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Asian Waterbird Census

December 2014 (issue 20)

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Dear reader,

With many of you busy preparing for the Asian Waterbird Census counts in January 2015, now is a timely moment to look back over the past year and ahead to the next. With the continued help of national coordinators and participants, we have made some progress in filling important data gaps from 2008 to present – 23 countries have now sent us counts for this period. We have also been busy developing new tools to help support quicker and easier data collection in the future. We are developing an online database to accommodate the AWC data and have trialled a new excel form in India to help participants and state coordinators transfer data from paper forms more easily.

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aware there are still important gaps to fill in the region and we will be looking to strengthen monitoring in these areas for the future.

Next year will also see an update of the Waterbird Population Estimates, a major policy document for which the International Waterbird Census remains a key source of information. We hope especially to improve the number of populations in Asia with reliable trends and estimates - especially since the population estimates of a number of species are outdated and some are changing (mainly declining rapidly).

As ever (and as national coordinators are well aware!) securing long-term and sustainable funding for the census will be a priority for next year. We are especially grateful for the continued support of the Wetlands International Members, whose contributions provide a crucial foundation for the coordination and data management for the entire IWC. We are also very grateful for the many hours put in by national coordinators and their networks of counters to collect and collate waterbird counts.

We wish you all a successful survey for 2015!

Taej Mundkur
Tom Langendoen

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Asian Waterbird Census - Jan 2015

The recommended dates for the AWC 2015 counts are Saturday 10 to Sunday 25, January 2015, covering 2 weeks and three weekends, when we should encourage you to count waterbirds. These dates are for guidance only and counts from any date in January are very welcome.

Kindly use the appropriate AWC Site and Count forms to report your observations and provide these through your national coordinators. In India, kindly submit your count information to your state coordinators.

For more information...

Check out www.wetlands.org/AWC. For all AWC communication, kindly use awc@wetlands.org.

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Species of interest for 2015

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* – two subspecies occur in the region *longipes* (largely in South Asia eastwards to the Malay Peninsula) and *osculans* (mainly in China, Korean peninsula and Japan during the northern winter – with few observations from Southeast Asia). The eastern subspecies *osculans* (often called the Far Eastern Oystercatcher) has been considered a contender for the Near threatened IUCN category due to its rapidly declining status.

The distribution and status of these two subspecies, particularly in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia is not clear and more information is being sought.

Separating the two subspecies in the field is relatively easy. The adult non-breeding and immature *longipes* both have a distinct white fore-collar, a duller red bill and bill tip. The eye-ring of the adult is scarlet. The adult non-breeding *osculans* lack the fore-collar as do most immatures. However, some immature *osculans* show a faint fore-collar, and especially in the most strongly-marked birds a small white chin spot. The bill of *osculans* remains bright orange throughout the year, with only the distal third washed browner in immatures, and in adults a slightly duller tip in the non-breeding season and a yellowish tip in the breeding season. Also, *osculans* has an orange eye-ring.

We would like to encourage participants to pay particular attention to reporting on the species and in your notes on your count forms to clarify the subspecies with observed features.

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis middendorffi* and *serrirostris* - in East Asia, two distinct subspecies occur and increasingly are being identified based on their bill colour differences and reported separately. The *middendorffi* is a larger bird with a long body and bill; while *serrirostris* has a short body, neck and a particularly short and thick bill. We encourage reporting on the two subspecies and in your notes on your count forms to clarify the subspecies with observed features.

Pallas's Fish-eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* a globally vulnerable species with a limited distribution in Asia is believed to be declining. The key breeding range countries are Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, but any data (presence or absence) would also be valuable from Myanmar, China, Bhutan, Iran and Afghanistan. This raptor is closely associated with wetlands and has been covered during the AWC. We encourage continued reporting of this species during the census.

If any observations are made outside the main AWC period, these observation are also worth reporting to awc@wetlands.org

Species taxonomy update

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[International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World Volume 1: Non-passerines](#), that was published in July 2014 is fast gaining the interest of people worldwide and is now being accepted as the latest taxonomic reference. This brings with it the latest information on species and subspecies. In November it was adopted as the standard reference for bird taxonomy and nomenclature for non-passerine species by the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) at its eleventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Quito, Ecuador. Those interested in the new taxonomy, may download it from the BirdLife International website <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/info/taxonomy>

Wetlands International aims to adopt this new taxonomy as a standard and in 2015 would be bring our International Waterbird Census and Waterbird Population Estimate databases in line with this new standard. We foresee this will require updating and standardising of the AWC count forms used in the different countries. Linked to this, we also plan to review the information being collected on wetland condition, uses and threats. We will be communication with national coordinators and participants in mid 2015 to enable us to plan the process in the best way possible.

[16th Goose Specialist Group meeting held in China](#)

In November the 16th meeting of the Goose Specialist Group was held in Beijing, China. Over two and a half days a number of presentations were given, focusing on recent advances in goose research and conservation. This included a presentation by Lu Yong from Wetlands International China on strengthening the monitoring of geese and other waterbirds in the East Asian-Australasian and Central Asian Flyways. With apparent declines in many waterbird populations and a paucity of data, the Asian Waterbird Census remains a crucial source of information for many populations, and strengthening the census will be one of our top priorities in the coming years.

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For more information...

Much more information about the meeting will be available from the [Goose Specialist Group website](#). The presentation made by Wetlands International is available [here](#).

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Strengthening migratory waterbird conservation in East Asian-Australasian Flyway region

The 8th Meeting of Partners (MOP8) of the East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership will take place in Kushiro City, kindly hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Japan, and Kushiro City, during 16–21 January 2015. The AWC serves as an key programme to support the monitoring of waterbirds at network and other important sites for the Partnership, and ways to improve this are to be discussed here.

For more information...

See the [EAAF partnership website](#) and see [our report](#) submitted to the meeting

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CMP COP11 leads the way for promoting conservation of migratory birds globally

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the conservation of migratory waterbirds and to deal with major threats (e.g. poisoning and illegal harvest).

Importantly, for the first time, a global "Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways - 2014-2023" (POW-MBF) was endorsed as a means of prioritising global action along major flyways, including the East Asian-Australasian and Central Asian flyways. The POW-MBF identifies the importance of designating and improving management of critically and internationally important sites; understanding the ecological functionality of flyways through research of migratory birds and their habitats; strengthening monitoring programmes; and promoting the conservation of migratory birds and ensuring any use of migratory birds is sustainable. In addition, it calls for strengthening national and local capacity for flyway conservation including, by developing partnerships with key stakeholders and organizing training courses.

For more information...

The Programme of Work is available [here](#).

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Balanga City welcomes migratory birds!

Balanga City wetland and Nature park in the Philippines is a major stop-over and wintering site for migratory birds, with many tens of thousands counted regularly. Every December a festival is held to celebrate the arrival of these visitors, with numerous events for locals and tourists alike. So if you are in the area next December, do check it out!

For more information...

[Click here](#) for an article about this year's festival.

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Waterbirds affected by new strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian influenza virus

Over the last few months there has been an increasing number of wild waterbird species found to be affected by Highly Pathogenic Avian influenza (HPAI) virus subtype H5N8 in East Asia (Japan and South Korea) and recently detected in Europe (Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). There is concern that migratory

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this. The UN Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds have issued a statement on H5N8 in poultry and wild birds, that provides useful information on the rapidly changing situation.

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Further reading

Conservation status of Oystercatchers around the world, edited by Bruno J. Ens and Les G. Underhill, (International Wader Studies Group #20)

Announcements

8th Meeting of Partners of the East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership

12th meeting of the Ramsar Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP12), Uruguay, 1-9 June 2015.

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