



Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force News Bulletin No 14 · August 2015



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Head-started in 2012, female '8' is breeding for the second time in 2015

Pavel Tomkovich

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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 and Sayam Chowdhury.

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 BirdsRussia. 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 and experts and conservation organisations from principal range states and other partners.

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Foreword from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Coordinator SBS TF · August 2015

If you think the Spoon-billed Sandpiper story can't become more exciting after all the previous events, then this new issue might prove you wrong and if you think the SBS made of 45,000 shells as shown in issue 12 cannot be topped, well they are not getting bigger, but big enough. See what our team has spotted in Rudong in spring and also what has been constructed in Slimbridge.

There have been 2000 people in Bangladesh watching the first boat race for SBS conservation and we are getting a little bit closer to having the Gulf of Mottama in Myanmar protected as Ramsar site.

But our heroine this time is '8' featuring on top. She has been one of the first head-started birds in 2012 and so far the only one of the 2012 cohort that returned in 2014, spotted on migration in 2014 in Taiwan and Rudong in spring and autumn and this summer returned to Meinypil'gyno to breed in the same area again. The monumental pair 01 and 02 were again breeding, but unfortunately their nest was predated early on. There were five more head-started birds returning and recruiting into the breeding population, increasing it for the first time, which is very good news.

It means head-starting is working, but it also means that all the efforts of all SBS TF members along the flyway are working. Without the many different activities stopping the hunting pressure and protecting sites, raising awareness and many more, this success would not have been possible. There is a real hope that we might be able to turn the tide for the species.

But there is even more good news. Evgeny and his



team found a new site in South Chukotka with the highest density so far known of 18 or more pairs. This is surprising, but finally a reward for the Russian efforts after looking for new sites for the past five years with little success.

Unfortunately, the captive stock in Slimbridge still has not bred this year, even though it came very close with nest scraping and territorial displays. The great success of the head-starting though might be a comfort and a timely contribution to boost the population on the brink of extinction.

The threat of reclamation in China is still there and the spring survey showed again how important the site is also in spring for the entire population. Our most urgent task remains to secure these vital stop-over sites for the future, where SBS spends most of their time over the year. For the coming autumn more excursions and surveys are planned by our Chinese friends and currently some studies began to investigate the feeding ecology of SBS in Jiangsu province. These surveys are supported by the RSPB and the Manfred-Hermesen Foundation, who gratefully continued their support for our work along with many other organisations.

SBS in figures:

2000 people watching a boat race for SBS in Bangladesh
62 SBS in May in Rudong, China
6 resightings in Rudong in spring

18 marked SBS returning to the breeding grounds
13 pairs breeding in Meinypil'gyno, Chukotka
25 pairs estimated in newly found breeding colony
28 head-started birds released at the end of July
12,800 Lego bricks to build Suki the Lego SBS

Guest Editorial

Spike Millington · Chief Secretary EAAFP

It is August 2015, I have just returned from three weeks in Chukotka at the kind invitation of EAAFP Focal Point for Russia and Chair of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) Task Force, Evgeny Syroechkovskiy. Unfortunately one week of that time involved waiting for the weather to improve to be able to take the helicopter from the provincial capital Anadyr to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper breeding grounds around Meinypil'gyno village, apparently a not unusual occurrence. This time was not entirely wasted, however, since many species of migratory waterbirds, including grebes, ducks and shorebirds were nesting around Anadyr and we were able to do a seabird survey on a small island off the coast.

Upon arrival in Meinypil'gyno, I hitched a ride, together with colleague Andrey, on the local caterpillar (like a tank without the guns) commuting along the coast to the next village. This dropped us off at the first of two campsites, where we joined the team searching for new Spoon-billed Sandpiper breeding areas. We were lucky to find one relatively small area that supported a population of 15-18 breeding pairs, mostly with broods (although we only succeeded in banding a single chick, A4 – I hope to see you in Korea or China soon). The Spoonies shared this habitat with Ringed Plovers and the occasional Pacific Golden Plover. A few Dunlins occupied the wetter areas and Temminck's Stints were found along the rivers. An additional pair of Spoonies, with 2 chicks, was discovered in another area. All in all, this is very encouraging, since it represents a doubling of the current known breeding territories. Meanwhile at the main site around Meinypil'gyno, late spring flooding and high predation reduced breeding success this year (although perhaps 28 head-started chicks are due for release at the end of July). On the positive site, there was a small uptick in the number of breeding pairs, so perhaps the species is finally beginning to turn the corner! Of course, in order for Spoon-billed Sandpipers



to benefit from these dedicated efforts on the breeding grounds, we also need to significantly step up our efforts to protect the species at other sites used during its migration, perhaps most importantly at the threatened Tiaozini mudflats in southern Jiangsu province of China, where a high proportion of the global population stages and moults. Fostering international cooperation along the countries of the Flyway is of course the *raison d'être* of EAAFP and at the most recent Meeting of Partners in Japan earlier this year, all Partners issued a statement calling for “a flyway-wide step change in activity” to effectively deal with the crisis affecting SBS and other migratory waterbirds.

http://eaaflyway.net/wordpress/new/thepartnership/partners/meetingofpartners/mop8/SBS%20waterbird%20and%20intertidal%20area%20statement_draft%205.1.pdf

I would like to give many thanks to the team in Meinypil'gyno. Camping in the tundra is a unique experience, for the sights (fog, mostly), sounds (Black-throated Divers singing through the night), tastes (porridge + mosquitos, soup + mosquitos, etc) and smells (the delicate scent of hundreds of densely-packed walruses on the nearby beach). I wish the Spoonies and all the other migratory waterbirds breeding in Chukotka, and elsewhere, good luck as they start their migration southwards.

Boat race for shorebird conservation

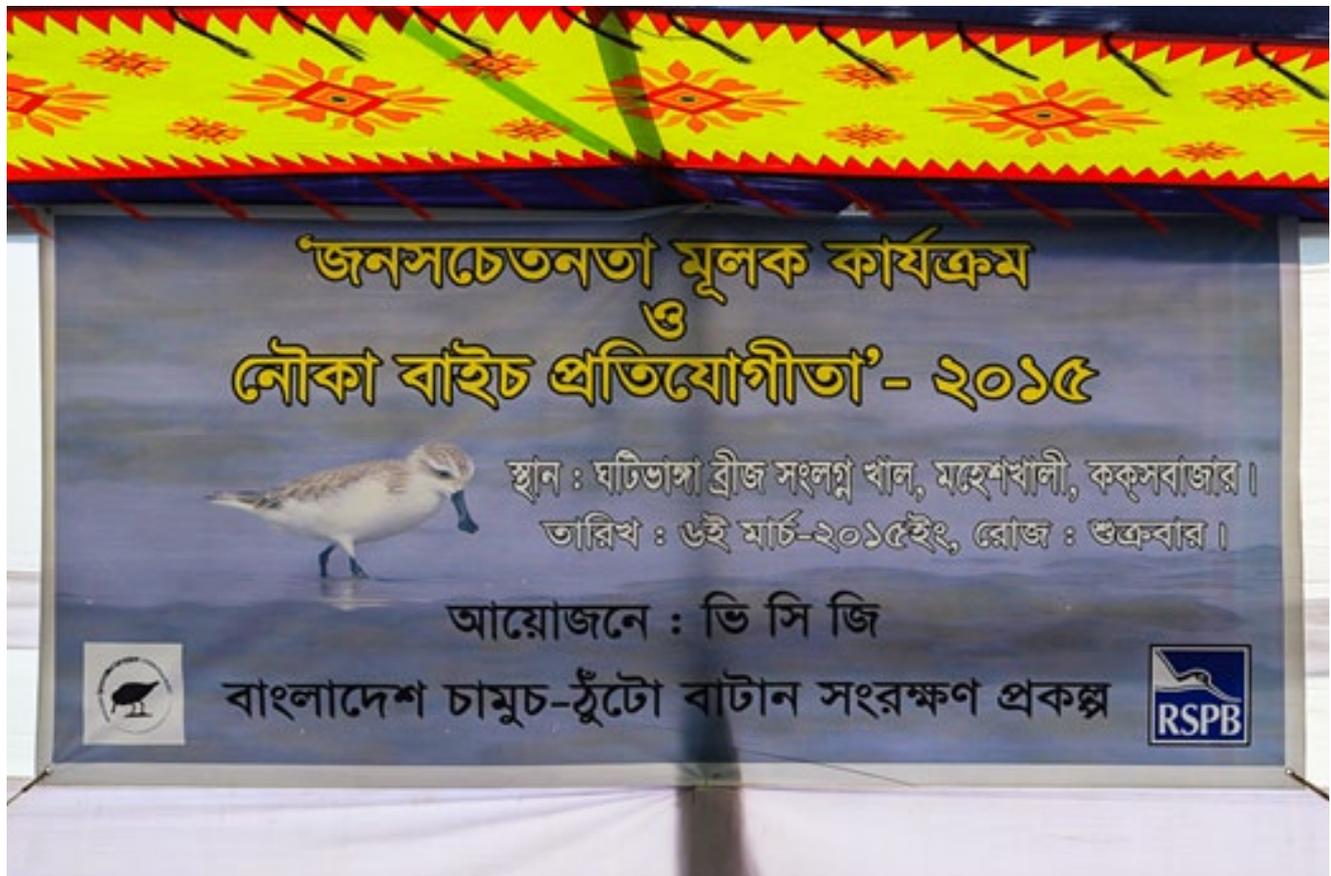
Md. Foysal and Nazim Uddin Prince

Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project (BSCP) organized a boat race between the five target villages of Sonadia Island, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh in early March 2015. Each village formed a team and represented one threatened shorebird species of Sonadia Island. Approximately 2,000 local people attended the event, and 1,000 leaflets and 120 t-shirts on SBS conservation were distributed. Boat races were traditionally common as part of folk culture in Bangladesh, but this is the first time such an event has been used for conservation purposes. Four winning teams were given prize money. Local government officials were also present during the event.

In addition, as part of the shorebird conservation campaign, the BSCP team visited a local school

in Moheshkhali Island. A BSCP representative, school teachers and an ex-hunter delivered speeches among school children. The topics included the importance of biodiversity, coastal wetlands, shorebirds and especially the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, its habitat and the threats to the species. A few hundred students participated in the event. A quiz competition was also arranged for each class, based on information provided in the talks. Bird and wildlife books were distributed among winners.

A hundred 2015 calendars were distributed to various stakeholders including relevant government and NGO officials, and other interested parties. Robert Vaughan (a bird illustrator and artist from Ireland) kindly contributed his wonderful illustrations for the BSCP 2015 calendar.



All Boat race photos by Nazim Uddin Prince





BSCP school campaign 2014



BSCP calendar 2015

Once was a Bird Hunter

Andrew Eagle, The Daily Star Bangladesh

Nowadays, 33-year-old Muslim Miah of Moheshkhali Island in south-eastern Bangladesh earns his living as proprietor of a tailor shop. When business is good the retired fisherman's son earns US \$60 - \$120 per month, a modest income but enough in rural Bangladesh to keep the bachelor on his feet financially.

For Miah it's a career change. He used to be a bird hunter.

Home to 200,000 people and 362 square kilometres in size, subtropical Moheshkhali Island is unique in Bangladesh for being the only island with hilly terrain. The island is famed for the historic Adinath shrine and its main industries include salt production, betel plantations and fishing in the adjoining Bay of Bengal.

The sand and mud shoals of southern Moheshkhali and adjacent Sonadia Island meanwhile, are rich habitat for shorebirds. The area attracts numerous species including the Nordmann's Greenshank and Spoon-billed Sandpiper, endangered migrant species from the Siberian Arctic that arrive each winter after a long journey south. Worldwide there remain as few as 1,000 mature individuals of the former species and 200 of the latter.

Prior to October 2011, Miah, together with more than 20 other hunters, would head for the shoals at low tide and set up expansive nets along the shoreline. The only other income generating activity available to them was collecting wood from the coastal mangrove forests.



“It was dirty, difficult work,” says Miah, who, due to his family’s poverty, hadn’t the opportunity to complete his primary school education.

The hunters would wait for shorebirds to entangle themselves as they landed, knowing the wild flapping of any caught bird would attract yet more.

Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Kingfisher, Indian Pond Heron and Black-headed Ibis: these species were common fare at Moshekhali dining tables. “Shorebirds were a usual food item in the market,” says local school teacher Morshedul Hoque, “We never thought about it.” The northern shoveller, a common duck species, was particularly sought after for being tasty.

As a bird hunter Miah’s income was significantly higher than today. A single Eurasian Curlew, locally known as ‘totlarku’ and considered to be “better than chicken” would fetch about US \$2 in the market. On average, by selling 7 – 10 birds, Miah could make about \$20 each day.

But in 2011 the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project (BSCP) which was founded two years earlier with the goal of protecting the local habitat for Spoon-billed Sandpipers, signed conservation agreements with 25 identified active hunters including Miah.

Resources were provided for alternate livelihoods, with Miah receiving US \$150 to buy a sewing machine and cloth stock. Through loans he raised the rest of the approximately US \$900 needed to establish his shop.

“Some of the hunters are now fishermen,” he says. Yet others took to watermelon cultivation, live-stock rearing or grocery stores.

As important as providing alternate livelihoods, was to change the mentality of both hunters and

the local community towards eating wild birds. This change has been encouraged through ongoing awareness raising activities including lectures, film screenings, photographic displays, folk songs and staged drama events.

According to conservationist Mohammed Foysal, 29, of South Keraniganj, involved with the BSCP project since 2010, villagers were presented with two main conservation arguments. “One is the scientific argument,” he says, “about the value of healthy ecosystems; while the other is philosophical, that all creatures have a right to exist.”

He believes the latter approach proved the more persuasive, as it was explained that if they continued to hunt there would come a day when there simply weren’t any Spoon-billed Sandpipers left in the world.

To date, awareness-raising efforts have met with some success. Miah is apologetic for his past profession. “We did it out of need,” he says.

Ironically Miah believes he has never seen a Spoon-billed Sandpiper, the signature species of conservation efforts, since hunters focused on the more lucrative larger species and paid little attention to a by-catch bird barely 16 centimetres in length.

The tailoring business has not proved easy for Miah. Located in a small coastal market, cloth is often acquired after an order is placed and challenges including political shutdown and a low fish catch this year means for many customers a shortage of income to spend on clothes. Weeks have passed without Miah receiving a single order.

Nonetheless he attends his shop daily and believes in the future of his newfound, more eco-friendly profession. “Business will be good when the fish bite,” he says.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper update news from Myanmar

Pyae Phyo Aung @Phyolay (BANCA)

BANCA conducted “Welcome to the Birds” event in Khin Tan village in January 2015. This is pioneer celebration in Myanmar. About 350 students near the villages, Local authorities from the Mon State Government and media and villagers are participated and the event ceremony is opened by Minister of Forest and Mines. During the event, BANCA gave information of the migratory bird species, important habitats and flagship species Spoon-billed Sandpiper. And also conducted the adlib competition interested on the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and made postcard flyway exchange activities.

Ramsar site, Mon State government is generally agreed for the two townships (Kyeikhto and Bilin) about 15500 ha. About 90 representatives are involved for this workshop from the different level. The stakeholder consultation workshop is opened by Chief Minister of the Mon State.

The Director of the Forest Department read the official letter from Ramsar Secretariat and explained wetlands importance in Myanmar, Ramsar Convention and Rules and Regulations. And BANCA presented up to date conservation activities in Gulf of Mottama and next steps.



Adlib competition by students

In February 2015, BANCA collaborated with Mon State Government, “Regional Level Stakeholders workshop for designate Gulf of Mottama as a Wetland of International Important (Ramsar site)” in Mawlamyine. According the BANCA’s proposed boundary area for Gulf of Mottama as

Mon State government is willing want to conservation Gulf of Mottama collaboration with LN-GOs, INGOs and Agencies.

This Year BANCA provided the livelihood opportunity for the Local Conservation Group members supported by the Darwin Initiative. Moreo-



Audience

ver, Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland's international cooperation agency seeking huge opportunity for community led coastal Management in Gulf of Mottama.

Part of the project will support Ramsar designation for this site through a consultative process with communities, capacity-building for local committees, and support provided to governance systems as well as awareness campaigns on Ramsar. The

project will also support studies and conservation activities on specific threatened species in the GoM, and increase the body of knowledge on the ecosystem and its services, as well as potential impact climate change. The Ramsar site governance mechanisms will mirror, or be the same as, those of the fisheries governance, and be built at and between all levels e.g. within villages and between states and regions, and the national level.



Opening Speech by Chief Minister, H.E U Ohn Myint

Surveys of SBS and other waterbirds on the coast of Jiangsu Province, China, May 2015

James Phillips, Jing Li, Guy Anderson

From 3-12 May 2015, an international team of surveyors from China, the UK and the USA surveyed the 'Rudong' area in southern Jiangsu Province, China for SBS and other waterbirds. The survey repeated that in spring 2014, used the same methods (see Anderson et al 2014), and covered the same 3 key sites (Tiaozini in Dong Tai county, and the Yangkou-Feng Li and Dong Lin areas in Rudong county). The survey was timed to coincide with the series of spring tides at the start of May – the period which produced most SBS records during the spring 2014 survey. The aims were to continue to build our knowledge and understanding on the number of SBS passing through the Jiangsu Coast in spring, how long they stop here for, and to look for individually marked birds. As well as being important for Spoon-billed Sandpipers, the mudflats are vital staging posts for many species of shorebird and we recorded numbers of all waterbirds using the different sites.

The timings of the surveys each day were based completely around the tide times. The team would be on site 2 hours before the high tide, with surveying taking place on the rising tide, over high tide, and – most importantly – on the falling tide, as this afforded the best opportunity, and the most time, to get close to flocks of feeding shorebirds on the recently exposed mudflats. The team worked together at a single site each day, splitting the survey area into sections, with no more than 300m between each observer. This allowed us to get thorough coverage of a large area of mud flat. Counts of all species present were usually made at high tide, focussing on roosting flocks.

The following data were collected for each record of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper:

- The date, time and GPS location for each bird
- The plumage score 1-7 (A seven being a full adult bird in breeding plumage)
- Whether and how the bird was marked (Which

leg it was marked on, the colour of flag or rings and whether the flag was inscribed)

- And if possible a photo of every marked bird

Over 250 individual SBS sightings were made, including flocks of 33 and 13 birds. The maximum day totals of SBS recorded at each site were: Tiaozini – 47, Yangkou-Feng Li – 3, Dong Lin – 12. This gives a minimum estimate of at least 62 SBS present in the survey area in May 2015. This compares with the equivalent figure of 41 (Tiaozini- 25, Yangkou-Feng Li – 7, Dong Lin – 9) in spring 2014, an encouraging increase in records at Tiaozini.

Twelve sightings of flagged SBS were made, including at least 1 head-started bird from either 2013 or 2014 (white flag on right leg, but code could not be read), were recorded. Of these 12, 5 were able to be identified as individually marked birds as follows:

1. Lime Green 16, in nearly full breeding plumage, was recorded and photographed at Tiaozini, 10th May 2015. A male ringed as an adult in Chukotka on 26th June 2014 and returned to breeding area in 2015.
2. Lime Green 8 – recorded and photographed at Tiaozini on the 8th May 2015. This bird was collected as an egg on the 22nd June 2012 in Chukotka, hatched on 14th July, reared in captivity locally and then released as a head started bird on 10th August and bred the first time in 2014 and again in 2015 (see separate report in this issue).
3. Upper Left metal ring/Lower Left plain light blue flag/Upper Right blue colour ring/Lower Right white colour ring – Seen at Tiaozini on the 10th May on the falling tide. This bird was ringed in North Chukotka on 2nd July 2005. This bird is one of only a handful breeding birds marked in Belyaya spit in the most northern part of the breeding range and as far as we know this bird has never seen away from these breeding grounds before.

4. Lime Green 22 – Seen at Tiaozini on the 10th May on the falling tide. A female ringed as an adult in Chukotka on 29th June 2014.

5. Lime Green 09 – Seen at Tiaozini on the 10th May on the falling tide. A female ringed as an adult in Chukotka on 15th June 2014 and seen in Rudong in autumn 2014 before, wintered in Bangladesh and returned to the breeding grounds in 2015 (see separate report in this issue).

No individually flagged SBS was recorded on more than one date, and although far from providing conclusive proof, this is consistent with at least some SBS having short stop-over durations at these sites in spring. This would contrast with the situation in autumn, when there is mounting evidence that SBS stay on the southern Jiangsu coast for several weeks/months, the adults undergoing a full moult during that time.

No evidence of trapping of shorebirds – deliberate or accidental – was recorded during the survey. No

evidence of poisoning on, or immediately adjacent to, intertidal areas was recorded or reported, although one case of deliberately poisoned shorebirds and passerines on land only 2 kilometers inland from the seawall at Yangkou was found. This illustrates that this threat is still present in the area, and needs to be closely monitored in future.

The mudflats at Tiaozini have been previously reported on as an area of very high importance to SBS and other shorebirds on migration, and an area under acute threat of land claim through the construction of new seawalls. Although no new seawall construction since the autumn 2014 surveys was noted here, some of the most recently claimed areas behind the current seawall are now under new active development, with significant earthworks and construction taking place, indicating how much development pressure this coast is under. This development work appears to have shifted one of the main high tide shorebird roosts by a few km.

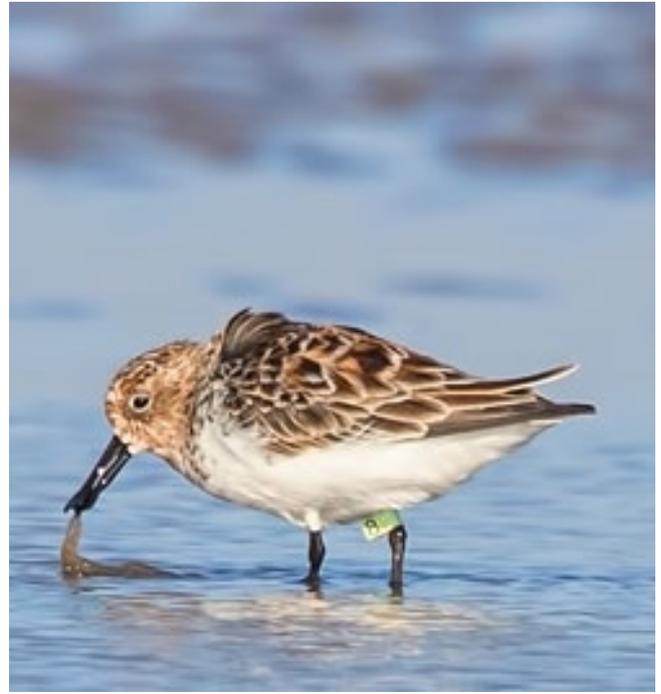


The survey team, from left to right: Zhang Jun (China), Richard Gregory (RSPB UK), Andrew Baksh (USA), John Mallord (RSPB UK), James Phillips (Natural England UK), Adam Gretton (Natural England UK), Xiaohui Ge (Student at Nanjing Normal University, China), Professor Qing Chang (School of Life Sciences, Nanjing Normal University, China) and Wei Liu (Student at Nanjing Normal University, China) not in shot but who is taking the actual team photograph!



Lime Green 16, at Tiaozini, 10 May 2015

James Phillips



Lime Green 8, at Tiaozini, 8 May 2015

Andrew Baksh



SBS with Plain Lime Green flag, at Tiaozini, 9 May 2015 at a high tide roost. Although not individually colour-marked, this bird was ringed as a chick in Chukotka before 2010

Dani Lopez Velasco



Roosting shorebirds on the Jiangsu coast, May 2015

Andrew Baksh



The team didn't have to venture too far from the Links Hotel in Yangkou to see SBS. This one was seen daily outside the hotel lobby.
James Phillips

The survey was co-ordinated by Jing Li and Zhang Jun of SBS in China, and supported financially by RSPB. Observer time for UK and USA participants was provided by RSPB, Natural England and Andrew kindly volunteering his own time.

Reference:
Guy Anderson, Andrew Baksh, Robert Bush, Adam Gretton, Jing Li, James Phillips, Zhang Lin. (2014) Surveying SBS in Rudong, spring 2014. Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force Bulletin 12: 12-14.

First signs of increase of local breeding population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Meinypil'gyno with support of head-started birds: preliminary results of 2015 summer season

P. Tomkovich, E. Syroechkovskiy, N. Yakushev, E. Loktionov, E. Lappo, R. Digby

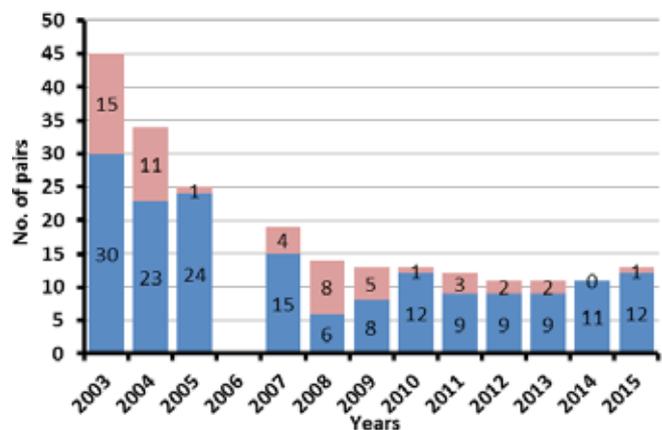
The BirdsRussia field team consisted of 5 Russian ornithologists, one Ukrainian volunteer and Roland Digby was running Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) monitoring, nest searching for head-starting (HS). The main tasks were ringing and biological observations around Meinypil'gyno in May-August 2015 as part of joint project of the SBS Task Force with RSPB, WWT and BirdsRussia as main partners. HS work was done by Roland and two Russian aviculturists. For part of the season the team was joined by several visitors including Chief Executive of the EAAFP Secretariat – Spike Millington and several other staff and members of BirdsRussia. Constant support was received from local SBS supporters Svetlana and Roman Belogorodtsev. The park of expedition vehicles had increased due to arrival of two new heavy machines: side-by-side “Polaris” and “Stels 600” obtained by BirdsRussia.

Spring of this season was rather unfavorable for breeding of birds: cold and wet, which resulted in a late start of breeding of most shorebirds. Low laying coastal breeding areas of SBS were flooded for the second year in a row due to the river mouth blocked by ice. Luckily, later in the season the weather improved, and HS birds were raised and released at reasonable conditions.

Due to weather conditions helicopter flights were delayed more often than in previous years with waiting time in Anadyr being over a week several times. Sadly, this was also the reason the visit of Chukotka Governor Mr. Roman Kopin to Meinypil'gyno to see SBS was postponed to next year.

Part of the team is still in the field, so this overview presents just very preliminary results, which might need some corrections later after all data were analyzed. Surveys at the main monitoring area revealed 13 breeding pairs of SBS, which is an increase from 9-11 pairs in recent years (2012-

2014). This is the very first record of a population increase since the SBS decline has been revealed in 2000 and from the time when SBS monitoring started in Meinypil'gyno in 2003 (see figure). One additional pair was found in a remote area not well surveyed in former years; that is why this pair is not added to the figure.



The number of breeding pairs of SBS around Meinypil'gyno recorded since 2003 showing slight increase in 2015, red in column depicts probable pairs without eggs or chicks found.

Over half of the local SBS breeding population consisted in 2015 of birds individually marked with engraved leg flags (ELFs). These were 6 out of 8 adult birds marked in 2013, 7-8 out of 14 adult birds marked in 2014, and 5 birds raised in captivity during the ‘head-starting’ project in 2012-2014. Reasons for the slightly reduced return rate of birds marked in 2014 are not clear (however, we only had 4 of 8 birds flagged in 2013 returning to the breeding grounds in 2014).

One of the ‘head-started’ birds (three-years-old female ‘8’) was breeding for the second year. Two 2-year-old birds of this cohort (female ‘LA’ and male ‘MA’) were nesting, while the third bird of the same generation (male ‘AA’) remained unmated. One-year-old female (‘U9’) was observed in many sites, also with a male courting to her, but she did not pair up this year.

Nine more adult SBS as well as nine chicks in the



Female '8' breeding again successfully in Meiny pyl'gino
Pavel Tomkovich



Female '30' with chicks
Pavel Tomkovich



'M2' record breaking breeding male only one year old!
Egor Loktionov



Young SBS in the release pen
Pavel Tomkovich



Head-started birds successfully returning
Egor Loktionov



Roland Digby fishing for the chicks
Pavel Tomkovich

wild were newly color-marked with ELF's in 2015. One of these adult birds was ringed as a chick in 2010 and another one also as a chick in 2013 from the replacement clutch of the pair '01' and '02'.

No between-years large-scale movements of birds marked in previous years were recorded in 2015. The following facts are of interest:

1. For the first time ever nesting of a one-year-old SBS male (lime 'M2') was recorded in a remote area, ca. 25 km SW of Meinypil'gyno, in 2015. This bird was ringed and flagged as a chick on 8 July 2014 30 meters away from its nest in 2015.

2. Birds arrived on the breeding grounds on 3 June, one of the latest arrival dates, likely following the cold and rainy weather and was also the reason for slightly delayed start of nesting SBS in 2015 as well of reduced mean egg clutches – several nests contained only 2 or 3 eggs and size of eggs collected for HS was slightly smaller than in previous year.

3. Seven clutches at the main monitoring area plus three clutches in a remote area SW of Meinypil'gyno were picked up for artificial incubation and raising chicks in captivity ('head-starting'). We found two replacement clutches of these birds and have indirect evidence of laying two more replacements. Thus, not many pairs resumed nesting after loss of their eggs, possibly a reflection of the cold weather and late breeding in 2015.

4. Chicks hatched in 5 out of 10 nests that were under control (8 on the main monitoring area and 2 near 'western oil drill tower'). One nest was trampled by somebody (a bear?) and eggs in 4 nests disappeared (depredated?). Nests of two more pairs were not found; however, chicks hatched in one of these. Thus, nest success was 50%, which is close to average.

5. We have only anecdotal info about survival of chicks. Only three broods of small SBS chicks that were found for the whole area during July



Release pen near the village

Pavel Tomkovich

consisted of 1, 3 and 4 chicks. Two other broods at fledging consisted of 2 and 3 chicks. At least one brood presumably perished (the accompanying male was observed away from brood area when chicks had to be 15-days-old). Due to absence of broods around many other breeding SBS territories monitored in late July and considering rather high predation rate for nests and broods of some other wader species in July we suspect that overall fledging success of birds hatched in the wild was one of the lowest for the whole period of our observations in Meinypil'gyno.

33 eggs were collected for 'head-starting'. Of these 29 hatched, but one of the chicks died. 28 chicks were raised and released into wild on 29 July. No straight predation was observed among head-started birds directly after release and during first week of August, and we presume that the main bulk of young SBS departing south from Meinypil'gyno in 2015 can be HS birds with only few birds fledged in the wild. Thus, this season with unfavorable weather conditions and rather high predation rate has shown and additionally stressed the importance of HS in the years with low natural breeding success for the increase of breeding productivity of the species as contribution to potential recovery of this critically endangered species.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation activities in Chukotka and Kamchatka by BirdsRussia in Summer 2015

Evgeny Syroechkovskiy

Five BirdsRussia field groups with a total of 27 participants were (and some of them still are) working in the tundra of Chukotka and Kamchatka aiming to improve our knowledge on distribution, population trends and implement conservation, education and awareness raising activities of Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS).

Meinypil'gyno monitoring and head-starting.

The main team was working as usual at the “capital of SBS country” – in Meinypil'gyno. The main results of the monitoring and conservation work, including Head-starting are described in separate article of this newsletter. As usual in addition to field work a series of lectures for villagers and children as well as education excursions at head-starting facilities were organised in Meinypil'gyno and Anadyr.

However, one additional information should be

mentioned here: The discovery of the new important SBS breeding location - “Okeanskoe” - on the sea coast in between Meinypil'gyno and Khatyrka. This potential SBS breeding area was on the list of areas to be visited for many years, while many other larger and more promising parts of the coast with good quality habitat were surveyed by BirdsRussia teams step by step during last 16 years with little success. This coast has rather limited number of good quality habitats and was left for the late stages of the survey plan. The coast was visited by part of Meinypil'gyno SBS monitoring team as well as EAAFP executive secretary Spike Millington and Tong Mu, PhD student from China. We surveyed about 70 km of coast with about a quarter of suitable habitat for SBS. Most promising areas had little but one location with one brood but finally we had discovered a good numbers of breeding SBS at a rather small patch of several km of coast line. Only part of the habitat was good.



6x6 big foot “Kerzhak” truck at camp

Andrey Maximov

Lots of males were warning near broods in rather suboptimal habitat, where one would not expect SBS to breed. The survey was carried out at the early stage of brood rearing (July 11-17th). This time the easiest period to find breeding SBS. We had counted 12 males with broods, 2 possible broods (probably lost), 5 territorial birds which might be mix of early stages of broods and still nesting birds plus 8 non-territorial birds, which were partly feeding partners partly might be failed breeders already dissociated with the territory. All birds were found at the same day and GPS locations taken. Double counting is unlikely. We assume that the area had at least 18 breeding pairs. We were extremely lucky to get a very foggy day for our survey. Most of time the visibility was

within 100 meters. It might have made it easier to locate territorial birds without much disturbance and also protecting the birds from numerous predators. On a sunny day our disturbance would be much more serious and without any doubts would have increased predation of a good portion of this small population.

As a result we have found a new key SBS area with potentially 20-25 pairs breeding which may comprise a quarter of the world population of the species and demonstrating a breeding density only recorded in the core part of the best known breeding locations (like Belyaka spit and Meinypil'gyno) that I have not seen for over decade. To avoid unwanted attention we decided



Spike Millington, Dr Elena Lappo and Tong Mu

Andrey Maximov

not to reveal the exact location. We have given it the name “Okeanskoe” - following the name of nearby mountain. Though being on a distance of around 100 km of so named “tundra road” from Meinypil’gyno the area is difficult to reach due to numerous river crossings and coastal cliffs, which allow passage only at lowest tide. Not doable for quad-bikes and the only way how SBS survey team from Meinypil’gyno was able to reach the area was by 6x6 big foot “Kerzhak” monster truck, which BirdsRussia co-owns with some other owner.

The area was first ever visited by ornithologists but used in former times by reindeer herders. It has no protection status and is located just some km from the caterpillar road in between villages. Considering the importance and vulnerability of such a concentration of SBS this area cannot be left without urgent conservation measures in the future. At the same time any operation in such

a place need to be done only during some parts of the season by very limited number of highly professional tundra bird observers to minimize disturbance and predation effect. There is a preliminary interest of German SBS support group to help with developing and implementing a management plan for this area.

Overall this finding had confirmed the extremely high importance of the southern Chukotka coasts for SBS conservation as it has now 90% of the currently known and over 50% of presume extrapolated population of the whole species.

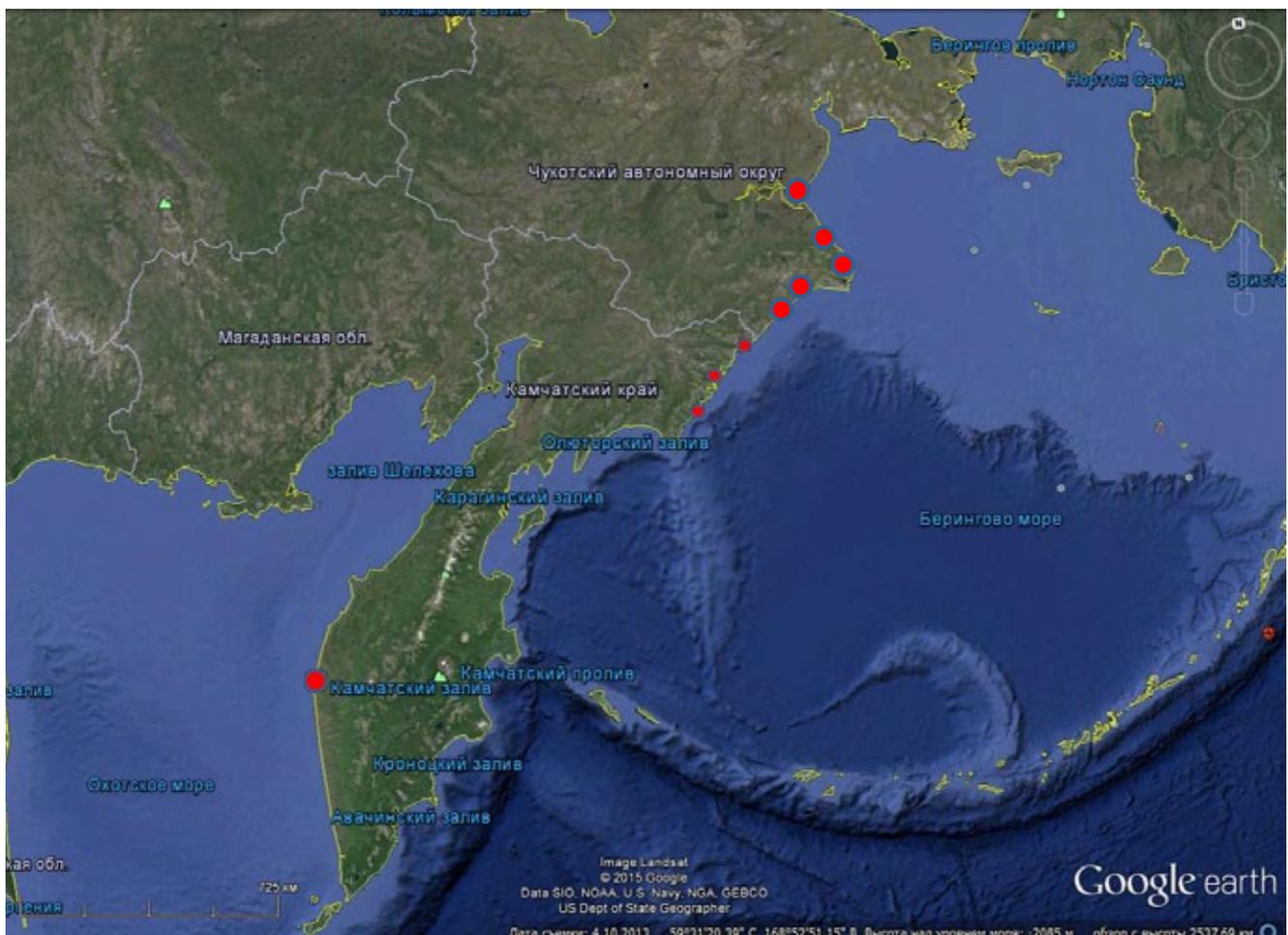
Monitoring of other key remaining SBS locations at southern Chukotka. Russkaya Koshka Spit was again visited in June by Danish SBS support group led by our long standing member of SBS Task Force Jens Gregersen, for whom it was his fifth visit to Chukotka. This time with participation and important contribution of enthusiastic



Pavel Tomkovich

hand highly professional team of Czech ornithologists under leadership of Prof. Miroslav Salek. This group operated on behalf of BirdsRussia with logistics (including hire of caterpillar vehicle) and formalities arranged by us. After promising findings of 2015, when a possible increase of numbers of breeding SBS up to 5 pairs were reported we were hoping for continuation and more good news. The team had discovered two breeding pairs with one more bird of unclear status. Which is not bad result as the lowest observation for the area was as low as one pair. It is also possible that unfavorable cold weather with late spring had limited birds in breeding. More information would be available later during the year.

Beringiovskiy vicinities. Three SBS breeding locations were checked by another group consisting of two bird experts from the UK (Andrew Dixon and Dave Gregsen) and BirdsRussia executive secretary Vladimir Yakovlev and assistant Slava Zamyslov. This group made a long tour by caterpillar vehicle from town of Beringovskiy as far North as Kainupilgyn lagoon to check three SBS locations known since the year 2000. Each of them used to have 2-5 breeding pairs when last checked 5-8 years ago. Sadly two locations were empty and only one had a nest and breeding pair but was very quickly predated due to human activity being too close to the road and mass fishing location. According to local people this spring was



SBS BirdsRussia activities 2015

very cold and with high snow cover very late to melt and extreme weather conditions. We hope that some of the areas, which had no SBS this time, might be still occupied in the years with more favorable weather.

Heritage Expeditions survey at Koryak coasts.

With long-term support of the Heritage Expeditions owner Rodney Russ we were able to get on board of the “Professor Khromov” to survey SBS breeding habitats at remotest part of Koryak coast. All places had reasonable amount of suitable SBS habitat but rather low numbers of waders breeding and no SBS seen. With the landings of 2015 summer the coverage of potentially SBS promising lagoons of Koryak coast is approaching 80%. With the help of Heritage Expeditions the most remote part of SBS breeding range at Koryak coast is close to be completely covered. Our short visits doesn't exclude the opportunity that

something has been missed but any serious concentrations of SBS are very unlikely to be missed there.

Weather conditions prevented us to land at two more locations where we were hoping to monitor previously known SBS breeding sites. Tourists were able to visit Meinypil'gyno monitoring plots and BirdsRussia staff – Nicolay and Egor – had shown them breeding birds. Awareness raising lectures were made on board of the ship during this expedition cruise as well as sell of SBS souvenir items, which helped to raise funds for SBS projects in the breeding grounds.

Autumn wader monitoring in Kamchatka.

Kamchatka branch of BirdsRussia under the lead of Dr. Yuri Gerassimov is monitoring for the second year running the autumn migration of waders at important SBS stopover around Sobole-



Pavel Tomkovich

vo at SW Kamchatka coast. The team of 5 ornithologists had already ringed over two thousand waders in ten days after starting work in early August. First adult SBS was seen there on 13 of August. We are looking forward to hear about their results in the next Newsletter. Series of education seminars and media publications regarding SBS conservation in the region will be organized by Yuri later on during the autumn.

Three other parties in the Russian Far East had contributed to observations of SBS this summer. The new deputy director of recently established National Park “Beringia” Maxim Antipin had visited several former SBS breeding locations around Provideniya (SE Chukotka peninsula) to confirm that the areas still doesn't have birds. Alexey Dondua at Belyaka spit (who is still in the field when this newsletter is in print) had reported to Pavel Tomkovich that a single pair of SBS is still breeding there and due to his predation control efforts managed to raise to chicks to fledging. Dmitri Dorofeev - the leader of the expedition of All Russian Research Institute for Ecology of Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia is currently running observations of autumn migration of waders at eastern coast of Kamchatka around Ust'-Khai-ruzovo. Together with Tom Noah - long standing member of German SBS Support Team - they had observed numerous adult SBS on return migration starting already from mid July when first two birds were seen. More info in this Newsletter. Dialog with Chukotka authorities was continued

both in Moscow at the Chukotka Autonomous Region office there as well as in Chukotka's capital Anadyr, series of meetings and discussions with the Governor, Vice-governor and number of regional administration officials were resulted in good progress towards discussion on the opportunity to start preparation of creation of the new Nature Park “Land of Spoon-billed Sandpiper” in south Chukotka, which will cover majority of SBS known breeding grounds. The first meeting on initiation of concrete steps is planned for winter 2015/16 in Anadyr. We hope for the agreement of local government. The next challenge for BirdsRussia would be to raise funds for the project work as local government doesn't have budget for that.

Serious discussion is on the way regarding runway construction work planned in Meinypil'gyno for 2016. The original idea of location of this runway was exactly next to head-starting aviary and overlapping with several SBS breeding territories. Which will put our work in Meinypil'gyno under serious challenge. BirdsRussia is arguing the need of moving the construction site to another location within a distance of at least 1 km from nearest SBS breeding territory. The series of official letters and scheme of suggested runway location were prepared and send to Chukotka administration and the Construction Company. We hope for positive decision of the Governor to be announced in early 2016.



Landscape at Meinypil'gyno

Christoph Zöckler

SBS Survey in West Kamchatka

Dmitry Dorofeev & Tom Noah

From 7 July to 6 August BirdsRussia organised a survey trip to scan large waterbird congregations at Ust Khairuzovo in West Kamchatka. After waiting for flights and boats and the usual delays we finally arrived 10 days later at our destination in Ust Khairuzovo.

There were a maximum of 30,000 waders, mostly Great Knot (appr. 20,000) but also many other waders including 170 Far-Eastern Curlew and even one Marsh Sandpiper that is rare in Kamchatka. On 19th and 20th of July we could observe 2 SBS in breeding plumage among flocks of Red-necked

Stints, on 24 July still 1 breeding plumage bird (but only 2 different individuals max., because observed at the same site). On 31 July and 1 August another 1 bird in breeding plumage (different site).

In summary: at least 3 different ind., all un-marked; the area was not completely surveyed and it could be easily a few more SBS in the area. Considering the timing of the arrival of birds it could have been either failed breeders returning or female returning early in late July early August.



One of three different SBS surveyed in West Kamchatka in July 2015

Tom Noah

Suki, the Lego Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Slimbridge

Chris Edwards-Pritchard, WWT

The LEGO SBS is part of a trail of nine giant LEGO brick animals – currently at WWT Slimbridge, but soon to tour around other WWT centres in the U.K.. The models are 4 foot tall [1.20 meters, the editor] and include a crane, a flamingo, swans and goose species and also an otter and can be seen at the WWT premises in Slimbridge.

Assuming an average weight of a SBS of 30g and a world population of 300-400 that gives a total population weight of 9-12kg. So the Suki at Slimbridge (with metal base), at 50kg, weighs 5 times the weight of the world population of Spoon-billed Sandpipers!



LEGO SBS Suki the Spoonie. She's made up of 12,800 bricks and took 110 hours to build.

Chris-Edwards-Pritchard

SBS IN ART

In this issue Elena Lappo interviews James McCallum, artist from Norfolk, England

James McCallum is an artist based in Norfolk, England. He is a graduate of The Royal College of Art and is best known for his watercolour paintings of the natural world, particularly birds, made outdoors from life.

Working directly from nature has enabled him to develop a thorough knowledge of the behaviour and visual language of wildlife in its chosen surroundings. The resulting pictures made rapidly whilst watching have an authenticity and energy difficult to reproduce in the studio.

Although happily engrossed in studying the wildlife of his native Norfolk, his interests, particularly in migrant birds, have taken him to many parts of the world. These have included visits to Europe, The Middle East, Africa and Japan. The North and Arctic have a special appeal and have resulted in trips to exciting destinations such as Spitsbergen and Hokkaido. Most cherished are long periods spent in Finnish Lapland, Varanger and Alaska and joining Russian expeditions to remote regions of Chukotka and Kamchatka.



Male Spoon-billed Sandpiper on territory – Belyaka Spit, 6th June 2002



Male Spoon-billed Sandpiper

EL How did you first hear about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?

JM As a teenager I saw Peter Hayman's illustrations in the Helm guide 'Shorebirds'. I remember thinking 'Wow, what an incredible bird!' I never imagined that I'd one day see one.

EL Where did you see your first Spoon-billed Sandpiper?

JM On Belyaka Spit, Northern Chukotka on 2nd June 2002. My first encounter was early that morning and I had just woken up when I heard an unfamiliar 'buzzing' high above my tent. I never saw the calling bird that morning but by the end of the day at least three males had arrived on Belyaka. It was a magic moment when I saw my first Spoon-billed Sandpiper – a male busy singing and making nest-scrapes in the tundra.

EL What is your most memorable encounter with Spoon-billed Sandpipers?

JM There were too many highlights to single out just one – seeing my first bird, courtship, mating, finding my first nest, seeing chicks. The month spent on Belyaka Spit with Pavel Tomkovich and his assistant, Vanja Taldenkov, was one of the most special times of my life.

EL Why is the Spoon-billed Sandpiper so important for people and the planet?



Scratching



Singing



Female feeding on dry tundra – Belyaka, 1st July 2002



Male brooding chicks

JM All species are of course important but unique species like the Spoon-billed Sandpiper really capture people's imagination. The evolution of that amazing bill and the exact movements of the birds are still shrouded in mystery - fuelling our imagination and reminding us what an incredible planet we live on and of our duty to conserve it.

EL What contribution can art make to saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?

JM I think art is important – it is a universal language that has the ability to quickly communicate with people of all backgrounds and origins. Furthermore I believe people think in a different way when they look at drawings and paintings and the use of art can complement and strengthen the conservation message.

Many of the pictures seen here are from the book 'Arctic Flight – Adventures Amongst Northern Birds' www.jamesmccallum.co.uk



Female trying one of the male's nest-scrapes and he displays above her – Belyaka, 6th June 2002



Male making nest-scrapes in tundra – Belyaka, 3rd June 2002

Sayam Chowdhury becomes assistant coordinator

Christoph Zöckler

The Task Force has acquired the assistance of Sayam Chowdhury from the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project. Sayam is not new to the Task Force and widely known in his active role in conservation in Bangladesh and beyond. His dedication to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has taken new levels and to my knowledge Sayam is the first and only who tattooed our logo on his body.

Sayam will be assisting the coordinator of the Task Force in maintaining the database, developing a communication strategy, coordinating winter counts and contributing to the editing of the bi-annual newsletter.

We are grateful for the generous support from BirdLife Asia and the RSPB to support Sayam in his new role.



Sayam is currently suffering in Cambridge on a Conservation Leadership Programme course, as the weather even in summer does not reach the temperature he is used in his native Bangladesh

Beatrix Schwehm

