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Preliminary results and conclusions of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper survey in Kamchatka and Chukotka 2009

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Karaginskiy Bay coasts, East Kamchatka, June-July 2009.

An International expedition of British, German, Russian and Swedish participants under the lead of Evgeny Syroechkovskiy (Russian Academy of Sciences) and Christoph Zöckler (ArcCona Cambridge) explored suitable coastal areas as potential breeding sites for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper on the southern most edge of the known breeding range in North-East Kamchatka in the Karaginsky Bay. Previous records from the area dated from the 1970s. Suitable habitats south and north of the area were checked and surveyed as appropriate (see survey map). A total of about 400 km coastline was covered in June-July 2009 by two field teams of four people each. 12 of 15 potentially breeding sites of SBS (crowberry spits and lagoon coasts) identified by satellite imagery interpretation were covered by approx. 370 km of field surveys;

Spoon-billed sandpiper Survey Karagynskiy Bay, Kamchatka summer 2009

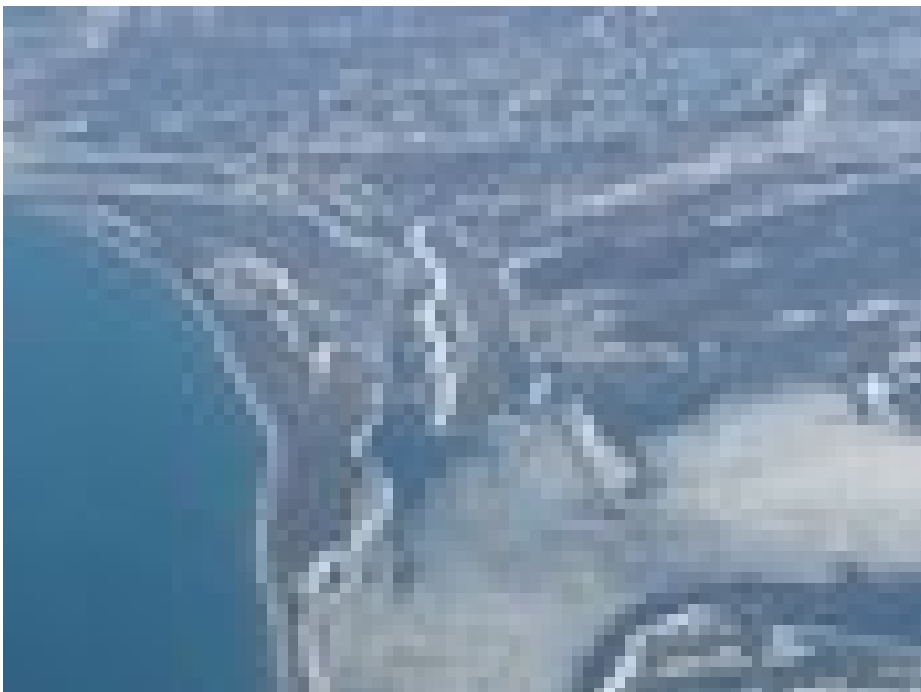
Preliminary Results:

- Only one probably breeding Spoon-billed Sandpipers was found within the most southern part of the species breeding range in Kamchatka. It was supposed to have 5-50 breeding pairs (Syroechkovskiy, 2005) so this survey cut the evaluation of total numbers considerably;



Territorial male, displaying briefly at Ilpysky spit, June 2009 (Phil Palmer)

- Two breeding locations known from ornithological literature and one more breeding discovered according to the local knowledge were no longer occupied and had no breeding pairs left;



Kayum spit 11 June 2009 (Christoph Zöckler)

- Species are changing and many of locations are becoming less likely due to warming of the climate: Kayum spit, where SBS brood was recorded in 1972 had hardly any good habitat left; Kostroma and Ossora spit had hardly any pine bushes in 1950-60s and know up to 20% of these spits are covered by pines.
- Main factors negatively influencing potential SBS crowberry habitat are:
 - overgrowing by pine bushes;
 - denser crowberry vegetation cover
 - overgrowing by tall grasses (e.g. *Elymus*) in the human impacted areas, mainly near fishing camps and former cattle farms;
 - Increased numbers of gulls (mainly Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*) concentrate around salmon processing factories, located on several of the visited spits and make it impossible for any small waders to breed. In late June 2009 Iløpyrskaya Koshka had over 5000 gulls and Kostroma Spit over 7000 gulls permanently staying on the spit, resting in flocks covering huge areas of the crowberry habitat;
 - In contrast to Chukotka, most of the spits with potential good habitats for SBS are permanently disturbed by humans in June-July, the peak salmon fishing time. Salmon fishing activities were once high: in 1950-60s after the forced settlement of former nomadic reindeer herders from inland to the coast to ease up ship supplies. Then, human population of the coastal spits decreased in 1970-80-s, but increased again in late 1990-s ó 2000s after Perestroika, with the intensification and modernisation of the salmon fishing by private investors. This coincided with the period of most rapid decline of SBS;
 - The tradition of shooting waders in local villages (quite distinct from Chukotka) makes the killing of SBS in flocks during spring migration more likely and a regular event: 30% of 60 hunters knew SBS and records of shot birds are known even as recent as 2008 and 2009 (see table 1 below). Areas of traditional spring hunting at spits are the areas of important regional spring stopover of SBS on snow free mudflat areas;
 - As Karaginsky Bay coasts are likely the area of spring pre-breeding concentration on migration of probably whole world population of SBS local hunting pressure may play significant role in species decline and should be considered for the future as a threat to be addressed by Action Plan;
 - Considering the widespread tradition of shooting waders in the intertidal areas in southern Russian Far East (Japan Sea, Sea of Okhotsk) further survey, capacity building and awareness raising work may be necessary to evaluate and eradicate this threat;
 - Neither hunters nor decision makers in Game Management and Environment Protection in Kamchatka are aware of the critically endangered status of SBS. Awareness raising is a crucial element of future conservation efforts in the region but also beyond in the Russian Far East. It needs to be focused and targeted to selected audiences, first of all hunters and schoolchildren regularly shooting waders by catapults, but also include increasingly Game Keeper Associations and Hunting Inspectors and authorities.
 - The surveyed area covers about 30% of potential breeding grounds of the species in Kamchatka. Future surveys of the remote northern coasts in Oliutorksiy region may further clarify the level of decline and assist to locate the southern limit of regularly breeding range of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Additional observation of conservation interest:

strong pressure of egg-collecting on gull and tern colonies. In an Tern seems to be hit hard. The total population in the 800- 1000 pairs. At several colonies up to 80% of the breeding pairs gave up breeding prematurely in response to heavy and persistent egg collecting by local people.

- Additional Red listed species recorded: CR: Kittlitz Murrelet, VU: Stellerø Eider (one record only), Stellerø Sea Eagle (good numbers everywhere, also breeding, no threats identified!), NT: Sooty Shearwater, Falcated Teal, Black-tailed Godwit, Long-billed Murrelet
- Several observation of Kittlitz Murrelet at three different locations indicate breeding of this bird in some good numbers (10-100 pairs)
- One new record for Kamchatka (Little Gull) and furthermore Grey Heron and Black-winged Stilt were recorded only once before

Meinypilgyno (Chukotka)

The survey team of Pavel Tomkovich (2 persons) started work in 2009 as early as early June. But that they found only 4 nests, 3 broods and probably 3 more breeding pairs in the outer spits (see table below for the decline of the population over the last 7 years). Three of the four nests have been predated and it also was a very rainy and cold (+4C) early July so survival of any broods is very questionable.

Table 1: Breeding population trend of the core breeding area of Meinypilgyno, South Chukotka

	2003	2004*	2005	2007*	2008	2009
Nests	23	14	15	10	6	4
Add.Broods	16	11	11	5	-	5
Additional territories	21	11	6	6	9	5
Total	60	36*	32	21*	15	14

*incomplete survey

Three previous flagged birds were resighted. Interestingly, one was ringed as female in 2003, breeding in 2009 only few hundred meters from the ringing site, confirming the high site fidelity of the species, but also the extremely low return of about 50% (Zöckler & Syroechkovsky in prep.). The bird has reached at least an age of 7 (more likely 8 or more years, as the adults return to the breeding grounds in general in the second year. The second bird was ringed in 2007 and the third was ringed as juvenile, one of more than 250 ringed that survived in the breeding area.

The team also recorded Bald Eagle (first confirmed record for Chukotka in the last 50 years), a pair of Bufflehead (2. or 3. record for Chukotka), Ross Gull (rare) and new species for Chukotka: Eye-browed Thrush and Olive-backed Pipit.

...e due to the adverse weather conditions in July. The water in
...d the movements of the team and further monitoring efforts.
...eeding success of the broods had been monitored.

The team noticed serious obstructions by heavy rain and flooding but also by unreliable local transport and wasted a lot of valuable time.

Hunting pressure in Kamchatka

Our findings in Kamchatka on quite some high hunting pressure on waders and Spoon-billed Sandpiper were surprising and contrary to the observation from Chukotka, where hardly any hunting pressure exists. Table 2 list all information obtained by interview data in the various villages.

Table 2: Summary of interview results of local hunters on cases of shooting and observations of Spoon-billed Sandpiper from 8 villages of Karaginskiy Region, East Kamchatka (June-July 2009)

	Village	Name	Active hunter	Shoot waders	SBS shot	SBS seen alive	Unreliable observations	Details
Kostroma – (8)								
1		Agafonov	+	+	-	+	-	Mudflats near around 2005
2		Gavriiov	+	-	-	-	-	
3		Anonymous 1	+	+	-	-	-	
4		Andrey (hunter)	+	+	-	-	+	Old Kostroma
5		Anonymous 2	+	+	-	-	+	Yaponka river
6		Sergey (hunter)	+	-	-	-	-	
7		Anonymous 3	+	+	+	-	-	Kostroma spi late 1990-s
8		Alexander (bus driver)	+	-	-	+	-	Karaga villag
Karaga – (6)								
9		Valeri Kudashev	+	+	-	-	+	Very general
10		Zhenya Kudashev	+	+	-	-	-	
11		Anonymous 1	+	-	-	-	-	
12		Anton ó boat driver,	+	+	?	?	?	1980s Please to him and Fe
13		Sergey	+	+	-	+	-	Mudflats near
14		Anonymous 2	+	+	-	-	-	
Ossora – (13)								
15		Andreev	+	+	-	-	-	
16		Yu.Tatarinov	+	+	-	-	-	
17		Romanyiuk	+	-	-	-	-	
18		Storozh DUSSh	+	+	-	-	-	
19		ZhKaKha manager	+	+	-	-	-	
20		Korayak hunter	+	+	+	-	-	Catapult as a
21		Boat captain	+	+	+	-	-	Kostroma spi
22		Fish factory director	+	-	-	-	-	
23		Car driver	+	+	-	-	-	
24		Fishing inspector	+	-	-	-	-	
25		Anonymous 1	+	+	-	-	+	Wrong place

			+	+	-	-	+	Wrong habitat
			+	-	-	-	+	Everything w
Tymlat – (2)								
		n	-	+	?	+		Late 1970/ear
29		Alexander Yablitsev (Biology teacher)	-	-	-	+		Late 1970/ear
Belorechensk (fishing company base) - (8)								
30		Ruslan	+	+	-	+	-	Found chick 1970-s
31		Old local man	+	-	+	-	-	Shot near Pak mid 1990-s
32		Sergey	+	+	-	-	-	
33		Fish factory manager	+	+	-	+	-	Kostroma spi 2000s, probab
34		Oleg ó director	+	+	-	-	-	
35		Anonymous 1	+	-	-	-	-	
36		Anonymous 2	-	-	-	-	+	Wrong habitat
37		Anonymous 3	+	+	-		+	Right habitat birds seen, lik
Anapka (closed village) – (2)								
38		Oleg Cechulin	+	+	-	-	-	
39		Nikolay Chechulin	+	+	-	-	-	
Ilyyrskiy -								
40		Slotin	+	+	-	-	-	
41		Bashkirov	+	+	-	-	+	Unshure in de
42		Leonid ó the fishermen	+	+	+	-	-	Shot in late M Ilyyrskaya sp
43		Blinkov	+	+	-	-	+	Can't remem
44		S. Khromov	+	+	-	-	-	
45		Sabirov	+	-	-	-	-	
46		Zhenya	+	+	-	+	-	Observed in l washed by wa with turnston
47		Ivan	+	+	+	-	-	Spit north of river: shot fro autumn 2005
48		Petrov	+	+	-	-	-	
49		Tall Russian fishermen	+	+	+	-	-	End of Ilyyrsk report details
50		Koryak hunter	+	+	-	+	-	End of Ilyyrsk around 2000-
51		Koryak anonymous	+	+	+	-	-	Catapult - Ch 1980-s
52		Track driver	+	+	+	-	-	Catapult at A
53		Igor Mikheev	+	+	+	-	-	End of Ilyyrsk small waders
54		Grigoriy	+	+	-	-	-	
55		G.Rassokhin	-	-	+	-	-	Catapult in 19 at the place o numerous oth flies at rotten
56		Anonymous 1	-	-	-	-	-	
Korf*								
57		Vassily from Karaga	+	+	-	+	-	Vassily lived ago). He refer Korf spit as r
Ivashka **								



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of more SBS being shot on Karaginskiy Bay coasts of

Potential hunting pressure in the southern parts of Russian Far East should be evaluated. Considering the recently shot SBS near the Vladivostok (individually marked in Meinypilgyno in 2005 the adult bird was shot in August 2007 and stuffed for taxidermy collection near Vladivostok. This is the only one known record but considering mass wader hunting in several locations of Prymorie and Sakhalin it may add to the mortality of the species. 99% of hunters in the southern Russian Far East are clearly not aware of how rare SBS is and its protected status. Estimated numbers of hunters in coastal areas of southern Russian Far East is around 80,000 individuals. It is likely only small part of them may influence small waders but there are no data available for any more speculations on the subject.

Future activities should address the spring and autumn hunting in the Russian Far East at a large scale awareness raising scheme among local hunters and the game and hunting authorities.