

Rare sighting of marked Spoon-billed Sandpiper on migration

Title

A rare sighting of a marked Spoon-billed Sandpiper on migration was reported last weekend from Rudong mudflats north of Shanghai.

The Critically Endangered bird was identified by a lime green plastic flag on its leg marked '01' that was attached by scientists from Birds Russia on its breeding grounds this summer. Conservationists know that this bird 'Lime 01' fathered six fledglings this summer – three that were hand-reared by conservationists and three that he raised himself – which is 10 times the average for the species.

In all, this summer sixteen hand-reared spoon-billed sandpiper fledglings and eight adults were marked with the lime green plastic leg flags. Birdwatchers are being asked to report all sightings of Spoon-billed Sandpipers.

Rudong mudflats are the most significant known staging post in China for Spoon-billed Sandpipers where 106 individuals were counted last year in October. Demand for land is high in the region, which is only 150km from Shanghai, and land has already been reclaimed from the marshes at Dongling to the southern end.

Pavel Tomkovich of Birds Russia, who caught and marked the bird with Nikolai Yakushev, said: 'When I marked 'Lime 01' I wondered if anybody would ever see it on its travels, almost a quarter of the way round the world, as looking for Spoon-billed Sandpipers can be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Looking for marked birds is even more difficult as we were only able to mark eight adult birds with these unique flags. Thanks to the reports of local birdwatchers, we're learning their stopover points.'

'Lime 01' was seen leaving the breeding grounds on 4 August and was seen 5,000km away at Rudong on 31 August. Spoon-billed sandpipers can cover as much as 1,000km per day, leaving around three weeks during which it may have been staging elsewhere.

Zhang Lin of the 'Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China' Team said: 'The first Spoon-billed Sandpiper arrived at Rudong about two weeks ago since when I have been regularly scanning the increasing numbers of waders at the high tide roost at Rudong. When I glimpsed a bird on 31 August that looked like it had a lime green leg flag I knew something exciting was in front

of me. On closer inspection it turned out to be 'Lime 01'. I was over the moon as this is the first time that one of the birds marked in 2013 has been seen in China.

It is amazing to see how these little but Critically Endangered birds are connecting our key sites along the flyway between Russia and China. They are very important as they allow us to track whether efforts to save the species are working.

BirdLife's project to save Rudong and Minjiang Estuary, two key resting and feeding sites used by Spoon-billed Sandpipers in China, 'Saving Spoony's Chinese Wetlands' is supported by a \$100,000 grant from The Walt Disney Company, through Disney's Friends for Change. Guidance on reporting spoon-billed sandpiper sightings is available from the East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership [Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force](#).

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