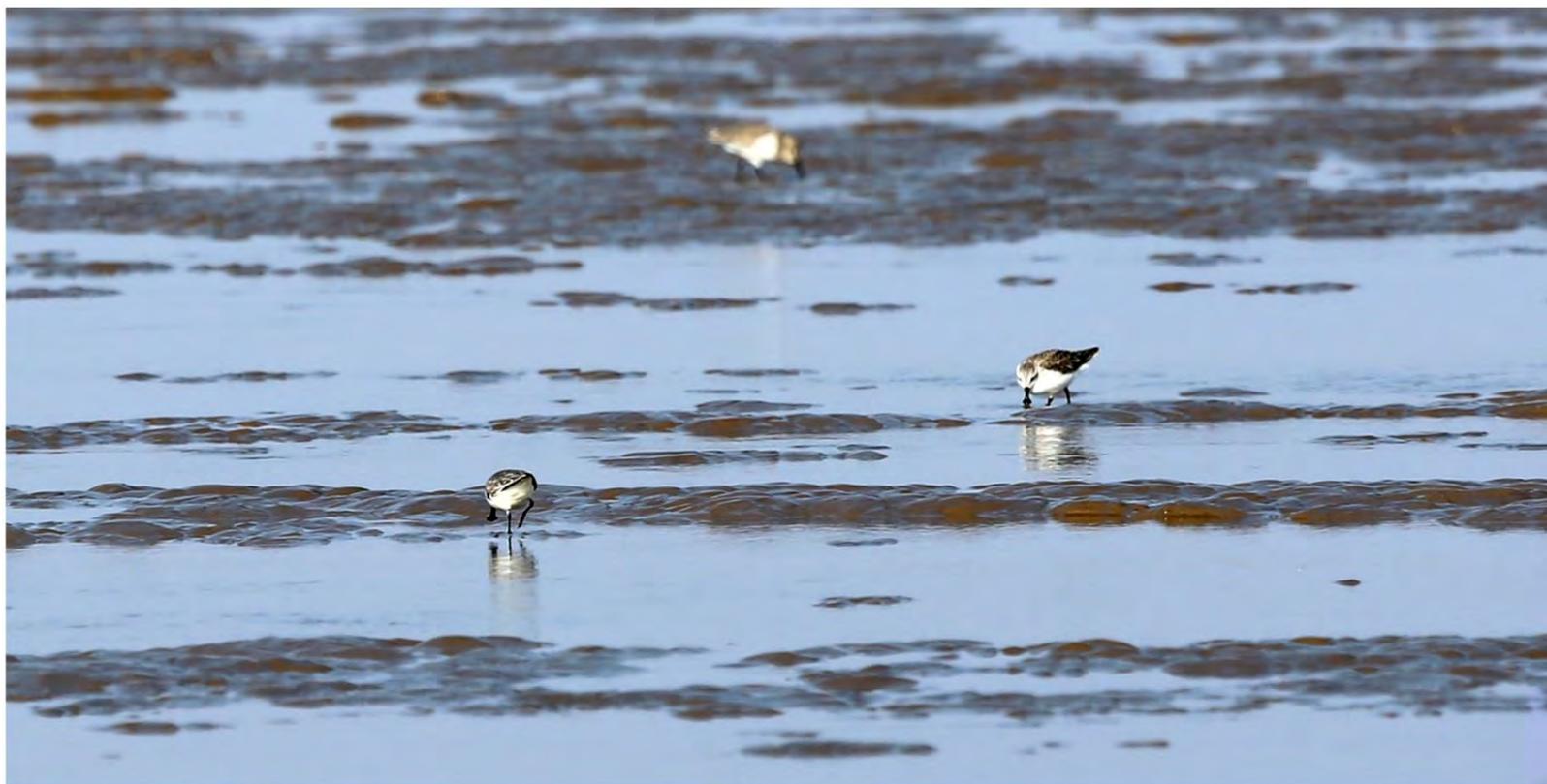


SPECIES ACTION PLAN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*) IN MYANMAR



January 2014 – December 2016





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Produced by Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA)

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This plan is based in large part on a Spoon-billed sandpiper workshop held on 13th November 2012, at the BANCA office in Yangon.

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Cover photo credit: Chen Lin and Pyae Phyo Aung

Duration: The duration of this Species Action Plan is: 2014 – 2016

1. Executive summary

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*) is a long distance migrant, breeding in Russia and annually migrates more than 8,000 km to winter in South and South-east Asia, with approximately half of the global population understood to winter in Myanmar. This species is classified as globally Critically Endangered on the Red List of Endangered Species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. That is the highest category of extinction threat for any species still present in the wild. The current rate of population decline could lead to its extinction within a decade. The main threats to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper were identified as taking place on the non-breeding grounds. In Myanmar the following four main threats were identified; hunting (the most severe and urgent threat), lack of formal protection of coastal sites, loss of habitat through unsustainable coastal development and mangrove forest restoration, and inadvertent by-catch from fishing. Actions to protect this species in Myanmar have been on-going since 2010, particularly by identifying hunters through socio-economic surveys and providing them support for alternative livelihoods, raising awareness of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, establishing local conservation groups and in 2013 demarcating the boundary of a proposed Ramsar site in the Gulf of Mottama.

This species conservation action plan outlines a series of actions to take place between January 2014 and December 2016 by BANCA to protect the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Myanmar and support international efforts to save this species from extinction. The following objectives of the action plan have been agreed, each with corresponding actions and responsible actors:

Objectives of National Action Plan

Objective 1: Ramsar site established for the Gulf of Mottama and Nanthar Island with internal and external boundary delineation appropriate to maintain critical species habitat.

Objective 2: Community-based natural resource management of the Gulf of Mottama supports both the protection of the species and local livelihoods with support of strengthened local governance institutions.

Objective 3: Key information and knowledge gaps necessary to the conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper are filled and contribute directly to a Ramsar site management plan

Objective 4: Local communities and government agencies are aware and mobilized to conserve the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other critical migratory birds.

2. Spoon-billed Sandpiper – international context

The Spoon-Billed Sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*) is categorised as Critically Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The population is declining by 26% per year, with a global population estimate of approximately 100 pairs. If the current rate of decline continues then the species will be extinct within a decade.

It is a long distance migrant, breeding on the coastal tundra of far eastern Russia, and migrating 8,000km south along the East-Asian Australasian Flyway, including major staging posts in the Yellow Sea. The species winters on inter-tidal mudflats in south-east Asia, particularly Myanmar and Bangladesh. The demographic driver of the recent population decline appears to be extremely low juvenile survival with few birds recruited back into the breeding population. Young birds do not return to the breeding grounds until the second year. The major cause of juvenile mortality is believed to be trapping and hunting, primarily on the wintering grounds, and notably in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

This action plan supports Myanmar's commitments to the following international conventions to which it is a signatory:

- Convention on Biological Diversity
- Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

3. Spoon-billed sandpiper in Myanmar – work to date

The importance of Myanmar as a wintering site for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper was not known until 2008. The key milestones for conservation of this species since then are highlighted in the following table:

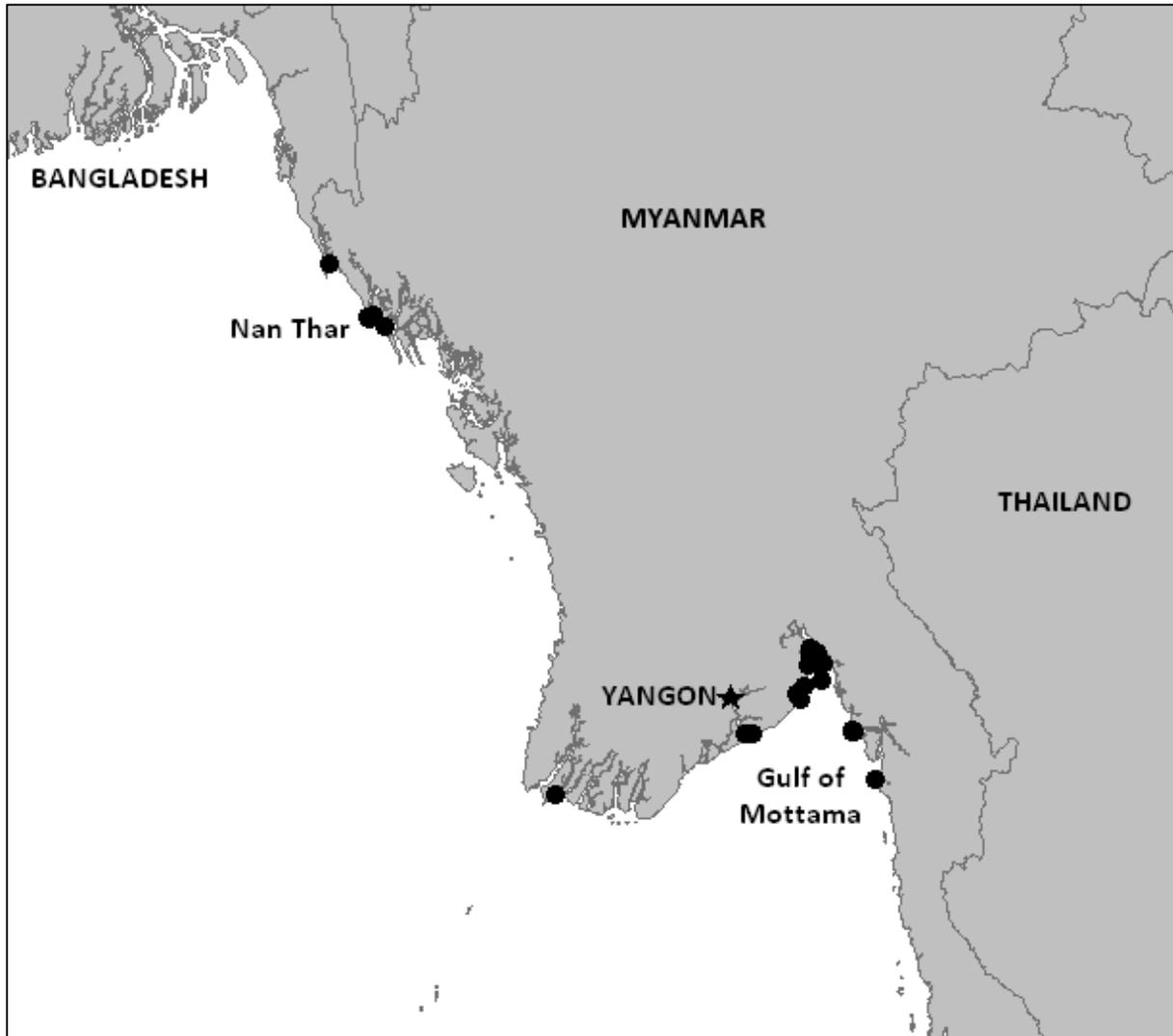
Date	Milestones
2008	
January	Surveys in the Gulf of Mottama recorded 48 Spoon-billed Sandpipers
January	Survey in Nan Thar Island recorded 36 Spoon-billed Sandpiper
January	First international Spoon-billed Sandpiper workshop in Yangon
2009	
January	Follow up surveys in the Gulf of Mottama and NanThar identified hunting as a serious issue
January	Surveys in Nan Thar and south of Nan Thar on the Rakhine coast located one Spoon-billed Sandpiper
January	First consultation and mitigation work with local communities on Nan Thar
January	Second international workshop in Yangon
2010	
January	Further surveys in the Gulf of Mottama revealed the broader significance of the inter-tidal habitats for shorebirds, with between 150,000-200,000 birds counted
January	Socio-economic surveys initiated and local hunters identified
January	Surveys in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta recorded one Spoon-billed Sandpiper
January	First eco-birdwatching tour to Nan Thar Island
March	Grants offered to hunters on the east coast of Gulf of Mottama to support alternative livelihoods
2011	
January	Further surveys in the Gulf of Mottama and Nan Thar Island
January	Spoon-billed Sandpiper workshop in Yangon
January	Further surveys in the Dawei Estuary and livelihood support offered to hunters to stop hunting activities
February	Monitoring and evaluation of the alternative livelihoods support undertaken
April	Grants offered to hunters on the west coast of Gulf of Mottama to support alternative livelihoods
April	Education and awareness raising programme started in the Gulf of Mottama

April	Socio-economic surveys identified no shorebird hunting
	Lease island at Nan Thar for the rights to protect birds. A local conservation group (Sittwe Nature Conservation Association) established and information materials distributed
2012	
January & February	Further surveys undertaken in Gulf of Mottama and Nan Thar Island
January & February	Study of feeding ecology undertaken on Nan Thar Island
January	Monitoring and evaluation of the alternative livelihoods support on the west coast of the Gulf of Mottama
February	World Wetlands Day workshop held in Naypidaw to promote the Gulf of Mottama as a future Ramsar site
February-May	Education and awareness raising programme undertaken on the Gulf of Mottama west coast
May	Workshop and site visit for the development of the Gulf of Mottama as a Ramsar site
October	Training for BANCA staff in Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) in the Gulf of Mottama
October	Surveys on the east coast record one Spoon-billed Sandpiper
November	National species action plan workshop for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper
December	Training of BANCA staff in social surveys for “most significant change”
2013	
January	Most significant change survey in two villages of the Gulf of Mottama and monitoring and evaluation of alternative livelihoods
February	World Wetlands Day workshop held in Naypyitaw and Mawlamyine to promote the Gulf of Mottama as a future Ramsar site Advocacy workshop in Mon State Day
March-April	Demarcation of the boundary of the Gulf of Mottama Ramsar site conducted jointly by BANCA and MOECAF
May	Local conservation group established on the east coast of the Gulf of Mottama
May	Ramsar site boundary map drafted for the east coast of the Gulf of Mottama, i.e. Mon State, is accepted by MOECAF
June	More local conservation groups established in the east and west of the Gulf of Mottama bringing the total to four
August	Training for local conservation groups in the Gulf of Mottama
September	Boats and equipment provided to the local conservation groups in the Gulf of Mottama
October	Survey of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the Gulf of Mottama

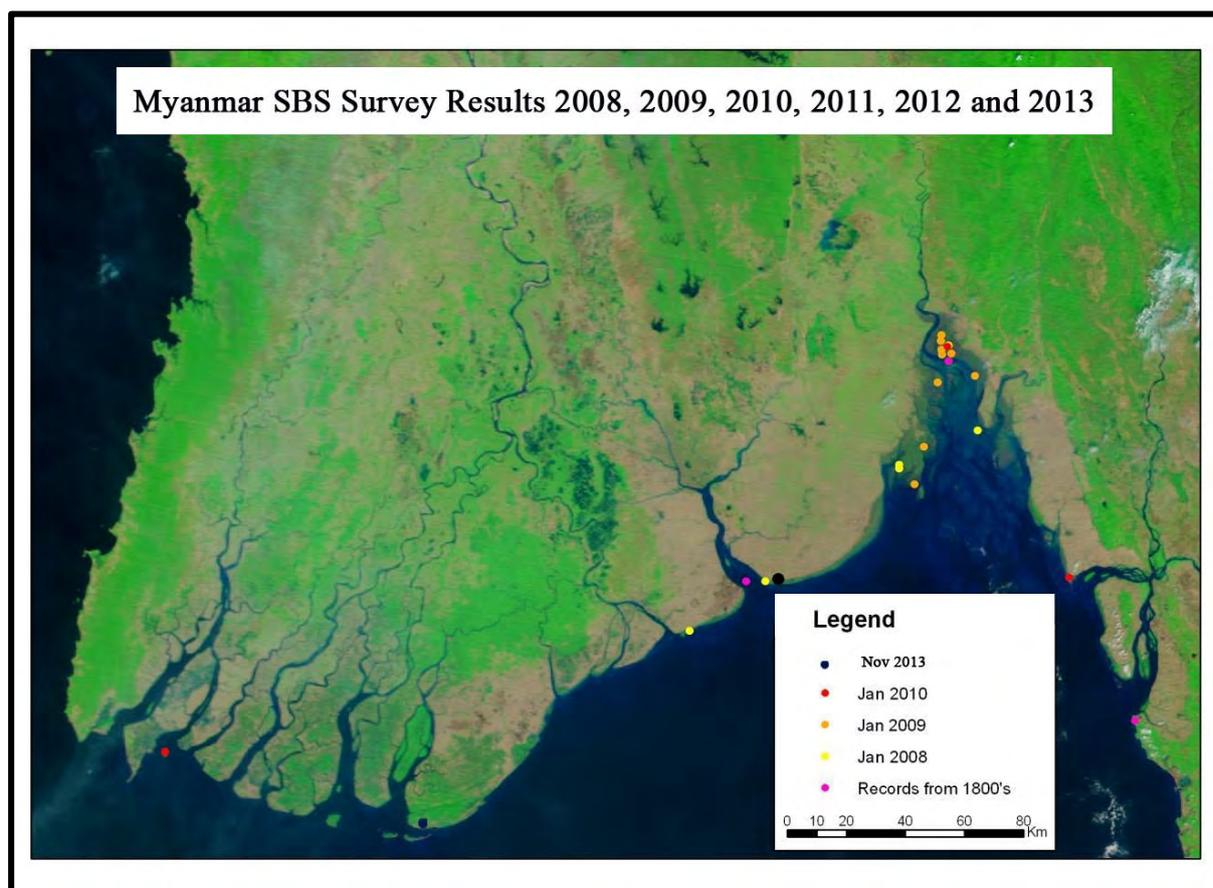
November	Survey of waterbird population status in the eastern Ayeyarwaddy delta
December	<p>Preliminary survey of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the southern Gulf of Mottama (Thanphyuzayat Township Mon State)</p> <p>Population status survey of Spoon-billed Sandpiper wintering grounds in Gulf of Mottama and Nanthar Island</p> <p>Training on birdwatching for the local conservation groups in the Gulf of Mottama</p> <p>Discussion with Minister of Forest & Mining Department on the proposed Ramsar Site boundary plan (Mon State)</p>
2014	
January	<p>Evaluation and monitoring of support to on ex-bird hunters</p> <p>Population surveys of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Gulf of Mottama</p> <p>Freshwater ponds provided to villages on the east coast of the Gulf of Mottama</p>
February	<p>Population surveys of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Nanthar Island, Gulf of Mottama and Southern Gulf of Mottama (Thanphyuzayat Township Mon State)</p> <p>Freshwater ponds provided to villages on the east coast of the Gulf of Mottama</p>
March	<p>Sustainable Resource Use Development Plan prepared for the Gulf of Mottama (East coast)</p> <p>Freshwater ponds provided to villages on the east coast of the Gulf of Mottama</p> <p>Population surveys of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Gulf of Mottama</p>
April	<p>Sustainable Resources Use Development Plan in Gulf of Mottama (East coast)</p> <p>Freshwater ponds provided to villages on the east coast of the Gulf of Mottama</p> <p>Discussions with Mon State Government on proposed Ramsar Site boundary</p>
May	Wetlands Management Training in Kyaikhto Township, Mon State

Map of Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites in Myanmar

The most northern site is in Bangladesh close to the border with Myanmar



Recent records of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in and close to the Gulf of Mottama



4. Key threats to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Myanmar

Five high priority threats were identified that require urgent action during the life-time of this Species Action Plan:

1. Hunting is the key threat to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper that needs urgent action to reduce the impact on the world population. Although conservation actions since 2010 have led to a sharp drop in hunting, a small level of hunting could have a very serious impact on the small Spoon-billed Sandpiper population.
2. Lack of legal protection at the known key Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites. Coastal development linked to the expected rapid economic growth in the next few years should not be under-estimated. Ensuring key sites are identified, protected and developed in an environmentally sensitive way is a high priority.
3. Inter-tidal habitat loss due to mangrove planting is potentially detrimental to shorebirds, including Spoon-billed Sandpiper, if done in an uncontrolled way at key wader sites.

4. Illegal fishing using nets left in-situ could lead to unintentional by-catch of shorebirds, including Spoon-billed Sandpiper.
5. Illegal sand abstraction on Nan Thar Island could lead to major changes in the morphology of the island and its habitats

Additional lower priority threats include development of aquaculture, indirect effects of intensification of agriculture, upstream developments, such as hydro-electric power, pollution from upstream industries and weak environmental legislation and enforcement.

Other issues that need addressing:

- Lack of conservation priorities within Myanmar, both at the species level (no national Red-list) and the site level (for example, neither of the key sites currently have any short of national protection status)
- Lack of collaboration between key stakeholders needs addressing, at the site and national levels.

5. Key knowledge gaps

Four key knowledge gaps were identified for which research and monitoring needs to be progressed during the life-time of this Species Action Plan:

1. Away from the key sites of the Gulf of Mottama and Nan Thar, the distribution of Spoon-billed Sandpiper is poorly understood.
2. Within the Gulf of Mottama there is a need for a better understanding of how Spoon-billed Sandpipers utilise the broader estuary. This will help focus site protection (particularly boundary demarcation and internal zoning) and hunting mitigation work.
3. Greater understanding of the occurrence of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Myanmar. Arrival and departure dates are poorly understood, and it is not clear if first-year birds over-summer. This information is key to enable the targeting of appropriate conservation measures.
4. What is the medium and long-term sustainability of alternative livelihoods work, and is Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) an appropriate approach in Myanmar?

Lower priority knowledge gaps that need addressing include a greater understanding of feeding behaviour and habitat use, the overlap between mangrove planting and Spoon-billed Sandpiper sites, and the future implications of climate change at priority sites. These gaps are low priority during the life-time of this species action plan.

6. Aim of this Species Action Plan

The aim of this Spoon-billed Sandpiper action plan for Myanmar is to contribute to the international conservation effort to prevent the global extinction of the species. This will be achieved through improving the knowledge of the distribution of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Myanmar and through tackling the key threat of hunting.

Objectives

Objective 1: Ramsar sites established for the Gulf of Mottama and Nanthar Island with internal and external boundary delineation appropriate to maintain critical species habitat

A Ramsar site is an international designation for a wetland recognised to have international importance, which is managed to protect important wetland values through wise-use of natural resources by local stakeholders. It is essential that all habitat of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper is sufficiently covered. The dynamic nature of the mudflats in the Gulf of Mottama presents a challenge and requires more knowledge for the large area. In the Gulf of Mottama important water bird habitat includes areas in Mon State as well as both Yangon and Bago regions. Progress towards demarcation of the Ramsar site is more advanced in Mon State, therefore a phased approach is recommended, whereby consultations with local stakeholders and informed research will enable areas in Bago and Yangon regions to be added later on. The final Ramsar site will need to include parts of Mon State and the other two regions, and a coordination mechanism for managing the whole area will need to be identified.

Objective 2: Community-based natural resource management of the Gulf of Mottama supports both protection of species and local livelihoods with support of strengthened local governance institutions

Ramsar site designation should be beneficial to local communities, as the overall goal is sustainable management of the nature resources which should ensure long-term benefits to

local communities while supporting conservation of important biodiversity (in this case the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other important water birds) and natural systems. A management plan prepared by the stakeholders with support and facilitation from outside experts should identify, among other things, internal zones for resource use and conservation, livelihood needs, regulations for sustainable natural resource use, research requirements, stakeholders responsible and monitoring. While the plan is being developed, livelihood support will continue and some new activities will be piloted, in particular ecotourism through bird-watching tours. Local conservation groups comprised of local villagers have already been established and will be important for day-to-day conservation and livelihoods activities. They will need capacity building and strong relations with and support from local institutions.

Objective 3: Key information and knowledge gaps necessary to the conservation of the Spoon-billed sandpiper are being filled and contribute directly to a Ramsar site management plan

As discussed above, there are important information gaps, which remain to be filled. Research is required to contribute directly to management of the key site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper, as well as to identify other important locations for the species in Myanmar.

Objective 4: Local communities and local government agencies are aware and mobilized to conserve the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other critical migratory bird

To date awareness raising has played an important role in curtailing shorebird hunting. This needs to continue and developed to ensure local communities and local government agencies are kept up to date with new information and developments, in particular with regard to the functions of the Ramsar site. Importantly communications should be two way to enable local knowledge to feed into the most effective management of the Ramsar sites. Where local stakeholders still remain unaware of the importance of local water birds populations, awareness raising programmes should be implemented drawing from experience and methods used at other locations.

BANCA will report annually to MOECAAF and the international Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force on progress towards implementing this action plan and any arising issues. BANCA will receive technical support and support for fundraising from the RSPB.

7. Framework for action

Objective 1: Ramsar sites established for the Gulf of Mottama and Nanthar Island with internal and external boundary delineation appropriate to maintain critical species habitat

Key Actions	Priority	Time	Main partners	Funding
1.1 Boundary demarcation in Mon State, Gulf of Mottama	Urgent		Mon State Government, MOECAF Technical support from RSPB	✓
1.1a Discussion and review with Mon State government and MOECAF	Urgent	Q3 2014	Mon State Government, Ministries Technical support from RSPB	✓
1.1b Technical review by Ramsar and the RSPB		Q3 2014		✓
1.2 Township consultation workshops		Q3 2014		✓
1.3 Preparation of Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) for Mon State	Urgent	Q4 2014	Technical support from RSPB	✓
1.4 MOECAF submits RIS to Ramsar Secretariat	Urgent	2015	MOECAF	
1.5 Preparation of management plan for the Ramsar site		2015		
1.6 Consultations on expanding Ramsar site to Bago and Yangon Divisions	Medium	2015 and 2016		
1.7 Resubmission of RIS for expanded Ramsar site	Medium	2016		
1.8 Consultations on Nanthar Island as a Ramsar site		2016	Sittwe Nature Conservation Association (SNCA)	

Objective 2: Community-based natural resource management of the Gulf of Mottama supports both protection of the species and local livelihoods with support of strengthened local governance institutions

Key Actions	Priority	Time	Main partners	Funding
2.1 Identify key stakeholders for CBNRM implementation	High	Q1 2014		Darwin via RSPB
2.2 Form Local Conservation Groups (LCGs)	High	Q1 & Q2 2014		Darwin via RSPB
2.3 Training of Local Conservation Groups	High	2014		Darwin & CEPF
2.4 Implementation of LCG work programme	High	Ongoing	LCGs	Darwin & CEPF
2.5 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of LCG work	High	5 visits per year		Darwin via RSPB
2.6 Establishment of micro-grant programme in 20 key villages	Medium			
2.7 Livestock programme as alternative livelihood in key villages	Medium			
2.8. Provision of freshwater ponds in Bago and Yangon Region	Medium			
2.9 Community forestry programme to support fuelwood and market change	Medium			
2.10 Fuel-efficient stoves programme to reduce fuelwood consumption	Medium			
2.11 Birdwatching tourism development in five villages	High	Dec 2014		
2.12 Monitoring of fisheries	High			
2.13 Sustainable fisheries management and support	High			

Objective 3: Key information and knowledge gaps necessary to the conservation of the Spoon billed Sandpiper are being filled and contribute directly to a Ramsar site management plan

Key Actions	Priority	Time	Main partners	Funding
3.1 Annual monitoring of SBS in Gulf of Mottama	High	Q4 & Q1		
3.2 Surveys of new sites of SBS in southern Gulf of Mottama (Mon State), Thanintharyi, Ayerayewaddy Delta and Rakhine	High	Q4 2014 & Q1 2015		
3.3 Annual monitoring of SBS in Nan Thar	High	Q4 & Q1	Sittwe Nature Conservation Association (SNCA)	
3.4 Benthos research	Medium	Q1 & Q2 2014	Ramsar Network Japan.	
3.5 Feeding behaviour of SBS and estuarine use (through Myanmar PhD student)	Low		Possibly Ramsar Network Japan & Nigel Clark (BTO)	
3.6 Mangrove planting and impact on shorebird habitat	Low		Ministry of Social Welfare RSPB (remote sensing)	
3.7 Potential impacts of climate change on coastal areas	Low			
3.8 Changing mudflat dynamics	Low		RSPB (remote sensing)	

Objective 4: Local communities and local government agencies are aware and mobilized to conserve the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and other critical migratory birds

Key Actions	Priority	Time	Main partners	Funding
4.1 Hold World Wetlands Day events for the Ramsar site	High	Feb 2015 Feb 2016		RSPB
4.2 Identify key target audiences for the Gulf of Mottama	High	Jan 2014		BANCA core work
4.2a Hold workshops with Yangon and Bago Regions and Mon State	High	Feb 2014*		
4.3 Repeat school education programme in Gulf of Mottama	Medium	Nov/Dec 2014 & Jan 2015		
4.4 Review requirements for education and awareness raising depending on political situation and outcome of survey work	Medium	Q3 2014		
4.5 Development of a national Spoon-billed sandpiper communications plan	Medium	Q4 2014		
4.6 Village education and environmental awareness activities by LCGs	High	Continuous from Q4 2014		CEPF in 2014
4.6a Develop work programme and training for the LCGs	High	Q3&Q4 2014		CEPF
4.7 Bird watching training for school children	Low	Q2&Q3 2015		

8. Further reading

Pain, D., Green, R. & Clark, N. (2011) On the edge: can the Spoon-billed Sandpiper be saved? *British Birds* 104: 350-363.

Zöckler, C., Htin Hla, T., Clark, N., Syroechkovskiy, E.E., Yakushev, N., Daengphayon, S. & Robinson, R. (2010a) Hunting in Myanmar is probably the main cause of the decline of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. *Wader Study Group Bulletin* 117: 1-8.

Zöckler, C., Syroechkovskiy, E.E. & Atkinson, P.W. (2010b) Rapid and continued population decline in the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* indicates imminent extinction unless conservation action is taken. *Bird Conservation International* 20: 95-111.

Zöckler, C., Syroechkovskiy, E.E. & Bunting, G. (2010). International single species action plan for the conservation of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*. CMS Technical Report Series No.23.

9. Appendix – key stakeholders.

List of key stakeholders identified during the November 2012 workshop.

Local

- Bird hunters
- Local authority
- Fishermen
- Fish related businessmen and traders who finance fishing activities
- Aquaculture owners
- Villagers and local communities
- Schools – children and teachers
- Farmers where land reclamation may be an issue
- Local Conservation Groups (LCGs)
- Sittwe Nature Conservation Association (SNCA)

National

- Minister for Environment, Conservation and Forestry (MOECAF)
- Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development (MOLFRD)
- Department of Land Records
- Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation
- Ministry of Electrical Power
- Ministry of Industries
- General Administrative Department

International

- BirdLife International (Asia)
- Other BirdLife partners, BCST
- Asian Bird Fair
- RSPB (through RSPB, access DFID, DEFRA, Darwin)
- SBS Task Force
- Arcona Consulting, Cambridge UK
- British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)
- KNCF (Japan)
- Light house foundation
- Manfred Hermsem Stiftung
- Ramsar Secretariat
- Ramsar Network Japan
- WWT
- EAAFP
- Ministry of Environment Japan (MOEJ)
- Oil/gas joint ventures
- TOTAL, Myanmar



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