

# Shorebird trapping threatens new Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering site in China

## Title

Four [Spoon-billed Sandpipers](#) were found at Fucheng, near Leizhou, south-west Guangdong Province in December 2012. Together with several other recent sightings this record indicates that Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a more widespread wintering species on the coast of southern China than was previously known. However, evidence was found of large-scale trapping of shorebirds and action is needed to address this threat.

The discovery was made by Jonathan Martinez and Richard Lewthwaite of Hong Kong Bird Watching Society during a project to investigate the winter distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in southern China. They surveyed nine sites in south-west Guangdong and found the group of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in a large area of drained-down fishponds at Fucheng. This site is close to Zhanjiang, where the French ornithologist Pierre Jabouille described Spoon-billed Sandpiper as fairly numerous in winter in the 1930s, and where Professor Fasheng Zou of the South China Institute of Endangered Animals recorded three Spoon-billed Sandpipers in March 2003.

Since 2005, there have been sightings of Spoon-billed Sandpiper during the winter months at several other sites in southern China, indicating that this is a more important wintering area for the species than was previously known. The northernmost wintering location is the [Minjiang Estuary in Fujian](#), where a flock of Spoon-billed Sandpipers has regularly been present in recent winters. There have also been sightings of up to three birds at Xitao in south-west Guangdong, Mai Po in Hong Kong, Fangcheng and Qinzhou Bay in Guangxi and the Changhua Estuary in Hainan. The on-going project will carry out further surveys in Fujian, Guangxi and Hainan and will hopefully locate some more wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers.



One of the three Spoon-billed Sandpipers

recorded at Zhanjiang in 2003 was caught in a bird trapper's net. Since then the problem of trapping appears to have become even worse and illegal bird-netting now poses a major threat to Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other shorebirds. The team counted a total of 460 mistnets during the survey – these were typically 25 m long and 3 m high, meaning that the nets counted equated to a length of 11.5 km. The nets were placed, often in parallel lines or V-shapes, beside shorebird roost-sites on fishponds, salt pans and sandbars on the coast, as well as in nearby paddyfields and marshes.

The shorebird trapping found during the survey has been reported to Guangdong Forestry Department, which is responsible for the protection of wildlife. Discussions are underway amongst Chinese birdwatchers and conservationists about how to support the local government agencies to address the trapping of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other migratory birds (and other forms of illegal hunting) at the key sites for these birds.

*The project "Study of the non-breeding distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Southern China" is being managed by The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and supported by Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong. It is being implemented in partnership with Fujian Bird Watching Society, Xiamen Bird Watching Society, Beilun Estuary National Nature Reserve and Kadoorie Conservation China of Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden.*

[Videos and more photos of Spoon-billed Sandpiper sighted at Fucheng](#)

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