



Darwin Initiative Annual Report



1. Darwin Project Information

Project Reference	19-012
Project Title	Saving the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper from global extinction
Host Country/ies	Russia and Myanmar (and various countries across the East Asian-Australasian Flyway)
UK contract holder institution	RSPB
Host country partner institutions	WWT, BirdLife International, Birds Russia, Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA), Moscow Zoo and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force (through the EAAFP & BirdLife International).
Other partner institutions	
Darwin Grant Value	£295,437
Start/end dates of project	1 st April 2012 – 31 st March 2015
Reporting period (eg Apr 2012 – Mar 2013) and number (eg Annual Report 1, 2, 3)	Annual Report 2 – 2013/2014
Project Leader name	Dr Rob Sheldon, RSPB
Project website	www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com
Report authors, main contributors and date	Rob Sheldon, Baz Hughes, Becky Rush, Mike Crosby, Vivian Fu, Nicola Crockford, Sue Samuel, Pyae Phyo Aung, Paul Insua-Cao.

2. Project Background

With a population that is thought to number approximately 100 pairs, and has declined at approximately 25% per year in recent years, the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* appears to be heading towards extinction faster than any other bird species. Without emergency action, it will probably be gone within 10 to 20 years, and is likely to be beyond saving well before then. The loss of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) would be particularly disastrous because it is evolutionarily distinct, and because it is a flagship species for the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF).

The SBS nests on tundra shorelines in far eastern Russia, and migrates south along the western Pacific seaboard to winter in intertidal areas in South Asia. The most acute current cause of decline is believed to be illegal trapping and hunting, primarily on the wintering grounds, and above all in the Gulf of Martaban in Myanmar, where more than half of the global population appears to winter. In Martaban, poorer members of fishing communities catch waders as a source of protein and income.

In addition, the species' long-term future is likely to be jeopardised by rapid infrastructure development along the EAAF. This problem affects not just SBS, but also many other birds and millions of people who depend on the region's natural resources. The precipitous decline of waterbirds along the EAAF is one of the gravest bird extinction crises on Earth. As well as SBS, at least 24 other globally threatened or near-threatened waterbirds depend on intertidal areas in the flyway, together with a further nine that maybe red-listed soon.

3. Project Partnerships

The project partnership remains strong with regular meetings of the key partners and sub-sets of the partners. The UK and Russian partners have had several face-to-face meetings during the course of the last 12 months. In January 2014 Evgeny Syroechkovskiy (Birds Russia) visited the UK for a range of Spoon-billed Sandpiper project meetings, including a full day meeting on the major SBS work that is underway (including Darwin and SOS projects). The meeting was attended by all the key UK-based organisations working on SBS, including the SBS Task Force Co-ordinator, Christoph Zöckler (ArcCona Consulting).

Other opportunities for project updates and planning were taken at the International Wader Study Group Conference in Germany in September 2013. Additional side-meetings were held at the UK Birdfair in August 2012 as well as specific project meetings at the RSPB, WWT and BirdLife headquarters.

In July 2013, Debbie Pain (WWT) and Tim Stowe (RSPB) visited the breeding grounds as part of a Heritage Expeditions expedition to look for new breeding sites.

The project leader visited BANCA in Myanmar on two separate occasions for project planning and to assist with training of shorebird surveyors in the Gulf of Mottama. In October a monitoring workshop for BirdLife partners was held in Thailand which led to the implementation of a co-ordinated count in December.

Baz Hughes, Rebecca Lee (WWT), Rob Sheldon and Sue Samuel (RSPB) have met on two occasions, and held numerous telephone conferences throughout the year to ensure effective budget management of the project. The financial management of this project needs to be integrated with a SOS –funded project awarded to WWT. These regular co-ordination meetings have been extremely valuable in ensuring effective financial management.

A particular challenge has been working in Myanmar. The project partner is in a state of flux with the organisation being re-structured significantly. Relationships remain very strong and the project leader has visited the BANCA office in November 2013. The RSPB's Country Programme in Myanmar is underway with a full-time Partner Development Officer working in the region focussed on Myanmar (and Thailand). This will greatly enhance the delivery of the Darwin project.

Various meetings have been held between the Project Leader and BirdLife International staff including, Cristi Nozawa (Regional Director of BirdLife International – Asia Division), Becky Rush (Darwin-funded Asia Flyway Policy Officer), Simba Chan and Mike Crosby (BirdLife Asia Senior Conservation Officers), including discussions about SBS conservation as part of the Darwin project, but also in other focal countries such as China and Bangladesh.

Two issues of the SBS Task Force newsletter were produced by Christoph Zöckler in his role as the Task Force Co-ordinator. These were disseminated to all project partners and a wide-range of stakeholders in the region. They are available on the EAAFP web-site: <http://www.eaaflyway.net/spoon-billed-sandpiper.php>

As well as specific meetings outlined above, there is regular email, phone and skype communication between all of the partners.

Other Collaboration:

Further work has been undertaken with IUCN to implement the *Resolution 28 on the Conservation of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and its threatened waterbirds, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea*. This has involved a vast array of stakeholders working across the flyway (see Section 4.1)

Strong links have been developed between RSPB and the SBS project in Bangladesh, primarily due to the SOS project with WWT. Much of the work has focused on the protection of the key wintering site at Sonadia Island. Sayam Chowdhury has visited the UK for project discussions and Rob Sheldon has visited Bangladesh twice to develop plans for awareness raising and future casework. Sayam Chowdhury was awarded a Darwin Fellowship grant in April 2014.

We've encouraged the exchange of best practice between the staff involved in the Myanmar component of the Darwin project and the SOS team in Bangladesh. Sayam Chowdhury and the Project Leader visited the Gulf of Mottama in November to help develop the survey skills of BANCA staff. Further exchange visits are planned for this year.

A Spoon-billed Sandpiper monitoring workshop was held for BirdLife partners in Thailand in October and was facilitated by the Project Leader. As mentioned above, this led to an initiative to undertake a co-ordinated count between 15-21st December 2013 with project partners from a range of key Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering sites. BirdLife partners and other organisations from China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Thailand and Myanmar took part in the counts.

4. Project Progress

4.1 Progress in carrying out project activities

Output 1: Mortality due to trapping in the Gulf of Martaban (now known as Mottama) is further reduced, and this reduction is secured for the long term through the creation of local plans and institutions to promote sustainable and equitable use of the gulf's natural resources

The local partner, BANCA, has continued to strengthen their relationships with the local communities in the Gulf of Mottama. Four local conservation groups (LCGs) have been established in one township in Bago Region and three townships in Mon State; Bilin (Koe Te Su village), Thahton (Aung Kan Thar village) and Paung (Ahlat village). Members of these LCGs include ex-bird hunters. They have been given training on environmental awareness raising, SBS ecology/conservation and patrolling techniques. Through the project the LCGs have also been equipped with motorbikes and boats for patrolling. While hunting has been curtailed, there was one record of a SBS accidentally caught in a fishing net in December. It was taken by the fisherman to the Aung Kan Thar LCG leader who, took some photos then, released it immediately.

Regular survey has been undertaken by BANCA in the Gulf of Mottama with the support of the LCGs. Training and support has been given on survey techniques and identification by the Project Leader and Sayam Chowdhury (Annex 3.1)

BANCA worked in seven villages¹ along the east coast of the Gulf of Mottama (i.e. Mon State) to conduct surveys for Sustainable Resource Use and Development Plans (SRUDP), PRA tools such as interview, transect walks, village mapping, power analysis, wealth ranking and various matrices resources users and managers and village time line history. These plans are being developed. In the meantime, the results have been informing the livelihood and conservation needs of a planned Swiss-funded project to support community development in Mon State. With additional co-financing from the BBC Wildlife Fund, BANCA has been supporting five villages with freshwater ponds, which serve about 4,500 people. Before the provision of freshwater ponds, village-level water management committees were established.

Local markets have been monitored showing a marked decline in the sale of shorebirds.

A national Spoon-billed Sandpiper Action Plan is currently in draft format with the National Government, and BANCA are working with the relevant departments to get the plan recognised. This will provide an invaluable framework to deliver co-ordinated conservation work for the species across the country.

Progress towards indicators: the focus on training and capacity building of BANCA will act as an excellent springboard to achieve all the indicators outlined in the project local framework during 2014 – 2015.

Output 2: Proposal developed for a Protected Area within the Gulf of Mottama, together with a Zonation Plan for critical parts of the Burmese coastline specifying which areas can be developed and which should be protected

Boundary demarcation took place throughout the whole of the Gulf of Mottama during March and April 2014. It was officially led by staff of the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MOECAF), i.e. the Ministry with the responsibility for commitments to the Ramsar Convention. BANCA staff provided technical and logistical support. Also present were local government representatives, particularly with representatives of the equivalent of cadastral departments. In principle the high-tide mark was taken as the outer boundary of the Ramsar site and local community leaders were involved in identifying where the effective boundary should be. Data was then used by local authorities to prepare maps. The demarcation process is complicated by the need to cover two regions, Bago and Yangon and Mon State. In addition there are a diverse suite of resource-users and stakeholders in the large area of over 200,000ha. Mon State, which incorporates about half the shore line of the proposed Ramsar site is more progressive, having been exposed to more of the work that BANCA has been conducting among villages and understands the implications of the Ramsar site more clearly. A map was prepared more quickly for Mon State. Bago and Yangon Regions have been slower because of their need to conduct more consultations with other government departments concerning land-use planning. The Gulf of Mottama remains a national priority for MOECAF to designate as a Ramsar site (Myanmar currently only has one Ramsar site), however they require more consultation in order to identify a management system to coordinate two regions, one state and the various different stakeholders therein. The other Ramsar site in Myanmar is a MOECAF-managed wildlife sanctuary as are the other two priorities on their list, therefore Ramsar site management is conceivably simpler. Following further consultation, including a joint RSPB-BANCA visit to MOECAF in the capital Nyapyitaw in November, the revised strategy is to focus on Mon State first, and once established expand the Ramsar site to cover other areas. It should be noted that the bottom-up approach needed for development and management of the proposed Ramsar site is progressive to MOECAF and Myanmar. In the meantime, consultations with local communities are on-going, supplemented with BANCA's livelihood support and operations of the LCGs.

¹ Koedaesu, Kayarsiaung, Myasein, Zokali, Ngew Thuang Yan villages (Bilin Township), Aung Kan Thar village (Thahton Township), Khin Tan village (Paung Township)

Both the Gulf of Mottama and Nan Thar Island have now been declared Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) by BirdLife International (<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/site/search>)

Progress towards indicators: progress has been slower than expected due to the reasons stated above, but we remain hopeful that we will achieve Protected Area status in the Gulf of Mottama before the end of the project. The focus for the next six months is on Mon State, with extra resources allocated for consultation in other parts of the Gulf.

Output 3: Knowledge of the distribution of SBS outside the breeding season enhanced, together with knowledge of the use made of key sites by local communities

The BirdLife China Programme has supported the China Coastal Waterbird Census, which conducts monthly monitoring of waterbirds at 13 coastal wetlands including at least two of which support important populations of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (BirdLife Partner) and several mainland Chinese bird watching societies conducted a Spoon-billed Sandpiper survey during winter 2013/14 which recorded the species at several sites and confirmed that southern China is an important wintering area for the species.

In Fucheng of Leizhou Peninsular, Guangdong Province, three Spoon-billed Sandpipers were sighted in late November 2013, which is the second wintering record since 2012. Two spring surveys of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and monitoring of illegal mist-nets for bird trapping were conducted in March and April 2014 respectively, covering most part of Guangdong Province (Annex 3.2). Three Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded in Xitou, Yangxi County. Spoon-billed Sandpipers have been recorded in this area for 3 consecutive years, highlighting the importance of Xitou as a stop-over site. Illegal mist-nets sighted during project surveys were reported to the local Forestry Department. The number of mist-nets appears to be declining due to collaboration with the Forestry Department and through local media activities and awareness raising.

Targeted educational work had been carried out in March at one of the illegal mist-net 'black spots' in Xitou, exhibition boards were displayed near the local market and promotional leaflets were distributed to villagers during the government-initiated "Birds Loving Week" held in late March. This provided an opportunity for us to work with local forestry department directly.

Elsewhere in China, significant numbers of Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded at Rudong, north of Shanghai, in October 2013. The local group 'Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China' with support from Dr Nigel Clark (BTO), Evgeny Syroechkovskiy (Birds Russia & SBS Task Force Chairman), Christoph Zockler (SBS Task Force Co-ordinator), Gavin Thomas (RSPB) and other international colleagues, undertook surveys and held training workshops. A record total of 140 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were recorded. The importance of the area has been recognised by the local authorities and a protected area established which will hopefully lead to better protection of this crucial stop-over site.

In Vietnam, surveys were conducted in December in the coastal areas of the Red River and Mekong Delta in the north and south of the country respectively. There were no records in the north, although any records in the past have been limited to one or two individuals so any individuals may easily have been missed, and seven individuals were counted in the south at one site. The principle sites for spoon-billed sandpiper have been largely identified along with required conservation needs. A site visit to the Mekong Delta was conducted by the RSPB with local counterpart organisation Viet Nature in April 2014. An action plan for the spoon-billed sandpiper will be prepared in the very near future.

The *Recording information on Spoon-billed Sandpipers to aid their conservation* leaflet (that we reported on in the last annual report) has now been translated into Thai, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Japanese, and distributed throughout the BirdLife Partnership and other networks widely. This leaflet formed the basis of a monitoring workshop held in Thailand in October 2013 for BirdLife partners (Annex 3.3). There were attendees from all the key non-breeding range states, including BANCA, Myanmar. The workshop was facilitated by Rob Sheldon and focussed on standardising survey methods and data recording. A key output from the workshop was the desire to implement a co-ordinated count in December at all the known key wintering sites, as well as less well known sites – for example the Red River and Mekong Delta area already mentioned above. A total of 80 individuals were recorded during the survey period 15th – 22nd December, and the results are summarised below:-

Country	Site	Date	Maximum number	Comments
China	Minjiang Estuary	22nd	4	Co-ordinated by Huang Ping
	Leizhou, Guangdong	16th – 17th	0	Co-ordinated by Vivian Fu & Jonathan Martinez
	Hong Kong – Tam Kon Chau*	16th	1	Information from Paul Leader, via Vivian Fu
Vietnam	Quan Lon Island/Red River Delta		1	Co-ordinated by Trai Le Trong, Viet Nature
	Mekong Delta		3	Co-ordinated by Hoang Thanh Ha, Viet Nature
Thailand	Inner Gulf of Thailand	16 th – 21 st	9	Co-ordinated by Mongkol Pajangthonasaris, Phil Round & Wicha Narangsri
Bangladesh	Sonadia Island	20 th	16	Co-ordinated by Sayam Chowdhury & Mohammad Foysal
Myanmar	Gulf of Mottama		32	Co-ordinated by Phylolay, Kolay & Lay Win
	Gulf of Mottama – Aung Kan Thar		3	Co-ordinated by Phylolay, Kolay & Lay Win
	Nan Thar	19 th & 20 th	11	Co-ordinated by Rennaungsoe
TOTAL			80	

A manuscript is currently at final draft stage that details the potential winter and passage distribution of the SBS. The paper by Zöckler, Bunting, Beresford, Engler, Faulkmann and Buchanan will be submitted to a high impact peer-reviewed scientific journal by the end of 2014. The focus of the paper was to compare different modelling methods to identify candidate sites. No new major sites were identified, but China was highlighted as a key passage country for the species. The paper reinforces what we know about key sites that are currently the focus of this and other major SBS projects.

Progress towards indicators: good progress has been made on the survey work component of the indicator, and the foundations have been laid for gathering information on local community activities along the flyway. We expect the indicators to be more than met in full by end of project.

Output 4: Awareness raised among decision-makers and the public in relevant countries of the importance of intertidal habitats along the East Asian–Australasian flyway for ecosystem services (e.g. flood protection), local livelihoods (e.g. through the support of vital shellfisheries) and biodiversity, and of the urgent need for key threats to these habitats to be tackled

Significant progress has been made in the implementation of IUCN World Conservation Congress 2012 Resolution 28 on 'Conservation of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and its threatened waterbirds, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea'. Three meetings across the flyway are planned for 2014 and this has taken a significant amount of planning in the last 6 months. These workshops will bring together academics, site managers and government representatives from across Southeast Asia to raise awareness of the importance of conservation of, and threats to, the intertidal zone of the EAAF, with significant progress made towards their planning. Two of these are national meetings that will be held in China (September 16-17, 2014) and Korea (likely October 2014), while the third meeting will be held in Singapore (June 12-13, 2014) bringing together the ASEAN countries plus Bangladesh. For the meeting in Singapore, planning is close to completion. Target attendees will be government representatives from across South East Asia, site managers from EAAFP Flyway sites in the region and academics working in the field. At the time of writing, speakers, accommodation and venue had been confirmed, and invitations to participants had gone out.

A meeting is also planned for November 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand which will bring together the BirdLife Asia Partnership as well as a number of other relevant Partners (e.g. from the USA, Australia, New Zealand) and those Partners who undertake work in the region (e.g. from the UK, the Netherlands) to discuss and develop a strategy for the conservation of the Central Asian Flyway and the EAAF.

BirdLife is also involved in a new initiative by the Paulson Institute and the State Forestry Administration of China which aims to influence policy and development decisions impacting the coast of China.

In May 2013 a proposal was submitted to the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services to undertake an assessment of the ecosystem services arising from the intertidal areas of EAAF. The BirdLife proposal gathered 20 co-supporters. The outcome of this proposal is still yet to be determined.

A workshop to build capacity for the BirdLife Partnership to engage in advocacy for the conservation of key sites was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia between July 29 and August 2, 2013. A total of 21 participants from all 14 BirdLife Partners and Country Programmes in Asia attended the 'Communications and Policy/Advocacy Training' workshop. One important outcome of the workshop has been the establishment of an Asia Casework Taskforce, a forum for Partner staff who undertake casework to share experience, develop ideas and provide support and expertise on casework for the conservation of key sites in Asia.

Illegal hunting is a major threat to *Spoon-billed Sandpiper* in several parts of its range. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and the BirdLife China Programme have taken successful action to address this threat in southern China by passing on information about the locations of hunters' mist-nets to the local authorities, who have removed large numbers of nets. Additionally, BirdLife is working with the Chinese State Forestry Administration (the agency in charge of illegal hunting enforcement) to increase enforcement and co-host a national workshop on addressing illegal hunting in China in November 2014.

Progress towards indicators: Significant progress has been made and we will exceed the indicators by the end of project.

Output 5: Robust captive population established to act as a source of birds for augmentation of the wild population, to prevent it falling below a critical level from which recovery is impossible (or for rapid reintroduction, if the worst happens and the wild population goes extinct) – and Russian capacity in this field significantly enhanced

In May 2014, the captive population comprised 25 birds (16 males and nine females) living in specially-designed biosecure aviaries in Slimbridge (Annex 3.4). Through a carefully managed breeding programme, the size of the flock will be built up to the point where eggs can be transported to the Russian Far East, to be hatched, reared and released on the breeding grounds.

In addition to the conservation breeding initiative in the UK, eggs were collected in 2012 and 2013 to attempt a technique called headstarting, in-situ, in Russia. Headstarting involved hatching Spoon-billed Sandpiper eggs in incubators and raising chicks in brooders in Meinypil'gyno. Young birds were then marked with uniquely coded leg-flags and placed in a large predator-proof aviary on the tundra, before releasing them when they could fly at approximately 23 days. In November 2013, two of the 2013 headstarted birds were seen at stop-over and wintering sites in Asia – one at a salt pan near Bangkok in Thailand, and another on a fish pond in Fucheng, southern China. One of the 2012 birds was also seen in Taiwan in April - on spring migration back to the breeding grounds. An adult male bird, known to have produced a total of six chicks in 2013 (three chicks that were headstarted and another three from a second brood) was seen on a disused salt-pan at Khok Kham on the Inner Gulf of Thailand. Headstarting shows great potential to boost the wild population and will be evaluated by monitoring the return rate of leg-flagged birds.

During the 2013 expedition a Moscow Zoo vet student, Juriy Bragin, again assisted WWT staff with the headstarting programme, as did expedition team members Nikolay Yakushev and Nastya Syestnova. Unfortunately Juriy will no longer be working on the project in future as he is leaving to continue his veterinary studies, but the team will be joined by new Moscow Zoo staff in 2014.

Progress towards indicators: all indicators have been achieved. The one exception is the breeding of captive birds in 2013. This was not achieved although the birds did show signs of breeding behaviour. It is thought that the stress of moving birds as chicks between Anadyr, Moscow and the UK has resulted in slower development and adaptation to captive conditions of this 1st cohort. We are confident that the birds from this cohort will breed in 2014 and possibly also some of the birds transferred to the UK in 2012.

All of the project activities were undertaken on time and to a very high standard.

4.2 Progress towards project outputs

Overall project progress has been very good, and we are on track to achieve most, if not all, of the stated outputs. The package of work across the breeding grounds, the flyway and the wintering grounds is setting an excellent foundation to secure the future conservation status of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The project is adapting well to the rapidly changing political situation in Myanmar, and we are in a strong position through BANCA, to support and influence the National Government's future conservation priorities. The captive breeding programme at WWT Slimbridge is making solid progress, and the innovative technique of headstarting has the potential to both boost the population in the wild, and also to provide us invaluable information on how to reintroduce captive bred birds back into the breeding grounds.

4.3 Standard Measures

Further consultation is required with project partners to accurately report the Project Standard Output Measures – this is an action outstanding from last year, and a completed table will be included in the next half year report.

Table 1 Project Standard Output Measures (not completed)

Code No.	Description	Year 1 Total	Total to date	Number planned for reporting period	Total planned during the project
4A	Number of undergraduate students to receive training				20
4B	Number of training weeks to be provided				18
4C	Number of postgraduate students to receive training				10
4D	Number of training weeks to be provided				18
6A	Number of people to receive other forms of education/training (which does not fall into categories 1-5 above)				10
6B	Number of training weeks to be provided				20
7	Number of (ie different types - not volume - of material produced) training materials to be produced for use by host country				2
8	Number of weeks to be spent by UK project staff on project work in the host country				22
9	Number of species/habitat management plans (or action plans) to be produced for Governments, public authorities, or other implementing agencies in the host country				3
11B	Number of papers to be submitted to peer reviewed journals				5
14A	Number of conferences/seminars/workshops to be organised to present/disseminate findings				1
14B	Number of conferences/seminars/workshops attended at which findings from Darwin project work will be presented/ disseminated.				4
15A	Number of national press releases in host country(ies)				8
15B	Number of local press releases in host country(ies)				
15C	Number of national press releases in UK				4
15D	Number of local press releases in UK				
16A	Number of newsletters to be produced				6
16B	Estimated circulation of each newsletter in the host country(ies)				500
16C	Estimated circulation of each newsletter in the UK				500
20	Estimated value (£'s) of physical assets to be handed over to host country(ies)	£10,000			
23	Value of resources raised from other sources (ie in addition to Darwin funding) for project work	£201,707			

Table 2 Publications

Type (eg journals, manual, CDs)	Detail (title, author, year)	Publishers (name, city)	Available from (eg contact address, website)	Cost £
Information booklet	<i>Recording information on Spoon-billed Sandpipers to aid their conservation</i> , 2013 Now also available in Thai, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese		http://www.eaaflyway.net/documents/Final%20SBS%20records%20factsheet_online_english.pdf	Free to download
Technical report	<i>IUCN situation analysis on East and Southeast Asian intertidal habitats, with particular reference to the Yellow Sea (including the Bohai Sea)</i> . 2012 Russian translation underway	IUCN, Switzerland, UK	Available in English, Korean, Chinese at http://www.iucn.org/about/work/programmes/species/our_work/regional_initiatives/asian_coastal_wetlands/	Free to download

4.4 Progress towards the project purpose and outcomes

Project purpose: To implement the highest-priority actions needed to ensure the continued existence of SBS in the wild over the next 10 years and secure the longer-term future of this species' migratory flyway, taking full account of the need to integrate these conservation goals with the development needs of the people living along the flyway. Actions to include vital livelihood-related activities in the Gulf of Martaban in Myanmar, building on previous activities to reduce hunting pressure at this key site.

All work is on track to achieve the project purpose, outputs and key activities. The work during the first two years of the Darwin project has been to a very high standard. All work has contributed significantly to the overall project purpose and all expected outcomes are largely on track.

4.5 Progress towards impact on biodiversity, sustainable use or equitable sharing of biodiversity benefits

We remain confident that the conservation prospects for the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed sandpiper will be enhanced once the Darwin project is completed in March 2015. The conservation status of the species will not be changed but its imminent extinction will have been averted. This will be a significant conservation achievement for a species that utilises one of the most threatened migratory flyways on the planet. There is much work to be done to ensure the sustainable development of this flyway, and this project is making a significant contribution.

5. Monitoring, evaluation and lessons

Progress is monitored through a combination of regular 1:1 updates between key partners, broader meetings, and email correspondence. Contracts are drawn up between RSPB (as host partner) and project partners that have objectives and work plans which reflect the Darwin log-frame and activities. End of contract reports are then provided to the Project Leader to check on progress. This combination of approaches has worked well during the first two years of the project.

6. Actions taken in response to previous reviews (if applicable)

Not applicable

7. Other comments on progress not covered elsewhere

The design of the Darwin project remains as outlined in the original application, although the links with many other projects and stakeholders has been greater than originally expected. The utilisation of the international conventions, notably IUCN, has added real value to the project (see section 4.1), and we envisage the implementation of the IUCN Resolution across the flyway will make a significant difference to inter-tidal habitat conservation across the flyway. We could not have predicted the success of this approach whilst preparing the original application.

We have also developed collaboration with more national and international organisations across the flyway than we had initially envisaged. Not all of this work is funded through the Darwin project but is integrally linked to the objectives of our work. The co-ordinated count reported elsewhere in this report is a prime example of this, where organisations from across China, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Thailand co-ordinated survey efforts for the first time with our Darwin project partner in Myanmar.

The development of the 'headstarting' technique to complement the captive breeding programme is also a significant step to boost the declining population. Whilst not part of the Darwin project, we will include the progress of this work in future reports as the technique emerged from our work on the conservation breeding programme.

Although we haven't experienced any major difficulties that are severely limiting our ability to deliver the Darwin project, we should mention that BANCA, our project partner in Myanmar, have undergone rapid change in their organisational development, following the departure of their long-standing Chairman. During these changes BANCA have continued to deliver their project requirements and remain committed to the Darwin project

8. Sustainability

The profile of the project within the main breeding grounds of *Meinypil'gyno* is high with local people benefitting from the project through the provision of goods and services to the expedition teams, and direct employment of a number of individuals. This high profile is due to the excellent work of Evgeny Syroechkovskiy and his Birds Russia colleagues.

The SBS project has high profile within the two UK institutions, RSPB and WWT, and is used within a wide-range of communications (see Annex 3.5). Furthermore, SBS is a high profile species for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway and is seen by many organisations and individuals as an excellent flagship species for influencing changes in wider land-use planning to slow the rate of inter-tidal habitat loss (see IUCN report, Section 4). Several BirdLife International partners along the flyway are actively working for the conservation of Spoon-billed Sandpiper, in particular Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (and BirdLife's China Programme), Bird Conservation Society of Thailand and BANCA. They have projects for the conservation of key sites, conduct surveys and monitoring, and use Spoon-billed Sandpiper as a flagship species for education and wider advocacy programmes. The SBS work was given high profile at the recent BirdLife World Congress in Ottawa.

Many of the project partners mentioned above will continue to undertake conservation activities for Spoon-billed Sandpiper once the Darwin project has ended in March 2015. RSPB, WWT and BirdLife International are committed to continue fund-raising efforts, as well as using core funds, to maintain the recent momentum in the conservation of the species.

9. Dissemination

Both RSPB and WWT use SBS in a wide-range of communications to their membership and beyond, RSPB has included SBS work in 'Birds' magazine which is sent to RSPB members and is read by 576,000 people. Similarly WWT have had several feature articles in 'WaterLife' which has a readership of approximately 206,000 individuals.

We provide regular project updates via www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com through blogposts and news items. The site is maintained by WWT, and is widely read. Most visits were from the UK and USA, but it was encouraging to see visitors from across Asia and Australasia, including current and former flyway countries.

A comprehensive list of articles and news features is maintained by WWT, and a summary is provided in Annex 3.5.

10. Project Expenditure

Project expenditure during the reporting period (1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014)

ITEM	BUDGET	EXPENDITURE	VARIANCE
Staff costs (UK partners)	-	-	0%
Staff costs (Host country partners)			0%
Staff costs; sub-total			
Consultancy costs (UK partners)	-	-	0%
Consultancy costs (Host country partners)			0%
Consultancy costs; sub-total			
Overhead costs (UK partners)	-	-	0%
Overhead costs (Host country partners)			0%
Overhead costs; sub-total			
Travel & subsistence costs (UK partners)			0%
Travel & subsistence costs (Host country partners)			0%
Travel & subsistence; sub-total			
Operating costs (UK partners)	-	-	0%
Operating costs (Host country partners)	-	-	0%
Operating costs; sub-total	-	-	
Capital equipment (UK partners)	-	-	0%
Capital equipment (Host country partners)	-	-	0%
Capital equipment; sub-total	-	-	
Other costs (UK partners)	-	-	0%
Other costs (Host country partners) Martaban tube wells for villages			0%
Other costs (Host country partners) Flyway officer; supplies/communications etc			0%
Other costs; sub-total			
GRAND TOTAL			

Note: The above expenditure figures are indicative at this stage, based on amounts disbursed to Partner Organisations and are subject to submission of Q4 financial claim.

The project has operated a budget cap policy with regard to expenditure incurred in the project area. Thus, when the budget for a particular budget category has been fully expended, no further costs are charged to that budget category, and instead are funded from other sources. It is for this reason that the above table shows expenditure matching budget for many of the specified budget categories

11. OPTIONAL: Outstanding achievements of your project during the reporting period (300-400 words maximum). This section may be used for publicity purposes

I agree for LTS and the Darwin Secretariat to publish the content of this section (please leave this line in to indicate your agreement to use any material you provide here)

This year has seen excellent progress in the battle to save the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper from global extinction. On the breeding grounds, the innovative technique of headstarting has been hugely successful, with 16 fledged birds released in 2013, to add to the 9 released in 2012. It has been particularly exciting to have a number of sightings of the headstarted birds at various places along the flyway. In November, one of the 2013 birds was seen at a salt pan in Bangkok, and another one at a fish pond in Fucheng, China. The captive population at WWT Slimbridge is doing well and many of the birds are exhibiting the early signs of breeding behaviour. The project team are confident that the birds will breed for the first time in captivity this year.

In December 2013, the first ever co-ordinated count of SBS at key wintering sites was undertaken in China, Vietnam, Thailand, Bangladesh and Myanmar, with a total of 80 individuals seen between the 16-21st.

High profile international collaboration through IUCN has led to positive discussions with many governments along the flyway. Building on these will be crucial if we are to reduce the speed and extent of inter-tidal habitat loss that the Spoon-billed Sandpiper requires. The Darwin project has complemented this work through collating site-level information which will be used to inform a series of workshops in 2014. It is clear that protecting the flyway is a huge challenge but the foundations are being put in place to give us the best chance of success.

Reducing mortality on the key wintering grounds in Myanmar and Bangladesh is continuing to be successful, and strong links are being made across the wintering grounds between partners involved in this Darwin project and one funded by SOS. Excellent progress is being made with protecting key sites, with the Gulf of Mottama in the final stages of Ramsar designation, and Sonadia Island in Bangladesh recently declared an Important Bird Area (IBA).

There is still a long way to go in the race to save the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, but the partnership between RSPB, WWT, BTO, Birds Russia, ArcCona, Moscow Zoo, the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, BirdLife International and many others, is making solid progress. For updates, visit www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com