

Title
One of the most challenging issues faced by conservationists working to save the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper from extinction has been establishing exactly where they breed in the vast coastal areas of the Russian Far East.

For the past two decades, local Russian and international scientists working with BirdLife have been monitoring diminishing populations at a handful of important breeding sites in Chukotka and Northern Kamchatka.

Knowledge gleaned from recent studies coupled with new mapping and modelling techniques have identified several other areas where Spoon-billed Sandpipers are highly likely to be nesting. However, getting to these places is by no means straightforward. The sheer scale of the areas to be surveyed, their remoteness and their inaccessibility has, to date, presented an insurmountable barrier to visiting potential new breeding sites.

Now, BirdLife Species Champion and award winning expedition travel company *Heritage Expeditions* is providing the necessary logistical and financial support that will enable surveys to be conducted in an area with particularly high potential by making an approach from the sea.

A new Heritage Expeditions voyage '*In the Wake of Bering*' will take place in June/July this year which will incorporate a dedicated search for breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the previously inaccessible Olyutorsky Bay area.

Those customers making this pioneering voyage will split in to small groups and participate in searches for the birds under the supervision and guidance of BirdLife scientists. As this area has never been surveyed before, all species encountered will be carefully recorded and detailed notes will be taken on the suitability of habitat encountered.



Small survey teams will explore inaccessible areas of Olyutorsky bay in Heritage's Zodiacs - © Jenny E. Ross.

Rodney Russ, conservationist and owner and founder of Heritage Expeditions comments "Our remarkable ship - The Spirit of Enderby - unlocks the opportunity for this urgent piece of research to be undertaken. We are delighted to be able to offer our customers this extraordinary adventure and support the vital conservation action required for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in this way".

Jim Lawrence, BirdLife's Preventing Extinctions Programme Manager comments "There is much hype in the

tourism industry about *unique travel opportunities* but this expedition offers just that. Heritage's customers will not only visit places tourists have never set foot before, they will also be directly contributing to conservation. We are very excited about the new opportunities this initiative represents."

After searching for new breeding sites, the voyage will continue north to the main Spoon-billed Sandpiper study site at Meinypilgyno - an area where Birds Russia, in conjunction with BirdLife International, are monitoring breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Whether the earlier searches are successful or not, here Heritage's passengers should have another good chance of seeing nesting Spoon-billed Sandpipers under controlled conditions that minimise disturbance.

For information about joining this extraordinary Heritage Expedition [please follow this link](#).

Over the coming months *BirdLife Community* will be carrying regular posts about Spoon-billed Sandpiper conservation being undertaken throughout the species' migratory flyway. So watch out for more news shortly, including blogs from this voyage carrying news, images and videos of the extraordinary scenery, fauna and conservation activity encountered.

In August 2010 Heritage Expeditions joined several other Species Champions who are supporting conservation for Spoon-billed Sandpiper under the auspices of [The BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme](#).

We would also like to 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](#), Ed Keeble and the many other generous individuals who have become Species Champions and Programme Supporters.

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...