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Asian Waterbird Census Newsletter

June 2017



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**COASTS
COUNT!**

SAVE OUR COASTAL WETLANDS



**INTERNATIONAL
WATERBIRD CENSUS**

LET'S MAKE IT COUNT

Update on the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2017

Taej Mundkur & Tom Langendoen, Wetlands International

In January and February, the 51st count for the International Waterbird Census was conducted across Africa, Asia, Australasia, Europe, the Caribbean and the Neotropics. This year there was a special focus on the coastal wetlands of the Indian Ocean, including Africa, Asia, Australia and island nations. The considerable efforts of national coordinators and their teams has provided valuable information on this region where our knowledge of the distribution and status of waterbirds is comparatively poor. Some AWC highlights include:

- A special survey to the western most **Sundarbans** in **Bangladesh**. This revealed at least one critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Besides this, the regular counts of coastal and inland sites have been conducted.
- Counts in the Gulf of Mottama in **Myanmar**, conducted in conjunction with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force meeting, have demonstrated the global significance of this estuarine area. Importantly, at the initiative of the Mon state government, a 45,000 hectare stretch of the Gulf was officially designated Myanmar's fourth Ramsar site on **World Migratory Bird Day** – and the first to be situated outside of a legally protected area.
- In **Indonesia**, with welcome support from a National Geographic Grant, our office in collaboration with Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry successfully organised counts across the country, covering a number of new sites in several islands by a large number of volunteers. The report is being compiled (the 2016 Annual report has been recently released, see below).

- In **Timor Leste**, enhanced coverage of 12 coastal and inland sites by Alito Rosa and his team have built on the first counts reported in 2016 with a total of over 5,000 waterbirds of 32 species. Lake Tasi-Toli (a recognised IBA) reported over 2500 waterbirds, including over 1,000 Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus*. Twenty-two Endangered Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* were reported at the Former fishponds of Tibar.
- Important counts for the **British Indian Ocean Territory of Diego Garcia** have taken place and will provide a glimpse into the waterbirds of this rarely visited corner of the world.
- Extended efforts across the **India** coast, including the first counts from the Andaman Islands.

AWC 2017 updates are also coming in from many other countries, including Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei and Australia, whilst AWC 2016 updates have continued coming through with nearly 1000 sites being reported.

Our thanks as ever to the national coordinators and their networks for their continuing efforts and support for this important monitoring programme. Our special thanks also to Wetlands International members, Avendus Capitals, the National Geographic for supporting counts and international coordination of the census this year.

If you want to find out more or support the census in a country, [please do contact the relevant national coordinators](#).

Overview of Waterbird Counts reported during the AWC 2016 & 2017 (as of June 2017)

'x' indicates counts confirmed, and are in processing. Greyed countries have no census in place. Countries in italics are new to the AWC

Country/region	2016	2017
East Asia		
China		
China (mainland)	81	x
Hong Kong SAR	2	x
Taiwan	x	x
Japan	x	x
Republic of Korea	x	x
DPR of Korea		
Mongolia	1	1
Russian Federation		
South Asia		
Bangladesh	x	6
Bhutan	17	x
India	370	211
Nepal		
Pakistan	12	16
Sri Lanka	48	43
Maldives		
<i>British Indian Ocean Territories</i>		3

Country/region	2016	2017
Australasia		
Australia	38	x
New Zealand	x	x
Southeast Asia		
Brunei Darusallam	10	13
Cambodia	9	12
Indonesia	78	155
Malaysia	24	24
Myanmar	25	3
Lao PDR		
<i>Palau</i>	1	1
Philippines	140	x
Singapore	9	8
Thailand	87	49
Timor-Leste	3	12
Vietnam	x	4
Total	955	561

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Waterbird training for the Asian Waterbird Census in Penang, Malaysia

Our thanks to Sonny Wong, Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) for providing this news item, originally produced in the EAAFP newsletter

This year's Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) training was hosted by the MNS Penang Branch on 21-22 January 2017. The training was sponsored by the Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund, Hong Kong. The training was held in the Kampung Benggali village's community center which is situated in Teluk Air Tawar, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA). During low tide, the mudflats extend far out into the sea, the bay is fringed by villages and fragmented coastal wetlands. The idyllic view of the bay with the waterbirds was mesmerising with Penang Island in the background. The first day weather was perfect – cool and cloudy, but with fewer birds compared to the second day which was sunny with blue skies.

Twenty MNS members from the northern region attended the short course. The course was conducted by two veteran birders, Mr. Kanda Kumar, from MNS Penang Branch, and Mr. David Li, from the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Singapore. Mr. Tan Choo Eng, chairman of the MNS Penang Branch helped in organising the event. The course was conducted with field observations and classroom group discussions based on their notes from the field.

Meanwhile development is occurring foreshore, along the main road not far from the coast. This is one of the many activities to be carried out is to get more local support and to train more counters, raise awareness among the local communities, and involving the locals. The Seberang Perai Town Council were quite receptive about the importance of the IBAs from last years' event – the Seberang Perai International Conference on Ecotourism and Conservation Efforts (or [SPICEC 2016 website](#)). You can find the resolution from the conference [here](#).



A team from the Malaysian Nature Society (c) during the AWC 2017

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A special survey in Sundarbans, Bangladesh

Kindly provided by the Bangladesh Bird Club

As part of the Indian Ocean Coastal Waterbird Count 2017, the Bangladesh Bird Club (BBC) undertook a special count of the western Sundarbans, Khulna District, adjacent to the Indian border. The area consists of the outer estuary with mangrove islands and mudbanks. It is an area that has very rarely been visited by birdwatchers.

A team of five experienced BBC members (Onu Tareq, Israt Jebin, Humayra Mahmud, Ananda Kumar Das and Samiul Mohsanin) took part in a seven day survey (between 16-22 February) and recorded a total of 2,439 waterbirds of 41 species in six island areas. We also recorded 53 raptors of 13 species. Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*, Mongolian Plover *Charadrius mongolus* and Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* were the most abundant species. We recorded two globally threatened species, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* (1) and a pair of Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata*. Other Near Threatened birds included Lesser Adjutant (29), Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* (53), Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris* (7), Brown-winged Kingfisher *Pelargopsis amauroptera* (7) and Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (2). Also a pair of Critically

Endangered White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* were observed at the Koromjol Area.



A surprise sighting, Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* photograph by Onu Tareq

Of the 6 major areas counted, Bangabandhu Char had the highest number of shorebirds (>800) with a total of 28 species of waterbirds. Here we observed the lone Spoon-billed Sandpiper and a pair of Eurasian Oystercatchers. This island is newly formed and provided an ideal habitat for shorebirds including the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

From our seven days observation on different islands, we found that the older islands have comparatively low number of waterbirds and lower diversity. Earlier, the Dimer Char (Egg Island) was separate from Pokkhir Char (Bird Island), but this time we found that the islands have turned into one big island from silt deposition, though some water channels remain inside – demonstrating the dynamic nature of these coastal systems.

Although overall numbers of birds reported were small on this visit, the record of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is particularly significant, as after early 1990s it has not been recorded so far west in the Sundarbans; as well as the Masked Finfoot. Additional surveys will be needed, covering different periods of the annual migration cycle to better understand the abundance and diversity of waterbirds and especially the population trend of Masked Finfoot. Also the possible impact of the proposed 1,320 Megawatt coal based power plant at Rampal on the bird life in the Sundarbans should be evaluated.

The survey was supported by Wetlands International as part of the Indian Ocean Coastal Waterbird Count 2017. BBC is thankful to the Wildlife Circle of the Forest Department of Bangladesh for granting the survey permission in the Bangladesh Sundarbans.



The survey team, photo by Samiul Mohsanin

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AWC 2017 in Brunei

Kindly provided by Shirley Hee, Panaga Natural History Society (PNHS)

Early on the morning of Sunday, 22 January, Steve Brown, Dean Golding, Judy Leslie and Vanessa Burton – the PNHS team met at Supasave Seria to take part in bird counting for the AWC. This regional programme monitors the distribution and populations of waterbirds and the status of wetlands throughout Asia. We were keen to start early in the day to maximise our chances of seeing birds, and to avoid the midday heat ourselves. In the car park we were lucky to see a group of about eighteen hornbills flying above us. Our first site was the Tutong Sewage Plant, which is more pleasant than you might think. At this site Oriental Darters and Grey Herons were counted, along with a number of egrets, and some well-fed monitor lizards lounging on the sides of the ponds. Our second site was the Samaun Shrimp Farm, near the Golden Chick Farm, south of Tutong. Here there were fewer birds, possibility due to high tide levels. Still, we were able to see Black-winged Stilts, Wood Sandpipers and Little Terns, along with egrets. From there we drove to our final site at Sungai Seria. The southern end of this site, near the Billionth Barrel monument has been disturbed by extensive water and earth works. There is a

derelict bird hide by the ponds, but it didn't look sturdy enough to support us, so we remained on the ground. In a small area, Wood Sandpipers, a Grey Plover, a Grey Heron and more of the ubiquitous egrets were observed. Driving along the coastal road between the monument and the premises of Scott, more egrets were counted. The bird counts we gathered, along with our observations of the wetland sites we visited will be collated by Shirley Hee, Brunei's AWC Coordinator, and forwarded to Wetlands International for inclusion in the annual Census report.



Counters from BruWild at Wasan Ricefield

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AWC 2017 in Sri Lanka

Adapted from a report by Udaya Sirivardana, Ceylon Bird Club (CBC), AWC National Coordinator

Sri Lanka conducted their nationwide waterbird census in the first two weeks of February 2017, with almost 120,000 birds counted in the Jaffna, Mannar and the Southern Coastal Regions (SCR) as well as limited coverage elsewhere in the country at numerous sites.

Jaffna saw the highest numbers (63,000 in total), with figures approaching the 20,000 threshold for international importance (as per the Ramsar Convention) in Kayts Island and Punkudutivu Lagoon. This region seems also to be somewhat of a national refuge for the Near Threatened Eurasian Curlew with a total of 46 at just one site.

Unfortunately, the once major Hambanota Wetlands of the SCR have now all but disappeared due to the development of a seaport. Surveys in the SCR included

counts from more westerly regions but numbers were still disappointingly low, with just under 5,000 birds counted from 61 species over 12 sites.

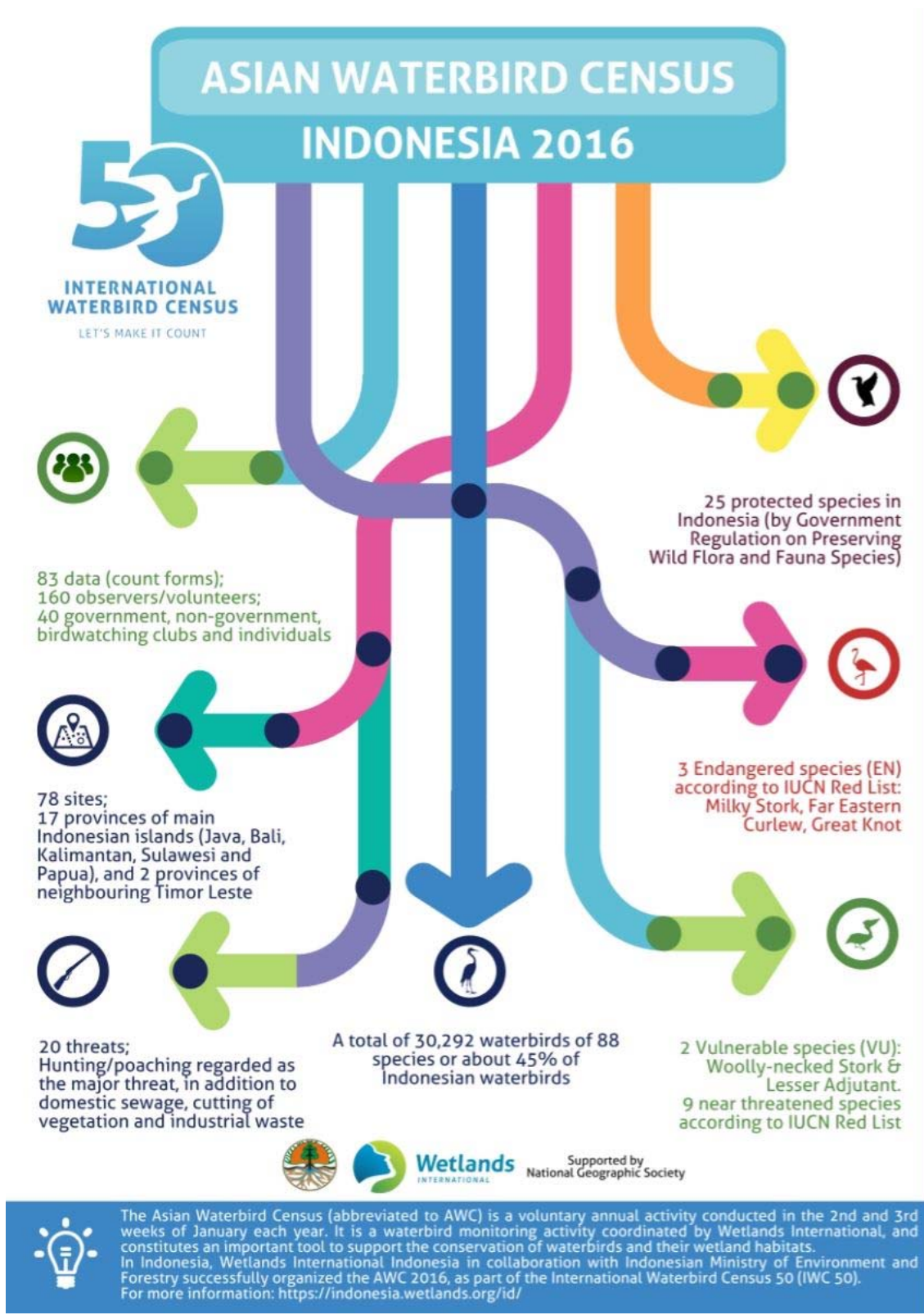
Dry conditions contributed to the low count in SCR, though in Mannar rains in the last week of January brought better conditions for waders and a total of 48000 waterbirds. Surprising absences here during the census included Spot-billed Duck, Crab Plover, Indian Courser, Great Knot and Broad-billed Sandpiper, so it will be interesting to see the numbers of these species elsewhere in the flyway.

[A more detailed overview is available on the AWC News page.](#)

Participants in the census were: CBC members Bennie Abeyratne, Moditha Kodikara-Arachchi, Kiran Kumaranayagam, Hasitha Perera, Anura Ratnayake, U. Sirivardana, Thushara Senanayake, Srinath Seneviratna, Hemantha Seneviratne, Sampath Senviratne, Sarath Seneviratne, Deepal Warakagoda, Tara Wikramanayake; CBC Affiliates: Errol Anthonisz, Yasandu Seneviratne; and non-CBC members: John Bundock, Isuru de Silva, Ajith Gamage, Ram Nair, Tanya Perera, Damayanthi Warakagoda and Himesha Warakagoda.

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[AWC 2016 in Indonesia](#)



A graphical summary of Indonesia's special counts in 2016. See also this [report](#) from Wetlands International Indonesia.

Change in coordinators

Ms Kaori Tsujita of the Ministry of the Environment of Japan who has been the AWC coordinator for Japan for the last few years. We greatly appreciate all Ms Tsujita's support in ensuring that annual counts have been submitted regularly and her personal interest to ensure continued annual financial support from the Ministry for our regional coordination and database work. We also appreciate her efforts in facilitating linking and strengthening of the waterbird monitoring work to the priorities of the EAAFP (see news item below). Ms Eiko Okawa has just taken over this responsibility and we welcome her.

In India, the AWC is coordinated jointly by the Bombay Natural History Society and Wetlands International working closely through a network of state-level coordinators. Dr Raju Kasambe has been jointly coordinating the AWC on behalf of the BNHS for the last two years and was instrumental in strengthening the national network by filling geographic gaps. He has also helped to integrate the AWC state coordinators with the state coordinators of Indian Bird Conservation Network and Important Bird and Biodiversity Area monitoring network that are coordinated by the BNHS. Raju has taken on new responsibilities and passes on the coordinator role to Dr Sathyaselvam (Selvam) who has recently taken over as head of the BNHS Wetlands Programme. Many thanks to Raju for all his great work and we welcome Selvam in this new role.



Indian coordinators, Raju (left) and Selvam (right) from BNHS

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East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) MOP9

The 9th Meeting of Partners of the EAAF Partnership was held in Singapore in January 2017, covering many issues of interest for conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway region.

Of particular note for the AWC network was the meeting of the Monitoring Task Force (TF) in which the key issues identified included generating knowledge for species assessment, monitoring needs of single species action plans, data sharing, developing an inventory of monitoring activities across the Flyway, use of social media, citizen science approaches and capacity building, among others. The meeting nominated Mr. Doug Watkins to continue to chair the Monitoring TF. Moving forward, Partners endorsed the proposed TF's Work Plan for 2017-2019 which includes developing a cooperative programme that builds on the existing monitoring activities, to strengthen and enhance waterbird and site monitoring across the Flyway. BirdLife International and Wetlands International have agreed to lead on its development in consultation with the TF and other Partners. This is to be developed in 2017 to enable roll out in January 2018 with a workshop of the TF proposed in late 2017 to finalise it. We will post updates as they become available.

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Grant Opportunities

[National Geographic Society](#)

[Saving Species Grant](#)

[Rolex Awards for young leaders](#)

Upcoming Events

23-28 October: The Twelfth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS COP12), Philippines

7-11 November: 8th Asian Wetland Symposium, Saga, Japan / [Call for Abstracts](#)

Useful links

A major new report on the 2015 coordinated waterbird census of the Central and Lower **Yangtze floodplain** has been published. Click [here](#) for the news item on WWT's website and [here](#) for the report.

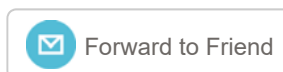
Revision of the **East Asian-Australasian Flyway estimates** of 37 shorebird populations has been undertaken in 2016 for Environment Australia. A report has now been published on the Department's website [here](#).

SBS newsletter No 17 with a **focus on Myanmar** and progress that has been made on this important region for wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers (SBS). It includes a new series on people's profiles with Karin Eberhardt portraying key SBS conservationists from Myanmar.

Several countries in EAAF have organised local events involving school children and adults for **World Migratory Bird Day**. A summary of each event is [posted by the EAAFP Secretariat](#).

More news from the IWC and the western Indian Ocean Coastal Waterbird Count 2017 in the **African-Eurasian Waterbird Census** regional programme [newsletter](#).

Past newsletters and announcements to the AWC network are available [here](#).



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