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**PROJECT NEWS**

**Sociable Lapwing –  
 International Species Action Plan Workshop  
 (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 30 March–1 April 2009)**

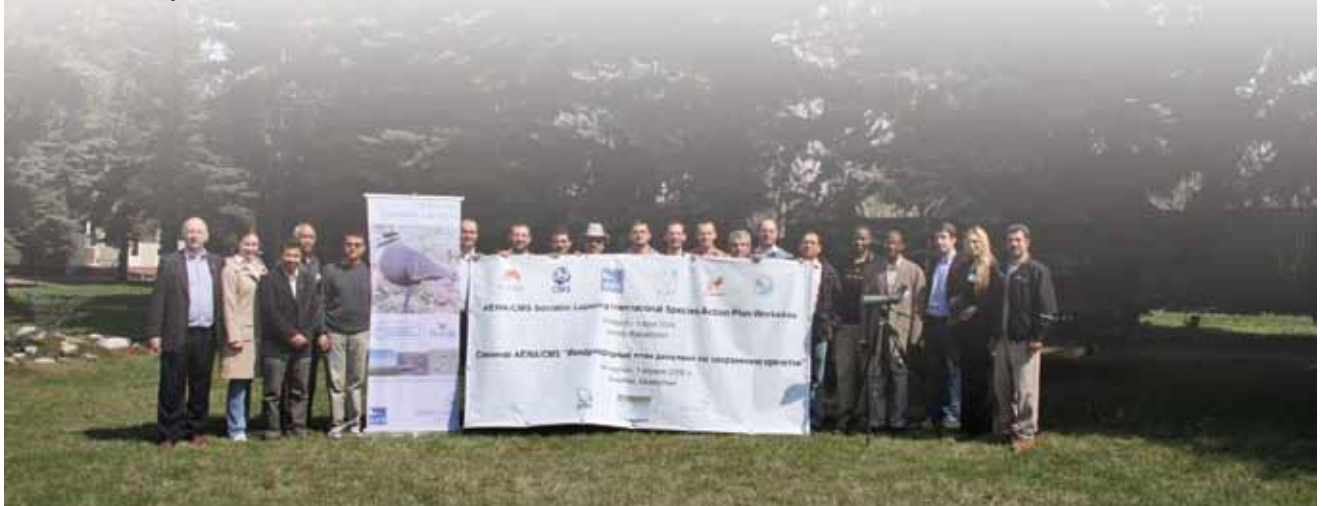
The Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* is a Critically Endangered species that has undergone a large population decline. Initial estimates put the world’s breeding population as low as 200–600 breeding pairs. However, recent exciting discoveries would suggest that this estimate was too pessimistic, but that the species’ status remains precarious. Recent research efforts for Sociable Lapwings have been targeted at the breeding grounds in Kazakhstan as recommended by the AEWI International Species Action Plan published in 2004. However, it now seems likely that the magnitude of the recent population decline cannot be wholly explained by the observed levels of breeding success.

During 30 March to 1 April 2009, a workshop was organised by the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, the Convention on Migratory Species, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan, and the Committee for Forestry and Hunting, Kazakhstan, and held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The aim of the workshop was to review progress made under the first Species Action Plan and to present the findings of work undertaken as part of the Darwin Initiative Project (<http://darwin.defra.gov.uk/>) *Conserving a Flagship Steppe Species – the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing*. The workshop was attended by Sociable Lapwing researchers and Government representatives from a number of countries including Kazakhstan, Russia, India, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Germany and the UK.

The workshop reported excellent progress on determining the causes of the population decline in Sociable Lapwing. Research on the breeding grounds in central Kazakhstan during 2004–2008 found that nest survival is generally high but varies from year to year and that chick survival tends to be high in most years. This coupled with low return rates of colour-ringed individuals suggests that factors away from the breeding grounds maybe responsible for the reported decline of the species.

Presentations by BirdLife partners highlighted how the increased collaboration across range states in recent years has led to the discovery of several large flocks of Sociable Lapwings in SW Russia, SE Turkey and N Syria. The largest flock located to date was about 3,200 in Ceylanpinar, Turkey, in Oct 2007. This flock was located partly due to the location of a satellite-tagged bird that subsequently migrated to Sudan – the first record there for more than 50 years. In addition, a survey by the Sudanese Wildlife Society in Jan 2009 confirmed the presence of a number of flocks totalling 150 birds. Representatives from Syria and Iraq outlined recent work in their respective countries, including worrying reports of hunting being targeted at Sociable Lapwings.

The Action Plan is currently being drafted for consultation but some of the key recommendations include urgent work in Syria and Iraq to determine the extent of hunting and to work with Government Agencies and local people to limit hunting where possible. Further work is also required in India to determine the number and distribution of Sociable Lapwings occurring there. Increased collaboration between BirdLife partners will be required in the coming years to undertake coordinated counts across the species’ range to obtain a robust population estimate and to further increase our knowledge of Sociable Lapwing migration routes and wintering areas.



The workshop ended with a presentation by Andreas Pittl who outlined Swarovski Optik's commitment to Sociable Lapwing conservation through BirdLife International's Preventing Extinctions Programme through which they are joint Species Champion with RSPB. Swarovski optical equipment was presented to a number of the researchers to help the survey effort across the Sociable Lapwing range.

The organisers and attendees would like to thank the Darwin Initiative, Swarovski Optik, BirdLife International's Preventing Extinctions Programme and an anonymous donor for their financial support of the workshop. The Darwin Initiative is thanked for funding a further two year project which will allow the recommendations of this workshop to be implemented.

For further information contact Rob Sheldon (*Robert.Sheldon@rspb.org.uk*) or Maxim Koshkin (*maxim.koshkin@acbk.kz*).

## CONSERVATION NEWS

### Hunting endangers one of the world's most threatened birds

Hunting in the Middle East has been recognised as a major threat to one of the world's most threatened birds. A joint survey mission by RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and the Syrian Society for Conservation of Wildlife have uncovered new dangers in Syria to Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*. Alarming news shows that Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwings have been shot by hunters in NE Syria, one of the bird's most important migration sites. The birds migrate through the region between their NE Africa wintering areas and only nesting site, the Central Asian steppe grasslands, which are mainly in Kazakhstan. The wintering grounds have only been recently confirmed by an RSPB satellite-tracking project that tracked the movements of birds from Kazakhstan to Sudan. The species is thought to have declined by 90% since the 1990s; the world population is now thought to be no more than 11,200.

Sociable Lapwing is one of the species benefitting from the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions Programme. In Aug 2008, the RSPB and Swarovski Optik became Species Champions for Sociable Lapwing. The programme is spearheading greater conservation action, awareness and funding support for all of the world's most threatened birds, starting with the 190 species classified as Critically Endangered, the highest level of threat. For more information, go to [http://www.bird-life.org/news/news/2009/03/sociable\\_lapwing.html](http://www.bird-life.org/news/news/2009/03/sociable_lapwing.html).

### Mexican government endangers migratory bird populations

The Mexican government, as of 11 Feb 2008, is permitting the industrial development of Laguna de Cuyutlan, Manzanillo, Mexico, the fourth largest mangrove-lagoon wetland in the nation. This lagoon is on the principal western migratory corridor for 89 species of water/shorebirds, 22 of which are at risk. Construction of an access canal will raise the concentration of salt and water levels in all parts of the lagoon system, which, in turn, will kill species of mangrove and fish not adapted to these new conditions. As a result, many species of amphibians, reptiles, mammals and invertebrates will lose their habitat.

In 1993, the Mexican government, along with the U.S.

and Canada, signed the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, which obliges each signatory to respect the environmental laws of the other two countries, and to "increase co-operation between the Parties to better preserve protect and enhance the environment, including wild flora and fauna".

The environmental organization Bios Iguana is calling for a moratorium on development. Currently, the government has authorized the developer to begin construction, and although Mexican law requires that all mangroves receive protection, there has been no scientific demonstration that these species will be unaffected.

See <http://www.cec.org/citizen/submissions/details/index.cfm?varlan=english&ID=129> or contact Esperanza Salazar Zenil (*bios\_iguana@hotmail.com*) for more information.

### Ramsar Site News (including the declaration of the world's smallest and largest Ramsar sites!)

**Kazakhstan** has designated three new Wetlands of International Importance. *Ural River Delta* and adjacent *Caspian Sea coast* (111,500 ha), part of North Caspian Nature Reserve is a unique river delta wetland in western Kazakhstan along the northern shore of the Caspian Sea, comprising a large variety of marine/coastal and inland wetland types. Due to its mixed water supply and seasonal variation, the site has a range of marine and freshwater habitats and supports considerable numbers and diversity of species, notably 13 IUCN threatened bird species. The site is significant for large numbers of nesting, moulting and migratory species, among them appreciable numbers of Mute Swan (22,000), Mallard (12,000) and Teal (44,000). The Ural River is significant as a spawning ground for a number of Caspian Sea sturgeon fish species. The site supports more than 460 species of vertebrate animals, including 76 species of fish, 20 species of reptile, 292 bird species and 48 species of mammals. The site is important for transport, and also supports farming activities (pasture, cropping) and tourism. Intensive fishing, navigation and exploration all pose threats to the ecological character of the wetland. The *Koibagar-Tyntyugur Lake System* (58,000 ha) comprises five river-fed, freshwater lakes characterized by a diversity of habitats including extensive shoreline reedbeds, open water and seasonal floodplain wet meadows. The lake system is of great importance for Anseriformes during all periods; up to 200,000 moulting individuals have been recorded during favourable conditions, and as many as 500,000 waterbirds during the period of autumn passage. The site supports 13 bird species on the IUCN Red List, including the Siberian Crane and Sociable Lapwing. The *Kulykol-Taldykol Lake System* (8,300 ha) is a wetland complex comprising two large lakes, Kulykol and Taldykol, and several smaller lakes. It is habitat for 12 bird species on the IUCN Red List, including the Siberian Crane, and supports tens of thousands of Anseriformes during migration and moulting, as well as over 1% of the populations of 12 species of waterbird. It is reported that 45 species of wetland birds nest at the site.

**Congo** has designated three new Ramsar Sites: *Les Rapides du Congo-Djou* (2,500 ha) comprises two important Congo River tributaries and a rich complex of surrounding wetland types. The very large *Sangha-Nouabal Ndoki* (1,525,000 ha), which includes a National Park, comprises the Sangha River and its surroundings. *Ngiri-Tumba-Maindombe* (6,569,624 ha) is *the world's largest Ramsar*



*Site*, a vast area of rainforest, rivers, and lakes on the eastern side of the Congo River.

**Sudan** has designated two new Wetlands of International Importance, both biodiversity-rich coastal areas in Red Sea State. **Dongonab Bay-Marsa Waiyai** (280,000 ha) features an array of coral reefs, mangroves, off-shore islands, soft-bottom mud flats, sand beaches and hard bottom rocky shores. **Suakin-Gulf of Agig** (1,125,000 ha) encompasses the sand flats, lagoons, sand shores and Tokar Delta along the coastline, as well as the marine expanse of the Suakin Archipelago and its coral reefs.

**Bosnia-Herzegovina** celebrated the inscription of **Livanjsko Polje** (45,868 ha) in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. The extensive Livno karst basin is shaped by seasonal floods which provide habitat for up to 70,000 wintering waterbirds, a rare concentration in SE Europe. During the dry season, the receding waters disappear through many sinkholes and leave behind lush pastures, large fens, alluvial forests and good-quality arable peatlands that harbour a rich set of species, including in the least accessible areas, probably the most southern breeding pairs of Eurasian Crane, the symbol of the new Ramsar site. And down in the cave bottoms of the secluded sinkholes, a number of endemic fish survive until the next floods. The Ramsar site covers the entire karst field, arguably the largest in the world, stretching over 60 km between the high tops of the Dinaric Alps east of the Adriatic Sea.

**Korea** has designated three new Ramsar Sites. **Ganghwa Maehwamarum Habitat** (0.3015 ha), *the world's smallest Ramsar Site*, is a human-made rice paddy wetland near the city of Incheon. Because of eco-friendly rice farming at the site, it also functions as a refuge for aquatic plants and insects and benthic invertebrates and fish, which become food sources for migratory birds. The site is also used for educational purposes, and an educational centre is in preparation. **Muljangori-oreum Wetland** (63 ha) is a National Park, UNESCO World Heritage site and Biosphere Reserve that comprises a volcanic crater lake at above 900 m altitude on Jeju Island, with a forest of broad-leaved deciduous trees. **Odaesan National Park Wetlands** (2 ha), a National Park in Gwangwon-do in the northeast, are a complex of three small fens at about 1000 m altitude on Odaesan mountain, including some of the best conserved peatlands in the country.

**Uganda** has added **Rwenzori Mountains** (99,500 ha) to the list of Ramsar sites. It is located in the west of the country, ranging from 1,600 to 5,100 meters above sea level in mountains that are home to one of only three glaciated areas in Africa (with Mounts Kenya and Kilimanjaro).

**Argentina** has named a new Ramsar site: **Lagunas Altoandinas y Puneñas de Catamarca** (1,228,175 ha) lies between 3,010 m and 6,885 m a.s.l. and is part of the Laguna Blanca MAB Biosphere Reserve. It includes a complex of high Andean endorheic river basins representative of the Central Dry Puna: shallow meso- and hypersaline lakes, shallow and deep brackish lakes, and deep hypersaline lakes. Puna Flamingos (19,000) and Andean Flamingos (2,100) gather in this site, representing 18% and 6% of the worldwide population of these species, respectively.

**Mexico** has designated **Humedales de Bahía Adair** (42,430 ha) in Sonora state as its 113th Wetland of International Importance. The site is composed of three types of habitats, including estuaries, artesian wells, and salt marshes, and is located in the Gran Desierto de Altar, one of the most arid and extreme deserts of North America.

## Wader populations decline faster than ever

According to a new publication by Wetlands International, more than half the populations of waders in Europe, West Asia and Africa are declining at an accelerating rate. The new *Atlas of Wader Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia* by Simon Delany, Derek Scott, Tim Dodman and David Stroud (see review in the last issue of the *Bulletin* (116(1):1)) is the first comprehensive overview of key site networks for waders in Europe, West Asia and Africa, and the publication highlights a need for better protection of the key wetlands along their flyways, especially in Africa and the Middle East. The authors say that whilst many European Union member states have established a fairly comprehensive network of protected areas for waders, many of which are Important Bird Areas identified by the BirdLife Partnership, the protection and management of key sites is still far from adequate beyond the EU's borders. The wetlands of the African west coast are under enormous pressures. The sparse water resources in the Sahelian zone are tapped by dams which have turned formerly shallow wetlands into permanently dry lands. Irrigation schemes for the growing human population disrupt the water flow in wetlands such as the shrinking Lake Chad. The *Atlas* also shows that wetlands are often converted to agricultural use – such as in the Tana River Delta in Kenya, which is threatened by conversion to sugar-cane plantations.

[http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/06/wader\\_atlas.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/06/wader_atlas.html)

## BirdLife grant helps endangered shorebird

A grant from the BirdLife International Community Conservation Fund is helping establish a new population of the endangered Shore Plover *Thinornis novaeseelandiae* on Mana Island, off the west coast of Wellington, New Zealand. The project is showing early signs of success. A pair from among 41 juveniles introduced to the island in 2007 hatched and fledged a chick during 2008, and five more young Shore Plovers have fledged in 2009. The first chick was born to one-year-old parents. Shore Plovers normally breed from two years. The sole natural breeding population of Shore Plovers is on Rangatira Island in the Chatham Islands. The species was once widespread around the coast of New Zealand's South Island, but had been extirpated by the 1870s. The global population is estimated to be less than 250 birds, with a total range of just 4 km<sup>2</sup>. The island is a scientific reserve, and Shore Plover joins other successful introductions of New Zealand's endemic bird species that are rare on the mainland, including two more endangered species – Takahe *Porphyrio hochstetteri* and Brown Teal *Anas chlorotis*.

[http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/06/shore\\_plover.html](http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/06/shore_plover.html)

## PUBLICATIONS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

### New issue of the *Arctic Birds* bulletin

Issue 10 of the *Arctic Birds* bulletin has become available for download in pdf format at the website of the Arctic Birds Breeding Conditions Survey (<http://www.arcticbirds.net>). Hardcopies are being sent to all contributors to the survey database in 2008 and previous years, as well as to members



of the International Wader Study Group. Send a request to Mikhail Soloviev ([mikhail-soloviev@yandex.ru](mailto:mikhail-soloviev@yandex.ru)) if you need a copy, but do not belong to the survey or IWSG mailing lists.

### **New release of *Ramsar Sites of the World* book**

The Ministry of Environment Korea, WWT, and UNDP/GEF Korea Wetland Project are pleased to announce the publication of *Ramsar Sites of the World* book in support of the goals of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands. This new publication shows exemplary conservation practices at 17 Ramsar sites around the world: South Korea, Mali, China, India, Iran, Japan, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK, Brazil, Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Twenty-four wetland experts and more than 40 photographers deliver a vivid description of Ramsar sites in 17 countries and willingly donated resources to make this publication possible. We certainly hope that their effort will encourage people to take action for the precious wetlands in the world. You can download the book at <http://koreawetland.org/en/sub05.asp>

### **Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Forum**

Rainforest Alliance has launched the bilingual Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Forum ([www.eco-index.org/forums/birds](http://www.eco-index.org/forums/birds)), which aims to provide migratory bird conservation organizations, government agencies and researchers with a bilingual platform to facilitate collaboration and cooperation across geographic and language barriers. The forum is organized by the following categories: News/Event Information; Bird-Friendly Agriculture; Climate Change; Ecosystem Restoration; Environmental Education; Monitoring/Inventories; Southern Wings; and a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Group category.

### **AFRING (African Bird Ringing Scheme) website is now live**

The African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement and the Animal Demography Unit are pleased to announce that the AFRING (African Bird Ringing Scheme) website is now live at [www.afring.org](http://www.afring.org). The principal aims of the site are to provide information and links to bird ringers in Africa and

around the world relating to African bird ringing initiatives, access to ringing data and on-line mechanisms for reporting recovered metal rings or re-sightings of colour rings. This will all contribute to establishing regional cooperation and encouraging use of scientific data for bird and wetland conservation. The site will be continually updated and further developments are already in the pipeline to provide more information and resources.

*Thanks to Les Underhill for this item.*

### **. . . AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST!**

#### **Hidden treasure in Brown Hyena pooh**

A metal bird-band was recovered from the pooh of a Brown Hyena in Namibia, which was identified to have belonged to a White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*. Whether the unlucky previous owner was taken by the hyena alive or had died of other causes remains unknown. For more details go to <http://safring.adu.org.za/>



Brown Hyena, also known as strandwolf. Photo by Dr Ingrid Wiesel.

*Thanks to Les Underhill for this item.*

