



Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No. 10, August 2013



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

Update August 2013: Contents

- 1) Foreword from the Editor
- 2) Foreword from Rodney Russ, Heritage Expeditions
- 3) Brief report from Meinopylgino, Chukotka, Russia
- 4) Searching for new SBS sites with Heritage Expeditions 2013
- 5) Conservation breeding update for SBS TF
- 6) Headstarting- results from the second year!
- 7) Analyses of stopover sites in Japan
- 8) SBS activities in the Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar
- 9) SBS stopping over in Bohai Bay, Yellow Sea, China
- 10) Report from the EAAFP MoP7 in Alaska
- 11) The SBS Wedding



Spoon-billed sandpiper on the breeding grounds in Meinopyl'gino

Baz Scampion

In figures:

25 young chicks reared for head-starting in Meinypil'gino, chukotka
9 more potential breeding sites searched with Heritage Expedition
No more new breeding sites found
10-11 breeding pairs in Meinypil'gino, Chukotka
542 SBS records from Japan have been analysed
2 Spoon-billed sandpiper (one first summer!) in Bohai Bay, Yellow Sea, China in late spring
28 happy adult SBS in the captive breeding facilities in Slimbridge
£1195 generated for SBS conservation at the world's first SBS devoted wedding!

1) Foreword from the Editor

Dear friends and colleagues,

It has become increasingly difficult to keep up with all the developments over the past half year and I apologise now if some of the activities have not been adequately covered by this newsletter. With a better understanding of the flyway route and stopover sites we also receive more observations, but many of these have not yet been submitted, entered into the database or analysed, and many questions still remain.

The news about the status of the species over the past six months is a mixed bag. For the third time Heritage Expeditions supported an extensive search of remote and difficult to access areas in the breeding area, but again without finding any new sites (see Rodney Russ' forward and Chris Collins' more detailed report). This is, however, in contrast with the development at our core breeding and monitoring site in Meinypil'gino, where Pavel Tomkovich reports of a stabilizing breeding population of 9-10 pairs. This is particularly encouraging as, with all caution, it could be seen as a further success of our conservation work in the non-breeding areas. Our 'head-starting' project efforts to give the young raised in Meinypil'gino a good start have been very successful too and WWT reports on this as well as providing an update on the captive breeding stock in Slimbridge.

Our efforts in the Gulf of Mottama seem to progress very nicely too, receiving high level attention and support from the region, including none other than the Prime Minister of the Mon state himself, as well as support from former hunters, as Phylolay from BANCA reports. However, the country is opening and developing fast with unforeseen impacts on the fragile coastal ecosystems. We will have to report in more detail on some of the perils of conventional coastal developments in our next newsletters.

We continue to receive support from literally all over the world which is indeed very encouraging. These include of course our old friends from BirdLife International and its Species Champions, Wildsounds, Heritage Expeditions and the Dutch Birding Association, as well as continued support from Keidanren in Tokyo, the Lighthouse and Manfred-Hermesen Foundations in Germany, the RSPB in the UK and the US FWS in the US, but more and more also from private donors. However, to devote your own wedding entirely to Spoon-billed sandpiper conservation has been unheard of. This is exactly what Ian and Beth Ellis did and we would like to thank them and all the others very much for their generous contributions.

Dr Christoph Zöckler, Coordinator SBS TF, August 2013

2) Foreword from Rodney Russ, Heritage Expeditions

When I suggested to my staff some years ago that we should consider becoming a species champion for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper with BirdLife International, it would be fair to say the majority didn't know what a Spoon-billed Sandpiper was and they probably thought there were better ways to spend our money.

The year was 2008 and we were developing our Russian Far East expedition cruise programme. We had had many setbacks. We missed an entire season because the ship was delayed in a Russian ship yard, the paper work and permit applications with the Border Guards, FSB (the modern equivalent of the KGB) and it seemed countless other Government agencies, were bogged down or at best only moving at glacial speed. It was not a great time to be promoting and investing in a little known species. I was aware of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper through my interest in rare and endangered species management, something I had been involved in professionally for the New Zealand Government. I had worked on Kakapo, Black Robins, Takahe, Black Stilt, Saddleback and many others.

Through this work I had become convinced that advocacy was as critical as management and research in saving rare species. It was my conviction that conservation was empowering and only made possible by communities be they local, national or international. If these communities supported it, anything and everything was possible.

Our proposed cruises travelled to the very heart of the breeding ground for this species. Very few people had ever seen these birds in breeding plumage let alone on a nest. I approached BirdLife International with an audacious plan. We wanted to become a Species Champion for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper but we wanted to do more than give money... we wanted to help. We wanted to put teams (paying participants on our cruises) on the ground in the known breeding areas to search for breeding birds. This would give participants a rare opportunity to hopefully see birds but it would also possibly help find new breeding birds. Full credit to Jim Lawrence and his team at BirdLife International, he listened and took our ideas to the SBS recovery team and convinced them that they should at least try.

As I write this and reflect on three years of partnering with BirdLife International, Birds Russia and the SBS recovery team, it has been one of the most rewarding relationships of my long career developing sustainable tourism in remote places. Many of the results are intangible but our teams have searched hundreds of hectares of habitat within the known breeding range of the species. Sadly (for the species) we haven't located many new breeding sites but we have eliminated a lot of areas. We have done in three years what it would have taken SBS recovery team a lifetime and at no cost to the project. We have helped in many other ways as well. One of the most memorable was transporting the first lot of SBS eggs from Meinypil'gino to Anadyr. In addition to the SBS work, we have contributed significantly to the general knowledge of bird and mammal distribution in the Russian Far East, which will prove invaluable in monitoring other species some of which will, if they are not already, face similar problems as the SBS.

Our work hasn't saved the species and there is still a lot of work to be done, but what I hope our partnership has shown is that empowering communities can achieve great things. This species belongs to numerous communities and only when we have empowered them all can there be hope. The SBS recovery team and its supporters are doing an amazing job in empowering communities throughout the known SBS breeding, migratory and wintering range. I congratulate them and encourage them in their work and hope that others may be inspired and encouraged to find ways to assist as we at Heritage Expeditions did and will continue to do.

Finally, one of the greatest rewards of this work has not been seeing SBS on the breeding grounds and in breeding plumage, although that still remains a very special moment. It has been the amazing friendships that have formed during the course of this work. Friendships forged in the field through common interests, commitment to conservation and a love and passion for all things Arctic.

Thank you.

Rodney Russ

Expedition Leader, Biologist, Owner and Founder of Heritage Expeditions Ltd

3) Brief report from the Breeding area in Meinypylgino, late summer 2013



Adult male Spoon-billed sandpiper with chick in Meinypylgino, July 2013

Photo: Pavel Tomkovich

The breeding season 2013 seemed to have been very favourable for our ambitious plans to monitor the last known big breeding population. Progress has been also beyond our expectations with the head-starting – (rearing chicks in incubators and give them a head start, when released as fledglings) - in the core breeding area in Meinypylgino.

With again 9 pairs with nests or chicks in the core monitoring area plus one warning male with a brood in July and one additional egg-laying female recorded in June, the estimated total is around 10-11 pairs in 2013. For the first time the population in Meinypylgino has not declined and is stable at around 10 pairs. In addition there were at least 5 breeding pairs recorded nearby at the tundra and moraine hills west of Meinypylgino and at least one breeding pair (and more birds seen) near Kaipylgyn Lake. Unlike last year when many males were not paired, no unmated males were recorded this year (all got a female). Eggs of 6 pairs were collected for head-starting. Of these, four pairs relayed (as well as one more pair that likely lost their eggs). Two of the 5 replacements were predated.

18 chicks were raised in outside pens for headstarting and 16 migrated successfully. They spread more widely along the lake shore in comparison to 2012. Eight adults, 3 wild chicks and all birds of the headstarted project were marked with engraved leg flags in addition to a standard metal ring. More information will follow later when a more comprehensive report will be compiled.

Dr. Sci Pavel Tomkovich, Birds Russia

4) Searching for Spoon-billed Sandpiper with Heritage Expeditions

For the last three Arctic summers, the New Zealand based travel company, Heritage Expeditions, has had a very successful partnership with Birdlife International and Birds Russia to search for new breeding sites for Spoon-billed Sandpiper along the coastlines of Kamchatka, Koryak and Chukotka. Heritage Expedition uses the Russian research vessel Professor Khromov (now branded as the Spirit of Enderby) to take travellers to isolated parts of the world and, during the northern summer, the company offers a series of trips in the Russian Far East. In 2011-13 inclusive, one of these voyages, 'In the Wake of Bering' has included up to three days searching unsurveyed areas along the Pacific coast between northern Kamchatka and Meinypil'gyno for Spoon-billed Sandpipers. In 2013 the company offered a new voyage, "Chukotka: Where Russia's day begins", sailing north from Anadyr through the Bering Strait, with three days set aside to look for Spoon-billed Sandpipers. With several days between these two voyages for a team to also check areas to the east of Kresta Bay (approximately 130 miles to the NE of Anadyr), we were certainly hopeful of success.

'In the Wake of Bering' voyage 2013

In late June 2013, four areas identified by Evgeny Syroechkovskiy and Elena Lappo (based on satellite imagery) as potentially good habitat for breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers were searched along the Koryak coastline.

Those passengers who wanted to participate were split into a series of teams variously led by Evgeny, Elena, Anders Blomdahl (leader for the Swedish bird tour company, Avifauna), Adam Walley (Heritage Expeditions guide) and myself and we systematically checked the habitat.

All the areas we searched had areas of suitable habitat, with one site in particular being seemingly ideal with large areas of crowberry. Indeed, the vegetation here was very similar to the site where we found at least three territories of Spoon-billed Sandpipers on the 2011 voyage.

Despite spending the equivalent of approximately 100 man days surveying four sites, no Spoon-billed Sandpipers were found in 2013. Although this was disappointing, some important data was gathered on the birds of this region and one site in particular was noteworthy for the number and variety of waterfowl which were present. Seventeen species were recorded there during the afternoon with the highlights being sightings of lone males of both Falcated Duck and American Wigeon. The area also held good numbers of Sandhill Cranes with approximately forty individuals being recorded, as well as seventeen Brown Bears – something the surveyors were glad did not come too close !!!!

Other important information gathered during the voyage including recording over 130 Kittlitz's Murrelets over the last five days of the trip (north-eastward along the coastline from approximately 59 54N 170 09E to Anadyr). This species is treated as 'critically endangered' by Birdlife International as it is thought to be "suffering an extremely rapid population decline owing to a variety of threats", however, the number of sightings on the recent trip supports the suggestion "that the population may not be undergoing such a steep downward trend" as had been originally thought.

During the expedition, we also enjoyed a memorable day at Meinypil'gyno where the local monitoring team arranged for all participants to be taken to two Spoon-billed Sandpiper nests. To minimise disturbance, the group was split into two with approximately twenty people visiting each site. Viewing was at approximately 30 metres and everyone left very happy with their experience, demonstrating that conservation and eco-tourism can genuinely work together even when the species is one which is as threatened as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Eastern Kresta Bay survey

The intention had been to spend up to five days surveying an area of seemingly ideal habitat along the coastline (and east of Kresta Bay) between approximately 65 30N 178 32W and 65 27N 177 45W. This area comprises a patchwork of pools and several small river deltas, and Spoon-billed Sandpiper has previously been recorded breeding in this general area, although not for a number of years.

Rodney Russ, the founder of Heritage Expeditions, generously provided the Spirit of Enderby as a 'support vessel' for this expedition and the plan had been to land three search parties along a 25 mile stretch of coastline with the groups then camping out for several days.

This coastline sits behind a 48 mile long shingle bar and when we arrived on 5 July 2013, the area was completely choked with sea ice making it impossible to operate zodiacs or get ashore. As a result, plans were soon reorganised and the ten participants spent three days surveying the area around a huge lagoon system immediately to the east of the spit.

Unfortunately, no Spoon-billed Sandpipers were found here either, although some of the habitat was possibly more marginal than other sites I have visited. That said, there were still areas which were excellent for waders and a range of interesting species (many of which it is presumed were breeding) were recorded including Red Knot, Pacific Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Common Ringed Plover and Western Sandpiper.



Breeding adult at Meinypil'gino colour-marked with lime green flag

C. Collins

'Chukotka: Where Russia's day begins' voyage 2013

This voyage sailed from Anadyr on 11 July, going through the Bering Strait, with two days of landings in the Kolyuchin Inlet (entrance at 67 04N 174 38W). This inland waterway is enormous (covering approximately 700 square miles) and during the surveys we explored a series of locations which Evgeny Syroechkovskiy and Elena Lappo believed looked promising for Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Historically the species is known from this region but, unfortunately, once again the survey teams drew a blank, although again some useful data was gathered on the birds of this region.

Within the Inlet itself, probably the most interesting sightings were upwards of 15,000 Grey Phalaropes which were seen on 18 July. There was one flock which was estimated at upwards of 10,000 individuals and it seems that the Inlet must be an important post-breeding staging point for this species.

As well as the Grey Phalaropes, sixteen other species of wader were recorded with the totals for the two days noted after the species: Common Ringed Plover (126), Mongolian Plover (1), Pacific Golden Plover (21), Grey Plover (8), Dunlin (100), Red Knot (5), Pectoral Sandpiper (109), Rock Sandpiper (1), Red-necked Stint (67), Western Sandpiper (69), Temminck's Stint (34), Ruff (1), Little Stint (1), Long-billed Dowitcher (4), Ruddy Turnstone (16) and Red-necked Phalarope (several thousand).

The trip also spent a couple of days at the modest community of Lavrentiya (65 35N 171 00W) where some of the party explored the pools to the south of the town. This site, which is just 82 miles west of Alaska, and approximately ten years ago (CZ per comms) several pairs of Semi-palmated Plover were found breeding here. This year at least four pairs (and up to 12 individuals) were located in the same area (with at least one bird still sitting on eggs/very young chicks) and the species was actually commoner than Common Ringed Plover.



Support Vessel 'Prof Khromov' North Chukotka July 2013

C. Zöckler

The collaboration between Heritage Expeditions, Birdlife International, Birds Russia and the SBS Task Force has undoubtedly produced a lot of very useful data over the last three years and I would like to thank Rodney Russ for the opportunity to be part of the onboard team. Although only one new breeding site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been found, this in itself is highly significant given the large areas of suitable habitat which have been checked. Unfortunately, the searches have, therefore, seemingly confirmed the view of the SBS Task Force that the breeding population is now at extremely low levels, as otherwise the surveys would surely have uncovered more birds.

Chris Collins

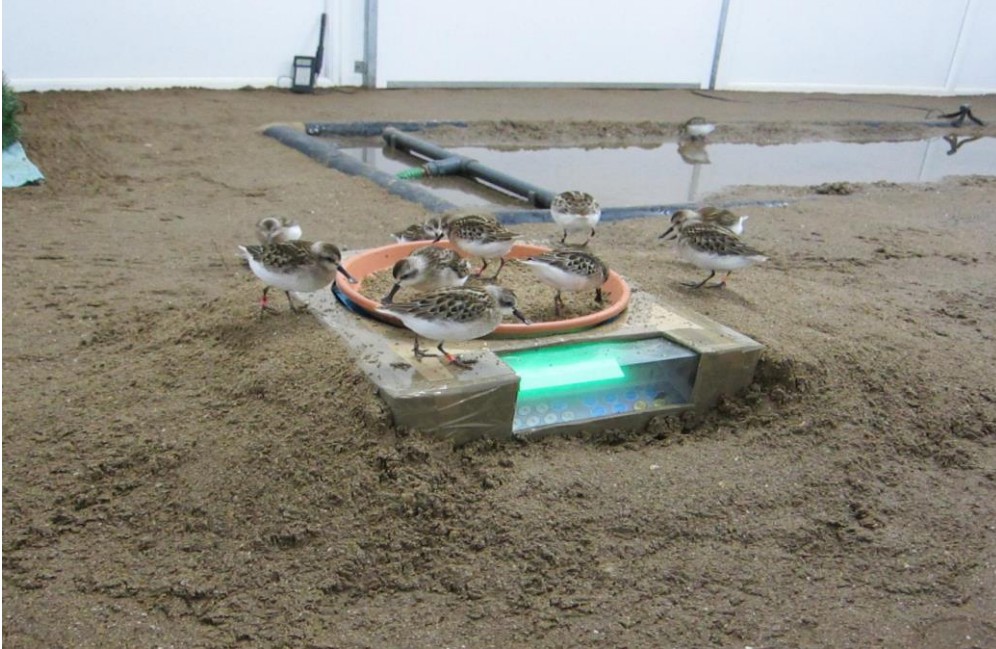
5) Conservation Breeding update for SBS TF

Conservation Breeding

All 17 of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper chicks reared at Slimbridge from the 2012 expedition are still surviving well and the captive population remains at 28 birds. We have had no deaths amongst the captive birds since February 2012. DNA sexing has suggested that we have seven males, two females and two individuals of unknown sex from the 2011 cohort and eight males, eight females and one individual of

unknown sex from 2012. So signs are good that that we may be able to reach our target population size of ten breeding pairs.

The new summer accommodation is complete – following completion of the groundworks and poly-tunnel construction, the ponds were set-up, substrate laid, soft netting fitted and electrics installed. In the winter accommodation, windows have been fitted and a new lighting system installed – these increase light levels and allow for ‘dawn/dusk’ with an automated dimming feature.



Remote weighing of juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Slimbridge.



“Blue left” – second summer plumaged male Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Slimbridge, April 2013

In spring 2013, all of the 2011 birds attained breeding plumage (to a greater or lesser degree), after the changes were made to the lighting regime in their accommodation, and the 2012 birds also moulted at the same time. The adults’ behaviour also changed with much displaying, chasing and calling however there were no eggs laid, as to be expected as Spoon-billed Sandpipers don’t normally breed until they are three years old.

Baz Hughes, WWT

6) Head-starting

The 2012 and 2013 headstarting expeditions were both very successful. In 2013, seven team members and kit arrived on time (no small feat considering the logistics and permissions needed) and we have now released a total of 25 juveniles from 35 eggs collected in the last two years.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper release aviary, Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka, Russia.

There were no sightings of the nine legged-flagged juveniles headstarted in 2012, although this is not surprising given the small number of birds marked and the vast extent of their staging and wintering range. However, awareness raising materials regarding the marking programme have been produced by Nigel Clark, BirdLife International and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and circulated throughout the flyway. For more information see:

http://www.eaflyway.net/documents/Final%20SBS%20records%20factsheet_online_english.pdf

Recording colour-marked Spoon-billed Sandpipers

As part of the conservation effort to save the species, small numbers of Spoon-billed Sandpipers will be marked with a leg flag with two characters on it. The colour of the flag and the characters identify each bird individually. In addition, there are a few colour-ringed birds alive that were marked before 2007 with colour rings and leg flags without any characters on them. Every sighting of any of these birds will be of great value, but it will be equally valuable to record the locations of individuals that are definitely not marked.



© Christoph Zockler / ArcCona

The colour-marked bird in the picture above would be recorded as follows:
Above the 'knee' left leg metal above a lime flag, below a yellow colour ring.
Above the 'knee' right leg nothing, below yellow colour ring.
Note you record the bird's left, not left as you look at the bird!
More information on colour-marking birds, including useful brochures, can be found at: <http://www.eaflyway.net/coordination-of-marking.php>.



© Zhang Lin

The picture above has three Spoon-billed sandpipers in it. The following would be the most useful information to record:
Date: 28 August 2012. Place: Rudong, China. GPS coordinates: unknown. Observer: Zhang Lin.
Three birds seen standing in shallow water.
Bird 1 in near full winter plumage (code 2). It is not possible to see its legs.
Bird 2 in near full breeding plumage (code 6). Upper legs seen clearly - definitely no marks above the 'knee', lower legs only partly visible so not certain that there were no marks.
Bird 3 had about 75% breeding plumage (faded) (code 5). Not possible to see its legs.
None of the birds seen in flight.

Even if you see what you think is the same bird the next day please send in the same detail of information

What should you record if you see Spoon-billed Sandpipers ?

First, can you get a picture? Do not disturb the bird to get a picture, but if it is possible it will help in the identification of age and plumage state.

Important information

- Record the date, time, place in as much detail as possible (GPS coordinates if possible) and the observer's name.
- Could you see the bird well enough to be sure if it was colour-marked with leg flags or colour rings?
- If you could see the bird well enough, was it marked?
- If yes, what were the markings? If it has a flag are there any characters on it? Getting detailed markings correct is vital, so if you are not certain, only record what you are certain about. Then you can explain in as much detail as possible any parts that you were not certain about. (See the picture on the previous page for an example of a colour-ringed and leg-flagged bird).
- What plumage was the bird in? (If possible, use the codes described on page 5 of this leaflet. If it was moulting between two plumages record as much as you can about it.
- If it is between August and October, and it was seen with its wing stretched, could you see how far the bird was through wing moult? Please explain what you see.

Additional information

- It would be useful to record what other shorebirds (waders) were in the area and whether it was likely that you saw all the Spoon-billed Sandpipers that were present.
- Were there any threats to the shorebirds that you are aware of?

Send the information as soon as possible to your national ornithological society (you can find a list of BirdLife Partners and their contact details at: <http://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/national/index.html>) AND ALSO to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force at sbsrecords@eaflyway.net



© Peter Yonkovich

For further information go to: <http://www.eaflyway.net/spoon-billed-sandpiper.php>







Produced by N.A. Clark (BTO) on behalf of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force. Graphic design by MaoMoring Studios, Hong Kong. Design and production funded through BirdLife International, as part of a project supported by the RSPB (the BirdLife International Partner in the UK) and the UK Government's Darwin Initiative.

Information on Spoon-billed Sandpiper colour-marking.

7) Records of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Japan. What do they tell us for conservation?

Hiroshi TOMIDA(1, **Minoru KASHIWAGI**(2
Fukuoka Wetland Conservation Research Group (1
Ramsar Network Japan (1 (2
E-mail; htomida99@gmail.com ,

Introduction

The migratory flyway including waterbird breeding sites in the northern Arctic and non-breeding sites in southern East Asia and Oceania is called the East Asia - Australasian Flyway (EAAF). More than fifty million migratory waterbirds of over 250 different populations use this flyway, including 28 globally threatened species (Delany and Scott, 2006). Among the threatened species, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*) is one of the most threatened. Previous perceptions indicated that records of Spoon-billed Sandpiper are distributed throughout the Japanese Archipelago. However, 1) spatial distribution of these records vary across the Japanese Archipelago and 2) habitat preference inferred from sighting records based on clear data has not been argued yet. These insights should contribute to the understanding of the ecology of the species, and its conservation in Japan.

Material and Method

We collected Spoon-billed Sandpiper records within the Japanese Archipelago, and constructed a database of these records. First, we included records collated by BirdLife International (BirdLife International, 2001). Secondly, we updated records from National Count of Shorebirds in Japan (1996-1998), Shorebirds Population Monitoring Census 1999-2003 in Japan (1999-2003) and ongoing national nationwide shorebirds survey (Monitoring sites1000; 2003-2013). These surveys focused on major habitats of shorebirds, including estuaries and coastal tidal flats in Japan. The surveys were conducted three times per year in spring (for northward migration), autumn (for southward migration), and wintering season. In addition, we have conducted a hearing survey among local bird researchers from 2003 to 2013.

Spatial distribution.

We analyzed spatial distribution of records in ArcGIS 10.1 in order to highlight important areas, using geospatial information provided by National Land Numerical Information Download Service (National and regional policy bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism).

Habitat preference.

After that, we inferred spatial distribution of the density of sighted records using a Kernel average analysis. We classified habitat types into five groups based on geographical characteristics: A) estuary and coastal tidal flat, B) tidal lagoon, C) rice paddy, D) sandy beach, E) landfill and reclamation area.

Results

From a total of 542 records of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Japanese Archipelago from 1890 to 2012, 471 records include detailed description of sites. These 471 records were collected from 168 sites widely spread across Japan.

Spatial distribution.

The result shows 8 distinct areas where Spoon-billed Sandpiper records concentrate (Figure 2). These areas are 1) Okhotsk Coast area (north-east coast of Hokkaido including Nemuro area), 2) Ishikari area (western part of Hokkaido), 3) Sanriku Coast area (Aomori prefecture), 4) Tokyo Bay and surrounding area, 5) Mikawa and Ise Bays, 6) western coast of Honshu (Japan Sea Coast), 7) Osaka Bay and Seto Inland Sea, and 8) northern Kyushu and Ariake Sea (including Sone tidal flats, Hakata Bay wetlands).

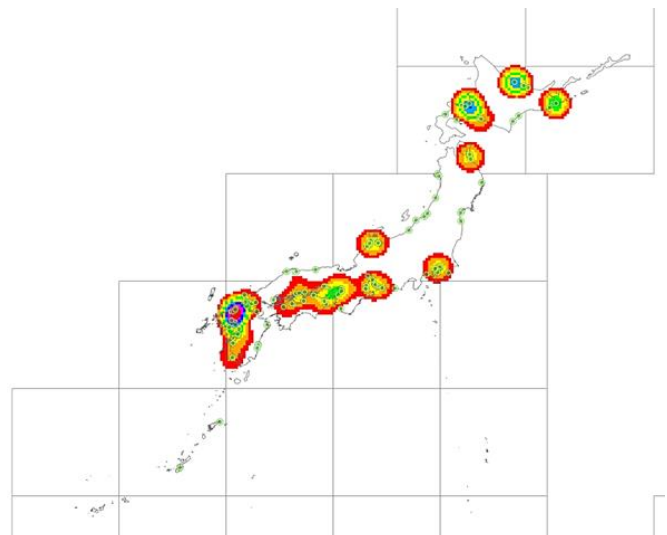


Figure1. Spatial distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper records in the Japanese Archipelago.

Habitat preference.

The preferred habitat of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Japan, based on our data, is the tidal mudflat and estuaries with 36.7% of all sites. However, 22.5% of the records are from sand beach, and 20.6% were from landfill and reclamation areas. Figure 3 shows the geographical character of sites with Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

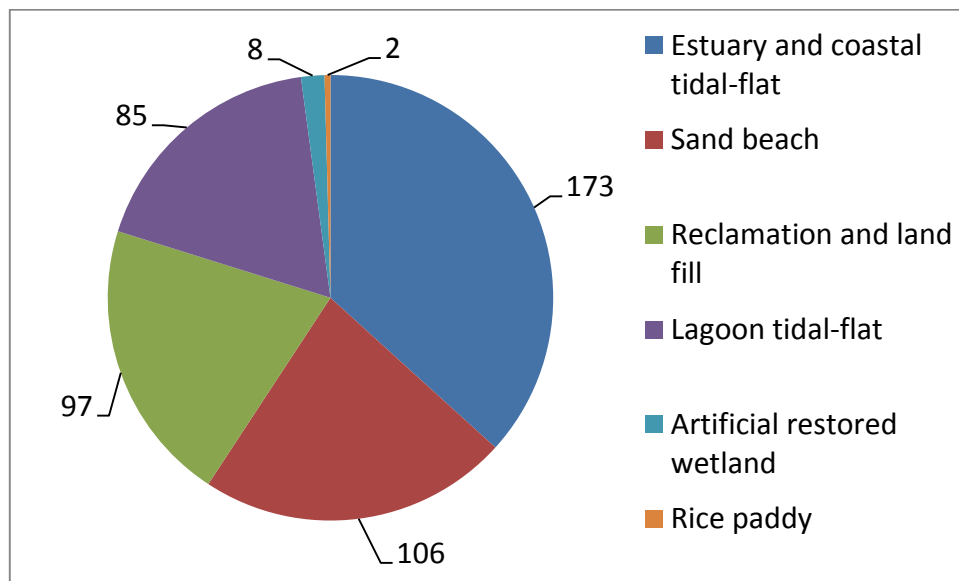


Figure2. Habitat type at sites with Spoon-billed Sandpiper records in the Japanese Archipelago.

Discussion

About 20.6 % of the records were obtained from landfill and reclamation areas. In general, low salinity and shallow wetland are formed temporarily in landfill area. Landfill area construction uses sea-sand obtained from the surrounding shallow sea. Input of sea-sand inside of the walls adds enormous amounts of sea water. But rainfall dilutes salinity and gradually forms a low-salinity, shallow wetland. Previous studies also reported that birds preferring fresh-water occurred on landfill areas (KOBAYASHI 1955, KAWASHIMA, 1997). In addition, the construction of huge landfill projects (over c.100 ha) has supplied fresh-water wetland for waterbirds over 50 years. For example, at Hakata Bay, one of the important shorebird staging areas in the northern part of Kyushu region, a coastal landfill project started in early 1950's. Thereafter, coastal landfill constructions followed one after another (1960s, Hakozaiki Landfill; 1970s; Meinohama Landfill; 1980s, Kashii Park port; 1990s to present, Island City Project. Other important areas, Tokyo Bay, Ise and Mikawa Bays, and Osaka Bay, have experienced the same "landfill chain". Especially, it is said that landfill projects in Tokyo Bay and Osaka Bay started in late 1800.

However, such large landfill constructions gradually ceased and the birds have had to return to their natural habitats. Unfortunately, however, natural habitats for shorebirds have almost gone throughout Japan. It means that habitat loss that causes population decline of shorebirds is beginning to take effect now. Thus, recognizing potentially important sites, and planning restoration of habitats is one of the required conservation activity in Japanese Archipelago.

Another insight to the ecology of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its conservation is that Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been recorded in a small flock of shorebirds (for example, Red necked stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Sanderling *Calidris alba*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*) throughout Japanese Archipelago. Especially, this situation seems to occur frequently in sandy beaches stretching along the western coast of Honshu (Japan Sea Coast). This region has not been recognized as an important stop-over site for migratory shorebirds but over 106 of our records derive from this region. This result points to the limitations when identifying important stop-over sites based on total bird numbers. On the other hand, sites with small flocks only, which may include endangered species almost every year, should be recognised, especially in Japan. In addition, the Japanese Archipelago has a total coastline of 32000 km, but the percentage of natural coast is approximately 55 %, and most of the remaining 45 % coastline has been altered by industrialization and

expanding human development (Ministry of Environment Japan, 1982). Furthermore, ecosystem management of sand beach is one of the most significant issues after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Acknowledgement

The data base of Spoon-billed Sandpiper has been formed by the participation of many birdwatchers in Japan. Our thanks go to all of them. especially, Mr. Kazuhiro OODATE, Mr. Takeyoshi MATSUO, Mr. Masayuki SENZAKI, Mr. Yoshiaki WATANABE, Mr. Junichi EBINA, Mr. Hiroshi TAKADA, Mr. Takuro HATTORI, Mr. Shigeki Takano, who contributed to the main result and argument of this article. We like to thank Dr. Christoph Zöckler, who gave us very helpful suggestions and edited the article.

References

Delany, S. and Scott, D. (2006), Waterbird Population Estimates. Fourth Edition. Wageningen: Wetlands International.

MacKinnon, J., Verkuil, Y.I. & Murray, N. 2012. IUCN situation analysis on East and Southeast Asian intertidal habitats, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea (including the Bohai Sea). Occasional Paper of the IUCN Species Survival Commission No. 47. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK. ii + 70 pp.

BirdLife International (2001) Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

Keisuke KOBAYASHI (1955), On some rare waders (Limicola) recorded from Osaka Bay coast, Tori, 65-13. (Japanese article)

Kenji KAWASHIMA(1997), Fluctuations of wader populations in relation to the construction of the Tokyo Port Wild Bird Park, STRIX, vol.15.(Japanese article)

Ministry of Environment Japan (1982), THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF JAPAN, Printing Bureau of the Ministry of Finance.

8) Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation activities in Gulf of Martaban (Mottama) Myanmar

This year, 2013, from 21st to 27th January, a monitoring and evaluation project has been conducted by Open University students from the British Council funded by OBC, with the aim to observe, evaluate and assess the progress of the population status of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and alternative livelihoods of bird hunters. This activity was implemented after two years of immediate action plan that was conducted by BANCA in 2010.

After the World Wetlands Day workshop hosted by the Government of Mon State on 5th Feb 2013 (see SBS Newsletter No 9), BANCA was involved with MOECAF on 39th Mon State Day on 17th March 2013 in Mawlamyine. At the exhibitions, BANCA joined with MOECAF State level and displayed all the activities of Martaban, explaining to government levels and stakeholders about the conservation status and Ramsar. The audiences were very interested in the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the significance of (Martaban) Mottama Gulf.



Explaining to prime minister of Mon State and audiences about Spoon-billed Sandpiper and significant site of Mottama Gulf

From 24th March to 2nd April, BANCA joined with MOECAF to gather exact coordinate points and current information for the designation of Gulf of Mottama as a Ramsar Site. This survey was led by MOECAF who met with other relevant departments to explain about the benefits of Ramsar Site designation and future plans. The following points are the outline of their objectives.

- To get exact coordinate points for designation of Gulf of Mottama as a Ramsar Site
- To conserve the biodiversity for the sustainability of the Ramsar Site
- To obtain more opportunities for local people and community
- To provide for the development of ecotourism in this area
- To perform research activities

During this time, one team went to the East coast and another team went to West coast of Mottama. They will now submit the collated boundary demarcation maps from state and regional levels to MOECAF.

For more effective conservation work at the Mottama Gulf, BANCA formed the Local Conservation Group (LCG) in June and July 2013. The following points outline the project objectives:

- To understand the benefits of natural resources and biodiversity and how to conserve them for long term sustainable use by local people
- To manage the natural resources to pass on to the next generation

There are four Local Conservation Groups in Mottama Gulf: pioneer group is Koe-tae-su Birds Conservation Group (KBCG), second is Nature Environment Conservation Group (NECG), third is Aung-kan-thar Nature Conservation (ANCG) which are on the eastern side of gulf of Mottama and fourth is Sar-ta-lin Environment Conservation Group (SECG) which is on the western side. Before 2013, Mottama gulf had no LCG, and Aye

Ko, a former hunter, and his colleagues were actively working as volunteers at the Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation project from east gulf of Mottama in Ahlat village.

Further actions in 2013 will include capacity building and bird-watching training for LCGs, regular monitoring for bird-hunting at the high season and patrol of Mottama Gulf.

As part of our conservation arrangement, after visiting Ahlat village with tourists (see SBS newsletter No 9) we agreed with the former local hunters that they would monitor the shorebird numbers. In May



Taking information and coordinate points on the west coast of Mottama

I met with Aye Ko and Nyunt Swe from Ahlat village and got wader information from their regular checks on the tidal flat and the waders' status. According to their records, in March, April and May, bird flocks were seen at the regular places in morning (6-7 am) and evening (3-6 pm), and at the new moon time were seen from about 4pm to end of afterglow. At high tide, the bird flocks were seen on the high land and near Shwe-thar-hlaung Pagoda. On March-11 the weather was very hot and no birds were seen at the coastline near the village. Before the village had the LCG, Aye Ko and his colleagues were actively patrolling near the village. He said one spoon-billed sandpiper was accidental caught in a fishing net at the end of May. The net was set up at the creek at night time when, with the coming tide, the birds flew to their roosting places. The bird was lucky because the fisherman saw it and released it alive. Unfortunately we have no record photo, this bird was ringed but the ring was not read because we had no camera.



Pioneer local conservation group in Mottama (KBCG)

The monsoon season has been quite severe and disruptive and the photos below give some impressions.



Acknowledgements

Thanks to RSPB and BBC Wildlife Funds, who gave funds for the Ramsar Site boundary demarcation plan and to form the LCGs

Pyae Phyo Aung@Phyolay (BANCA)

9) Spoon-billed Sandpiper sightings in Northern Bohai Bay, May 25th to May 29th 2013.

On May 25th 2013, we were scanning flocks of shorebirds for individually marked Red Knots at 'Prison Salt Pond' Beipu, Bohai Bay, China 39° 08' 58" N 118° 15' 44" E during Global Flyway Network (GFN) field work when we saw a Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

The bird had 0% breeding plumage. The bird was checked carefully for flags, colourbands and metal bands, it was carrying none. This same bird was relocated in the same salt pond on May 26th and May 29th. Images of this bird were taken on 25th and 26th, one is reproduced below. According to N. Clark, BTO the bird resembles the first summer birds that are currently in Slimbridge and this bird is most likely a first summer bird!

A Spoon-billed Sandpiper was also recorded at the same site on May 28th. This was a different individual as it was in 100% breeding plumage. One distant image of this bird was obtained.

We were very pleased to record two different Spoon-billed Sandpipers however with the huge areas of suitable habitat and large numbers of birds present we could easily have missed them in this and previous years. The salt pond that we saw the bird in had tens of thousands of shorebirds foraging and roosting in it. On May 16th there were 90,500 birds using this pond and 20,600 of those were Red-necked Stint so it would be easy for us to overlook other Spoon-billed Sandpipers at this site.

We have been conducting shorebird studies at this site for 5 years during April and May 2009 to 2013 and this is our second and third sightings of this species on the mudflats and within the salt works complex. The sighting in 2012 was on the very same date as this 2013 sighting but the 2012 bird was on the inter-tidal mudflats. This could very well be a coincidence as we have spent a lot more time working on the mudflats, as opposed to the salt ponds, in previous years.

See report for 2012 <http://globalflywaynetwork.com.au/bohai-bay/> for more details.

The Google map below shows the location of the sighting in relation to Beijing.



Image: Matt Slaymaker May 26th 2013.

Observers; Adrian Boyle, Matt Slaymaker, Chris Hassell and Ying Chi Chan.

Chris Hassell

Global Flyway Network

+61 (0)8 9192 8585

+61 (0)408 954 655

turnstone@wn.com.au

www.globalflywaynetwork.com.au/

10) Note on the 7th Meeting of Partners to the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership

The 7th Meeting of Partners (MoP7) to the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), was recently held in Anchorage and Seward, Alaska (USA) from 10th to 14th June, 2013. The EAAFP, a Ramsar Regional Type II Initiative, works to conserve migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent upon those habitats in the EAAF region, and is currently made up of 30 Partners, including national governments (15), inter-government organizations (4), INGOs (10) and the international business community (1). At the start of MoP7, a ceremony was held to mark the addition of three new Partners, these being the Government of Malaysia, the Conservation of Arctic Fauna and Flora, and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

The Flyway Site Network is one of the foundations of the Partnership; of over 1,000 sites that have so far been identified as being internationally important for migratory waterbirds, 113 have been officially recognized by being added onto the EAAFP's Flyway Site Network. During MoP7, celebrations were also held for five new sites that were added to the Network. These were Arao-Higata (Japan), Bako Buntal Bay (Malaysia), Eighty-Mile Beach and Roebuck Bay (Australia), and Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (USA). Furthermore a report, prepared by Roger Jaensch for the Secretariat, was received which listed and prioritized internationally important sites providing guidance and tools to assist in the nomination of sites to the Flyway Site Network. At the same time it was recognized that there was a need to better identify site boundaries and improve count data which could be incorporated into a Critical Site Network Tool over time.

The Shorebird Working Group provided an opportunity for David Melville to report on the survey he had recently undertaken with two Chinese students from Fudan University, Shanghai, of many of the important areas of the China coastline of the Yellow Sea. The increasing loss of tidal zones to reclamation and development was concerning and stimulated discussion on priorities. These issues were key to the Yellow Sea Task Force which was established by the Partnership to develop collaboration for conserving priority areas of this critical eco region. The task is obviously complex and involves action at the local and national level, and between a range of stakeholders. However, representatives of the national governments that border the Yellow Sea and who were present at the meeting, agreed to continue working to raise awareness of the issue at the national level. This would include holding workshops and promoting discussion and cooperation between the government departments with responsibility for the conservation and management of the coastal areas. On a positive note the Partnership recognized the action of China on their initiative to evaluate the establishment of a protected area along the Luannan coast in Hebei. In recent years the Luannan coast has been found to be a critical feeding site for shorebirds on migration from Australia and New Zealand to their breeding grounds in Far East Russia. The work lead by Chris Hassell for the Global Flyway Network, has shown the site supports over 60% of the Flyway population of the Red Knot during northward migration.

Recognising the rapid decline in waterbird populations throughout the EAAF and to ensure that conservation decisions are based on the best available science, it is important to know what information is required and in which form and timeframes. In order to address these issues a 'Science workshop' was held on Day 2 of the Meeting. This was led by Dr Rich Fuller of the University of Queensland assisted by Dr Judit Szabo, the new Science officer of the Partnership. The workshop commenced with several short presentations ranging from population collapse in migratory shorebirds in Australia, new methods of assessment of tidal flat losses in the Yellow Sea, understanding migration routes through use of geolocators to costs and benefits of habitat loss. Some of the key questions demanding answers included, but not limited to, (i) how are numbers of waterbirds in the EAAF changing over time, (ii) how do waterbirds respond to habitat loss, (iii) what are the migration routes and key stopover sites for all species, (iv) what makes a site important for a species, (v) population viability analysis for endangered populations in the Flyway.

WWF(HK) reported on their initiative for regional prioritization of the status of shorebird species using the EAAF, the first step towards a flyway-wide Conservation Plan. This will be developed further through workshops and collaboration in coming months. Another initiative was the formation of a new Working Group to address the recent precipitous decline of Baer's Pochard.

Minoru Kashiwagi (Wild Bird Society Japan) reported to the Meeting on behalf of the Sbs TF Chair on the Implementation Plan that was advanced at MoP6 and noted the National action plan developed for Thailand. Also the second year of successful cooperation with BirdLife Species Champion, Heritage Expeditions, supporting ongoing efforts in the breeding area in Russia together with a captive breeding program resulting in some birds being released for 'headstarting' was advised. Myanmar announced it would designate Gulf of Mottama (Martaban), a key non-breeding site, as a Ramsar site. Other aspects included were that CEPA work is being carried out in Bangladesh to stop shorebird hunting, mist-netting and threat of habitat loss in southern China together with surveys and CEPA work by bird-watching groups. An animation project has been developed by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society. Partners were encouraged to continue their support to the TF, to monitor the species and its threats and to work to reduce/stop threats including reclamation of mudflats.

The Meeting elected China as the new Chair of EAAFP, with USA as Vice-Chair. The meeting was hosted by the US Government Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Services and I would like to acknowledge the excellent support and organisation they provided. There is no doubt that Alaska is an exciting location for wildlife enthusiasts and our hosts reinforced this by enabling an excursion to the Kenai Fjords National Park. Thanks to our hosts for a stimulating and successful meeting.



Following the Meeting several of us took the opportunity of flying to Barrow (71 degrees N) on the North Slope of Alaska where we spent a few days. Quite an amazing experience for those of us from the southern hemisphere. To observe shorebirds and other species in breeding plumage and preparing to start breeding in the short Arctic summer was a memorable experience. One of the highlights for many of us was to see a Polar bear moving towards us on the sea ice at 2am one morning. All of these sights reinforced to us the wonders of the birds that make these amazing migrations from the southern hemisphere to the desolate but beautiful Arctic tundra where there is such an abundance of food to support their breeding activities.

Ken Gosbell

Chair, Shorebird Working Group of the EAAFP

11) The Spoon-billed Sandpiper dedicated Wedding

Ian and Beth Ellis set a world first when, on 23rd March 2013, their wedding in snowy north Norfolk had a spoon-billed sandpiper conservation theme! Pride of place went to the wedding cake (see photo) while guests were quietly encouraged to contribute to the Taskforce fund instead of bearing gifts. Well equipped with the infamous SBS vodka glasses, the wedding raised £645 for the SBS Task Force. An additional £ 550 went straight to WWT to support the conservation breeding efforts.

We would very much like to thank Ian and Beth for their generous support and wish the newly wedded couple all the best for their future together.



Сохраним кулика-лопатня

ヘラシギを守ろう

넓적부리도요를 구하자

拯救勺嘴鷸

Hãy bảo vệ loài Rẽ mỏ thìa

รักษนกชายเลนปากช้อน

ရေညောင်နွတ်ခိုင်းငှက်များ တည်တံ့ဖို့ တို့များခိုင်းဝန်းထိန်းသိမ်းခို့.

Selamatkan Kedidi Paruh Sudu

চামুচ-খুঁটো বাটান বাঁচান

கரண்டி மூக்கு உள்ளானை

காப்பாற்றுவோம்

Rettet den Löffelstrandläufer

Save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

