

China Coastal Waterbird Census wins Ford Green Award

Title

China lies at the centre of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, and vast numbers of migratory birds pass through the country every year on the journeys between their breeding and non-breeding grounds. In the past seven years the China Coastal Waterbird Census has gathered a wealth of new information on the populations of the waterbirds that migrate along the coast of China, including many globally threatened species.

In late 2012, the team of volunteers that runs the China Coastal Waterbird Census was awarded the second prize in the Nature Conservation Pioneer Award category of the Ford Green Awards 2012. The extra resources provided by the award will be used to recruit new surveyors and cover additional sites, and to provide training to enhance the skills of the team.

The China Coastal Waterbird Census is a long-term project initiated by a group of keen birdwatchers in September 2005 with an aim of monitoring the distribution, numbers and seasonal movements of waterbirds through monthly surveys along the Chinese coast. It was also hoped that the results of the China Coastal Waterbird Census would assist with the conservation of the country's biodiversity and Important Bird Areas.

Getting baseline data.

The China Coastal Waterbird Census is coordinated by representatives from the different survey sites and to date more than 150 volunteers from Chinese birdwatching societies, nature reserves and other organisations have participated in the census work. At present, waterbirds are counted at thirteen coastal intertidal wetlands every month, in Liaoning, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Fujian, Guangdong and Hong Kong.

The results of the monthly surveys are providing important baseline information on the biodiversity of the thirteen coastal sites and the distribution, populations and migratory movements of individual waterbird species in China. Since the start of the project, a total of 21 globally threatened species (four Critically Endangered, six Endangered and 11 Vulnerable) has been recorded, as well as 71 species that have been counted in internationally important numbers (exceeding 1% of their global or flyway population at one or more sites).

The China Coastal Waterbird Census has made some exciting discoveries, notably that Rudong in Jiangsu is a key stopover site for both Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Critically Endangered) and Spotted Greenshank (Endangered), that the Min Jiang Estuary in Fujian support a wintering population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and that Lianyungang in Jiangsu is a key wintering site for Eurasian Oystercatcher.

Reporting back

Two reports have been published on the results of the China Coastal Waterbird Census – in Chinese with an English summary – covering 2005-2007 and 2008-2009, and the data have been cited in both national and international studies. A new report covering 2010-2011 will be published shortly. A leaflet about the China Coastal Waterbird Census was produced to promote wetland and waterbird conservation to the general public.

A meeting of the China Coastal Waterbird Census participants is held every year or two, to review the previous year's counts and plan for the following year. Training courses have been held on survey techniques, the identification of difficult waterbird groups and site conservation, which has helped to build the capacity of the Chinese birdwatching societies. The Ford Green Award provides an important opportunity to expand the China Coastal Waterbird Census, and provide further training to increase the skills of the participants.

Since it was established in 2005, the China Coastal Waterbird Census has received support from The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, BirdLife International, Darwin Initiative, Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong, Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust, and Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund.