

# Newsletter of the Asian Waterbird Census

No. 18, December 2010

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## Contents

- |  |                                    |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. Letter from the AWC Coordinator ..... 1       | 3. AWC 2008 Results Update..... 2  |
| 2. Dates for Asian Waterbird Census 2011. .... 2 | 4. AWC News from the Region..... 3 |

## 1. From the Regional Coordinator's Desk

Dear AWC Coordinators and Participants,

In this annual issue of the AWC Newsletter, I would like to briefly update you on the status of the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) as well as other important developments of significance to waterbird conservation in our region since January 2010.

The year 2010 – marked as the International Year of Biodiversity saw a renewed focus on waterbird conservation. Wetlands International produced a milestone publication - "Status of the World's Waterbird- 2010" describing the trends in waterbird populations across the world and also indicating several key findings. The report underlines that stress on waterbird populations in Asia continues with 62% of the known population being under decline or already extinct. The report concludes with several key recommendations to protect and conserve waterbirds and their habitats around the world.

Wetlands International in partnership with BirdLife International and UNEP-WCMC launched "The Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool" to assist governments in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement. The CSN Tool provides ready access to information about the most important sites for every waterbird population occurring at these sites and provides links to a lot of other useful information.

This year also saw consolidation of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership, with many new countries and organizations joining in after recognizing the value of working together for conservation of waterbirds and their habitats. The Partnership is an informal and voluntary initiative, aimed at protecting migratory waterbirds, their habitat and the livelihoods of people dependent upon them. EAAFP currently has 24 partners including 12 countries, 3 intergovernmental

agencies and 9 international non-government organizations. The success of EAAFP provides hope for further support to implementation of other flyway agreements, most important in the region being the Central Asian Flyway (CAF). This year, EAAFP provided financial support to AWC coordination, which is gratefully acknowledged. We look forward to enhanced support to implementation of CAF. Wetlands International stands committed to supporting its implementation in partnership with the governments of the region.

Recent workshop of the Taskforce on Waterbird and Habitat Monitoring, held in Oct-2010 at EAAF partnership office in Korea has emphasised that there is a need to strengthen the Asian Waterbird Census and its scopes in the EAAF region. I request all the volunteers and regional coordinators to work more closely to enhance data quality and site coverage in their respective regions.

I would kindly request all the participants, volunteers and coordinators to interact more frequently on activities and issues through the Asianwaterbird yahoo e-group as well as the newly established Facebook site. The Facebook site offers us all an opportunity to make use of it to promote the census to wider audiences and gain support for this important work.

The success on AWC is critically hinged on communication between participants, volunteers and coordinators. We urge you to use ianwaterbird yahoo group as well as the recently created facebook profile as a medium to connect to the network.

Finally, as the International Biodiversity Year 2010 draws to a close, I would like to wish you all joyful holidays and best wishes for a great year ahead and a successful AWC 2011.

*Dr Bharat Jethva,  
AWC Coordinator*

## 2. Dates for Asian Waterbird Census 2011

Keeping in line with the practise since several years, the dates for Asian Waterbird Census-2011 would be between **8<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>th</sup> January 2011**. This period would provide us three weekends and some local holidays to conduct the work. I request all the National and Regional Coordinators to urgently communicate this to your networks and volunteers in order to conduct waterbird census during these dates.

I once again request all the AWC volunteers to actively participate in AWC-2011. Your contribution gets multiplied many times over across the Asia and helps generate a critical dataset that will continue to benefit the conservation of waterbirds in the region. Importantly, kindly don't forget to request for completed count and site forms to be sent to the national/sub-national coordinators for verification and compilation of the data.

## 3. AWC Resources

The AWC network gets bigger every year with many new participants and volunteers joining in. To facilitate access to AWC information and resources, we request you to visit our website:

<http://www.wetlands.org/Whatwedo/Wetlandbiodiversity/MonitoringWaterbirds/AsianWaterbirdCensus/AWCFormsGuidelines/tabid/1069/Default.aspx>

Here you can download 1) AWC Site and Count forms, 2) AWC census guidelines, 3) list of country coordinators, etc.

Separate forms are available to four different regions: i) East Asia, ii) South East Asia, iii) Australasia, and iv) South Asia. You can also download a form in Mandarin.

You can also download publications which make use of AWC data.

You can download some of the waterbird publications available online which synthesise the AWC data or linked to the programme.

Apart from the website, we also have interactive discussion opportunities on 1) AWC Yahoo e-group (which could be subscribed at [asianwaterbird@yahoogroups.com](mailto:asianwaterbird@yahoogroups.com)) and Facebook at asianwaterbird.

In case any of you require any forms or information, kindly communicate with your national coordinator or with me on [bharat.jethva@wi-sa.org](mailto:bharat.jethva@wi-sa.org)

## 4. AWC 2010 Results Update

We are now heading towards the AWC-2011 in a few days time! At this juncture it is important to provide an update on the status of the AWC-2010 data received from different countries. As of 25<sup>th</sup> December 2010, AWC Coordinators from countries and individual counters had submitted reports from 382 sites in 2010. The following table provides country wise information on sites covered and status of submission of data. We request coordinators that have not yet reported and submitted their count results to do so as soon as possible.

### Latest update on the status of the AWC data (as of 25 Dec. 2010).

Country	Sites	Note
Bangladesh	0	To be reported
Bhutan	0	No contact available
India	13	More to be reported
Maldives	0	No contact available
Nepal	10	
Pakistan	0	
Sri Lanka	54	To be reported
<b>South Asia</b>	<b>77</b>	
Brunei Darussalam	6	
Cambodia	3	
Indonesia	0	To be reported
Lao PDR	0	No contact available
Malaysia	0	
Myanmar	15	
Philippines	190	
Singapore	0	To be reported
Thailand	53	
Timor Leste	57	
Vietnam	0	To be reported
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	<b>324</b>	
China		
Mainland	0	To be reported
Hong Kong	0	To be reported
Macao	0	
Taiwan	33	
Japan*		To be reported
DPR Korea	0	No contact available
Republic of Korea	0	To be reported
Mongolia	0	
Eastern Russia	2	
<b>East Asia</b>	<b>35</b>	
Australia	0	
New Zealand	0	To be reported
Papua New Guinea	0	No contact available
<b>Total No. of Sites</b>	<b>436</b>	

## 5. AWC News from the Region

### i. AWC in Sri Lanka – 2009 and 2010

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National Coordinator  
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The Geylon Bird Club (CBC) conducted the waterbird census in Sri Lanka for the 26th and 27th years in 2009 and 2010.

This was made possible by the participation of Club members Bennie Abeyratne, Senaka Abeyratne, Lucky Abeyawardena, Palitha Antony, Niran Caldera, Rohan de Soysa, Kithsiri Gunawardena, Tharanga Herath, Uditha Hettige, Thilo Hoffmann, Kiran Kumaranayagam, W. D. H. Perera, Anura Ratnayake, Pathmanath Samaraweera, Nanda Senanayake, Thushara Senanayake, Srinath Seneviratna, Hemantha Seneviratne, S. C. Seneviratne, U. Sirivardana, Deepal Warakagoda, Tara Wikramanayake, and non-members John Bundock, Isuru de Silva, Mary Ann Fernando, Ram J. Nair and M. H. Perera.

**2009:** With unprecedented security constraints in early 2009 coverage was very small. The total count was 38,400 birds, of 85 species. This was the second lowest.

The Kalametiya-Lunama Sanctuary on the South coast, a very important site, held very few birds: only 201, of 20 species, were counted. This may be due to the extensive growth of Typha bulrushes and Exoecaria agallocha. The Lunawa Lagoon, a wetland near Colombo, was included for the first time.

**Rarities included a Grey-headed Lapwing in the South-East.**

**2010:** The security situation had immensely improved in 2010. In the census the usual personnel constraints remained.

At Mannar in the North-West the Vankalai Sanctuary was declared by the State, in late 2008, with the information and constant persuasion of the CBC, which was sustained to make it Sri Lanka's fourth Ramsar Site in July 2010. (The Club had a major role in the declaration of the first two.) In this year's census 56,000 Eurasian Wigeon were recorded here, the highest ever in Sri Lanka, and a total of more than 82,000 waterbirds, further Ramsar criteria statistics.

Since many years ago a coastal stretch which includes this had been noted by the then census co-ordinator Thilo Hoffmann as requiring survey. The Vidattaltivu Lagoon, a site here inaccessible during the armed conflict, was censused this year for the first time. On its intertidal sand and mud flats were observed 1.1 to 1.2 million shorebirds. The previous highest total of waterbirds for the entire country was c. 304,000! Details of the counting at this site (by Uditha Hettige, assisted by U. Sirivardana and Thushara Senanayake) were sent to AWC South Asia and Wetlands International.

It may thus be the most important shorebird site in the Central-South Asia flyway. It is one of the very few sites in the world known to hold a million waterbirds, and possibly the only one where such a number has been seen in one ground view.

For several species the numbers here were the highest in the entire region of the AWC since it commenced in 1986. These are:

Curlew Sandpiper	357,500
Little Stint	55,000
Mongolian Plover	27,500
Redshank	27,500
Marsh Sandpiper	27,500.

Waterbirds flight in large numbers among these two sites and others nearby, sparsely populated by humans. There were similar records for two shorebird species at the Toddaveli Causeway in 2007. At Kora Kulam this year were 32,000 Northern Pintail, 30,000 Garganey and 4,000 Black-tailed Godwit.

The CBC has suggested protection of these and yet other sites in Mannar to the Department of Wildlife Conservation, who are proceeding in the matter. It is also hoped to obtain Ramsar status for these areas.

At a saltern on the West coast were observed 5,000 Caspian Tern in this year's census. This, too, is a record in the AWC. Remarkably, the larger salterns in Sri Lanka are highly favoured by waterbirds.

1,345,222 birds of 96 species were counted, countrywide. Rarities included a Ruddy Shelduck in the South-East, a Red Knot at Mannar and a Spotted Redshank on the West coast.

## ii. AWC in Taiwan - plan for 2011.

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The AWC in Taiwan will be coordinated by Wild Bird Society of Taipei. The count will be in conjunction with 'Avian Flu Monitoring Project of wetland migratory waterbirds', which is a Government supported project for monitoring conditions in some major waterbird congregations at wetlands in Taiwan. Since our neighbouring Hong Kong reported an outbreak of avian flu H5 human case in November 2010, we expect to receive a strong support from the government for the monitoring programme

We also encourage birdwatchers visiting important wetlands for birdwatching to record their sighting by logging in the bird data base of Chinese Wild Bird Federation and Wild Bird Society of Ilan websites. The coordinator will later download the sighting for data analysis and compilation.

## iii. AWC in Thailand, January 2010

*Philip Round on behalf of  
Bird Conservation Society of Thailand-  
BirdLife Thailand*

A total of 53 sites were counted by the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand teams or by regional bird clubs during 04 January to 01 February 2010 for the AWC. Of these 26 were coastal, brackish or salt-water localities and the remainder were freshwater sites. Of the 26 coastal sites, all but three were located on sections of the Inner Gulf. The three other sites counted were in Peninsular Thailand, with two on the Andaman Coast and one on the East Coast.

Of the 278 freshwater sites, 11 were lakes, five reservoirs, four were rice paddies or other cultivated fields, four marshes and two were primarily riverine.

A total of 18 of the sites were "new sites" that were not counted in previous years. No site description forms have been received for these sites. As in previous years AWC was administered jointly by BCST and by the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plants Conservation (DNP) which took responsibility for counting in the majority of wetland protected areas, including wildlife sanctuaries and non-hunting areas. Some key sites such as Pak Nam Krabi, one of Thailand's Ramsar sites, were not counted by BCST this year and it is expected that they were covered by DNP. However, details of the DNP contribution to AWC are still awaited. A total of 92,324 waterbirds of 102 species was

counted, among the most numerous of which on primarily fresh-water areas were Lesser Whistling-ducks (21,606), Cattle Egrets (5,061), Asian Openbills (4,092), Little Egret (2,948), Common Moorhen (1,321) and Purple Swamphen (1,107).

The outstanding importance of the Inner Gulf of Thailand was reinforced by the large numbers of wintering shorebirds, among them counts of 11,488 Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers (both species combined), Black-tailed Godwits (3,357), Curlew Sandpipers (2,499), Red-necked Stints (2,059), Marsh Sandpipers (2,008), as well as Whiskered Terns (1,688) and Brown-headed Gulls (8,407). Over half of all Black-winged Stilts recorded (3,280 of a grand total of 6,246) were likewise from Inner Gulf sites, although this species is spreading and increasing widely in inland freshwater areas, with several hundred now being present in the Chiang Saen Basin of the far north.

The increase in numbers and total range of breeding Cattle Egrets has also continued. Both this species and Black-winged Stilt are thought to have spread due to much increased irrigation.

Numbers of Palaearctic ducks were relatively small. In particular, very few (only 20) Garganeys, once the commonest wintering duck, were recorded. Eastern populations of this species have declined enormously and are surely gravely threatened. However the increase in numbers of the resident (Indian) Spot-billed Duck in the Chiang Saen Basin continues, with 642 birds recorded in total.

A count of 2,879 Broad-billed Sandpipers from the Inner Gulf needs independent confirmation as this seem unusually high number for this species., RDB species recorded were Chinese Egret (one), Black-faced Spoonbill (2), Nordmann's Greenshank (2). Although roughly ten Spoon-billed Sandpipers winter in the Inner Gulf, none were recorded during AWC. According to counters, a sudden, torrential rainstorm caused shorebirds to fly while counting was in progress, so this species was missed and counts of some others (e.g., Great Knot) were depressed well below what might be expected.

Acknowledgements: BCST and the AWC organizers gratefully acknowledge Red Bull Spirit plc for financial support. Additionally we should like to thank the many counters who contributed to the success of this year's survey.

## iv. The Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool

The Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool has been developed by a partnership of Wetlands International, BirdLife International, UNEP-WCMC

and others to assist governments in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement.

The CSN Tool provides ready access to information about the most important sites for migratory waterbird populations occurring at these sites. Site-level data and information about waterbirds are held in two large international databases, the International Waterbird Census (IWC) database managed by Wetlands International, and the World Bird Database (WBDB) managed by BirdLife International, which includes data relating to the Important Bird Area (IBA) network.

The CSN Tool gives site managers help with assessing the international importance of the populations of waterbirds at their site, and provides access to information about their ecological requirements. It also assists national and international organizations in identifying protection gaps within the network and in understanding the pattern of population changes. To this end, the Tool brings together waterbird and wetland information from BirdLife's WBDB, Wetlands International's IWC and Waterbird Population Estimates databases, UNEP-WCMC's World Database on Protected Areas and the Ramsar Site Information System.

## v. State of the world's waterbirds 2010

Wetlands International team, consisting of Simon Delany, Szabolcs Nagy and Nick Davidson have compiled a report entitled *Status of the World's Waterbirds 2010*.

It is one of the most useful and need of the hour publications that summarises what is known about the status of waterbird populations in different parts of the world. It shows how numbers and population trends compare from region to region, and how they changed between the 1970s and the 2000s.

The first section is a summary of the current and past state of the world's waterbirds using the newly developed Waterbird Index. This is followed by a section detailing the pressures which most threaten these populations and the sites and landscapes they use. Finally, examples are given of responses to those pressures which are known to have benefited waterbird status and which should be used to guide and implement future management of these species.

**The report indicates that waterbird populations in North America and Europe increased between the 1970s and the 2000s. Globally, however, 45% of waterbird populations are still in decline, and in Asia, this rises to 67%,**

**indicating an urgent need to accelerate the processes necessary for their conservation.**

The book can be downloaded from the Wetlands International website at:

[http://www.wetlands.org/Portals/0/publications/Report/SO WW2010%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.wetlands.org/Portals/0/publications/Report/SO WW2010%20(3).pdf)

## vi. Recent status of threatened waterbirds in Taiwan

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Beginning on 10th October 2010, Taijiang National Park (Tainan, Taiwan) in collaboration with with local birdwatching and conservation group have been undertaking regular monitoring of the Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor*. The first count for the season was 47 individuals. On 28th of November, the count reached a historical high of 1671 birds. The count for the same period last year was 1010 birds.

From previous records, the number of Black-faced Spoonbill in Taiwan usually reaches high number in November-December. However, both Asian Waterfowl Census and International Black-faced Spoonbill Census are performed in January annually. Thus, the data in the reports of AWC and International Black-faced Spoonbill Census usually do not show the highest counts of this species in Taiwan.

While the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill prospers from active conservation measure in South-western coast of Taiwan, the other globally threatened Saunders's Gull now face uncertain future in central west coast. The 8th petroleum refinery complex proposed by Kuokuang Petrochemical Technology Company is located in the very center of Saunders' Gull northern wintering area in west coast of Taiwan. The proposed development plan passed the first stage of environment impact assessment early this year; however, many environment conservation groups questioned the validity of the EIA. Thus it is an ongoing conservation issue at the site.

## vii. Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmeus*) facing extinction!

Today the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmeus*) is facing extinction and pushed to the Critically Endangered Species list. It is learnt that it is being hunted annually for subsistence in south-western part of the East Asian - Australasian Flyway (EAAF) particularly in Myanmar and

Bangladesh. It is believed that its global population size may be only a few hundred pairs.

Fortunately, East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership has recognized conservation of the species as a priority action and following it up. There is also an international action plan that has been developed for the species and a taskforce of the members from EAAF countries constituted.

Species monitoring, alternative livelihood to hunters and public awareness has been identified as key activities for conservation of the species in the region.

It is requested to all the AWC participants to keep vigil on the species and report all its whereabouts in your region. Some of the key sites in the region are 1) Bay of Martaban, Myanmar, 2) Nan Thar Island, Myanmar, Arakhan region, 3) Rudong, Shanghai, 4) Saemangeum, Korea, 5) Chukotka, Russia.

### **viii. Some funding opportunities for waterbird conservation in the region**

From the  
EAAF website  
[www.eaaflyway.net](http://www.eaaflyway.net)

Many of the volunteers and small local NGOs are looking for small funds to carryout waterbird conservation activities in their regions. Here are few of the funding opportunities with deadlines for submission of the proposals. If anyone who is interested in applying for these funds and need any guidelines, technical assistance etc. can get in touch with us.

#### **1. Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund of WWF - Hong Kong**

The Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund was established to provide financial support to waterbird conservation projects in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway. Priority is given to projects that lead to the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their important wetland habitats, as well as those which bring socio-economic benefits to the local community at the site. Each year WWF makes a single call for applications to the Fund with the deadline of 31 October.

#### **2. The Ramsar Small Grants Fund**

The Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) was established by the Conference of the Contracting Parties in 1990, and it provides financial assistance for wetland conservation projects in the form of small grants (maximum Swiss francs 40,000 per

project) for projects in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

#### **3. Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund**

The Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF) was authorized as a public trust by the Ministry of Environment Japan, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in April 2000. The Sumitomo Trust & Banking Co., Ltd. was selected as the Trustee of the Fund. After its establishment in April 2000, a lot of corporations (mainly Nippon Keidanren member corporations) and the general public have been contributing donations to the Fund on the approval of KNCF. The KNCF has supported projects every year with about the total amount of 150 million (JPY). The KNCF raises applicants for the Fund on its Web Page every fiscal year, and the Project Selection Committee has assumed the rigid responsibility of appraising and selecting supported projects among submitted applications

#### **4. Japan Fund for Global Environment**

We are now faced with environmental problems that are occurring on a global scale: global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, and destruction of tropical rain forests. Regardless of whether we live in developed or developing countries, the economic activities that support our societies have not only caused an abuse of resources but have also made a large impact on the environment, the foundation for our livelihoods. Moreover these problems not only influence our local environment but also they cross national borders into neighboring countries and are connected to the destruction of the environment on a global scale. Environmental problems cannot be solved only by the power of one nation, one region, one company, nor one individual alone. To alleviate the global environmental crisis and to create a sustainable society, it becomes essential to collaborate internationally.

#### **5. The Ramsar Regional Center - East Asia**

The RRC-EA Wetland Fund is comparable with the Ramsar Small Grant Fund. The purpose of the RRC-EA WF is to provide funding to East-Southeast Asian nations for the purpose of wetland conservation and wetland education programs. The grant is open to all applicants, but the project fund cannot exceed 12,000,000KRW or about 10,280 USD. The grant is established with the purpose of assisting countries in the enhancement of conservation and protection of wetlands in the Asian Region. Project proposals

need to be submitted by the deadline for consideration in the award process. A group of professional wetland experts and the RRC-EA staff evaluates the proposals. Successful proposals will exhibit sound knowledge of wetland processes, and management protocols as well as an innovative approach to the research being performed.

6. **Future for Nature Award**

The goal of the Future for Nature Foundation is to protect species of wild animals and plants. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation has established the Future for Nature Award. The prize rewards and funds individuals for their internationally outstanding species protection efforts. The Future for Nature Awards is awarded annually during the Future for Nature Conference at Burgers' Zoo in Arnhem, the Netherlands. A sponsor market for species protection will accompany the annual conference

## ix. Sightings of Sociable Plovers (*Vanellus gregarious*) in Gujarat, India

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Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India  
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On my trip to a Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) nesting colony in Gujarat, India, I saw a flock of birds in a patchily inundated fallow tract just off the road between village Bol and Siyavada, near Sanand town in Ahmedabad District of Gujarat, India.

Initially, I thought them to be a mixed party of waders dominated by Ruffs (*Philomachus pugnax*), however, it was revealed through a closer look that it was a flock of 58 Sociable Lapwings (*Vanellus gregarious*) with another 32 birds at a similarly moistened fallow strip around hundred meters from the first sighting.



Authentic reports of subsequent sightings this year have been of a flock of around 15-20 birds near Dasada, while four Sociable Plovers were sighted by the undersigned at Bajana (Little Rann of Kachchh) on 4th Dec 2010.

More sighting reports of the species are also from Great Rann of Kachchh, from north of Chhari Dhand wetland. A total of 15-17 birds have been reported by Davesh Gadhvi a local birder.

Sociable Plovers in north and central Gujarat, India are now regular winter visitors, every year they are invariably seen in fellow agriculture fields on the periphery of Rann of Kachchh.

### **Acknowledgements:**

We are grateful to the East Asian - Australasian Flyway (EAAF) Partnership Secretariat, based in Korea, for contributing towards the AWC Coordination costs for 2010-11.

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