

Title Heritage Expeditions - a BirdLife Species Champion supporting [Spoon-billed Sandpiper](#) conservation through the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme - struck gold this week when they, and the passengers they have taken to the Russian Far East, helped scientists discover a previously unknown breeding population of these rapidly declining waders. Searching for breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the vast coastal expanses of Arctic Russia is like looking for a needle in a haystack, so Heritage's passengers, guides and crew were delighted when they encountered this Critically Endangered species at a remote location on the Chukotka coast. The first sighting they made was of a pair with three eggs and another bird, they found close by, was behaving in a manner indicating it was also breeding there. A further Spoon-billed Sandpiper was found by a second search team at another suitable breeding location a little way along the coast. "We were absolutely stunned when we came across the first bird" said Chris Collins - Heritage Expeditions tour guide and member of the survey team that found the nesting birds. "Seeing a breeding plumaged Spoon-billed Sandpiper walk towards us and settle on to its nest was undoubtedly one of my all time top birding moments and everyone on this expedition was equally thrilled when I radioed in the news our survey had been successful". These new surveys have been carefully designed to look for breeding birds in coastal areas where scientists predicted they should be present but had previously been unable to explore. As the only access to these remote areas is by sea, the costs of mounting searches have previously been prohibitive and so they have remained unexplored until now. When Heritage Expeditions became a Species Champion for Spoon-billed Sandpiper the opportunity unfolded and so, with careful planning in conjunction with BirdLife and Birds Russia, Heritage Expeditions' vessel - *Spirit of Enderby* - provided the ideal access solution. Heritage's passengers and experienced guides, travelling ashore in zodiacs, were valuable and enthusiastic participants searching under the guidance of experts from the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force. These surveys had been carefully planned to explore areas where Birds Russia experts had predicted Spoon-billed Sandpipers should be present. The participating teams were thoroughly briefed in advance on how to undertake the surveys with minimum environmental impact and each team was led by staff experienced in avoiding disturbance to nesting birds. Throughout the surveys Heritage Expeditions ensured the highest standards of responsible ecotourism were employed.



The *Spirit of Enderby* is

now sailing north to the main Spoon-billed Sandpiper study site at Meinypil'gyno where this year a conservation breeding programme is in progress for the first time. The conservation breeding team, led by Birds Russia, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), is working there with colleagues from BirdLife International, the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), British Trust for Ornithology and Moscow Zoo to protect this species, which would most likely become extinct within a decade if this urgent action was not taken now. The pioneering team working at the site for the last month has constructed a state-of-the-art incubation

facility to hatch eggs carefully collected from a few of the nesting birds in the area. Once hatched, the next challenge will be safely transporting chicks to the port of Anadyr. Normally travel in and out of the remote study site to Anadyr is only possible by ex-military helicopter. Scientists deemed the considerable vibration encountered during helicopter flight far too traumatic for tiny chicks the size of bumblebees so an alternative mode of transport is required. This logistical challenge was solved by Heritage Expeditions who stepped forward again and offered to provide safe onward transit by sea aboard Spirit of Enderby for both the chicks and the scientists now raising them. If all goes to plan, once safely ashore at Anadyr, the precious cargo will be transferred to a secure site where the chicks can fully fledge and grow sufficiently robust before they are taken onwards to Moscow Zoo where they are required to enter quarantine. In a few months the chicks will be flown from Moscow to London and then transferred to a secure purpose-built conservation-breeding unit at WWT's headquarters at Slimbridge, in Gloucestershire, UK. Once there, WWT staff will rear the birds as a flock and create the ideal conditions to promote breeding. In this way we hope to raise a new population which can be reintroduced to help augment the remaining wild population in future years. Meanwhile, much advocacy and conservation action remains necessary to address the major threats that the birds and their habitats still face throughout their flyway. If you would like to support our work for Spoon-billed Sandpiper by also becoming a BirdLife Species Champion please email species.champions@birdlife.org or you can make an [online donation here](#). Please join us in taking action now as time is running out for this most charismatic wader... You can view a listing of our most recent BirdLife Species Champions [here](#). In 2012 Heritage Expeditions will run another 15-day ***?In the Wake of Bering ? Search for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper?*** voyage departing from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy on 24 June. If you would like to be part of this amazing conservation-supporting expedition please see details [here](#). We thank Heritage Expeditions for their considerable support to Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation. We also thank [WildSounds](#) - who stepped up as the first BirdLife Species Champion for Spoon-billed Sandpiper back in 2008, [Birdfair](#)- Global Sponsor of the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme, [The Dutch Birding Association](#) and [VBN \(BirdLife in the Netherlands\)](#), [The David & Lucile Packard Foundation](#), [Disney Friends for Change](#), [The CMS Secretariat](#), [The MBZ Foundation](#), [Save Our Species](#), Ed Keeble and the many other generous individuals who have all become BirdLife Species Champions or Programme Supporters under the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme helping this species. Find out all the latest news on Spoon-billed Sandpiper by visiting www.birdlife.org/spoonbilledsandpiper