

Surprise Spoon-billed Sandpiper sighting at Malaysian IBA highlights importance of CEMEX's new support

Title

During a bird survey of an Important Bird Area (IBA) in north-west Malaysia, Dave Bakewell (a member of the Malaysian Nature Society and bird survey leader) picked out a Spoon-billed Sandpiper from over 10,000 birds on the intertidal mudflats, noticing the bird's characteristic 'snowplough' feeding behaviour through the morning haze.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a Critically Endangered species with an estimated global population of only 240-400 mature individuals, so every sighting of the bird is crucial to learning more about the species and the sites it relies upon for survival.

The [recent partnership launched](#) between the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS, BirdLife Partner), CEMEX (an international cement and aggregates company) and BirdLife International takes a landscape-scale approach to assessing biodiversity in mainland Penang State, including monitoring of this IBA which is already recognised as a vital site for over 15,000 birds.

Now, the presence of one of the world's rarest and most threatened shorebirds at the Teluk Air Tawar-Kuala Muda coast IBA – only the second record of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Penang, Malaysia in nine years – further highlights the value of the CEMEX-BirdLife-MNS partnership, not least the provision of funding to monitor and help conserve this IBA.

Dave Bakewell's video of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper showing its characteristic feeding behaviour:

Mike Crosby (Senior Conservation Officer at BirdLife International and expert on Asian birds) commented on the significance of the sighting in Malaysia, given the rarity of the species:

?It indicates that there might be small numbers of Spoon-billed Sandpiper present in Malaysia during the non-breeding season that are only occasionally picked up during the infrequent waterbird surveys. The support for surveys/monitoring by CEMEX is helping to increase coverage and the chances of locating this and other globally threatened species.?

As part of a [partnership with CEMEX and BirdLife International](#), CEMEX Malaysia and MNS [launched a collaboration](#) earlier this year to scale up biodiversity conservation in the country. The partnership has an initial focus on a CEMEX quarry site on mainland Penang as well as the wider region, including the Teluk Air Tawar-Kuala Muda coast IBA, seeking to identify ways to better protect and conserve this intertidal site. With around two more weeks of bird surveys to go in this IBA, Dave Bakewell said:

?The CEMEX-MNS-BirdLife collaboration has enabled the first accurate assessment of the site for some years, and it has been heartening to discover that the site still holds large numbers of waders, including a noteworthy roost of up to 63 Spotted Greenshanks (possibly over 10% of the world population) categorised as Endangered on the IUCN Red List.?

?The discovery of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper on 25 February 2013 underlines the critical importance of this IBA. CEMEX supports MNS's efforts to secure conservation of the site, providing hope that the site can be protected in the long-term amid ever-increasing pressure from economic development along the Penang coastline.?

Spoon-billed Sandpiper nests in north-east Russia and migrates along the East Asian coast to spend the winter in South-East Asia. All along the flyway, BirdLife Partners are linking up under the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme to help protect and save the species. It is hoped that further support from partnerships like that between BirdLife and CEMEX can help birds like the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Malaysia along the whole length of their flyways. For more information on the sighting, visit: www.mns.my; and [Dave Bakewell's blog](#).

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