

Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Eurynorhynchus pygmeus

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The situation for this charismatic species is rapidly worsening with less than ten birds seen on the regular migration sites in South Korea in spring 2008.

Photo: © Choi Soons-Kyoo

South Korea, 2003

Population: 50-249	REASON FOR CR-LISTING DECLINE POPULATION RANGE
THREATS Infrastructure development, agriculture, dams & water use	

History

1758 – described by Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778) as *Platalea pygmaea*.

1821 – Swedish zoologist Sven Nilsson (1787-1883) places it in the genus *Eurynorhynchus*.

1914 – two Spoon-billed Sandpipers are collected from a flock of ten in Alaska, USA on August 15th.

1970s – the population is thought to number 2,000 – 2,800 pairs.

2000 – numbers are estimated at less than 1,000 pairs.

2003 – 402-572 pairs are estimated.

2004 – a juvenile Spoon-billed Sandpiper leg-flagged in Chukotka, Russia in July is seen on Yuboo Island, South Korea in September. Four wintering birds in southern India disappear after the tsunami.

2005 – 350-380 breeding pairs.



2007 – perhaps less than 100 pairs are estimated. A breeding male from Chukotka is shot in Russia near the Chinese border on southbound migration.

2008 – 84 Spoon-billed Sandpipers are found at Myanmar wetlands in January by the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team. The wetlands are deemed to be in a healthy state. At least 15 birds are seen in a shorebird flock in Bangladesh in April. Surveys in South Korea fail to find the usual spring influx, only three and four birds are found at Saemageum and Geum respectively.

This peculiar sandpiper breeds in north-eastern Russia and migrates along the Pacific to winter in South-East Asia where the most important known occurrences are in Myanmar. It has probably always been scarce due to its specialised ecology, but the decrease has been marked over the last 40 years in all colonies. Breeding success is low, with 0.66 fledged young recorded per nest in 2005 and it seems that the return rate of juveniles is low, meaning that the population is ageing and rapidly declining. It breeds in June-July and lays four eggs in a nest. It has never been recorded more than seven km from the coast and favours lagoon spits with crowberry-lichen vegetation or dwarf birch and willow sedges, together with adjacent estuary or mudflat habitats that are used as feeding sites by adults during nesting. The main concern is the disappearance of important staging sites, mudflats and lagoons that are reclaimed for industry, infrastructure and aquaculture purposes and which have become polluted. The Saemangeum and Geum estuary of South Korea is one such important staging site that has been destroyed recently. It is not directly targeted for hunting, but

in Myanmar it may be caught among other waders trapped for consumption. On the breeding grounds nests can sometimes be destroyed by reindeer or herder's dogs. Human disturbance of breeding grounds has also occurred, including collection of eggs of one colony for "scientific purposes" which wiped it out completely. Climate change and associated habitat shifts are expected to impact negatively on this species which depends on tundra habitat for breeding. There are several protected areas in its breeding grounds and along the migration routes. Actions required are close monitoring of the breeding grounds and stopping the collection of birds and eggs for scientific purposes and asserting that field researchers do not disturb the birds. Legal protection must be awarded for all known sites and surveys of wintering areas in India, Myanmar and Bangladesh should be performed. Legal protection should be established in all range states and new sites, especially in South Korea, should be protected as well as old ones restored. Awareness campaigns to stop shorebird hunting would surely benefit this species.



Baan Pak Taley, Phetburi Province, Thailand, 2006



Kapar Power Station, Selangor, Malaysia, 2008

Photo: © Chaiwat Chinuparawat

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