

Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering site becomes Bangladesh's 20th IBA

Title

Sonadia Island in Bangladesh, where 10% of the known population of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* spends the winter, has been recognised as Bangladesh's 20th Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) by BirdLife International.

"A series of recent surveys confirms that Bangladesh is still an extremely important wintering ground for Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and we identified Sonadia Island as the main wintering site in Bangladesh", said Sayam U. Chowdhury, Principal Investigator of the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project, a group of young conservationists who monitor the wader population, and work with local communities to raise awareness and reduce threats.

Sonadia Island also supports the globally Endangered Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, and other threatened and Near Threatened birds such as Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*.

BirdLife Partners and others involved in the "Saving the Spoon-billed Sandpiper" project have been working at Sonadia since 2009, when hunting of waders on the mudflats was identified as a major threat to the fast-diminishing Spoon-billed Sandpiper population.

Local hunters have now been trained and equipped for alternative, more secure and sustainable livelihoods. A very successful campaign has led to a better understanding of the importance of shorebird conservation in general, and a sense of pride and custodianship towards the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in particular.

"The work has gone extremely well, and we are trying to really deliver conservation through the local communities", said Sayam Chowdhury. "Through the provision of alternative livelihoods we have seen hunting reduced to almost zero. Hunters are now working as fisherman, tailors and watermelon producers. An awareness-raising event we held in December 2012 involved close to a thousand people, local government and non-governmental organisation representatives."

Inamul Haque is Assistant Conservator of Forest (coastal) for Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar

region, and has been involved in the restoration of mangrove cover on Sonadia. “We have been supporting the Bangladesh Spoon-billed Sandpiper Conservation Project by avoiding mangrove planting in areas that are important for shorebirds”, he explained. “We have also been protecting the key sites from illegal hunting. I am delighted that Sonadia is receiving the international recognition it deserves by being declared an Important Bird Area.”

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