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## PROJECT NEWS

### Shorebirds 2020 Project underway

A new shorebird initiative in Australia called **Shorebirds 2020** has just been launched. It is designed to reinvigorate and coordinate national shorebird monitoring in Australia. It is a collaborative enterprise between Birds Australia, the Australian Wader Study Group, WWF Australia and the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust. The primary objectives of the project are to collect data on the numbers of shorebirds to be utilized in their conservation and management, specifically long- and short-term population trends, and explore the reasons underlying such changes. For more information contact Joanne Oldland at [j.oldland@birdsaustralia.com.au](mailto:j.oldland@birdsaustralia.com.au).

## CONSERVATION NEWS

### Unique Spoon-billed Sandpiper facing extinction

Populations of one of the world's strangest birds have crashed over the last decade, and surveys summer 2007 of its breeding grounds in the remote Russian province of Chukotka suggest that the situation is now critical. The charismatic, and rather aptly named, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus* is now worryingly close to becoming extinct. With only 200–300 pairs left, conservationists are calling for urgent help to tackle the decline.

"We've seen a 70% drop in the number of breeding pairs at some sites over the last couple of years. If this decline continues, these amazing birds won't be around for much longer," says Evgeny Syroechkovskiy, Vice President of the Russian Bird Conservation Union (BirdLife in Russia). The reasons for these losses are complex, involving changes to habitats used during migration and loss of breeding areas. What is clear is that nest predation by foxes and disturbance by people and dogs could prove to be the final nail in the coffin for the few birds left.

"Action to safeguard the remaining breeding pairs needs to be taken now for there to be any chance of saving them. We are planning to put wardens in place at these critical sites. Once they are protected and the birds are successfully fledging young, we can get on with the task of trying to save areas that they use whilst on migration," Evgeny adds.

Spoon-billed Sandpipers' spoon-shaped bill is still something of a mystery; exactly how it is used and why it evolved is still unknown. They breed during June–July in a small strip of coastal Arctic tundra in Chukotka, NE Russia. They then migrate thousands of kilometres to winter along the coasts of South and South-East Asia. Spoon-billed Sandpipers are

one of several species to depend on the rich tidal coasts of the Yellow Sea in East Asia, where they stop to refuel on their way to and from their breeding grounds.

"Coastal reclamation in South Korea is currently destroying over 40,000 ha of habitat; coastal habitats are being converted into saltpans and shrimp farms in Bangladesh and Chinese coasts have been rapidly developed in recent years," says Christoph Zöckler, international coordinator of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Action Plan, "They are just running out of places to stop and feed on migration."

What seems certain is that if these changes continue there will soon be no place left for Spoon-billed Sandpipers. "The recent declines have shocked those concerned about the species, but with investment and the dedication of those involved we can still save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper," says Richard Grimmett, BirdLife's Global Conservation Manager.

BirdLife International has launched the **Preventing Extinctions** initiative to try and turn the tide for Spoon-billed Sandpiper and species like it, and is looking for companies, institutions and individuals to step up and provide funding by becoming BirdLife Species Champions. With the right conservation action plan in place it is possible to save a species. It has been done before, but it takes hard work and hard cash, but aren't we all better for knowing that a bird with a spoon for a bill exists out there, somewhere?

<http://www.birdlife.org/news/>

### Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* receives draft IUCN Red List up-listing to 'Near Threatened' status

Declines in various European breeding populations (including the sizeable one in the United Kingdom) have continued or accelerated since 2000, and, despite ongoing uncertainty about the population size of the race *suschkini*, qualitative evidence of declines in Kazakhstan and south-west Siberia support the suggestion that the overall global decline approaches 30% over the last 15 years, and hence the species warrants up-listing from Least Concern to Near Threatened.

Thanks to David Stroud for this item  
(<http://www.birdlifeforums.org/WebX/2cba5d97>)

### Largest flock for 100 years: Sociable Lapwing lives up to its name

Thanks to a single satellite tag, a 3,000-strong flock of Sociable Lapwing has been discovered in Turkey – the largest



seen for more than 100 years. "By tracking a single bird from its Kazakh breeding grounds, we have found the location of most of the world population of these birds in Turkey," announced Guven Eken, Executive Director of Doğa Derneği (BirdLife in Turkey).

The finding represents another significant rise in fortune for the Critically Endangered bird: almost five years ago, as few as 400 Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* were thought to exist globally. The birds were found in the Ceylanpinar district of south-eastern Turkey after a satellite tag was fitted to one of the birds migrating from breeding grounds in Kazakhstan earlier this year. The tagged bird covered 2,000 miles, flying north of the Caspian Sea, then down through the Caucasus and south into Turkey, where it effectively stopped. The tagged bird was part of a flock of 1,800 other lapwing. The following day a staggering 3,200 Sociable Lapwing were observed at the site.

Conservationists from a number of nations have been working to conserve Sociable Lapwing in recent years, by coordinating their actions on the ground; focusing their efforts to conserve wintering sites, stopover sites and breeding sites along the species' flyways. This coordinated action has included research and protection of breeding sites in Kazakhstan; and actions to protect wintering and stopover sites in Turkey and Syria.

"Understanding the migration from breeding sites in Kazakhstan is essential for the future protection of this species, so the news of such a large flock is a great cause for celebration," commented Maxim Koshkin (Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan). "This discovery is something we didn't dare dream of," said the RSPB's Dr Rob Sheldon, responsible for tagging the bird in Kazakhstan. "The Sociable Lapwing is one of the rarest birds on earth and suddenly it's been found in these large numbers." "It shows just how important both Kazakhstan and Turkey have become for the survival of this species. The next step is to protect the bird, both on its breeding grounds and at all the key sites on its migration route." The tagging project is partly paid for by the UK government's Darwin Initiative and conservationists from Britain and Kazakhstan hope to win new funds to tag more birds next summer.

<http://www.birdlife.org/news/>

### Rediscovered notebooks give historical insight into 'lost bird'

Javan Lapwing *Vanellus macropterus* has not been recorded with certainty since 1940 and is currently classified as Critically Endangered by BirdLife International. The species was confined to wide steppe-like marshes in river deltas on the Indonesian island of Java, which is now densely populated and is currently home to 124 million people. This human pressure means that there is little suitable habitat left and the situation is looking bleak for Javan Lapwings, should any remain.

In a recent issue of *Bird Conservation International* ((2007) 17: 225–234), a fascinating paper gives a historical insight into the life of one of the world's rarest and most poorly known species of bird, pieced together from newly translated notes by a German amateur ornithologist.

In 2000, the Zoological Museum Amsterdam received a number of unpublished and previously unknown notes and

manuscripts written by August Spennemann. He lived on Java from c.1915 to 1940 and among his notes was a detailed typed account of his observations of the Javan Lapwing in the late 1920s near Pamanukan, West Java province.

"Spennemann's notes contain descriptions of the calls and behaviour of these birds, things we knew almost nothing of before. This discovery provides us with an amazing window onto their lives," says Bas van Balen, one of the authors of the paper.

These records come from areas with no previous reports of Javan Lapwings and suggest that these birds may have wider habitat preferences than was previously thought. "If it still exists the population of Javan Lapwings must be tiny and work needs to be carried out immediately to survey all potential areas," Bas adds.

<http://www.birdlife.org/news/>

### Ramsar News

**Nepal** declared four new Ramsar sites. The high altitude Himalayan wetlands are *Gokyo of Sagarmatha National Park, Shey-Phoksundo of Dolpa, Rara Lake of Mugu, and Gosaikunda of Rauswa*.

**Australia** has designated its 65th Ramsar site with the nomination of the Paroo River Wetlands in NW New South Wales. It is one of the most important wetland systems for waterbirds in eastern Australia, supporting threatened species like Australian Painted-Snipe and Freckled Ducks.

**Iraq's** obligatory first Wetland of International Importance, *Hawizeh Marsh (Haur Al-Hawizeh)* (137,700 ha), in the southern Governorates of Basra and Amara, is an integral part of the Mesopotamian marshlands complex centred at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A transboundary wetland, the marshes are c.75–80% located in Iraq and extend partly into the Islamic Republic of Iran, where they are known as *Hawr Al-Azim*. Representing the only significant area to have survived recent drainage actions and the most intact part of the original Mesopotamian system, they are a biodiversity reservoir of priority importance for conservation. The results of recent re-flooding have been promising so far, and many displaced Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs have returned to resume their traditional ancient ways of life. The site is of international importance as a staging and wintering area for at least 79 species of waterfowl and nine species of birds of prey on their way between Western Siberia/Central Asia and eastern and southern Africa. The northern half of the marsh was never completely dried and is being used as a reference for monitoring the flora and fauna of the newly re-inundated southern sector. The effects of extensive drainage in the 1990s and warfare destruction, as well as dam-building activities upstream in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, are seen as the chief potential threats to the site.

**Tunisia** has designated 19 new Wetlands of International Importance. Tunisia now has 20 Ramsar sites, covering an area of 726,541 ha.

**Togo** has designated two new Wetlands of International Importance, the large *catchment of the Oti-Mandouri River* in the north of the country and the *entire coastal area in the south*. Togo, which joined the Convention in 1995, now has four Ramsar sites covering 1,210,400 ha.

**Guinea** has added two further sites to the Ramsar List and now has 16, covering an area of 6,422,361 ha. *Bafing-*



**Falémé** (517,300 ha) is an extensive area of rolling terrain in Labé region, 800–1000 m altitude, including gallery forest, shrub and wooded savannah, and floodplains, near where the Bafing River descends from the Fouta Djallon massif northward to become the Senegal River in north-western Mali. The area has an important influence on the hydrology of the Senegal River basin, and it also supports an array of threatened species such as chimpanzees, lions, and vultures. **Bafing-Source** (317,200 ha) comprises an extended highland area, 800–1500 m altitude, of varied hilly terrain with shrub and wooded savannah, gallery forest, and wet meadow. The site supports a number of threatened species, including the Black Vulture and the West African Chimpanzee.

**Germany** has designated the **Bayerische Wildalm** (7 ha) as its 33rd Wetland of International Importance. The small site is an area of remarkable peatland concentration in the southern state of Bavaria which extends across the frontier to the Austrian Ramsar site of the same name. The site is a karst depression, or polje, with a natural brook that vanishes into one big and several small ponors (swallow hole). The bottom of the polje is covered completely by a fen which is hydrologically controlled both by water coming from the sloping fens along the polje slopes and by periodic floods of the brook. The mires show typical features of mire type representative for the Limestone Alps, with many endangered plant species, which form the chief basis for the site's nomination to the List.

The **Republic of Korea** has added two new sites to their Ramsar List. **Du-ung Wetland** (6,500 ha) in Chungcheongnam-do is a topographically unique wetland for the area: a freshwater lagoon fed by underground water, separated from the Yellow Sea by a sandy dune system. **Moojehineup** (4 ha) is a 10,000-year-old high moor, the oldest in Korea, with well-developed peat layers and slightly acidic surface water. The name of the site comes from a ritual praying for rain in the Ulsan area.

**Poland** has completed the formalities for the removal of its two Ramsar sites that have been on the Montreux Record of sites "where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur" for quite a few years. Managers at *Lake of Seven Islands Nature Reserve* (*Rezerwat przyrody Jezioro Siedmiu Wysp*) and *Warta River Mouth National Park* (*Park Narodowy Ujście Warty*) have made substantial progress in resolving the problems for which the sites were added to the Record in 1990 and 1993 respectively, and after consultations with the Scientific and Technical Review Panel they have been removed from the Record as of 5 November 2007.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

### Australian Shorebird Conservation Toolkit

This website has been developed to help protect and enhance shorebird habitat across Australia. The toolkit aims to: increase awareness and understanding of shorebirds and their conservation needs, improve the sharing of information between shorebird research and conservation groups and the broader community, and inform development, implementation and monitoring of shorebird conservation projects. The toolkit is funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust. See <http://shorebirds.org.au/index.html>.

## WADERS IN THE MEDIA

### Migrating birds can see the earth's magnetic field

Migrating birds, it seems, can "see" the earth's magnetic field which they use as a compass to guide them around the globe. Specialized neurons in the eye, sensitive to magnetic direction, have been shown for the first time to connect via a specific brain pathway to an area in the forebrain of birds responsible for vision. Scientists have known for many years, from behavioural experiments, that birds use an internal magnetic compass to navigate on their epic annual journeys. But exactly how the system works has been a mystery. Now work by Dominik Heyers and colleagues at the University of Oldenburg in Germany has started to unravel the mechanism at a neuroanatomical level – and it shows the eye is key.

Magnetic sensing molecules in the eye, known as cryptochromes, appear to stimulate photoreceptors depending on the orientation of the magnetic field. This strongly suggests migratory birds perceive the magnetic field as a visual pattern, the researchers said. "It's a pity we cannot ask them, but what we imagine is that it is like a shadow or a light spot on the normal vision of the bird," Heyers said in a telephone interview. The German team, which published their findings in the online Public Library of Science journal PLoS ONE, based their research on laboratory studies of the Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*, a highly migratory bird. Warblers from Germany and Russia were held in captivity and their nerve patterns traced and analyzed to establish the direct functional link between cells in the retina and the Cluster N forebrain region. Garden Warblers, which are estimated to number around 10 million worldwide, breed in northern Europe and spend the winter in Africa.

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## CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENTS

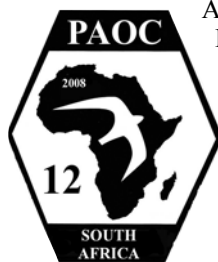
### 4th Asian Wetland Symposium in Hanoi Vietnam, 22–25 June 2008

The Asian Wetland Symposium provides a single platform for discussions among various sectors including, national and local governments, NGOs, scientific experts, the private sector, and local and indigenous people engaged in wetland management to discuss issues, approaches and priorities in wetland management in the Asian Region. Go to [www.aws2008.net](http://www.aws2008.net) for more information.



## 12th Pan-African Ornithological Congress, South Africa, 7–12 September 2008

The Twelfth Pan-African Ornithological Congress will take place near Cape Town, from Sunday evening 7 to Friday afternoon 12 Sept 2008. It will be hosted by the



Animal Demography Unit and the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, and by the AP Leventis Ornithological Research Institute at the University of Jos, Nigeria. The theme of the meetings is: "Birds and People – Interaction, Utilisation and Conservation". See <http://paoc12.adu.org.za/> for more information.

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## PUBLICATIONS

### ***The Status of Coastal Waterbirds and Wetlands in Southeast Asia: Results of Waterbird Surveys in Malaysia (2004–2006) and Thailand and Myanmar (2006)*** by David Li

This latest Wetlands International publication presents a comprehensive update of the status of waterbird populations and wetlands along the coasts of Malaysia, Thailand and Myanmar based on surveys undertaken between 2004 and 2006. Shorebird numbers showed an overall decline of 22% in Malaysia between 1983–1986 and 2004–2006.

The surveys confirmed the Peninsular Malaysian coast as one of the most important wintering grounds for the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank, supporting up to 25% of the rarest shorebird species along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. The entire Inner Gulf of Thailand is at risk from urbanisation and development for industry and housing. Further threats include the construction of sea walls, coastal erosion and the unregulated planting of mangroves on mudflats, and the conversion of traditional prawn ponds and salt pans to deep, steep-sided ponds for rearing crabs and prawns. In other areas, hunting waterbirds is now becoming a real threat.

A total of 134 wetland sites were covered in Malaysia, including 15 sites on the south-west coast of Sarawak – the first comprehensive update of the status of waterbird populations and wetlands on this coast since 1985. Peak counts for all sites between 2004 and 2006 recorded over 105,000 waterbirds. Selangor and Sarawak were the most important states, with more than 30,000 waterbirds recorded along the coasts of both states. A total of 16 sites meet the criterion for international importance (>1% of the population), and a further 39 sites are potentially of international importance in having recorded large numbers of unidentified waterbirds or

at least one globally threatened species. Sixteen sites surveyed in Central and Southern Thailand recorded a total of over 76,000 waterbirds in Jan 2006. A total of three sites of the 16 surveyed in Jan 2006 met the 1% criterion for international importance, and seven sites were identified as being potentially of international importance.

The critically important Inner Gulf of Thailand wetlands recorded over 52,000 waterbirds with a total of 10 species recorded in internationally important concentrations (>1% population). Globally threatened species recorded in the area including the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill, Nordmann's Greenshank (up to 9% of the population) and Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Eleven sites in the Ayeyarwaddy (Irrawaddy) Delta and mouth of the Yangon River in Myanmar recorded a total of over 38,000 waterbirds in Dec 2005 to Mar 2006. This represents the first comprehensive ornithological survey of the Ayeyarwaddy Delta. A total of 8 species recorded in internationally important concentrations including more than 3% of the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank. Four of the total of 11 sites surveyed met the 1% criterion for sites of international importance.

Download the book for free (<http://www.wetlands.org/publication.aspx?ID=35190519-ae69-4755-b620-beb94b86b877>) or purchase it from: [www.NHBS.co.uk](http://www.NHBS.co.uk)

### ***Ramsar Handbooks on the Wise Use of Wetlands on CD-ROM***

The Ramsar Handbooks include all of the guidelines adopted by the Conference of the Contracting Parties, as well as a good deal of additional illustrative material, and this 3rd edition has been updated through the 9th meeting of the COP in Nov 2005. The CD-ROM includes all 17 of the Handbooks in Adobe PDF format in English, French, and Spanish versions, with a Web-based interface. The PDF texts are also available for download on the Ramsar website ([http://www.ramsar.org/lib/lib\\_handbooks2006\\_e.htm](http://www.ramsar.org/lib/lib_handbooks2006_e.htm)), but the CD-ROM can be ordered free of charge by contacting Ramsar's Montse Riera ([riera@ramsar.org](mailto:riera@ramsar.org)).

### ***Annual Report 2005–07 of the Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund***

The Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund was established in July 2005 to provide financial support for projects at sites of importance for migratory waterbirds in the East Asia–Australasian Flyway. The report can be downloaded at <http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/maipo/awcf/>.

### ***Encyclopaedia of the Convention on Migratory Species now available online***

This guide comprises over 100 fact-sheets explaining the history and structure of the convention, its daughter Agreements and MoUs, and some of the many species the Convention seeks to conserve. Additional sections cover Threats and Challenges to migratory species and the CMS's activities in relation to other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, including the Ramsar Convention, and some of its many activities, from the Small Grants Programme to World Migratory Bird Day to the "Friends of the CMS". The guide will be updated periodically to take account of new parties, new agreements and progress made in conserving endangered migratory animals. The package of fact-sheets can be down-



loaded in PDF format in eight sections ([http://www.cms.int/publications/family\\_guide.htm](http://www.cms.int/publications/family_guide.htm)) and the hardcopy can be requested from the Secretariat in Bonn, [secretariat@cms.int](mailto:secretariat@cms.int).

### **Effects of climate variation on the breeding ecology of Arctic shorebirds**

This extensive review resulted from a workshop near Copenhagen, Denmark, four years ago. It was published in *Meddelelser om Grønland Bioscience* (2007) 59:1–48 as a multi-author effort by a large number of our colleagues: Meltofte, H., T. Piersma, H. Boyd, B. McCaffery, B. Ganter, V.V. Golovnyuk, K. Graham, C.L. Gratto-Trevor, R.I.G. Morrison, E. Nol, H-U. Rösner, D. Schamel, H. Schekkerman, M.Y. Soloviev, P.S. Tomkovich, D.M. Tracy, I. Tulp, and L. Wennerberg. Hard copies may be purchased at the Danish Polar Center ([dpc@dpc.dk](mailto:dpc@dpc.dk)) at a cost of €20. This is the paper's abstract:

About 50 species of shorebirds breed in the Arctic, where they constitute the most characteristic component of the tundra avifauna. Here, we review the impact of weather and climate on the breeding cycle of shorebirds based on extensive studies conducted across the Arctic.

Conditions for breeding shorebirds are highly variable among species, sites and regions, both within and between continents. Weather effects on breeding are most moderate in the Low Arctic of northern Europe and most extreme in the Siberian High Arctic. The decision of whether or not to breed upon

arrival on the breeding grounds, the timing of egg-laying and the chick-growth period are most affected by annual variation in weather. In large parts of the Arctic, clutch initiation dates are highly correlated with snowmelt dates and in regions and years where extensive snowmelt occurs before or soon after the arrival of shorebirds, the decision to breed and clutch initiation dates appear to be a function of food availability for laying females. Once incubation is initiated, adult shorebirds appear fairly resilient to variations in temperature with nest abandonment primarily occurring in case of severe weather with new snow covering the ground. Feeding conditions for chicks, a factor highly influenced by weather, affects juvenile production in most regions. Predation has a very strong impact on breeding productivity throughout the Arctic and subarctic, with lemming *Dicrostonyx* spp. and *Lemmus* spp. fluctuations strongly influencing predation rates, particularly in the Siberian Arctic.

The fate of Arctic shorebirds under projected future climate scenarios is uncertain, but High Arctic species and populations appear particularly at risk. Climatic amelioration may benefit Arctic shorebirds in the short term by increasing both survival and productivity, whereas in the long term habitat changes both on the breeding grounds and in the temperate and tropical non-breeding areas may put them under considerable pressure and may bring some of them near to extinction. Their relatively low genetic diversity, which is thought to be a consequence of survival through past climatically-driven population bottlenecks, may also put them more at risk to anthropogenic-induced climate variation than other avian taxa.

