

Mystery of wintering SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER remains unsolved

Cambridge, Moscow in February 2005

An International expedition of British, German, Indian, Japanese and Russian Ornithologists, funded by the German based Manfred Hermsen Foundation, could not find any of the globally threatened SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER in previously suspected wintering areas in the Indian Sundarbans (West Bengal) Lake Chilika (Orissa) and Point Calimere. An earlier claim of up to 200 birds on Lake Chilika and several observations in the Sundarbans have not been substantiated and there is increasing doubt about these observations. Only single birds seem to visit both regions. A regularly frequented site in Southern India at Point Calimere has been devastated by the tsunami. The four birds, which have been observed there in December, have not been relocated by today in the drastically changed coastal terrain.

The expedition initiated and strengthened an awareness of the species and widened the network of observers in the region but also beyond, already releasing further information on previous observations along the Indian East coast, but also from Bangladesh and Thailand. With surveying all of Lake Chilika and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Sundarbans we must conclude that India is likely not hosting the majority of the wintering population. With the continuing decline noted on the breeding grounds also in 2004, the chances of finding the wintering grounds of the remaining SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER population remain slim. The reasons for the decline are still unknown, but suspected to occur along the flyway or in the wintering grounds. Increased international efforts are required to halt the decline of this charismatic sandpiper. A SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER Recovery Team has been established in Edinburgh at the Global Waterbird Conference in April 2004 with the task to co-ordinate the international efforts to save the species for extinction. All observers of the species in the potential wintering grounds or on migration are requested to report there observations with date and exact location with habitat details to the Recovery Team members.

Contact

Dr. Christoph Zöckler (Expedition leader, ArcCona Consulting , Cambridge) cz@arccona.com

Dr. E.E. Syroechkovski (Lead SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER RT, RBCU) eesjr@eesjr.msk.ru

Dr S. Balachandran (BNHS India) bnhsbala@rediffmail.com