

# Newsletter of the Asian Waterbird Census

No. 9, May 2005



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## 1. Letter from the AWC International Coordinator

Dear AWC coordinators and participants,

The AWC 2005 has been a very successful exercise! I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of you for your kind contribution, coordination and participation in this years' census.

Although information has not been received from all the participating countries, however based on some of the highlights of the census to date, it has been very encouraging and exciting. In China, a survey organised by WWF-China in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River counted 635,967 waterbirds of 95 species. The counts for Swan Geese (61,178 individuals), Bean Goose (104,519), Tundra Swan (65,114), Hooded Cranes (1,088) and Eurasian Spoonbill (6,853) has provided an update towards the new global population for these species. In Malaysia, the Spot-billed Pelican appeared again after it's disappearance for 45 years. In Nepal, the highest count comprising 20 sites were covered in 2005, and this is the largest number since the country started participating in the census back in 1987. The International Black-faced Spoonbill census coordinated by Hong Kong Bird Watching Society counted 1,475 individuals. This figure shows a minimum increase of 22% as compared to the result of 2004 census. A more detailed result of the census is provided in this newsletter.

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, we have finally standardised the AWC database. We can now easily access all of the AWC data from 1987-2004. We are also working on the data entry from 2002-2004, so that the information will be ready for the production of the triennial report. We would like to thank Laziana binti Ahmad, our intern who helped us with the data entry from March-April 2005.

This year, we will continue working on the advancement of the AWC as well as fund raising in order to produce the AWC report 2002-2004.

The AWC will only be able to contribute to waterbird and wetland conservation with your continuous great support and enthusiasm. I would like to thank you once again for all your hard work and contributions!

David Li  
AWC International Coordinator  
Wetlands International

## 2. AWC 2002 - 2005 Results Update

David Li, [david@wiap.nasionet.net](mailto:david@wiap.nasionet.net)

As of 1 May 2005, a total of 1,051, 1,268 and 1,040 sites were counted respectively in year 2002, 2003 and 2004 as reported by the AWC coordinators and individual counters (see accompanying Table). Compared to only 314-770 sites counted between the years of 1997-2001, the AWC had achieved a much better result during the period 2002-2004. With the consistent site coverage annually, we believe this information will greatly benefit the wetland and waterbird conservation in the Asia-Pacific region. The result for year 2005 shows a very low figure because many countries have not reported back on their results. We would like to encourage them to report their count results as soon as possible.

Country/Region	No. of sites counted			
	2002	2003	2004	2005
Bangladesh	37	38	56	
Bhutan	6			
India	356	528	421	138
Maldives			2	
Nepal	3	2	10	20
Pakistan	70	80	10	
Sri Lanka	76	83	72	
<b>South Asia Total</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>731</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>158</b>
Brunei	9			1
Cambodia	5	1	6	9
Indonesia	44			
Laos				1
Malaysia	23	47	43	68
Myanmar	53	77	37	57
Philippines	49	49	61	
Singapore	1	9	9	
Thailand	9	26	21	
Vietnam	16	4	4	9
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>145</b>
China, PR	2	32	61	2
Hong Kong	3	3	3	1
Macau	1	1	1	1
Taiwan	33	23	33	
Japan	106	116	70	
North Korea				
South Korea	118	118	118	
Mongolia		1		
Eastern Russia	2	1	2	2
<b>East Asia Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>6</b>
Australia	29	29		
New Zealand				
Papua New Guinea				
<b>Australasia Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1,051</b>	<b>1,268</b>	<b>1,040</b>	<b>309</b>

## 3. AWC News from the Region

The following section provides an update of AWC 2005 in the region.

### Mainland China

Mark Barter, Australasian Wader Studies Group, [markbarter@optusnet.com.au](mailto:markbarter@optusnet.com.au)

WWF-China has recently conducted the second comprehensive waterbird survey along the floodplain of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River stretching through Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Jiangsu to Shanghai. The first count was conducted in February 2004.

The count took place over a two-week period, shortly after Chinese New Year. The count teams consisted of staff from nature reserves, provincial and county forestry bureaus, universities, and volunteers from non-government organisations.

The survey teams counted 635,967 waterbirds of 95 species. Individual Province counts were: Jiangxi - 226,175, Anhui - 158,743, Hunan - 110,566, Hubei - 82,104, Jiangsu - 38,361 and Shanghai Municipality - 20,018.

Fourteen globally-threatened species and one near-threatened species were found during the survey.

The most common species group was the Anatidae (ducks, geese and swans) comprising 67% of the waterbirds counted; next were shorebirds (16%), egrets and herons (5%), and gulls (4%).

The 2005 survey confirmed the exceptional importance of the floodplain wetlands for many waterbird species and showed that waterbird distribution had changed considerably due to the different water levels in 2005 compared to 2004.

### GLOBALY-THREATENED SPECIES

The count of Swan Geese (61,178 individuals) exceeded the current estimate of the global population of (55,000). The numbers of Lesser White-fronted Geese counted (8,636) represented 62% of the estimated flyway population.

A Large number of cranes were seen: 90% of the global population of the Siberian Crane (2,693 individuals) and 37% of the regional population of the White-naped Crane (1,491) were counted. The numbers of Hooded Cranes seen (1,088) exceeded the estimated flyway population of (1,000).

40% of the global population of the Oriental White Stork (1,194 individuals) were counted.

Other globally-threatened species seen in smaller numbers were: Black Stork (61), Scaly-sided Merganser (44), Saunders's Gull (34), Baer's Pochard (8), Black-faced Spoonbill (4), Swinhoe's Rail (2), Relict Gull (2) and Dalmatian Pelican (1). 123 individuals of the near-threatened Ferruginous Duck were also counted.

#### OTHER WATERBIRD SPECIES

The most common waterbird recorded was the Bean Goose (104,519). Other species counted in large numbers were Tundra Swan (65,114), Swan Goose (61,178), Common Teal (43,037), Dunlin (41,744), Spot-billed Duck (29,210), Greater White-fronted Geese (26,494), Black-headed Gull (22,616), Pied Avocet (20,636), Black-crowned Night-Heron (16,934), Falcated Duck (14,763), Mallard (13,884) and Common Coot (12,414).

The numbers of Eurasian Spoonbill (6,853) exceeded the estimated flyway population of (6,500). Species present in large percentages of their estimated flyway populations were: Bean Goose (91%), Tundra Swan (77%), Black Stork (61%), Falcated Duck (42%), Pied Avocet (21%) and Greater White-fronted Goose (20%).

Waterbird distribution varied greatly between the two years due to significant changes in water levels - demonstrating the importance of ensuring that sufficient waterbird habitat is protected to allow for variations in waterbird dispersal between years.

For more information please contact Lei Gang [glei@wwfchina.org](mailto:glei@wwfchina.org), WWF China

#### Hong Kong

*Yu Yat Tung, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society,*  
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The AWC in Hong Kong took place on 16 January which covered the whole Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site and its environs in Hong Kong, and also the Futian National Nature Reserve in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone in China.

A total of 54,454 waterbirds were recorded in this AWC, which showed an increase of 50% increase from an unusual low figure of 36,478 birds in the previous year and returned to a similar figure of 53,795 in January 2003. Reasons for the increase in the figures were due to the discovery of a number of wintering ducks and the presence of a relatively large number of Ardeids. The globally threatened Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* and Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* were recorded at 311 (21% of the known global population) and 14 (at least 10% of the known global population) individuals respectively. Results

of the Hong Kong census are available for download at: <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/waterbird/>

#### India: Mystery of wintering Spoon-billed Sandpiper remains unsolved

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 (SBS) in previously suspected non-breeding (wintering) areas in the Indian Sundarbans (West Bengal) Lake Chilika (Orissa) and Point Calimere (Tamil Nadu). Earlier claims 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 of the SBS in southern India at Point Calimere has been affected by the 26 December 2004 tsunami. The four birds, which have been observed there in December 2004, 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 and from Bangladesh and Thailand. With surveying all of Lake Chilika and ¾ of the Indian Sundarbans, we must conclude that India is likely not to be hosting the majority of the non-breeding (wintering) population. With the continuing decline noted on the breeding grounds also in 2004, the chances of finding the wintering grounds of the remaining SBS population remain slim. The reasons for the decline is 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 SBS 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 their observations with date and exact location with habitat details to the Recovery Team members.

#### Contact

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## Myanmar

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A total of 57 sites were counted during the Asian Waterbird Census 2005 in Myanmar. The number of sites surveyed this year, has increased compared to that of last year. Thirty one sites have been surveyed in the previous years and 26 sites were new sites.

A total of 59,843 waterbirds of 103 species were recorded during the census. Including Grebes ( 3 species, 288 individuals ), Pelicans ( 1, 10 ), Cormorants and Darters ( 3, 2,892), Herons and Egrets ( 12, 4,570), Storks(6, 605), Ibises (2, 362), Anatidae (21, 33,470 ), Cranes (2, 3,069), Rails, Gallinules and Coots ( 6, 2,835), Finfoots and Jacanas (3, 460), Shorebirds (32, 2,835 ) and Gulls, Terns and Skimmers (12, 3,748).

Six globally threatened species were recorded. The White-winged Duck (4 individuals) is listed on the category of Endangered. The Spot-billed Pelican (10), Lesser Adjutant (18), Sarus Crane (5), Masked Finfoot (2) and Indian Skimmer (2) are Listed as Vulnerable. The Near Threatened species recorded are the Oriental Darter (184), Painted Stork (3), Black-necked Stork (3), Black-headed Ibis (195), Ferruginous Duck (1,281) and Black-billed Tern (18).

The notable records for Myanmar are Black-necked Grebe (3), Bar-tailed Godwit (5), Yellow-legged Gull (1) and Brown Noddy (2). And also new large assembly for respective sites are Black-winged Stilt (2,000 individuals) and Pied Avocet (14) at Taung Taman Lake in Central Myanmar and Black-headed Gull (1,450) at Indawgyi Lake in North Myanmar.

Myanmar Bird and Nature Society would like to extend their appreciation to the participants of this year's census. MBNS is extremely grateful to Mr. Joost van der Ven who kindly joined this waterbird survey.

## Malaysia

*Yeap Chin Aik, Malaysian Nature Society, [conservation2@mns.org.my](mailto:conservation2@mns.org.my)*

This annual census was the largest undertaken by volunteers and government agencies. More than 40 volunteers took part and surveyed about 68 sites nationally. Most of the Malaysian States were covered with the exception of Kelantan and Negeri Sembilan. The census was contributed by a comprehensive survey of the Nordmann's Greenshank and Chinese Egret during November 2004-April 2005 which was funded by AEC/ OBC Award for Conservation and RSPB/British

Birdwatching Fair Research Fund for Endangered Species (A separate report on this survey will be produced by Wetlands International).

About 80 waterbird species were encountered, comprising of at least over 30,000 individuals. Amongst the globally threatened waterbird species counted were the migratory Chinese Egret and Nordmann's Greenshank and resident storks i.e. Milky Stork and Lesser Adjutant. A most exciting record is the Spot-billed Pelican, which has not been seen in this country for 45 years. Other near-threatened species included Asian Dowitcher and Malaysian Plover. A drastic decline of wild resident Milky Storks was confirmed through surveys in Pulau Kalumpang (in the Matang coast IBA). Only three birds were observed, a drop from about 100 individuals in the 1980s. Unless concerted national conservation action is undertaken, the wild population would cease to exist in a few years time.

Other interesting sightings include a shearwater sp., Wandering Whistling Ducks, Northern Shovellers, and a Red-necked Phalarope. A final report is currently being compiled.

## Nepal

*Dr Hem Sagar Baral, Bird Conservation Nepal, [bcn@mail.com.np](mailto:bcn@mail.com.np)*

We managed to cover Koshi Tappu and Koshi Barrage area for the counts this year. In addition to this, a total of 9 sites were also covered around Pokhara. In Chitwan, 3 sites have been systematically covered by volunteers. Data from one site, was rather doubtful therefore we are trying to verify the records here before filing it into the database. Similarly, data collected from some sites at Chitwan requires further verification. Rara Lake has been surveyed too but in December 2004, just a month before the specified time period for the count. In total, 20 sites were covered.

The security situation in the country at the time of data collection had worsened compared to last year. Even in the most difficult circumstances we have managed to cover more sites with reliable data. This is a significant achievement for us.

The sites covered this year include, two sites from Kathmandu Valley, 6 sites from and around Royal Chitwan National Park, 9 sites from Pokhara, 2 sites from Koshi area and one site at Rara.

A total of 34 participants took part in this programme assisted by similar number of people that included drivers, boatmen, and other helpers. I would like to thank all the participants who in spite of the adverse conditions in the country went in the field for data collection.

As pointed out in last year's report, the low number of fish eating birds continues to become a major issue. This year also all the count reports indicate very low number of terns and gulls and those recorded only from Koshi area. All areas in Nepal suffer from problem like shortage of prey especially fish.

A recently published book on the assessment of the threats to individual species in Nepal (Baral and Inskipp 2004, The state of Nepal's birds 2004) indicates a large number of wetland birds to have suddenly appeared on the most critically threatened category. These include terns and gulls as well as fish eating birds of prey. A pdf version of the book is available on the website [www.birdlifenepal.org](http://www.birdlifenepal.org) and can be downloaded.

Public awareness on the wise use of wetlands should be increased and this is very essential. Because of the over fishing, disturbance and hunting, the wetland birds continue to suffer.

## Sri Lanka

*Udaya Sirivardana & Deepal Warakagoda, Ceylon Bird Club, [birdclub@sltnet.lk](mailto:birdclub@sltnet.lk)*

The annual waterbird census in Sri Lanka was carried out by the Ceylon Bird Club this year, for the 22nd time.

It was scheduled from mid January to mid February. By 26 December counters were assigned informally to many sites and the letter to members of the club listing assignments and asking others their preferences was about to be sent. The tsunami that day struck Sri Lanka at the east and south coasts and halfway northwards along the west. The census was put back for several reasons. Many counters had lengthy involvements in relief work. It was inappropriate to go ahead in some areas amidst human tragedy. Use of affected sites by waterbirds had to be checked. The major sites were done between 15 January and 21 February but some others were delayed up to 5 March. 17 members of the CBC and five other people participated.

The effects of the tsunami on five important census sites have been detailed in the special forms sent back to WI. These included invasion of sea water, sea sand, natural and artificial debris, and destruction of shoreline vegetation, including mangroves. The effect of such changes on numbers of waterbirds varied among sites. Some sites in Ruhuna National Park underwent drastic changes in topography and here a distinct decrease was seen.

For the reasons given earlier, among others, coverage of the country this year was not

satisfactory. However, the number of waterbirds counted was c.216,000, one of the higher totals across the years. The number of species was 86, a little lower than average. In the Mannar region a congregation of c.100,000 Pintail was observed. Seabirds were fewer in numbers than usual. The more uncommon species of waterbird recorded in the count were: Indian Reef Heron, Black-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Spot-billed Duck (since recently a breeding resident), Collared Pratincole, Bar-tailed Godwit, Red-necked Phalarope, Common Snipe, Great Knot, Sanderling and Osprey.

Sri Lanka's first Ramsar Site, Bundala National Park is in an area badly affected by the tsunami but it was protected from great damage by sand dunes and forest cover near the beach. It yielded good returns in the census. The second site, Anavilundawa continues to show much lower numbers of waterbirds than some years ago, but the authorities are addressing its problems, described in recent reports. It was not covered in the census. The other sites listed in those reports as needing urgent protection have, unfortunately, still not received it.

## Vietnam

*Nguyen Duc Tu, BirdLife International – Vietnam Programme, [tu@birdlife.netnam.vn](mailto:tu@birdlife.netnam.vn)*

The 2005 AWC was conducted at wetland sites from November 2004 to February 2005 in Vietnam. The sites visited were Ha Nam Island, An Hai District, Tien Lang District, Thai Thuy District, Xuan Thuy National Park and Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve in the north, Nui Chua National Park in the centre, and Tram Chim National Park and Lang Sen Wetland Nature Reserve in the south of Vietnam.

In total, at least 49,327 waterbirds of 84 species were counted; the highest number recorded was 32,094 birds, including 18,000 Garganey, at Tram Chim National Park. This count was made by park staff and an ornithologist from the Tropical Biology Research Institute on 21 January 2005. During the counts, four species of conservation concern were recorded: Black-faced Spoonbill (EN, 61 birds), Spoon-billed Sandpiper (EN, 4), Saunders's Gull (VU, 30) and Sarus Crane (VU, 13).

In addition, other counts were made in Thai Thuy and Nghia Hung in the Red River Delta and Ba Tri District in Mekong Delta during March 2005. The notable records made during these counts were 195 Saunders's Gulls in Thai Thuy, and one Chinese Egret (VU) and 4 Malaysian Plover (NT) in Ba Tri.

The counts were made possible with financial support from the BirdLife International- Vietnam Programme, the Korean Federation for Environmental Movement, IUCN's Lower Mekong Basin Project and contributions from volunteer birdwatchers.



## 4. International Black-faced Spoonbill Census 2005

*Yu Yat Tong, Coordinator of the International Black-faced Spoonbill Census, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, [hkbws@hkbws.org.hk](mailto:hkbws@hkbws.org.hk)*

The census was conducted in 21-23 January 2005 and a total of 1,475 Black-faced Spoonbills were recorded. This figure has shown a minimum of 22% increase from the figure of 1,206 individuals in the 2004 census. Taiwan and Hong Kong are still two largest wintering places for this species and hold a total of 72% of the known wintering population. Such increasing trend indicates that this species is recovering from the previous known low numbers. However, this species is still facing high risk of extinction because large proportion of the total known population still congregates in a few sites. This census report is available for download at: <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/bfs/index.html> or contact the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society at [hkbws@hkbws.org.hk](mailto:hkbws@hkbws.org.hk).

## 5. News on the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy

### Central Asian Flyway Meeting Confirmed for 10-13 June 2005

*Taej Mundkur, Strategy Coordination Officer, Wetlands International, [taejmundkur.wi@vsnl.net](mailto:taejmundkur.wi@vsnl.net)*

A Meeting to Conclude and Endorse the Proposed Central Asian Flyway Action Plan to Conserve Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats, and a separate Meeting to Endorse the Proposed Western/Central Asian Site Network for Siberian Cranes (and other waterbirds), will take place under the auspices of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). The meetings, respectively scheduled for 10-13 June 2005 (including a one day excursion) and 12 June 2005, are being held in New Delhi, India at the kind invitation of the Indian Ministry of the Environment and Forests (MOEF). Financial support is from the Government of India, the

Government of the Netherlands, the Government of Switzerland, the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), various UNEP Regional offices and CMS. Wetlands International is assisting CMS by organising the first meeting and providing technical support. The International Crane Foundation is also assisting CMS by organising the Siberian Crane meeting and providing technical support.



## English and Scientific names of bird species mentioned in the Newsletter

English Name	Scientific Name
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>
Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
Chinese Egret	<i>Egretta eulophotes</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Indian Reef Heron,	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
Milky Stork	<i>Mycteria cinerea</i>
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
Oriental White Stork	<i>Ciconia boyciana</i>
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Black-faced Spoonbill	<i>Platalea minor</i>
Wandering Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna arcuata</i>
Tundra Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>
Swan Geese	<i>Anser cygnoides</i>
Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>
White-winged Duck	<i>Cairina scutulata</i>
Falcated Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Northern Shoveller	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Baer's Pochard	<i>Aythya baeri</i>
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
Scaly-sided Merganser	<i>Mergus squamatus</i>
Siberian Crane	<i>Grus leucogeranus</i>
White-naped Crane	<i>Grus vipio</i>
Hooded Crane	<i>Grus monacha</i>
Sarus Crane	<i>Grus antigone</i>
Swinhoe's Rail	<i>Coturnicops exquisitus</i>
Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Masked Finfoot	<i>Heliopais personata</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Malaysian Plover	<i>Charadrius peronii</i>
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Asian Dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Nordmann's Greenshank	<i>Tringa guttifer</i>
Great Knot	<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	<i>Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus</i>
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Saunders's Gull	<i>Larus saundersi</i>
Relict Gull	<i>Larus relictus</i>
Black-billed Tern	<i>Sterna acuticauda</i>
Indian Skimmer	<i>Rynchops albigollis</i>
Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
shearwater sp.	<i>Puffinus</i> sp.