pavel Tomkovich

Our team of the Korea National Nature Investigation found a banded SBS in the course of investigation on 31st of August 2016 in Jeongja-dong, Buk-gu, Ulsan on the East coast in Korea. Details of the banded bird show a lime flag with engraved U5 and a Moscow metal ring. The bird was observed by Soon-kyoo Choi among 120 Red-necked Stints, Dunlin, Lesser Sand Plovers and Sanderling. No other SBS was present. The more surprising it was that the following day on 1 September another flagged juvenile bird was observed at the same location by the same observer with the engraved number of 1K on white flag.

It is assumed that because of the extreme weather conditions a bad typhoon might have brought the two birds amongst many other waders down to this beach. We think the SBS use this area as stopover site for a while, maybe. This area made up sand substrate because of bathing place.

The bird with Lime U5 flag and band MOSKVA KA06957 was banded on 17 July 2016 in a brood of 4 chicks attended by an adult male Lime 21. Chicks were already about one week old. The brood was observed again on 24 July, but not later. This male Lime 21 was paired with head-started female Lime 8 in two previous summers, but in 2016 it was mated with a new unmarked female.

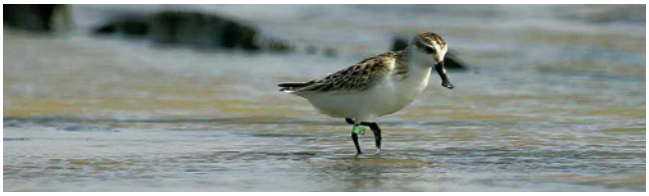
So far U5 is the only young Spoonie of this year marked in the wild that was observed on the flyway. Interestingly, U5 was again recorded further on in China in the Yellow Sea area near Lianyungang in Jiangsu province on 17 September.

The bird with white 1K flag and band MOSKVA KA05261 is a head-started bird that hatched on 5 July 2016, released into nature on 26 July and was last recorded in the aviary area on 10 August.

2016 head-started bird 1K in Chukotka *Nikolay Yakushev*

1K at Jeongja-dong, Buk-gu, Pohang, Gyeongbuk. Korea
Soon-kyoo Choi

U5 at Jeongja-dong, Buk-gu, Pohang, Gyeongbuk. Korea
Soon-kyoo Choi



U5 at Lin hong River mouth near Lian Yungang, Jiangsu
Haibing Jiao

New Hope for Nanthar Island - News Update from Myanmar

Pyae Phyo Aung / Phyolay (BANCA) · September 2016

The 740 km long Rakhine coastline has a lot of important coastal habitats, but hardly any of it is yet protected. There are some potential protected areas including Nanthar Island. Unfortunately information gaps and conflict of interest for biodiversity and other natural resources exist for most of the coast. Advocacy is important for proposing protected area status and long-term management for biodiversity and sustainability of natural resources. Nanthar Island is close to Sittwe and should be promoted as an ecotourism site in future for Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation and protection of other forms of biodiversity. Other local conservation groups should be formed and need to be trained for patrolling and law enforcement in collaboration with relevant departments.

Since SNCA was established in 2009, the team has been closely working with BANCA for Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation activities in Rakhine State. This year, SNCA reformed the team with members from retired foresters and the name was changed to "Biodiversity And Environmental Conservation Association-Rakhine" (BECAR). It was officially registered at Ministry of Home Affairs, Myanmar.

Currently BECAR is carrying out CEPA activities at five villages (Sittwe Township and Rathedaung Township) in collaboration with Forest Department (Rakhine State). The isolated Nanthar Island does not fall under the management of State Government and Forest Department. Previous government authorized Veteran Soldiers Organization to manage at Nanthar. The reason is that Nanthar Island is a critical place from military point of view. However, as the island has a lot of potential for biodiversity conservation, it should be accorded status of a protected area.

Veteran Soldiers Organization does not serve the purpose of biodiversity conservation (birds, and

Education team and re-endorsement meeting with community

sea turtles etc.). Near the Nanthar Island there are five villages, which have no electricity and local communities are relying on fishing and few people have own land for cultivation. The communities are using fuel woods that were collected near their villages in mangrove area. During the education activities, the team observed that no organization is currently working on community development and conservation in the area. Local communities have been facing the problem of freshwater shortage during every dry season.

Now, the Forest Department is keen to propose Nanthar Island as a protected area since the site supports wintering Spoon-billed Sandpiper and nesting Sea Turtles. We hope, Nanthar Island becomes a new protected area in the near future.

The new government of Mon State is interested to designate Gulf of Mottama as Ramsar site in the near future and willing to extend support for Gulf of Mottama Project. BANCA and Forest Department staff organized meetings with the community, explained Ramsar Site designation process and received re-endorsement letter for Ramsar site designation from community in April 2016. For effective conservation programme in Gulf of Mottama, WCS Myanmar Program supported SMART training for BANCA staff in Gulf of Mottama area.

BANCA carried out the ecosystems services of Kelatha Wildlife Sanctuary which is close to Gulf of Mottama in March-June 2016. Overall objectives of the survey is to conserve the Kelatha WS with the participation of community for long-term sustainable conservation and to promote Gulf of Mottama and Kelatha as eco-tourism sites due to the presence of rich biodiversity and archeological sites which rekindle the region of once powerful nation of Mon Kingdom which originated at Thuwunna Bhumi, around Kelatha and its environs. After the assessment survey of Kelatha

Opening speech by H.E U Min Min Oo (Chief Minister of Mon State) and Participants

WS, BANCA formed the Community Based Organization (CBO) with the participation of local community who live in Kelatha WS.

On 29 August 2016 the Chief Minister of Mon State officially opened a meeting on Mon State conservation with active participation of the Mon State Government officials for Gulf of Mottama Ramsar-site designation process and discussed other potential conservation areas in Mon State. Mon State Government strongly recommended to designate Gulf of Mottama as a Ramsar site and requested to provide with official letter along with Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) to Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC).

U Saw Tun Khaing (Executive Director BANCA) explained Kelatha Wildlife Sanctuary and GoM

U Pyae Phyo Aung (Program Manager-BANCA) explained the progress of Gulf of Mottama Ramsar Site Designation Process

Biodiversity And Nature Conservation Association
BANCA

Spoon-billed Sandpiper and a Romance on the Heritage Cruise: Happily ever after seen SBS together

Elena Lappo, Anna Syroechkovskaya

One day in late June 2016 during this summer's Heritage Expedition we found the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in one of the lagoons we searched along the coast of Chukotka. This was not just special for us, and Rodney Russ – the Heritage Expeditions leader – and his team, who after helping the search for more than six years were more than delighted with finding additional territories. This day was absolutely outstanding for Annelies Jacobs and David 'Billy' Herman from Belgium. When they saw the first Spoon-billed Sandpiper in their life, Billy proposed to Annelies with a spoon-bill-shaped ring on the shores of the lagoon. He said he wants to be with her ever after. Later, we asked Billy and Annelies a few questions about the role of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in their lives.

How have you got involved into birdwatching? Your first experience in this.

Annelies When I was a kid, I couldn't stop looking at children's wildlife books: so many colours, so many species! My grandmother bought me my first bird book and a plastic toy binocular. I spent many days as a little girl sitting behind the window, watching and identifying all the birds that visited the garden: Hawfinch, Greenfinch, Grey Heron, I used to call our small garden 'the jungle'.

Billy I got involved into nature and birdwatching when I was 7 years old. My mother saw I was attracted by nature and she sent me to a youth movement for nature. Since that moment, I have been birdwatching and exploring nature and it became more a lifestyle rather than just a hobby.

Where do you come from, what is your background, profession, what are you doing for life?

A I grew up just outside the city of Antwerp, Belgium. It is an area that is getting more and more urbanized and where people slowly lose their knowledge and love for wildlife. I studied Biology at the University of Antwerp. Today I work for Natuurpunt, the Belgian nature organization. I coordinate different groups of volunteers that monitor birds, mammals, plants, grasshoppers, fireflies, all over the country. I hope I can support them to share their knowledge and passion with local communities.

B For me my choice for studying Biology at the University of Ghent and Antwerp was very easy. After I graduated, I started to travel for birdwatching and do some seasonal work. Some years later, I started to work for two organizations for conservation in Belgium. It was mainly an administration job. After more than two years, nature in real life called back and I started a travel agency in Belgium. We organize weekends and tours to bring nature closer to people (starlingtours.com).

How did you meet each other? When it happened?

A Three years ago, Billy asked me out on a bird watching trip at the Belgian coast. I suppose not too many couples had their first date watching birds …

B Annelies and I met each other three years ago. The nature scene in Belgium is rather small, so we found each other by our friends in common. We went on a 'date' in the nature along our coast

and since then, we have been exploring in our free time as much as possible and combine our outs with scouting for guiding later.

Where and when did you first find out about SBS? Why is this species outstanding for you?
B I always had a very special feeling for waders like many birdwatchers. I got to know this bird in the magazine BirdingWorld with an article about Spoon-billed Sandpiper on the breeding grounds. Since then I dreamed to see this bird in full summer plumage, rather than in winter plumage in Thailand. It was and still is definitely one of my top 10 birds to see in the world!
A I think SBS is a true beauty… Our wonder about a species makes us want to learn more about it. For me, SBS is a true icon for nature conservation, it is a flagship species of the East Asian flyway and for habitat conservation in its breeding and wintering grounds. I think you could call SBS the 'panda' of the bird world.

When you first discussed SBS with each other?
A We were very eager to join Heritage Expedition in the Russian Far East. When we saw one of the 2016 expeditions was especially dedicated to SBS, to learn about conservation work of the breeding population in Chukotka, we smiled at each other and knew what our plans for the summer would be.
B The first time we spoke about Spoon-billed Sandpiper two years ago, I mentioned dreams that could become reality with the trip of Heritage Expeditions.

What did you feel, say and do first when you SAW your first SBS?
B For me, this scenario could not have been better than it was. When the plan was communicated on the ship, I really believed it could happen. Also in the Zodiac I remember I pepped up the other members of our team that I really 'believed' in finding SBS. Strolling around in what could be a possible new breeding ground from this elusive wader was just WOW. When Max and Elena told us that Evgeny found two birds, I could not believe my ears and the first thrill inside my body was a fact, stressing me and I could only think of one thing... The ring! Half an hour later, we headed back to the zodiacs along the shore and suddenly Max and Annelies had seen some small sandpipers on the beach. We walked easily towards the group of waders when suddenly, out of the blue, just in front of us, a small wader came out of the grass... We pointed out our binoculars with the four of us and confirmed what we were seeing: SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER in full summer plumage! The feeling was just stunning inside. One of the best and most intense thrills in my life and the first time I cried for a bird. Waiting more than 15 years for this sighting and finding a bird by ourselves on new breeding grounds was just FANTASTIC. Shortly after, I gave Annelies the special ring, to seal this very unique moment and to seal our special relationship.

A We were walking along a stony beach, on our way back to the ship. Suddenly we saw a SBS in breeding plumage just a few meters in front of us. My heart was beating really fast! As it flew up, it seemed like a slow motion scene. I think the first minute, we didn't say much at all!

Where did you get that special ring from? Was it designed especially for you?
B I approached a friend of mine who designs rings. He always found it funny that I was so into birds, but was really blessed with designing something very exclusive. I asked him to integrate the bill in a ring, as realistic as possible and gave him pictures from the internet. Silver was not good enough, I wanted it to be pure white gold. The end result was just perfect for me without too much 'bling-bling'. Sober and accurate.

Do you think there will be more of SBS in your life in the future, by any means, in any ways?
A I'm sure SBS will be in our future. We are very happy to give a number of lectures on the SBS project in Belgium, in order to inform and educate people on the topic of the East Asian flyway and conservation of breeding and wintering grounds of the species. I also hope to inspire people to join the Heritage Expeditions in the future, to join the search for new SBS habitats. I think one day we will also go back. And off course, I see the SBS on my hand every day now…
B We dream this is not the end but just the beginning of something new. A very special relationship, not only with ourselves, but also with a bird we would love to connect with in the future. So let's hope we can catch up with Spoon-billed Sandpipers anywhere in the world and we can mean something real to prevent this fantastic creature from extinction.

Layouter's note: SBS Task Force wishes the young couple a long-term and always happy relationship

David 'Billy' Herman

Heritage Expeditions has been supporting the SBS Task Force in its efforts to protect Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Chukotka and Kamchatka for a long time. Over the past six years of cooperation more than 20 lagoons have been surveyed in remote areas of the Koryak Coast and Chukotka (more than 80% of the potential breeding range of SBS). This resulted in discovering of two new nesting areas (in 2011 and 2016). The total estimated number of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the surveyed area, with extrapolation of unexplored areas, is probably not more than 20 pairs, representing about 10-20 % of the global breeding population. The survey in 2016 was complicated by unfavourable weather conditions which made it impossible to land in a number of planned locations. Despite this, this year's finding is the highest and most successful of all six years with four nesting pairs in 2016.

We like to thank Rodney Russ for his continued and generous support of our conservation work.

Heritage Expeditions

SBS in Art

Souvenir spoonbills from Chukotka carved by a talented microbiologist

Elena Lappo

Ivan Shepelev was born in a small town not far from Ural mountains in Kazakhstan, and now lives at the Volga river near Saratov. Ivan has a PhD in biology with a background in microbiological studies. Since 2014 he has been working with the expedition of BirdsRussia, involved actively in the ‚Headstarting' programm serving as an aviculture specialist: his duty is to raise SBS chicks in the semi-wild conditions, which contributes to this rare species' population recovery.

The idea of Headstarting briefly described again: Eggs are taken from the SBS clutches in the wild, then put into the incubator and, after the hatching is completed, the young Spoonies spend about a month in special care of aviculturists, who raise them in their natural environment, making sure the chicks are growing and getting strong enough to get prepared for the migration. Ivan is the key Russian person responsible for this day-and-night care, so named one of the "foster-fathers".

After the chicks hatched Ivan starts taking everyday care to catch water invertebrates. He's doing this every evening walking up to his waist in the cold water of a local tundra lake. Another duty of Ivan is to keep off the predators. Overall, Ivan has a pleasing character and cheers up his colleagues. During the summer months he is working with Roland Digby from WWT (Slimbridge, UK) and Nikolay Yakushev (BirdsRussia).

In his free time Ivan carves from wood: He is making unique Spoon-billed Sandpiper souvenirs. His works are getting really popular among not only his colleagues, but also tourists visiting these remote places for the unique birdwatching experience of seeing SBS in the wild. Ivan had

never been trained as an artist but he seems to be really talented in carving the birds he's observing around the clock during his work. Those who admire his masterpieces tell that he is using the beauty of natural materials masterly, carving from stone, bone, wood, birch bark and other materials which can be found abundantly at the sea shore.

Ivan, when did you draw a bird or any other animal for the first time?
Ivan Shepelev I have been drawing from my childhood, but only when I was 10-11 years old I started to draw from life which is more anatomically correct. My favourite model was my cat (mostly when it was asleep of course). When I was 17 years old I carved my first bas-relief on a pebble: at one side there was a flying Gull, and at the other side - a Caucasian goat (or, it would be better to say, a horned creature which I believed was resembling a Caucasian goat).

Where did you first find out about Spoon-billed Sandpiper – saw it or maybe heard or read something about it?
I Well, for the first time I saw an SBS at the postal stamp when I was a child. In live I saw it first in Chukotka in June 2014, thanks to my friend Nikolay Yakushev. I was surprised a lot to find out how tiny the bird was! I find it hard to distinguish it even through the binocular despite distance between us was quite short. Now birds look much bigger to me (laughing).

How, when and where did you first created an SBS?
I During my first trip to Chukotka in 2014, while waiting for incubators, I carved a big spoon from

a piece of wood which I found at the Bering sea shore, it's handle was an SBS' head. And then I decided that it might be great to make more SBS souvenirs, which I am working on now, when I have time.

What is the most exciting story you can tell about yourself and SBS?

I The year I started to work in the Headstarting project was such a story in itself! The time I spent in Chukotka that year impressed me to a highest degree as everything was new for me: for the first time I came to Chukotka, for the first time I saw a bear, grey and white whales, a lot of bird species I was not familiar with – and the most unique among them was SBS.

What is your job with SBS in Chukotka and what do you like about it?

I We take some eggs from the SBS clutches in the wild, let the chicks hatch, feed them and release them back to the wild as soon as they can fly. So, in short, I can say my work is to be a brooding hen. I am really glad to see every time how the tiny Spoonies are growing bigger and stronger. I do see the sense in my job: it is important for me to realize that three months of the hard work – searching for the nests, controlling the hatchery, keeping an eye at the youngs in the open-air cage – all result in the fact that every year more of these precious and rare birds depart to the South. And unlike any of my previous jobs, here I really see the effect of my efforts. I realize this every time we release the birds, and later, when we receive the feedback from our colleagues along the flyway and at the wintering grounds, telling us that our "graduates" are doing well.
Another part of my job – making the SBS souvenirs – giving me a lot of positive emotions as well. I enjoy making up the image in my head, then carving a piece and most of all I like it when what I imagined finally becomes real. It all makes me happy. And of course I am glad to know that people like my work.

Why is it important to conserve SBS as the species?

I At least because conserving SBS, as far as many other species, we conserve their habitats as well, which I find really important nowadays when growing population of the Planet produces more and more waste and contaminants. Apart from that, Spoonbills are so very pretty and fun! I wish there would always be a niche for the birds on our Planet.

How can artists and sculptors contribute to the aim of conserving birds in general and spoon-billed sandpiper in particular?

I I think artists can show people (with their art) that the bird world is so very diverse and interesting... The art can definitely draw attention to the problem and maybe even encourage people to make their own small contribution for the conservation of birds. Everyone can do something in their life – like donating money or dedicating their own time and effort. And add a small part of your own soul in what you are doing.

New paper on the winter distribution of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper by the Task Force

Sayam Chowdhury

In order to target advocacy, ensure long-term habitat protection and reduction of hunting pressure in all stop-over and wintering sites, better understanding on the areas used by Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the non-breeding season is extremely important.

Often, lack of resources has prevented a comprehensive shorebird survey of the entire coastline of SBS range, so survey effort has been focused on areas with remotely-sensed attributes characteristic of sites known to have winter concentrations of Spoon-billed Sandpipers throughout the species' winter range. The present paper is the result of over 8 years of surveys across the potential wintering area between India and China.

A species distribution model based on SBS sightings elsewhere has been developed by the SBS Task Force (Zöckler et al. 2016) to map potentially suitable habitat for wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers to be identified prior to expensive and time-consuming ground surveys.

The species distribution model has been proved useful already as it was applied to discover a new SBS site along the Sandwip coast of Bangladesh (Chowdhury in prep 2016).

The paper was published in
Bird Conservation International in May 2016
(DOI: 10.1017/S0959270915000295) and the full paper can be downloaded from here:
http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0959270915000295

The winter distribution of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Calidris pygmaeus

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Abstract

Declines in populations of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaeus* have been rapid, with the breeding population now perhaps numbering fewer than 120 pairs. The reasons for this decline remain unresolved. Whilst there is evidence that hunting in wintering areas is an important factor, loss of suitable habitat on passage and wintering areas is also of concern. While some key sites for the species are already documented, many of their wintering locations are described here for the first time. Their wintering range primarily stretches from Bangladesh to China. Comprehensive surveys of potential Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering sites from 2005 to 2013 showed a wide distribution with three key concentrations in Myanmar and Bangladesh, but also regular sites in China, Vietnam and Thailand. The identification of all important nonbreeding sites remains of high priority for the conservation of the species. Here, we present the results of field surveys of wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers that took place in six countries between 2005 and 2013 and present species distribution models which map the potential wintering areas. These include known and currently unrecognised wintering locations. Our maximum entropy model did not identify any new extensive candidate areas within the winter distribution, suggesting that most key sites are already known, but it did identify small sites on the coast of eastern Bangladesh, western Myanmar, and the Guangxi and Guangdong regions of China that may merit further investigation. As no extensive areas of new potential habitat were identified, we suggest that the priorities for the conservation of this species are habitat protection in important wintering and passage areas and reducing hunting pressure on birds at these sites.

2nd German Support Group Meeting September 2016 in Berlin

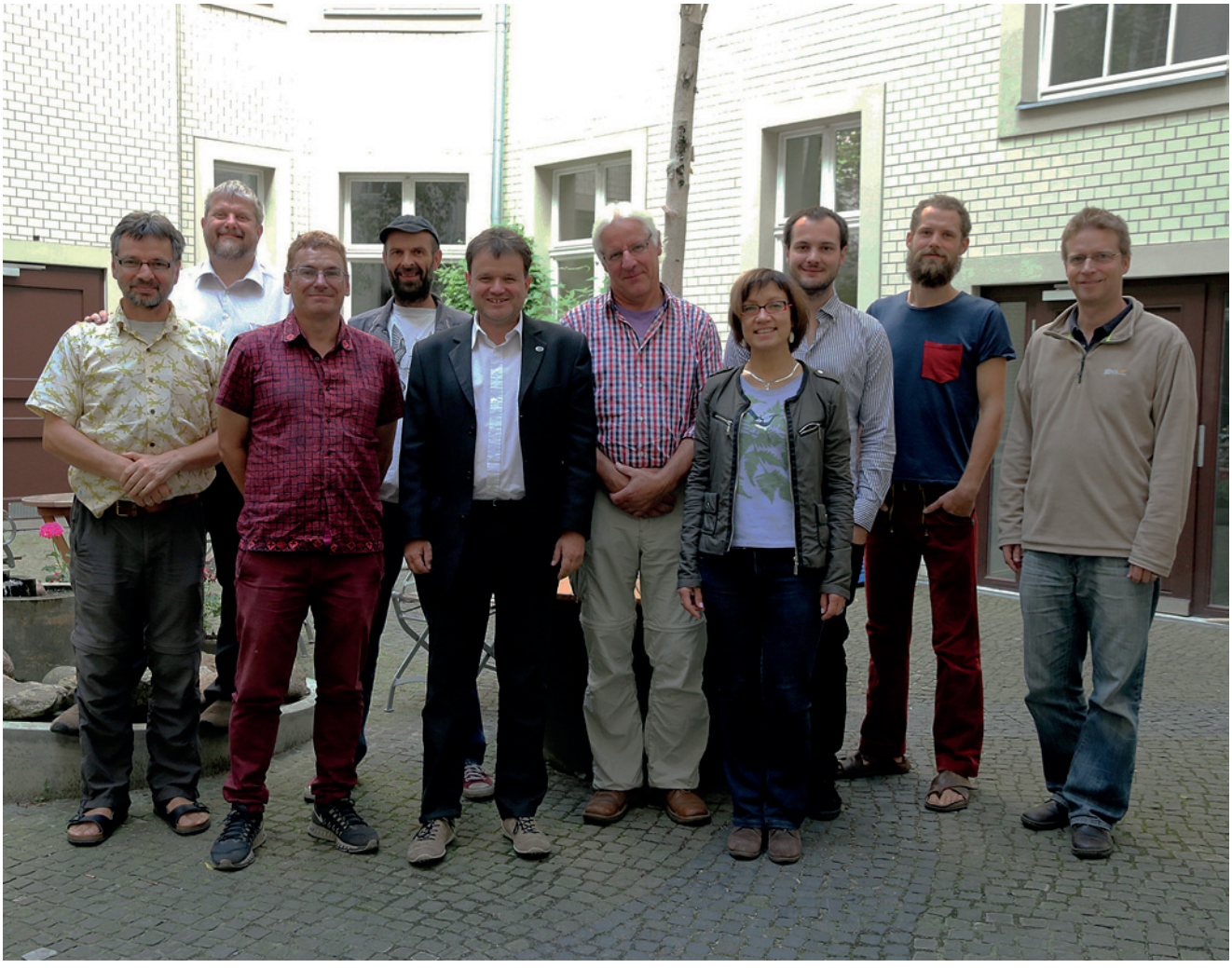
Christoph Zöckler

After officially established the German SBS Support Group last year at the office of our long-term partner the Manfred-Hermsen Stiftung (MHS) in Bremen, the group met again in September 2016. This time ten people including two special guests from Russia met in Berlin at the premises of NABU.

In an agreement with the MHS the German BirdLife partner NABU has stepped up his support for the SBS TF and raised additional funds specifically to complement our work on the breeding grounds, but also for other important areas along the flyway.

Tom Noah and Matthias Fanck reported from their excursion to the new breeding area (see separate report) and Evgeniy reported with fresh impressions and new developments on the creation of new protected areas in the main breeding areas in Chukotka.

We are very grateful for NABU's support that helps our work in Russia and China at a very welcome moment.



German support group in Berlin *Photo NABU*

Сохраним кулика-лопатня

Мыныгйипгъэн вылпатъек

ヘラシギを守ろう

넓적부리도요를 구하자

拯救勺嘴鹬

Hãy bảo vệ loài Rẽ mỏ thìa

รักษ์นกชายเลนปากช้อน

Selamatkan Kedidi Paruh Sudu

চামুচ-ঠুঁটো । বাটান বাঁচান

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கரண்டி மூக்கு
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காப்பாற்றுவோம்

Rettet den Löffelstrandläufer

Save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper