The conservation of the Black-faced Spoonbill

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History

The first meeting for the conservation of Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* was held at Rosenheim, Germany during the 21st BirdLife World Conference in August 1994. Participants were from mainland China, North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vietnam. It was agreed to develop a conservation action plan to protect this globally threatened species as a project of BirdLife Asia Council. Dr. Liu Severinghaus of the Chinese Wild Bird Federation agreed to take the initiative to develop the conservation action plan of this species and organised a workshop in Taipei in January 1995. The result of the discussion was published in September 1995 as ‘Action Plan for the Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*’ (Severinghaus et al. 1995) and it became a guideline for the protection of this species.

To follow up the Taipei Workshop, the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ) and the China Ornithological Society held a ‘Black-faced Spoonbill Conservation Workshop’ on 6-7 May 1996 in Beijing, China. Nineteen scientists from eight countries or areas attended the workshop and detailed actions were discussed and agreed to start. These meetings were the real start of the international action for the conservation of this species. A follow-up workshop in June 1997 was held at WING of the WBSJ in Tokyo.

It was fortunate that we received kind financial support from the Japan Fund for Global Environment (Tokyo) and from the Council of Agriculture (Taiwan).

Result of Beijing Workshop and its Progress

The agenda discussed at the Beijing Workshop and the actions taken since then are as follows:

A) Establishment of a Conservation Network

A conservation network for the Black-faced Spoonbill was established among organizations of the range countries or areas and the WBSJ was nominated as the secretariat. The members of the network are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Korea</td>
<td>Center for Nature Conservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Forestry Institute</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Ornithological Society of Korea</td>
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<td>China Mainland</td>
<td>China Ornithological Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Ecosystems Ltd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Chinese Wild Bird Federation</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>BirdLife International Vietnam Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Wild Bird Society of Japan</td>
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B) Questionnaire

To get information on breeding and wintering sites, questionnaires for students, hunters, fishermen and scientists were made in each local language by the WBSJ Research Center and distributed to North and South Korea, China and Russia through the network (Fig. 1). This survey and its results are described by Chong & Pak (1999; pp. 5-9 of these Proceedings).

C) Breeding Ground Study

To find new breeding sites, a breeding ground survey was proposed for China and North Korea. Dr. Pak U-Il of the Center for Nature Conservation conducted this survey on islands off the west coast of the Korean Peninsula in 1997 and 1998 and found several new breeding sites. The details are given in Chong & Pak (1999; pp. 5-9 of these Proceedings).

D) Satellite-tracking of Migration Routes

Three sites were suggested as being suitable for catching the birds in winter so that they could then be tracked by satellite: the Tseng-Wen River of Taiwan, Maipo Marsh in Hong Kong and the Red River Delta in Vietnam. The study was also started at Maipo and Tseng-Wen River in the winter of 97/98 and 98/99 by the co-operation between WBSJ Research Center, Chinese Wild Bird Federation, WWF Hong Kong and the Yamashina Institute for Ornithology. The various parts of this study are shown in Asia Council, BirdLife International (1999; pp. 39-42 of these Proceedings) and Melville et al. (1999; pp. 19-26 of these Proceedings).

E) Inventory of Important Sites

To compile a brief inventory of the sites important for the conservation of this species, the WBSJ contacted member organizations to collect information, but the inventory has not been published.

F) International Census

To monitor the population trend, it was agreed to hold an annual international census and Ecosystems Ltd. of Hong Kong was nominated as the secretariat. The first census was conducted in January 1997 and the total number of Black-faced Spoonbills was estimated at 530-590. The second census was done in January 1998 and the number was 613. The third one was in January 1999 and the results are now being compiled.

G) Public Education

The importance of public education for protecting this species was emphasized and the Chinese Wild Bird Federation published a poster and leaflet in each local language. These were distributed to the public through the network. This work is explained by Severinghaus (1999; pp. 43-46 of these Proceedings).

H) Promotion of Conservation

Using the scientific data collected by the above studies or activities, all the member organizations of the network are expected to work for the promotion of the conservation of this species and its habitat.
Fig. 1. Questionnaire to find breeding and wintering sites of Black-faced Spoonbills.
Future Actions

The International Census is very important, not only to monitor the population trend but also to raise the interest of the researchers and the general public in the conservation of this species. It is very much expected that this programme will continue in the future. By satellite-tracking, the important areas for stopover and for breeding will become known, and all of these can be expected to be well protected by the respective local governments. Naturally the network will work to encourage and support these governments for this purpose. Although there are many problems remaining for the protection of this species at its wintering sites in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vietnam, the main wintering sites are basically protected as nature reserves or by other systems. For the stopover points and breeding sites, and in particular for the breeding sites, once we find new sites, we should work for protecting them. As was done for cranes, an international network of the important sites for the conservation of this species will be needed. The Northeast Asia Crane Site Network would be a good model.

The details will be discussed again at a future meeting of the members of the network.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As Chairman of the BirdLife Asia Council, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all the member organizations of the network and other organizations which kindly supported the above activities and so helped to co-operate for the protection of this species. I also thank the Japan Fund for the Global Environment and the Council of Agriculture for their financial support and NTT for its technical support for the satellite-tracking.

LITERATURE CITED


