

PREVENTING EXTINCTIONS

Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*



Spoon-billed Sandpiper (© www.birdlife.org).

Background

Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a small and extremely charismatic wader with a spatulate bill. It has a naturally limited breeding range on the Chukotsk peninsula south to Kamchatka peninsula, in north-eastern Russia. It migrates through the Yellow Sea to winter in south-east Asia from Bangladesh to Vietnam. It was probably always a scarce species, but numbers have dropped precipitously. Surveys on the breeding grounds have revealed a dramatic decline from 2,000-2,800 pairs in the 1970s to fewer than 1,000 pairs in 2000, and not more than 150-320 pairs in 2008.

The reasons behind this rapid decline are not well understood; myriad threats exist in the breeding, passage and wintering grounds. The species has suffered poor productivity, perhaps owing to heavy nest predation, human persecution by hunters and collectors, and bad weather which may deteriorate with climate change. Key stopover sites on migration are threatened by land reclamation projects – the Saemangeum and Geum Estuary, South Korea was an important staging area that has been destroyed. The main recorded threat in the wintering grounds is hunting, with waders regularly trapped in nets, but the overall impact of hunting on the population is not known.

Actions being implemented

1. Monitoring at Rudong, supported by BirdLife, has yielded the **highest count** of the species ever in China. Elsewhere in the country a small wintering population has been confirmed at Min Jiang.
2. BirdLife is supporting a **conservation breeding programme** being led by Birds Russia, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and the RSPB. Twenty eggs have been collected, with 16 young successfully hatched to be sent to a custom-built facility at Slimbridge.
3. Contact has been made with heads of villages regarding **agreements to stop hunting** at key wintering sites in Myanmar. Follow-up visits to the first villages contacted found that hunting had completely ceased 10 months after the initial visits.
4. Progress has been made towards creating a **Ramsar site** at the wintering grounds in Martaban, Myanmar. BANCA have been invited by the government to draft an action plan for its conservation.

5. Birds Russia is supporting **wardening** at Chokota, the species's most important known breeding site. Wardens protect against human disturbance and egg collection, and conduct surveys, one of which has led to discovery of a new breeding site with the help of a group from Heritage Expeditions.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper ecotourism – small survey teams explore inaccessible areas of Olyotorsky Bay with Heritage Expeditions (© Jenny E. Ross).

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