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# Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force

## News Bulletin No 28 · May 2023





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*The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) News Bulletin is a regular, half-yearly update of activities of the SBS Task Force of the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). The News Bulletin is edited by Dr Christoph Zöckler, Coordinator of the EAAFP SBS Task Force with assistance from Sayam Chowdhury, Bangladesh and Dr Elena Lappo, Russia, who also chairs the Russian team of the Task Force.*

*Mission:*

*The East Asian and Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) aims to coordinate the conservation activities identified in the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Single Species Action Plan for the species, which was commissioned by BirdLife International. The activities in the Action Plan are regularly reviewed and updated by all Flyway Members and a growing network of active supporters and groups in the Flyway countries, and beyond.*

*The Task Force originates from the establishment of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team (SBS RT) in 2004, when several partners active in the conservation of this globally threatened wader met in Edinburgh. With the growing level of activity, the finalization of the Action Plan in 2008 and a growing network of partners, organisations and supporters the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was formed at the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) meeting in Korea in February 2010. In December 2010, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) was officially endorsed as one of the first species Task Forces by the Partnership under the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group. Implementing organisation for the SBS TF is BirdLife International through its partner Birds Russia. It is chaired by the Government Partner of Russia. Task Force members consist of the EAAFP Government Partners of key range states for the species and international conservation organisations. These are: the Russian Federation, Japan, People's Republic of China, People's Democratic Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Union of Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh and India, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT), Wetlands International, a representative of the EAAFP Shorebird Working Group, Fauna Flora International (FFI) and experts and conservation organisations from principal range states and other partners. We are grateful to the RSPB, NABU and the Manfred-Hermsen-Stiftung for their continued support of the SBS Task Force and Spoon-billed Sandpiper projects across the range states.*

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*Layout by Matthias Fanck Graphic Design, Zell, Germany, German SBS Support Group*



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## Foreword from the Editor

Dr Christoph Zöckler · Manfred Hermsen Foundation

Last winter, I joined for the first time in three years our survey team in Myanmar for the midwinter counts in January. Our Russian, Chinese, Thai, American and German friends joined the team in the field. It was nice to meet everybody again after COVID and all the other current global disruptions. It was also nice to be back in the Gulf of Mottama; a place that even after eight previous visits still amazes me. This was not an easy event to organise for Phyolay, our Myanmar focal point, but he managed to obtain all the necessary permissions. Five road checks and recent troubles flaring up in a neighboring district while we were conducting our survey were a stark reminder that life is different now. Conditions in this country have changed and despite that we were very lucky. Three quarters of the country is still at civil war and many of our conservation activities came to a halt or were severely obstructed, especially in the south, but also close to the Gulf of Mottama.

To add to all this misery, the cyclone Mocha this month could not have come at a worse time. The devastation has been scary to say the least. Sometimes, these natural catastrophes can bring unity and conflicting parties working together. Let's hope this will be the case after the Mocha shock.

We are not so lucky with the total numbers of SBS though! While the total numbers in the Gulf have plummeted like in many other SE Asian sites, numbers in South China look more promising. Yet overall, the wintering population is worryingly diminishing.

With so many friends coming together and Lili Sun arriving in Yangon, we managed to get together for an extra sessional SBS meeting. This



*Sai, Tagu Films*

was an opportunity to meet again but also discuss the species' decline and our action plan. There are many factors, and it seems hard to pinpoint to just one particular issue. One of the remaining threats which might still play a major role is the hunting especially in the Russian Far East. The latest of three major assessments of the vast region has been introduced. Two more reports reflect the increase of activities in this important part of the SBS flyway.

Many people think or hope that Artificial Intelligence could solve some of our current problems and climate change is often listed upfront. Maybe the mystery surrounding the decline of Spoony can also be addressed by AI? Some of us used the recent ChatGPT but the results, shown on the Last Page, indicate that we might need to wait a little longer before we get some real insights from AI.

## 2023 Spoon-billed Sandpiper Census in the Gulf of Mottama, Myanmar

Pyaephyo Aung

For the twelfth consecutive year the Nature Conservation Society Myanmar (NCS) in close collaboration with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (SBS TF) organised the Spoon-billed Sandpiper winter survey and waterbird monitoring expedition. The Gulf of Mottama Ramsar Site is a hugely important intertidal mudflat in Myanmar hosting thousands of migratory waterbirds including the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and supporting local people's livelihoods such as fishery. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and its local partner have carried out annual shorebird monitoring surveys at the Gulf of Mottama over the last 15 years. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic impact the 2020-2022 surveys were carried out without any international participation.

In 2023 NCS organised a total of 20 surveyors from China, Russia, Thailand, Germany, US and Myanmar, who were accompanied by 40 local boat crew who have been surveyed the East (Mon State) and West (Bago Region) of the Gulf of

Mottama for 5 days between 20-25 January 2023. Local experts were trained by the Local Conservation Group members during the survey period for basic birdwatching, and flock scanning that will help for future citizen science surveys.

Overall preliminary results of the total small wader population significantly decreased to approximately only 60,000 which is one-third less than in previous years. Further analysis is still ongoing, but sadly, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper has also declined and is estimated based on flock count to less than 20 individuals. According to the local fishermen information hunting is now resuming in some places in the Gulf of Mottama area and stronger law enforcement is needed.

The survey was generously supported by the Mangrove Conservation Fund Shenzhen (MCF), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) through the Gulf of Mottama Project and the Manfred-Hermsen Foundation, Germany.



Survey team of 2023 Spoon-billed Sandpiper Census in Myanmar in January 2023

Sai, Tagu Films



SBS observed during the 2023 survey on Nanthar Island, Myanmar



Gideon Dun

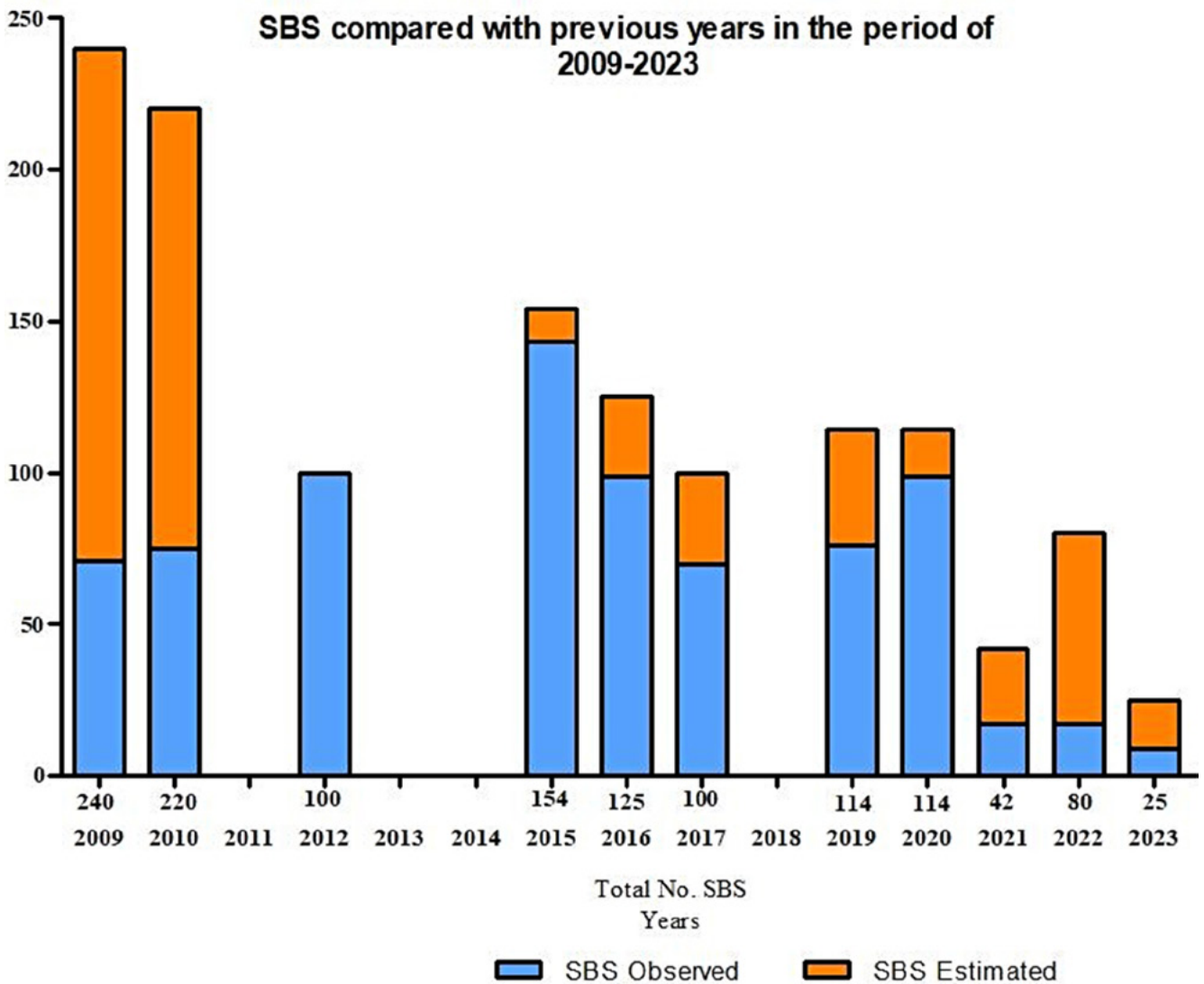


Figure 2: Spoon-billed Sandpiper population estimates in the Gulf of Mottama from 2009-2023, blue reflects the actual observed numbers, and orange the additional estimated numbers based on flock counts



*Survey camp at sunset*



*Traces in the mud*



*Searching the vast expanses of the Gulf for the last Spoonies*

## Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force Extra sessional Meeting Report

Christoph Zöckler and Pyae Phyo Aung

On 27-28 January 2023 we held our 14th SBS-TF Meeting at the Summit Parkview Hotel, Yangon. It was the first in person & Zoom hybrid meeting after the pandemic. Participants from Russia, China, Thailand and Germany were hosted by our strong SBS team in Myanmar lead by NCS and ten Myanmar participants including Yangon based Tagu Films. Through Zoom we were also linked with most of our team members from around the world in UK, Russia, China, Japan, Korea and Bangladesh.

The meeting was opened by our Chair Lili Sun with reflections on recent global meetings in Geneva, Sharm el Sheik and Montreal.

The overall theme is advancing on the action plan. Christoph Zöckler provided a brief status report on SBS conservation and gave together with Pyae Phyo Aung a short summary of the recent Gulf of Mottama survey. Sao from Tagu Films presented a summary video of last year's excursion into the Gulf. Ziyou Yang from SBSinChina presented on the dangers posed by bycatch in the fishing process along the Chinese coasts. Elena Lappo

reported on the previous breeding season in Chukotka, while Fyodor Kondrashov joined us via Zoom presenting his results of the genetics of SBS. Nigel Clark via video link summarized the results from satellite tags and flagged birds. Yanju Ma from a lab working with Jimmy Choi on pollution issues reported on heavy metal pollution and its potential dangers for SBS.

On the second day our discussions focused on the issues affecting SBS followed by presentations by Pyae Phyo Aung on hunting and necessary actions, by Chen Qing on habitat restoration and progress in China. The afternoon session on the second day focused on CEPA (awareness raising) with presentations by Vivian Fu and Pyae Phyo Aung. The final presentation was on future research requirements and the following discussions focused on future research and monitoring followed with closing remarks by Lili Sun and Christoph.

We are grateful for support from the Mangrove Conservation Fund as well as the Manfred Hermsen Foundation for sponsoring the meeting.







*Manfred Hermsen Foundation*



*Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force*



*Nature Conservation Society Myanmar*



*Mangrove Conservation Fund*



## Exploring the wintering grounds of the Spoon-billed Sandpipers in southern China: new Sites and Leg-flags

Ziyou Yang, Zhang Lin and Jing Li, SBS in China

To monitor known and identify new Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites and assess the threats, surveys were conducted in southern China during the winter of 2022–2023. While the surveys in Guangxi and Hainan were mostly completed by the local birdwatching associations, SBS in China carried out investigations in Guangdong province, including the areas of Shanwai West Beach, Santouzui, Wuchuan, Hepu (on the border between Guangdong and Guangxi), Jijia and the tidal flat areas to the south.

One of the highlights of the survey was the discovery of two new sites: Wuchuan, Zhanjiang and Area South of Jijia, Zhanjiang (Table 1). Site in Wuchuan held at least nine Spoon-billed Sandpipers, they were recorded foraging on the edge of a tidal creek. This area also had incidences of bird nets, which were later reported and removed by the local police. Jijia's large tidal flats supported

one Spoon-billed Sandpiper (White E1) and had less human disturbance, and sporadically fishermen using rakes were observed.

Counts of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Yangjiang's Santouzui (Table 1) area is also worth noting, where at least seven Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded in the winter. The investigation in Hepu, Beihai, found many fishermen using high-pressure water guns to catch sandworms, which may be a threat to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, along with benthos feeding aquatic birds. Suixi's coastline was devastated, and no Spoon-billed Sandpipers sighting with many fishermen frequently using high-pressure water guns.

The investigation found no significant threats to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in southern China apart from occasional hunting, indicating that the work of local government and conservation





*Flagged Spoonies at Santouzui*

*Jie Chen*



*Lime 8X in Wuchuan*

*Jie Chen*

organisations has been effective. However, the use of high-pressure water guns to catch sandworms needs to be addressed, and there should be stricter enforcement and punishment. Although the phenomenon of setting up mist nets has decreased, it has not disappeared. Therefore, continuous monitoring, publicity and education of local partners are necessary. It is also recommended that bird-watchers in the south go out more and explore some coastlines that have not been investigated.

In conclusion, the investigation highlights new habitats for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and records new leg-flags that have not been recorded in China, showing that the southern coast of China is worth exploring. It is important to continue to investigate Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the known sites and step out of the “comfort zone” to get some unexpected surprises in new sites.



*Kentish plover in mistnet*

*Ziyou Yang*

*Table 1: Spoon-billed Sandpipers recorded in south China in 2022–23 with site status, number of birds, leg-flagged birds at each site and notes*

Location	Site Status	No. of SBS	Leg-flagged Individuals	Date	Notes
Shanwai West Beach, Yangjiang	Known	2+	Yellow 53	Feb 2023	Yellow 53 was marked at Tiaozini, China in 2015
Santouzui, Yangjiang	Known	7+	White 1H, Lime L0, White L5	Feb 2023	White 1H was head-started in 2016 in Russia; Lime L0 was born and marked in 2018 in Russia; White L5 head-started in 2021, offspring of Lime L0
Wuchuan, Zhanjiang	New	9+	White KC, Lime 8X, Lime 1L	16–17 Feb 2023	White KC and Lime 8X were born and marked in 2019 in Russia; Lime 1L was born and marked in 2021 in Russia; First resightings of White KC and Lime 1L outside their breeding area
Area South of Jijia, Zhanjiang	New	1+	White E1	21 Feb 2023	White E1 head-started in 2021; first resighting outside of the breeding area



*Mistnets in Wuchuan*

*Ziyou Yang*



*Fisherman using high-pressure water gun to harvest sandworms*  
*Ziyou Yang*



SBS in China was supported by the International Conservation Fund of Canada (ICFC) to carry out this work.

## Spoon-billed Sandpiper side Meeting in Brisbane, Australia in March 2023

Sayam U. Chowdhury

The 11th Meeting of Partners (MOP11) of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) was an important event held in Brisbane, Australia in March 2023. Although it was the first EAAFP meeting in person since the start of the COVID pandemic, it was decided well in advance that this event was not suitable for a full Task Force meeting, as too far and too expensive for all participants to join. Instead a significant side event was organized by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and the Mangrove Foundation (MCF), where several experts discussed the critical issue of the recent population decline of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and attended by 30 participants.

Many representatives from the majority of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper range countries participated in the meeting, which was facilitated by Dr. Lyu Cai of the Center for East Asian-Australasian

Flyway Studies (CEAAF). Several informative talks were presented, including updates from Russia, China, Bangladesh, and Southeast Asia. The first talk was delivered by Dr. Elena Lappo of the Institute of Geography Russian Academy of Sciences, who discussed SBS surveys and conservation in the breeding grounds, with a special focus on stop-over sites in Russia. Dr. Yifei Jia of the CEAAF presented on the diet of the SBS in China, and Chen Qing of the Mangrove Foundation gave an update on conservation efforts. The last part of the series of talks focused on the hunting of shorebirds in Vietnam by Dr. Ding Li Yong of BirdLife International and hunting issues in Russia Far East by Dr. Kostya Klokov of BirdsRussia, who revealed that hunters in Russia Far East harvest (shoot) at least 150,000 shorebirds a year in several different regions (Kamchatka, Sakhalin, Khabarovsk Krai, Amur Oblast and Magadan Oblast) alone.



## Important stopover Sites for Spoon-billed Sandpiper on Sakhalin Island (Far Eastern Russia) during northward and southward Migration - needs for further Study

Anton Ivanov<sup>1</sup>, Vladimir Zykov<sup>2</sup>, Zoya Reviakina<sup>2</sup>, Pavel Ktitorov<sup>3</sup>

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The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is considered to be one of the most endangered birds in the world. The IUCN threat status of the species was upgraded to Critically Endangered in 2008. With a breeding population that may now be less than 500 mature individuals (Green et al., 2021), the species is in real risk of extinction. SBS migrate along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, following the west Pacific coast between its breeding grounds in the coastal tundra of north-east Russia and the wintering sites in China and South-East Asia.

In Russia 25 internationally important stopover sites for migrant waders on the East Asian-Aus-

tralasian Flyway are known (Bamford et al, 2008). Only two of these sites have international importance for Spoon-billed Sandpiper: Lososey Bay, southern Sakhalin Island (Nechaev, 1991) and Moroshechnaya River Estuary, Kamchatka Peninsula (Gerasimov & Gerasimov, 1997).

Based on published and survey data we have compiled a database of SBS records on Sakhalin (Table 1, 2; Fig. 1, 2). SBS was registered during spring and autumn migration on South Sakhalin and North Sakhalin, on west and east shore of the island. However most of records were in Aniva Bay – throughout the whole period of studies, counting by years, Spoon-billed Sandpipers were

Table 1: Records of SBS during northward migration on Sakhalin Island

Date	Location	Birds number/code	Source
25.05.1977	TER	singles	Nechaev, 1988, 1991
26.05.1977	TER	singles	Nechaev, 1988, 1991
27.05.-30.05.1977	LOS	3-30	Nechaev, 1991
30.05.-01.06.1979	LOS	200	Nechaev, 1991, 1998
27.05.1987	LOS	10	Nechaev, 1991
20.05.1988	LOS	10	Nechaev, 1991
25.05.1995	LOS	7	Zykov, Reviakina, unpublished data
27.05.1995	LOS	11	Zykov, Reviakina, unpublished data
29.05.1995	LOS	1	Zykov, Reviakina, unpublished data
28.05.2008	CHV	1	Bloch, Tiunov, 2009, 2011
29.05.2011	LOS	1	Ktitorov, 2012
20.06.2011	NAB	1	Tiunov, Bloch, 2012
22.05.2012	LOS	1	Radford et al, 2012; Ivanov et al, 2013
27.05.2012	LOS	1	Radford et al, 2012; Ivanov et al, 2013
28.05.2012	LOS	5	Radford et al, 2012; Ivanov et al, 2013
29.05.2012	LOS	5	Radford et al, 2012; Ivanov et al, 2013
12.06.-15.06.2017	BAY	YXT	Chang et al., 2020 + further details

Locations: TER - Terpenia Bay; LOS - Lososey Bay, Aniva Gulf; CHV - Chayvo Bay; NAB - Nabil Bay; BAY - Baykal Bay

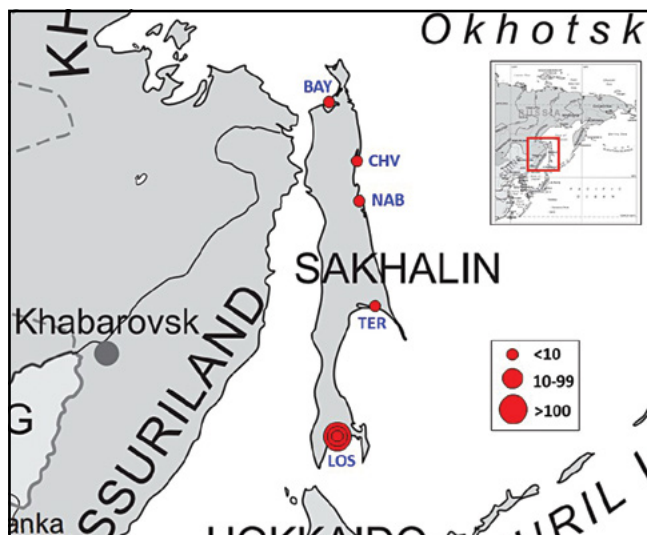


Figure 1: Distribution of SBS during northward migration on Sakhalin Island

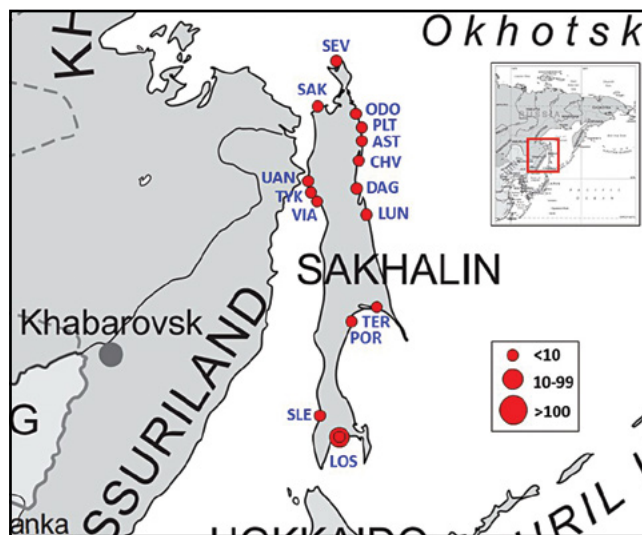


Figure 2: Distribution of SBS during southward migration on Sakhalin Island

observed there 13 times (7 records during the spring migration, 6 records during the autumn migration) (Table 1, 2; Fig. 1, 2). On the east coast Spoon-billed Sandpiper were more frequent than in the west (possibly due to the greater intensity of research on the east coast).

One of the most important places where SBS often seen on spring and autumn migration is Southern Sakhalin, Lososey Bay. Counts of up to 200 birds (on 30 May 1979) have been documented (Nechaev, 1991), but only single individuals have been seen in recent years. In May 2012 we conducted a survey on this waders stopover site with special search of SBS in Lososey Bay (Ivanov et al, 2013). Fieldwork was organized by Birds Russia with help and encouragement from Dr. Evgeny Syroechkovskiy and Dr. Christoph Zockler. SBS was seen 6 times during May 2012: as many as five to nine different individuals could have been seen (Table 1; Fig. 4).

Our knowledge of spring stopover sites is limited by five locations at the east and north coast of the island, while records at autumn stopovers are more widely distributed along the island (15

locations) (Table 1, 2; Fig. 1, 2). The spring migration in the Russian Far East is much faster than in autumn and takes not more than 10-14 days for a bird to reach breeding ground on the Chukotka (Tomkovich, 1992). At the staging site in Lososey Bay, Southern Sakhalin SBS occurs from 20 May to the beginning of June with the highest numbers present during the last week of May (Table 1; Fig. 5). In autumn, adults and juveniles migrate independently, with adults leaving breeding area by early August and the juveniles 2-3 weeks later (Tomkovich, 1995). Autumn migration takes a much longer period on Sakhalin (Table 2).

#### Tracking data

Satellite tracking of individuals tagged at breeding grounds in the south of Chukotka provided new and important insights for migration routes and key stopover sites of SBS during autumn migration. All four tagged at breeding area in Meinypil'gino (Russia, Chukotka) SBS males (L07, L21, L32, L43) crossed the northern part of the island, moving west towards the mainland, without any southward movements along the island (Fig. 6). One more tagged SBS (YXT) was tracked in spring and used Baykal Bay on the northern

Table 2: Records of SBS during southward migration on Sakhalin Island

Date	Location	Birds number/code	Source
20.07.-25.07.1909	VIA	1	Chersky, 1915, in Nechaev 1991
09.10.1914	LOS	?	Munsterhjelm, 1922 in Nechaev 1991
08.08.1926	TER	?	Yamashina, 1928 in Nechaev 1991
09.10.1926	POR	?	Momiyama 1928 in Nechaev 1991
19.08.1947	LOS	?	Gizenko, 1955
01.08.1979	SAK	8	Nechaev, 1988, 1991, 1998
12.08.1980	LOS	singles	Nechaev, 1991
06.09.1981	SLE	3	IMGG FEB RAS collection
31.07.1987	LOS	20	Nechaev, 1991, 1998
23.07.-26.07.1989	LOS	singles	Nechaev, 1991
21.09.1989	LUN	1	Zykov, Reviakina, 1996
19.07.1990	UAN	4	Poyarkov, 1992
20.07.1990	UAN	1	Poyarkov, 1992
22.08.-23.08.1990	LUN	4	Zykov, Reviakina, 1996
?09.1998	TER	1	Pirogov, 2001
02.09.2000	DAG	1	Zykov, Reviakina, unpublished data
14.09.2000	DAG	1	Zykov, Reviakina, unpublished data
16.09.2000	DAG	1	Zykov, Reviakina, unpublished data
13.07.2009	AST	1	Sotnikov et al., 2013
19.08.2009	ODO	1	Bloch, Tiunov, 2010, 2011
27.08.2009	ODO	1	Bloch, Tiunov, 2010, 2011
19.08.2010	ODO	1	Bloch, Tiunov, 2011
28.08.2010	LOS	1	Zykov, Reviakina, unpublished data
16.07.2011	CHV	1	Sotnikov et al., 2013
17.08.2011	ODO	1	Tiunov, Bloch, 2012
16.07.-31.07.2017	TYK	L32	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
07.08.2017	PLT	L43	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
07.08.2017	CHV	L43	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
08.08.2017	DAG	L43	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
08.08.-17.08.2017	TYK	L43	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
31.07.-02.08.2018	ODO	L07	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
03.08.-09.08.2018	TYK	L07	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
09.08.-10.08.2018	SEV	L21	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
10.08.-17.08.2018	TYK	L21	Chang et al., 2020 + further details
16.09.2018	PLT	1	Peter van der Wolf, pers. comm.

Locations: VIA - Viachtu Bay; LOS - Lososey Bay, Aniva Gulf; TER - Terpenia Bay; POR - Poronaysk; SAK - Sakhalin Bay, Rybnoe Village; SLE - Slepikovsogo; LUN - Lunsky Bay; UAN - Uanga River; DAG - Dage (Nyisky) Bay; AST - Astokh Bay; ODO - Odoptu Bay; CHV - Chayvo Bay; TYK - Tyk Bay; SEV - Severniy Bay; PLT - Piltun Bay





Figure 3: Southern Sakhalin, Lososey Bay

Anton Ivanov

Sakhalin. This result provides important implications for estimation of hunting hazard, showing that only hunting in the lagoons of Northern Sakhalin might not be a potentially danger for migrating SBS. Tyk Bay (the north-west coast

of Sakhalin) turned out to be an important autumn stopover site for SBS. That location was not known by direct observations as stopover site for SBS, and it was identified by satellite tracking alone (Chang et al., 2020). Tyk Bay is important due to the long mean durations of SBS staying (mean >8 days), and the fact that 4 out of 4 tracked birds used it, suggesting that this location might be particularly valuable for refueling of substantial part of Chukotka population. On the other hand, these insights suggest some conserva-



Figure 4: An adult SBS on Lososey Bay at 28.05.2012

Anton Ivanov

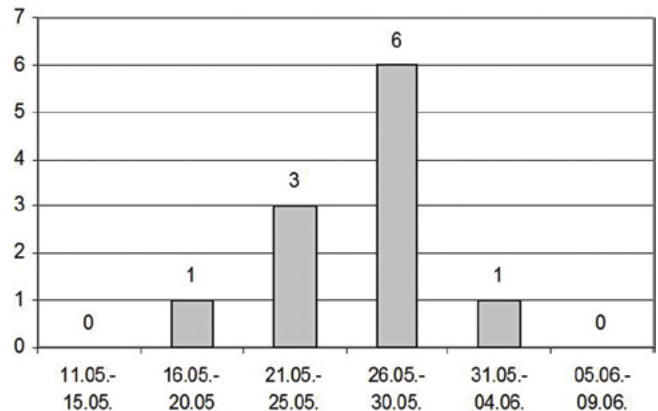
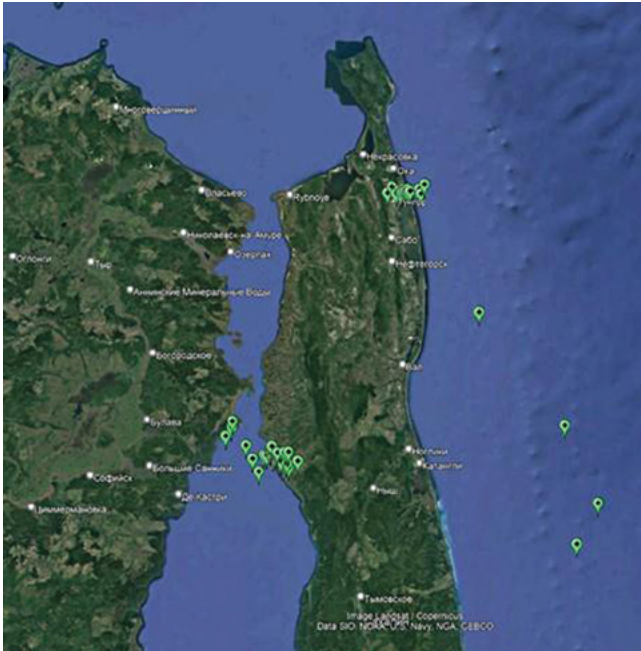
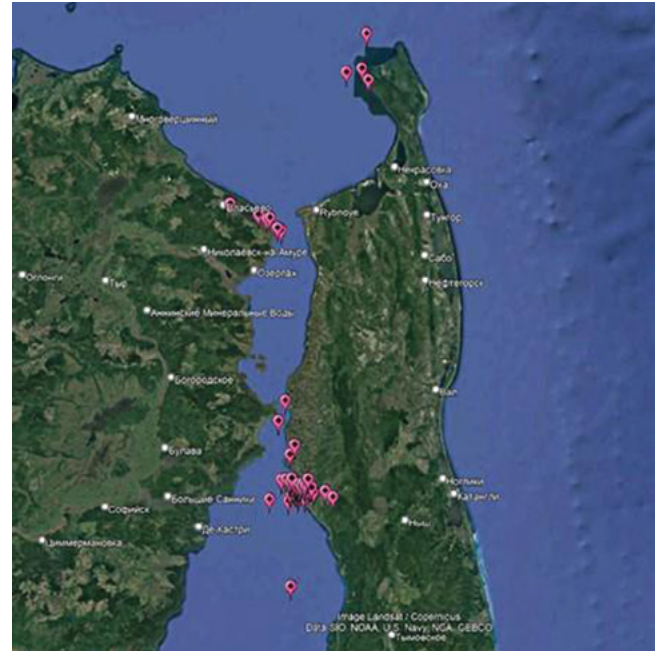


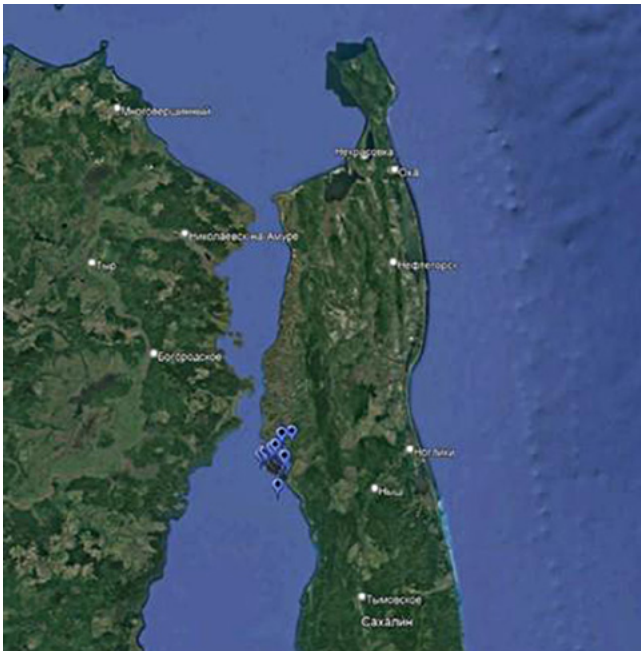
Figure 5: Phenology of SBS northward migration on Sakhalin Island



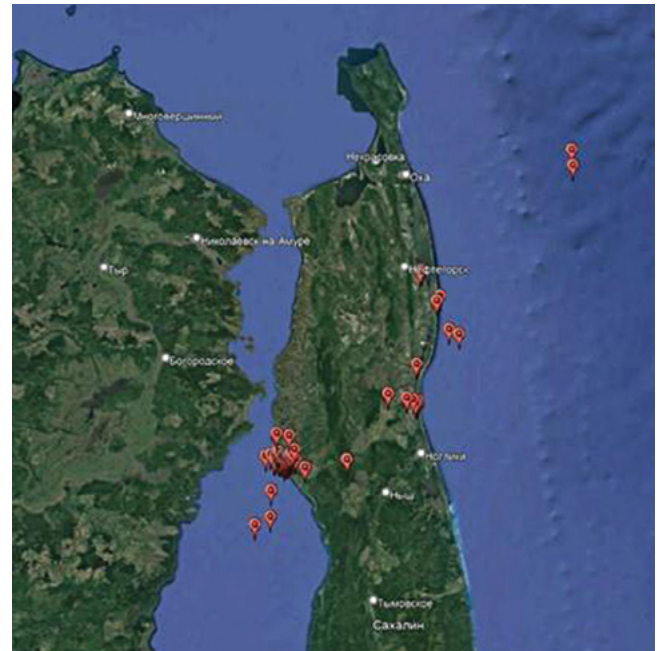
Lime 07 (31.07.-09.08.2018)



Lime 21 (09.08.-17.08.2018)



Lime 32 (16.07.-31.07.2017)



Lime 43 (07.08.-17.08.2017)

Figure 6. Tracking data for Spoon-billed Sandpipers marked with satellite tags passed through Sakhalin during their post-breeding migrations (Chang et al., 2020)

tion challenges. Tyk bay was used as a military missile test site till early 2000th, with targets placed there. It suggests that this area might be polluted by toxic missile fuel.

Analysis of original and published data of SBS records on Sakhalin Island shows that tidal flats of the island serve as important stopover sites for SBS on their migration (Ivanov, 2014), but de-



Figure 7: SBS at Piltun Bay (north-east Sakhalin) on 16.09.2018  
Peter van der Wolf

creasing numbers of SBS records confirm rapid and continued population decline for this species (Tomkovich et al., 2002; Zöckler et al., 2010). There is no special research and monitoring in these places made recently. Last record of single SBS was on Piltun Bay in 2018 (Fig. 7, Table 2). We suggest it is important to continue monitoring of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Sakhalin Island during its migration with the main focus to Lososey Bay and Tyk Bay. At the same time, we note that Lososey Bay is situated close to administrative centre Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk and relatively easy accessible, Tyk Bay is located in a difficult-to-reach area.

#### **Conservation concerns, main threats**

Lososey Bay is a traditional area for waterfowl hunting. Hunting most probably does not influence much waders on stopover sites because main game species of local hunters are different species of Anseriformes, mainly different ducks which are very numerous on the bay. However, it is known that waders can also be the prey of hunters on Sakhalin Island (Matsyna et al., 2021). There must be different level of potential hazard of hunting on waders during northward and southward migration. Based on analysis of database and personal observations SBS migrate through Lososey Bay

soon after the end of spring hunting season. Therefore, hunters have no effect on SBS on their spring migration (Ivanov, Ktitorov, 2017). However, hunting during autumn migration can have more negative impact due to wider distribution of SBS on stopover sites and longer duration of migration and autumn hunting season. Another potential threat for SBS could be oil pollution, because pipelines and other industrial objects of oil and gas companies are situated close to known SBS stopover sites. No data on effect of oil pollution on SBS are available. Unfortunately, Lososey Bay is not a protected area. It is listed as Important Bird Areas (IBA), but has no any conservation status approved by Russian government.

#### **Acknowledgments**

We acknowledge the authors of Chang et al. (2020) for permission to include further details of their records, in addition to those already published in “Wader Study” (127, 200-209) for providing tracking data. We thank Christoph Zöckler and Elena Lappo for the help in preparation of this report.

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## Observation of Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other waders on Baydukov Island (Sea of Okhotsk, Schastya Bay, Khabarovsk Krai, Russia) in 2022

Yuri Gluschenko, Dmitri Korobov, Vladimir Pronkevich



Fig. 1. Places of the most numerous concentration of waders in the vicinity of Baydukov Island during the passage to the south. 1 – shores of the lagoon located in the east of Baydukov Island; 2 – the spit, stripped at low tide on the south-eastern shore of Malyy Langr (Cheush) Island; 3 – south-eastern shore of Baydukov Island

Schastya Bay, located on the south-western side of Sakhalin Gulf of the Sea of Okhotsk, is a place of the mass passage and feeding stopover of waders. Special counts of their numbers here were conducted on Baydukov Island from June 28 to August 22, 2022 as part of the project “Study of different breeding strategies, migration features of Nordmann’s Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* to develop an action plan for the conservation of the endangered species”.

At low tide, waders fed in the vast littoral zone and at high tide, daily fluctuations of which reached two metres, they concentrated in particular areas of the island (Fig. 1,2), where counts were carried out.

Total length of counts amounted to almost 450 km. In addition, flying birds were counted at the station, which took about 150 hours. Overall, over

360 thousand waders of 40 species were counted. The most numerous among them were Dunlins *Calidris alpina*, Red-necked Stints *C. ruficollis*, Sanderlings *C. alba* and Great Knots *C. ruficollis*. Spoon-billed Sandpiper turned out to be the rarest species, comprising approximately 0.005% from the total number of registered waders.

The first single adult bird was observed on August 1 (Fig. 3.1), and later these birds were registered six more times: on August 5, 8, 12, 13, 15 and 22 (birds 4, 1, 2, 4, 1 and 1 respectively). Almost all encountered Spoon-billed Sandpipers turned out to be adult birds, one of which, observed on August 13, was tagged with a numbered flag (Fig. 3.2). According to the personal communication by P S Tomkovich, this bird with a light-green flag with number 24, was ringed by him in Chukotka as a young bird in 2010 and the engraved flag was



Fig. 2. Flock of birds on Baydukov island. July 31, 2022

Dmitri Korobov



Fig. 3. Adult Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmaeus*, one of which (2) is tagged by a coloured flag. Baydukov Island, August 1st (1) and 13 (2), 2022

Dmitri Korobov

added later when the adult bird was caught on the nest. This is a male bird which breeds every year in the vicinity of Meinypilgyno (Chukotka Autonomous Okrug).

The largest number of Spoon-billed Sandpipers encountered at the same time amounted to three birds, which were feeding in gatherings of other

wader species, staying near small puddles on the side of the lagoon on August 5 (Fig. 4).

With one exception, all Spoon-billed Sandpipers which we managed to observe were adults, only the last encountered bird, registered on August 22, was a young bird.



*Fig. 4. A group, which included three adult Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmaeus* (the left bird in the group of three is a Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*), Baydukov Island, August 5, 2022* Dmitri Korobov



*Fig. 5. Young Spoon-Billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaeus*, Baydukov Island, August 22, 2022* Dmitri Korobov



## Hunting Pressure on Shorebirds in Khabarovsk Krai and Amur Oblast

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The assessment of the hunting pressure on shorebirds in Khabarovsk Krai and Amur Oblast in 2021 was the third survey (after Kamchatka in 2019 and Sakhalin in 2020) organised by BirdsRussia together with the Working Group on Waders of Northern Eurasia (WGW NE) to explore the impact of illegal and legal unsustainable hunting on shorebirds in the Russian part of EAAF. The main research approaches were anonymous questionnaires and personal interviews of hunters, as well as detailed interviews with local experts during personal meetings.

In **Amur Oblast**, the work included 130 completed anonymous questionnaires of hunters only. 48% of the respondents noted that they hunt shorebirds, and 52% that they do not; 40% of the respondents indicated that they shot single birds, 18% reported that they hunted shorebirds by shooting at flocks, while 46% did not indicate this in their responses. The harvesting of shorebird in the Amur Oblast is not so developed as in other Russian Far Eastern regions because there are no large migratory con-

centrations of shorebirds. According to the questionnaires, people most often shoot Common Snipe and Woodcock. Our rough estimate is at least 2,000 each per year. Whimbrel and Far Eastern Curlew are hit by gunfire much less often (about 100-200 each). To this must be added several hundred of shot small and medium-sized shorebirds, and hunters do not usually distinguish between the species.

In **Khabarovsk Krai** surveys and interviews with hunters were conducted in 14 (from 17) districts. The main work was concentrated in the central part of the region in areas with roads. A total length of 4,500 km of roads was covered. The remote Verkhne-Bureinsky district was reached by rail. During the trips, interviews were held with hunters, including poachers, and with local conservation experts. Whenever possible, interviews were conducted directly at the hunting site and were accompanied by an inspection of the harvested birds (Fig. 1). Experts living in the northern hard-to-reach areas were interviewed by telephone.



Fig. 1. Survey of hunters in Verkhnebureinsky District of Khabarovsk Krai

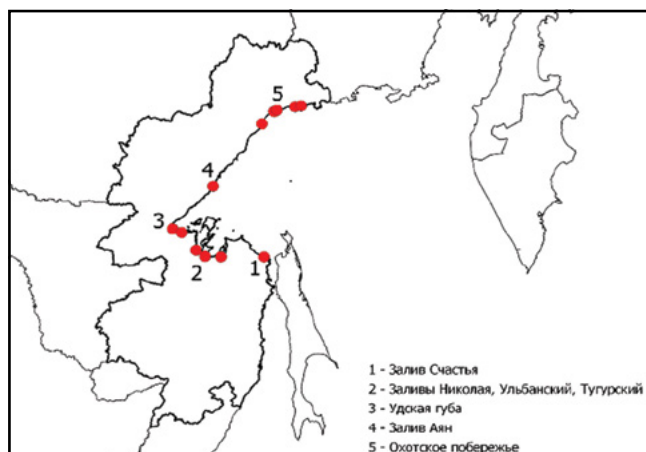


Fig. 2a. The most important stopover sites for migrating shorebirds in Khabarovsk Krai.

1 – Schastya Bay; 2 – Nikolay, Ulbansky and Tugurskiy Bays; 3 – Uda Bay; 4 – Aian Bay; 5 – coast of the Sea of Okhotsk

We found a huge difference in hunting pressure on different species of shorebirds and on the group as a whole, depending on the geographical location of each surveyed area. In contrast to Kamchatka and Sakhalin, most of the territory of Khabarovsk Krai is remote from the sea coast and has few mass concentrations of shorebirds during seasonal migrations. For this reason, harvesting of flocking species of shorebird is much lower. On the contrary, the yield of the Far Eastern Curlew (FEC), which nests mainly in the inland areas of Khabarovsk Krai and Amur Oblast, is high.

However, Okhotsky, Ayano-Maisky, Tuguro-Chumikansky, and Nikolaevsky districts of Khabarovsk Krai have a long western shoreline in the Okhotsk Sea, where shorebirds stop regularly and often form dense local concentrations (Fig. 2). 47% of hunters interviewed in the Tuguro-Chumikansky district gave negative responses to the question “Do they hunt shorebirds?”, and 53% of respondents had hunted shorebirds regularly, at least during the last three years; 41% of them shot from 20 to 50 birds per season, and 59% – from 50 to 100 shorebirds. Some respondents reported a significantly higher number of shorebirds shot per season. In total, we estimated roughly as many

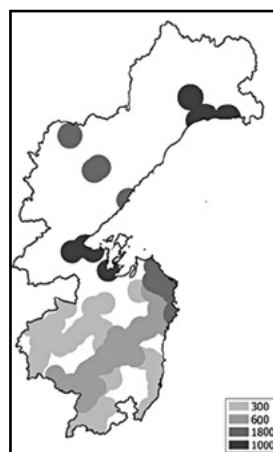


Fig. 2b. Number of small-sized shorebirds harvested annually in Khabarovsk Krai (expert estimation). The total number of birds shot within the outline shaded by each colour is indicated

as 40,000 shorebirds, of which 6,000 large-sized, 23,000 medium-sized, and 13,000 small ones were harvested in Khabarovsk Krai in 2021.

The target of special hunting is mainly large shorebirds: Wimbrel and Far Eastern Curlew. Both of them are much less harvested here than on Sakhalin: We estimated only about 1,000-1,500 Wimbrel and 500 FEC per year. Hunters shot Wimbrel mostly in coastal districts and FEC in central part of Khabarovsk Krai and in the valley of Amur River during migrations and also during the breeding season.

In the medium-sized shorebirds group, Great Knot, Red Knot, Common Snipe, Terek Sandpiper, Ruff, Redshank have been reported as the most often harvested species. The first two species are shot most often by hunters shooting at dense flocks resting on the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk at high tide.

Some hunters reported especially “lucky” hunts. For example, in Nikolayevsky District of the Khabarovsk Krai we recorded a detailed description of such a hunt in the Schastya Bay on Baydukov Island (see also separate article in this issue!). Two hunters returning home in a motor boat approached a large mixed flock of shorebirds resting on the shore. They managed to make only four shots, after which the birds flew away. While collecting the birds they started to count them, but after 360 birds they stopped counting. About a half of the birds were still not collected. Thus, about 700

shorebirds were killed in a few seconds. We managed to obtain a photo (Fig. 3) of cooked carcasses of over 53 Great Knots. We reminded the hunters that Great Knot is included in the Red Book of Russia. Without exception, all interviewed respondents harvesting shorebirds usually shoot at flocks of birds without species distinction, which certainly results in a high number of incidental and wasted victims.

Small-sized shorebirds are also shot in flocks. In the Tuguro-Chumikansky District, more than one third of the hunters surveyed (37.2%) regularly shot small-sized shorebirds. Dunlin, Red-necked Stints and Mongolian Plover constitute the bulk of the birds shot in this size group. Resting Spoon-billed Sandpipers often feed in mixed flocks with these species and they are at risk as well. During surveys, hunters also called Broad-billed Sandpiper and Sanderling. Unfortunately, most of the well-known site with mass concentrations of shorebirds in the Okhotsky, Tuguro-Chumikansky and Nikolaevsky districts of Khabarovsk Krai are quite actively visited by humans, including hunters (Fig. 2). Shorebird stopovers are mostly situated in the valley bottoms of large rivers where currents carry a lot of silt and sand to the sea. Unfortunately, several settlements (Okhotsk, Inya, Vostretsovo, Chumikan, Tugur, etc.) are located in the same areas.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper is at great risk of being accidentally shot during its migrations on the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk. As recently as the second half of the 20th century, it was regularly encountered in Khabarovsk Krai. Thus, in the 1960-70s, it was not very rare near the Okhotsk town (Pronkevich and Morokov 2012). Every year several Spoon-billed Sandpipers were shot here along with other shorebirds. The Museum of Regional Studies of Okhotsk keeps two beaks of Spoon-billed Sandpipers shot here. The last known sighting of a small flock of several Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the Okhotsk area was made in the third decade of May 2005.



Fig. 3. Great Knots carcasses (at least 53 birds) from more than 700 shorebirds shot in Schastya Bay during one short hunt

The survey results confirmed that the main threat to shorebirds is the low level of awareness and competence. Both hunters and many employees of hunting agencies are just as ignorant of distinguishing between different species, especially small and medium-sized species. It was revealing for most hunters that many species of shorebirds are banned from hunting.

The survey in Khabarovsk Krai and Amur Oblast has provided the missing data for understanding the importance of this sector of the Okhotsk Sea coast for shorebirds of EAAF. Several important shorebird concentrations during autumn migration are situated in the areas with high hunting pressure. To obtain a complete picture we need to further extend the project to include all other regions of the Russian Far East.

#### Acknowledgments

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## Spoon-billed Sandpiper ‘White 1H’

Pavel Tomkovich

This bird is an offspring of male Lime 27 and female Lime 31. Their nest was found on the shore of the Pekul’neiskoe Lake (N 62.62178, E 177.0246) north from Meinypilgyno Village, Chukotka on 18 June 2016, and eggs were taken for artificial incubation (head-starting) in the same day. Therefore chicks hatched in incubator on 6 July and were banded and flagged on the same date. After fledging the chick with ELF ‘White 1H’ was released with others into the wild on 26 July and last time observed in the vicinity in that year on 10 August being 35 days old.

The ‘White 1H’ was not recorded back on the breeding grounds till summer 2019, when it remained solitary while displaying rather close to the release site on 14-16 June, and then in another site, at a distance of about 1 km on 19-26 June. By this territorial behavior the bird was sexed as being male.

In 2020, the male was observed since 4 June, later he was paired with female ‘Lime 34’. Their nest (4 eggs) was found on 25 June 2020 in the second territory of the male, he defended in 2019. However, at checking of the nest on 9 & 10 July the nest turned out to be depredated. Birds were not around.

In 2021, the male was first seen in the same site on 5 June, but not later. His nest with female ‘Lime 88’ was found on 16 June at a distance of 3.74 km from his former nest. Eggs from that nest were taken for head-starting in the same day. A replacement clutch of the pair was found at a distance of 200 m on 30 June. Chicks hatched on 17 July; the male with at least one chick was last time seen on 24 July.

In 2022, this male was recorded on 2 June in the area of his nesting in 2020, but on the next day he was seen being paired with female ‘Lime 88’ close to their nests in 2021. The nest with 4 eggs was



Male ‘White 1H’, 2021

Nikolay Yakushev



Male ‘White 1H’, 2022

Elena Lappo



Male ‘White 1H’, South China 2022

Chen Jie

found on 13 June in that area; it was depredated as learnt on 4 July. A nest with a replacement clutch was not found. Last record of the male was on 4 July that year.

## Finding BuBu (White 1H) and cleaning its home in South Korea

Green Choi

I am Green Choi, a bird researcher and illustrator from South Korea. My goal is to promote public awareness and understanding of birds and nature through character illustrations and education. As part of this effort, I have been working at the [MEET GREEN Center for Bird Watching Culture and Content Production](#), where I create illustrations that provide general information about birds and nature, and promote educational programs that engage people with the natural world. I also run birdwatching programs in collaboration with local environmental interpreters.

One particular bird that has captured my attention is the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and in 2019 I wrote and illustrated a picture book called 'Journey of BuBu the Spoon-billed Sandpiper'. The book was inspired by a news article I read in 2016 about the arrival of the head-started White 1H Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the Seocheon Tidal Flat. The bird was hatched through artificial incubation in Chukotka, Russia. I decided to make White 1H the main character of my book and used it as an opportunity to raise awareness about the endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the efforts to restore its population, especially in South Korea.

To further promote public engagement with this species, I developed a birdwatching program that centered around finding BuBu, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper featured in my book. The program serves as an engaging introduction to birdwatching for those who are new to the hobby, and also encourages participants to observe and appreciate the natural environment more closely. While finding the elusive BuBu is a challenge, I hoped that the program would inspire participants to become interested in the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and take action to protect its habitats.

After the birdwatching activity, we also organized a cleaning program to protect the marine environment that the Spoon-billed Sandpiper depends on.



*Green Choi*

This effort allowed the participants to have a sense of responsibility towards the species, which will help to promote concrete conservation actions. We also encouraged participants to continue with their habitat restoration activities by picking up litter in their own areas, with the goal of having 600 members, or one for each of the existing Spoon-billed Sandpipers. So far, we have nominated 75 members, and we hope that this number will continue to grow along with the program.



*Cleaning up the marine environment with Rescuers of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper*

While this may seem like a small effort, we believe that it can have a bigger impact if it inspires more people to care about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and its habitat. We hope that we can continue to engage people with this species and promote greater awareness and conservation efforts.

At present, BuBu has been sighted four times over the past six years at the Seocheon Tidal Flat, and we hope to see him again this September. We look forward to sharing this good news with our newsletter subscribers, and continuing to spread the word about the incredible biodiversity and beauty of South Korea's natural environments.



Birdwatching program in search of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper BuBu (White 1H)



Cleaning up the marine environment with Rescuers of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

## SBS in Arts

### Ishrat Jahan



**Ishrat Jahan** is an artist and co-founder of Deshal Limited which is a progressive ethnic fashion and lifestyle company from Bangladesh:

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/deshal/about/>  
<https://www.deshal.net/>

She loves to travel and enjoy nature. We chatted about SBS during one of the trips she was in and she ended up drawing and presenting this nice picture to me.

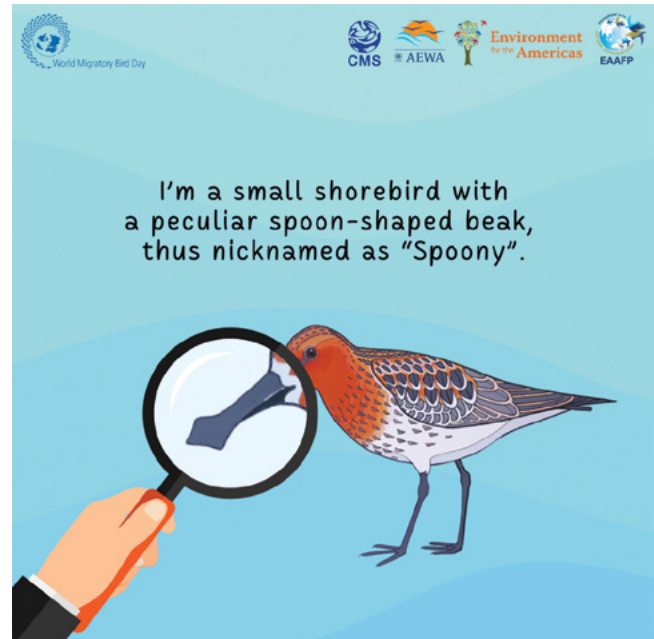
Sayam U. Chowdhury

## News in Brief

### EAAF

**World Migratory Bird Day** was celebrated on 13 May. The theme of World Migratory Bird Day 2023 was (and still is!) “Water: Sustaining Bird Life”.

Water is fundamental to life on our planet. The vast majority of migratory birds including the Spoon-billed Sandpiper rely on aquatic ecosystems during their life cycles. On the other hand, aquatic ecosystems are becoming increasingly threatened around the world due to increasing human demand for water, integrating with problems of pollution and climate change. This imposes direct impacts on the availability of clean water and mi-



gratory birds that depend on them. This year's World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) campaign highlights the importance of water for migratory birds and identify key actions for protecting water resources and aquatic ecosystems.

Learn more: [Spoon-billed Sandpiper - Eaa-flyway](#)

<https://trello.com/c/yQC0mxmm/22-eaa-flyway-species-introduction-card-news-spoon-billed-sandpiper>

All card news are available here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uLftyhSxPwWcztG0MP4TaezqtgFwO6E->



## News in Brief

### Bangladesh, Myanmar

#### The path of destruction of Cyclone Mocha

On the 14th of May 2023, Mocha struck the Bay of Bengal coast affecting millions of people. Despite the strength of the storm and the flooding that ensued in coastal cities of Bangladesh and Myanmar, casualties were surprisingly low.

Two of the important Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering sites, namely Sonadia Island in Bangladesh and Nan Thar Island in Myanmar, were hit by the powerful tropical storm. While our team from Sonadia Island reported minor destruction on the island and no casualties due to the effective cyclone preparedness, Myanmar was hit harder. The Rakhine region in the west of the country plunged into chaos without electricity, phone service, and limited water supplies, leading the Myanmar government to declare a state of emergency.

Regrettably, the house of the local conservationist and our member Ren Nou Soe was completely destroyed, and he is understandably very concerned about himself and his family's well-being in the near future. Myanmar was also well-prepared in advance of the storm that resulted in only a few casualties. Nevertheless, the country is struggling to cope with the aftermath of a storm which was a once in a lifetime event.

We will support to our team in Myanmar and provide assistance if people want to donate to the disaster struck region. Nan Thar Island was evacuated early on and no casualties noted, but the devastation is horrendous and no house or boat is left undamaged. It will need to be seen if the habitat structure has changed too. We will report.



*Destructions on Nan Thar, 17 May 2023 including the capsized and half sunken boat which was donated to our local group by the Rainforest Trust*

*Ren Noe Soe*



*House of Ren Noe Soe after Mocha hit regional capital Sittwe*

*Ren Noe Soe*

## News in Brief

### China

#### A Spoony from Lianyungang dated May 3rd

This is only the 7th record so far from Lianyungang, Jiangsu Coast. The site is currently threatened by the construction of the “Blue Lagoon” tourism development project. But conservation organisations aim to promote the development of coastal mudflats within the project to provide sufficient space for 20,000 Asian Dowitcher and the odd Spoon-billed Sandpiper!

Jing Li

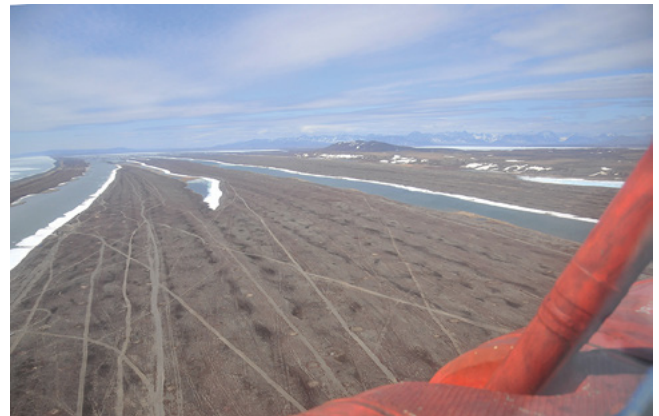


Yongxiang Han

### Russia

#### Setting sails for Chukotka

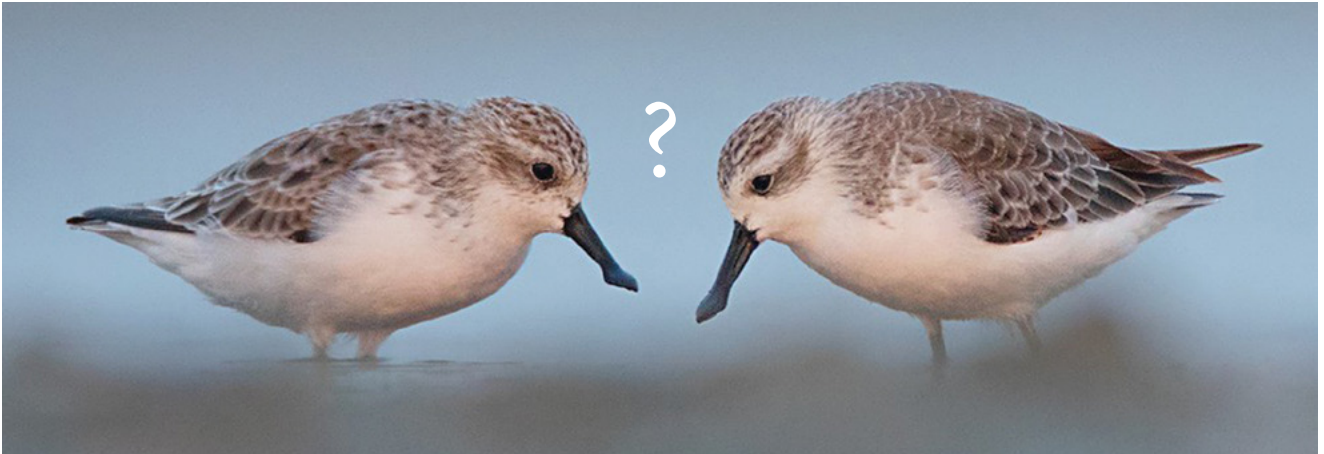
On May 29th Dr Elena Lappo will start from Moscow to the East with a group of five. They will survey this breeding season again around Meinypilgyno, the capital of the “Land of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper”. Good luck to them and the remaining Spoonies there! Let’s hope for a good breeding result!



Approaching the Meinypilgyno coastal tundra

Matthias Fanck

## The last Page



### SBS in Artificial Intelligence: A Chatbot conversation

“Where can we find Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China?”

“In China, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper can be seen mainly on the coasts and wetlands along the east and south coasts, but also inland on lakes and rivers. The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a common species in China and plays an important role in the ecosystem as a pollinator and pest controller.”