

## **Spoon-billed sandpiper expedition Bangladesh 2006**

At least 11 of the globally endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper were found at three sites along the coast of Bangladesh in January, during an international expedition of Bangladeshi, British, German and Russian Ornithologists, organised by the Wildlife Trust for Bangladesh and ArcCona Consulting Cambridge and funded by the German-based Manfred-Hermsen-Foundation. The findings are raising hopes for the survival of the birds, whose population has declined to just 300-350 pairs in the wild. The sightings are all from previously unknown sites and crucial in the understanding of its wintering. It is now assumed that the species is much more scattered, with the core wintering areas along the mudflats between the Gulf of Thailand and possibly Vietnam in the East and the Eastern shores of Bangladesh in the West. No birds were found in the Western part of Bangladesh, coinciding with a lack of sightings on the East coast of India at last year's expedition in West Bengal. Bangladesh and possibly Myanmar, from where no information is available, are highly important. In this respect, it is of great concern that so many mudflats were found degraded or converted into prawn farms or salt pans with out the vital intertidal exchange of saltwater, critical for the species feeding grounds. These mudflats are disappearing at an alarming rate in Eastern Bangladesh, but also in Thailand, Vietnam and possibly Myanmar. These small-scale, but wide-spread conversions reduce the habitat of the species with huge impacts and add significantly to the devastating large-scale reclamation of the Saemangeum mudflats in Korea.

The expedition members received a warm reception from the local people, the government and the press. Even the President of Bangladesh backed the expedition and sent his good wishes. The level of interest and support is very promising for the implementation of a future action plan, envisioned in the country and the wider region to protect core sites along the flyway. The safeguarding of intertidal ecosystems will not only help the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, but also secure the livelihoods of many millions people, who depend on small-scale coastal fisheries.

Urgent action is required and an international species action plan will need to address the issues within each country along the flyway.

The success of the expedition was due to the help of many people in Bangladesh and outside. In particular thanks are due to Prof Anwarul Islam and Enam Ul Haque.

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