Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force

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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, Chair of the EAAFP SBS Task Force with assistance from Elena Lappo and Coordinator Sayam Chowdhury.

Mission:
The East Asian-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. Implementing organisation for the SBS TF is BirdLife International through its partner Birds Russia. It is chaired by the Government Partner of Russia. Task Force members consist of the EAAFP Government Partners of key range states for the species and international conservation organisations. These are: the Russian Federation, Japan, People's Republic of China, People's Democratic Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Union of Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh and India, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT), Wetlands International, a representative of the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group, Fauna Flora International (FFI) and experts and conservation organisations from principal range states and other partners. We are grateful to the RSPB, NABU and the Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung for their continued support of the SBS Task Force and Spoon-billed Sandpiper projects across the range states.

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Contents

Foreword by the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Manfred Hermsen Foundation

This spring and summer felt like following a Voyager probe into space, as satellite-tagged K9 ventured along the flyway, uncovering unknown stopover sites and the amazing feat of migrating across huge distances over the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk. When K9 finally landed at a mountain site in North Kamchatka, it was as if a 'new planet' has been found. This new knowledge was surreal, and after K9 spent over six weeks at this remote mountain site, it looked like, quite unexpected – a new breeding habitat was discovered! It was too late and too remote to go and check the area immediately, but for 2025 a 'manned' mission to the 'new planet' mountain area is planned. Katherine Leung has summarised for us the amazing journey of K9.

Our Russian team has been able to visit our key monitoring sites in Chukotka and completed their work successfully – revealing new insights from two breeding areas. Hopefully, head-starting could resume in the coming years.

Sadly, our last two remaining Spoon-billed Sandpiper in captivity in Slimbridge, U.K. died in November possibly on kidney failure due to bacteria and yeast infections. This is a sober moment for our conservation efforts, and we all feel very sorry for the team at WWT who worked so hard to get conservation breeding going. In this respect our discussions in China on resuming conservation breeding and head-starting were well in time.

Earlier in October 2024, I had the pleasure and privilege to revisit Tiaozini after eight years. The changes I saw were astonishing and almost beyond belief. It was quite emotional to witness so much progress, accompanied by some of China's best wildlife photographers. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is now featuring everywhere, even on the toilet doors and at the 'mouth' of the trains carrying tourists around the wetland!

China has fully adopted the species. This commitment to conserving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and protecting coastal wetlands and biodiversity in China was also evident during the Beijing Science Week. It was heartening to see the dedication of the Chinese authorities and institutions towards species and wetland conservation. Even though our new and revised Action Plan is not quite finalised, it received prominent attention at the conference in Beijing and was highlighted by a specially produced video by Mangrove Conservation Foundation.

All these developments provide a much-needed boost for our species that is still in peril of extinction, at a time when securing funding for our work has become more challenging. For this reason, we are especially grateful for the continued support we receive from the Manfred Hermsen Foundation, the Mangrove Conservation Foundation, the International Canadian Fund for Conservation, NABU, RSPB, Wildsounds, Rare Bird Alert UK and many private donors.

Foreword by Wendy Paulson

Vice-Chair of Paulson Institute and Chair of Bobolink Foundation

I vividly remember my first visit to the coast of the Yellow Sea in 2013. The impression of a bleak and forsaken place quickly gave way to a sense of awe as the incoming tide pushed flock after flock of birds ever closer to the shore. What were at first insect-like swarms on the horizon became spectacular 'murmurations' as they approached, wheeling around in perfect synchrony, alighting briefly on the mud to frantically feed before being pushed closer and closer to dry land. Finally, as the last of the mud was engulfed by the sea, over our heads they flew, wings whirring, to inland roosting sites where they would wait for the tide to begin its next retreat, the mud freshly enriched with nutrients from the sea.

It was a special experience I will never forget and one that I have relished multiple times since.

Yet migratory shorebirds are in serious decline. A combination of habitat loss, illegal hunting, pollution, invasive species (e.g. Spartina), and the effects of climate change, are causing the populations of many species to plummet.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) is the most endangered shorebird species in East Asia, and arguably the most charismatic. It has become an ambassador, representing a community of migratory shorebirds that are part of the rich natural heritage of East Asia, connecting countries and communities.

For 20 years, an international group, later established as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, has been working to try to slow, stop, and reverse the decline in the fortunes of this imperilled shorebird. So how has it fared?

Just a few weeks ago an important paper was published that provided a new estimate of the population of the SBS, suggesting the number of mature individuals is fewer than 450 with an annual rate

of decline of 5%. Despite all the head-starting and tracking of SBS, the important policy turnaround by China in the Yellow Sea that has put a stop to commercial-related coastal wetland reclamation; the work with communities on the wintering grounds to reduce illegal hunting and accidental bycatch; and all the awareness raising campaigns, the population is still falling.

In the face of these latest estimates, it would be easy to be downhearted. However, I prefer to take a different perspective.

Back in 2010 the annual population decline of SBS was estimated to be 26%. At that time, there was rampant reclamation of coastal wetlands in the Yellow Sea, illegal hunting was widespread throughout the range of SBS, and scientists knew little about the migratory routes and important stopover sites. Today, some 14 years later, there has been remarkable progress. The Chinese government has banned further reclamation in the Yellow Sea, halting the single most important driver of the declines. Several of the most important remaining sites for migratory shorebirds

in the Yellow Sea have been inscribed as World Heritage Sites. Satellite tracking and leg-flagging have revealed the most important staging and wintering sites for SBS and helped to direct efforts to raise awareness in communities in order to tackle illegal hunting and reduce bycatch. There are now coordinated surveys to better understand the non-breeding populations at key sites. And there has been an explosion in birding and bird photography, in China particularly, resulting in a dramatic increase of SBS records by citizen scientists and adding an immense amount of important data to those collected by scientists.

All of these efforts have slowed the rate of decline of SBS from 26% in 2010 to just 5% today. To me, this is notable progress.

It could also be argued that the significant headwinds experienced in the first few years of the SBS Task Force's work may be turning in favour of conservation. Everyone involved in wildlife conservation should be buoyed by the 2022 agreement by more than 190 countries, under China's presidency of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This framework includes an overall goal to slow, stop, and reverse biodiversity loss and requires all parties to develop national biodiversity plans, with appropriate resources for implementation. At the same time, there is a growing understanding of the risks to humans of biodiversity loss, which is elevating biodiversity as a political, diplomatic, and economic issue. These developments will inevitably provide opportunities for more prominence and, importantly, for more resources to be dedicated to biodiversity protection.

In this context, now is the time not to be downhearted but instead to redouble efforts, to keep pushing, to keep working to gather more and better data, harnessing new tools such as AI, to strengthen collaboration, and to continue to raise awareness, confident in the knowledge that support for your efforts will grow.

The SBS Task Force should be incredibly proud of its achievements thus far. We all need to build on this foundation to do our utmost to halt the decline in this species and to create the conditions for recovery. To do so will not only save this charismatic species for its own sake, but will benefit countless other species that rely on the same ecosystems. And, importantly, saving SBS will set an example of how countries around the world can successfully collaborate to protect shared natural heritage. By doing so, we can and will contribute to a healthier planet for generations to come.

Wendy Paulson

https://www.paulsoninstitute.org/
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulson_Institute
https://www.bobolinkfoundation.org/

Every Spoonie counts – protecting just 22 Adults a Year could halt the Decline!

Nigel Clark, Sayam Chowdhury and Christoph Zöckler

The massive effort that has been put in to individually marking Spoonies has enabled us to estimate the world population and its rate of population change over that last decade and the latest results were published in the latest issue of Wader Study (Green et al. 2024). This has only been possible as a result of the continuing dedication of the teams marking Spoonies at a range of sites!

The efforts of the BirdsRussia teams in Meinypyl'gyno, and Kamchatka continue to give us the ability to understand the relationship between adult and juvenile survival while the Nanjing Normal University team in Jiangsu has been vital in giving us additional marked birds many of which come from different breeding areas. In addition, the marking of small numbers in other locations enables us to build a complete picture of the movements of these incredible birds. Teams of the SBS Task Force along the entire flyway from Kamchatka to China, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar and Bangladesh kept surveying and reporting flagged birds. Every single marked bird adds to our knowledge and every sighting of a marked bird sighted has enabled us to understand the effect of our actions.

At the start of the century, the population was declining at 26% a year and without our actions Spoonies would have gone extinct by 2018. The latest analysis shows that through our efforts the annual decline rate is down to 5%, buying us a critical window to save the species. However, if the current trends continue, the last Spoonie will fly in the wild in 2065. The current effort to halt the decline has not been good enough as there are only about 440 adult birds left in the world. This means that we are still losing about 22 adults a year – we need to protect these individuals to sustain the population. Even if the decline rate of adult birds is lower, as observed at some locations overall the yearly loss remains roughly 22 birds.

SBS chick Lime T9 from Okeanskoye, 2024 *Anton Ivanov*

SBS Yellow 60, 14 October 2018 *Sayam Chowdhury*

This illustrates the value of conserving every single Spoonie. The task is now within reach, and with many more people dedicated to saving Spoonie than there are Spoonies left. We have a real chance to change its fate, by working together it will be possible to turn the fortunes of this flagship of the flyway, so that our children and children's children can delight in seeing this iconic species.

Green. R.E., K.K.S. Leung, N.A. Clark, G.Q.A. Anderson, K. Brides, Q. Chang, S.U. Chowdhury, J.A. Clark, M. Foysal, C. Zöckler, Y. Gerasimov, G.A. Gale, N. Iakushev, J. Khamaye, E. Lappo, D.S. Melville, P.S. Tomkovich, E. Weston, J. Weston & Z. Yang. 2024. New estimate of the trend in world population size of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper suggests continuing decline. Wader Study 131(2) 122–131.

SBS Survey and Monitoring at the Breeding Grounds in South-East Chukotka in 2024 by BirdsRussia Expedition

E. Lappo[1, 4], A. Ivanov[2, 4], N. Karlionova[3, 4] & V. Danilova[4]

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SBS expedition team in June 2024 (from left to right): A. Ivanov, E. Lappo, V. Danilova, N. Karlionova. A. Golub'

SBS expedition team in July 2024 (from left to right): A. Ivanov, N. Karlionova.V. Danilova, K. Parafenyuk, E. Lappo, S. Belogorodseva, I. Shepelev A. Golub'

Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) breeding survey in Meinypyl'gyno and surroundings is conducted by BirdsRussia since 2003 almost annually. In summer 2024 the survey was conducted from 26 May until 10 July by E. Lappo, A. Ivanov, N. Karlionova and V. Danilova. On 10 July N. Karlionova and V. Danilova left Meinypyl'gyno, and E. Lappo and A. Ivanov left Meinypyl'gyno on 23 July. Both went for a survey to Okeanskoye and Khatyrka area on 12-16 June (this bulletin, pp. 14-18).

The breeding conditions. The spring of 2024 turned out to be late and cold. Unlike in Anadyr area where nearly all land was covered by snow, in Meinypyl'gyno snow was almost completely blown from hilltops and tundra and accumulated in depressions and between the buildings in the village. As a result, the tundra became almost free of snow relatively early, at the beginning of June, and was rather dry except the boggy areas near the remains of snow. The stream's beds were dry as well. Pekulny Lake was almost covered by ice till 20 June. This caused comparatively low floods in Ankavie area at the SE end of the spit, but quite high floods in Vaamochka area at the SW end, where most of the SBS habitat in the vicinity of the Western Oil Drill Station was flooded on 16 June during our visit there.

The mouth of the main First River was blocked by ice and gravel by autumn storms, and it was opened on 19 June manually, quite late. The last snow in the settlement melted only on 3 July. The weather in July was not so cold as in June, but still foggy and rainy. The only days with sun were between 10 and 16 July.

The spring migration of shorebirds was extremely late in 2024. Many species known for the area being were late in comparison with medium dates. Some common species were not recorded at all (*Tringa brevipes, Calidris melanotos*) or were seen only once or rarely (*Calidris tenuirostris*), except of some species which were more or less common (*Phalaropus lobatus, Arenaria interpres, Calidris ruficollis, Calidris alpina*). Numbers of some locally breeding shorebirds (*Pluvialis fulva, Charadrius*

The landscape around Meinypyl'gyno in early June E. Lappo

The landscape around Meinypyl'gyno in late June E. Lappo

hiaticula, Phalaropus lobatus, Calidris alpina, Calidris ruficollis) were more or less common. The first SBS was recorded on 1 June, and the next day, on 2 June male lime "24" was found with his female lime "36" within their usual territory. All migration and beginning of breeding for most of the shorebirds were shifted by about a week. We assume that this is a result of cold windy weather in late May in SE Chukotka and the cyclone in the Okhotsk sea region at that time, which prevented further migration of birds to the north. Bird list of this year consists of 99 species (from the total 200 species recorded for the area over the 20 years).

Spoon-billed Sandpiper survey. In total 33 SBS were seen in the wider area around Meinypyl'gyno in 2024 (21 males and 12 females). Among them 26 SBS were individually recognizable as marked birds, including 4 Head-started birds (male 'White 1H' from 2016, male 'White 2L' from 2017, female 'White NC' from 2019 and female 'White L5' from 2021) (Table 1). Male 'Lime 24' was ringed as a chick in 2010 and 'Lime 27' was ringed as a chick in 2013, so they are 14 and 11 years old respectively. In addition, female 'Lime E3' was ringed as a chick in 2015, and it means its age is now 9 years.

On the way to the moraine hills V. Danilova

In 2024 we found 12 SBS pairs, which were observed in the "total area" of Meinypyl'gyno, and 10 nests (including a compensatory clutch). Two other pairs were possible breeding due to their behavior, but we could not locate their territories exactly or find their nests. Therefore, the number of SBS is about the same as in 2022-2023 (Fig.1). But among the adult birds in the "total area" 6 territorial solitary males were recorded. We noticed that the number of solitary males significantly increased in recent years.

Within these 33 SBS, 9 adults (4 marked and 5 unmarked), 2 nests and one more possible breeding pair were encountered in the distant, rarely visited area Western Oil Drill Station about 30 km west of Meinypyl'gyno.

One nest in the moraine hills near Western Oil Drill Station was uncommon and contained 2 SBS chicks and 3 eggs (one egg possibly belonged to

Table 1. SBS recorded around Meinypyl'gyno in three sections of the main monitoring area and in a distant Western Oil Drill Station in 2024

Sex	Main monitoring area			Western Oil Drill Station	Total
	Western section	Central section	Eastern section		
Males	0	Lime 24, Lime 27, Lime 79, Lime 94, Lime 8V, Lime M4, Lime OY, Lime L0, White 1H, White 2L, 1 unmarked, 1 unmarked	Lime UN, Lime H0, Lime OJ	Lime 84, Lime 92, Lime 7L, Lime 48, 1 unmarked, 1 unmarked	21
Fem	0	Lime 36, Lime 8M, Lime E3, Lime XP, Lime 88, White NC, White L5, 1 unmarked	Lime 47	Lime 00, 1 unmarked, 1 unmarked	12
Total	**0**	**20**	**4**	**9**	**33**

Male "Lime 24" *V. Danilova*

Male "Lime 27" *V. Danilova*

Male "Lime 84" *E. Lappo*

Male "Lime 94" *A. Ivanov*

Adult female unmarked near the "nest of 5" at Western Oil drill station *E. Lappo*

"The nest of 5"" (in the middle) from Western oil drill station *E. Lappo*

2 chicks and 3 eggs from the "nest of 5"(possible RNS egg on top) *E. Lappo*

Chick "Lime 3A" *E. Lappo*

Red-necked Stint, and remained in the nest after the hatching of SBS chicks. The first 2 chicks were marked on 7 July, and one more chick on 8 July, when the last one hatched, and the first one was walking near the nest with male, while female was incubating.

Nest predations. To learn about nest predators and predation rate we set up 5 automatic nest cameras (= camera traps) near 5 nests of 2 waders species (3 Pacific Golden plover and 2 Red-necked Stints). One nest of Pacific Golden plover and two nests of Red-necked Stint were predated, but we were able to recognize only one predator – it was Sandhill Crane that predated Red-necked Stint sadly one day before supposed hatching.

The total list of recorded nest predators on nests in previous years consists of several species – Red

The pair of Sandhill Cranes near the fresh predated nests of Red-necked Stint

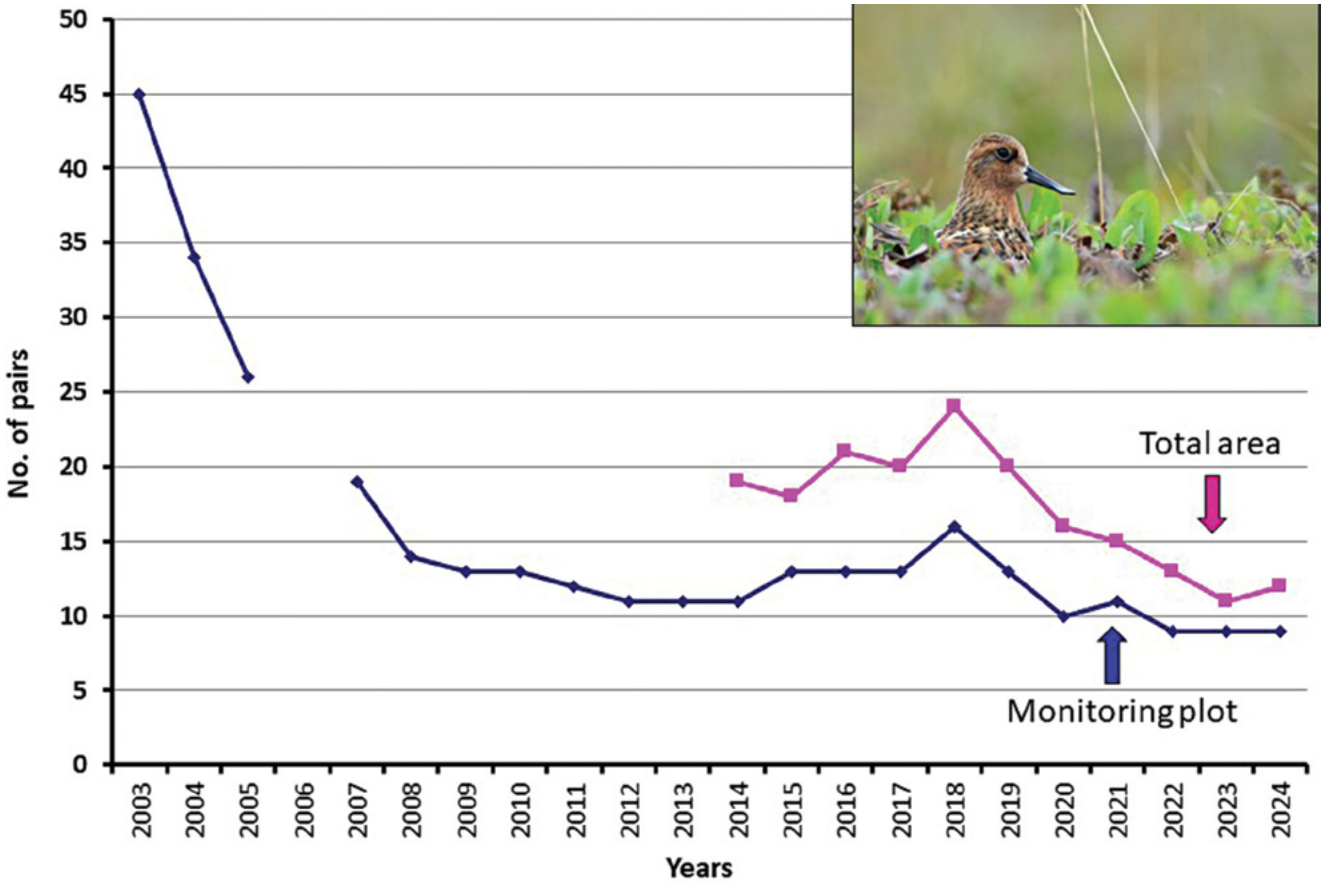

Figure 1. SBS population estimates in the main monitoring area (blue line) and grand total (purple line) near Meinypyl'gyno in 2003–2024

Fox, Arctic Fox, Arctic ground squirrel, Brown Bear, Arctic Skua, Raven. Let's note that all three species of Skuas were extremely abundant this year, especially in Ankavie area, and we saw Arctic Skua catching a small stint in the moraine hills. Because of the high level of nest predation rate and its high risk for SBS breeding success it is important to continue the monitoring of nest survival using other wader nests and to think about ways to control numbers of predators within the area.

Ringing and color marking SBS programme is running in Chukotka since 2000 and in Meinypyl'gyno since 2001. In South-East Chukotka adult birds get a metal ring on left tibia, and Lime flag on right tibia, and chicks – other way around. Since 2012, SBS are also marked with leg flags. In total, one adult SBS female on nest and 14 wild chicks of 5 broods were ringed and marked with ELF in 2024 at the main monitoring area and in Western Oil Drill Station. (Table 2).

Public awareness. E. Lappo and A. Ivanov provided interviews with Chukotka TV in Anadyr; with the local Newspaper "Krainii Sever"; with internet-resource ProChukotka; and for the websites of BirdsRussia, Institute of Geography Russian Academy of Science and All-Russian Research Institute for Environmental Protection.

Head-starting program. We still could not yet renovate the Head-Starting project in 2024 in the scale it was finished in 2021 after 10 years, because of lack in skilled people and funding. However, this year Ivan Shepelev and Katya Parafenyuk

Table 2. Number of SBS nests/broods found and birds marked in 2024

Species	Found		Ringed		Total Ringed
	nests	broods	adults	chicks	
Pacific Golden Plover	9	1	1	1	2
Common Ringed Plover	12	12	10	50	60
Mongolian Plover	2	-	-	-	-
Red-necked Phalarope	7	1	-	3	3
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	10	-	1	14	15
Red-necked Stint	5	-	6	-	6
Dunlin	4	-	1	-	1
Temminck's Stint	-	1	-	1	1
Red Knot	2	6	1	17	18
Total	**51**	**21**	**20**	**86**	**106**

Male "Lime OY" *E. Lappo*

Female "Lime XP" *V. Danilova*

Male "White 2L" *V. Danilova*

Female "White NC" *A. Ivanov*

joined the team to check the equipment and took part in some SBS survey and ringing. This year we became closer to resuming Head-Starting and, assuming its importance for the local SBS population we hope to continue future steps in this direction in 2025.

Acknowlegements. We are specially thankful for

Andrey Golub' for sharing the data on bird observation and his help in logistics, as well as to Svetlana and Roman Belogorodsevy, Marina Nikulina; and Vladimir Yakovlev for his coordination from Moscow.

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Remote area - Western Oil Drill Station *E. Lappo*

SBS monitoring and marking at Okeanskoye breeding Site, South-East Chukotka, in 2024

Elena Lappo[1,3], Anton Ivanov[2, 3], Egor Radivilov[3]

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SBS male yellow "PU" in Okeanskoye *Anton Ivanov*

On 12-17 June 2024 we made a trip from Meinypyl'gyno to Okeanskoye and Khatyrka for SBS survey, counts and ringing. This trip was possible because of Egor Radivilov and his team from Al'katvaam settlement on their 4 wheel drive vehicle that could cross the rivers. On the way we visited a place, where SBS broods were found by P. Tomkovich in 2005, but we have not observed any SBS there. We also made a short visit to Khatyrka, where we learned about the living facilities and logistics for potential future surveys in Okeanskoye.

We visited Okeanskoye on 13-14 and 16 July, so we had more time for the survey than last year and managed to check nearly all suitable areas (Lappo et.al., 2023). The habitats in Okeanskoye were wetter than the previous year, and we have the impression that SBS broods were located more upstream in the valley, compared to the previous year. During the survey in Okeanskoye we found two pairs and one male with broods, and one pair sharing incubation on the nest (with 3 eggs), which means at least four breeding pairs (but might be more in June, if some of SBS had lost their clutches). In total, in 2024 in Okeanskoye within the area of 6,1 km^2 we have seen 13-16 adult SBS, but we could not say for certain, because our survey time was too short and all birds were without individual marks. It looks like the population in Okeanskoye is also declining, because in July 2015, 18 possibly SBS territories were found there (Syroechkovskiy, 2015), and in June 2016, a week long survey estimated 17 breeding pairs (Noah & Fanck, 2016).

4WD car for SBS survey in 2024 in Okeanskoye Elena Lappo

Our field camp in Okeanskoye Elena Lappo

Unfortunately, we did not see male 'Lime 95' and female 'Lime 96', the nesting pair, which we marked in Okeanskoye last year. Both were seen in China in autumn 2023, and male 'Lime 95' was seen in autumn 2024 as well. The most exciting result was that one male with the yellow flag "PU" leading a brood of at least one chick, was caught and marked in Tiaozini, China during the autumn migration in 2018 (Katherine Leung, pers. comm.). Later this bird was resighted in autumn 2019 in China and in 2020 on wintering ground in Bangladesh (Sayam Chowdhury, pers. comm.).

Another bird recorded in Okeanskoye was male SBS with yellow flag "XJ" with unknown status. This bird was ringed as 1st-year bird in Kamchatka by Yuri Gerasimov and his team in 2020 (Gerasimov et al., 2020), first seen in September 2022 in Yangkau, in February 2024 in the Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar (Pyae Phyo Aung et al., 2024) and in Yangkou in August and September 2024 (Ziyou Yang pers. comm.).

In total 6 chicks from 3 broods were caught, ringed and individually marked with ELFs (kindly provided by Dr. N. Clark) during our visit (Table 1). Two of three broods were exactly located at the same place, where we found warning SBS in 2015. Additionally, we ringed and marked two adult SBS (both partners on the single nest we found in a vicinity of our camp – male Lime "97" & female Lime "99 ") and took the blood samples for genetic analysis from these adult birds.

Some of the individually marked SBS have already been seen on their migration in China:

Table 1. Number of SBS nests/broods found and birds marked in 2024

Nest/brood ID	Parents	Date	Metal ring	Codes left	Codes right	Age	Sex
SBS-24-A	unmarked	13.07.	KA67710	M	Lime L9	pull	-
SBS-24-A	unmarked	13.07.	KA67711	M	Lime J9	pull	-
SBS-24-A	unmarked	14.07.	KA67715	M	Lime N9	pull	-
SBS-24-B	PU (yellow)	13.07.	KA67712	M	Lime H9	pull	-
SBS-24-C	unmarked	13.07.	KA67713	M	Lime T9	pull	-
SBS-24-C	unmarked	13.07.	KA67714	M	Lime K9	pull	-
SBS-24-11	-	15.07.	KA67001	Lime 97	m	ad.	M
SBS-24-11	-	16.07.	KA67002	Lime 99	m	ad.	F

SBS male Yellow "XJ", Okeanskoye July 2024 *Anton Ivanov*

SBS male Yellow "XJ", left to right: Kamchatka, August 2020, Yuri Gerasimov · Gulf of Mottama, February 2024, Ye Min Aung · Yangkou, September 2022, Rainy CAI · Yangkou, autumn 2022, Wei Yan

SBS male yellow "PU". Picture compiled by S. Chowdhury with photos by Guy Anderson, Sayam U. Chowdhury, Anton Ivanov

Adult male "Lime 97" and female "Lime 99" were seen in Tiaozini on 22.08.2024 by Li Dongming, Katherine Leung (Katherine Leung, pers. comm.) and later by other Chinese photographers. "Yellow XJ" was seen in Yangkou this autumn (Ziyou Yang pers. comm.). Recently the chick from Okeanskoye, "Lime N9" was seen in Yuboo-do Island, Korea on 17-10-2024 by Jinho Kim (Katherine Leung, pers. comm.).

The brief survey in Okeanskoye confirmed the existence of the local SBS breeding site with the number of SBS similar to the entire Meinypyl'gyno population and is important future monitoring. The sightings of individually SBS marked in Kamchatka and China are also very important for the understanding of the breeding distribution of SBS marked on the flyway.

We want to express our gratitude to three sons of Egor – Georgiy, Roman and Sergei and his friend Aleksandre from Al'katvaam for their company and help; to Evgeny and Ekaterina Mishchenko from Khatyrka for their hospitality, and to Vladimir Yakovlev for logistical help and the idea of this travel suggested and organized by him from Moscow.

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Habitats in Okeanskoye *both Elena Lappo*

Literature

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Tracking the spring migration of two Spoonies from Thailand, and beyond

Katherine Leung on behalf of the tracking team

I imagine this might be the conversation happened between two special Spoonies, Orange K9 and Yellow HU, on 6 September 2024 at the high tide roost in Tiaozini, Jiangsu, China:

***Yellow HU**: Ni hao! I remember that high-tech backpack, I had one eight years ago and took it from here to my wintering ground 1,700 km away in Southern China.*
***Orange K9**: Sawadikap! I got mine half-a-year ago in Thailand, went 7,000 km north to my breeding grounds in Russia and then another 4,000 km south back here!*
***Yellow HU**: That's amazing, what a journey! Where's next?*
***Orange K9**: Well, I guess it's time for a bit longer rest here to replace my worn flight feathers and breeding outfit, before flying back to Thailand to enjoy seafood and spa!*

Orange K9 at Tiaozini, starting to moult out of breeding plumage, early September 2024 *Dongming Li*

With the transmitter deployed with glue on the back feather in March, we fully expected the tag to fall off during a moult period, and sure enough, on 28 September, K9's satellite transmitter sent its last signal, marking the end of 204-day tracking of this record-setting "Super Spoonie".

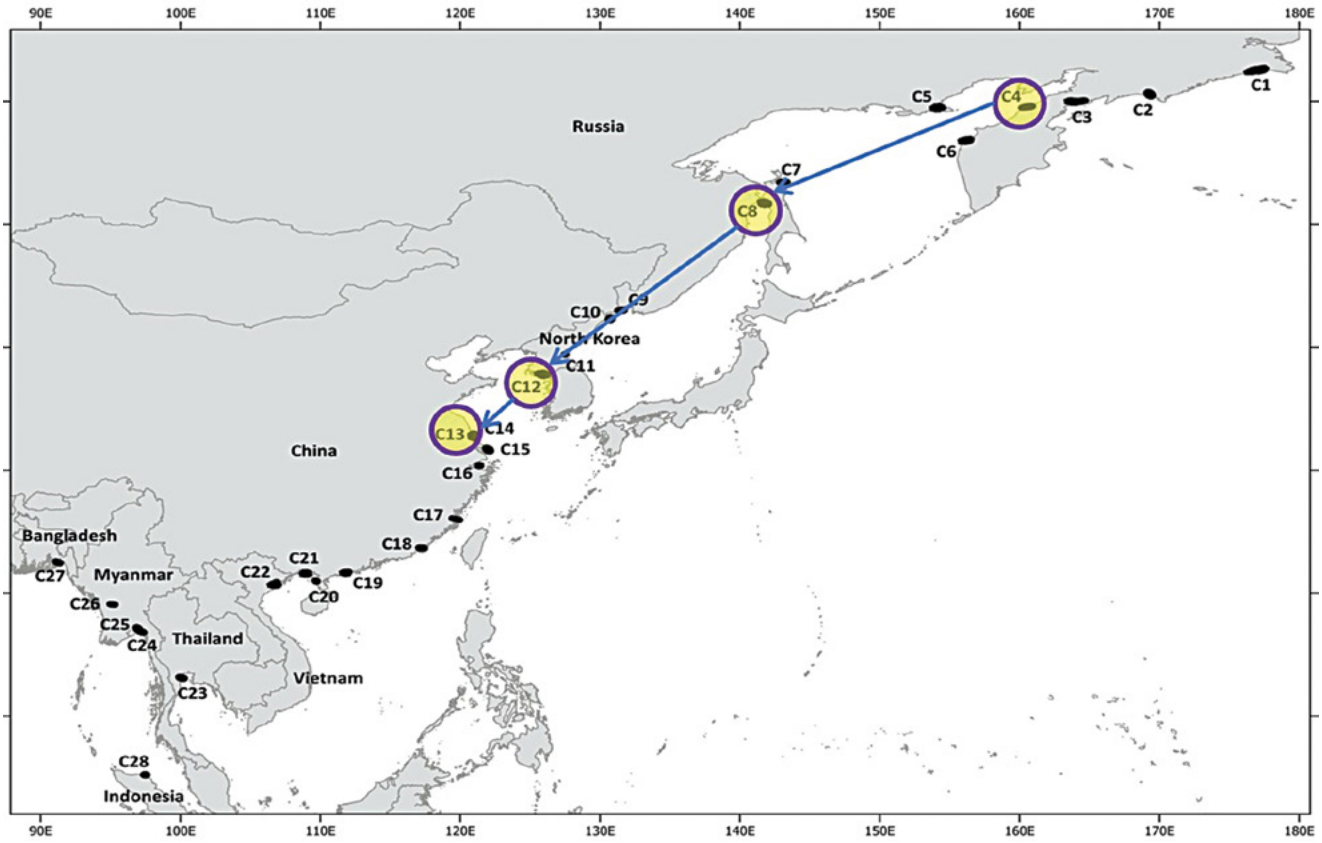
Orange K9 and A6 have brought a wealth of new information to help Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation. They mapped out critical stop-over sites that need protection to safeguard their epic annual migration. K9 also revealed a potential new breeding site and habitat type in Russia.

In the May 2024 News Bulletin, we reported that both Orange K9 and A6 safely reached the Yellow Sea Coast in Southern Jiangsu, China in late April and early May. K9 stayed for 19 days until 14 May at Dongling, while A6 stayed for 26 days at Tiaozini. Their next challenge was to fly across the Yellow Sea, a big leap of at least 700 km.

For K9, this leap took 12 hours and it reached Ryong Mae mudflat on the south-west coast of DPRK near the DMZ in the morning of 15 May. This area was also used by all four Spoonies tagged on the Meinypyl'gyno breeding grounds, that transited Korea Peninsula during their autumn southward migration. Tracking studies on other threatened shorebird species, such as Nordmann's Greenshank and Great Knot, have also highlighted the Ryong Mae mudflat area as key stop-over site for migratory waders. K9 stopped here for 7 days before moving on north again. With a non-stop flight of over 40 hours, K9 next stop-over at Tyk Bay on the west coast of Sakhalin Island, another site known to support Spoonies during southward migration in previous tracking study from Meinypyl'gyno, also a breeding site for Nordmann's Greenshank. In early June, K9 left Sakhalin Island and finally arrived at its potential breeding site. A full two-month journey from wintering ground to breeding site.

It then remained at an undisclosed potential breeding site for two months until early August, suggesting successful breeding, before returning south. A follow-up expedition to the potential breeding site is planned for 2025.

On its southward migration, K9 followed the "traditional" route used by many of the previously



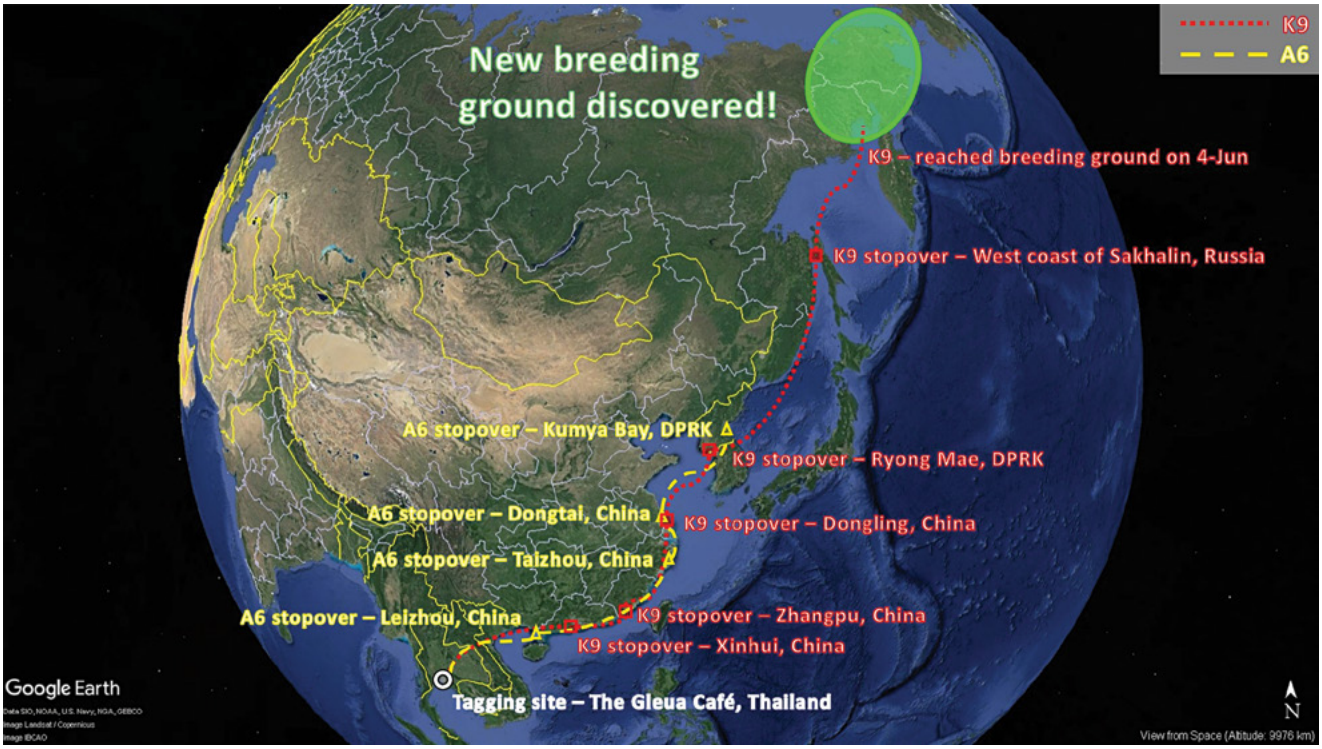
Critical sites for Spoon-billed Sandpiper identified by previous tracking studies (Chang et al. 2020). Yellow circles and blue arrows show the sites which were used by K9 during its southward migration from potential breeding ground

tracked Spoonies from Meinypyl'gyno, with 7-day stop-over at the west coast of Kamchatka and then returning to Tyk Bay in Sakhalin for another 7 days, before coming back to Ryong Mae in DPRK again.

On 30 August, transmitter signals show that K9 safely crossed the Yellow Sea again to reach southern Jiangsu. Rather than heading back to Dongling, where it stop-over during its northward journey, K9 decided to rest at the first location where it landed on the Jiangsu coast at the protected Tiaozini wetland. During the high tide on 6 September, it was observed at the same roosting site with former satellite tagged Spoonie Yellow HU.

Whilst K9's tag stayed attached and transmitting for longer than expected, A6's tag functioned more as we had predicted, falling off and stopping transmitting on 2 June with its last signal sent from the north-east coast of DPRK. Comparing to K9, A6 has a lot less breeding plumage when the transmitter was fitted in March 2024 (glued on to its back feathers). Therefore, as the breeding plumage was likely to develop further during its northward migration, replacing older back feathers in the process, it is not surprising that A6's transmitter dropped off earlier than K9's. Nevertheless, A6 still showed us its partial migration of over 3,800 km, providing yet more vital information on key stopover sites.

Orange K9 and A6 have directing the Task Force to more conservation actions needed along the EAAF for the species. As K9 and A6 were migrating north, local Chinese birdwatchers have been contacted to visit the sites where they stop-over,



Northward migration tracks of Orange K9 and A6

not only to check for presence of K9, A6 and other Spoonies, but also to identify potential threats. Many of these sites are currently not protected in any form, thus, further conservation actions are needed soon. One of the most significant results from this tracking study was the use by K9 – in both spring and autumn, of the Ryong Mae mudflats in DPRK. Given that this area was used by all four other southbound tracked Spoonies that overflew the Korean peninsula, its importance is clear. Thorough investigation of this area in future to quantify its importance to Spoonies, and other waterbirds, on both north and southward migration, is a very high priority.

The tagging of A6 and K9 was part of the "Migratory Shorebird Research Project" led by the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand (DNP), in collaboration with the Conservation Ecology Program at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (CEG KMUTT), WWT, RSPB, and the SBS Task Force.

Epilogue: On 21 October, a Spoonie in full winter plumage with orange flag on its left tibia was observed at Tiaozini by Zhang Lin from SBSinChina. He did not manage to read the code on the flag but was sure that the bird was not carrying a satellite transmitter. Most likely this individual is K9, but the possibility of it being A6 cannot be fully ruled out. We hope to see both K9 and A6 again in Thailand during the upcoming winter survey.

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Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Waterbird Research in southern Jiangsu, September 2024

Guy Anderson, on behalf of the Jiangsu research team

Southern Jiangsu Spoon-billed Sandpiper and waterbird Research team, September 2024, Yangkou, Rudong County, Jiangsu

From 5-16 September 2024, an international team, with partners from China, the UK and New Zealand, under the leadership of Prof Chang Qing, Nanjing Normal University, continued its long running field research programme on Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other migratory waders, in southern Jiangsu Province, China. The mudflats of the southern Jiangsu coast remain one of the most important waterbird migration sites in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, and a critically important autumn staging and moulting area for adult Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

Our research team has been studying Spoonies and other waders in southern Jiangsu since 2015, following on the surveys led by SBSinChina since 2011. As well as marking Spoonies we have also colour-flagged large numbers of waders and fitted GPS tags to a range of larger wader species. These birds have been recorded far and wide, from Russia to Australia, highlighting the pivotal role the Jiangsu coastal wetlands play in bird migration along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. These data will be written up in full in due course.

This year, the team had three priority objectives:
1. 'Scan-sampling' surveys for Spoon-billed Sandpipers; finding as many Spoonies as possible, identifying individually marked (flagged) birds and using specific field survey methods to estimate the ratio of marked to unmarked birds present. These data allow unbiassed estimation of both local site, and world population, sizes. The latest, very recently, published world population estimate derived from these methods (Green et al. 2024), gave a mean of 443 breeding-age birds, averaged over the years 2014 to 2022, with a probable slight population decline, around 5% per year, during this period. This result is both sobering, in that the Spoonie population is not yet showing any sign of recovery, but also encouraging in that the catastrophic decline rate of 26% per annum recorded between 2001 and 2009 (Zöckler et al. 2010) has at least levelled off, in line with concerted international conservation efforts successfully addressing several key known threats. The number of Spoonies observed in the field in Jiangsu in autumn 2024 appeared to be lower than in recent years. Our raw ground counts produced only 20 Spoon-billed Sandpipers at Tiaozini (including one juvenile) and a total of 71 across all four southern Jiangsu coast sites surveyed in September (Tiaozini, Yangkou, Dongling, Tongzhou Bay). Formal analysis of the scan sampling data to provide more robust local autumn population estimates for the Jiangsu sites is underway, as is

Spoon-billed Sandpiper 'Yellow LY', flagged during our fieldwork in Jiangsu Province, September 2024. Photo taken 5 October 2024, Jiangsu by © Jiang Yilei (used with their permission)

Students from Nanjing Normal University studying the pattern of moult on a Siberian Sandplover, southern Jiangsu, September 2024. Collecting data on the moult status of birds caught for ringing provides valuable information on how important this coast is as a moulting site for many waterbird populations *Guy Anderson, RSPB*

an investigation as to why and how numbers may have changed.

2. Catching and colour-flagging more Spoonies to contribute to the marked population, allowing continued assessment of global and local population size estimates, and increasing our knowledge of migratory behaviour and site connectivity along the Spoonie's flyway. Just one new Spoonie was caught and marked this year – Yellow LY. Both weather and site conditions conspired against us this year. We lost two of the best catching opportunities to bad weather. Habitat changes to key sites also made catching more difficult. Large scale mechanical removal of the invasive *Spartina alterniflora* cord-grass from upper mudflats – a programme of the Chinese Central Government – is taking place extensively and rapidly all along the coast of southern Jiangsu. If these areas remain Spartina-free in the long term this will be a very positive move for the future health of intertidal mudflat habitats in southern Jiangsu, and therefore beneficial for Spoonies, and all the other migratory waterbirds that depend on these open habitats. This management work in progress has changed wader roosting behaviour since 2023, making catching more challenging this year, but this is a short-term inconvenience to us at most. As mentioned above, there is also some evidence that the numbers of Spoonies being encountered along the southern Jiangsu coast are lower now than before 2020. Reasons for this are not yet entirely understood, although sightings of individually marked birds indicate that some of this change could be associated with redistribution of birds, rather than only an increased mortality rate. Further planned analysis of the flagged birds sightings dataset should help provide further insights. Although the opportunities to catch and mark Spoonies in southern Jiangsu this year and last were reduced, thankfully efforts elsewhere, particularly at Meinypyl'gyno, continue to be successful, and we will continue to look for other options elsewhere on the flyway.

3. Colour-flagging and GPS tagging a range of other wader species to learn more about migratory connectivity of southern Jiangsu coastal wetlands within the EAAF. During the fieldwork period we caught and marked nearly 1,000 waterbirds of 32 species. The majority of the waders were colour-flagged, many with individually coded leg

flags (ELFs). GPS tags were deployed on 28 birds in total; 7 Dunlin, 4 Great Knot, 2 Grey-tailed Tattler, 5 Bar-tailed Godwit, 2 Common Greenshank, 4 Common Redshank, 2 Ruddy Turnstone and 2 Eurasian Curlew. All will help our understanding of how migratory waders use the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, and key sites along it.

We also found time to have valuable discussions with the Beijing Forestry University shorebird research team based at Tiaozini, covering Spoonie and other shorebird foraging ecology, and the apparently growing shortage of suitable high tide roost sites for waders along much of the southern Jiangsu coast. The only accidental benefit of previous successive intertidal land claims along the Yellow Sea coastline has been the availability of large areas of substrate suitable for high-tide-roosting waders immediately behind the most recent seawall. As these areas get developed subsequently, however, this suitability disappears. In no way, of course, should this be used as an argument to reinstate any form of land claim plans – the maintenance and management of remaining open intertidal mudflats as foraging areas for waterbirds is far more important. The halt to large-scale land claims around much of the Yellow Sea coastline remains the greatest single positive change in the 20+ year history of concerted international efforts to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. It does however, emphasise the need for a network of dedicated, secure, undisturbed waterbird high tide roost sites along this coast, and indeed along the entire Chinese coastline. The example of the '720 Mu roosting pond' (720 Mu = 48 hectares) at Tiaozini, within the Yancheng World Heritage Site, shows how successful such sites can be. This area, originally managed as an aquaculture pond, and re-purposed as a dedicated waterbird roost site, regularly holds internationally important numbers of multiple waterbird species. Replicating its success elsewhere with similarly dedicated high tide roost areas at the other key sites along the southern Jiangsu coast (and indeed the entire Chinese coastline) would be a very valuable objective. Ongoing large-scale habitat change, both anthropogenic and from natural coastal processes, has the potential to change waterbird distribution in future, and the recorded inter-site movements of some individually-marked Spoonies support this possibility. Therefore, treating the entire southern Jiangsu coast as a priority region for the conservation of waterbirds and the coastal wetland habitats on which they depend would be appropriate.

The southern Jiangsu Spoon-billed Sandpiper and waterbird research programme is a collaboration between the Jiangsu Key Laboratory for Biodiversity and Biotechnology, School of Life Science of Nanjing Normal University, Jiangsu Forestry Academy, Yancheng National Nature Reserve, RSPB (supported by its generous donors), Katherine Leung (Hong Kong Waterbirds Ringing Group) and David Melville (independent researcher). It benefits from valuable cooperation with SBSinChina (NGO), and local volunteer observers and photographers.

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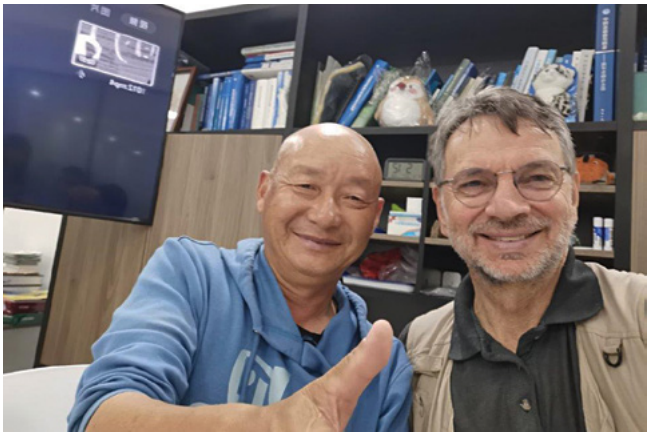
Returning to Tiaozini

Christoph Zöckler

After several years of absence, I was able to return to Tiaozini for the first time since 2016. In that year I was joining the Russian – Chinese Bilateral team to discuss the conservation of our threatened species amongst other things. I was 'adopted' by Evgeny, the chair of the Russian delegation at the time as a friend and joined the excursion in the mudflats, the counts and also the discussions afterwards as 'Honorary Russian'. This also meant I had to drink a bit but not quite like a Russian! It was still the time when things were not going in the right direction but we sensed that there were some changes on the way, as new billboards did no longer show the economic development plans but rather new pretty landscapes and cranes flying over it. We remained suspicious but what started then in 2016 culminated in 2019 with the announcement that Tiaozini has been accepted in the list of World Heritage Sites.

Eight years later again with Russians, this time with my friend Lena, we were invited and joined by the team of the Jiangsu Broadcasting TV channel, Huang Jian from MCF and Yifei Jia from the Beijing Forest University to visit Tiaozini and the Wetland Information Centre. Already in Dongtai City at the office of the administration and the restaurants pictures of Spoonies on almost every wall. At the Tiaozini Wetland entrance oversized Spoonies are greeting us, next to an information Centre, where Spoonie shaped arm rests invite the visitors to rest at outdoor benches. A small train pulling small wagons has a Spoonie shaped face at the front!

Jian and Yifei are taking us to bird hides, towers and the visitor Centre. We are meeting Dongming Li, the famous photographer at Tiaozini. Rainy weather and later commitments with the film team prevent us from going into mudflats, but on the following days we managed to get good views of about ten Spoonies. We even managed to spot two yellow flagged birds. The exciting news is that one was flagged on the right leg, indicating that it has been flagged by Yuri's team



Meeting photographer Dongming Li



Impressions from Tiaozini Wetland Park - a real pilgrimage site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Christoph Zöckler*

in Kamchatka! At the high tide roost we are not alone. A good 30 photographers have assembled and are waiting for the waders to appear. Cameras worth half a million are on display and you hear constant shooting. Even more exciting news for Lena emerges when Jian receives the news from one photographer who shows us a photo of Lime 99 he just took this morning. We cannot find the bird, but Lena just remarks this was the female they marked this summer in Okeanskoye (see pages 15-19). What an amazing coincidence, but the Chinese photographer does not seem to understand the significance of his photo and turns his camera again towards the ever-increasing flock of now more than 10,000 waders!

One day we went to Yancheng NR on invitation of Prof Chang Qing of Nanjing University, who has been accompanying our work since 2013. The Yancheng NR director Zhizhou Chen and staff guided us through the reserve. Red-crowned Cranes are bred and have been released into the wild. The reserve staff is keen to help and assist with conservation breeding of waders including Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This is of course a massive undertaking and requires a lot of preparation and agreements. Both, Chinese and Russian delegations are discussing the legal requirements for such an undertaking. As a first step the Yancheng NR started this year with the breeding of Avocets, Black-winged Stilts and Kentish Plovers, all

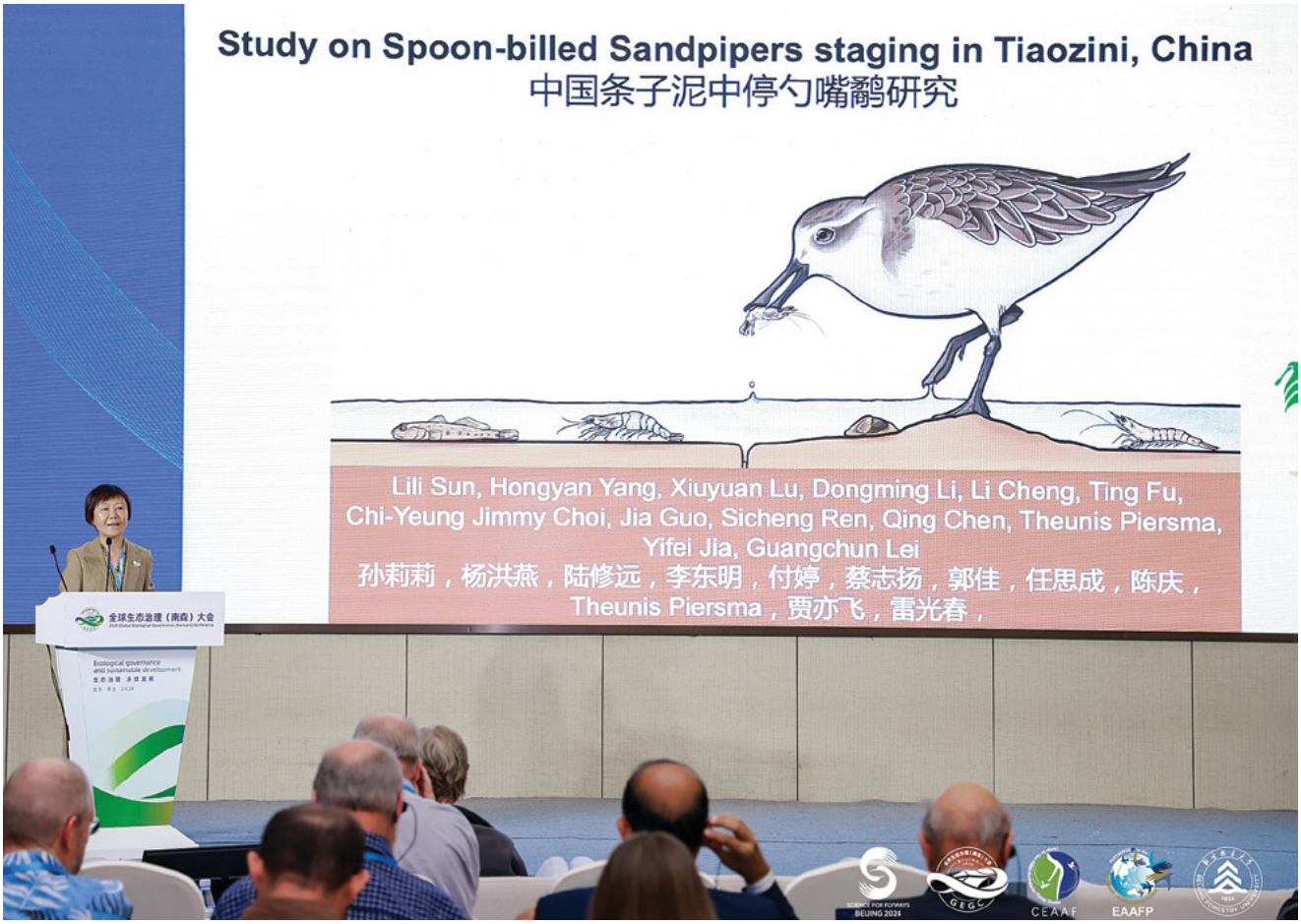
local breeders, but important lessons have been learned.

Everywhere we arrived along the coast we received a very warm welcome and were generously hosted with food and drinks. Yancheng NR and the Dongtai City administration, Beijing Forest University and Nanjing Normal University, the Mangrove Conservation Fund, all fully committed to conserving Spoon-billed Sandpiper and with this many other species and ecosystem services are protected. This was a very comforting visit. Very emotional!

Conservation breeding at Yancheng NR *all Christoph Zöckler*

Beijing EAAFP Science Week October 2024

Lili Sun (MCF)



Lili Sun presenting on Spoon-billed Sandpiper research conducted at Tiaozini Wetland at the Beijing Science Symposium

Beijing, October 16-18, 2024 - The 1st Flyway Science Symposium, hosted by Beijing Forestry University and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) and co-hosted by the Mangrove Conservation Foundation (MCF), Jiangsu Yancheng National Rare Bird Nature Reserve, Hanns Seidel Foundation, China Wit Media, Druid Technology, and Global Messenger, successfully took place in Beijing. The symposium established a long-term platform for scientific exchange on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and global migratory routes.

The symposium, one of the series of meetings under the Global Ecological Governance (Nansen) Forum hosted by Beijing Forestry University, spanned three days and welcomed over 240 participants, including more than 60 international experts from over 20 countries. The conference received high praise from attendees and generated significant international attention.

Beijing Forestry University Party Secretary Wang Hongyuan, EAAFP Secretariat CEO Jennifer George, and National Forestry and Grassland Administration Wildlife Conservation Department Director Su Rui delivered speeches at the opening ceremony. Professor Guangchun Lei, Beijing Forestry University Professor and MCF Chairman, and former Chairman of the Wetlands Convention Scientific and Technical Review Panel and first President of the International Flyway Science Education Alliance, chaired the opening session.

Lili Sun and Christoph Zöckler in the MCF video presented at the Science Symposium

Sayam Chowdhury presenting

Elena Lappo presenting on 2024 survey in Chukotka

The symposium featured keynote speeches, the launch of international large-scale scientific initiatives, thematic sessions, parallel forums, side events, and working group meetings. It covered six key topics: migratory waterbird population dynamics and conservation biology, habitat evolution and conservation gaps along migratory routes, the role of Indigenous peoples, communities, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), the impact of climate change and mitigation strategies, avian diseases and human health, and scientific monitoring, data platforms, and sharing. Three thematic forums on EAAF shorebird conservation, the Central Asian Flyway, and flyway network sites and birdwatching economy were also held.

Academy Professor Theunis Piersma of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences and Groningen University, and Professor Guangchun Lei of Beijing Forestry University delivered keynote speeches. They analyzed and summarized the current status of migratory flyways globally and in China, highlighting the urgent need to improve the efficiency of migratory bird conservation. They proposed solutions to enhance the protection network of key habitats for migratory birds in China and combine habitat restoration with priority conservation actions.

The symposium premiered a video introducing the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Action Plan, featuring experts from around the world discussing the background and significance of the plan. They expressed hope that the plan would have a positive impact on Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation over the next decade and called for more people to participate in their protection.

Ms. Sun Lili, Co-founder and Vice President of MCF, presented on Spoon-billed Sandpiper research conducted at Tiaozini Wetland, revealing the species' unique diet and abundant food resources in the intertidal mudflats. She also shared findings on the species' habitat utilization and residency status based on long-term data. Dr. Elena Lappo from the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences presented on Spoon-billed Sandpiper surveys and conservation in Russia, discussing the species' status and challenges in its breeding grounds. Mr. Huang Jian from MCF reported on the 2024 winter census of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in China, showcasing their wintering distribution and population changes within the country.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force held a working meeting to review recent progress and plan future tasks. The Task Force will continue to investigate Spoon-billed Sandpiper population dynamics, habitat selection, migratory routes, and strengthen collaboration with conservation organizations and communities. The Global Action Plan will be officially launched at the 12th Meeting of Partners (MOP12) of the EAAFP in the Philippines in November 2025, with a call for more partners to join the efforts to save this critically endangered species.

The symposium facilitated international exchange and collaboration on migratory flyway research and conservation. Participants agreed on the need for future cross-regional collaborative research and joint actions on migratory flyways, the development of innovative scientific plans for flyway research, and strengthened collaborative research and monitoring. They aim to jointly promote global biodiversity conservation.

Late night debriefing session after delicious Chinese dinner

Spoon-billed Sandpiper Stand at the Global BirdFair, Rutland Water, Leicestershire, UK, 12-14 July 2024

Baz Hughes

At the memorial service of our dear friend and colleague Rich Hearn in February this year, I got chatting to an old friend of ours, Tim Appleton, who some of you will know from his trips to China. Tim had found Rich and I accommodation over 30 years ago in 1993 when we were working at Rutland Water on the initial research phase of the UK Ruddy Duck eradication programme. Tim asked me whether we could resurrect the display stand for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force at the BirdFair because he and his co-organiser (and wife), Penny Robinson, were keen to increase the number of stands with a conservation message. I immediately got on the phone to Christoph, and he said he would be very happy for the UK SBS Support Group to give it a go. Then a quick message exchange with Guy Anderson confirmed that RSPB would provide the funds for our attendance, including our rather lovely glamping pod accommodation, so it was game on!

The UK SBS SG has been rather dormant for the last couple of years, so it was a brilliant opportunity for us all to get back in contact and to see each other again face-to-face for the first time in over four years. UK SBS SG members have been involved in most of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation projects over the last 15 years so putting together posters to tell the story of Spoonie conservation was straightforward. The stand was dedicated to Evgeny Syroechkovskiy and Rich Hearn.

EAAFP Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force stand at the Global BirdFair, July 2024

We had posters on Population Estimate and Trend (Sayam), (Conservation Interventions by the Task Force & Allies (Sayam); Monitoring on Passage and Wintering Grounds (Paul Insua-Cao); Finding the Unknown – Satellite Transmitters Give Answers (Nigel Clark); Headstarting (Jodie Clements); and the EAAFP kids' Spoonie poster (Jenny Weston). These led us quite nicely through our narrative to visitors.

The stand was flanked by two huge Spoonie banners and overlooked by Nigel's massive model Spoonie hanging in pea-netting and with a backdrop of TV screens showing the old WWT spoonie video of our captive breeding initiative and expeditions to Russia https://vimeo.com/42556744. A lovely blast from the past if ever there was one. And rather timeless too.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper paintings by Jodie Clements

Pride of place though was this wonderful Spoonie painting by Jodie – the grand prize of our raffle. We sold over 500 raffle tickets, and the lucky winner was David A. Christie of Southampton, UK, a friend of Axel Braunlich no less.

As well as those mentioned above the stand was also staffed by Ewan Weston, Debbie Pain and Nicola Crockford, so a full UK SBS SG turnout.

One of the best things about the BirdFair is bumping into birdwatching friends and colleagues. Our stand was in the Robin Marquee, right next to other wader stands in the shape of our old friends Rick and Elis Simpson of Wader Quest and our rather newer friends Curlew Action. Bumping into old friends is by far the best though - none more so than my old buddy Jonathan Martinez. Surprise visitor was our Task Force rep Bao Nguyen with his wife from Vietnam.

Bao Nguyen from Vietnam with his wife at the BirdFair

As well as waxing lyrical about Spoonies to many of the 13,000 visitors, Christoph also gave a talk on Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation on the Friday with Duncan McDonald of the Species Champion Wildsounds presenting a donation of 3000 £ with Dick Philby of Rare Bird Alert after the talk to the SBS TF!

We did have big plans for some of us being dressed up in Spoon-billed Sandpiper costumes, but we didn't manage it this year. We'll be wearing them next year though, as we maraud around the BirdFair selling many more raffle tickets than we

Little Ollie as a big Spoonie

managed this year. We also planned that Jodie and Egor's daughter, Ollie, would be making a guest appearance on the stand dressed in this wonderful Spoonie chick costume (made by Jodie), but events again conspired against us. Again, another one for next year.

We also provided a Global BirdFair auction prize

Neil Glenn with his wife Jackie at Slimbridge

Wildsounds and Rare Bird Alert presenting a donation of 3000 £ with Dick Philby and Duncan McDonald

- a VIP tour to see the two remaining Spoonies at Slimbridge. Neil Glenn bought this as an anniversary present for his wife Jackie. Hosted by Nigel Jarrett and Jodie, we all had a magnificent time at the Conservation Breeding Unit at Slimbridge on 22 September.

Afterwards Tim told me that he thought the Spoonie stand was the best stand he'd ever seen at the BirdFair. Even when pressed, he still said it was! Either way, we all did a pretty good job and had a huge amount of fun doing it. Bring on the 2025 Global BirdFair.

All conservation stands at the BirdFair were sponsored by Conservation Sponsors Wildwings and Limosa while the Spoonie stand was also sponsored by the Task Force's long-term supporter Wildsounds. Rare Bird Alert supported the SBS TF with a generous check. Our heartfelt thanks go to Tim and especially Penny who helped enormously in the run up to their BirdFair meaning everything ran like clockwork. We look forward to running the stand again next year and hopefully meeting many more Task Force members. All funds raised at the Global BirdFair go towards Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation.

From the Archives

Chukchi Peninsula 2004

Phil Palmer

In June 2004 we camped at the Karupka River Delta on the Chukchi peninsula to survey it for SBS having kayaked 120 miles down it from inland looking for other species too.

We stayed in tents but also used a wooden hut for keeping supplies, then a small hunting house where we dried our gear inside having capsized it all in the river. When we first arrived we had to transport gear over frozen lakes by skidoo & sled. There is a picture of fishermen on the iced lake.

I found the Meadowlark on this expedition, a first for Russia as well as many other species, but no Spoon-billed Sandpiper and had to return twice many years later to fulfil this dream.

Latest News

Myanmar

Pyae Phyo Aung our Myanmar rep and Hnin Wai Lwin got married on 10 November in Mawlamayne, Myanmar

China

Huang Jian becomes new focal point for MCF

United Kingdom

It is with a heavy heart I inform you that the last male Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the conservation breeding programme at WWT Slimbridge UK, died on 11th November 2024, 13 years to the day that the first birds arrived at Slimbridge. This day will always be a Remembrance Day for Spoonies at WWT.

Though we only ever managed to breed a small number of Spoonies, the project contributed enormously to Spoonie conservation on the EAAF. In establishing the conservation breeding population, Spoonie headstarting was developed and this has played a role in keeping species 'afloat', and the lessons learned from the tracking and flagging work that accompanied it have been absolutely critical to improving the status of Spoonies in the wild.

The project brought massive global attention to the poor conservation status of Spoonies and their wetland homes on the EAAF. One of the consequences of all this attention – and I know this project certainly cannot claim all the credit – was the moratorium in China on coastal reclamation – a vital mandate to save and protect intertidal wetland ecosystems and one that has probably saved a number of wader species from global extinction.

We will provide more information on the Spoonie conservation breeding project (2011-24) in the next newsletter.

Nigel Jarrett

The last Page

Spoonies everywhere, even at the toilet doors at the Tiaozini Wetland Information Centre